

European neo-fascists gather in Koblenz, Germany to hail Trump inauguration

Alex Lantier
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On January 21, the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as US president in Washington, a coalition of European far-right parties met in the German city of Koblenz to hail Trump's installation in the White House.

Attendees included Marine Le Pen of France's National Front (FN), Frauke Petry of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), Harald Vilimsky of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and Matteo Salvini of Italy's Northern League. They all treated the coming to power of a violently nationalist and protectionist regime in Washington as support for their own political aspirations in Europe.

The Trump administration has made clear that the cultivation of neo-fascists in Europe is a priority of its foreign policy. Trump has selected as his top adviser the white supremacist Stephen Bannon, who praised the FN during the presidential election campaign, and whose *Breitbart News* web site refers to the French New Right—the ideological basis of the FN—as a source of “inspiration.” He also hailed Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Marine's niece, as a “rising star.”

Maréchal-Le Pen—an extreme-right Catholic figure who has attended meetings of the Action Française, the descendant of the anti-Semitic Action Française of Charles Maurras that provided the basis of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime—publicly thanked Bannon after Trump's election. She tweeted, “I answer yes to the invitation of Stephen Bannon, CEO of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, to work together.”

At the same time, it is ever clearer that the Trump administration's cultivation of far-right forces reflects more than just political sympathy between Trump and neo-fascism. Since Trump spoke to the *Times* and *Bild*,

applauding Britain's exit from the European Union (EU) and denouncing the EU as a tool of Germany, it is obvious that his links to far-right, anti-EU parties are bound up with a broader agenda of confrontation with the EU, and especially Germany.

The parties attending the Koblenz conference all applauded Brexit and the election of Trump as the starting point of a new political order in which they would not only turn even further to the right, but play a far more prominent role. This view was in particular laid out by Le Pen. She is currently forecast to win the most votes in the first round of the French presidential elections in April and so progress to the run-off round in May, and could become France's first far-right executive since Marshal Philippe Pétain during the Vichy regime.

“We are living the end of a world and the birth of another,” Le Pen declared. “2016 was the year that the Anglo-Saxon world rose up. 2017 will be, and I am sure of it, the year of the awakening of the peoples of continental Europe. We must pass to the next stage, the stage where we are no longer contented with being a minority in the European parliament, the step where we get the majority of the votes in the ballot boxes at each election.”

She also called for the renegotiation of a “new treaty” on the EU's structure, based on a common rejection of “all authoritarian or totalitarian plans,” including any “supra-national model,” and the defense of policies “to control and regulate immigration” as a “fundamental right” of nation states.

The meeting reportedly largely focused on this year's elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany, and hopes that Wilders, Le Pen and Petry could come to power in all three countries. They particularly denounced German Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy

of briefly allowing refugees fleeing wars in the Middle East into Germany, a policy now denounced very broadly in European ruling circles, and laid out a policy of appealing to politicized anti-Muslim racism.

Prior to the meeting, leading AfD member Björn Höcke provoked a scandal by denouncing the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, attacking it as a “memorial of shame” and demanding a “180 turn in our policy on memory” of the Nazi crimes of the World War II period. This week, after the Koblenz meeting, and despite public calls for Höcke’s expulsion from the AfD over these remarks, he was allowed to remain inside the party.

Marcus Pretzell—Petry’s husband, who is also a leading AfD member—responded to the crisis provoked by Höcke’s comments by praising Israel, effectively holding up its repeated murderous onslaughts against the Palestinians as a model for Europe’s relations with its Muslim population.

“We have a problem with political Islam in Germany, in Europe, above all in Western Europe. But there is a country that already has decades of experience on this issue,” Pretzell said about Israel. “It’s a country that faces a policy from the European Union that could hardly be more hostile. ... Israel is our future, ladies and gentlemen!”

Petry attacked the EU in anticommunist terms, advocating a “spiritual-moral transformation” in Europe. “Today’s brainwashing is much cleverer than the previous socialistic propaganda,” she said, denouncing “social engineers” that she said were attacking key historical traditions, or “at least those of white Europeans.”

The other officials presented similar attacks on Merkel and the EU’s bankrupt record. Wilders declared, “The AfD and my friend Frauke Petry are standing against the new totalitarianism, which threatens us today,” adding that 2017 would be the year of “liberation,” while Salvini called for Petry to defeat Merkel, declaring, “Good bye Angela, good luck Frauke.”

The coming to power of a US administration that publicly aims to use Europe’s neo-fascists as tools of its foreign policy, and the growing role that the neo-fascists play in European politics, testify to the broad collapse of international bourgeois politics. Immediately after World War II, Washington poured

enormous economic resources into Europe. It went on to support European integration projects and helped somewhat hide the vast number of former Nazis and Nazi-collaborationists in Europe, which pointed to the criminal roots of post-war European capitalism.

The collapse of the institutions of post-World War II politics has transformed the situation, however. Twenty-five years after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union and after nearly a decade of intense economic crisis since the 2008 Wall Street crash, neo-fascists play a critical public role in European political life. Having exploited the absence of any organization that speaks to the growing social distress in Europe to grow politically, and having obtained coverage from European media, they are also emerging in close alignment with US foreign policy.

This is a warning on the reactionary character not only of Trump’s “America first” policy and its allies, but also of the European bourgeois factions now entering into conflict with Trump. They helped create the conditions for the rise of neo-fascist parties, imposing massively unpopular austerity policies, attacking immigrants and Muslims, and legitimating the far right.

The only way forward to oppose the nationalistic and anti-democratic policies of Trump and his European allies is to unify the struggles of the working class against both the agenda of the Trump administration and the reactionary plans of the EU.



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