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Dear Friends,

This is the fifth issue of the *Germany Brief* written by Dr. Malte Fuhrmann, our new DAAD Fachlektor. The paper expands on what Peter Widmann and Mareike Rump had touched upon in our last Germany Brief: the rise of populist political formations in Germany. The author traces the legacy of the far right-wing parties in Germany after 1949 and analyses how they today increasingly challenge the established conservative party. The author underlines that the CDU/CSU have come to a crossroad where they have to decide whether to go on following the Strauss doctrine of not leaving a space to the right of their own party open, or to pursue a political course that does not include appeals to the far right.

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The AfD and its Precursors A History of the Right in (West) German Politics

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In the last issue of *Germany Briefs*, Peter Widmann and Mareike Rump dealt with a topic that at the time (2014) was still new and to some seemed ephemeral: the rise of a new populist right wing party in Germany. By late 2016, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) has moved from its 2014 success of 7.1% in the European Parliament election to far more spectacular results in state elections: 24.2% and 20.8% respectively in the structurally underdeveloped states of Saxony Anhalt

and Mecklenburg Western Pomerania, but also 15.1% in wealthy Baden Württemberg and 14.2% in traditionally leftist Berlin and anything between 10 and 15% in national opinion polls. While the global development has obviously added to the rise of right-wing populism, it is necessary to also understand this phenomenon's specific German component.

Observers have wondered how to integrate this with the image of the Federal Republic of Germany as a country strongly identifying with European integration, of relative economic prosperity, and enforcing a strong taboo on Nazi party symbols. How can a country that since its 1949 founding never had a party in national parliament comparable to the *Front National* (FN) in France or the *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (MHP) in Turkey now turn to right wing populism? From a historical perspective, this question should be posed the other way around: how could the country that in 1933 had by 39 % supported the most radical racist, antisocial, and antidemocratic movement in Europe adopt without much resistance to the political systems of the Warsaw Pact on the one hand and NATO on the other? This process obviously cannot have happened without leaving behind a legacy that had its impact on the post-war social and political models. The following brief will attempt to trace that legacy within its West German trajectory, while the impact of post-Nazi attitudes on East Germany will be dealt with in the next edition of the *Germany Briefs*.

‘The Womb that Spawned this is still Fertile’: Right Wing Parties after Denazification

On the surface, the West German parliamentary system seems almost unchanged from its origins in 1949 until 1980, and only minor additions later: a large Christian conservative party (CDU) with a nominally independent Bavarian regional offspring (CSU), another large party in the tradition of moderate Social Democracy (SPD), and a minor free market, citizens' rights-oriented liberal party (FDP). However, the right half of the party spectrum was in the initial years not so clearly defined. The openly fascist Socialist Reich Party (SRP) was banned in 1952, after it had received 7.7 % of the votes in Bremen state elections. A more serious challenge arose with the All-German Bloc/League of Expellees and Deprived of Rights (GB/BHE). The party had been formed in 1950 as a vigorous lobbyist for German war refugees from East European states and former Nazi cadres in fear of their jobs and also saw itself as a spearhead of anticommunism and irredentism concerning the territories lost to Poland and the Soviet Union. It had had big successes

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in state elections in Northern Germany, where German refugees posed a larger percentage of the population. With 5.2% of the vote for the 1953 Bundestag, they entered parliament and formed part of the coalition with Konrad Adenauer's CDU and the German Party (DP) and were awarded the Ministry of Refugees as well as one other.

The GB/BHE in the following years suffered severe infighting over the question of supporting Adenauer's integration into West European military and political structures, resulting in several leading members defecting to the CDU. The economic boom of the 1950s from which the refugees also benefitted helped to erode their share of the votes. In 1957 the party failed to pass the five percent national election threshold, but continued to be of regional importance for some more years. In the period, both the DP and the FDP also had strong personal continuities to the former regime and supported staunch rightist world views. The fact that none of these parties managed to gain much influence is mostly attributed to the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*, Western Germany's economic boom caused by Marshall Plan development aid, great leniency by the new allies in the question of war reparations, and the emerging West European market. The *Wirtschaftswunder* led to an immense popularity of Adenauer's CDU and his pro-American policy.

