I have to admit, I was deeply upset when I read the essay by Dr. Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe: we all feel anguish over instances of occasional misunderstanding by colleagues. However, it is not my hurt feelings that are the primary motivation for writing this brief response. There is a much more important issue at stake here, namely the instrumentalization of historical analysis in the service of a particular political agenda. This can be revolutionary or conservative (as in the case of recent attacks on Jan T. Gross by the new Polish government), but it has the same effect of projecting a certain simplified ideological vision on to the multidimensional multivalent past.

It is easy to dismiss any misunderstandings regarding my essay in the Frankfurter Algemeine Zeitung (which itself had a complex genealogy: originally written in Russian, it was translated into German and published on 8 January 2016 in a shortened version, with a title provided by the newspaper). It is sufficient to consult my academic publications on the politics of memory in post-Soviet Ukraine that are available in English to understand my scholarly view of the topic and the scope of sources I rely on [1]. What is really troubling is the persistence with which Dr. Rossolinski-Liebe has been targeting the most critically thinking Ukrainian historians, who are involved in Ukrainian Jewish history and the Polish-Ukrainian and German-Ukrainian historical dialogue, ascribing to them the political and methodological stance of bigots and nationalists [2]. Any speculations about my own work are equally ridiculous, as I have systematically published in various languages (Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, German and French) on the ethnic cleansings committed by Ukrainian nationalist underground and the importance of the Holocaust remembrance in Ukraine [3]. So why should one go out of one’s way, trying to present Ukrainian revisionist historians as caricatured versions of politically nationalist and apologetic figures such as Volodymyr Viatrovych?

The format of a brief response does not allow substantiating any hypothetical explanation of such a political choice. For instance, that it a much more comfortable position (both morally and scholarly) to explain the genocidal impulse of nationalism by restricting it to a couple of inherently defective cases – of ‘Hitler’s willing executioners’ in Germany or chronically judeophobic Ukrainians. Otherwise, a scholar would have to address all sorts of uneasy questions. For example, about the degree to which the politics of ethnic cleansing was embedded into the very project of democratic nation state in the early twentieth century. Modern scholarship on the entangled histories of Eastern Europe has become so complex and sophisticated, that easy, one-dimensional answers can only be sustained when reinforced by some para-academic political arguments. And vice versa, a complex professional historical analysis usually problematizes any simple political slogans.

The unequivocal moral and political condemnation of any genocide and mass killing, and accepting the full responsibility of its perpetrators is the point of departure for any professional historian – not the conclusion that needs to be established through a special study. Our more specific and less self-evident conclusions, however, require extensive
research and broad historiographic discussions, in which there is no place for the language that borders on political denunciation.

