



## **STRANGERS LIKE US** GERMANS IN THE SEARCH FOR A NEW IDENTITY

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**STRANGERS LIKE US**  
GERMANS IN THE SEARCH  
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# **Contents**

## **INTRODUCTION | 5**

### **I. THE MEMORABLE SEPTEMBER OF 2015 | 8**

1. What happened? The un-closed border | **8**
2. Interim crisis management | **10**

### **II. THE BATTLE FOR AN INTERPRETIVE ADVANTAGE | 12**

1. Extreme interpretations | **13**
2. “Lügenpresse” – the media as prisoners of their own bias | **16**
3. AfD – the party that was not supposed to be there | **18**

### **III. OLD AND NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT INTEGRATION | 23**

1. Back to the past – old problems are still relevant | **23**
2. Three assumptions of successful integration – controversies | **27**

### **IV. MANAGING CHANGE: “WHO WILL BE THE PEOPLE?” | 36**

## INTRODUCTION

The sudden influx of more than one million refugees and migrants<sup>1</sup> to Germany in late 2015 and early 2016 exacerbated the country's social and political crisis. The latent, protracted dispute about the character of Germany as a migration state resurfaced with renewed force and will divide the German public for many years to come. The scale of this conflict resembles those with which the Germans had grappled for decades, concerning attitudes towards the past and German history, or the use of nuclear energy. There are many indications that this time the division will be longer-lasting and certainly deeper, since at the centre of the dispute is Germans' sense of national identity. It can be assumed that of all the recent crises (starting from the financial crisis, through the Eurozone crisis and Brexit, to the war in Ukraine), it is this migration crisis that will engender the most conflicts in Europe, creating a toxic mix of identity problems. Those problems could also be dangerous for German democracy<sup>2</sup>.

With great difficulty and much organisational effort, Germany has managed to cope with the first effects of the migration wave. Although not all the newcomers were registered and some of them entered into conflict with the law, the basic needs of several hundred thousand people were met. Some of the newcomers have already started integration training and found work. However, in the public debate, the initially prevailing concerns about technical problems related to migration and integration quickly gave way to more universal, even existential, questions. Such questions have dominated the discussion about the consequences of the migration crisis; though the famous utterance of Angela Merkel, who proclaimed "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do it"), was useful initially,

- <sup>1</sup> These two groups could not be clearly distinguished then, and they still cannot be today. The new arrivals included both authentic refugees, and economic migrants claiming to be refugees.
- <sup>2</sup> C. Stelzenmüller, 'Der ratlose Hegemon', *Internationale Politik*, March–April 2019, pp. 8–13, zeitschrift-ip.dgap.org.

it quickly turned out to be superficial and failed to stop the ensuing barrage of questions. Who has the right to state protection and support: a refugee or a German? Who is a German? What is patriotism?

German decision makers already know that one of the key consequences of the migration crisis is that they need to make the entire German public realise that Germany has irrevocably become a migration state. A debate is still ongoing about what the German version of such a state should look like and how a citizen should be defined. The divisions in this dispute run across the political divide and different social strata, both within the electorate and among politicians. The only common view seems to be that migration and integration constitute a challenge to maintaining the *status quo*, which has been relatively favourable for Germany and its people.

It is quite common to view immigration as a threat, sparking concerns not only about material prosperity, but also about the preservation of German national identity. The opponents of this view, including a majority of the German political class, believe that in the face of a demographic crisis, migration is necessary for Germany to sustain its political and economic power and that it is up to politicians to make sure that the newcomers integrate with society.

The present paper discusses some aspects of this discussion and the effects of the measures taken by German politicians, such as the effort to manage not only the technical aspects of migration and integration, but also the emotions of the people whom the politicians have been trying to prepare for the inevitable continued influx of migrants.

Although the study focuses on the internal political consequences of the migration crisis, it is also important to mention the international aspect, which is crucial for Germany's partners in foreign

policy and the EU. All German politicians, and especially the Christian Democrats, are aware that the situation of 2015 must not be repeated. The decision to leave the borders open and its consequences were formational experiences for the current political class in Germany, in addition to its effect in shaping foreign policy. While Germany does not perceive Russia as a military threat and sees China as a worthwhile trading partner rather than an aggressive competitor (and if it sees it as a threatening competitor, then it is in line with Washington), it will certainly try at all costs to prevent a migration wave of a similar scale and disorderliness as in 2015. Germany is ready to subordinate many of its international activities to this goal, whether in its relations with Russia, Turkey or North African countries.

# I. THE MEMORABLE SEPTEMBER OF 2015

## 1. What happened? The un-closed border

On 4 September 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel took the momentous decision to keep the German border with Austria open for refugees and migrants, who had started to gather in Hungary after crossing the so-called Balkan route, and let them travel on to Germany. She consulted her closest colleagues (most of whom were not present in Berlin at the time) and the Vice-Chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel of the SPD. The CSU coalition partner and the president of the party, Horst Seehofer, tried to avoid meeting the Chancellor, and the next day he began to criticise her decision. Border services were prepared to close the borders, but Merkel failed to obtain assurances from her colleagues, including constitutional ministers, that this step would be legal, and she was apprehensive of an unfavourable response by the media and public opinion towards a possible forced halt to the wave of refugees and migrants by border guards<sup>3</sup>.

The uncontrolled influx of immigrants continued until 13 September, when the German Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière, announced that checks at the Austrian border would be re-introduced<sup>4</sup>. He said that the Dublin III procedure, under which refugees should seek international protection in the first EU country in which they arrived, remained in force (although Merkel had *de facto* repealed it on 4 September). However, after the Minister's statement, they still had the right to enter Germany – it was enough for them to express their willingness to lodge an asylum application at the border and to be registered.

<sup>3</sup> See: R. Alexander, *Die Getriebenen: Merkel und die Flüchtlingspolitik. Report aus dem Innern der Macht*, Munich 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Imposing border controls was a response to the chaos that broke at Munich's railway station and the dramatic media pleas of the authorities. See: A. Ciechanowicz, "'Refugees' – Germany's increasing problem", 16.09.2015, [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).



The border states of Germany and local authorities soon started experiencing organisational problems. Chancellor Merkel came under fire: she was accused of encouraging migrants to come to Germany by giving one-off permission to admit refugees from Hungary and by assuring that Germany would respect international law and recognise unfettered access to the right to asylum.

However, the developments of September 2015 and the admission of more than one million migrants to Germany within a short period of time stemmed not only from the immediate decisions of Chancellor Merkel, but also from earlier negligence by EU politicians. For many years, the EU had failed to create a coherent asylum system. By clinging to the Dublin III procedure, it burdened the Southern European countries disproportionately to their economic situation. The calls by those countries, especially Italy and Greece, which pleaded for help as they faced rapidly increasing numbers of arrivals and a humanitarian crisis (e.g. on the island of Lampedusa in 2012) were ignored<sup>5</sup>.

