The Challenge from Merkel's Right

An Alternative for Germany and an Alliance for Progress and Renewal in Bavaria and Eastern Germany

Richard R. Moeller

In the past three years two new political parties have been established in Germany. Both parties approach recent economic, social and civil issues from the political Right. The Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) can indeed be viewed further to the right than the Alliance for Progress and Renewal (Allianz für Fortschritt und Aufbruch, ALFA), yet each notably exists in spite of Angela Merkel's (Chancellor of Germany) Christian Democratic Union party (CDU). Moreover, each has emerged under the direction of the same political figure. Current political discord within Germany today regarding the European Union as well as migration has empowered the two parties to advance a populist or even nationalist approach to gather strength in German national and state elections.

This article addresses the unique reasons for the overall division among the established Centre-Right parties in Bavaria and Eastern Germany. It also attempts to answer the question whether the Centre-Right will make accommodations to the new parties. Otherwise, there is a question as to whether the Alternative for Germany and Alliance for Progress and Renewal will fail since, for personal reasons, they lack any kind of relationship. Along the same line, this article ex-

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amines the similarities and differences of the two new parties as well as their ability to garner votes for 2017.

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A Political Shift of the Extremes

The year 2016 has seen political cleavages in Germany widen as never before. Unlike other states of Europe, Germany has, for all intents and purposes, been able to deliver a congenial and stable political system since May of 1949. In fact, the parliamentary 'German Model' has been borrowed by more than a few states following the end of the Cold War. In their 1967 seminal work, Lipset and Rokkan argued that parties in (then Western) European republics were 'frozen' or connected to the centre.[1] This was challenged a year later from the Left. Historically in Germany, according to Markovits and Gorski, extremes in the form of political parties and especially political movements had been from Leftist groups that some have referred to as 'Extra parliamentary opposition' (*Ausserparliamentarische Opposition*) and 'the K-groups', or *Kommunistische Gruppen*.[2] These earlier extremes have been moderated a great deal as a result of their political success (pragmatic *68ers* are now part of national, state and local governance), economic solidity has increased, energy responsibility has become a priority, and federal military trepidation in world conflicts is the norm. Today the opposite is true, the angst of German opposition is coming from the Right and they are becoming too substantial and broad to ignore. Along the same line, Centre-Right parties have now won at least ten per cent of the vote in five of Germany's 16 state parliaments. In the 2016 Eastern German Saxony-Anhalt state election, the Right, in the form of the AfD, won an astounding 24.2 per cent of the vote.[3] How did Germany get here and why are the results more pronounced in Bavaria and in the Eastern (*Länder*) states?

2012 – 2015: Where did it Begin? Bavaria.

According to Professor Hans-Gerd Jaschke, politically disaffected Germans can be linked to Bavaria early on. Jaschke stresses that with small citizens' movements on the Right rising and falling throughout the

1990s, populist groups went looking for a stable substitute beginning in 2005.[4] There are various theories regarding the dissolution of Bavarians with the traditional notions of social democracy and collective institutions of the state. The push to the Right in the last few years, however, has not been driven by debate. It is driven by vague concepts about 'nation' as well as various everyday policies that divide Germans and have, consequently, created modern populist movements on the Right. These differences are a strange mixture of cultural values (e.g. refugees) and tangible positions (e.g. Euro). Moreover, theoretical disputes of the 'old Right' like religion play a smaller role in modern Germany than before. With that, it can be argued that when the 'old Right' began to morph into the 'new Right', the Bavarians were front and centre.

