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Developments within the Radical Right in Germany: Discourses, Attitudes and Actors

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Public discourse and attitudes

The Sarrazin debate

Even though there is wider acceptance of heterogeneity, recently we have also witnessed a new Social-Darwinistic discourse in Germany, defaming certain groups, especially Muslims. The best example of such a discourse is the so-called Sarrazin debate. The starting point was an interview with Thilo Sarrazin (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/Social Democratic Party (SPD)), a former Senator of Finance for Berlin and board member of the German Federal Bank, in the cultural magazine *Lettre Internationale* in autumn 2009 (Sarrazin 2009: 197–201). In the interview, Sarrazin complained of a steady increase in Arab and Turkish migrants in Berlin and called this a ‘negative selection’. Muslims were ‘*integrationsunwillig*’ (unwilling to integrate) and ‘*integrationsunfähig*’ (unable to integrate), Sarrazin said. Shortly afterwards, in 2010, he published a book, with a provocative title, describing the outcome of such ‘negative selection’: ‘*Deutschland schafft sich ab*’ (Germany Abolishes Itself) (Sarrazin 2010). Within two months the title became Germany’s best-selling book on politics in a decade. This reflects the willingness of many to consume his claims, the attraction of his assertions and the public controversy about them.

In his book, Sarrazin categorizes people according to their intellectual ability and their assumed (economic) value to society. Sarrazin claims that an individual’s ability is largely determined by his or her genes. And he connects the quality of genes to certain groups established along ethnic/religious and class lines. For instance, he believes that the children of uneducated and poor families deserve a minor place in German society because their intelligence quotient is – in his view – low. He elaborates at length on the ‘problem’ of a growing number of schoolchildren having a Muslim, Arab or Turkish background. The combined impact of a growing lower class, Muslim immigration

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and a decline in the birth rate among ethnic Germans would lead to the abolition of Germany. Typical of the German situation is that Sarrazin, at one point in the debate, also employs stereotypes that are understood as antisemitic: He states that every 'Volk' (people) has its own genetic identity and he points at Jews who, he alleges, all share a certain gene (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 29 August 2010).

Sarrazin's statements were and remain a source of controversy, criticism and encouragement. They also provoked a dispute with his employer, the German Federal Bank, which led to his resignation. However, despite severe criticism within the SPD, attempts to exclude him from the party failed. The first ousting procedures against Sarrazin took place after the publication of his interview in *Lettre Internationale*. Even though a branch of the SPD Berlin had commissioned a report by the University of Potsdam that claimed Sarrazin's statements were racist, the SPD State Arbitration Commission in Berlin ultimately rejected the ousting procedures. An attempt to exclude Sarrazin from the party also was initiated by the SPD party executive after the publication of his book. However, Sarrazin had prominent advocates within the party, so when he promised to uphold Social Democratic norms a compromise was found. In SPD hearings, Sarrazin stated he did not intend to endanger equal opportunity norms in education by introducing a selective system and testified to his belief that all children are equally worthy as human beings. In a defensive statement he also said that he did not mean to argue on an ethnic basis but was rather looking at the cultural differences between people (*Zeit-online*, 21 April 2011).

Both Sarrazin's book and the debate surrounding it reflect the hostility towards Muslims and the lower classes, as well as a social-Darwinist orientation. However, in the media and even in politics, the Sarrazin debate has focused primarily on migration and Islam. It became clear (surprising some German Muslims) that many participants in the discussion made a distinction between 'Germans' and 'Muslims'.

Before looking at how the radical right reacts to the Sarrazin debate and tries to prosper from it, I will present results of attitudinal surveys. Here we can see how widespread 'group focused enmity' (Heitmeyer 2002–11)² is within the German population.

