

Warsaw, 12 November 2025

**OPEN LETTER**  
**ON THE STIGMATISATION OF POLISH VICTIMS OF THE GERMAN NAZI REGIME AND**  
**THE DESECRATION OF THE MEMORY OF JEWISH VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST**

**We, the undersigned representatives of the Polish academic, historical, and civic community, express our deep concern and strong opposition to the actions of German and Austrian cultural, memorial, and scholarly institutions that promote events and publications which explicitly betray their entrusted mission and propagate a false historical narrative concerning Polish victims of the German Nazi regime.**

The events surrounding the promotion of the book by Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, a scholar at Freie Universität Berlin, are particularly disturbing.

On 29 September 2025, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe's book, *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust*, was presented at the Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Am Großen Wannsee 56–58 in Berlin.

On 12 November, the book was presented by Central European University in Vienna, in cooperation with the Wiener Wiesenthal Institut and the Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte.

A meeting devoted to *Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust* was scheduled for 25 November 2025 at the Polish-German House in Berlin. According to media reports, it has been postponed to another, as yet unspecified, date.

The official announcements of these events include a statement that also appears on the website of the Polish-German House. It reads as follows:

*"During World War II, Polish mayors constituted a key group of officials within the administrative apparatus of the 'General Government.' Together with German district heads and mayors, they shaped local policy and were significantly involved in the persecution and murder of Polish and European Jews."*

As members of the Polish academic, historical, and civic community, we firmly reject the main assertion presented at the event as false, contrary to historical fact, scientifically unsound, and harmful to good Polish-German relations.

All the institutions mentioned are entrusted with the mission of preserving and documenting the crimes of genocide and persecution committed by the National Socialist German regime between 1933 and 1945; safeguarding and transmitting historical memory to future generations in a reliable, honest, and objective manner; and honouring the victims.

What is particularly disturbing is that the book, which in a manipulative manner shifts responsibility for the crimes of the National Socialist German regime onto the Polish people, is presented at an institution located in the House of the Wannsee Conference, the infamous

gathering of the highest-ranking representatives of the German government and police, chaired by SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, held on 20 January 1942. At that conference, the details of implementing the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe”— that is, the extermination of all European Jews – were determined. Do the representatives of this museum lack knowledge and awareness of who perpetrated the Shoah, or are they openly betraying the mission entrusted to them?

Equally astonishing is the involvement of the Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien in Vienna – an institution named after Simon Wiesenthal, a Polish Jew (1908–2005) from Lwów who was imprisoned in the German Janowska camp there, and whose 89 family members were murdered in the Belżec death camp. He himself was imprisoned in the German concentration camps of Płaszów, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen, and miraculously survived. Has the Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien in Vienna, a mere 80 years after the end of the Second World War, already forgotten the fate of its patron, who devoted his life to pursuing Nazi criminals?

We also note that the book has undergone critical scholarly analysis by the Institute of National Remembrance. According to the review by Dr Damian Sitkiewicz, the publication displays characteristics of journalism, including a tendentious selection of facts, conjecture and speculation, and the deliberate omission of essential historical context, such as Germany’s racist policies. By using impersonal formulations, the author minimises the role and agency of the Germans, seeking to falsely equate Polish mayors with the occupiers as supposedly equal partners in perpetrating the crime. The ultimate aim of these efforts is to persuade the reader that local Polish officials in the General Government were co-responsible for the extermination of the Jews.

It should be emphasised that **reversing the roles of perpetrator and victim** – especially in a German public institution whose mission is to foster reconciliation and deepen mutual friendship – **once again stigmatises and retraumatises the Polish victims of the Second World War and their families**. The trauma and scars of World War II are still deeply felt in Poland. Such actions do not contribute to **building good Polish-German relations**; in our view, they are in fact profoundly damaging. This causes us deep concern and bewilderment.

In the context of the event planned in Berlin, we wish to express our concern for **the future of Polish-German reconciliation**. The announcement of the meeting is perceived by the public as an attempt to shift responsibility for the Holocaust from the Germans to the Poles, and thus as a classic effort to invert the roles of victim and perpetrator. **The perpetrators of the Holocaust were Nazi Germans.**

The brutal occupation of Poland by the Third Reich was unprecedented and, in many areas, exterminatory. The list of sites and instances of these crimes is extensive. The public administration was completely controlled by the German occupier, and Polish citizens – including those in administrative roles – were fully subordinated to German orders.