Despite the fact that German Basic Law does not grant any *Länder a* distinctive status in the way that Spanish or Italian ones do,[5] Bavaria has a distinctive history that requires some sort of recognition. According to Bavarian historians and the official Bavarian state narrative, Bavaria constitutes 'one of the oldest European states'.[6] Scholars have traced a long historical lineage, starting with the establishment of a Bavarian dukedom in 554, and later its transformation into a kingdom by Napoleon in 1806. After the Wars of German Unification of 1866–71, Bavaria became absorbed into a German Empire dominated by Bismarck, which created a strong sense of resentment of Prussia that persists to this day.[7] This came to an end in November 1918 with the establishment of a Bavarian *Freistaat* by Kurt Eisner's Independent Socialist Party,[8] which ended quickly and violently.[9] This affair in Bavarian history cemented a distrust of socialism, with Bavarians soon going to the opposite extreme by supporting Hitler's anti-Communist position. After the capitulation of the German army in 1945, Bavaria came under the control of an American military government. The lack of a solid German political structure at this time gave Bavaria the opportunity to establish its autonomy by creating a Bavarian constitution that celebrated Bavaria's 'thousand-year' history, tradition of statehood and sense of identity.[10]

Steve Padgett and Tony Burkett noted that uniqueness is the driving force of the dominant Bavarian party – the Christian Social Union (CSU). At its inception in 1945, the aims of the CSU were clear: to protect Bavaria's special interests, unique identity and culture with as much political autonomy as possible while still supporting federalism. The

CSU saw then and still see today Bavaria as a cultural 'nation'. For example, the CSU uses the word *Heimat* for Bavaria and asserts that this uniqueness be recognised in Germany.[11] In the mid-20th Century, the religious component in Bavarian party politics as well as the territorial exclusivity was central to understanding the strength of the CSU. In fact, the main political traditions in Bavaria have been identified as 'Catholicism and separatism'.[12] This was further demonstrated by the micro-party Bavarian Party (*Bayernpartei*), an independence-seeking nationalist party that once took up to 30 per cent of the vote in the 1950s, but which has been reduced to less than five per cent since.[13] Today, the zenith of religious influence with the party has passed.

As an example, a marginal split occurred in the late 1990s between the CDU and CSU when the German government, controlled by SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, promoted a law pushed by the Greens, (*Die Grünen*) in August 2001 to create registered partnerships giving same-sex couple protections similar to those of married couples. The law passed, with the CDU remaining relatively silent. Since the vast majority of Germans supported partnership equality, CSU leaders in Bavaria attempted to approach this issue not from an ideological or religious position, but rather the party questioned the implementation and speed of the law. This served as a way to pacify Bavarian Catholics and at the same time maintain the CSU relationship with the CDU. In 2011, the disagreement with the CDU and CSU came to focus on same sex privileges (policy), like insurance, inheritance, and taxation. It was seen by some that it was religion creeping back into the CSU. After all, it was a Christian Party in name, if not a Catholic one. Without a hiccup, the German High Court answered with expansion of gay rights angering many traditional CSU members. The CSU position was, without doubt, a product of religion; yet, at the same time, it also had much to do with Bavarian national self-importance.[14] Nowadays, by all accounts, Right-leaning members of the CSU have new differences, front-burner issues with the CDU, or even Merkel herself, that now occupy the Zeitgeist of 2016. For some, the party is now torn between its official sister (the CDU) and the two new upstarts – the AfD and ALFA.[15] These CSU members are represented through those such as Bavaria's Finance Minister Markus Söder who said in late August 2016 that many refugees should be sent back to their countries of origin.[16] This will be addressed further below.

When did it Begin? 2012.

In 2012, the CSU became sceptical regarding the adoption of more Eastern European countries into the Schengen Area. At a European Union meeting in early March, Germany opposed a measure which would have allowed Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to travel passport-free across the Schengen Area. Even though Hans-Peter Friedrich, German Interior Minister and CSU party member, argued that the countries haven't done enough to curtail corruption and organised crime, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* accused the CSU of using the party's opposition as a way to fan the flames of anti-immigrant sentiment. The paper stated, 'Friedrich has framed the issue in a way that urges the public to link the Schengen Area with the problem of poverty migration'.[17] Poverty migration was indeed a hot-button issue in Germany in 2012. It was then that Chancellor Merkel began to be pressured from the traditional and 'New' Right as well as the opposition Left.

