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## Anti-Muslim Movement Rattles Germany The End of Tolerance?

By SPIEGEL Staff

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**Disenchanted German citizens and right-wing extremists are joining forces to form a protest movement to fight what they see as the Islamization of the West. Is this the end of the long-praised German tolerance of recent years?**

Felix Menzel is sitting in his study in an elegant villa in Dresden's Striesen neighborhood on a dark afternoon in early December. He's thinking about Europe. A portrait of Ernst Jünger, a favorite author of many German archconservatives is hung on the wall.

Menzel, 29, is a polite, unimposing man wearing corduroys and rimless glasses. He takes pains to come across as an intellectual, and avoids virulent rhetoric like "Foreigners out!" He prefers to talk about "Europe's Western soul," which, as he believes, includes Christianity and the legacy of antiquity, but not Islam. "I see serious threats coming our way from outside Europe. I feel especially pessimistic about the overpopulation of Africa and Asia," says Menzel, looking serious. "And I believe that what is unfolding in Iraq and Syria at the moment is a clear harbinger of the first global civil war."

Menzel, a media scholar, has been running the *Blaue Narzisse* (Blue Narcissus), a conservative right-wing magazine for high school and university students, for the last 10 years. His small magazine had attracted little interest until now. But that is about to change, at least if Menzel has his way. "The uprising of the masses that we have long yearned for is slowly getting underway," he writes on his magazine's website. "And this movement is moving toward the right."

In Dresden, at least, the sentiments expressed in the *Blaue Narzisse* have become more palpable in recent weeks. Protests staged each week on Mondays initially attracted only a few dozen to a few hundred people, but more recently the number of citizens taking to the streets has reached 10,000. The group, which calls itself Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (and goes by the German acronym Pegida), demonstrates against economic migrants and a supposed "cultural foreign domination of our country" -- whatever is meant by that.

What is going on in Germany, the world's second most popular destination for immigrants? Has the open-mindedness for which Germans had long been praised now ended? Are we seeing a return of the vague fear of being overwhelmed by immigrants that Germany experienced in the 1990s, when a hostel for asylum seekers was burned down? How large is the new right-wing movement, and will it remain limited to Dresden, or is it spreading nationwide?

So far, protests held under the Pegida label in other cities -- like Kassel and Würzburg -- have attracted only a few hundred people at a time. In fact, some of the protests attracted significantly larger numbers of counter-demonstrators. And while thousands of "patriotic Europeans" aim to take to the streets in Dresden again in the coming days, their counterparts in Germany's western states are taking a Christmas break. Pegida supporters are waiting until after the holidays to return to the streets in cities like Cologne, Düsseldorf and Unna.

### **34 Percent Believe Germany Becoming Islamicized**

Still, many Germans share the protestors' views, according to a current SPIEGEL poll. Some 34 percent of citizens agreed with the Pegida protestors that Germany is becoming increasingly Islamicized.

Even before the Pegida movement began, the number of right-wing protests was on the rise nationwide. In the first 10 months of this year, the refugee organization Pro Asyl and the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, which combats racism, counted more than 200 demonstrations against hostels for asylum seekers.

Violence has erupted at the protests again and again. Right-wing perpetrators are attacking accommodations for immigrants an average of twice a week in Germany. On Dec. 11, three buildings that had been converted to house refugees but were still empty became the targets of right-wing hate, when they were painted with swastikas and set on fire. Attacks like these are "intolerable," Chancellor Angela Merkel said after the incidents.

According to the federal government, there were 86 attacks by right-wing assailants on asylum seekers' hostels between January and the end of September 2014. The offences included arson, grievous bodily assault, trespassing and painting symbols barred by the German constitution.

In addition, the Internet has been flooded with countless right-wing hate sites and Facebook groups. Just one anti-Islamic blog, Politically Incorrect, is reporting about 70,000 visitors a day.

Various movements are coming together in the new wave of protests. Concerned residents are encountering conservatives who have grown wary of democratic values, while hooligans are joining forces with neo-Nazis and notorious right-wing conspiracy theorists. Citizens' qualms about those on the far right are decreasing, and extremist, xenophobic ideas have apparently become socially acceptable.

### **German Officials Alarmed**

This confusing coexistence of movements and ideas is what makes it so difficult to deal with the self-proclaimed saviors of the West. The majority of the demonstrators don't want to be pegged as right-wing extremists. Still, it doesn't seem to trouble them that, week after week, they are demonstrating alongside bullnecked men with shaved heads, as they all shout together: "We are the people!," a slogan adopted from the protests in East Germany in the autumn of 1989 that preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Far-right groups like the xenophobic National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) see the protests as a chance to take their worldview directly to the middle class. Populist movements that have attracted little attention until now, like the so-called "identitarian movement," are suddenly in the spotlight, as is the aimlessly wandering *Reichsbürgerbewegung*, or Reich Citizens' Movement, which asserts that the German Reich still exists within its pre-World War II borders.

