

Leading member of far-right AfD named chief prosecutor in Berlin

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The judicial authority in Berlin has appointed Roman Reusch, a member of the executive committee of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Brandenburg, to the position of chief prosecutor. He is now responsible for heading the Department for the Extradition of Foreign Criminals and International Legal Assistance.

Reusch joined the executive committee of the AfD in Brandenburg in November of 2015. He leads the party's work on policy questions and is a close collaborator of the AfD's Brandenburg state chairman, Alexander Gauland.

In 2007, State Prosecutor Reusch created a furor with racist statements about criminality among young people and foreigners. At that time, he led the habitual offenders department of Berlin's public prosecutor's office. Gisela von der Aue (Social Democratic Party—SPD), then serving as senator of justice in the SPD-Left Party coalition government in Berlin, established the department herself in 2003 and appointed Reusch as its director. Following criticisms of his remarks, she transferred him at the beginning of 2008 to a less exposed position within the public prosecutor's office.

The controversy was provoked by a speech titled "Immigration and Criminality" delivered by Reusch to a conference of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, which is associated with the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU). Reusch declared it was necessary to get "especially conspicuous foreign criminals out of the country, or otherwise 'put them out of commission.'"

In a *Spiegel* debate, he said 80 percent of the offenders he supervised had immigrant backgrounds and had "no place in this country." For young immigrants, he counterposed to the current juvenile law preventative detention "as a means of education."

Not everyone in the media criticized Reusch's statements. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* editor Regina Mönch defended him as a "critical spirit." The *Bild* newspaper called him "Germany's most courageous prosecutor." Frank Plasberg and Anne Will invited him onto their respective TV shows—something Reusch's superior at the time, senior prosecutor Andreas Behm, forbade.

Now times have changed. Reusch's supporters have won the upper hand. The Berlin justice administration defended the decision to entrust the controversial jurist with, of all things, leadership of the Department for the Extradition of Foreign Criminals. Spokesperson Martin Steltner dismissed Reusch's AfD activities by saying the AfD was not an illegal party and even public prosecutors were allowed to be politically active.

The Association of Berlin Defense Attorneys protested vehemently. One had to worry, it said, that "the public prosecutor's office simply accepts that in questions of extradition, it is to function as the judicial arm of the AfD." It continued, "In doing so, it damages any potential trust in the neutrality of its decisions."

In a recent edition of *Tagesspiegel*, Association Chairman Martin Rubbert expressed regret that Reusch still had not distanced himself from his comments, and had instead gone one step further, saying, "Why should I take back that criminal Arabs have no place here?" He had something against criminals generally, he continued, "and if they were also foreigners, and one could imagine them gone without missing them, then one can only be in favour of expelling them from the country when possible."

What Reusch is boasting of is the refugee policy of the German government and the SPD-led Berlin Senate. Interior Senator Henkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) has forced through deportations since the

beginning of the year and implemented harsh police measures against people who help refugees and take a stand against racism.

When Reusch made his statements in 2007, the AfD did not yet exist and Gauland was still a leading member of the CDU. However, his statements correspond almost exactly with the most recent decisions and plans of the government with regard to asylum policy.

He has advocated the removal of obstacles to deportation such as the lack of a passport. He has also called for enforcement if foreigners fail to “cooperate,” demanded the revocation of German citizenship for dual citizens if they do something wrong, advocated the restriction of family and spousal reunification, and demanded the introduction of a requirement for foreigners to “integrate” into German society and culture.

He has justified his demands with blatantly racist remarks. For example, in a speech to the Hans Seidel Foundation he claimed that “criminals stemming from the Orient” are “instructed by their mothers to steal from childhood on.” He added that “to try to instruct young people from such families to learn and work is like trying to catch water with a sieve... They have developed a self-serving mentality whose aim is to allow them to take whatever they want, whenever and as often as they want.” He also said, “Girls and young women who, in the truest sense of the words, fall into the hands of these perpetrators have to expect they will become the victims of sexual assault.”

There is “only one measure that can really impress them, namely imprisonment,” Reusch added. He explicitly advocated that perpetrators with an immigrant background be dealt with on the basis of different standards than perpetrators from German families. He even wanted to punish the children of delinquent foreigners and deny them the right to naturalization. According to Reusch, it is to be expected that “children from criminal tribes” will become criminals as well.

Such an interpretation of the law is the trademark of dictatorship, not democracy. The Nazi past of the German legal system shows through in such remarks. Tirades against “oriental” perpetrators of the kind that appeared in the media following the events on New Years Eve in Cologne have encouraged AfD supporters

and emboldened right-wing extremists to carry out countless attacks on refugees.

The presence of Roman Reusch in the Berlin judiciary apparatus is not a normal “official process,” as the spokesperson of the judicial Senate claimed. It shows how the AfD is being cultivated for positions of power in the government.

Relations between far-right parties and the Berlin judiciary have a long history, and, in this regard, Reusch is no exception. In 2008, Public Prosecutor Rolf von Niewitecki, who was active in the far-right Republican Party and had been deputy state president in Berlin, was due to succeed Reusch in the habitual offenders department. The appointment was stopped only by public protest.

According to Wikipedia, Matthias Bath, another state prosecutor in the Berlin judiciary and a former agent active in assisting those seeking to flee East Germany, was a member of the Berlin state association of the Republican Party in the 1990s.



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