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Reunification, its Discontents, and the Strauss Doctrine

Under the following long rule of the SPD/FDP coalition (1969-1982), the CDU managed to monopolize the right-wing opposition. Voters felt the need to unite in order to oppose the SPD's policy of reconciliation with Eastern Europe and, as the CDU's reign grew more distant, the party was free to appeal to different camps to the right of the centre. Therefore, it was only after Helmut Kohl had come to power and the shape of CDU's policies had come to show that a new right-wing challenge arose. Frustrated CDU/CSU supporters watched as the Kohl government, far from returning to its Cold War policy and initiating the promised socio-cultural turn, actually

economically supported the German Democratic Republic and did not do much to enforce a more conservative way of life on wider society. By 1989 the relatively new party Republicans (REP), aspiring to become a German version of the Front National, managed to attract a noticeable number of votes first in the West Berlin local elections and then won 7% of the West German seats in the European Parliament. Thus for the first time since 1953 a party to the right of the CDU and CSU had surpassed 5% in a nation-wide election. At the time, the sudden turn of events, the East German revolution, Helmut Kohl's clever diplomacy to assure speedy unification of the two states, and a concomitant surge of nationalism turned the mood before the 1990 Bundestag elections, but by 1991 the tide had turned again.

The economically disastrous policy of the quick merger of the two countries as well as an unprecedented surge in migration, East German jobseekers moving westward, arriving ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union, plus other East European migrants escaping civil war, ethnic strife, or economic hardship, unnerved the electorate. Many had the impression that their previously rather stable socio-economic system was endangered and in need of a militant defence. Three factors were important to prevent a right-wing party from entering the Bundestag at this point in time. First, the REPs found competition in the shape of the German People's Union (Deutsche Volks-Union) and a revived NPD, all of which managed to come out ahead of the others in certain regions. While their positions – in the grey zone between mainstream right-wing and militant Neonazism – barely differed from one another, personal rivalry kept them from establishing a common movement. Second, despite sympathies for these parties' racism or calls for law and order, many mainstream voters shied away from parties that did not distance themselves from the Nazi regime. The REP leader Franz Schönhuber had written an autobiography glorifying his time as a member of the SS and the DVU and NPD had even more overtly embraced the Nazi past. Third, the CDU and CSU began to act according to the doctrine Franz Josef Strauss (head of the CSU) had postulated in the face of REP successes in 1989, claiming that they could not leave a space to the right of their own party open. They began a campaign targeting migration and the right to asylum as the central threats to socio-economic stability, culminating in the curtailing of the right to asylum through a constitutional amendment supported by the SPD in 1993. Thus one of the main grievances of the far right seemed resolved and the feeling of moral panic stopped. Due to infighting, DVU and REP eventually fell off the grid, losing their mandates in various state parliaments in elections, while the NPD, becoming more explicitly Neo-Nazi, continued to be present in state parliaments. Strong as its role was in states such as Baden Württemberg and Saxony, it no longer posed a challenge at the national level.

A threat of a different kind arose in Hamburg in 2001. Ronald Schill, who had come to popularity as 'Judge Merciless' due to his harsh jurisprudence, formed the Party for a Rule of Law Offensive (PRO or Schill Party) and surprisingly won 19.4% of the state votes in 2001. For the first time since the Strauss Doctrine of 1989, the CDU chose not to ostracize its competition, but to include it in a coalition together with the FDP in order to rule Hamburg. Due to his intrigues against Mayor Ole von Beust, Schill was deposed as senator of the interior in 2003 and his party dismissed from the city state government in 2004. While only a short episode, PRO nonetheless proved itself indicative of a new type of right-wing party. It had more convincingly than its predecessors prevented outright Neo-Nazis from taking control; nonetheless it had met many expectations of the far- to mid-right clientele, polemicizing against immigration, preaching law and order, and antagonizing the left. Other parties, such as Pro DM, which tried to cash in on fears of inflation during the transition to the Euro, attempted to copy the concept, but with little success. With the rise of anti-Islamism, pro Deutschland, grown strong on local anti-mosque protests, once again fell into the trap of open Nazi extremism.

