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PEGIDA and the Alternative für Deutschland: two sides of the same coin?

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Abstract Over the last two years Germany has experienced a significant growth of nationalist, anti-Islamic and xenophobic forces. While the movement Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, PEGIDA) has been mobilising protest on the ground in the Saxon capital, the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) has continually increased its number of seats in state parliaments, with a fundamental rejection of the refugee policy of the federal government. Since the election of a new leadership of the AfD in the summer of 2015, one can observe signs of rapprochement between these two organisations. In this paper I argue that the AfD and PEGIDA are two sides of the same coin. Further approximation and collaboration will depend on the outcome of lasting internal power struggles inside the AfD.

Keywords Germany | Anti-Islamic protest | Radicalisation | Right-wing and national populism

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Introduction

Compared to its neighbours, Germany is a latecomer when it comes to having a relevant and nationwide right-wing populist party. Attempts to establish such parties previously were either locally or temporarily restricted, or failed because of resistance from the established democratic forces, including the media. Moreover, far-right parties suffered from internal disputes over leadership and strategy, and problems demarcating themselves from the right-wing extremist camp. Their major problem was, however, that they could not build up alliances with like-minded social movements.

Things changed with the foundation of the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) in April 2013 and the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, PEGIDA) movement, which entered the scene for the first time in October 2014 in Dresden, the capital of Saxony. Although these two events were separated by a gap of more than a year, and although in the beginning the AfD was primarily an anti-euro protest party with some nationalist and anti-immigration influences that it tried very hard to repress, some representatives of the party's nationalist wing, such as the leaders of the AfD group in the state parliaments of Brandenburg and Thuringia, Alexander Gauland and Björn Höcke, respectively, immediately recognised PEGIDA as a natural ally (Vorländer et al. 2016, 40; Korsch 2016a, 120). At the top level, however, the leaders of both organisations at this time were reluctant to move closer together.

Bernd Lucke and other AfD officials of the misleadingly labelled 'economic-liberal' wing¹ were sceptical about the true character of PEGIDA, considering it too xenophobic, too nationalist and too radical, and therefore repellent to potential voters. For their part, the hardcore PEGIDA activists accused the Lucke-led AfD of being too accommodating. PEGIDA's front man, Lutz Bachmann, insulted the AfD, even calling it a toothless mainstream party (Korsch 2016a, 114). The indifferent relationship between the AfD and PEGIDA cooled even further when Frauke Petry, then chair of the AfD in Saxony and leader of the AfD parliamentary group in the Saxon parliament, called for Bachmann's immediate resignation, after the PEGIDA founder labelled refugees 'scum and brutes' and posted Hitlerposed selfies on social media (Korsch 2016a, 121–2). His reaction was instant: Bachmann declared the AfD a mainstream party of careerists that was no longer an ally.

The relationship between the two organisations was close to a complete breakdown when PEGIDA decided to compete against the AfD with a candidate of its own in the

¹ Bernd Lucke and his party fellows Hans-Olaf Henkel and Joachim Starbatty—all Members of the European Parliament now in the AfD splinter group Alliance for Progress and Departure—justified their rejection of the euro with their obtrusively claimed economic expertise, even though, while the members of that wing of the party certainly advocated a liberal market economy, Lucke, at least, was the opposite of a 'liberal'. His leadership of the party closely resembled a dictatorship, and documents show that he sat on a radicalisation strategy in order to heat up protest potential for street mobilisation and to mobilise right-wing and xenophobic voters (*Spiegel Online* 2015a, b). Under his leadership the AfD campaigned with right-wing populist slogans ('no immigration to the German welfare state', 'guarded and safe borders instead of border crime', and so forth), and Lucke carefully considered cooperation with PEGIDA for a while to exploit this potential (Korsch 2016a, 118).

elections for the mayor of Dresden, the home base of the movement, in June 2015, with the result that the PEGIDA candidate gathered twice as many votes as the candidate of the AfD (although both failed to reach the run-off). Nonetheless, after an inner-party revolt against Lucke and his wing, and the election of a new leadership in July 2015, the AfD changed its position regarding PEGIDA and approached the movement openly. After the election of Petry as one of the party's two speakers, right-wing representative Marcus Pretzell celebrated the AfD as 'the PEGIDA party' (Vorländer et al. 2016, 41).

