

Germany's Green Party backs the European Union

By Michael Regens
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The Green Party continued its rightward journey at its conference on the weekend, choosing Katrin Göring-Eckardt and Jürgen Trittin as lead candidates in next year's federal elections. The theologian Göring-Eckardt, who openly proclaims her conservative values and has repeatedly called for a coalition with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was elected at the conference with 72.1 percent of the vote.

The 820 registered delegates at the conference were confronted with 380 motions, some of which led to long and controversial debates. For example, one long debate concerned the size of the Hartz IV welfare benefit rates. While the federal leadership has recently called for a miserly benefit rate of €420 for adults, the speaker for the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district association in Berlin demanded somewhat more—€475 a month.

Though many speakers stressed that the Greens must raise their profile on social policy questions, the entire party accepts the Hartz IV system that it helped to introduce. The federal whip Steffi Lemke stressed that despite having every sympathy for those calling for social improvements, regard had to be given to funding restrictions. The sanctions against those in receipt of Hartz IV welfare benefits should remain and only be lifted temporarily while they are “checked to see if they are appropriate”.

The same applies to the increase in retirement age to 67, and the extension of subcontract labour also introduced by the former Social Democratic Party-Green Party coalition government: both should remain in place. Other declarations of intent, such as an unconditional child allowance of around €300 a month, was commented on by *Die Zeit* with the words: “In the jargon of politics that reads: It is likely this social

benefit will never come about.”

The question of what position the Greens should take on the search for a nuclear waste disposal site led to a long debate. There were very diverse opinions as to whether the facility at Salzstock Gorleben should be excluded. This issue also raises the party's relationship to the Christian Democrats, since both the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) are against Gorleben being excluded on political grounds.

At the heart of the conference was an 11-page motion submitted by the federal executive on European policy and the crisis of the euro, which was agreed on without much argument. The motion commits the Greens unreservedly to the policies of the European Union (EU). “Outside the European Union, no member state would be able to ensure lasting peace, security, civil rights and well being for its people—not even Germany, which has so far suffered least under the crisis”, it reads.

The Greens expressly support the austerity measures of the Troika—the European Central Bank (ECB), EU Commission and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—that have led to a social catastrophe in Greece. Even as the conference was meeting, lead candidate Jürgen Trittin told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that his party would support the government in any new vote on providing aid to Greece.

But to push through its policy, the “democratic legitimacy of the EU” had to be improved. It had been a big mistake that “Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou had been prevented from allowing his people to vote in a referendum on the fate of the country”, the lead motion reads. Such an “experience of their own sovereignty and self-determination” for the people in Greece would have “created dignity and a

basis for their identification with Europe in the upcoming and difficult consolidation phase”.

Europe suffers from a “dramatic democratic deficit”, the Greens write. The “deep-going changes that have become necessary can no longer be elaborated in back offices, but require a democratic, transparent and citizen-friendly process: that of the European Convention.”

In other words, while the European Union and its financial emissaries in Greece commit terrible crimes and destroy an entire country’s social infrastructure, the Greens are calling for the extension of pseudo-democratic institutions, such as the European Parliament, in order to better impose the EU’s dictatorial measures.

They accuse the German chancellor of ignoring the “democratic deficit in Europe”, and thus of indirectly playing into the hands of those “whose aim is a popular revolt against Europe”. Chancellor Merkel continually makes concessions to the anti-Europeans in her own coalition, and places at risk the “traditional German position in favour of stronger European institutions”, they say. She delays “necessary decisions”, causing more expense, and is playing “with a conflagration in the collapse of the euro zone.”

The Greens call for “a strong European Banking Union” and a European Stability Mechanism (ESM) with extensive powers. This had already been formulated in a joint manifesto in the summer by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, leader of the Greens in the European Parliament, together with his liberal colleague Guy Verhofstadt. In it, Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt openly advocate an imperialist superpower Europe and regard welfare cuts and militarism as the price that must be paid for this goal (see “Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s imperialist ‘For Europe’ manifesto”).

In foreign policy, the conference delegates made clear that the Greens are amongst the strongest advocates of imperialist war. By a majority, they voted that in future the UN General Assembly could agree on “peace enforcement” military operations by a two-thirds majority. This would make possible NATO’s imperialist adventures under a humanitarian pretext, such as in Libya in 2011 or as currently in Syria, also against a veto by China or Russia.

A study by the German Institute for Economic Research in 2011 makes clear that the rightward course

of the Greens is combined with a change in the socio-economic composition of their electorate. In the 1980s, the party frequently won support from those with the lowest 20 percent of income; today, it is the top 20 percent of society. Amongst their core voters today are those with very high incomes.

“The Greens are only a people’s party in one section of the population”, wrote the Göttinger political scientist Franz Walter in 2010 in *Tageszeitung*: “Among senior civil servants”. *Spiegel Online* writes: “And looking at occupations, the Greens can rely on significant electoral support from two groups: senior civil servants and employers.”

These changes could also be seen at the conference in Hannover. As an editorial in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* smugly noted, the “wall-papering tables and book tables of the activists and tendencies” no longer take up most of the space in the halls around the conference. Instead, these are filled with stands from motorway petrol station operators, and the Association of Private Health Insurance Companies handed out healthy fruit juice drinks, while real estate representatives dished out sweets and long queues formed at the “waffle stand of the steel industry”, whose slogan read “saving energy begins with steel.”

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