Radical-right attitudes in the general population

Attitude surveys indicate that about 8.2 per cent of the German population hold hard-core right-wing extremist views (Decker et al. 2010: 96). Extreme right-wing views had been declining continuously since 2002, but opinion polls show an increase in 2010. According to a study by the University of Leipzig, *Die Mitte in der Krise*, commissioned by the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, almost 35 per cent of the population believe that 'the presence of so many foreigners is a threat to Germany'. There is a rise in the categories of: 'approval of dictatorship' (5.1%), 'chauvinism' (19.3%), 'xenophobia' (24.7%) and 'social Darwinism' (3.9%). In the former East Germany,

² 'Group focused enmity' is a syndrome that W. Heitmeyer of the Bielefeld Institute analyses in his long-term study, 'Deutsche Zustände' (State of affairs in Germany). It focuses on dimensions like Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and hostility against the homeless.

some of the categories found much more approval than in the former West ('approval of dictatorship' 6.8%, 'xenophobia' 35%, 'social Darwinism' 6.2%) (Decker et al., 2010). The study on 'group focused enmity' (GMF) by the Bielefeld Institute records similarly high acceptance of xenophobic statements. The study, which collects data on an annual basis, illustrates a sharp rise in Islamophobia among the German population. Despite the relatively low proportion of Muslims in the German population (around 5%), the study shows that 46 per cent agree with the statement 'There are too many Muslims in Germany' and 52.2 per cent of respondents held the view that Islam is an intolerant religion. The opinions of Germans towards Muslims and Islam therefore largely correspond to opinions held in the rest of the European countries covered by the study (average country samples: 44.2%; 54.4%). However, German respondents agreed least frequently with the statement: 'Muslim culture fits in well in Germany' (16.6%); in other words, of all the Europeans sampled, Germans are the most critical of Muslim culture (country sample average: 31.3%) (Zick & Küpper 2009).³

Recent studies also show a fairly high agreement with classic antisemitic statements: Almost 15 per cent of respondents agreed with the statements, 'Jews are more prone than other people to use nasty tricks to get what they want' and 'Jews simply have something special and unique about them, and don't fit in so well with us' (Decker et al. 2010: 73f., 79). Concerning antisemitic attitudes, a new phenomenon can be detected: anti-Semitism in the guise of criticism against Israel or finding expression through criticism of Holocaust remembrance. Far more people agree with antisemitic statements in those contexts, as the following examples show: 44.4 per cent agree with the statement: 'Looking at Israel's politics I can understand that people dislike Jews', and 51.2 per cent agree with the direct comparison between Israel and the National Socialist regime (Heyder et al. 2005: 151); 54 per cent agree with the statement 'the Jews use the commemoration of the Holocaust for their own purposes' (Rensmann 2004: 492). While this 'new' anti-Semitism is widespread, the levels of agreement with openly antisemitic statements are still fairly high.

A further interesting finding is that various hostile attitudes show a positive correlation, proving the existence of a phenomenon Heitmeyer calls 'group-focused enmity'. The annual surveys show another trend in Germany: increasing enmity against the homeless and jobless (Heitmeyer 2002: 10–11). At this point it is possible to conclude that the themes Sarrazin put on the agenda correspond with attitudes in the general population: widespread anti-Muslim sentiment, indirectly voiced antisemitic attitudes and derogation of socially 'weak' groups.

The radical right

The ethnicization of problematic social relations or individual dispositions creates favourable conditions for a radical right-wing perception of reality. Indeed, radical right-wing parties took their chances and campaigned with Thilo Sarrazin: The right-wing extremists (NPD) stated that 'Sarrazin is right' and the recent election

³ Countries studied: France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal.

campaign of the right-wing populist party Pro-Deutschland (Pro-Germany)⁴ (Berlin, September 2011) read: 'Cast a vote for Thilo's theses' (*Wählen gehen für Thilos Thesen*).⁵ René Stadtkewitz, a former Christian Democratic Union (CDU) member of the Berlin State Parliament, emphasized – when announcing the formation of a new Islamophobic party, Die Freiheit, in October 2010 – the need to stop blaming Sarrazin, who in his view had singled out the most important theme of the day ('Muslim immigrants'). Actors on the radical right agree with the overall picture drawn in the debate: Certain conflicts are interpreted as 'survival battles of specific groups of people or races', and individuals are attributed a certain value by virtue of their membership of a specific ethnic or cultural group. However, those on the radical right applaud only Sarrazin's anti-Muslim statements and his criticism of migration. The fact that Sarrazin defames the lower classes⁶ as being (economically) useless is largely ignored. Being incongruent with a primarily National Socialist radical right (parties, subculture), the 'economic usefulness discourse' is rather characteristic of a racist élitism held by less visible right-wing radical players: Members of the duelling and non-duelling fraternities and segments of the (old) German élite.