In this paper I argue that, at least since the election of the new AfD leadership, the party and PEGIDA have come to be two sides of the same coin, although the PEGIDA speakers have been more radical in their behaviour since the beginning. The two organisations benefit from the same overall political trends, primarily concerning the refugee crisis. They address the same issues, they have the same demands, they share the same bogeyman and they use the same style of propaganda. AfD officials and PEGIDA speakers have repeatedly attacked representatives of the state personally and in highly offensive ways. Finally, a large proportion of PEGIDA's followers prefer the AfD above all other German parties (Patzelt 2016b, 183–6).

At present, closer cooperation between PEGIDA and the AfD is not guaranteed, although mutual contacts have intensified over recent months (*Spiegel Online* 2016; Weiland 2016b; *Zeit Online* 2016). However, deeper cooperation depends on developments inside the AfD, which is—again—being shaken by an intense dispute about leadership. If the wing around the challenged party co-speaker Frauke Petry should win the inner-party power struggle, the hesitant back-and-forth relationship with PEGIDA could last. But if the nationalist wing of her challengers were to gain more influence, an outcome that seems to be likely at present, I argue, PEGIDA and the AfD will probably converge further, assuming that PEGIDA does not disintegrate. In that scenario the AfD would become the parliamentary arm of the movement, with PEGIDA serving as the societal bridgehead of the party. In this case, Germany will have an aggressive right-wing and anti-system party—within several state parliaments, at least—and an obscure movement outside that gathers and mobilises dissatisfied, grumbling, politically homeless, nationalist and xenophobic-minded people who are afraid of the future.

For the remaining part of this paper I will briefly describe the characteristics of the two organisations under study. Then I will summarise the recent signs of approximation. The last section will consider how the democratic parties could deal with growing unrest from the right.

PEGIDA: the mobilisation of detached people by political entrepreneurs

In this movement it is necessary to distinguish between the organisers and the spokespersons, on the one hand, and the followers, on the other. One half of the organisers and speakers are predominantly parvenus with either a difficult or a simple past, and

with links to the security business and the red-light milieu (*Zeit Magazin* 2015). Prior to joining PEGIDA, Bachmann made his way in various small jobs and gained notice for some petty crimes (assault, theft). He was supported by René Jahn, a caretaker; Kathrin Oertel, a freelance property consultant; and Achim Exner, a security businessman, who have all since left PEGIDA after disputes with Bachmann in the interim. The inner circle consisted additionally of Frank Ingo Friedemann, a failed businessman; Siegfried Däbritz, the operator of a small pension in Meißen, a city close to Dresden; and Edwin Wagensveld, the owner of a mail-order business for pneumatic guns, self-defence products and outdoor equipment (Vorländer et al. 2016, 31–3).

Other PEGIDA spokespersons were notorious far-right activists, such as Götz Kubitschek, the owner of a small publishing business through which he distributes the right-wing magazine *Sezession*. The former first lieutenant of the Bundeswehr (unified armed forces) is known to have links to numerous networks of the radical right in Germany and as the co-founder of the Institute for State Policy (Institut für Staatspolitik), which is considered to be the think tank of the right-wing milieu in Germany (Backes 2012).

At the very beginning it was unclear what PEGIDA stood for. The only hint about its goals was the name—some people against the Islamisation of the West. The first call for a demonstration under this slogan via Facebook mobilised some hundred followers, but their numbers grew weekly to a peak of roughly 25,000 in January 2015. By that time PEGIDA had published some position papers. Together with the contents of the speeches, it was possible to identify PEGIDA's messages.

The movement fights a kind of *Kulturkampf* (cultural war) to protect Germans against an 'ethnic redeployment' ('*Umvolkung*'). It warns against foreign infiltration, primarily by (Muslim) immigrants and refugees; the loss of German identity because of the steady Islamisation of public life ('turbo Islamisation'); parallel societies; and the threat of the introduction of Sharia, and it links crime with immigration (Vorländer et al. 2016, 36; Korsch 2016b, 143; Patzelt 2016a, 72–100). All these positions have been connected with severe attacks against the federal government, especially the chancellor and the minister of justice, Heiko Maas,² who have been accused of selling out Germany to Muslims and forgetting the needs and worries of the concerned citizens, while the media have not dared to report these needs or have done so in a biased way ('lying press'). PEGIDA has demanded limits on immigration, immediate restrictions to asylum regulations, border controls, zero tolerance in cases of abuse of the right to asylum, stringent deportation of criminal foreigners, and significantly more staff and equipment for police forces to increase public safety. Demands of the second order, appearing less frequently in documents and speeches, have called for referenda, the rejection of the

