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[European Union](#)

[European Neighbourhood](#)

[Russia & Eurasia](#)

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# Why David Cameron is right to break ranks with Sarkozy and Merkel

By Marko Attila Hoare, 31st July 2009

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1. The new European Conservative and Reformist group in the European Parliament, which Britain's Conservatives have recently formed, has been criticised for containing unsavoury far-right elements, yet critics ignore the equally bad or worse elements within the European People's Party, with whom the British Conservatives formerly sat.**
- 2. The Euro-federalist bloc represented by the European People's Party and by France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany's Angela Merkel is leading the EU down a dangerous path that threatens to undermine**

**Europe's security and the Western alliance. British Conservative leader David Cameron is to be commended for breaking ranks with this bloc.**

**3. Whatever the original motivations for its formation, it is to be hoped that the European Conservatives and Reformists will provide a voice for Europeans, particularly East and Central Europeans, who are uncomfortable with the federalist project and with the Franco-German preponderance in the EU, and who staunchly support the US alliance.**

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David Cameron, the British Conservative leader and probable next British Prime Minister, has been coming under harsh criticism for his decision to take the British Conservatives out of the conservative Euro-federalist bloc in the European Parliament, the European People's Party, and to form a new anti-federalist group: the European Conservatives and Reformists, whose most prominent other members are Poland's Law and Justice Party and the Czech Republic's Civic Democratic Party. Critics have pointed out that the new group includes racists, homophobes, climate-change-deniers and politicians with far-right backgrounds. The European Conservatives and Reformists is chaired by Michal Kaminski, an admirer of Augusto Pinochet and opponent of Polish moves to apologise for the Polish massacre of Jews at Jedwabne during World War II. They have argued that Cameron is marginalising Britain within the EU.

So far as Cameron's critics from the ranks of the Euro-federalist wing of the Conservative Party and of Britain's Labour Party are concerned, it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. The European People's Party, supposedly the voice of moderate, centre-right conservatism, includes the ruling Italian party, Silvio Berlusconi's 'People of Freedom'. The latter, formally founded this spring, includes the heirs to Italy's Fascist movement, including Gianfranco Fini's National Alliance and Alessandra Mussolini's Social Action. Poland's homophobic Civic Platform is also a member of the European People's Party. Stefan Niesiolowski, deputy speaker of the Polish Sejm and a member of Civic Platform, has described lesbians as '[sickening](#)' and as a '[pathology](#)'. The European People's Party includes also as

observers or associates Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), which denies the Armenian Genocide and flirts with anti-Semitism, and Serbia's Democratic Party of Serbia, whose leader Vojislav Kostunica presided over the burning down of the US embassy in Belgrade last year.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party's members in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe sit in the Socialist Group, which includes Russia's fascist Liberal Democratic Party, headed by the overtly racist and anti-Semitic Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who [called](#) publicly for the 'preservation of the white race' and warned that 'it's all over for you once you're Americanised and Zionised'. The Socialist Group also includes 'Just Russia', which incorporates the racist, far-right Rodina party – several of whose members in the Russian Duma have called for all Jewish organisations in Russia to be closed. Another member of the Socialist Group is Turkey's anti-Kurdish Republican People's Party, which not only denies the Armenian Genocide but opposed even the Turkish government's own measures to lift restrictions on the Kurdish language.

This sort of point-scoring is very easy. Geopolitical alliances are not equivalent to domestic political alliances, in which there can be no excuse for allying with bigots or fascists. The reality of geopolitics is that the majority of the world's states have not achieved Western-democratic standards of democracy, tolerance and human rights. Consequently, even democratic states are frequently forced to have unsavoury allies. We had to ally with Stalin to defeat Hitler; with Saudi Arabia and Hafez al-Assad's Syria to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991; with the Northern Alliance to defeat the Taliban in 2001. NATO has long included the highly chauvinistic states of Turkey and Greece, which discriminate against their national minorities in a manner that is wholly at odds with the standards of democratic Europe. The UK shares membership of the EU with states, such as Italy and Poland, that tolerate fascism or bigotry to an extent that would be unacceptable to the UK's politically conscious public. We share membership of the Council of Europe with states whose democratic credentials are still more flawed, such as Turkey and Russia. A British party sitting in the European Parliament or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of

Europe, that does not wish wholly to isolate itself, has little choice but to join blocs that include some highly unsavoury members.

Of course, one could take the principled position that international isolation would be preferable to any alliance that includes bigots or extremists. Yet this is the opposite of what Cameron's critics, such as [Denis MacShane](#) and [Nick Cohen](#) are saying, which is that he should have kept the British Conservatives in the European People's Party in order to preserve British influence through membership of the dominant mainstream centre-right bloc, as represented by Angela Merkel's German Christian Democrats and Nicolas Sarkozy's Union for a Popular Movement.