When in 2015 EU migration law was breached and it was decided not to send the migrants back to the EU country of first arrival, the political leaders of Germany mainly cited humanitarian and economic reasons for doing so. The proponents of the humanitarian narrative emphasised the need for a humane response and the obligation to respect human rights, but they also invoked notions such as ‘moral imperative’ and obligations stemming from Germany’s history. Those who referred to economic arguments pointed to Germany’s favourable economic situation and the needs of the market, especially in view of the country’s demographic problems and the labour shortage. Immediately, however, a counter-narrative was put forward which argued that even if

<sup>5</sup> The number of migrants had been growing for several years, but the beginning of the crisis is considered to have occurred in 2015, when a record number of 1.2 million asylum applications were lodged in European Union countries. According to UNHCR data, the migrants who arrived in Europe in 2015 were mainly Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis.

the economy needed new workers (even hundreds of thousands per year), they needed to be admitted in an orderly fashion, taking into account the demand for the skills in the German market. It also argued that humanitarian considerations could not lead to a destabilisation of the state and society in the name of endlessly repenting for the sins of World War II and ‘overcoming the past’. It was argued that the belief that Germany could save the whole world was a sign of arrogance and immaturity that led to a sense of superiority and served to build a self-image of the Germans as ‘super-moral’ citizens of the world with a monopoly on humanity<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Interim crisis management

Thanks to the efforts of administrative bodies at all levels, as well as the organisational support of the armed forces and the involvement of ordinary citizens, including hundreds of retired civil servants and teachers, Germany managed to overcome most of its technical difficulties and speed up its asylum procedures. However, these were only ad hoc solutions<sup>7</sup>.

In the following years the inflow of new refugees and the number of registrations decreased significantly. Explaining this change, the message from the ruling elites and the mainstream media highlighted the merits of Chancellor Angela Merkel and her efforts to bring about an EU–Turkey agreement<sup>8</sup>. The closing of the Balkan route, which contributed to discouraging some migrants from sailing to Greek islands and allowed Germany to prepare the infrastructure necessary to receive refugees within the framework

<sup>6</sup> H.A. Winkler, ‘Es gibt kein deutsches Moralmonopol’, *Zeit Online*, 24.04.2016, [www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de).

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the atmosphere and the problems of that period, see: A. Ciechanowicz, in co-operation with L. Gibadło, ‘Germany’s “refugee” problem. The most important test for Chancellor Merkel and the grand coalition’, *OSW Commentary*, no. 182, 11.09.2015, [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).

<sup>8</sup> A. Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, K. Strachota, M. Chudziak, ‘The Ankara–Berlin pact: how to stop the migration crisis?’, 9.03.2016, [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).

of the relocation resulting from the agreement with Turkey, was mentioned only as a secondary factor. Berlin also began to argue that agreements with similar provisions to those in the EU-Turkey deal should be negotiated with North African countries. For a long time, relocating the migrants to different European states, based upon a quota system, was presented as the only effective solution to the migration crisis. In the summer of 2018 that concept was replaced by the principle of ‘flexible solidarity’, which Chancellor Merkel interpreted as the involvement of individual states in humanitarian assistance, border protection or the handling of asylum procedures and combatting of the causes of illegal migration within their respective capabilities and potentials. Work on the common EU asylum system is still ongoing<sup>9</sup>.

For the last four years, the Bundestag has annually adopted new legislation tightening the asylum rules, easing the burden of migration borne by the German states and expanding the list of safe countries of origin<sup>10</sup>. Proposals to tighten the asylum procedures were among the cornerstones of the Christian Democrats’ campaign prior to the Bundestag elections in September 2017. At the federal CDU convention on 6–7 December 2016, which re-elected Angela Merkel as the party leader, she not only assured her party that a crisis on the scale seen in 2015 would never repeat itself, but also supported a ban on the burqa in public offices, schools and public transport, as well as the proposal to systematically deport foreigners denied the right to stay in Germany. This rhetoric was designed to meet voter expectations and was a reaction to the campaign of the anti-migration Alternative for Germany.

<sup>9</sup> [Press release of the European Commission of 6 March 2019](#), [europa.eu](#).

<sup>10</sup> A. Ciechanowicz, ‘Germany: stricter asylum laws’, 21.10.2015, [www.osw.waw.pl](#).

## II. THE BATTLE FOR AN INTERPRETIVE ADVANTAGE

The rivalry between the two different interpretations of the migration crisis predated its peak in September 2015. The decision to leave the border open had been greatly influenced by hostile behaviour towards migrants and the resulting deterioration in the image of Germany. Many people still remembered the beginning of the 1990s, when Germany experienced a wave of right-wing violence. Between 1991 and 1993, extremists committed a total of 4,500 acts of violence against refugees, immigrants and Jews. 28 people died and 1,800 were injured<sup>11</sup>. In the summer of 2015, the world once again saw pictures of aggressive crowds. When the Chancellor visited a refugee camp in Heidenau, Saxony, the assembled residents of the city booed her and called her a traitor. Merkel decided to make that visit because she had been accused of having an aloof attitude towards the problem, which allegedly manifested itself in her lack of response to the calls for help coming from southern Europe as it struggled with the migration crisis, but also in shying away from contact with refugees and the institutions in Germany to which they started to come in large numbers<sup>12</sup>. The Chancellor was also accused of lacking empathy when she explained that Germany could not accept all the world's refugees<sup>13</sup>. Merkel's disengagement and the growing wave of xenophobic behaviour in Germany, as well as the deeply moving media images of the chaos at Keleti station, the bodies of children who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, etc., were countered with demonstrations of hospitality (*Willkommenskultur*), which in September 2015 could be observed in places like Munich

<sup>11</sup> J.S. Eder, *Lęk przed Holocaustem. Republika Federalna Niemiec a amerykańska pamięć o Holocaustie od lat 70. XX wieku* [*Federal Republic of Germany and the American memory of the Holocaust since the 1970s*], Pilecki Institute, 2019, pp. 276–277.

<sup>12</sup> 219,000 refugees were registered in the first seven months of 2015 alone – it marked a 125% increase over the same period in 2014.

<sup>13</sup> R. Alexander, *Die Getriebenen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–44.

train station, where migrants were welcomed by the locals and given gifts, including toys for children. After this wave of sympathy, which also included various forms of volunteering, more grudging sentiments began to surface. This outbreak of hostility towards migrants had been triggered by the events of New Year's Eve in 2015, during which a series of attacks on women took place in the centre of Cologne. Even then, however, it was not uncommon to believe that refugees were inherently weaker and helpless, so they should not be presented as aggressive intruders, and that local attacks on them were based on fear, insecurity and concerns about losing social status.

One of the dominant narratives was that the government's response to the crisis had been correct but poorly communicated, and this is why support for it was waning<sup>14</sup>, while “Wir schaffen das” (“We can do it”) should be interpreted as an encouragement for the public, rather than an order or a phrase meaning there was no alternative to Merkel's policy. That policy, it was stressed, was perceived as acting outside the interests of the nation and the voters, especially since it had not been sufficiently consulted with parliament. Meanwhile, in the longer term, accepting the refugees and migrants is intended as a grand political project, rather than a simple administrative exercise, and should be talked about in terms of opportunities and new possibilities<sup>15</sup>.

## 1. Extreme interpretations

The events of late 2015 and early 2016 exacerbated Germany's political and social crisis. Their interpretation, and the consequences

<sup>14</sup> H. Münkler, M. Münkler, *Die neuen Deutschen. Ein Land vor seiner Zukunft*, Berlin 2016, p. 224.