² Heiko Maas was among the first prominent politicians to condemn the PEGIDA marches and messages, having denounced them as a 'shame for Germany' early in 2015. Since that time he has been bogeyman number one at PEGIDA marches. This reveals the PEGIDA speakers' kind of thinking, including how they link their attacks against the minister with Nazi comparisons. In a speech on 4 July 2016 in Dresden, Siegfried Däbritz, one of the hardcore radical PEGIDA speakers, referred to Heiko Maas as 'Josef', by which he meant the former *Reichsminister* of propaganda, Josef Goebbels.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (presumably as representative of a loss of national sovereignty), and declarations of understanding and sympathy for the Russian president, in tandem with a call for the ‘normalisation’ of German–Russian relations (Vorländer et al. 2016, 36; Korsch 2016b, 143; Patzelt 2016a, 72–100).

As we know, these claims have mobilised up to 25,000 followers, who each Monday cheer on their spokespersons. Research has shown that this crowd does not consist entirely of xenophobes, racists or people with far-right attitudes, but followers who are highly receptive to the messages sent out by Bachmann and his fellows. The majority of PEGIDA followers are men from Dresden, mainly between 30 and 60 years of age, employed, with a medium or even higher formal education and with a regular income; this group is followed by male pensioners. They feel disappointed and completely misrepresented by the established political parties. They have lost all trust in the government and the media, support claims for direct democracy, are afraid of the future in general and Islam in particular, and they show—if any political inclination—considerable sympathies for the AfD (Daphi et al. 2015; Vorländer et al. 2016, 57–68). It appears that it was only in the Saxon capital and its surrounding areas that there was a critical mass of detached and angry people who could be mobilised, goaded and used by political entrepreneurs such as Lutz Bachmann and his fellows, who have discovered a new calling in running a business as brokers of uncertainty, worry and indignation.

The AfD: a torn party moving further to the right

The short history of the AfD has been marked by internal struggles of competing wings and splinter groups, and ongoing disputes over leadership. From the very beginning the party was torn between two competing wings. The first was made up of those loyal to the founder, Bernd Lucke; it was primarily in favour of Germany’s exit from the eurozone. Then there was a nationalist wing that formed around Frauke Petry, Marcus Pretzell, Alexander Gauland, Björn Höcke and others, who wore down Lucke with their nationalist and xenophobic statements and lack of loyalty. At the party convention in July 2015, Petry and Jörg Meuthen, an economist, were elected as the new leaders. The Lucke camp founded a new party, the Alliance for Progress and Departure (Allianz für Fortschritt und Aufbruch), and have paled into insignificance, except for the fact that Lucke, together with three others, represents this minor party in the European Parliament.

The election of Petry was seen as a move further to the right. First, her home branch, the AfD in Saxony, is considered to be one of the anti-Islamic forerunners of the present-day AfD. From the start, the Saxony party linked immigration with crime and emphasised—among other things—strict border controls and the deportation of criminals (Korsch 2016b, 144). Second, in early 2016 Petry revealed herself to be a taboo-breaking radical when she demanded that the German border police use firearms to prevent ‘illegal crossings’ of the German borders by refugees. This same idea was set forth—with a slight variation—by speaker Tatjana Festerling at a PEGIDA demonstration on 22 February 2016, and was celebrated by the demonstrators (Meisner 2016).

Third, the new leaders did not suspend the nationalists for their right-wing-inspired statements and in some cases actively participated in their meetings. When in May of 2016 the still-acting co-speaker Jörg Meuthen returned from a visit to the Patriotic Platform (Patriotische Plattform, PP), the podium of the nationalist right wing of the party, he declared that he felt very comfortable with the platform (Weiland 2016a).

At the same time the party celebrated remarkable success in the state elections in Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt, where the party's right-wing representative André Poggenburg was elected as a member of parliament. Together with Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, another member of parliament from Saxony-Anhalt and a member of the PP, Poggenburg, Gauland and Höcke are working on a strategy aimed at bringing about a xenophobic and nationalist radicalisation of the AfD. Höcke is fighting a kind of a crusade against the hypothetical Islamisation of Germany (Grabow 2016), while Gauland is using racist prejudices as a provocation. For example, he openly racially attacked German soccer player Jérôme Boateng ('People like to see him playing but they won't have such guys in their neighbourhood'. See Wehner and Lohse 2016).

