

German Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Greens negotiating right-wing coalition agreement in Saxony

By Martin Nowak and Johannes Stern
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The party executives of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Greens in the German state of Saxony agreed last weekend to begin exploratory talks on forming a new coalition government. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) state executive previously indicated its support immediately after the election earlier this month for exploratory talks on the formation of a CDU/Green/SPD coalition, which is being referred to in the German press as a “Kenya coalition” due to the parties’ colors, which correspond to the African nation’s flag.

“Our main concern is to ensure the state has a stable government,” said CDU leader and current Minister President Michael Kretschmer at a CDU state executive meeting in Riesa on Saturday.

The Greens’ party council, meeting the same day in Dresden, voted for the beginning of exploratory talks with the CDU and SPD. “There really is a need for a new start,” stated the Greens’ lead candidate in the election, Wolfram Günther, after the meeting. The exploratory talks will “involve considering ... how a new political culture can be introduced in the state, and how a new cohesive society can be organized,” he said.

In reality, a CDU/Green/SPD coalition would have nothing to do with a “new start” or a “new political culture.” On the contrary, it would continue the right-wing policies pursued by the former CDU/SPD government, which strengthened the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the recent state election.

A glance at the parties’ programmes makes clear just how right-wing a CDU/Green/SPD coalition would be. The CDU’s election programme, entitled “From Saxony, For Saxony,” was co-authored by the political scientist Werner Patzelt, who is well known for his close ties to the AfD and the right-wing extremist Pegida movement.

The text corresponds to this political line. The heart of the programme is the strengthening of the police and the security and intelligence authorities, which in Saxony are

notorious for their close ties to the neo-Nazi scene and right-wing extremist terrorist groups. The programme pledges, among other things, to “hire 525 new police officers over the coming two years.” It adds, “This figure will be increased to at least 1,000 by 2024.”

A no less significant expansion is planned for Saxony’s Verfassungsschutz, the state’s domestic intelligence agency, which has criminalised and persecuted left-wing groups under the pretext of fighting “extremism.” In the latest Verfassungsschutz Report, the state authorities attack the “Rock against the Right” concert held in Chemnitz, which attracted some 70,000 people last year following the right-wing extremist rampage in the city. The report calls the concert a “left-wing extremist” event.

The CDU document leaves no doubt about the fact that the intelligence agency’s orientation will not change. “We support the Verfassungsschutz in its current structure,” it states. “We want to arm the Verfassungsschutz for new challenges that emerge from groups on the margins of society, radical movements, and the growth of the readiness to commit violence among extremist milieus.”

The programme is a blueprint for the creation of a modern-day police and surveillance state. One of its main concerns is to modify Saxony’s Verfassungsschutz law to create “the legal framework for the Verfassungsschutz to access the data of known extremists, threats and terrorist suspects.” To this end, Saxony’s Verfassungsschutz is to be “strengthened in terms of personnel,” and “cooperation with Verfassungsschutz offices in other states as well as with the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution [federal Verfassungsschutz]” is to be “improved.”

Spying on children is also planned, with “the Verfassungsschutz in the future not being bound when collecting data to strict age limits.” Additionally, the “freedom of movement” of people deemed to be “threats” will be restricted “by residency and contact bans, as well as surveillance of their movements with the ‘electronic tag.’”

The surveillance of the internet will also be expanded under the guise of combatting “cyber crime.”

The final chapter, “A homeland in town and countryside,” reads like a copy of the AfD’s programme. It includes sentences such as, “Around the home in the narrowest sense, feelings of identity as a Saxon, German or European can emerge.” And, “We defend this very special Saxon identity by sharing our culture with others and rejecting undesirable changes to it.”

A component of this essentially far-right programme is the launching of further attacks on the working class in collaboration with the trade unions. The programme praises “the common endeavours of employers and employees, who have secured our economic competitiveness through hard work and sound judgement.” Now, “the collective bargaining partners continue to bear the responsibility of securing Saxony’s competitive advantage.”

The very fact that the Greens are initiating exploratory talks with the CDU underscores that, like the SPD, they are ready to press ahead with the anti-working class “law and order” agenda. “We strengthen the rule of law and guarantee more security by ensuring our police force is well-equipped, receives the best possible training, and gets more personnel, as well as by a firm application of existing laws,” states the Green Party’s election programme.

As an opposition party, the Greens even managed to criticise Kretschmer and the previous CDU/SPD government from the right. Five years ago, the Greens’ spokesperson for interior affairs, Eva Jähmingen, complained that “400 new hires per year” is inadequate for a “high-performing police force.” The Greens’ parliamentary group leader in Saxony’s state parliament at the time, Antje Hermenau, was awarded Saxony’s Constitutional Medal for her efforts to have the debt brake, which prohibits governments from taking on new debt, written into the state’s constitution. She is now a member of the Free Voters and speaks at AfD meetings.

Developments in neighbouring Saxony-Anhalt show that a CDU/Green/SPD government would not hesitate to cooperate closely with the AfD and lay the basis for future government coalitions with the right-wing extremist party. In the only state to date where the three parties have formed a government, in a coalition that has lasted three years, the CDU and AfD voted in 2017 to create a commission against left-wing extremism headed by AfD parliamentary group leader Andre Poggenburg, an open racist and fascist.

In June, the co-leaders of the CDU parliamentary group in Saxony-Anhalt’s state parliament, Ulrich Thomas and Lars-Jörn Zimmer, published a strategy paper calling for consideration of a possible government coalition with the AfD. This was on the basis of an explicitly right-wing

extremist programme.

They wrote that it was necessary “to once again unite the social with the national, security from social decline with security from criminality.” The document continued: “The desire for a home and national identity must be clearly opposed to all strands of multiculturalism in left-wing parties and groups.”

Sections of the CDU in Saxony are already working closely with the AfD and strongly advocating a future government coalition. At election meetings addressed by former federal Verfassungsschutz head Hans-Jörg Maassen (CDU), more AfD members were often present than those from his own party. Significantly, Matthias Rössler, a close ally of Maassen, was recently nominated by the CDU parliamentary group as president of the state parliament.

The Left Party is not a force opposing the shift to the right, but is part of it. The party, whose predecessor organised the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany 30 years ago and thus bears chief responsibility for the social misery and political frustration that are now being exploited by the far-right, is also pushing to embrace the AfD’s programme following its electoral debacle.

Left Party parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht complained about how her party “deals with AfD voters, who are enthusiastically denounced en masse as racists.” If one wants to have “more appeal,” it is necessary to “change,” she said. The issue isn’t just “our stance on immigration,” she continued. The ideas of “homeland” and “family” are also “very important things.” The same applies to issues like “security” and “protection from criminality,” she added.

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