

# Understanding Pegida in Context

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# Contents

<b>Understanding Pegida – An Introduction</b>	1
<i>By Henning Meyer and Ulrich Storck</i>	
<b>Pegida: Why Is The Populist Right On The Rise In Germany?</b>	4
<i>By Catrin Nye</i>	
<b>How Newcastle United Won Against Pegida &amp; Associates</b>	7
<i>By Chi Onwurah</i>	
<b>How Pegida Uses Social Insecurity</b>	10
<i>By Gesine Schwan</i>	
<b>The Pegida Brand: A Right-wing Populist Success Product</b>	12
<i>By Dieter Rucht and Simon Teune</i>	
<b>AfD And Pegida: Understanding Germany's New Populist Right</b>	15
<i>By Frank Decker</i>	
<b>Pegida In A European Landscape</b>	17
<i>By Claudia Chwalisz</i>	
<b>Europe's Populist Pandora's Box</b>	20
<i>By Rene Cuperus</i>	

**Pegida's Spirit Haunts France – With No Response Yet** 22

*By Renaud Thillaye*

**Pegida: Poland Takes Stock** 25

*By Paweł Świeboda*

**It's The Failure Of Modern Liberalism That Has Propelled UKIP's Rise** 27

*By David Goodhart*

# Understanding Pegida – An Introduction

*By Henning Meyer and Ulrich Storck*

The Pegida demonstrations that took place in Dresden and some other big German cities have attracted a significant amount of attention in the media across Europe and beyond. Uncomfortable questions such as whether the sudden and unexpected outpouring of large-scale discontent means that right-wing tendencies are once again on the rise in Europe's most populous country have been amongst the issues raised.

Even though the German demonstrations seem moribund owing to the decline in numbers and infighting amongst the organisers, the discontent that has fed the protests is not going to go away. For this reason it is vital to analyse the underlying causes that have driven tens of thousands of Germans and like-minded protesters across Europe - the cover of this eBook shows a Pegida protest in Spain - onto the streets.

It is, furthermore, important to view these protests in the wider context of a general emergence of different forms of populism in Europe. When looking at this issue it is often argued that socio-economic decline in many European countries has been the root cause. Economic deprivation is certainly an important contributing factor but is not the only one.

For this reason the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung London and Social Europe organised a project to analyse the Pegida phenomenon and its context. This project has provided a fascinating but deeply worrying look beneath the surface of European politics. It has revealed that Pegida and the wider context of European populism are best understood as symptoms of continuing social and economic changes that so far lack convincing political answers.

Antonio Gramsci once wrote in a prison cell: "This crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." Following the discussions of our online debate and the event we organised in London, one cannot help but feel that we live in a Gramscian period of interregnum and that Pegida is one of the morbid symptoms – or a "time for monsters" as Gramsci also described it.

So how can we explain the rise of Pegida and general populism in Europe? Three factors in particular seem to be important.

First, there is a widespread sense of social insecurity. This feeling - which is driven by many forms of social and economic change and surfaces as anxiety and fear of decline - is diffuse and hard to grasp but it leads to typical forms of scapegoating and the creation of an artificial sense of cohesion by juxtaposing "us" versus "them". Whether it is blaming immigrants, Muslims or Jews, people look out for ethnic or social groups that can be made responsible for ones own feeling of insecurity. As Gesine Schwan writes, this pattern is well-known and the subjects of scapegoating are interchangeable. Whether it was Jews during the Third Reich or Muslims today, the root cause of these prejudices is to be found in the people holding them, not in the social groups they are targeted at. Catrin Nye also showed the interchangeable nature of the targets of anger when she reported that a whole

range of different issues, from the Greek bailout to immigration, were cited by Pegida marchers, not just the “Islamisation of the West”.

As these feelings of social insecurity spread throughout society, these prejudices find fertile ground and multiply as Dieter Rucht and Simon Teune indicate. This can be seen in opinion polls and claims to speak “for the people” by the likes of Pegida. It is also no coincidence that these prejudices develop precisely in the areas where the scapegoats are barely present. In areas where there is regular exchange between “us” and “them,” people quickly come to realise commonalities through shared experiences rather than playing up real or perceived differences. So the first lesson is about understanding the nature and spread of prejudice.

