

Polish defence minister condemned over Jewish conspiracy theory

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Newly appointed Antoni Macierewicz criticised for saying hoax document about plan for world domination could be real

Poland's newly appointed defence minister has been condemned for entertaining the possibility that a fraudulent document claiming to show there is a Jewish plan for world domination may be real.

Antoni Macierewicz is one of a number of controversial appointments the rightwing Law and Justice party made on Monday after securing an absolute majority for the first time in the country's general election.

His appointment could complicate Poland's relations with Nato and EU allies as they seek to contain Russia. It could also prove difficult for David Cameron, whose European Conservatives and Reformists group is propped up by Law and Justice.

Macierewicz told listeners to Radio Maryja in 2002 that he had read Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a pamphlet that purports to be a Jewish plan to control the global economy and media, but which has been exposed as a hoax.

He acknowledged there was debate about the pamphlet's authenticity, but told a listener: "Experience shows that there are such groups in Jewish circles."

His words have been widely condemned by anti-racist campaigners in Poland. Rafał Pankowski, who wrote about Macierewicz's appearance on the radio show in a book about Poland's far right, said: "He is well known for his divisive, radical style of politics, which is rooted in the nationalist identity discourse of Radio Maryja."

"The political culture of Law and Justice seems strongly influenced by such discourse. It is a sad time for Polish and European democracy if the promotion of conspiracy theories is rewarded with high-level appointments."

A former member of Poland's anti-communist opposition movement and deputy defence minister, Macierewicz is known for his efforts to purge the country's military intelligence services of communist and Russian influence.

In the early 1990s, he led a search for communists among former Solidarity leaders, accusing them of having worked for the secret police. He even accused the union's founder, Lech Wałęsa, of being a spy known as Agent Bolek, but his claims could not be proven.

More recently, he has been the main champion of a theory that a plane crash that killed 96 Poles in 2010, including the Polish president, was assassination orchestrated by Russia, rather than an accident as official investigations found.

“The government headed by [Russia’s then prime minister Vladimir] Putin is fully responsible for this tragedy,” he told the European parliament in March.

“It may be said that it was the first salvo in a war which today is going on in the east of Europe, and which is ever more dramatically nearing EU and Nato borders.”

The Russian government blamed pilot error, and Polish investigators have said airport crew were also responsible.

Macierewicz’s incendiary language may concern diplomats in Brussels already wary about the victory of the nationalist and Eurosceptic Law and Justice.

Protocols of the Elders of Zion was supposed to have been first published in Russia in the 1900s, translated into various languages and disseminated internationally in the early 20th century.

It claimed to be the minutes of a late 19th-century meeting of Jewish leaders, in which they discussed their goal of a global plan to subvert the morals of gentiles and control the press and the global economy.

Journalists and historians exposed it as a fraud in the 1920s, showing it to contain chunks of text lifted from other books. It was nonetheless studied in German classrooms after the Nazis came to power in 1933.

Law and Justice became the first party in post-communist Poland to win an absolute majority in parliament, giving it unprecedented control over policy.

Its return to power brings back the former prime minister Jarosław Kaczyński, whose government annoyed European allies with anti-EU rhetoric between 2005 and 2007.

Law and Justice did not respond to the Guardian’s request for a comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/10/polish-defence-minister-condemned-over-jewish-conspiracy-theory>