



AUSTRIA Freedom Party looks for electoral gain

From Martin Jordan for UNITED in Vienna

EIGHT PARTIES WILL fight for Austria's 17 seats in the European Parliament on 7 June. According to opinion polls the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) will improve on its current single seat while its equally far-right rival, Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), will struggle to enter the parliament in the first election since its foundation in 2005.

Under the patronage of Andreas Mölzer, its lone MEP and passionate bridge-builder with right-wing extremist groups internationally, the FPÖ scents a strengthening of its position. As usual, it has launched its election campaign with extremist propaganda. "The Occident in Christian hands – the day of reckoning" screamed the FPÖ's posters.

The Islamic Denomination in Austria (IGGIÖ) denounced the slogan as anti-Islamic and antisemitic and countered with: "The Occident not in fascist hands!". Christian churches likewise lambasted the FPÖ for its racist and sectarian stance.

Rising concern about the constant stigmatisation of "non-Christians" and the defamation of people who do not

belong to the so-called German cultural area take place against the background of an increasingly xenophobic and nationalistic environment in Austria. The Freedom Youth Ring, the FPÖ's state-funded youth outfit, is contributing strongly to this unwholesome development and proving its "promotional creativity" with stickers showing a cigarette packet bearing the warning: "Mixed sort – immigration can cause death".

The BZÖ's difficulty is trying to position itself somewhere between the conservative-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the FPÖ. Its top candidate is the ultra-conservative Catholic fundamentalist Ewald Stadler. A former FPÖ MP, Stadler has only been with the BZÖ – a party that he mocked on its foundation in 2005 – since autumn 2008. He serves the German nationalist wing of the electorate and hopes to attract potential FPÖ voters.

Second on the list is Jörg Freunschlag, a long-serving provincial politician and a faithful acolyte of the late Jörg Haider, the long-time leader of the FPÖ and founder of the BZÖ.

His task is to collar the regional vote especially in Carinthia, his home province and BZÖ stronghold.

Third is the bank official Matthäus Thun-Hohenstein, known until now as an ÖVP member and monarchist. He is supposed to indicate economic skill but it is somewhat misconceived at a time when everybody is raging at bankers for the economic crisis.

Ambiguous slogans for the European election seem to be a general trend and the ÖVP is no exception, proclaiming "Europe votes, Austria decides". The biscuit in this "contest", though, is taken by the parliament's own PR team, which uses a stupidly provocative way to encourage people to vote. Its billboards show a defensive wall opposite a hedge with the question "How open should our borders be?"

Motivation is sorely needed because in 2004 only 42.4% of Austrians voted but this sort of campaigning is too reminiscent of the rhetoric and symbolism used by far-right groups that campaign to shut out the world from Austria. The adverts do create publicity but, rather than stimulating voters, they tend to polarise opinions. ◀

POLAND Polish rightists may form bloc with Tories

From Rafal Pankowski for *Nigdy Wiecej* and Antifa-Net in Warsaw

THE BRITISH Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) may launch a joint right-wing group in the European Parliament soon after the election, if Polish press reports are correct.

A similar initiative was reported three years ago when the former Tory leader William Hague visited Poland to discuss details and Polish politicians were quick to announce an agreement triumphantly. That alliance did not materialise, because the well publicised antics of the PiS-led Polish government did not fit the new image cultivated by David Cameron. Jaroslaw Kaczynski's administration was violently homophobic and included notorious extreme-right activists such as its

Education Minister, Roman Giertych.

Now two years on from the collapse of the Kaczynski government, the Tories and their right-wing Polish friends are again discussing a joint group. PiS MEPs are currently members of the small Union for a Europe of the Nations group, together with far-right Italian MEPs from the National Alliance and Northern League, the toxically anti-immigrant Danish People's Party and the Irish nationalists of Fianna Fail.

Currently, the Conservatives belong to the much larger centre-right European People's Party (EPP). When Cameron stood for election as Tory leader he promised to leave the EPP but courting the PiS may turn out to be a seriously ill-advised move.



The PiS was formed by the Kaczynski twins in 2001 on an authoritarian law and order platform. Initially, it could not be described as far-right, but since then it has moved strongly in that direction. Around 2005 it formed a strategic alliance with Radio Maryja, the notoriously antisemitic and nationalist Catholic radio station and has largely embraced its Catholic

BELGIUM VB set to lose an MEP

Wim Haelsterman reports from Brussels for AFF/Verzet – RésistanceS in Brussels

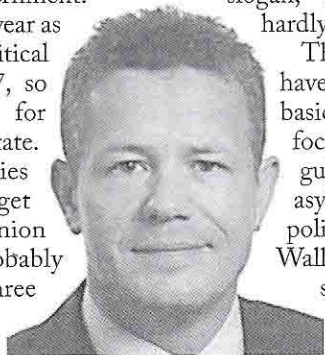
BELGIUM ELECTS 22 MEPs on 7 June. Thirteen will represent the Flemish community, eight the French-speaking community and one the German minority in eastern Belgium.