Lessons from the History of the German Right

This long history of right-wing parties in the Federal Republic of Germany goes to prove several points relevant to the discussion about the relatively new party AfD. First, ever since the reintroduction of the parliamentary system in 1945, a sizable portion of the electorate has searched for a right-wing alternative to the established parties. Depending on the political questions of their times, they have challenged the established parties by advocating an apologetic attitude towards the

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Nazi regime, anti-communism, irredentism, law and order, anti-immigration policies, and more recently anti-Islamism, often in conjuncture with an opposition against global capitalism and its proponents in the USA and the EU. Despite the lack of a stable party in West German history that this section of society could turn to, right-wing positions always have appealed to a sizable portion of the electorate. While opinion polls usually can only identify less than 10% as potential supporters of Nazi ideology, authoritarian right-wing

positions are acclaimedly shared by up to 20% of the population, and racism can, when coinciding with appropriate media hype, gather up to 30% support. These figures have only changed slightly over time.

Second, a mix of factors have kept right-wing parties from establishing themselves at the national parliament level. Among them is the five percent threshold, higher than in all other European countries but Turkey, a high hurdle in a country with a federalist political structure of originally 60 and nowadays 80 million. Most often, right-wing parties have been their own worst enemies, hindering their progress by infighting or vicious rivalry. Periodically the center parties have managed to reintegrate this voter clientele, by promoting chauvinist positions themselves. Also, the lingering stigma of outright advocating of Nazi sympathies has prevented some parties from tapping the additional reserve of 10% that would advocate authoritarian, but not Nazi worldviews.

However, the historical rule that German right-wing parties never make it into national parliament is not set in stone. Rather, it looks as if it could be broken in 2017. This is because many of the preconditions of previous parties' failures have eroded. Under Angela Merkel's coalition with the Social Democrats, the CDU has moved, by its own standards, into a position as far left as never before. In particular, the flirt with a pro-refugee policy in the summer of 2015, short though it might have been, seems unforgivable for the right-wing in the face of the largest immigration influx since the early 1990s and it is unlikely that deportations or other measures will reassure these voters. To sit back and wait until the emerging party destroys itself also no longer seems a viable option. The AfD's short history is rife with infighting, but the party has always emerged stronger from it. While the party had originally appealed to more centrist and bourgeois voters, speaking to their fears of financial ruin through EU monetary policy, it has actually grown in popularity since its founders, among them a professor of economics and a former bank CEO, were ousted. Now the party more strongly addresses the fears of the *petits bourgeois*, a potentially higher segment of the population. A split of the Baden Württemberg AfD parliamentary faction into two actually improved the party's stance, as they discovered that two factions together enjoy more parliamentary rights. Nor has the AfD gone down the road of trying to eliminate rival organizations. The Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization of the Occident (Pegida) voluntarily play the part of the more thuggish street organization and leave the parliamentary field to AfD. Attempts to link Pegida and more rarely AfD to the glorification of National Socialism have proven successful, but their critics cannot deny that especially AfD speaks to more than the limited number of Hitler fans. On the other hand, an increasing number of potential voters refuse to accept contact to Nazis as the decisive threshold for supporting a party or not, seeing this as simply an imposition by the liberal media (or lie press, in their language).

Indicators therefore seem to show that the AfD's accession into the Bundestag is highly likely and that for the first time since 1957, a party beyond CDU/CSU or FDP will represent the

voices of Germany's right at the national level. Whether this will lead to a permanent representation comparable to the Front National or MHP or the AfD eventually declines due to infighting or reabsorption into a centrist party is not decided yet. Nor are the ramifications for the other parties, especially the CDU and CSU. Will they enter a rivalry with the new party, trying to once again appeal to voters who cannot identify with Merkel? Will they one day follow the example set in 2001 Hamburg, to use this party to form a coalition? Or will they take this as a chance to abandon the Strauss Doctrine and pursue a political course that does not include appeals to the far right? These are some of the interesting questions of the near future in German party politics.