The radical right in Germany shares not only a belief in a homogeneous and superior German nation or '*Volk*' that is threatened by 'the others' or certain destructive powers, it also opposes the great triggers of cultural shifts since the reign of National Socialism: the Allied 'occupation' of Germany, especially liberal and allegedly 'decadent' American impulses, the political movement of 1968 and Germany's immigration policy. However, as the radical right is a heterogeneous phenomenon, it is necessary to acknowledge (at least roughly) its different ideological groups. It is also important to stress that these different groups often have close contacts with each other and even intermingle.

National socialist-oriented groups

Right-wing extremism in Germany has been marked by a lively subculture and diverse movement-type organizations. The Freie Kameradschaften (Free Associations), loose networks of 10–30 neo-Nazis, were developed in reaction to perceived State repression. The Freie Kameradschaften regard themselves as part of a 'national resistance', a 'radical-right united front'. There are about 150 regional and supra-regional groups in Germany. Since around 2002, a new group has become an established part of the far right in Germany – and an export: the Autonome Nationalisten (Autonomous Nationalists). Their supporters are mostly very young and adopt the clothing styles and some of the habits of left-wing groups,⁷ particularly the autonomous Schwarze Blocks (Black Blocks). The group is attractive to some young people in precarious situations, offering temporary accommodation (e.g. beds for homeless youths) and

⁴ The party was founded 2005 in Cologne as the national branch of *Pro Cologne*, which had just been elected to the Civil Council of Cologne. For a description of the party, see below.

⁵ Sarrazin sued those parties.

⁶ He includes Turkish and Arab migrants in this category.

⁷ For instance, they live in a commune, gather and listen to 'protest' music, join protest marches and even shout slogans only slightly (but decisively) different from those of the left: *Hoch die nationale Solidarität!* (Long live national solidarity!) instead of *Hoch die internationale Solidarität!* (Long live international solidarity!).

jobs (Borstel 2010). This extreme right scene is characterized by high levels of violence (Schellenberg 2011a: 70–2).

With the NPD, which was set up in 1964, Germany also has a hard-core right-wing extremist party. Many of its members and functionaries are former Nazis. Today, while the party is recruiting its personnel partly from violence-prone neo-Nazi groups like the *Freie Kameradschaften*, it also is trying to appear gentrified and to attract members from the common middle class. For some years now the NPD has increasingly won local and regional mandates, especially in rural areas of eastern Germany. Moreover, it recently had electoral success⁸ in the federal states of Saxony (2004 election: 9.2%; 2009: 5.6%) and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (2006 election: 7.3%; 2011: 6.0%). In Thuringia (2009: 4.3%) and Saxony-Anhalt (2011: 4.6%) the NPD just missed entering the Federal State Assembly (2009: 4.3%). Today the former 'old men's party' is particularly active in reaching out to young people, including through leisure activities or the distribution of free CDs. The NPD's 'School Playground' CD, which has appeared in various versions since 2006, promotes right-wing ideology and boastfully describes the party as 'the movement'.⁹ These groups are particularly successful in rural areas of the former East Germany.

Elitist racists and xenophobic anti-Muslim groups

In addition to the National Socialist scene there is an élitist radical right with a long tradition. Its supporters are likely to be both quite wealthy (or descended from rich families) and well-educated. In this group, ideas à la Sarrazin are a matter of course. They have nationalistic and social-Darwinist beliefs. Typical exponents are: student fraternities and duelling fraternities as well as media, such as the weekly paper *Junge Freiheit* (Young Freedom/Liberty) and the internet-newspaper/blog 'Politically Incorrect'. They seek to build a bridge between hard-core neo-Nazi ideologies and more complex nationalistic and conservative attitudes.