Moreover, in 2012, Merkel was also still being pressured from the internal East-West differences of her country. An economic research report of *IWH Halle* stated that Germany was facing a dangerous demographic shift[18]; Eastern Germany's workforce was decreasing since more working-age people had moved west. This shift led to inequality and poverty.[19] Merkel's government was criticised for adjusting a Dec. 2012 draft of the report by weakening the phrasing of statements about negative outcomes in order to 'mirror Germany's current well-being', as German Economic Minister and Vice Chancellor Philipp Rösler argued.[20] Critics called for studies like this to be conducted by an independent economic institute rather than a government committee.[21] In a *Deutsche Welle* interview, Gerda Hasselfeldt (mentioned above) was asked about the financial goals of her party ahead of the September 2013 elections. Her answers were not in step with that of Chancellor Merkel and the public noticed. She stated that she was disappointed with Merkel's cooperation with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens regarding Euro stabilisation and hinted at opposition with the CDU in the years ahead.[22]

In the East, during this time, the schism of alienation (along with the shortcomings mentioned above), would contribute to the start of a regressive movement in 2012. Shortly after, Merkel's SPD rival erroneously stated that she lacked a 'passion for Europe' because she grew up in Communist East Germany. Peer Steinbrück stated that it was a lia-

bility at a time of crisis that the chancellor had not been steeped in the pro-Europe traditions of post-war West Germany. 'The fact that she until 1989-1990 had a very different personal and political socialisation than those who experienced European integration since the early 1950s ... in my eyes plays a role'.[23] He insisted that he did not mean his remarks as an accusation against her, noting 'she had no choice whether she grew up on the Eastern or Western side of Germany or Europe'.[24] Lothar Bisky, a European Parliament deputy and former head of the Left (*Linke*) party, which has roots in East Germany through the PDS, criticised Steinbrück's comments. He told the daily *Tagesspiegel* that Steinbrück had managed to alienate millions of East German voters, 'branding them for life'.[25]

As early as 2012 and 2013, the failures of the EU were a substantial part of both the CSU platform in Bavaria as well as the CDU platform in the Eastern part of the country. Once investors started differentiating between individual Eurozone member states in terms of risk assessment, the peculiar nature of the European Central Bank as a federal bank that is not guaranteed by a sovereign state (and is prohibited from acting as a lender of last resort) meant that the crisis could not be addressed in the way that a "normal" federal state would have done by printing additional money. Instead, the ECB had stretched its mandate in an *ad hoc* way, seemingly favouring some countries over others and creating discontent all around. In spite of the displeasure of the Bavarians and Eastern Germans with Chancellor Merkel, no real traction had been achieved by the obvious alternative – the Social Democrats.[26] Bernd Lucke noticed the weak alternatives and imagined a potential party to the right of the CDU and Angela Merkel.

The AfD from Bernd Lucke to Frauke Petry.

Some scholars like Britta Schellenberg, have attributed the rise of the AfD to a movement inspired by a book that became popular in 2010.[27] The book was called *Germany Abolishes Itself* (*Deutschland schafft sich ab*) by Thilo Sarazzin. Interest and even some support for the book came from the daily newspaper the *Bild* as well as the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. According to the book, a population problem existed in Germany. This problem related to the decline of the intelligent upper-classes in Germany coupled with the rise of the population among the lower classes in Germany, in large part with Muslim immigrants.

The book even hinted at programmes that may help to fix this trend. Some interpreted that these programmes as a call for eugenics - a deliberate attempt to populate Germany with more intelligent people. This of course, was troubling to many because of Germany's past. It is doubtful that Bernd Lucke was motivated by this book because he was, for all intents and purposes, an anti-European Stability Mechanism (ESM), fiscally focused professor who saw the bureaucracy in Brussels and the single currency as key problems.

