

# Exclusive: Jewish leaders turn on Cameron's Tories

James Macintyre

Published 29 July 2009

## Cameron criticised over ties with Polish MEP Michal Kaminski

David Cameron could not have been more unequivocal in his support for British Jews when addressing the Conservative Friends of Israel in 2007. "Government, individuals and all community leaders have shared responsibility to tackle prejudice which, if unchallenged, can lead to hatred and violence." If the audience was reassured, little did it know that within two years the Tories would be members of a European group led by a politician widely seen on the Continent as anti-Semitic. Indeed, Cameron himself cannot have known, back in 2005, that his leadership campaign pledge to withdraw from the mainstream European People's Party (EPP) - made to see off Liam Fox to his right - would come back to haunt him in this way.

The new chair of the Conservatives and Reformists group, which includes the 24 Tory MEPs, is Michal Kaminski. He belongs to Poland's Law and Justice party, one of whose MPs, Artur Górski, described the election of Barack Obama in the US as "a disaster" and "the end of the civilisation of the white man". Kaminski is a former member of the neo-Nazi National Revival of Poland party (NOP), which, in a direct quotation from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, says in its manifesto that "Jews will be removed from Poland, and their possessions will be confiscated".

In 2001, he condemned his own president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, for apologising over the Polish massacre of hundreds of Jews in Jedwabne in July 1941.

The role of Poland in massacres of this kind is often overlooked. Though he now denies it, Kaminski is reported to have said in an interview with the right-wing journal *Nasza Polska*: "I think Mr President can apologise but for other things. He should withhold apologies for Jedwabne." That the interview took place has been confirmed by the then editor of *Nasza Polska*.

European Jews have looked on in horror at the ascent of Kaminski. In Poland, he continues to cause alarm at the highest levels of Jewish society. Now, the chief rabbi of that country, Michael Schudrich, tells me: "It is clear that Mr Kaminski was a member of the NOP, a group that is openly far-right and neo-Nazi." Asked about the Tories' new alliance with Kaminski, the chief rabbi said: "Anyone who would want to align himself with a person who was an active member of NOP and the Committee to Defend the Good Name of Jedwabne, which was established to deny historical facts of the massacre . . . , needs to understand with what and by whom he is being represented."

Also in Poland, Rafal Pankowski of the Holocaust campaign group Never Again said: "Kaminski has an extreme-right background. To have him, of all people, the chairman of a group that legitimises far-right tendencies across Europe, is somewhat ironic. [Especially] for a leader like Cameron, who domestically opposed the BNP, for example . . . I would call on David Cameron to sever links with Kaminski."

In London, Rabbi Barry Marcus of the Central Synagogue told me: "Any politician of any political party should have the moral courage to clearly distance themselves from those who espouse and promote anti-Semitism, racism or any attitude that fosters intolerance." And, in Paris, the European Jewish Congress said: "We remain extremely vigilant. We have communicated [our concerns about] this to the president of the EPP [Wilfried Martens] and the new elected parliament president [Jerzy Buzek, the former Polish prime minister]."

Of politicians such as Kaminski, the congress told me: "We know them to make racist comments even in parliamentary gatherings. We are alarmed at the fact that they are given a venue to be outspoken." And he called for British Jews to express their concerns to the Conservative Party. "I would call on the British Jewish community to contact David Cameron over this."

I have learned that the question has, in fact, been raised behind the scenes. During a recent meeting at the International Institute for Strategic Studies that was attended by senior Jewish leaders, a Polish Jew asked William Hague about the matter. According to witnesses, the shadow foreign secretary "brushed aside" the concerns, pointing out that Kaminski is elected. (As we go to press, I am contacting Hague's office and will update this report online.) Cameron, however, appears less relaxed. At a party in July, the Labour MP Denis MacShane was enjoying a glass of champagne when he was accosted by the Tory leader. "Cameron told me to stop asking questions about his new European alliance in the House," MacShane says. But if the Conservatives keep allies like Kaminski, the questions will not go away.