On the political level, the ideology is represented by parties like the Republikaner (REP), which – after having had some regional successes (mainly in the 1980s and 1990s) – has become quite meaningless, or the Schill Party, which was only briefly successful in Hamburg at the beginning of the millennium. So far, those parties have found no permanent space in politics.

However, there is a fairly new party group that takes up anti-Muslim propaganda as its central theme: Member groups describe themselves as 'populist' or 'citizens' movements and put the topic of Islam – with its widespread connotations of fear – at the heart of their political agenda. Today the civic action group Pro Köln (Pro Cologne) is the most successful of these. Its branches Pro NRW in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (regional) and Pro Deutschland (national) are less important. A typical slogan of the party is: 'We oppose the Islamisation of Cologne'. Pro Cologne was set up as an association in 1996 and survived into the new millennium through the efforts of activists from the extreme right-wing scene. The initiators and members of

⁸ A party must receive 5 per cent of the vote in order to gain seats in a regional or federal legislature.

⁹ The contents and aims of the CDs are presented and analysed in detail in Schellenberg 2011b.

these anti-Muslim parties are often linked to the right-wing extremist scene (Häusler 2008). In 2004, Pro Cologne succeeded in winning 4.7 per cent of the vote, thus gaining four seats on the Cologne City Council. The party particularly attracts attention through initiatives against the building of mosques. Another party is Bürgerinitiative Ausländerstopp (civic action group to stop foreigners). It was founded in Nuremberg in 2001 and was able to send two representatives to the Nuremberg City Council and one to the Munich City Council.¹⁰

A rather new party that seems (so far) not to be influenced by the right-wing extremist scene is Die Freiheit (freedom/liberty), formed in October 2010 by René Stadtkewitz, then a member of Berlin's State Parliament for the CDU. He was excluded from the CDU after having initiated a round table called 'Islam as obstacle to integration' and inviting the Dutch populist Geert Wilders as speaker. The agenda of this new party is mainly anti-Muslim. Die Freiheit seems to be inspired by Wilders and his right-wing populist Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV). Wilders participated in the election campaign for Stadtkewitz's new party in Berlin. However, so far, Die Freiheit has failed to succeed in elections. Despite its intensive election campaign in Berlin – using Sarrazin allusions – it received less than 1 per cent of the vote for the Berlin Parliament in September 2011.

Characteristically, these players have intensive European liaisons. For instance, Pro Cologne is a member of the European network 'Cities Against Islamisation' and receives support from the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party Austria, FPÖ) and the Belgian Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest). Anti-Muslim political parties in Germany are not only linked with those in other European countries but inspired by them. These currently active groups are highly xenophobic and today identify 'the Muslim' as the prototypical 'other'. The main goal of those groups is to declare cultural war on Islam and Muslims and to fight the 'multicultural society'. But they have other hate targets, including Roma and migrants in general, whom they describe as 'criminal elements'.

However, it may be important to note that, in Germany, these parties have no modern spin to them – they usually appear authoritarian and their protagonists are almost exclusively male. For an understanding of the phenomenon in Germany, it is also helpful to note that all the described groups cling to Germany's political traditions: In contrast to other European countries, Germany has at best few liberal and democratic historical reference points; it also has a short history as 'a' or 'one' nation. The radical right relates to authoritarian and neurotic nationalist traditions and movements.

Failure and success

Given their electoral results on the national level, all these parties are quite unimportant. The NPD scored relatively well in 2009, gaining 1.5 per cent of the vote in the national election (its best result was 4.3% in 1969). So far, parties of the radical right have gained only regional and local success. An exception was the European success of the

¹⁰ Since their politicians come from the right-wing extremist subcultural scene and foster contacts with this scene and the NPD, the Bürgerinitiative Ausländerstopp is often called a '*Tarnorganisation*' (cover organization) in the media.

Republikaner (Republican, REP) in 1989. It won 7.1 per cent of the vote and entered the European Parliament.