German security agencies are alarmed. "We take this very seriously," says a senior official with the domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV). The authorities were especially aroused by the events of Oct. 26, when at least 400 right-wing extremists went on a rampage in downtown Cologne during a demonstration staged by the group "Hooligans Against Salafists" (HoGeSa). The issue was even on the agenda of an "intelligence situation" meeting at Merkel's Chancellery, where officials were ordered to heighten their scrutiny of the unusual mix of protestors.

The Federal Prosecutor's Office is also involved. According to a spokesman, there are more than 100 "observation and investigation procedures associated with right-wing extremist activities" pending at the agency, based in the southwestern city of Karlsruhe. The HoGeSa movement is one of the groups under observation, say the Karlsruhe officials.

A report on the connections between hooligans and right-wing extremists compiled by the police and the BfV was the focus of a meeting of the federal and state interior ministers just over a week ago. The group also discussed Pegida and its many clones, as well as the question of how to handle the simmering protests.

### **Fomenting Fears and Prejudice**

But the interior ministers failed to develop a convincing plan to effectively combat the problem. "We cannot label 10,000 people as right-wing extremists. That creates more problems than it

solves," says Saxony Interior Minister Markus Ulbig, a member of the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU). According to Ulbig, there were many "middle-class citizens" among the Dresden demonstrators, "and you can't toss them all into the same Neo-Nazi pot."

His counterpart from the Western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Ralf Jäger, a member of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the current chairman of the conference of interior ministers, began the meeting by referring to some of the protesters as "neo-Nazis in pinstripes." But he too became more cautious by the end of the conference. "We have to unmask these instigators. They are deliberately fomenting fears and prejudices," said Jäger. Instead of taking a repressive approach, he explained, the authorities should create awareness campaigns for nervous citizens.

The demonstrators aren't exactly making it easy for German authorities. Since the riots in Cologne, they have generally taken great pains to avoid committing prosecutable offences during the weekly protests, or being seen as too obviously in league with right-wing extremists. But the line between freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate, on the one hand, and hate speech and xenophobia, on the other, has become blurred. As a result, citizens are currently marching straight under the radar of the BfV and police.

In Dresden on Dec. 8, an anonymous Pegida speaker even began his speech by quoting the words of US black civil rights leader Martin Luther King, "I have a dream." He too had a dream, the demonstrator in Saxony said, a dream of the peaceful coexistence of all human beings and cultures. But then he arrived at what he called the hard reality: that we are in a state of war.

Was there an "objective reason," the speaker asked rhetorically, to invade Iraq, overthrow Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, intervene in Tunisia, depose Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and "provoke Russia with Ukraine?" "No!" the crowd shouted each time. "He who sows war will reap refugees," the Pegida speaker shouted to his audience of 10,000 Dresden citizens, and warned against the "perverse ideas" that are coming to Germany. "Do we have to wait until the conditions we see in the Neukölln neighborhood of Berlin have come to Saxony?" he asked, referring to a district in the nation's capital that is home to large Turkish and Arab immigrant populations and is wrought with urban problems.

### **Are Germans Yearning for 'Good Old Days'?**

In a dispatch from the city titled, "Dresden Journal," the *New York Times* wrote: "In German City Rich with History and Tragedy, Tide Rises Against Immigration." Still, the author, who was promptly interviewed by MDR, the public broadcaster for the eastern states of Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, praised the peaceful atmosphere at the demonstration, saying that the participants were in good cheer, "despite teeth-chattering cold." She told the German broadcaster that she had been under the impression that many were mourning the "good old days."

The only question is: Which good old days? Those after 1933, when Dresden, displaying the Nazi swastika, drove out its Jewish residents? Or those after 1945, when the East German Communist Party transformed an entire region into one that was virtually cut off from the

Western world because its residents were geographically cut off from illegal broadcasts of West German television that provided a link to other East Germans to the rest of the world.

## **Imaginations Run Wild**

What is so deeply upsetting to many Saxons is difficult to recognize at first glance. According to the official statistics, there are about 100,000 foreigners living in the state, or 2.5 percent of its population -- compared to 13.4 percent in Berlin. State interior ministry figures indicate that the share of Muslims who have the potential to seek to Islamicize the Saxon West is only 0.1 percent. But many of those who take to the streets every week don't believe the official statistics. Instead, they are convinced that a cartel of politicians and "main-stream media" are audaciously misleading the public over the true state of affairs.