According to populist scholar Kai Arzheimer, Bernd Lucke formed the AfD in 2013 with an overarching theme of Euroscepticism.[28] Without doubt, the immigration and migration issues were there; however for Lucke, the main argument for forming a new political party to the right of Merkel was economic. Bernd Lucke was nicknamed as a 'sour (*sauer*) professor' for his anti-EU (more specifically anti-Euro) position. Lucke responded to this boorish nickname early on with 'Not so. It was disappointment'.[29] Bernd Lucke became involved in conservative politics at a young age and joined the youth group of the CDU at the age of fourteen. He admired Heiner Geißler[30] for his direction in the 1980s – moving many youth in the CDU to the right politically. By 2001, Geißler had joined the movement Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions to Assist the Citizen (ATTAC) which attempted to tax large corporations to support average citizens.[31] ATTAC was an early anti-globalisation, pro-national sovereignty movement that would focus its ire on the EU as it became an increasingly political supranational endeavour. ATTAC leaders insisted that they favoured greater global integration, but in a quite different way promoted by the International Monetary Fund, WTO and most European governments.[32] Lucke was disappointed with the CDU for a slow, but progressive movement in that direction under Merkel's early tenure. He believed that the party had veered too far away from his own views over his 33 years of CDU loyalty, particularly in the course of the global economic and Euro crises.[33]

In a 2005 debate about increasing wages to stimulate the domestic economy, Lucke and his like-minded colleagues prearranged for 243 academics to sign a letter that ran in *Die Welt* newspaper, criticizing pledges of higher wages by the SPD and warning of a 'deep structural crisis that requires drastic and painful reforms'.[34] They highlighted the need for economic realism and attacked the use of class warfare rhetoric that might frighten investors away from Germany. When the

Eurozone moved to replace the temporary bailout fund with the permanent European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in 2011, Lucke founded the 'Plenum of Economists', a unit that was critical of SPD and CDU measures. Despite Lucke's ideas being well-received in academic circles, his words fell flat and had no impact with the public, and so his only choice, he felt, was to establish his own political party.

Many were surprised that a party politically to the right of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats could establish itself so quickly in 21st century Germany. This somehow seemed unique[35] because of the German war experience coupled with the failure of movements of the Right in Bavaria and arrangements of the Eastern states. Indeed, the AfD was and still is one of several parties using the idea of Euroscepticism to mobilise nationalist sentiment. UKIP of Britain's Nigel Farage, the *Vrijheid* of the Dutch's Geert Wilders and the National Front of Marine Le Pen in France were at this time harnessing even larger reactions of threats and loss in order to attract voters to their parties. In hindsight, the cultural issues revolving around what it was to be British, Dutch or French with the aforementioned parties was not close to the centre of Lucke's AfD. It would become so with Frauke Petry in 2015. Lucke would attempt to recover.

The ALFA Subsidiary.

According to author Michael Jankowski, ALFA has struggled as a go-between party with the CDU and the AfD.[36] Lucke has attempted to position his Eurosceptic party as another 'alternative' populist organisation maintaining a couple of rejections: no to the Euro currency and no to xenophobia. For example, as he left his first alternative, Lucke sent a letter to Reuters News Service calling out the AfD. His concern was that it was becoming 'Islamophobic and xenophobic'. He also highlighted anti-Western, pro-Russian leanings and growing public criticism of the United States by AfD members.[37] There seems to be little room for these vague positions as the AfD with a two-year head start (created by Lucke himself ironically) has stolen the limelight and the votes. Moreover, his focus has apparently been with the states in the north and west of Germany with CDU dominance of the Centre-Right there, rather than with Bavaria and the Eastern states. Despite the Brexit of June 2016 in the United Kingdom and denial of UKIP of being bigoted towards immigrants (and to a lesser degree than Germany

of migration from the Middle East), ALFA has failed to piggyback on the anti-EU illiberal Brussels momentum. Migration is not ignored, however, within the context of its policies. Yet unlike the AfD, ALFA approaches the issue with great caution and directs its connection to migration from an economic standpoint crouching it with weak economic state support from Germany stating in official language that the '[C]rises of unprecedented dimensions in Europe make Germany the destination of an endless stream of migrants and the willing paymaster of frail Eurozone countries. The German government has lost control or lost its mind, most likely both'.[38]

