Electoral success of AfD strengthens far-right forces in Germany

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The electoral success of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in state elections on March 13 has strengthened extreme right-wing forces in Germany. This is particularly true in Saxony-Anhalt, where the AfD emerged as the second-largest party in the state parliament with 24 percent of the vote. In Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, where the AfD campaigned on a more moderate basis, several representatives of the extreme right hold leading positions in the party.

One of the AfD's leading ideological figures in Saxony-Anhalt is Götz Kubitschek, a pioneer of the so-called New Right. He has close ties to state AfD chairman André Poggenburg and his colleague in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, who is considered to be Poggenburg's political mentor.

Last November, at the Institute for State Policy (IfS) at Rittergut Schnellroda, Höcke gave a fiercely racist speech that the state prosecutor is now investigating for hate speech. Entitled "Storming Europe," Höcke railed against the "spread of a life-affirming type of African" and stated, "As long as we are willing to accept this excess population, the reproductive behaviour of these Africans will not change."

Kubitschek acknowledges being in regular contact with Höcke and Poggenburg, and in the newspaper *Sezession*, which he publishes, he expressed extremely positive views of both men. Last year, he praised the "fighting spirit of Höcke and Poggenburg" and described the latter as a "rock-solid young man." He was also in full agreement with the "Erfurt resolution," which the pair initiated and around which the right wing of the AfD gathered. This led to the departure of AfD founder Berndt Lucke and the election of current AfD national chairwoman Frauke Petry.

The "Erfurt declaration" complains that the AfD is adapting "without necessity more and more to the business of establishment politics" and the "betrayal of our country's interests." The statement said AfD members understood the AfD as a "patriotic alternative to the established parties," "as a movement of our people against the social experiments of recent decades (gender mainstreaming, multiculturalism, haphazard child-rearing, etc.)" and "as a resistance movement against the further hollowing out of German sovereignty and identity."

Although Kubitschek is not formally a member of the AfD, he was a prominent guest at the AfD's election celebration in Magdeburg. On live television cameras, he offered his services as an adviser, "If anyone from the AfD needs expertise, a proposal, they know they can turn to us."

Also present at the election party was Jürgen Elsässer. The former Maoist and editor of daily *Junge Welt* now publishes the extreme right-wing magazine *Compact* and agitates against foreigners at Pegida rallies. On Elsässer's YouTube channel, *Compact* accompanied the AfD's election campaign. Höcke and Poggenburg both gave him interviews on election day.

Kubitschek, 45, has been one of the leading figures of the New Right for more than 20 years. This tendency distinguishes itself from the old right with an embrace of elitism and intellectualism, rather than simply promoting nostalgia for the Nazis. Instead, based on ideologies that played a major role in the rise of the Nazis, they seek to adapt extreme right-wing ideas to current society and develop connections with the right wing of the established parties. However, the distinction is fluid. Members of the neo-Nazi NPD made appearances at events of Kubitschek's Institute for State Policy and its youth organisation.

Kubitschek was a writer in the 1990s for the *Junge*

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Freiheit newspaper, a leading organ of the New Right, and was a member of the volkish-nationalist German Guild. In 1997-1998, he took part in the German army's deployment to Bosnia, where as a reserve officer he organised a reading from the works of Ernst Jünger on the occasion of his death. He was the spiritual leader of the "conservative-subversive action," advised the far-right "Republicans" organisation in Baden-Württemberg for a short time in the early 2000s, and founded the Institute for State Policy in 2000.

Kubitschek has appeared on several occasions at Pegida rallies in Leipzig and Dresden over the past year as the main speaker. At a major demonstration in March 2015 in Rome, Lega Nord leader Matteo Salvini introduced Kubitschek as a Pegida representative.

The IfS and its newspaper *Sezession* serve to link right-wing extremist and conservative circles. At IfS conferences, speakers include pioneers of the European New Right, such as Alain de Benoist, Austrian Freedom Party members, representatives of the right wing of the Christian Social Union, and Martin Hohmann, who was expelled from the CDU for anti-Semitism.

Sezession has published numerous articles by the right-wing historian Ernst Nolte, and interviews with Höcke. Höcke defended the Pegida demonstrations in its pages with the comment, "A state can count itself lucky to have such citizens."

The leading role of right-wing extremists in the AfD is not confined to states in eastern Germany. The state chairmen in Baden-Württemberg and Rheinland-Palatinate, economics tutor Jörg Meuthen and career officer Uwe Junge, a member of the CDU for 34 years, strike a more moderate pose. But there are also several representatives of the far right in leading positions.

According to the paper *Handelsblatt*, 6 of 14 executive members in Baden-Württemberg and 15 election candidates supported the "Erfurt resolution." Heinrich Fiechtner, a doctor elected to the state parliament, has been involved in Pegida and campaigned against an abortion clinic in Stuttgart. The self-appointed fraction leader, Joachim Kuhs, is active in the hard-right tendency Patriotic Platform. Deputy spokesman for the state party Christina Baum warned of a "creeping genocide" against Germans.

Things are similar in Rheinland-Palatinate. Junge's moderate pose is largely for public consumption. Prior to joining the AfD, he was a member of the right-wing populist and Islamophobic "Freedom" Party for many years.

Markus Pretzell, chairman of the North-Rhein Westphalia state party and the partner of AfD chairwoman Petry, stands for far-right positions. He appeared at a meeting of the AfD's youth movement in Cologne alongside the leader of Britain's UKIP, Nigel Farage, and described the AfD as the "Pegida party" and called for the use of weapons against refugees.

Brandenburg party chair and deputy party leader Alexander Gauland considers Pegida a "natural ally of the party."

The activities of Kubitschek, Höcke, Poggenburg and Gauland, as well as many other extreme right-wing figures within and on the sidelines of the AfD, are a serious warning. Seventy years after the collapse of the Nazi regime, Germany's ruling elite is responding to the global economic crisis and the growing war drive by building a right-wing movement.

Pegida and the AfD have been promoted above all by the established political parties and the media. Now, an attempt is being made to establish a violent, right-wing extremist movement that is directed not only against foreigners and refugees, but left-wing opposition as well.

Handelsblatt cited AfD youth leader Markus Frohnmeier as stating, "I say to these left-wing thought-terrorists, this partisan filth, very clearly: when we come, we will clear the muck out."

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