However, there are some tendencies that need to be noted: As early as 2005, German journalist and publicist Toralf Staud spoke of right-wing extremism dominating everyday culture in some rural areas of eastern Germany and described this phenomenon as the 'process of the east German provinces becoming fascist' (Staud 2005). Recent scientific research has examined the expansion of right-wing radicalism at the local level and confirmed Staud's point. There are clear indications of a growing presence of far-right structures at the local level and people are increasingly accepting its manifestations (e.g. organizations, political parties) Buchstein & Heinrich 2010, Schellenberg 2012).¹¹ In some areas today, right-wing radicals are seen as acceptable political players (Staud 2005, Buchstein & Heinrich 2010, Schellenberg 2012).

Special situation in Germany?

Despite the evident potential for extreme right-wing attitudes among the German population and its vibrant subcultural scene,¹² current radical right-wing parties have considerable difficulties in gaining credibility and acceptance among the wider population. Basically, radical-right parties do not enjoy a good reputation. A set of legal and historical conditions as well as developments in political culture make it difficult for the radical right to become widely acceptable political players in Germany.

Legal and political consequences from the history of national socialism

German law orients itself strictly against all actors and movements that exhibit a relationship to National Socialism. The political system of the Federal Republic of Germany, built on a free democratic order, understands itself to be a '*Wehrhafte Demokratie*' (defensive democracy). That means that the democratic State is supposed to prevent attacks against it and thus a repetition of history, namely the hegemony of National Socialism. Against this background, comprehensive legislation is to be understood as being against offences defined as right-wing extremism in Germany. Everything that opposes the German Constitution or refers to an affinity with National Socialism, whether in writing, speech, symbols or structure, is forbidden. The basic principle of the legislation is a variety of State measures against right-wing extremism, particularly those with limitations on associations and demonstrations.

Parties of the radical right are discredited in many people's eyes simply by their relationship to Nazism. Most people reject Nazism and believe their life within a pluralist democracy is preferable to the conditions of the Third Reich. Denying the Holocaust, using National Socialist symbols or wording, is prohibited by German law

¹¹ This trend is embedded in a set of occurrences and sensitivities that lead to a dissociation from federal politics and its general norms (like pluralism and liberalism).

¹² In Germany not only is there more violence committed by right-wing radicals than in other Western European countries, there also is an innovative far-right subculture (as mentioned, *Freie Kameradschaften* and *Autonome Nationalisten*).

and politicians from right-wing radical parties are regularly accused or convicted of such offences. In broad sections of society those parties are still suspected of wishing to resurrect National Socialism. This accusation is made not only against the clearly National Socialist-oriented groups but also against today's anti-immigrant and anti-Islam parties.¹³

Recent political choices and agendas

Moreover, there are quite a few developments in German society that make it difficult for political parties of the radical right to gain more support: In contrast to other European countries, Germany has – after a long phase of scepticism and denial that Germany is a land of immigration – seen a recent opening up towards migration and a trend to accept migrants as part of society.¹⁴ A milestone was set only in 2000 when regulations on German nationality were reformed: Nationality is no longer based on '*Blutsrecht*' (*jus sanguinis*), a purely ethnic definition of nationality, but now includes aspects of '*Bodenrecht*' (*jus soli*). Also, the German immigration law of 2002/2004 reflects the country's new perception of itself as a land of immigration. Today, all mainstream political parties welcome qualified immigrants and foster their integration. This change was prompted first and foremost by economic conditions: Germany's population is decreasing and it is increasingly difficult to find enough qualified workers to keep the economy running smoothly.

It is also only quite recently that wider parts of society have become increasingly vigilant about radical right aspirations.¹⁵ A key year was 2000, when – after some serious cases of violence – Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called for an 'uprising of all decent people'. This is due to the tireless commitment of some individuals with an influence on public opinion and decision-making, such as journalists, politicians and lawyers, as well as civil-rights activists. One big step forward was the initiation of State funding programmes for activities against right-wing extremism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Even though the programmes have been changed slightly by the present liberal-conservative government coalition (CDU/CSU and FDP), their core direction has been maintained: engagement for diversity, countering right-wing extremism.¹⁶

Another main losing formula for the radical right seems to be the growing support for plurality and individualism. Attitude surveys show that the oldest generation (people born before or during the Nazi era) tend towards right-wing extremism more strongly than people born and socialized in the Federal Republic of Germany. Younger

¹³ One indicator is that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, or a Länderbranch (State branch), watches these parties and reports on them – which is only permitted if a party or group is officially assessed as (potentially) anti-constitutional.

