

Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski: My critics are 'hysterical'

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Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski today defended his right to free speech as he attended a European conference alongside some of Europe's leading right wing politicians.

Mr Kawczynski criticised "hysterical" criticism as he featured at an event with anti-immigration figures including the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and a niece of Marine Le Pen.

The Conservative MP is one of 22 speakers at the National Conservatism conference in Rome.

He attracted criticism for attending the event alongside controversial European politicians and last week said he was consulting Tory whips before deciding if he would go.

Today he said he would attend and stood by his decision.

Those speaking on the same platform include Ryszard Legutko, the Polish Law and Justice MEP who has described homophobia as a "totally fictitious problem".

Hermann Tertsch, an MEP for the Spanish anti-immigrant Vox party, has also argued that General Franco was not a fascist and gave Catalans a good life.

Orbán, Hungary's prime minister since 2010, has been accused by opponents of being anti-semitic and Marion Maréchal, Le Pen's niece, has claimed France is becoming "the little niece of Islam".

Dismissed

Professor Rafal Pankowski, of the anti-fascist group Never Again, said the Tories were treading "a dangerous path" by allowing the MP to join a "trans-national cooperation of authoritarian forces".

But in an open letter to the Shropshire Star, Mr Kawczynski today dismissed criticism of him as "hysterical" and said he was using the platform to speak about the importance of nations maintaining their sovereignty rather than "top-down control by unelected bureaucrats".

He said: "The vast majority of Europeans feel stronger loyalties to their countries than the abstract idea of a federal European super-state.

"My own connection with the subject matter could not be clearer. I am the first Polish-born British MP. My family witnessed Communism first-hand. It was an experience that neither I nor most Polish people wish to repeat. I want to see an alliance of sovereign states, each in control of its borders and guardian of its legal and political heritage. In contrast, the European process moves always towards centralisation, top-down control, dictatorship by unelected bureaucrats and judges and constitutional treaties framed without any input from the people."

Meanwhile the Board of Deputies of British Jews have condemned Mr Kawczynski for speaking at the conference.

Board president Marie van der Zyl said: "If the Conservative Party fails to discipline Mr Kawczynski, it runs the serious risk of the public assuming that they share his views on association with such people."

Mr Kawczynski has called criticism of his decision to speak at the conference "hysterical".

Daniel Kawczynski's letter in full:

"I have been deplored for agreeing to speak at a conference on National Conservatism in Rome alongside European political leaders elected on huge mandates to preserve their national sovereignty. Here is why I will be going nonetheless.

The conference is being organised by a group of European and American think tanks brought together by Yoram Hazony, the Israeli political theorist and biblical scholar whose book *The Virtue of Nationalism* won the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's Conservative Book of the Year Award in 2019.

It is taking place in Rome in the centennial year of Pope John Paul II and will begin by revisiting the historic alliance between Pope John Paul and American President Ronald Reagan.

This was an alliance that successfully defeated Communism and re-established national independence, self-determination and religious freedom in Eastern Europe after 1989.

The conference will then cast forward 40 years to examine the fate of national independence and self-determination today, under the rule of the European Union. It will ask whether the freedom of nations that was promised a generation ago is still desirable in our time?

A fair question, you might think. But any mention of the word 'nationalism' tends to send even open-minded readers into a bit of a tailspin.

Serious ideas

Add in the names of the political leaders due to attend the conference, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and former Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, and organs like *The Guardian* turn apoplectic.

Clearly, Messrs. Orban and Salvini are not to everyone's tastes. But they represent serious ideas and concerns, some of which are shared by many citizens of the UK. They have certainly proved electorally attractive in their own countries and have every right to speak at a conference on the subject national sovereignty, the very thing they have pledged to defend and which accounts for their popularity with voters.

If it were to take a more inquisitive approach rather than trolling it, even *The Guardian* might discover why the vast majority of Europeans feel stronger loyalties to their countries than the abstract idea of a federal European super-state.

My own connection with the subject matter could not be clearer. I am the first Polish-born British MP. My family witnessed Communism first-hand. It was an experience that neither I nor most Polish people wish to repeat.

I remember returning to Poland in 1983. There was nothing. Everything was rationed. If you spotted a short queue, you joined it. It didn't matter what it was for, you needed everything.

Perspective

Communism impoverished the Polish people, but worse than that it took away their liberties – their personal freedoms as well as their right to national self-determination.

To Poles like my mother and father, it was the nation state that could guarantee these freedoms. This had been taken away by an empire that sought eviscerate their nationhood, and they wanted it back.

This is why I am going to Rome to speak at the conference. I will share an Anglo-Polish perspective on Brexit and what it signifies for the future of Europe.

But more than anything, I will seek to echo the wisdom of the late Sir Roger Scruton, who warned us not to accept the EU's propaganda version of events that the fall of the Berlin Wall was only about 'freedom of movement'.

This is not true. The revolutions of 1989 were about the restoration of national sovereignty to people who had been absorbed and oppressed by a lawless empire. The fact that they are now absorbed by a lawful one does not alter the case.

Like Sir Roger, in place of a new European empire, I want to see an alliance of sovereign states, each in control of its borders and guardian of its legal and political heritage. In contrast, the European process moves always towards centralisation, top-down control, dictatorship by unelected bureaucrats and judges and constitutional treaties framed without any input from the people.

This is what is meant by National Conservatism, not the hysterical version promulgated by likes of The Guardian who feverishly condemn anyone who expresses a healthy and decent loyalty to his own nation."

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