It was in July of 2015 that Bernd Lucke founded ALFA after being ousted by his own AfD. As mentioned above, he quit the AfD arguing it was becoming increasingly xenophobic. Lucke, one of seven AfDs to be elected MEPs in 2014, said the new party would be called the Alliance for Progress and Renewal. Soon after, the AfD climbed to nearly ten per cent in German opinion polls.[39] Lucke, seen as too mediocre, was replaced by the more unconventional Frauke Petry after a power struggle over the party's direction. Lucke had tried and failed to stop the AfD from focusing on anti-immigration policies and stick to economic and democratic policy positions. Petry was known in the Eastern state of Saxony, where the anti-immigration and anti-Islamisation movement, PEGIDA, sprang up in 2014. Lucke was elected chairman of ALFA by 70 people at a founding conference in Kassel in central Germany. He assured others that more than 5,000 people had shown an interest in the new party using *Weckruf 2015* (Wake-up 2015) as his social media mantra. Lucke primarily founded the AfD to oppose Eurozone bailouts, yet his AfD colleagues were displeased that he wanted to focus exclusively on Euro-related issues. Adding to the current problems, Centre-Left SPD politician Ralf Stegner said his party would have nothing to do with the new party, dismissing ALFA as Right-wing populists.[40] The new party has not ingratiated itself with the CDU or SPD (and of course the AfD) by stating:

> This is why on July 19, 2015 we formed the Alliance for Progress and Renewal (ALFA). We can no longer count on the Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU), increasingly drifting leftward to the socialists (SPD). Neither is the answer the increasingly nationalistic Alternative for Deutschland Party (AfD), openly xenophobic, friendly with Russia's Putin and hostile towards the US and the idea of free trade and free markets. These are

> policies which have failed in the past and they will fail again. We need policies for Germany's future.[41]

ALFA may never harmonise policies with the CSU and the AfD over the issue of Russia's position in a broad European context. Lucke's party states '[w]e seek close ties to the West, firmly withstanding irresponsible threats to Europe by Russian leaders seeking to rebuild their former empire'.[42] Conversely, Frauke Petry has stated:

> You see, we think this sort of a change in behaviour of the German Federal government is something that concerns us, as a new political party, very much, because we think that Germany's task, Germany's issue, not only with Russia but with the European community [*sic*], not just with the US, is to function as a balancing partner. We still think that Russia should be regarded and treated as a priority partner and it should be Germany moving that sort of relationship forward.[43]

As ALFA tries to grow, the party, just two years its senior, continues to belittle it. Uwe Junge, a former CDU member and now a leading figure in AfD politics, quipped when asked if a rapprochement with the party ALFA or Bernd Lucke was possible: 'ALFA is nothing. It is very small and represents practically nothing. This party doesn't have any future. Bernd Lucke doesn't have the social capacity and cannot lead correctly. He is an autocrat'.[44]

2016 and Beyond: The AfD in Bavaria

Franz-Josef Strauss argued that 'there was nothing to the right of the CSU except a wall' - a wall that couldn't be breached. But in 2016, things have indeed changed and the ideological and partisan wall has been formally breached. Many have argued that Angela Merkel is too 'social' democratic for those who have attempted to form these Centre-Right or Right-wing parties and with that comes hostility for her policies especially in Bavaria. In response, one of the ways in which Merkel's government has tried to frame the AfD (and thus, keep Right-leaning CSU members from joining the AfD or voting for AfD polices), is to portray the upstart party as obsessed with foreign invaders from conflict states and rife with wholesale racism that runs deep within the party.

Indeed, the Right flock to the AfD because they have no other practical alternative (not since 2011 when the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NDP) restructured) coupled with the rise of the AfD in

2013.[45] This is the reality that is unique to Germany, but not unique to Europe. Europe has been and is still filled with hard Right-wing parties. However, it is fair to admit that during the debate for Britain's exit from the EU, many Right-wing voices in the United Kingdom (England really) came out to add to the cacophony of voices calling for prejudiced policies to be implemented by government. An example of the typical and repeated answer that Petry has given regarding the allegation (from within and outside of Germany – in this case from Merkel herself) that the party is simply racist is this:

> You see, that's a rather simple conclusion of what's happening in Germany, but I can understand why Angela Merkel tries to simply put it down to the migration and the refugee crisis … [N]aturally the people in Germany are waking up, realizing that our Chancellor has given up the sovereignty of the country, she has given up our borders, she has given up our rules and regulations by simply letting everybody in; so, that this makes people angry. This "fairy-tale of migrants" coming to Germany and being the enriching factor for the economy has been proven to be false and there are no concepts from our government on how to deal with the situation.[46]

After the multiple terrorist attacks in Bavaria in July 2016, both sides and their positions are being put to the test especially after state elections in September where the AfD garnered a higher percentage than the CDU in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.[47] How these terrorist attacks will play out in elections is not too hard to predict. The AfD will gain strength. Germans like those in the oft violent *AntiFa* movements will do their best to shut down debate and perhaps elections for the better cause of keeping the past of Germany from becoming present and or future. Despite protests from the Left, there is a strange wind in the air as spring 2017 approaches regarding the migration issue. Even SPD Sigmar Gabriel, the leader of Merkel's coalition partner, stated in an interview with *ZDF* that the CDU had underestimated the challenge of integrating migrants. The CSU has broken away as well. As alluded to earlier, Bavarian Finance Minister Markus Söder, not wanting to encourage family reunions in Germany, argued that German officials should push for the "return of several hundreds of thousands of refugees in the next three years."[48] Despite polling showing the CSU as a strong political organisation in Bavaria, ideals like cultural importance and the independent social nature of Bavarians has some in the *Land*

attracted to ideas between the two new upstart parties and the CSU ahead of 2017. A 2016 *Spiegel* article entitled 'The AfD Wedge: Bavarian Conservatives Weigh Split from Merkel's CDU' begins with an ominous statement: 'The rise of the right-wing populist AfD has driven a wedge between Merkel's Christian Democrats and their Bavarian sister party. The CSU is now threatening to go it alone, with officials saying they may campaign against the chancellor in the 2017 election'.[49]

In May of 2016, CSU leader Horst Seehofer presented a graphic showing the degree of migrant movement into Germany. Seehofer was appalled by the chancellor's migration positions and excuses. He noted that after Sept. 5, 2015, when the chancellor opened German borders to those migrants stranded in Hungary, the numbers spiked. Seehofer then pointed out on the graph the day Macedonia closed its borders. The CSU leader noted that then, the numbers of refugees plunged. Seehofer's presentation was an effort to show that his understanding of the migration of people was correct and that Merkel's claim that her Hungary decision (and the "shameful selfies" she took with refugees) played no role in attracting migrants to Germany was, in fact, incorrect. He disputed her claim that they were on their way anyway. Yet Seehofer was also trying to get Merkel to change her entire approach. Senior CSU member and German Transportation Minister Alexander Dobrindt argued thereafter that the lesson of the rise of the AfD on issues like migration should focus German conservatives, essentially the CDU leadership, on more conservative CSU positions to keep the party faithful in the 'sisterhood' and not align with parties like the AfD.

The posturing of the CSU (Seehofer and his ilk) makes for interesting hypotheticals as 2017 begins. He made his point, albeit with some ambiguity: should the CDU not follow 'our' (CSU) lead, the CSU could run its own campaign for 2017. Seehofer himself would then become the party's candidate in the federal election of 2017, which would be unprecedented. The CSU has always campaigned by the side of the CDU and the two parties have always collectively supported a single candidate for chancellor. In the past, there have been chancellor candidates from the CSU, but they have been supported by the CDU leadership. There has never been a situation where the CSU has its own candidate running against a CDU incumbent. There are many who would like to see such a challenge to the Right of Merkel on a national stage. The CSU acronym only appears on Bavarian ballots, yet a recent poll by *Infratest Dimap* found that 45 per cent of Germans would welcome a na-

tionwide expansion of the CSU with 40 per cent against an expansion. Practically, such a move would not be likely. Indeed, Seehofer campaigning as the CSU's national candidate next year would hurt both parties. There is talk that in the future, however, a CSU member on the national ballot would make it clear to Bavarian voters that they were supporting "CSU values," rather than a broad German position just a bit to the Right of the SPD. Some CSU supporters argue that it would clarify that the CSU would not play the traditional role as CDU advocate, but rather function as an assurance that Merkel/CDU would not be able to push policies that did not take into consideration Bavarian interests.[50]