<sup>15</sup> The same narrative of a ‘great political project’ and ‘investment in the future’ was employed in Germany in 2011 when, in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, the decision was made to phase out nuclear energy and radically speed up the energy transition. However, its implementation has recently faced major difficulties, related, *inter alia*, to the revolutionary tempo of change.

of that interpretation, are crucial for the present-day debate concerning German identity and Germany as a migration state. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the two extreme positions which characterise the parties to the dispute and the divisions in Germany.

### **(1) Merkel ‘saves Europe’**

In the face of the collapse of the Dublin III system, caused by the powerlessness of supranational EU institutions and the lack of their real influence on individual Member States, Germany was aware of its responsibility for the EU. Faced with the threat of the disintegration of the EU and the dismantling of the Schengen zone, Merkel decided to act in a humanitarian and strategic way, taking decisions to prevent the destabilisation of other countries in Europe. This in turn prevented a deterioration in Germany’s image and avoided economic losses that would have far surpassed the cost of receiving and integrating the refugees. The main element of Merkel’s strategic action was to ‘surrender’ German territory to the wave of refugees, in accordance with the principle of ‘place for time’ – until a comprehensive European solution could be found<sup>16</sup>.

This interpretation highlighted the lack of solidarity and the deepening divisions within the EU. The V4 countries, in particular, were pilloried for blocking the ‘European solution and common European policy’. The attitude of those who did not wish to receive Muslims on the grounds of their ethnic and religious identity was considered unacceptable; it was also stressed that there was a risk that such discriminatory treatment might in future extend to citizens of the Member

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see: H. Münkler, M. Münkler, *Die neuen Deutschen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 217–220; H. Münkler, ‘[Wie ahnungslos kluge Leute doch sein können](#)’, Zeit Online, 11.02.2016, [www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de).

States of the Union. Lighter criticism was levelled at the other EU countries, which considered that the problem did not affect them at all and expected that Germany, Sweden and possibly Austria would take the solution on themselves.

To this day, German politicians hope that Germany will be able to convince the entire EU to 'share the burden fairly', and the calls for financial penalties for those EU countries which oppose the obligatory mechanism of the relocation of migrants soon returned to public discourse in Germany.

## **(2) Merkel 'betrays the nation'**

In a lighter version of this narrative Merkel was accused of passivity. Her failure to close the German border in 2015 and her claims that it was not possible to control every border these days made Germany look like a failed state, 'like the ones in Africa'<sup>17</sup>. Merkel's feeble policy was a mistake and led to Germany giving up its sovereignty and failing to protect its borders, as a result of which the country was flooded by migrants. The reasoning behind Germany's actions was immature and irresponsible, based on an assumption that the country could 'save everyone in need', which would equate to self-annihilation.

In a harsher version, this interpretation was a starting point to accuse the 'leftist elites in power in Germany', including the 'social-democratised' Christian Democrats and Merkel personally. Those elites were allegedly trying to 'dismantle Germany' and German culture, putting the country's inhabitants at risk of being flooded by foreigners and, in consequence, leading to the emergence or consolidation of a parallel

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Peter Sloterdijk, 'Wir haben das Lob der Grenze nicht gelernt', *Cicero*, 28.01.2016.

society living according to Sharia law, in which the Muslim faith would be hindering or preventing integration<sup>18</sup>.

This harsher version of the ‘betrayal of the nation’ narrative was usually presented by participants of the Pegida marches<sup>19</sup>, though not only. Those groups viewed Merkel as an ‘American agent’ who had started a real *Kulturkampf* in Germany and was seeking an *Umvolkung*<sup>20</sup> of Germany. Ethnic Germans and the German nation could still win this battle, as long as they did not let the lying media deceive them. The countries which resisted the obligatory migrant quotas were ruled by genuine patriots, and the excessively open countries, such as Sweden, were on the verge of collapse.

## 2. “Lügenpresse”<sup>21</sup> – the media as prisoners of their own bias

**The media played a crucial role in the debate and the social mood swings that accompanied it. In the discussion about the consequences of the migration crisis in Germany, the mainstream media fell into a trap of biased reporting, whereby they pilloried or excluded the critics of the government’s migration policy.** This caused even more polarisation and further deepened

<sup>18</sup> Such views had already been present in Germany and had gained considerable popularity thanks to the publications of Thilo Sarrazin, the former Social Democratic finance minister of Berlin, whom the SPD has unsuccessfully tried to remove from the party. Among other things, Sarrazin claims that the majority of Turks and Arabs living in Germany are unable to integrate. See also: T. Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*, DVA, Munich 2010.

<sup>19</sup> The acronym for: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West).

<sup>20</sup> *Umvolkung* (ethnic population replacement), one of Pegida’s slogans, was a term used by the propaganda of the Third Reich.

<sup>21</sup> A 19<sup>th</sup> century slogan denoting the media, especially newspapers and journals, accused of manipulating public opinion by withholding or distorting information under the influence of political, economic or ideological convictions. See “Lügenpresse” in the Duden German dictionary.



the divisions within German society, both among ‘ordinary citizens’, and within the intellectual elites<sup>22</sup>. People who were outraged by Merkel’s policy were denied the right to criticise the government and excoriated as inciters of violence and right-wing extremists, of which Germany was ashamed. Most of the media and politicians stigmatised people and opinions opposing the admission of migrants, by either stating directly or implying that they were frustrated, thoughtless nationalists or xenophobes who had fallen for the dubious arguments of anti-immigration political groups.

The behaviour of the media at the peak of the crisis was studied and described by the team of Michael Haller, a journalist and university professor<sup>23</sup>. His conclusions were alarming: journalists reportedly behaved like opportunist mouthpieces of the political elite, peddling government propaganda. The study looked at 35,000 texts published in late 2015 and 2016. In addition to excess of the views and interpretations of government politicians, the main allegations concerned:

- the one-sidedness of opinions and the dominance of the overly optimistic narrative of the culture of welcome, or Willkommenskultur;
- lack of objectivism: the prevalence of opinion pieces, a tendency to put opinions before facts;
- the failure to represent voices from outside institutionalised politics (such as volunteers, representatives of municipalities), the absence of messages from the regional press.

<sup>22</sup> See: A. Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, ‘*Filozof patrzy na kryzys migracyjny*’ [‘A philosopher’s view on the migration crisis’], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 14.05.2016, [tygodnikpowszechny.pl](http://tygodnikpowszechny.pl).

<sup>23</sup> M. Haller, ‘*Die “Flüchtlingskrise” in den Medien – Tagesaktueller Journalismus zwischen Meinung und Information*’, *OBS-Arbeitsheft* 93, 21.06.2017, [www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de](http://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de). See also: *Letter to German Press by Jay Rosen*, a journalism professor at the New York University, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 2.09.2018, [www.faz.net](http://www.faz.net).

