

AN OPEN LETTER FROM WOJCIECH KOZŁOWSKI, DIRECTOR OF THE PILECKI INSTITUTE, TO ELIYANA ADLER, THE PRIZEWINNER OF THE WITOLD PILECKI INTERNATIONAL BOOK AWARD IN THE "ACADEMIC HISTORY BOOK" CATEGORY

Dear Professor Adler,

The contents of the message that you had sent to the jury of the Witold Pilecki International Book Award and the Pilecki Institute on November 4, 2021 have just been made public. Therefore, I think it only fair to address you in an open letter.

You decided to decline the Witold Pilecki International Book Award in the "Academic Historical Book" category in this year's inaugural edition. The members of the jury – a body of eminent scholars (not only historians), journalists, war reporters and museologists who represent not only several countries, but also different views and sensibilities – have already expressed their sadness and regret. I do not in the slightest question the rightness of the jury's independent choice. I find it all the more regrettable that instead of discussing the merits of your wonderful book, we are pondering the reasons behind your unexpected decision.

In your message, you have briefly outlined the circumstances in which Nazi Germany implemented the Holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War. You have emphasized the significance of the collaboration between the invaders on the one hand and the governments and societies of the occupied countries on the other. You have pointed to various attitudes towards the Holocaust adopted by non-Jewish Poles. I agree with you in principle, though we might differ in particular assessments and interpretations. We can never find it out, however, if there is no will to meet, discuss, and face a different point of view. I agree that "recognizing and researching this entangled past is part of moving forward". This cannot be done, however, in the absence of plurality of opinion and a culture of open dialogue.

I respect your view on the current state of Holocaust research in Poland, though I do not concur with it. However, I must protest against some demonstrably untrue remarks. You wrote that the Pilecki Institute "has also been involved in suppressing the work of historians who strive to show the complex and indeed tragic aspects of Poland's wartime past" and supports the government in its attempts "to curtail this crucial research through the threat and reality of legal action". I am not surprised that you make these allegations with neither proof nor example, and that is because they are completely unfounded. Just as with studying the past, consulting the sources and verifying the readily available narratives is also required to develop an informed opinion about the present. This, however, takes more time than the four days that had passed between your positive response to the information that you have won the award and your final decision to decline it.

One of the reasons for establishing the Witold Pilecki International Book Award was to broaden the scope of discussion on the 20th-century history of Poland, so that books on the same subject published in various languages and in different cultures could engage in direct dialogue and compete on equal terms. We still believe that this is possible. As one of the winners of the first edition, you are always welcome at the Pilecki Institute – in Warsaw, Berlin or online – for a seminar, lecture, panel discussion, conference or a book promotion. This is a standing invitation.

I would like to congratulate you both on your excellent book and the complimentary decision of the jury of the Pilecki Award.

Yours sincerely,

Wojciech Kozłowski, PhD

Director of the Pilecki Institute