There are, in fact, indications that Merkel is prepared to accommodate the CSU despite advisors that are convinced that the CDU would lose more voters in the Centre than it would gain on the Right if it was to adopt moderate CSU positions. As mentioned, Merkel views AfD supporters to be completely isolated. Also, advisors to Merkel note that the majority of AfD voters have not voted in previous elections, and in the election of 2013, Merkel was successful in pocketing votes from the Left. The CDU grabbed over 600,000 votes nationwide from the Green Party and from the SPD back then. However, Merkel has made conciliatory moves relating to the migrant crisis and has sought to close off routes to Europe with the help of Turkey.[51] But she refuses to move her party on almost all other issues to the Right. CDU General Secretary Peter Tauber stated, 'The CDU sees itself confirmed in its choice to occupy the political centre'.

The AfD in Eastern Germany

Cornelia Hildebrandt in a journal article about the German Left Party notes that Eastern Germany has never been monolithic regarding policy or party. Notably, a strong ideological divide surrounds those who desire a new type of populism whether on the Left or Right.[52] The AfD connection to the Eastern part of Germany is essentially articulated by the party through, what they see as, a fight for citizen democracy. In an interview, Uwe Junge, a former CDU member and now a leading figure in AfD politics in Rhineland-Palatinate connected the East and AfD dots by responding to a question from the Belgium based *Global Independent Analytics* that asked: 'Why is there such a huge difference between East and West in Germany for [national] patriots? Why are they strong in the East, where they had Communism before, and not

in the West?' Junge answered, 'In the East, the people did huge demonstrations in 1989. They have a culture of it. They are more sensitive to the fact that the system tries to silence the people. They are more socialised. In the West, we stay at home in front of the television'.[53]

Scholars like Robert Grimm noted that the AfD sees patriotic promise in Germany.[54] This is especially true in East Germany. Contrarians, however, particularly within the SPD and in the West generally, would assert that AfD patriotism, represents jingoistic attitudes and are therefore dangerous to Germany. Uwe Junge argued however, '[f]or years, the German patriotic political field was a kind of a desert. In the Eastern part of the country, the patriotic family had to face, on one side, competition of the very radical nationalist NPD party and the less radical DVU. These two parties merged in January 2011. And on the other side the rivalry of the nationalist wing of the CDU as articulated by Erika Steinbach or Henry Nitzsche. The patriotic field of the German political landscape in the next years can only be occupied by two parties: the very soft patriotic ALFA and the AfD, which is becoming more and more patriotic'.[55]

The Russian issue (highlighted above) that pits the AfD against ALFA has promoted greater success in Eastern Germany for the AfD. In a *Russia Today* interview, Frauke Petry warned about how the EU-guided sanctions endorsed by ALFA will only hurt Germans in the East. She stated:

> We can calculate the degrees in economic growth in Germany. Economists reckon that with the sanctions against Russia we losing something like one per cent of our economic growth. This is a severe problem, especially in the East of Germany, but not only there. Whenever I go through the regions of Germany I find many people, many citizens, entrepreneurs, all sorts of small- and medium-sized companies who tell me that they suffer from these sanctions. So, I think, that slowly but gradually this message also gets to our government politicians - but, I think, it's getting there far too slow.[56]

The most notable growth of the AfD in the east of Germany comes from Germany's disenfranchised youth. The statistics compiled by the *German Institute for Economic Research* and Humboldt University were surprising in themselves with nearly twenty per cent support; however, as one extrapolates towards the future, especially with young German men in the East, the upturn of support and even the long-term survival

of a new "radical" party on the Right seems indisputable. 'The study, which drew on interviews with more than 40,000 people who have supported a political party over a long period of time, election results, opinion polls and political surveys, also found that AfD supporters tend of be mostly male, under 30, unemployed, poorly educated and living in the East of Germany'.[57]