Three far-right parties are taking part in the race to get their snouts into what they perceive as the EU gravy train: Flemish Interest (VB), the National Front (FN) and a newcomer, Wallonia First.

The European election is being held simultaneously with the regional elections, which attract more national media coverage because of the importance of regional politics in Belgium. The results can have a huge impact on the federal government.

This is especially true this year as Belgium has been in a political crisis since summer 2007, so outcome will be decisive for the future of the Belgian state.

Of the far-right parties only the VB is likely to get anyone elected. If the opinion polls are right it will probably lose at least one of its three MEPs. The once successful VB has had to



deal with a lot of internal conflicts and pressure from the right-wing populist Lijst Dedecker (LDD), which has lured away many of its activists, several MPs and a lot of its voters. The VB also faces competition from the more moderate nationalist New-Flemish Alliance (N-VA).

Frank Vanhecke MEP (pictured), the former party president, heads the VB's list of candidates. His re-election is expected but will not deflect attention from the fact that the party is in deep trouble. His successor, Bruno Valkeniers, has signally failed to develop strategies that can enable the party to defeat its rivals on the right. The VB's slogan, "This is OUR country", is hardly an inspiration.

The VB's pressing problems have shoved it into "back to basics" mode with a sharp focus on "those who are guilty", namely immigrants, asylum seekers, traditional politics and "lazy socialist Walloons". The Flemish separatist perspective has been exhumed and revived with the VB

loudly claiming to be the only party that can lead Flanders to autonomy.

In Wallonia only the yet-again "renewed" FN stands a tiny chance of getting a candidate elected. To get that far, the notoriously clumsy party needs close to 10% of the Francophone vote, a difficult though not impossible objective. The FN has not had an MEP since 1999 after its president Daniel Féret lost his seat. J P Borbouse, a veteran but uninspiring far-right politician, heads its European list.

The FN's campaign symbol is the infamous broom, which is controversial as its first use was by Rex, the Belgian Nazi party, before the Second World War. The VB also used the symbol in the early 1990s.

The microscopic Wallonia First has managed to organise itself well enough to participate in the elections, which is pretty much its main achievement. This outfit, led by former FN activists, has nothing going for it and will play no role at all. It profiles itself as a regionalist non-separatist party, defending the interests of the Walloon region in a rather old-fashioned and bigoted far-right manner. ◀

fundamentalist ideology. It has also accepted numerous Polish nationalist radicals into its ranks.

One of them is Michal Kaminski (pictured), a leading PiS member, who is rumoured to be the likely leader of any Polish-British European Parliament faction. His career is remarkable. As a young man at the beginning of the 1990s, he was a member of the fascist National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) before switching to the National Christian Union (ZChN), and became known for his strongly nationalist views.

In 1999, Kaminski made a much-publicised trip to London to meet and pay tribute to the murderous former Chilean fascist dictator Augusto Pinochet, who was under arrest.

In 2000, while campaigning in the ethnically diverse region of Bialystok, he went on record declaring his allegiance to the infamous slogan "Poland for the Polish", which invoked

memories of the nationalist violence against minorities there in the 1920s and 1930s. In 2001, Kaminski was busy mobilising the population of Jedwabne against important commemorations of the wartime pogrom against Jews.

In 2004, he became a PiS MEP and was the first Polish MEP to make a speech in the European Parliament. As the party's main public relations specialist he was credited with the success of its electoral campaign in 2005. In 2007, he became an official spokesman of President Lech Kaczynski, another proof of his political (in addition to physical) heavy weight.

Meanwhile, a new Polish political party is fielding European election candidates who have been linked with antisemitic views. The Eurosceptic Libertas, whose platform is opposition to European integration, will field a list that includes Ryszard Bender, a historian at the Catholic University of Lublin, who said in 2000 on Radio

Maryja that Auschwitz was "not a death camp but a labour camp" and that "Jews, Gypsies and others were killed by hard labour, not always that hard, and not always killed".

Another Libertas candidate, Anna Sobecka, is also known for her enthusiastic backing for Radio Maryja, which has been condemned by human and civil rights groups for its antisemitic broadcasts. Both Sobecka and Bender are former members of the Polish parliament and belonged to the League of Polish Families, another organisation whose members are tainted with antisemitism. In 2007, Sobecka and Bender were elected to the Polish parliament under the PiS banner.

Founded with support from Declan Ganley, the Irish Eurosceptic multimillionaire, Libertas has attracted members of both the League of Polish Families and the All-Polish Youth, a notoriously violent skinhead group. It will put up 128 candidates. ◀