The public was aware of this situation – and the people felt they were being manipulated. In a study by the Allensbach Institute conducted in October 2015, every second respondent stated that the media’s coverage of the refugees was one-sided and that it did not represent the real picture. Journalists came back to their senses only after the events of New Year’s Eve in 2015 in Cologne. Attacks on women, which were happening on a massive scale, turned out to be a major problem related to refugees and migrants, and one which directly affected ordinary citizens. Only then did the media start to cover situations, the coverage of which would previously have been deemed extreme right-wing, racist and xenophobic. One could gain the impression that some journalists were trying to make up for their own omissions by revealing what they had concealed in the first months of the mass and disorderly influx of people into German territory.

As a result, the narrative of the anti-immigrant parties and movements gained so much credibility that despite the country’s stable administrative situation, it managed to dominate the tone for the following months or even years (especially on social media), and thus partly also the public debate on the problems arising from the presence of immigrants and the broad application of asylum law. Moreover, the media bias that was revealed at the time has allowed AfD and its politicians to represent themselves as victims of persecution excluded from public debate, irrespective of the actual facts.

### **3. AfD – the party that was not supposed to be there**

Excluding those who had doubts about the Willkommenskultur from public debate backfired. Critics of the migration wave demanded information on the scale of risks, debate about concerns and how to address them, going beyond purely logistical issues. In her book<sup>24</sup>, Melanie Amann quotes a 2016 study by an insurance

<sup>24</sup> M. Amann, *Angst für Deutschland: Die Wahrheit über die AfD: wo sie herkommt, wer sie führt, wohin sie steuert*, Droemer Verlag, 2017.

company which showed that attacks on civilians and other tensions caused by the influx of migrants had led to an unprecedented escalation of fear and anxiety. Most respondents feared the influx of refugees would drive up crime rates, and 47% were afraid that their lifestyle would have to change<sup>25</sup>. Germany's civil society had been accustomed to evidence-based debate. The absence of this added to the growing sense of threat boosted the popularity of anti-immigration parties and movements.

One of the most significant, long-term effects of this wave of fear and anxiety concerned the political revival of Alternative for Germany (AfD), which won over some conservative voters and mobilised many people who had not voted before, and triumphantly entered the Bundestag in 2017.

Since the party was founded in 2013, the support for AfD<sup>26</sup> was an expression of protest against the political and media establishment in Germany and its argument that there is 'no alternative'. This is, by the way, where the party's name originated. Initially, during the financial crisis, the protest was directed at the idea that there was 'no alternative' to the euro, and economists, including renowned professors, called for Germany to leave the Eurozone and claimed that it was harmful for Germany. Since the outbreak of the migration crisis, the movement shifted to more radical positions and, while it continues to call for the common currency to be scrapped, it has also skilfully identified and tapped into German fears regarding illegal migration and the 'Islamic threat'. Its members have also stepped up their criticism of globalisation and political correctness, while notions such as 'sovereignty', 'identity' and 'patriotism' gained prominence.

<sup>25</sup> Cf.: [Press release by Germany's R+V insurance company](http://www.ruv.de/presse), [www.ruv.de/presse](http://www.ruv.de/presse).

<sup>26</sup> Source: A. Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, 'Alternatywa dla Niemiec – partia, której miało nigdy nie być' [Alternative for Germany – the party that was not supposed to be there'], Instytut Wolności, [instytutwolnosci.pl](http://instytutwolnosci.pl).

Thus, conservative voters were offered a political alternative. For many years, some of them had felt that the Christian Democrats, increasingly aligned with the programmes of the SPD or even the Greens, did not represent them. Chancellor Merkel had managed to build a broad political centre and win over new voters by taking over and implementing popular elements of the left's agenda, such as the minimum wage, climate protection, the abolition of mandatory military service and allowing Germans to hold dual citizenship. The consequence, however, was the loss of a distinct conservative political profile and those conservative voters associated with it. AfD also managed to attract the votes of citizens who had remained passive, who had been discouraged by the convergence of political programmes and saw little difference between the mainstream political parties.

In the autumn of 2017, 94 AfD members won seats in the Bundestag, thus forming the largest opposition group. The emergence of a populist, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic party breached the unwritten rule that had held for many years: that there should be no party right of the Christian Democrats in the Bundestag. AfD is also represented in the assemblies of all the sixteen German states, with a particularly strong presence in the eastern states. In Saxony it even won more votes than the CDU in the 2017 federal elections, and is likely to repeat this success in elections to the state assembly in the autumn of 2019.

Attempts to explain the success of AfD by recourse to economic factors or the lower education levels of its electorate do not seem to offer a correct interpretation of the phenomenon. 73% of AfD voters consider their material situation to be good<sup>27</sup>, and

<sup>27</sup> In the elections to the Bundestag in 2017, AfD achieved very good results in the affluent federal states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. In Bavaria it came third (12.4%, only 2.9 percentage points behind the SPD), and in 17 out of 46 constituencies it overtook the Social Democrats. In Baden-Württemberg it achieved its second-best result in western Germany (12.2%). In the northern states the support for the party did not exceed 10%.

the AfD group in the Bundestag has a record proportion of people with the academic title of doctor or professor. Those deputies are not the only intellectual resource of the party. Timothy Garton Ash quotes<sup>28</sup> an anonymous leading CDU politician who claims that most of the furious protest letters he gets from people who have ditched the Christian Democrats in favour of AfD come from doctors, entrepreneurs, lawyers and university professors.

At the same time, it should be noted (especially in Poland) that while AfD tries to avoid having links to the neo-Nazis<sup>29</sup>, it seeks to commemorate ‘the heroism of German soldiers’ and is proud of the German army’s record in both World Wars. It also calls for an end to what it refers to as the ‘cult of “Holocaust guilt”’, which it argues is prevalent in Germany. AfD is also overtly pro-Russian, and some AfD parliamentarians are facing serious allegations of being influenced by the Russian government<sup>30</sup>.

AfD’s success has already changed the way the political system in Germany works<sup>31</sup>. It has forced the hitherto elites to negotiate

Source: A. Ciechanowicz, ‘Predictability lost: the German political scene after the elections’, *OSW Commentary*, no. 254, 22.11.2017, [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted after: T.G. Ash, ‘Die Kultur, głupcze’, *Przegląd Polityczny* nr 149/2018, issue title: *Inne Niemcy*.

<sup>29</sup> The party’s formal procedures envisage vetting candidate members for links to neo-Nazi organisations, but AfD’s extreme wing known as ‘Der Flügel’, which is under surveillance by the counter-intelligence services, is known for its involvement in antisemitic incidents and has been growing in force within the party. See: M. Kamann, ‘Im Machtkampf mit Höcke erleidet Meuthen eine schwere Schlappe’, *Welt*, 15.07.2019, [www.welt.de](http://www.welt.de).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. M. Laruelle, ‘Collusion or Homegrown Collaboration? Connections between German Far Right and Russia’, *PONARS Eurasia*, 10.04.2019, [www.ponarseurasia.org](http://www.ponarseurasia.org).

<sup>31</sup> Its presence in the Bundestag not only gives AfD the opportunity to chair parliamentary committees, but also to sit on the board of the KfW development bank, the supervisory board of Deutsche Welle and state television. In addition, AfD has approximately 16 million euros in state grants to run its operations annually. AfD also counts on a part of the 450 million euros that Germany allocates every year to the activities of political foundations.

multi-party coalitions, which are unstable by definition, in order to avoid having to form a government with AfD.

