

# EKRE deputy chair attends far-right conference in London

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Estonian Minister of Finance Martin Helme from the Conservative People's Party (EKRE), the junior member of the government coalition, on his way to Estonia from an official visit to the United States, stopped over at a far-right conference in London, where he delivered a speech alongside known puppets of the Kremlin and other radicals, Postimees reports.

„Obviously, I know what the conference I attended was about,“ Helme said. The minister said on social media on Sunday that on his way back from a visit to the United States, he had stopped over at an event of a conservative British group in London on Oct. 19. The organization in question is the Traditional Britain Group (TBG).

„This premier real conservative and traditionalist conference presents for you for the first time ever a senior government minister, a leading populist figure and solid example of what real conservatism looks like,“ organizers of the TBG conference said on the event website.

When the minister was asked by Postimees if he was aware of whom he would share the stage with at the group's event, Helme said that he knew some of them.

In addition to Helme, a talk was also given at the event by John Laughland, who served as head of research at the Kremlin-funded Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC) from 2008 to 2018. Laughland, whose skeptical views of NATO and the EU are a carbon copy of those of Russia, has given speeches at the Russian State Duma and the Rhodes Forum, which has been called the Putin adoration society by the international political publication Politico.

IDC, the Paris-based branch of which had provided Laughland with employment since its creation, is a typical tool of Russian soft power. According to documents available on Wikileaks, the institute is intended to end what the Russian authorities see as the western "monopoly" on defining and reporting human rights abuses, and to improve Russia's image in the West. The IDC is financed by the Historical Perspective Foundation, an organization financed by the Russian president's grants. In the wake of the annexation of Crimea, for instance, the foundation was granted 4.7 million rubles to finance research on historical links between Russia and Crimea.

Another speaker at the event was Gustav Kasselstrand, who was expelled from the Sweden Democrats in 2015 and three years later founded a party of his own by the name of Alternative for Sweden (AfS). Kasselstrand, the chairman of AfS, which garnered the support of 0.3 percent of voters in last year's general elections, has been criticized in the Swedish media for his xenophobia, Euroscepticism and overtly pro-Kremlin attitudes, as well as his public opposition to the imposition of sanctions against Russia. According to Kasselstrand, Finland and Sweden should under no circumstances join NATO as the accession would spark tensions with Russia.

A campaign event organized by AfS in Copenhagen in March was also attended by Estonian MEP Jaak Madison.

In addition to pro-Kremlin politicians, speakers at the event also included self-proclaimed researcher Edward Dutton. Dutton holds a doctorate in anthropology of religion, however, his studies are generally not published by scientific journals as his research examines alleged links between religion and genetics, or so-called purity of breed, both of which have little to do with his area of expertise.

Polish politician Krzysztof Bosak was also among those to speak at the event in London. Bosak is a member of the Polish National Movement, which received five seats out of 460 in this year's parliamentary elections, and, according to Polish sociologist and political scientist Rafal Pankowski, represents the most extreme nationalist and neo-fascist subcultures in Poland. The Polish Law and Justice party, which is generally considered to be one of the most powerful far-right political forces in Europe, has been deemed too soft by Bosak.

Also scheduled to give a presentation at the event was former businesswoman and politician Catherine Blaiklock, who was forced to resign as leader of the Brexit Party when it was disclosed she had made anti-Islamic and racist statements online. Leadership of the party was subsequently taken over by Nigel Farage, who deemed Blaiklock's statements horrible and intolerant.

The final speaker at the TBG event was Bernhard Ziminiok, German anti-immigrant MEP from the far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD).

TBG conferences have previously also been attended by Richard Spencer, an American neo-Nazi and white supremacist who has been banned from entering a number of European states. Estonian MP Ruuben Kaalep from EKRE has spoken at events frequented by Spencer.

Helme's visit to London directly followed his attendance at the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Ministry of Finance said that the stopover was not a part of the official visit and the relating expenses were covered by Helme himself.

Postimees attempted to request a comment on the topic from Helme in person; however, the minister left as soon as the journalist had posed their first question.

„I know where you're going with this,“ the minister said. When asked again to comment on the matter on Friday, Helme added that he did not care what was written about him.

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