

Right-wing extremist Geert Wilders delivers diatribe in Dresden, Germany

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On Monday evening, the Dutch right-wing extremist Geert Wilders spoke at a Pegida demonstration in Dresden. Although only a few thousand people came from throughout Germany to the event, the major media outlets endeavoured to utilise Wilders' appearance to resurrect the Islamophobic movement.

The self-proclaimed "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West" (Pegida) have conducted a weekly demonstration in Dresden since last October, and have received intense media attention. Numerous politicians have spoken in favour of a dialogue with the Islamophobes. On the basis of this press attention, up to 20,000 people came to the right-wing extremist gatherings at times.

However, the number of protesters then dropped just as quickly. In recent weeks, even the police said only a few thousand participants attended, travelling from all over Germany. The Pegida organizers attempted to counter this trend by inviting Wilders, and the event received comprehensive media coverage prior to it.

Wilders is one of the most foul agitators and right-wing extremists in Europe. He makes Islam and the Koran responsible for extremist terrorism, and calls for a ban on Muslim texts and customs. He wants to reduce immigration and reintroduce border controls within the European Union.

In his speech, he called on the Pegida protesters to take pride in Germany and to oppose "Islamic barbarism". Islam called for the killing of Jews and Christians and for this reason must not become part of Germany, said Wilders, who warned against the "Islamisation of our society".

The invitation of Wilders is part of an attempt to network Pegida across Europe and to perpetuate an Islamophobia and extreme right-wing movement in Germany. Besides Wilders, the ex-journalist Udo

Ulfkotte and the former Berlin Christian Democratic state deputy and founder of the right-wing Party of Freedom, René Stadtkewitz, were invited as speakers. In March, the Swiss right-wing extremist Ignaz Bearth spoke at a Pegida meeting, and the new right thinker Götz Kubitschek was given a platform.

At the same time, Pegida announced it would stand its own candidate for Dresden mayor on June 7. The right-wing extremists want to enter Tatjana Festerling into the race, who like no other embodies the backwardness and vulgarity of the movement.

Festerling was a founding member of the Hamburg state association of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). She was the deputy marketing manager of the state association and, by her own account, also designed campaigns of the federal party. In Hamburg, she ran as a district candidate of the party.

After she glorified the hooligan demonstration against the Salafists in Cologne on the JournalistWatch web site, which involved violent rioting, the AfD threatened to expel her. The defence of right-wing extremists went too far even for the AfD leadership.

Festerling avoided expulsion by quitting the party in late January. She was a speaker at the Pegida demonstrations in Dresden and has advanced to become the new front person of the movement. In her speeches, she makes no secret of her far-right views.

There were "floods of asylum seekers, which they, the destroyers of the Germany of [Chancellor Angela] Merkel and Gabriel and Tillich, are swamping our Dresden, Saxony and our Germany." And many asylum seekers, she says, were "men, who abandoned their families and homes because the state provided nicer accommodation and regular incomes here."

In the many speeches she has made, not only in Dresden but also at the mini-demonstrations of Pegida

offshoots in other cities, she rails against “the continually offended, continually demanding impudent minorities from Islamic countries who get on our nerves with their Koran and special rights.”

The 50-year-old explicitly supported the views of Geert Wilders, that Islam is identical with Islamic extremism. “I do not distinguish between Islamism and Islam,” she said in an interview.

Her xenophobic tirades are paired with long-winded and vulgar attacks on homosexuals and sexual minorities, which in her view terrorise the majority. She compares sex education at school with paedophilia. If Dresden will not defend itself against such developments, she proposes building a new version of the Berlin Wall.

That such a dull and vulgar personality can be elevated as a political figure speaks volumes, not just about Pegida, but also about the media and politicians who have supported her movement since October.

In January, the Saxony state premier Stanislaw Tillich declared that he did not want to ban the Pegida demonstrations. At the same time, he said that Islam was not a part of Germany and that Muslim associations in Germany should distance themselves from terrorism more clearly. “People are afraid of Islam because acts of terrorism are perpetrated in the name of Islam,” he told *Welt am Sonntag*.

On January 23, the publically funded National Centre for Civic Education invited Saxony Pegida representatives to an official exchange, which was also attended by the chairman of the Social Democratic Party and German Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel.

But all these efforts could not consolidate the Pegida movement. Significantly more counterdemonstrators regularly demonstrate on the streets than right-wing extremists, and the number of Islamophobia participants has declined. A split occurred in the Pegida alliance in February, and the clique around Pegida founder Lutz Bachman aligned themselves more closely with European right-wing extremists.

Only when the movement shrank again did some politicians, who had previously regarded Pegida affirmatively, distance themselves. Wilders’ appearance was accompanied by a renewed media campaign popularising the movement, showing that the far-right group continues to receive support and is regarded as useful by sections of the ruling elite.

The social attacks in Europe and the militarisation of German foreign policy are rejected by the vast majority of the population. Pegida mobilises the dregs of society, attempting to intimidate this opposition and create a social basis for its suppression.



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