

November 14, 2016

President Andrzej Duda
Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland
ul. Wiejska 10
00-902 Warszawa
Poland
listy@prezydent.pl

Dear President Duda,

I am writing on behalf of the American Historical Association, respectfully to state our concern about events taking place in Poland with respect to the study of history, and in particular with relation to potential legal proceedings against our colleague Jan Tomasz Gross. We perceive a serious threat to academic freedom, freedom of speech, and impartial historical scholarship in your country. As the principal organization of historians in the United States, with almost 12,000 members, we feel obliged to caution you that these events could severely affect Poland's standing in world opinion, and your country's well-deserved reputation as a defender of truth and freedom.

Most generally, we are concerned with the law currently being discussed in the Polish parliament that would subject to strong penalties anyone convicted of ascribing to the Polish nation or the Polish state the responsibility for crimes against humanity that prosecutors themselves attribute to other perpetrators—in the first instance, the German Third Reich. We feel strongly that this law will allow police and judicial authorities to overrule the judgments of trained historians, and that it will threaten the ability of historians to conduct impartial research that might reveal facts that these authorities find uncomfortable. No nation's past is free of blemishes, and Poland will do itself no favors in the eye of world opinion by passing such a restrictive and prejudicial piece of legislation.

More specifically, and more urgently, we are concerned with the actions taken against Princeton University Professor Jan Tomasz Gross, who for four decades has done exemplary work on the history of World War II and on the Shoah in Poland. There have been actions taken to strip Professor Gross of the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit that he was quite deservedly awarded by Poland for his historical work. Now the Katowice prosecutor's office has overruled a prosecutor's decision not to bring charges against Gross for statements about the killing of Jews by Poles during World War II. If charges are filed against Gross—and still more if he is convicted—Poland's reputation will suffer greatly indeed.

We therefore ask you and your fellow leaders of the Polish state to take whatever steps you can to ensure that the law in question is not enacted, and that Professor Gross—a scholar of whom Poland can be deservedly proud—is not prosecuted for the pursuit of historical truth that has always animated his scholarship.

Sincerely Yours,



Patrick Manning
President
American Historical Association