

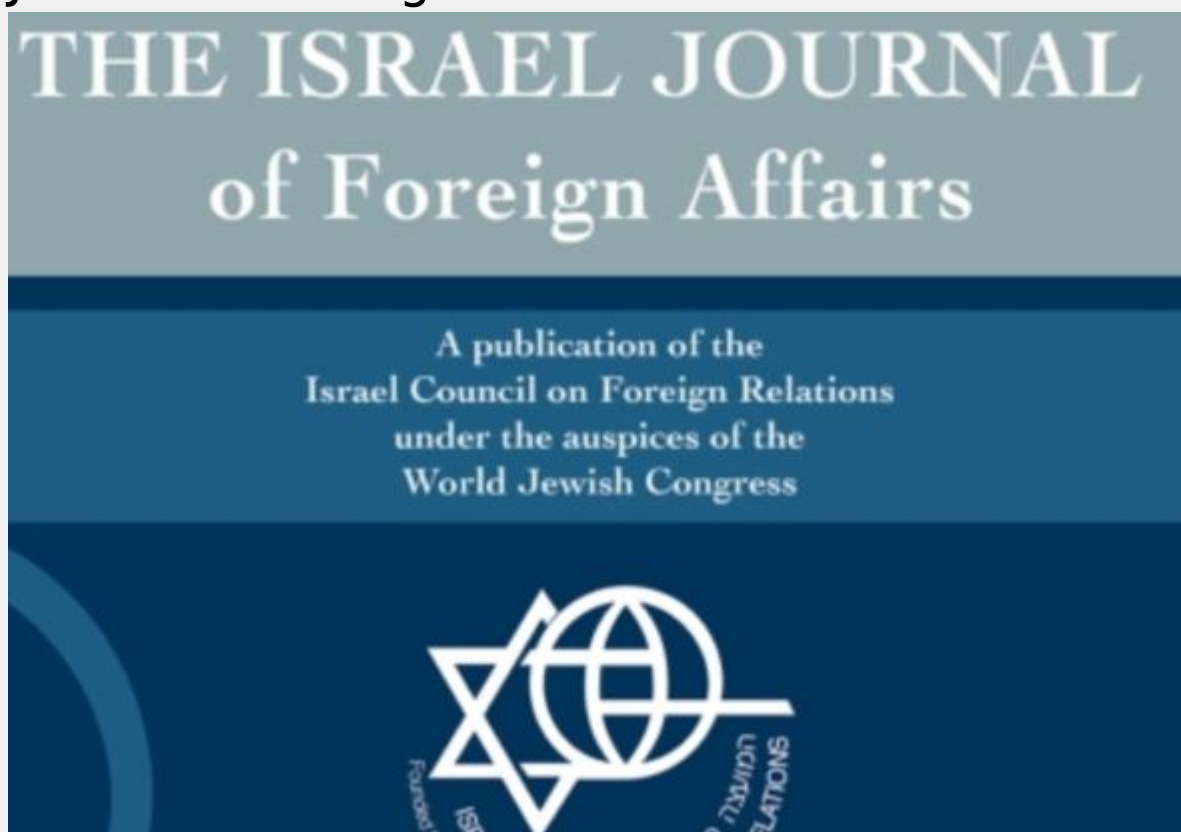
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A researcher's opinion on the article in “Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs”



“Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs” is a magazine published since 2006 which was created as a flagship publication of the Israel Council on Foreign Relations (ICFR). It is a non-partisan body operating under the aegis of the World Jewish Congress. Given the provenance of the magazine, account should be taken of the fact that the content contained therein is in line with the interpretation of this organisation.

At the same time its formal character is of great importance for the interpretation of such content – namely, it is a forum containing exclusively the authors' opinions, not aspiring to scientific analyses.

In the discussed title there is a strong thesis directly suggesting that nowadays in Europe a process of falsifying and whitewashing the history occurs with respect to the responsibility for the Holocaust of European nations. These phenomena are supposedly generated by European nations/societies and their governments. According to the author, the Polish state is one of such generators, which is proved by the examples he provides. However, it should be noted that the text is devoted not so much to historical issues but rather to the contemporary historical narration which, though it can be interdisciplinary researched, it is mostly the subject of social and not humanistic studies.

With regard to historical facts contained in the discussed text which became the basis of the author's considerations, several leads seem to deserve to be discussed in detail. According to the author, it seems that the key evidence for the formulated thesis is the story of the denouncement and murder of the Ulm family. According to his interpretation, symbolically it contains not one, heroic story concerning the sacrifice of life by the Ulm Family but also a second one about the Polish neighbours who contributed to giving this family up to the Germans. In the author's opinion, the Polish historical narration in this subject exposes only the first layer of this story, whereas the second is marginalised.