The presence of 'hard opposition' has also strengthened the role of parliament as the main forum for political disputes. During the current term, the Grand Coalition has already had to confront stronger parliamentary opposition than before, both on the left (the Left Party, the Greens), and on the right (AfD). This situation has allowed AfD to gain political ground by initiating sometimes very fierce debates.

Finally, pressure from AfD has forced the mainstream political forces to modify established political traditions, sometimes on the verge of breaking the law, which has lowered the prestige of state institutions. A telling example of this is the situation where, before the elections to the Bundestag in 2017, its Rules of Procedure were hastily amended in such a way that the representative of AfD could not become the Speaker-Senior of the Parliament and inaugurate the first meeting. AfD nominees for the deputy speaker of the Bundestag also continue to be blocked.

### **III. OLD AND NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT INTEGRATION**

In the coming years, AfD (or whatever it morphs into) and its anti-immigration and anti-European slogans and emotions will remain a point of reference for political parties in Germany, and especially the Christian Democrats. At stake in this dispute is the future of Germany as a political and social entity, and the success or failure of the integration policies will be the 'weapon' that will decide the outcome.

The current phase of heated debates about integration is not a novelty for the German political class or public opinion. Debates about 'guest workers' (Gastarbeiter), migrants and refugees have been going on in Germany with varying intensity for decades. In this context, public discourse in Germany mentions, for instance, the millions of refugees and displaced people who integrated into German society immediately after World War II, the job migrations of the 1950s, as well as refugees fleeing various armed conflicts. Emphasis is given to the considerable funds that were expended and the broad political and institutional involvement. Those periods are remembered as difficult and, just as is true today, dominated by issues such as the defence of conservative values versus the idea of multiculturalism, dual citizenship, deportations, the use of the welfare system, and integration in the labour market. The unprecedented events of late 2015 and early 2016 brought back to the fore fundamental questions from the earlier debates: Who has the right to stay, on what terms, who will integrate and how, and what is integration?

#### **1. Back to the past - old problems are still relevant**

The forcefulness of the social reaction often resembles the situation of the 1990s, when, due to the influx of Jews and Russians of German origin (Russlanddeutsche) who came to Germany after the collapse of the USSR, followed by a wave of refugees from the

Balkans as a result of the war in Yugoslavia, almost 4 million people arrived in Germany. Those times saw arson attacks on refugee centres and other acts of aggression. These were problems that had been brewing for some time already<sup>32</sup>.

A broad debate about migration has been taking place in Germany since 2000, leading to, *inter alia*, the appointment of a government plenipotentiary for migration and integration and the adoption of a special law in 2005. A significant change came in 2006 when those concerned were included in the debate via the Integration Dialogues which started to take place in that year, involving representatives of the federal government, the states, municipalities, employers, trade unions, churches and faith organisations, foundations, civil society organisations, the media, sports clubs, cultural organisations and migrant associations. A National Integration Plan was unveiled in 2007, which focused mainly on offering better educational opportunities to migrants (e.g. through access to language courses) and helping them find jobs. In addition to strengthening social dialogue, the CDU/CSU-FDP government pursued a policy of encouraging foreigners who had been living in Germany for many years to go through naturalisation procedures.

A comprehensive concept for the integration of foreigners was necessary for both social and economic reasons<sup>33</sup>. Public sentiment had soured while the failure of integration and the emergence of an increasing number of parallel communities (i.e. communities functioning on their own, alongside German society)<sup>34</sup> were seen

<sup>32</sup> For more information on the history of Germany's integration policy, see: V. Hanewinkel, J. Oltmer, '[Integration und Integrationspolitik in Deutschland](#)', Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 20.09.2017, bpb.de.

<sup>33</sup> After: M. Zawilska-Florczuk, '[Germany's policy towards immigrants - from integration to naturalization](#)', *OSW Commentary*, no. 32, 4.01.2010.

<sup>34</sup> In the German debate there is still a dispute over whether parallel societies are transitional forms in the process of integration, or rather spaces of permanent divisions (also described in the work by H. and M. Münkler, cited above, see footnote 14). Do the 'aliens' form separate groups that do not mix, live according to their own rules and are not interested in exchange, but



as generating an increase in crime; there was also resistance to spending ever larger amounts of public money on welfare benefits for foreigners. The problems of the German labour market and the high unemployment rate among migrants (20.3% in 2007) created an ever heavier burden on the German budget. A 2008 study by the Bertelsmann Foundation estimated the costs of failed integration for the German state (including welfare benefits for the unemployed) at 16 billion euros a year. A 2018 governmental report puts the cost of dealing with the effects of the migration crisis in that year at 23 billion euros, i.e. approximately 10% more than in 2017 (around 21 billion euros). This amount included 7.9 billion spent on combatting the causes of migration (including development assistance projects), 7.5 billion as assistance for the German states to compensate them for additional costs incurred (including 1.6 billion euros for the registration and accommodation of migrants pending asylum decisions, 2 billion for integration courses, 1.2 billion for the expansion of crèches), and 4 billion for welfare benefits as part of the Hartz IV unemployment benefit scheme<sup>35</sup>.

The growing demand for highly qualified workers has become an increasingly tangible problem. In recent years, worrying reports have been published in Germany about the dramatic demographic situation and the threat of labour shortages, whose message could

still enrich the community? The existence of such groups does not imply a failure of the integration process and can be treated as a stage on the road to integration. Such parallel communities functioned in the USA, where they played an important role and co-created American society. This 'folklore' is preserved to this day (also among Americans of German origin) and is viewed with sentiment and understanding in Germany.

Or, perhaps, we are dealing with people who will come into contact with the locals only in case of the greatest need, and their alienation will never disappear, as critics of the above vision claim. The latter opinion is in line with the public sentiment, which interprets integration as full and unconditional adjustment to the customs and principles of the majority of society, and not as a process of getting closer to each other.

<sup>35</sup> 'Bund gab 23 Milliarden Euro für Flüchtlingsthemen aus', Welt, 20.05.2019, welt.de.

be summed up without exaggeration as: Germany will be a migration state or it won't be there at all. A 2019 report<sup>36</sup> found that Germany had to prepare to deal with a shrinking number of people active in the job market. In the long term, although this trend could be eased it could not actually be reversed, either by the latest migration wave, through higher birth rates, from bringing or returning women and seniors into the labour market, or through longer working hours and digitalisation. It was therefore crucial to ensure an influx of migrants from third countries (in addition to migrants coming from the EU)<sup>37</sup>. The report concluded that the optimum rate of migrant admissions should be 146,000 a year on average between 2018 and 2060.

However, even with continued high migration to Germany, there would be no certainty that these people would actually enter the labour market and relieve the burden on social security systems. In order to avoid the reverse, i.e. high unemployment rates among a growing number of migrants, with a steadily increasing number of pensioners and the likely collapse of the system, not only did skilled workers have to be brought to Germany, but all others had to be integrated and educated.

Therefore, if Germany wished to remain at least at the current level of development, to maintain its place in the global economy, including as an 'export nation', they had not only to accept refugees for humanitarian reasons, but also join the race for those who are best qualified, in order to remain competitive as a country.