¹⁴ Since the 1950s, Germany has had agreements with foreign countries on labour recruitment and a growing percentage of migrants in the population, but it had never accepted the definition of being a country of immigrants who make a permanent home in Germany.

¹⁵ For instance: politicians (especially federal), journalists, clergy (especially Protestant ministers), stars (musicians, football players) and active citizens.

¹⁶ However, the government has initiated programmes against 'left-wing extremism' and 'Islamist extremism', and thus is partly relativizing the threat posed by the radical/extremist right (which – as mentioned above – is very violent in Germany, being responsible for at least 182 murders since 1990).

generations tend to be more liberal and cosmopolitan, even if not free of extreme right-wing attitudes (Bergmann 2001). The latest Shell Youth Study showed that most young people have a generally positive attitude towards social change; 84 per cent of them actually associate globalization with the freedom to travel, work and study all over the world. They appreciate a society that has become more open to pluralism and embraces internationality, for instance in cultural realms (e.g. music) (Albert et al. 2010).¹⁷

Is the radical right changing?

The radical right interprets the increased public engagement against right-wing extremism and for diversity as an attack against itself. It tries to discredit this attack (by claiming it is foreign led or politically triggered by the far left). The radical right sees 'natural' German culture and its nationalistic norms as being at stake, and is looking for new forms and spaces to articulate its concerns.¹⁸

The radical right is reacting to the losing formula of national socialism

Attempting to shake off its bad reputation, the radical right reacts to certain 'losing formulas'. Parties of the radical right are responding to the widespread dislike of National Socialism with their own ambivalent relationship to it. On the one hand, they allude to its ideology and even to its crimes: For instance, the NPD campaigned in the 2011 Berlin elections with the slogan '*Gas geben*' (the wording is ambiguous in German: it could mean 'accelerate' or 'give/treat with gas' which is seen by many as a reference to and glorification of the National Socialist concentration camps). On the other hand, the NPD is distancing itself from Nazism and accuses political opponents of trying to discredit the party by making absurd comparisons. Recently, the party has even started to accuse political adversaries of being Nazi-like or being related to Nazism.¹⁹ Even though National Socialist allusions are still common, radical right-wing parties of today fight associations with National Socialism.

Populist and revolutionary?

Political parties of the radical right take advantage of popular fears of relegation and loss to act as so-called advocates for the common people, or the losers in globalized economic processes. They propagate a 'national and social' policy, welcoming a welfare state that takes care of (only) its ethnic-national citizens. This is reflected in slogans

¹⁷ However, some segments of the younger population are sceptical about social change in general, and 10 per cent of young people experience a depressing lack of opportunity within society.

¹⁸ One sad example is the 'Nationalsozialistische Untergrund' (NSU), whose members murdered at least ten people (Turkish and Greek migrants and a policewoman) in the last decade.

¹⁹ For instance, a NPD member of the Parliament of Saxony accused a CDU MP of having a father who was a high-level National Socialist functionary. In this context, the NPD representative demanded that this fact be discussed in public. Speech of Jürgen Gansel (NPD) in the Parliament of Saxony (Sächsischer Landtag 2007: 7,840).

such as 'jobs for Germans first' (e.g. NPD, REP), '*sozial geht nur national*' (the only way to be social is to be nationalist) (NPD) or 'social security for our people' (REP).

National Socialist-oriented groups in particular, but also the protagonists of the anti-Muslim parties, call mainstream political parties and their politicians élitist, corrupt and profoundly antisocial. They attack them as 'the ruling class' and 'fat cats' and call their politics 'dirty tricks' and '*Asozialpolitik*' (anti-social politics). A big issue for radical right-wing parties like the NPD was the recent 'Hartz IV' reform of basic social services. In this context they argued that 'the rich' would let their people down. Of course, this socialist bias of the radical right has its tradition in Germany – but it gains new importance in a rapidly changing world that leaves many behind and creates a growing gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The agitation of the radical right on those issues reflects a populist undercurrent as well as a revolutionary bias. As research on the radical right shows, young people on the street and less advantaged people are most vulnerable to these arguments (Schellenberg 2011a: 67).