It is a subjective perception – this story was only shown in remembrance, while it is not accompanied either in historical works or in the Ulm Family Museum by the marginalisation of the negative attitude presented by Poles. The information about who committed the crime and for what reasons is given everywhere. It is also significant that its main ringleader was regarded as an Ukrainian and the other one was a Czechoslovak. However, ethnicization is not the only key to the examination of such kind of cases – it seems that the context of German occupation is the most

relevant here, which influenced the attitudes of Poles and yet is missing from the author's considerations.

Historical facts concerning the crime against the Ulm family are as follows. The culprit of the tragedy of the Ulm family was Włodzimierz Leś – a Blue Police constable in Łańcut. He came from Biała near Tyczyn and like his ancestors he was regarded as an Ukrainian. Thanks to surviving files of court proceedings against one of perpetrators, Joseph Kokott, it is possible to determine the course of the cruel crime. Lieutenant Eilert Dieken, the chief of a German gendarmerie station in Łańcut was the leader of the patrol. Other military policemen included: a germanised Czech Joseph Kokott, Michael Dziwulski and Erich Wilde. Two surnames were identified out of Blue Police members: Eustachy Kolman and the above-mentioned W. Leś.

After the war, on 10 September 1944, the underground passed a death sentence on a zealous Blue Police member Leś – he was shot in Łańcut, which proves that he was a degenerate who deserved the death

penalty. As far as lieutenant Eilert Dieken, the chief of the fatal patrol, is concerned, he escaped justice. When, in the 1960s, evidentiary material charging him for the crimes was gathered in the Federal Republic of Germany, it turned out that he had already died but Joseph Kokott was found in 1957 in Czechoslovakia and tried. In 1958 the court in Rzeszów found him guilty of murder and sentenced him to death. Upon Kokott's request, the Council of the State of the People's Republic of Poland granted clemency and replaced his penalty with a life sentence and next with 25 years of imprisonment. He died in prison in 1980.

It must be mentioned that in the light of only one account from Jehuda Erlich, hiding in Sietesz village, cited by the author after the crime against the Ulm family had been committed, probably at night or early in the morning, in panic and due to fear for their own life local Polish peasants hiding other Jews murdered 24 persons who were under their care. This story is used by the author to rebuke the Polish historical narration which, according to him, does not mention these facts. In his opinion the model narration concerning the Ulm family is provided on the Yad Vashem Internet website devoted to the Righteous. However, he forgets to add that there is also a summary on the fact that other peasants, even under fear, did not denounce Jews. In Markowa at least seventeen people survived in total, although the research concerning the issue of Poles rescuing Jews is still in progress, so these numbers may change. The discussed text is silent on these facts.

Furthermore, it must be noted that on the Yad Vashem website there is

no information which would point to the ethnicity of the murderers of the Ulm Family and this is a pity because such knowledge is presented in scientific reports.

Another author's allegation, this time addressed directly at Polish researchers, is related to the issue of carrying out research concerning Poles rescuing Jews. Without naming names (probably it is about Michał Kalisz, a historian employed in the Institute of National Remembrance) the author criticises one of them who, based on unspecified criteria and too hastily, found 600 new cases of Poles from Podkarpacie who helped Jews. He seems to suggest in this way that these are not genuine Righteous because they have to be approved by Yad Vashem, thus indicating that these are cases not subject to the stringent and arduous verification process.

From the historical point of view, there is no practice which requires that Poles who were awarded with the title of Righteous Among the Nations be treated as more worthy than those who were not verified by the Israeli institution. The Yad Vashem criteria constitute one method of selecting appropriate people who genuinely risked their lives rescuing Jews during World War II. Additional ways of assessing these issues, which are not related to the institutional verification process carried out in Israel and constitute the result of individual research carried out by certain historians, are commonly acceptable. No one needs to be convinced that independent historical analyses have developed into a research trend which has resulted in hundreds of articles and books concerning rescuers based on a diversified source

material related to rescuing Jews. Writing the history of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II taking into account only and exclusively the institutional acquis of Yad Vashem would be anachronistic and incorrect for the simple reason that the problematic aspects of the rescuers and the rescued goes beyond the issue of sacrificing life – ad hoc aid, assistance for money, etc. is involved.

By the way, it should be noted that recently M. Kalisz has contributed to awarding Poles from Podkarpacie with the medal the Righteous Among the Nations. This confirms his competence and suggests that the research direction which he chose is appropriate. He estimates that in the current Podkarpackie Voivodeship there were about 1,600 Poles who rescued about 2,900 Jews. Out of this number 200 people were murdered. The calculations of Yad Vashem talks about 400 Righteous in this region.