I have great respect for both Denis MacShane and Nick Cohen, but I must beg to differ. The biggest internal threat to the EU is not the homophobia or anti-environmentalism of Polish and Czech rightists – disgusting though these are. A rather bigger threat comes from the Euro-federalist project that, with only slight oversimplification, can be defined as follows: forge a strategic partnership with Russia at the expense of Eastern Europe; undermine the Western alliance in the interests of 'independence' from the US; keep Turkey out of the EU, at whatever cost to Western strategic interests; keep Ukraine and Georgia out of NATO, consigning them to the status of buffer zone vis-a-vis an appeased Russia; and build a narrow, inward-looking 'Fortress Europe' that would certainly not pull its weight in the global struggle with the enemies of freedom and human rights. Such is the policy of the dominant Franco-German bloc in the EU, currently led by Merkel and Sarkozy.

Sarkozy hardly scores higher in terms of political correctness than does Kaminski. He is on record for opposing Turkey's entry into the EU on the grounds that 'Turkey is in Asia Minor' and that 'I won't be able to explain to French school kids that Europe's border neighbors are Iraq and Syria.' (This from the head of a state that, via its overseas department of French Guiana, shares a land border with Brazil). Treating Turkey, which was part of the Ancient Greek world and the Roman Empire and whose largest city was for a time the Roman capital, as an Asian 'other' with no right to be part

of Europe, scarcely marks Sarkozy out as a respectable centre-right statesman free of bigoted views. Nor does his vocal support for the Greek-nationalist campaign to force the Republic of Macedonia to change its name, motivated as this is by the racist belief that a Slavic-speaking people has no right to use the Macedonian name of the ‘Greek’ Alexander the Great, and that the Macedonian nation has no right even to exist.

Sarkozy and Merkel were responsible in April 2008 for the failure to grant a NATO Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine, effectively announcing to Moscow that the Western alliance was not standing by these countries – a message that Vladimir Putin took to heart when he attacked Georgia soon after. Sarkozy and Merkel were then in the forefront of the appeasers who pushed to ensure that Moscow’s aggression would not be allowed to stand in the way of EU-Russian collaboration. At the height of Russia’s aggression against Georgia, while France held the EU Presidency, Sarkozy travelled to Moscow to [reassure](#) the Russians that ‘It’s perfectly normal that Russia would want to defend the interests both of Russians in Russia and Russophones outside Russia.’ Sarkozy’s negotiations, in Toby Vogel’s [words](#), ‘yielded a badly drafted ceasefire agreement and provided space for numerous Russian violations that the EU was in no position to counter’. Merkel, meanwhile, is in coalition with the German Social Democratic Party – the champion of collaboration with Russia, whose former leader Gerhard Schroeder described Putin as an ‘impeccable democrat’.

The Franco-German policy of excluding Turkey permanently from the EU – an integral element in the Euro-federalist strategy – has borne bitter fruit. The once reformist government of the AKP in Turkey, persistently disappointed in its ambition to join the EU, is turning away from the West and toward an increasing alignment with Russia, Iran and other tyrannical states of the Islamic world. For the current leaderships of France and Germany, cementing strategically crucial Turkey’s membership of the Western alliance is simply less important than their goal of an introverted federalist Fortress Europe that they would dominate. Meanwhile, Poland, the Czech Republic and other NATO members from the former Communist bloc are increasingly apprehensive at the possibility of a Western

rapprochement with Russia that would see their security interests sacrificed – as the recent [open letter](#) to the Obama Administration from a stellar panel of Eastern and Central European statesmen makes clear. We can be certain that it will not be Sarkozy and Merkel who will be reassuring our Eastern and Central European allies.

In sum, Sarkozy and Merkel are taking the EU down the wrong path – a path, moreover, with which British public opinion is deeply uncomfortable. The policy of Gordon Brown’s government so far has been to keep rank with the French and Germans. This policy has not achieved results.

It would be wrong to read too much into Cameron’s move, which is apparently the result principally of internal Conservative Party politics rather than geostrategic considerations. Despite promises to the contrary made at the time of the Georgian war last summer, the Conservatives are continuing to sit with Putin’s United Russia party in the European Democrat Group in the Council of Europe. But in principle, Cameron’s formation of the European Conservatives and Reformists shows a welcome readiness to shake up EU politics and power structures and break ranks with elements that are taking Europe down the wrong path. The European Parliament is not where power lies in the EU, but in principle, the new group – small as it currently is, and containing as it does some undeniably unsavoury elements – could grow to provide a powerful voice for Europeans, particularly East and Central Europeans, who are uncomfortable with the federalist project and with the Franco-German preponderance in the EU, and who staunchly support the US alliance. It is to be hoped that this new group will serve as a building block for a new, alternative European project in keeping with Cameron’s professed vision of ‘progressive conservatism’, and not as a haven for European reactionaries.

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