<sup>36</sup> 'Zuwanderung und Digitalisierung: Wie viel Migration aus Drittstaaten benötigt der deutsche Arbeitsmarkt künftig', European Commission, Europäische Webseite für Integration, 12.02.2019, ec.europa.eu.

<sup>37</sup> On 7 June 2019 the Bundestag voted through a package of seven laws and amendments to make it easier for foreigners from outside the EU to take up employment in Germany, after making the original government proposal more stringent. On 28 June the Bundesrat approved the package. The laws will come into force on 1 January 2020 and are part of the strategy adopted by the German government in December 2018 to attract skilled workers.

Especially since the latest OECD research shows that Germany is not so attractive to highly skilled workers. It ranks 12<sup>th</sup>, lower than Canada, Australia, Sweden and Switzerland, among others<sup>38</sup>.

## 2. Three assumptions of successful integration – controversies

The current phase of the integration debate, which also takes into consideration the developments of the migration crisis which started in Germany in 2015, is focused on defining and critically analysing the fundamental assumptions about what constitutes successful integration. Below, the three most controversial ones are discussed.

- **The integration of migrants will only be successful if Germans have no complexes and can approach their national identity in a more relaxed fashion<sup>39</sup>. They need to be self-confident and self-assured about their culture, and be aware of the values they have to offer, because it is not possible to integrate with a nation that constantly questions its own identity.**

Because of the crimes and legacy of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, and the subsequent process of dealing with the consequences of Germany's history (Vergangenheitsbewältigung), German society was unable to develop positive associations with the nation<sup>40</sup>. Those who identified with national

<sup>38</sup> 'Deutschland ist für ausländische Fachkräfte nur mäßig attraktiv', Frankfurter Allgemeine, 29.05.2019, faz.net.

<sup>39</sup> See the interview with Ulrich Schmidt-Denter, professor at the University of Cologne: "Viele Migranten finden es belastend, Deutsche zu sein", Welt, 26.07.2018, welt.de.

<sup>40</sup> The struggle of the 1970s conservatives to create a 'new West German patriotism' and their demand for greater historical awareness has been described well by Jacob S. Eder in: *Lęk przed Holocaustem...*, op. cit., p. 223 and the following. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff's book on the Chancellors of the Federal Republic of Germany (published in the 1990s) goes even further,

sentiments and spoke of their attachment to ‘Germanness’ were often pushed to the right-wing fringes of politics. Instead, some Germans built up their European identity and argued it was superior to the national identity. They were alone in this and did not understand that other nations felt no need to juxtapose those two identities and that one was not a threat to the other. This self-criticism and sense of shame for their history, and the urge to be ‘super-Europeans’, paradoxically engendered excessive self-confidence and a sense of superiority, which at the time of the migration crisis almost went so far as to manifest itself in suggesting that Germany had a ‘monopoly on morality’<sup>41</sup>.

This paradigm was shaken up during the 2006 World Cup games in Germany, when it turned out that patriotism did not equal chauvinism and that the outbreak of national pride in the achievements of the national football team brought together German citizens regardless of their origin. People also felt that singing the national anthem and waving flags was not ‘right-wing’ and did not affect their attitude towards the European Union or their tolerance. Nevertheless, many people still found such demonstrations of patriotism and adoration of the German national team distasteful.

AfD politicians have captured and used the slogans of ‘regaining national pride’ and ‘renationalising’ history. Seeing a positive reaction from part of the conservative electorate, Christian Democratic politicians also began to introduce some identity elements into their rhetoric. Thomas de Maizière,

claiming that Germany deserved loyalty, but that it was difficult to have a feeling of ‘love for the homeland’ in relation to it. The author even wonders whether Germany has ever had an identity of its own. M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *Kanclerze Republiki Federalnej Niemiec jakich nie znamy*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 9–11.

<sup>41</sup> B. Kohler, ‘Die Kraft, die stets das Gute will’, Frankfurter Allgemeine, 11.07.2019, faz.net.

while still a Minister of the Interior, argued in 2016 that “The more we as Germans are confident in ourselves, our culture, our freedom and our origins, the more we will be able to show tolerance and promote integration. Tolerance can flourish when we ourselves are confident in ourselves and in our identity... a strongly anchored Christian will have less fear of alienation/dominance by strangers (Überfremdung) than someone who does not have an ethical anchor”.

The idea that the success of integration depends on the strength of Germany’s national identity and patriotism was also present in the debate which took place after Mesut Özil stepped down from the German national football team. He said his decision was a reaction to the racist attacks on himself and his family after he was pictured with the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, before the World Championship in Russia, to whom he had presented a T-shirt saying “For my president”. He accused his critics of racism and said: “If we win, I’m a German. If we lose, I’m an immigrant”. The heated debate that followed in the wake of this dissected the condition of Germany’s integration policy and included the voices of young people with a migrant background who were born in Germany. Their point of view was quite striking: they effectively claimed that what underlay the allegations against Özil and other migrants, whether recent arrivals or third-generation, was the expectation that they should show a particular attachment to Germany, or even gratitude, while the Germans themselves avoided displays of their love for the homeland and considered it appropriate to be distanced about attachment to the home country. Migrants were expected to do the opposite, yet they had no role models to follow. If they could freely and emotionally identify with the country of origin, and not the country where they lived, they turned to the former, since everyone needs a sense of belonging, a social identity, while Germans themselves were making it

difficult to identify with Germany. The opinions expressed in the debate also showed that those Germans who had no German ethnic background but merely a German passport felt they were in a state of limbo, as though they were citizens ‘on a trial period’. They were accepted as long as they were successful and played by the rules, but as soon as any controversy around their behaviour or attitude in a specific situation arose, their claim to ‘Germanness’ would be questioned. While they consider Germany their home because they were born here, they feel no bond with the country and are under constant pressure to prove that they are good Germans, even though the Germans themselves do not know what that means. Nevertheless, Germans expect newcomers to become fully assimilated, while “assimilation means castration and only people without character submit to it”<sup>42</sup>.

- **All those who want to live in Germany should be familiar with the German culture and language and should accept the fundamental values of the state, especially the spirit and articles of the German Constitution.**

This is a slightly softer version of the concept of *Leitkultur*<sup>43</sup>, the leading culture, which is related to the assumption discussed above – that migrants should have ‘something’ to integrate with. Proponents of this criterion, including prominent CDU politicians such as Jens Spahn and Thomas de Maizière, stress in particular the requirement that all persons, whether born in Germany or those who came to the country, should

<sup>42</sup> “Eigentlich bin ich eine ganz normale Deutsche”, Welt, 23.07.2018, welt.de.