The third point addressed by the author is related to the attitude of “the Polish resistance” towards Jews. Apart from the incorrect name which is also used in the text to describe the Polish Underground, first of all, it is difficult to identify the relation between the cases of the physical extermination of Jews by the Polish Underground, including communist groups, and with respect to the main subject addressed by the author, i.e. whitewashing and falsifying the history, there are no examples concerning this fact and it is difficult to comment on the author’s words. One can only find the phrase that “many groups of the Underground” carried out such acts. Taking into account the rich and quite well-described and documented history of the AK [*Home Army*]

units, the number of such cases cannot be the reason for advancing a thesis about a high frequency of murders of Jews committed by the Underground. On the contrary, so far the research points to the incidental nature of such dramas and such cases were condemned and punished just as other crimes committed by the Underground members. There is no reliable book supported by the scientific evidence and written by a Polish or English-speaking researcher which would confirm this “multiplicity”.

Furthermore, the “Operation Ghetto” mentioned by the author requires comment as he has only a very vague idea about it – he cannot even name it and incorrectly writes that “members of the Polish resistance tried to break into it [the ghetto] to demonstrate the Polish solidarity with Jewish fighters”. Namely, first of all, the text presents the “revelatory” interpretation that in fact the above-mentioned Operation was a Polish-Polish battle which took place between the AK members and the so-called Blue Police. It is a bizarre opinion. The unit called the Blue Police was not actually Polish – formally as *Polnische Polizei im Generalgouvernement* – it was subject to local commanders of the German Order Police, the Ordnungspolizei. Its German provenance is also confirmed by the act of German law which established the *Polnische Polizei* – on the orders of Hans Frank it was set up on 17 December 1939 as a separate unit which was not related to the pre-war Polish police although it incorporated its members; they were threatened with the death penalty for not joining it.

Secondly, it must be emphasised that members of the Underground

were not attacked by blue policemen. They did not have such plans as the Germans entrusted them with the role of forming a cordon. When three vehicles with policemen arrived, the AK soldiers from the sapper cover decided to fire some shots to police groups in order to prevent them from forming a cordon which would have made the operation difficult. When the shoot-out started, the Germans provided back-up with the use of machine guns and an armoured vehicle. Thus, it is difficult to agree with the author that blue policemen shot at the AK soldiers, arrested and killed them. Poles were murdered by Germans operating in the ghetto. Eugeniusz Morawski and Józef Wilk were killed.

Thirdly, the statement that the AK soldiers only tried to break into the ghetto and because they succeeded a fierce battle began in which some of them were killed is false. According to other sources, also Jewish ones, a regular fight also took place inside the ghetto and not only at its walls. Therefore, let us emphasize that the operation did not have a symbolic dimension as the author

suggests, i.e. it was not mostly about the demonstration of solidarity but it was taken as a result of military plans focused on a real and not simulated fight lasting from 19 April to 16 May 1943. It is noticeable that the report by Jurgen Stroop provided the specific data concerning the number of Poles participating in the fights in the ghetto, e.g. on 22 April, 35 Poles were killed outside the ghetto; on 27 April, 27 Poles were killed in the ghetto, etc. Thus, the Germans are omitted from this entire "story" told by the author. This is not only the manifestation of the distortion of history which is broadly described in the text and with

the apparent knowledge but also the manifestation of its common falsification if, according to the author, Poles in the Warsaw Ghetto fought with Poles.

The author's prejudices are confirmed by the fact that he does not trust the number of Slavic victims of the German occupation. He calls calculations provided by the Institute of National Remembrance "subjective" (2.7 million). Obviously, these are not calculations made by the Institute of National Remembrance but are accepted by historians as the result of many years of research and so far remain unquestioned in this field. For the author who is not familiar with the history of Poland, these numbers are probably shocking as they indicate that on the Polish side there were as many victims of the German occupation as on the Jewish side. The author's scepticism towards the given numbers may only be explained by lack of knowledge.

Summing up, the author has limited knowledge of the history of Polish-Jewish relations during the war, incorporates the Polish strands into the histories of other countries without noticing subtle differences between them. Furthermore, supporting himself by the power of his imagination, he provides extreme examples in order to prove that Poles also have dark pages in their history. From a historical point of view, the cases which he described do not substantiate his bold theses and are only an exemplification of negative attitudes burdened by incorrect description. In fact, this article is characterised by a certain incoherence – the title does not correspond to the content, at least in

terms of considerations concerning the Holocaust in occupied Poland. It is consistent with the current trend of retelling the history of the Holocaust without the participation of German perpetrators and oppressors. Sadly, there are also socio-technical measures aiming at evoking powerful emotions through the story of a Jewish boy given fine assistance by a dog with whom he lived in a kennel.

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