

# **‘Dexit’: Will Germany Leave the EU?**

*Professor Arthur Noble, MA, PhD, Emeritus Professor of German at the French Universities of Metz and Nancy 2, analyses the latest pronouncements from the Eurosceptic Alternative für Deutschland party in Germany. Given the German dominance of the EU, a German Brexit (‘Dexit’) might seem unthinkable; but the AfD has seen a surge in popularity in recent years, and is now the third-largest political party in the German Parliament. Although the AfD has stopped short of calling for ‘Dexit’ for now, it has vowed to campaign for it if the EU does not fundamentally reform itself in the next five years.*

It would certainly be the height of irony if Germany, the instigator, mainstay and economic hub of the European Union, were to vote for ‘Dexit’ [Deutschland + exit] and by so doing leave and destroy what has been called its own ‘Fourth Reich’, achieved by ‘banks instead of tanks’.

Nevertheless, Germany’s major right-wing party, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), has always been Eurosceptic, and is now threatening to push for a ‘Dexit’ if the EU does not restore its member countries’ national sovereignty within the next five years. Otherwise, warns the AfD in its latest election programme released ahead of the 2019 European elections, it will “deem it necessary to consider a withdrawal of Germany [from the EU] or an orderly dissolution of the European Union and the establishment of a new European economic and interest community”.

The major structural reform demanded by the AfD is the scrapping of the European Parliament and its 751 MEPs and its replacement by a ‘European Assembly’ with only 100 delegates and powers yet to be specified. The new EU politicians would be nominated by “national parliaments in proportion to their

factional strength", which would also mean the end of European elections.

The AfD has praised Brexit and the Eurosceptic values of France's National Rally movement under Marine Le Pen, as well as the policies of the populist anti-EU parties across Europe. The new AfD policy document deplores the fact that the EU has "evolved into an undemocratic structure which has been occupied by Europe's political classes and has been designed by non-transparent, uncontrolled bureaucracies", in addition to being "dominated by the particular interests of certain states and lobbying cliques". While Dexit would be "the last option", the AfD says that it will still push for it if the EU does not curb "lobbyism and corruption" and reduce the size of its "bureaucratic apparatus".

It is highly significant that in its latest article published on 5 January 2019 – "AfD threatens Dexit: Right-wing populists are starting to talk about Germany's exit from the EU in 2024" – the normally mainstream *Bild* has begun to take the AfD's Dexit threat seriously in the run-up to the German elections of 2019 and the EU elections of 2024. The latter date marks the end of the current legislative term of the European Parliament. The AfD, which has always been in favour of a return of the EU to its original status as a purely economic organisation ("*Rückwandlung der Europäischen Union in eine Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft*"), has warned that if its demanded reforms are not implemented by then, Dexit will be a real possibility.

The AfD was established in 2013 and increased its popular support by attacking Chancellor Merkel's disastrous 'open door' policy toward refugees and migrants, which resulted in the influx of over a million migrants into Germany alone since 2015. During the past few years the AfD solidly increased its support in local and national elections and is now the third-largest political party in the German Parliament (*Bundestag*). A national poll conducted in February 2018 showed that the AfD

had already surpassed the centre left SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) for the first time by 16 percent to 15.5 percent – a new low for the latter. The conservative CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union*) and its Bavarian sister party the CSU (*Christlich-Soziale Union*) are also in trouble.

Besides its anti-EU stance, the AfD's opposition to migration, in particular from Muslim countries, has likely contributed to its electoral success. Several polls conducted by the German daily newspaper *Bild* and the research institute INSA (*Institut für neue soziale Antworten*) have demonstrated the growing hostility of Germans to Islam. One poll found that 46 percent of Germans were concerned that their country could be taken over by the advocates of political Islam, while 60 percent were of the opinion that there is "no place for Islam in Germany".

It may seem incredible that the option of leaving the EU is now being discussed in the very country that dominates it; but only a few years ago the word 'Brexit' did not exist, and the idea of the UK's leaving the EU seemed a far-off dream. Those campaigning for national sovereignty across the EU should keep a close eye on Germany's AfD.