Even Nigel Farage got into the personal motivations of the chancellor of Germany – insinuating that her upbringing in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) should make her more sympathetic to the Eastern half of Europe along with her pre-established allies found in the West. He blamed the problems that the entire European continent is having on her decision in 2015 to open the borders and allow the migration movement to move forward. His words were 'when she said as many migrants that wanted to cross the Mediterranean and come to Europe … you're all welcome! And she was doing that not just on behalf of Germany but actually on behalf of the whole of the EU. I think it was the biggest policy failure we've seen in the Western world for many many decades'.[58]

As 2017 arrives, revisiting the various polling organisations, through *Der Spiegel*, or other outlets in order to monitor the 'strength', 'threat', 'patriotism', or 'hate' as one may see it, the AfD is something to watch. Having never been seen in Germany before (at least with constitutional legitimacy), this phenomenon will occupy the minds of any student or scholar of German Politics until the election in 2017. The federal election result will fill some seats with these new opponents to the status quo. Like it or not, there are reasons that German citizens think there is a void to fill and this is, and will be, a challenge from Merkel's right.

Conclusion

The populist movements on the Right are not just a fad in Europe or more specifically, in Germany today. In fact, as 2017 approaches, these two new parties (especially the AfD) will be able to position themselves on the margins leading up to the elections of the Federal Republic. Moreover, the AfD will be a formidable player. Whether the AfD can act as a coalition spoiler remains dubious. In most ways, the AfD's chances to participate in government will be up to the success or failure of the CDU and Angela Merkel. If the CDU can generate a high

plurality of the votes next year, the AfD will remain on the fringes. After all, no major party will negotiate with the AfD as they have stated in the recent past. Yet it appears that the AfD will pass the percentage hurdle required by the *Grundgesezt* and pick up seats. What's more, historically, fringe parties have moderated themselves as they work in parliamentary systems. This generalised fact has some in Germany hopeful. Yet some fear that parties on the Left may adopt 'AfD light' positions as part of an à la carte political menu.

Specifically, the AfD is at a turning point in relation to its future. Furthermore, it seems that time is on the side of the Right in Germany as 2017 looms since the 'problems' that have propelled the party forward will not go away any time soon. As three journalists for *Der Spiegel*, Melanie Amann, Ralf Neukirch and René Pfister, wrote:

> Merkel is hoping that AfD will destroy itself, either as a function of internal party differences or by moving too far to the right. Both are rather vague hopes. As an internal study undertaken by the CDU think tank *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* recently concluded: 'Following the split at the (summer 2015) party convention in Essen, AfD has stabilised.' At the membership meeting two weekends ago [April of 2016] in Stuttgart, the report concludes, 'party leadership successfully avoided an open outbreak of significant personal conflicts and the conflict between the base and the party elite.' AfD leadership was clever enough to block the most radical proposed additions to the party platform - such as the call for a minimum of 200,000 deportations per year and Germany's withdrawal from NATO. In the past, there have been several reasons why no right-wing party has become established in Germany. One of those was that admitting to voting for a party such as the NPD or the Republikaner was akin to civic death. With AfD, though, that has changed.'[59]

After all, the pre-eminence of the two major parties, linked with the *AntiFa* movement, has acted as a kind of social bulwark which has kept ALFA and the AfD on the fringes of political legitimacy or even recognition. Indeed, ALFA remains, for all intents and purposes, isolated as it attempts to find an angle to gain support. If, however, the AfD collects over ten per cent in 2017, Germany will have to handle the juxtaposition of a mainstream rebuke of the AfD coupled with its electoral accomplishments. For most Germans, it will be a bitter pill to swallow. It may even

divide the Western/Northern and Eastern/Southern parts of the nation further. In the end, Bavarian nonalignment paired with Eastern dissatisfaction may bring about a German parliamentary system with some new peripheral players where many thought there would never be – on the Right.

RICHARD R. MOELLER, Associate Professor of Political Science, associate of the Golda Meir Center for Political Leadership, Metropolitan State University of Denver. He can be reached at *moeller@msudenver.edu*

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