<sup>43</sup> In 2000, Friedrich Merz, the then head of the CDU/CSU faction in the Bundestag, attacked the assumptions of the red-green migration policy (multiculturalism) and introduced the term ‘German *Leitkultur*’ into the political debate, meaning a “commonly accepted definition of what we understand as our culture”. The term *Leitkultur* had been invented by political scientist Professor Bassam Tibi, who had written in the 1990s about the need for a social and political consensus based on European values.

absolutely respect the constitution, including, for example, articles on the dignity of every human being. Speaking of the migration waves of recent years, Spahn pointed out in numerous interviews<sup>44</sup> that they were unprecedented not only because of the number of newcomers, but also the vastness of cultural differences, which he thought risked changing German society for the worse. He also said that not all cultures offered ‘enrichment’ and that persecution of Jews and homosexuals, or failure to recognise women’s equality, were unacceptable in German culture. He therefore called not only for the adoption of appropriate legislation (e.g. a new law on integration), but also for a clear formulation of society’s expectations regarding refugees and migrants. As an example, he cited the call for decisive action by instructors and carers in swimming pools (where harassment and aggression by migrants had taken place) or enforcement of acceptable behaviour by the police and severe punishment of unacceptable conduct. Spahn also believes that the state must regulate the life of German Muslim communities.

Thomas de Maizière, the then Minister of the Interior, spoke in a similar tone in his op-ed on the leading culture for the *Bild am Sonntag* in April 2017, tellingly entitled ‘We are not burqa’. He praised the notion of a lead culture and argued that without knowing and embracing the catalogue of German values, integration could not succeed. He enumerated various social norms concerning greetings in Germany (shaking hands, showing your face, introducing yourself), and spoke of the necessity to be acquainted with German culture and history, including its darker chapters, and consequently, to understand the special attitude towards Israel. He also pointed to the role of religion, which should serve to cement German society rather than sparking conflicts. Other elements of the

<sup>44</sup> R. Alexander, J. Schuster, “Nicht jede andere Kultur bereichert uns”, *Welt*, 19.07.2017, welt.de.

German leading culture included ‘enlightened patriotism’ and Germany’s ties with the West (Westbindung), as well as the country’s commitment to the European integration project. Similar ideas were presented in the ‘Conservative Manifesto’ published in early 2018 by Alexander Dobrindt, head of the CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, who called for a revival of the leading culture that could guide ‘bourgeois-conservative change’ throughout Germany<sup>45</sup>.

A separate position in this debate was taken by the so-called left-wing camp. The SPD and the Greens sharply criticised the statements by the Christian Democrats. An extreme response to the debate about Germany’s leading culture and its importance for integration was expressed by Aydan Özoğuz (SPD), the then plenipotentiary of the German government for integration. Özoğuz said that there was no such thing as a specific German culture (apart from the language), and that “our history had been shaped to a greater extent by migration and diversity” and it should not be relevant “what people believe in, what they listen to and what they wear”. She described the leading culture as a concept belonging to the lexicon of ideological struggle, and said that attempts at filling it with content would always slip into the realm of absurdity and ridicule of the stereotypes of Germanness. Such notions created barriers, not a sense of community in diversity, which she believed was the advantage and strength of Germany. Instead, Özoğuz proposed concluding a social compact that would define the values of the constitution as a foundation for equal opportunities for all to participate in the life of the community. In return, however, newcomers would be expected to make an integration effort and make their own contribution to this life.

<sup>45</sup> For more information, see: K. Frymark, *The free state of Bavaria. The end of the CSU’s sovereign duchy?*, OSW, Warsaw 2019, pp. 13–14, [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).



- **Integration must concern not only newcomers but also German society, especially that part of it which is sceptical. The new Germans will be both those born here and the migrants, and both groups should become the object of German integration policy.**

Apart from the willingness of the ‘newcomers’ to actively participate in society, a key part of the challenge also concerns the willingness of society itself to change by accepting them fully (and not just tolerating them), i.e. letting them be part of it. According to Münkler<sup>46</sup>, Germans should renounce ‘Germanness’ – understood as a form of self-privilege which defends them against competition and allows them to avoid confrontation with other people’s assessment of their record. This applies in particular to the older generation in Germany, who expected peace or even isolation and, consequently, the exclusion of others. Münkler also mentioned some of the characteristics of ‘being German’ (‘das Deutschsein’), which will apply to all Germans, both ‘new’ and ‘old’. First of all, Germans are convinced that they are able to take care of themselves and their family through their own work (or property) and only in exceptional cases rely on the support and solidarity of the community. A German citizen should also assume that they can achieve social advancement through their own commitment and personal effort. Secondly, such a person should respect the principle that faith and beliefs belong to the private sphere, play a subordinate role in society and must not have any impact on one’s position in the labour market or in public offices. Furthermore, the choice of lifestyle and life partners is every person’s individual decision and cannot be decided by other family members. However, the decisive factor concerns recognition of the form and content of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. In this way, all of the ‘new Germans’ are assigned a normative identity,

<sup>46</sup> H. Münkler, M. Münkler, *Die neuen Deutschen...*, op. cit., pp. 287–290.

which has to meet different requirements and is a process, not an act, whether of birth or the award of citizenship.

German politicians had previously attempted to ideologically include migrants in society and develop a new formula for patriotism in 2009–2010 during important anniversary celebrations. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the state (Germany) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of communism in East Germany and the reunification of Germany (1989–1990) were used to instil a sense of pride in belonging to the nation amongst the people. Extending this sense of pride to Germany's economic and political successes and adding a new founding myth to the idea of 'constitutional patriotism'<sup>47</sup>, that of the 'peaceful revolution' staged by the people of the German Democratic Republic and the abolition of communism, was intended not only to crystallise the German model of patriotism, but also to further social integration – of the inhabitants of the eastern and western parts of Germany, together with the ever more numerous migrants. It was argued at that time that the crimes of the Nazi era and the enduring memory of them should not place a burden on the newcomers and stand in the way of their integration. Years later, it can be said that, firstly, this aspect of the German historical memory narrative is still prominent and takes the form of a 'turn towards the future'<sup>48</sup> which should allow

<sup>47</sup> This idea assumes that the national bond is to be created through participation in a single political community (i.e. citizenship), whose framework is determined by the federal constitution. Constitutional patriotism, an idea referring to the practice of the United States, does not assume the cultural uniformity of society and is therefore open to newcomers from outside. Source: K.M. Zalewski, *The Berlin Republic. Evolution of Germany's politics of memory and German patriotism*, OSW, Warsaw 2009, aei.pitt.edu.

<sup>48</sup> This also means the end of the dominance of German culture and its role as the guardian of German identity. An interesting thread of such thinking can be found in an article by Tobias Hans, Prime Minister of the Saarland, who speaks in this context of a 'turn towards the future'. In his interpretation, the notion of a nation is inextricably linked to its history and nobody wants it to be different, but history cannot be the only point of reference

the new German society to focus on the challenges of tomorrow, since its history is unsuitable to serve the integration of people with such deeply diverse backgrounds. At the same time, it is certain that Germany will never forget the shameful chapters of its history and still takes responsibility for them. Secondly, the efforts to integrate people in the eastern states of Germany by appreciating their contribution to the development of a unified Germany have not been a great success. People in eastern parts of Germany still do not feel like equal citizens of their state and have repeatedly called on the government – with some degree of irony – to deal with their integration first, and only then integrate those refugees who arrived with the migration wave of 2015–2016<sup>49</sup>.

in a migrant society because it does not have a common history. What is meant to unite is 'a common future in peace and freedom, in a democratic and solidarity-based society, in prosperity and in caring for the environment'. T. Hans, 'Deutsch – eine Frage des Bekenntnisses', Frankfurter Allgemeine, 6.06.2019, faz.net.