At least one of Saxony's great citizens, the author Karl May, exhibited a considerable talent for imagining foreign, threatening worlds. His novels, which have sold millions of copies around the world, are crawling with what he calls Muslims dazzling infidels with their swords or simply dispatching them straight to hell.

Many Dresden residents also let their imaginations run wild at the Monday protests. One demonstrator says that he doesn't want to see his granddaughters being forced to wear headscarves in the future, while another suggests that Islamists would be better off seeking asylum in wealthy, oil-producing countries. A woman complains that she can't afford to buy a smartphone, but that the refugees can.

Lutz Bachmann has brought them together. The impetus for his movement, he says, was a walk through Dresden's post-Socialist Prager Strasse shopping district. He witnessed a rally by supporters of the Kurdish Workers' Party, or PKK, which opposes the Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq. His reaction was to start a Facebook group, primarily to oppose arms shipments to the PKK.

It was only a handful of people who showed up for the first demonstration in October. Today Pegida has more than 44,000 Facebook fans. By contrast, the state chapter of Merkel's conservative CDU party, which has been in office for 24 years, has only managed to drum up 661 Facebook fans.

## **Links to Crime and Hooligans**

While Pegida wants to see criminal asylum seekers deported immediately, some of its own activists are known to the police. Movement founder Bachmann is registered with the authorities under the heading "General crime (including violent offences)," and he has a criminal record for offences that include burglary and drug crimes. Another member of the group's middle-class leadership is also registered with authorities under the same category, and a third rally organizer has fraud convictions on his record.

Pegida's connections to the hooligan community are also noteworthy. For instance, the police have identified some of the protestors as members of "Fist of the East," a Dresden hooligan

group in the right-wing extremist camp. Members of "Hooligans Elbflorenz (Florence on the Elbe, a nickname for Dresden)," which the Dresden Regional Court has classified as a criminal organization, have also been spotted. Activists with the group have reportedly been in contact with the banned far-right extremist fellowship known as "Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz."

The police estimate that the Pegida marches include about 300 people "associated with the fan community of SG Dynamo Dresden," the city's football club, and describe about 250 of them as "problem fans." Unofficially, the authorities assume that a large portion of this group is "open to right-wing extremist ideas." There are also apparently ties between Pegida and HoGeSa. For instance, police have identified a 42-year-old in Meissen, a city near Dresden, who is seen as an organizer for both protest movements.

### **Nationalism Dressed Up as Patriotism**

A vague feeling of being threatened unites the demonstrators, whether they see themselves as members of the middle-class, conservative nationalists or radical right-wingers. They yearn for isolation and simple answers, which is why almost-forgotten, Nazi-era terms like "Volk" (the people) and "Vaterland" (the fatherland) are back in vogue.

Only last summer, the German flag was a symbol of a joyous, multicultural nation of soccer fans. Now it's being waved above the heads of Pegida followers as they crow: "Germany is awakening. For our fatherland, for Germany, it is our country, the country of our ancestors, descendants and children."

Where does this new nationalism, dressed up as patriotism, come from? "Disenchanted citizens with right-wing sympathies" are unable to cope with the social change of the last few decades," says Alexander Häusler, an expert on right-wing extremism in Düsseldorf. The protestors are pursuing a "restorative image of society" that roughly corresponds to Germany in the 1950s, long before it became a country of immigration.

"The collaboration between society and lawmakers is breaking down," says Werner Patzelt, a political scientist at the Technical University of Dresden. For decades, he explains, there was far too little investment in political education, especially in Saxony. That too has helped fuel the marches.

### **Conspiracy Theories**

Many citizens apparently believe that politicians and the media are treating an important issue -- the effects of immigration on society -- as a taboo. Their dissatisfaction isn't just expressed in the streets, but also in the tone of discourse in social media. It's also a popular subject for books. For instance, writer Udo Ulfkotte's book of conspiracy theories, "Bought Journalists," is currently a bestseller.

The so-called mainstream media supposed suppression of the truth has prompted Ulfkotte to speak out loudly for years. One of his subjects is a little-known variant of "holy war." Ulfkotte, a former journalist with the respected national daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, suggested on



the Internet that Muslims could be deliberately contaminating European food products with their excrement. "Even the intelligence services have been warning us for years about fecal matter jihad," he wrote.