We remind readers that, in the Nazi racial hierarchy, Poles were classified as “subhumans” and were destined partly for extermination, partly for forced labour, and partly for extermination through labour.

According to various estimates, between 5 and 6 million Polish citizens were killed by the German occupiers during the Second World War. Half of them were Polish Jews murdered by the Nazi invaders as part of the Holocaust. Several million more Polish citizens of various ethnic backgrounds were permanently maimed, in addition to the psychological trauma and emotional scars they suffered. Around three million Polish citizens were forced into forced labour, becoming de facto slaves, while Polish territories were transformed into colonies of the Third Reich. Many did not survive the war, dying from exhaustion, disease, bombardment, or mistreatment. Hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens were taken prisoner, and hundreds of thousands were deported to concentration camps. Poles, regardless of their ethnic background, were killed by the Nazis in mass executions. More than one million children were orphaned, and approximately 200,000 were deported to Germany for forced Germanisation.

During the Warsaw Uprising, the Germans razed the Polish capital to the ground and murdered around 200,000 of its inhabitants. The victims were overwhelmingly defenceless civilians, as exemplified by the Wola Massacre – a mass extermination of the residents of an entire district carried out by SS units under the command of SS-Gruppenführer Heinz Reinefarth in early August 1944.

We call for **an ethical approach to academic research and for scholarly integrity**. Shifting responsibility for the Holocaust onto “Polish mayors” is a serious distortion and, above all, desecrates the memory of the Jewish victims. These victims – regardless of their ethnic background or religious affiliation – were, first and foremost, Polish citizens and residents of Polish towns and cities. Each victim had a name, a family, and a world of their own.

We also draw attention to the fact that the announcement of the meeting displays the cover of the book by Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, featuring a photograph of the eminent Pole, **Julian Spitośław Kulski**. Presenting it as a symbol of the Holocaust is a blatant falsification of history, as is the title of the book *Polish Mayors and the Holocaust* suggesting their perpetration and responsibility. Before the war, Kulski served as deputy mayor of Warsaw under Stefan Starzyński, who, at the beginning of the war, was arrested by the Gestapo and brutally murdered. A similarly tragic fate befell Warsaw’s vice-president, Jan Pohoski, who was arrested and murdered by the Germans in the forest at Palmiry in June 1940.

Julian Spitosław Kulski served during the war (1939–1944) as the German-appointed Acting Mayor of Warsaw, **approved by the Polish Underground State and the Polish Government-in-Exile**. In this context, suggesting – on the basis of the event announcement – that Julian Spitosław Kulski was “significantly involved in the persecution and murder of Polish and European Jews,” attributing to him co-responsibility for the Holocaust, and placing him almost on a par with the German occupiers, **blatantly contradicts historical fact**.

It is worth recalling that **Julian Spitosław Kulski was himself of Jewish descent**. His great-grandfather was Dow Ber Meisels, a Polish patriot who served as Chief Rabbi of Warsaw from 1856 until the January Uprising. During the war, Kulski hid Jews in his own apartment. **In 2018, he was posthumously honoured with the From the Depths Mosberg Award**. He saved the lives of tens of thousands of Polish citizens of Jewish origin. Together with employees of the Warsaw City Hall, Kulski issued Jews with false identity papers and certificates attesting to their “employment” in the municipal office. He assisted members of the resistance, fugitives sought by the Germans, and Jewish escapees from the Warsaw Ghetto. **As a person of Jewish origin who cooperated with the Polish Underground State, he risked his life every day**.

We hope our message reaches those individuals and institutions responsible for preserving memory and educating the public about this darkest period in European and world history, and that it prompts reflection. The memory of the crimes committed by the National Socialist German regime should serve as a warning to all. We are obliged to preserve the memory of the victims, who can no longer speak for themselves about their terrible fate, and we – today’s generations – are and will remain the guardians of that memory.