Euphemistic language

Changes in the use of language are also characteristic of the fight of the radical right for greater public acceptance:²⁰ First the language becomes softer and the vocabulary of the old extreme right is expelled. One example is the word '*Rassentrennung*' (racial segregation). Today, such National Socialist vocabulary loses its appeal within the radical right, which instead uses terms such as '*Ethnopluralismus*' (ethnopluralism), which sounds harmless and positive and relates to popular concepts like diversity. However, it is the same old concept with the same old goals. Another term frequently used by the radical right is '*Freiheit*' (freedom/liberty) – even taken up as party name by the most recently founded right-wing radical party in Germany. '*Freiheit*' is used especially to refer to freedom of opinion and (discriminatory) speech and demands for the disregard or elimination of anti-discrimination legislation. This change in language and approach can be seen tentatively within the NPD (the old right-wing extremists) (Schellenberg 2011a), but is practised even more cleverly by the younger players in this ideological family. Especially *Die Freiheit* strives for soft language and distances itself from neo-Nazi thugs.

Ideological change or contradictions?

The goal of right-wing radicalism is an ethnically and culturally homogenous society: a right-wing utopia that promises to solve social and individual problems by excluding 'the guilty' or 'the other'. According to this logic, all that is alien must be identified and ruled out in order to ensure the nation's/people's survival. The definition of 'the other' is rather mutable and subject to the zeitgeist. Discourse analyses and attitude surveys make it clear: Today it is 'the Moslem' culture and religion in particular that are considered 'others'. Anti-Semitism, however, continues to be a core element of the radical right in Germany, with different guises for different right-wing players: from open hatred calling for violence among the extreme right, to codes and secondary allusions (such as

²⁰ This is not the case within the National Socialist-oriented subcultural scene.

in the reference to the 'American East Coast') among moderate right-wing radicals and public players. The very young political party, *Die Freiheit*, is among those European populist parties (like the Danish People's Party and Wilders' Party for Freedom) that exclude anti-Semitism and even seek proximity to the State of Israel (Jäger 2010). In Germany there are two explanations for this course of action: First it is a strategic turning away from Nazism. Especially, anti-Semitism is still (though decreasingly) taboo in the political arena and has – if expressed – always resulted in resignation from political office.²¹ Secondly, by pointing out that Muslims are threatening Israel, these parties aim at further discrediting the Muslim population at home as naturally aggressive and destructive. However, *Die Freiheit* has never gained much support, which might be characteristic of the present situation in Germany: Since the party is categorized publicly as right-wing radical, it has to cope with being related to National Socialism and the extreme right. In addition, it is hard to imagine that abstinence from anti-Semitism and support for Israel help the party gain popularity.

In Germany, not only does anti-Semitism have a long tradition; there also is a tradition of good relations between the radical right and the Arab/Persian world and its (Muslim) leaders, especially when they are against Israel and Jews. One example is the relationship between the Nazis and the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husaini. He found refuge in National Socialist Germany in 1941, where he settled (Nordbruch 2008: 261). More recent examples are the close contacts between right-wing extremist groups like the neo-Nazi Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann (Paramilitary Sport Group Hoffmann²²) and Arab countries: The group had an extraterritorial group in Lebanon. And one of their members fled Germany for Lebanon after having committed, in 1980, a double murder with antisemitic motivations (Virchow 2011). Another recent example of such relations is the visit of NPD functionaries²³ to the Holocaust denial conference in Teheran in 2006, which was hosted by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. An ideological closeness to extremist Islamist groups was visible when the right-wing extremist scene celebrated the terror attacks of 9/11 as pay-off to the United States, Jews and Western decadence.²⁴ However, it is not only the extreme right that is deeply antisemitic but also the right and left fringe of mainstream parties.²⁵ Even though there are some signs that actors of the radical right strategically approach Israel, it cannot be taken for granted that parties like *Die Freiheit* will ever find a space in Germany's

²¹ The latest example is that of Martin Hohmann, who was a member of the German Bundestag (CDU). He gave a speech that used antisemitic reasoning and sources and characterized the Jews as 'a nation of perpetrators' in the time of Stalinism. As a consequence he was excluded from the CDU/CSU faction of the Bundestag (2005) and later also from the CDU. See Benz 2011: 168–73.