Yet even Petry, once the figurehead of the national right-wingers of the party, is under pressure. On the one hand, she has broken with her co-chair, Meuthen, primarily because of a power-struggle for party leadership. Meuthen himself gave an additional reason for that conflict when he founded a new parliamentary group in the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg after the AfD group had split over a dispute about the anti-Semitic, inflammatory writings of one of its members. On the other hand, Petry is under observation by the nationalist hardliners, who are lurking and waiting for the proper moment to take control of the party.

Recent signs of rapprochement

At present the AfD is paralysed by internal power games. Nevertheless, the nationalist hardliners are gaining in influence. They share a number of common positions with the organisers of PEGIDA, including their hatred of the federal government. Then there are the repeated pronouncements that Germany is going to be overwhelmed by an aggressive and brutalised Islam; that German women are endangered by sexually uninhibited male Muslims; that crime caused by refugees and asylum seekers is going up; and that a cartel of silencers comprised of the established democratic parties and the media are suppressing 'people's voices, will and worries'; and so forth. Meanwhile, the movement does the 'dirty' fieldwork, and the AfD squad works—apart from some public remarks—rather silently, in order not to make any strategic mistakes. However, one can state that there are some clear signs of approximation between the AfD and PEGIDA, even while it seems that the actual leader of the AfD, like her predecessor, is losing control over crucial parts of her party.

The first to recognise PEGIDA as part of a common movement was Björn Höcke. For him, PEGIDA 'is the bridgehead of the AfD in Dresden' (*Zeit Online* 2016). Without

PEGIDA the AfD was not that strong, said Höcke in April 2016, and he thanked the movement for their important fieldwork. This was the initial spark for mutual visits by AfD officials to PEGIDA demonstrations and vice versa. AfD representative and PP member Tillschneider spoke at a PEGIDA demonstration in May 2016, where he repeated the thanks and mentioned that PEGIDA's messages are now part of the AfD's position on Islam, that is, 'No to Islam!' (*Spiegel Online* 2016). Under Lucke and then under Petry in the early days of her leadership, if AfD members participated at PEGIDA events they did so privately, whereas the PP faction of the AfD now seeks to close ranks. Shortly after Tillschneider's speech at the PEGIDA demonstration, PEGIDA speaker Siegfried Däbritz accepted an invitation by Höcke to speak at a public AfD event in Erfurt, the capital of Thuringia. Later, Höcke said that the two organisations share many common goals, which must be made visible by at least symbolic acts (Weiland 2016a).

According to Patzelt (2016b, 186), the AfD and PEGIDA are 'flesh of the same flesh'. This conclusion should be modified insofar as it holds true for the radical hardcore organisers of PEGIDA and the PP group within the AfD and its mentors such as Höcke. For them, PEGIDA is a beneficial bridgehead into parts of the Saxon lower middle class (and, by the way, an instrument able to weaken Petry's authority inside the party), while PEGIDA, for its part, is looking for a parliamentary arm for its messages. Whether the approximation continues depends a great deal on the result of the ongoing conflicts inside the AfD.

Counter strategies

As is well known, there is no fast-acting medicine against populist movements and parties, because the reasons for their foundation and growth cannot be changed overnight. Concerning right-wing populist parties, it seems plausible for established democratic parties, especially those that are in government, to deliver good policy outcomes—that means solving given problems in a manner that is good for the country and the majority of the people. Moreover, democratic forces should confront the right-wing and national populists, with their weak ideas. They are more or less complete naysayers and problem-seekers, not problem-solvers. The majority of their positions are either artificially constructed or do not fit the degree of complexity of the given challenges. There is no guarantee that the combination of these two approaches will work, but there is no reason for any democratic party to be afraid of an open confrontation with the political fortune seekers and demagogues of the right, provided that the established parties deliver.

The situation of PEGIDA is even more complicated because a large proportion of the followers do not seem to be amenable to reason. Whether problem-solving and good government can ease their frustration and alienation cannot be predicted with certainty. We can safely assume, however, that the mindset and the motivation of the PEGIDA organisers can never be changed. Alarming, defaming, and exaggerating problems and worries linked to xenophobic, Islamophobic or racist prejudices constitutes their personal business plan, which works as long as it finds a receptive audience. As long as the organisers do not fail on account of their own weakness, it seems that Germany

must put up with these protest marches and the messages that are sent out from the Saxon capital, because this is a legal, though unpleasant, part of democracy.

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