<sup>49</sup> R. Koecher, 'Das ostdeutsche Identitätsgefühl', Frankfurter Allgemeine, 23.07.2019, faz.net. See also: the 2018 Arte documentary *Petra Köpping: "Integriert doch erst mal uns!"*.

#### IV. MANAGING CHANGE: “WHO WILL BE THE PEOPLE?”<sup>50</sup>

Contrary to what some politicians and supporters of AfD or Pegida claim, the dispute is not about whether Germany will in future be an ethnically homogeneous country with a dominant leading culture based on Christianity. For a long time now, Germany has not been an ethnically homogeneous state and this fact seems irreversible. There are already 17.7 million people of migrant background living in Germany (out of 82.7 million) and more than 5% of the population, i.e. four million, are Muslims. As Professor Bassam Tibi points out, citing the statistics of the Pew Research Center in Washington, the percentage of Muslims will increase to 20% of the German population by 2050<sup>51</sup>. In large cities in the western part of the country, ethnic Germans are now only the largest group, but not the dominant one, i.e. they do not exceed 50% of the total population (e.g. Germans without a migration background account for 46.9% of the population in Frankfurt am Main, 44.6% in Nuremberg and 46% in Stuttgart)<sup>52</sup>. At the same time, the sense of threat from Islam (perceived as a political ideology rather than a religion) is growing: such sentiments were reported by every second respondent in the Bertelsmann Foundation study<sup>53</sup>.

The challenge for German decision-makers (but also for society as a whole) will be to find a common identity base for all German citizens. This task is set to be very difficult, both internally and externally. Politicians must alleviate the identity fears reinforced

<sup>50</sup> A paraphrase of the slogan of demonstrations staged after 1989 in the German Democratic Republic. The demonstrators chanted “Wir sind das Volk” (“We are the people”) and called for change and political reform.

<sup>51</sup> B. Tibi, ‘Der Anteil Muslime an der europäischen Bevölkerung wird weiter wachsen: Wie will Europa damit umgehen?’, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 5.07.2019, nzz.ch.

<sup>52</sup> M. Rasch, ‘In deutschen Städten sieht die Mehrheitsgesellschaft ihrem Ende entgegen’, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 9.07.2019, nzz.ch.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Jeder Zweite sieht den Islam als Bedrohung’, Zeit Online, 11.07.2019, www.zeit.de.

by the latest wave of migration. The manner in which German leaders manage to consolidate society and make it aware that Germany is irrevocably a multi-ethnic state, manage this social change and emotions that go with it, will either allow Germany to maintain its leadership in the European Union or hinder its efforts to stay at the helm<sup>54</sup>.

At this stage of the debate it is possible to hypothesise that in the search for a unifying sense of identity, decision-makers, depending on their political affiliations, will manoeuvre between two distinct visions: the 'national' one and the 'social' one, which, it turns out, possess common features. The aim of both is to create a community in which all citizens, regardless of their cultural background, will subscribe to a common set of values and rights.

In the 'national' vision, Tobias Hans, a Christian Democratic politician and Prime Minister of Saarland, described such a community by using the term 'Bekanntnisnation' (literally, the professed nation), meaning a "nation comprising all those who identify with it, irrespective of the origin, ethnicity or religion"<sup>55</sup>. The notion refers not to a concept imposed by the state and its laws, but rather a way of self-reflection by a nation which "does not avoid its regional identity but also does not stand in the way of European integration". This definition of a nation as proposed by Hans is intended to facilitate this process, offering a means of positive identification to anyone who wishes to live in Germany and opening wide future prospects for them<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> See: A. Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, 'Niemcy i Unia Europejska: kto boi się bardziej? Nowa odłona German Angst', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny* 2019, no. 3.

<sup>55</sup> T. Hans, 'Deutsch – eine Frage des Bekenntnisses', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 6.06.2019, faz.net.

<sup>56</sup> Hans also answers the question of who is a German: everyone who identifies with the Bekanntnisnation. There will no longer be negatively charged terms such as 'German Turk' or 'Turk with a German passport'. Hans concludes that the possibility for people to hold dual citizenship should be abolished because a citizen should be loyal to one state.

The Christian Democrats will choose to use the concept of nation (even if it is historically charged in the German mind), part of the justification being that it denotes a political notion that mobilises solidarity and encourages people to help others, and as such should not be left to right-wing or left-wing extremists who may deform it and use it to their own ends. This is why in his article Hans calls for a discussion about the nation and the nation state, which is not a common occurrence in mainstream political debate in Germany (dominated by notions such as globalisation, European integration, etc.). He justifies this call by saying that the nation state is still relevant, and is not an obsolete, useless idea. On the contrary, in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation and migration, it is becoming increasingly important for the political identity of citizens<sup>57</sup>.

Both on the left and on the right there are more and more voices arguing that it was a mistake to reject patriotism, and an act of negligence not to show and promote a progressive, open formula for the love of one's homeland. That is because integration will only be possible if, in addition to the welfare system, the state also

<sup>57</sup> One of the threads in the extremely heated debate mentioned before (cf. footnote 16) in 2016 between the author and philosopher Rüdiger Safranski and the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk on the one hand, and the political scientist Herfried Münkler on the other concerned the very capabilities of, and the need for, the nation state. In an interview for *Cicero* magazine, Sloterdijk accused Merkel of pursuing an erroneous policy that has led Germany directly to give up its sovereignty, stop protecting its borders and be flooded by migrants. Safranski, on the other hand, accused Merkel of putting Germany on the same footing as failed states by saying that it is not possible to control all its borders. The dispute continues. It is to be seen who is right: Münkler, who accuses his opponents of immaturity and strategic naivety, and Andreas Vosskuhle, President of the German Constitutional Court, who claims that "the idea of the state defined through its borders and people, as it is seen by Merkel's critics, is a 19<sup>th</sup> century concept"? Or Sloterdijk who predicts "a long life for the nation state as the only large political entity that more or less works" and the respondents (from Germany, France or Italy), the vast majority of whom would like to see the return of borders national border services? See: A. Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, *Filozof patrzy na kryzys migracyjny*, Tygodnik Powszechny, 14.05.2016, tygodnikpowszechny.pl.

offers its citizens – and that means all citizens – a culture and an identity.

The ‘social’ vision is also based on the human need for acceptance and belonging. However, it avoids the concept of ‘nation’, seeing it as ethnically charged and serving as a tool of exclusion. Instead, it proposes the notions of ‘society’ and, possibly, ‘state’. It replaces the classic notion of a national community with the category of an immigration society (*Einwanderungsgesellschaft*) in which everyone has the same rights and duties, and lives by the rules set down in the constitution. This is intended to provide an inclusive integration model in which the social and economic successes of migrants who serve as role models play an important role. What this concept proposes is not a unilateral integration of newcomers into a homogeneous whole, but rather the universal integration of everyone with everyone else, within one immigration society.

The implementation of both of these political visions would flesh out Chancellor Angela Merkel’s proposition that: “Das Volk ist jeder, der in diesem Land lebt” (“The people means everyone who lives in this country”). This way of looking at German society and the German state could change, however, once Merkel leaves or AfD politicians come to power.

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