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**'A TRAGIC MOMENT': THOUSANDS GATHER ACROSS POLAND TO MOURN GDAŃSK MAYOR**

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The Guardian (15 January 2019)

Thousands of people have gathered in cities across Poland after the fatal stabbing of Gdańsk mayor Paweł Adamowicz in protest at what some say is a creeping pervasiveness of hate speech in Poland's national discourse.

In Gdańsk, thousands gathered for a minutes silence at the statue of Neptune in the city's Long Market, which also hosts the city hall, where Adamowicz served as mayor for more than 20 years. Adamowicz died after he was stabbed in the chest on stage at a charity concert on Sunday evening.

They were addressed by European Council president Donald Tusk, a Gdańsk native, friend and longtime ally of Adamowicz. In an emotional address, Tusk addressed Adamowicz directly: My dear Paweł, we are here with you today as your friends. You had to wait so long, until such a tragic moment, to see from up there just how many friends you have here in Gdansk.

Aleksandra Nabożny, who came with her father to pay her respects at a candlelit vigil by the statue of Neptune, said: We are very sad, and deeply, deeply hurt by what has happened.

We used to see him walking to work in his suit and with his briefcase, stopping and talking to people, wanting to be kind to everyone. He and the city were a perfect match.

Agata Ołubowicz, a local architect, fighting back tears as she spoke, said: We were having such a happy celebration of the Great Christmas Orchestra charity, when people are collecting money for children and older people, it's a moment that connects people, and the next moment, someone from the crowd appears with a knife.

The silence was very powerful – we were alone with our thoughts, but we were connected again.

Adamowicz died on Monday after undergoing more than five hours of surgery on Sunday night. We couldn't win, said Poland's health minister, Łukasz Szumowski.

Dr Tomasz Stefaniak, the director of the hospital where Adamowicz was treated, said: With the deepest regret we must inform that unfortunately we lost the struggle for the life of the president of the city. Honour to his memory.

The alleged assailant, a 27-year-old man from Gdańsk with a record of violent crime, was released from prison last month, it emerged on Monday. After the stabbing, the assailant told the crowd he blamed Adamowicz's former political party Civic Platform for his jailing in 2014 for a series of

violent attacks.

Adamowicz, a popular, liberal mayor, had long been considered a hate figure in far-right circles for his vigorous defence of migrants and refugees and LGBT rights, but no evidence has emerged that the attack was politically motivated.

Some in Poland are blaming the stabbing on a more general rise in social tensions and an increasing prevalence of hate speech. Even before his death, silent protests had been planned in a number of cities on Monday.

The assassination of Adamowicz, a six-term mayor who often mingled freely with the citizens of his city, sent Poland into shock. In Gdańsk, the city flag was lowered to half-mast and a mass was planned for later in the day.

Politicians from across the political spectrum condemned the stabbing, including the prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, the interior minister, Joachim Brudziński, and other members of the ruling nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS). Adamowicz was known as an opponent of PiS.

Jarosław Kaczyński, the PiS leader, was quoted as saying in a tweet from a party spokeswoman: Im expressing great pain for the tragic death due to the criminal attack on mayor Paweł Adamowicz. We express solidarity with his family.

Adamowicz was part of the democratic opposition formed in Gdańsk under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa during the 1980s. After leaving Civic Platform, he was re-elected for a sixth term as an independent candidate late last year.

As mayor he was a progressive voice, supporting sex education in schools, LGBT rights and tolerance for minorities. He showed solidarity with the Jewish community when windows at Gdańsk synagogue were broken last year, strongly denouncing the vandalism.

Adamowicz's wife, Magdalena, was in the United States at the time of the attack, visiting her daughter. She flew to the UK on Monday and the Polish government sent a plane to London to bring her back to Poland.

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