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Germany

A victory of the far right – the results of the elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV500 - September 2016 -

Publication date: Sunday 18 September 2016

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Mecklenburg- West Pomerania is a Land (region) in the north-east of Germany, situated on the territory of the ex-GDR. There are only 1.33 million voters. Nevertheless, the result of the regional elections on September 4 in this Land is shaking up the political debate in Germany, up to federal level. It was a spectacular victory for the AfD (Alternative for Germany, similar to the National Front in France or UKIP in Britain). All the other parties lost votes to it, especially the SPD (social-democrats) the CDU (Christian democrats) and even more Die Linke (The Left).

In 2011, only 51.5 per cent of the electorate took part in the elections; this time it was about 61 per cent. It was especially the AfD, with an aggressive racist and xenophobic profile, that was able to mobilize public attention and the votes of those who had not gone to the polls five years ago.

The SPD, which had governed together with the CDU, remains the strongest party, with 30.6 per cent of the vote, but lost five percentage points. According to the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen* institute, it was the popularity of its outgoing minister-president Erwin Selering that enabled it to limit the damage. According to the polls, 75 per cent of electors recognized that he “did a good job” as head of government and two-thirds want him to be re-elected to his post.

The AfD, standing for the first time in this Land, won 20.8 per cent of the vote and thus becomes the second political force in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania from an electoral point of view. Although there are very few immigrants and refugees in this Land, the noisy demagogic calls by the party to fight without mercy against the “wave” of refugees, Muslims, terrorists, spongers on the German social system, against Chancellor Angela Merkel for being irresponsible because she supposedly invited everyone to take refuge in Germany, against the “establishment politics” which does not care about ordinary people and the national interest, etc., functioned very well. Later, we will suggest some reasons for this sinister success.

The CDU only won 19 per cent of the vote, which corresponds to a loss of four points and represents its historically worst result in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. Furthermore, from an electoral point of view; it came behind the AfD in this Land. In the public debate in Germany, this bad result is especially interpreted as a political slap in the face for Angela Merkel and her supposedly too friendly and welcoming attitude towards refugees.

Die Linke, with 13.2 per cent of the vote, lost even more, 5.2 per cent. Its political profile is rather moderate (as in all the new L nder of the ex-GDR), and especially dreams of co-governing with the SPD and the Greens. Die Linke is broadly perceived as being part of the political establishment;

The liberal FDP, with a miniscule advance on 2011 (when it got 2.8 per cent), with 3 per cent will still not be represented in the regional parliament. The same goes for the fascistic NPD, which only won 3 per cent of the vote (6 per cent in 2011). This party is of course the “victim” of the spectacular success of the AfD, which attracted a big majority of the far-right electorate.

Taking a look at the absolute figures, we can see some examples of the movement of electors towards other parties, published by the *infratest dimap* institute. The almost 21 per cent of the vote won by the AfD corresponds to 167,000 electors, mostly men, considerably fewer women. The AfD was able to mobilize 56,000 of those who did not vote in 2011 and also 23,000 electors who voted for very small parties in 2011. The AfD took 23,000 votes from the CDU, 20,000 from the NPD, 18,000 from Die Linke, 16,000 from the SPD and 3,000 from the Greens. So the AfD made gains across the board. Especially, its hold over a significant part of the left electorate will have to be carefully discussed in the ranks of Die Linke.

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In the new parliament of Mecklenburg- West Pomerania (which counts 71 seats) the SPD won 26 seats, the AfD 18, the CDU 16 and Die Linke 11. So a government of the SPD along with Die Linke remains possible (with 37 seats against 34 for the CDU and the AfD together). But this choice does not seem probable as things stand. The AfD has declared, before and after the elections, that it will not take part in any coalition, giving as its reason that within a coalition with the established parties it would not be able to attain its main objectives. The most likely outcome is the continuation of the “grand coalition” of the SPD and the CDU. But we will have to wait for the results of the negotiations between the representatives of the parties concerned.

The spectacular success of the AfD is very probably linked to the fact that the parties that make up the government at federal level (CDU and SPD), particularly under the pressure of the Bavarian CSU, do a great deal to validate the demagogy of the far-right. They do everything to prevent the refugees from coming to then European Union and to Germany. They made the shameful deal with Erdogan’s Turkey; they have on two occasions reduced the right of asylum to tatters and made even more uncomfortable the situation of the refugees in Germany. Following a well-known politico-psychological mechanism, people prefer to vote for the original than the copies. The electorate of the AfD can with reason think that the electoral strengthening of the party really exerts an influence on the policies implemented, even though the AfD remains an opposition party.

As for Die Linke in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, even though it has interesting things to say in criticising unbridled neoliberal capitalism and makes good proposals concerning the welcoming of refugees, more social policies, for a more equitable sharing of wealth, etc., it in no way comes across as an anti-capitalist and internationalist alternative. It announces quite clearly its readiness to govern with the SPD and the Greens. On the European Union, for example, it only proposes to reform and democratise it. Moreover, it announces its willingness to respect “budgetary discipline” in order to bring the debt down to zero by 2020 (which is the entrance ticket for anyone to take part in government in Germany). Die Linke appears as being part of established politics – in a political climate that is more and more polarised and in a context of more and more obvious discontent among a growing part of the population.

The nostalgia for the former GDR is certainly present in the ranks of the party in the new *Länder* of eastern Germany. For example, on August 20 Helmut Holter, the principal candidate of Die Linke in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, took part in the *Landeswandertag* (a day excursion or traditional annual ramble) of the *Volkssolidarität* (popular solidarity), an association for social assistance which already existed in the GDR. The participants in this kind of events are in general not very young, to say the least. But at the same time Die Linke in the new *Länder* still signs the declarations of ritual condemnation of the GDR as “Unrechtstaat” (a term invented by German conservatives to put on the same level the Nazi dictatorship and that of the SED – the “communist” party of the GDR) that are regularly imposed by the SDP if it goes into a collation with Die Linke.

The AfD has no problem adapting to feelings of nostalgia towards the GDR past, which can very well correspond to an extreme politico-cultural conservatism. Die Linke has a tendency to justify the policies of Putin’s Russia (although that goes, alas, much more strongly for the majority of its anti-capitalist wing). As for the AfD, it supports Putin’s Russia openly and without any embarrassment.

September 5, 2016