²² Hoffmann is the surname of the founder of this paramilitary group.

²³ Two prominent right-wing radicals, Horst Mahler and Günter Deckert, were prevented by the State from leaving Germany to attend the conference. The conference was attended by NPD functionaries Carsten Bormann, Benedikt Frings, Markus Haverkamp, Arnold Höfs and Herbert Hoff, as well as Christian Lindtner, a member of the NPD, and Peter Töpfer, another right-wing activist from Germany.

²⁴ See for instance the text and video to the songs 'ZOG I' and 'ZOG II' by the band Stahlgewitter. The latter is printed in: Schellenberg 2011b: 50.

²⁵ This is not only shown by attitude surveys but also by statements from people of the right fringe of mainstream parties like Hohmann (CDU) and Möllemann (FDP). Both attracted attention by making antisemitic statements (see fn. 18).

political arena or that other right-wing radical parties will distance themselves from anti-Semitism.

Conclusion

Unlike radical-right parties in most European countries, those in Germany have so far failed to break through at the national level. This is due in large part to a comprehensive repression of neo-Nazi activities in Germany and to the fact that political parties are related to Nazism and therewith discredited. However, as parts of society dissociate from political developments, norms and the changing zeitgeist, a certain degree of right-wing radical stabilization is becoming apparent in specific groups (modernity losers, parts of the old *élite*) and areas (rural remote areas).

Moreover, the radical right has taken up the struggle against 'losing formulae' and against its own slow demise: It has developed an ambivalent relationship to Nazism in public, offensively distancing itself from it.²⁶ Some far-right leaders soften their language, striving to be democratic and to give positively connoted words (like freedom/liberty and pluralism) a new ideological meaning. In addition, they participate in the public debate about political culture and societal norms. Here they try to fight developments towards a liberal pluralist society in which people are seen as individuals and worthy members with equal rights. Finally, they take the opportunity to engage with public debate, which is increasingly directed against Muslims. However, this causes friction for at least some sections of the radical right – as German right-wing radicals are, traditionally, committed anti-Semites and tend to have rather good relations with Arab/Persian countries and (Muslim) leaders. On the ideological level, the belief in an existential threat to German identity from conspiratorial powers still plays a dominant role.

However, right-wing radical ideas are widespread among the German population. A trend in public discourse is hostility towards Muslims and other population groups such as migrants, the unemployed and the homeless. These attitudes are found well beyond the far-right spectrum. A discourse of economic 'usefulness' is currently superimposed over the xenophobic discourse in Germany. But for right-wing radical parties that target the disadvantaged, these two discourses are difficult to reconcile. It remains unclear whether or how the radical right can gain from them: On the one hand the 'economic usefulness discourse' might promote discrimination against Muslims – as this group comprises mainly former labour migrants and their descendants and is highly impacted by unemployment due to the increased need for skilled labour. On the other hand, the intermingling of those two discourses might make it difficult to attract the traditional target group of the radical right because this attack is also directed against them: people who feel dissociated from society and its norms and are living in fragile economic situations or feel that they are losing status within society. This group might feel excluded and discriminated against by aims à la Sarrazin: 'Positive selection'

²⁶ While, however, protesting about any debate over Germany's National Socialist past.

means – for the racist élitist group – diminishing or excluding certain ethnic groups as well as members of those families with little education and low status. The racist élitists believe the genes of members of those groups to be less promising and less worthy than those of the ‘white élite’. That is the essential message of Sarrazin’s ‘Germany Abolishes Itself’ – and the pattern of most populist discourse in Germany today.

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