Christian Jung, an official with the city of Munich, has also struck a chord with the public. When we meet for a beer at the Isarthor pub, he looks very unassuming in his brown cardigan, as he pleasantly discusses his website Blu-News, founded in 2012, which bills itself as "middle-class, liberal and independent." The site is one of the biggest in the nationalist conservative community. Jung describes it as an "alternative medium with a politically incorrect and provocative voice."

But this isn't an accurate reflection of reality. For instance, the site characterizes the group Hooligans Against Salafists as part of a new protest culture that is being "treated unfairly in the media," and Blu-News also shows shock videos about Islamic State in which children are holding severed heads in their hands. The commentary reads: "It's the religion, nothing else. This hell cannot be explained without Islam." According to Jung, a former official with the anti-Islam party Die Freiheit (Freedom), the video is the most successful on the site to date, with more than 300,000 views.

Each of these websites links to other sites. One click after another takes us more and more deeply into a parallel world that perceives itself as a bulwark against "foreign infiltration." There's also the Patriotic Platform, which aligns itself with the anti-euro party Alternative for Germany (AfD). Another website is called Nuremberg 2.0 Germany, which wants to put about 100 prominent citizens, like former President Christian Wulff, on trial for the alleged "systematic Islamization of Germany" -- using the Nuremberg war crimes trials as its model.

Another blog, "Heerlager der Heiligen" (The Camp of the Saints), is named after a novel by French author Jean Raspail popular with the right, in which Indian refugees storm the European continent after a famine in their country.

### **'A Radical, Parallel Society Is Taking Shape'**

Apparently the beginnings of militant structures are also taking shape in the wake of their wave of anger. The Berlin state security agency is now investigating an obscure group known as the German Resistance Movement (DWB), which has been linked to four attempted arson attacks on the national offices of the CDU, the Reichstag building in Berlin and the Paul Löbe parliamentary building.

Between Aug. 25 and Nov. 24, previously unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails at the buildings, which fortunately caused only minor property damage. According to pamphlets the group left behind at the sites, today's prevailing "multicultural, multiethnic, multi-religious and multi-historical population mix" will "subvert and Balkanize the country."

"A radical, parallel society is taking shape here," says Andreas Zick, director of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Conflict and Violence Studies at the University of Bielefeld in northwestern

Germany. What is especially unsettling, he adds, is that a number of previously separate groups and mini-groups are now on the verge of creating "a shared nationalist and chauvinist identity."

In addition to populist opponents of the euro, anti-Islam agitators and nationalists, these groups include classic right-wing extremists and, more and more openly, a portion of the AfD -- "and a large number of people who simply don't care about this country anymore," says Zick.

The emergence of Pegida, Zick explains, has made it possible to unite all of these groups behind a single banner. "I think this is dangerous, because there are many people with violent tendencies in those groups." This willingness to commit acts of violence is currently more palpable than measurable, he adds, "but I'm convinced that this will eventually tilt in another direction." Even today, says social psychologist Zick, the demonstrators' countless anti-foreigner slogans can be seen as veiled threats, as if the crowds were preparing a return to some kind of ethnic German ideal. "They may be chanting, 'We are the people,'" he adds, but they might as well be saying, "We are the (ethnic) German people." It's a message that is exclusionary toward immigrants and foreigners.

Meanwhile, in Dresden, Saxony Governor Stanislaw Tillich is trying to formulate an official position. He has long been silent about the conservative right-wing throngs appearing at the city's Schlossplatz square every Monday, within view of the state government headquarters. CDU politician Tillich apparently believes the Pegida will eventually go away.

For now, he says, he wants to "start a conversation" with the "patriotic Europeans," in order to alleviate their "anxieties." But in his statements earlier this month, he neglected to mention the anxieties of refugees and Muslims, who must live in fear of being attacked by the right-wing mob.

## **Hashtag #Niewieda**

He has since made more clear statements against Pegida. In an interview with the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* newspaper published on Sunday, Tillich noted that the world had been opened up to residents of Saxony after the fall of the Berlin Wall and that world must also be welcomed in the state. One day before the next major Pegida demonstration, he warned that Saxons should not have walls in their heads and that they should be open and curious about experiencing enrichment.

Meanwhile, the counter-protests are growing. On Monday, anti-Pegida organizers are planning demonstrations in Dresden, Munich, Würzburg and Nuremberg. Similar protests are slated for Cologne, Leipzig, Düsseldorf and Frankfurt in January. There's even a hashtag for the counter-protests: #niewieda, "never again," the anti-Nazi slogan that has been a standard rallying cry against right-wing sentiment in Germany since the end of World War II.