The second point is related to the first one but deserves a special mention. Because of the scale of the social and economic changes around us, bedrock social institutions that usually could be relied on to deal with rising social insecurity are eroding too. Insecure people are not open to the rational argument about the net benefits of immigration, for instance, if their insecurity is not just rooted in economic fears but in cultural alienation and the persistent erosion of the social fabric. Claudia Chwalisz analyses a “declining feeling of belonging” and the lack of a new form of cultural identity offered through social institutions.

In a nutshell, through the progressing individualisation of society and the erosion of community institutions, as David Goodhart argues, there is a deep sense of dislocation that goes way beyond fears of social and economic decline. If the fear of decline is fear of collapse then the feeling of social dislocation is the fear that there is nothing to soften or stop that fall.

Third, the blame for this is not just ascribed to scapegoated groups but also to the political process itself. The feelings described above are combined with a progressive lack of trust in the political system, which is seen as more and more detached from the lives of ordinary people. Whereas the political system used to present different alternatives to voters who had the freedom to make their sovereign decision, the years of TINA politics (There Is No Alternative) have led to a, maybe unprecedented, loss of trust in political elites. Rene Cuperus criticises the fact that mainstream politics around Europe has simply ignored popular feelings of discontent and continued on the path it perceives as the only viable one. Renaud Thillaye argues that French political elites have been looking for answers to the rise of the Front National for decades – without much success so far.

Even in the cases in which populism expresses itself in the traditional form of a political party, as is the case in the UK with UKIP, in France with the Front National or the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany, they style themselves as “anti-parties” in protest against the political mainstream. As Frank Decker shows in the case of the AfD, however, populist parties feed off the same anger in society.

This eBook brings together two reports from Pegida marches in Dresden and Newcastle, several analyses of the phenomenon’s origins in Germany and examinations of its wider European context. It is one of the most comprehensive publications on the subject we hope that it will inform the work of many people interested in the reasons for the rise of Pegida.

European populism has already caused remarkable damage and threatens to accelerate the continuing fragmentation of the European Union. There are no quick fixes but a solid understanding of the underlying problems and the ways in which they manifest themselves in civil and political protest is a much-needed foundation on which a counter-strategy can be developed.

This project has also made clear that in order to solve the issue of European populism you need an alternative politics that seeks to shape the social and economic changes surrounding us. Too often politics is seen as the catalyst of unwelcome social and economic transformation rather than a force that works to strengthen the roots of communities and, at the same time, develops a positive cosmopolitan view of the brave new world that is developing. We need a politics that aims to shape the future rather than manage different forms of decline. This, for us, is the overarching lesson.

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# Pegida: Why Is The Populist Right On The Rise In Germany?

*By Catrin Nye*

How has this “anti-Islamisation” movement managed to mobilise huge crowds in less than three months? Catrin Nye reports her experience of attending one of the marches in January.

The noisiest bit of the Pegida march is the brief moment, at a Dresden tram intersection, at which demonstrators meet their opposition, something the German police have blocked along most of the route. Here, an argument is raging between Dresden’s young and old. I’m in the city to make a documentary for BBC Radio 4, but members of the counter-protest tell me they’re embarrassed that foreign media are here, that it’s “shameful that Nazis” are back on the streets of Germany.

Pegida was formed last October by Lutz Bachmann, the 41-year-old former cook, who has just stepped down as leader after a picture of him posing as Adolf Hitler went viral. First, a Facebook page was set up, then Bachmann and his supporters started marching in Dresden with just a few hundred people. Within three months, 25,000 people were flocking to the Pegida banner.

Bachmann insists the movement is not against Islam itself but the “Islamisation of Germany and radical Islam - I have many Muslim friends,” he tells me when I interview him prior to his resignation. “A lot of people have fears about Islamisation”, says Bachmann, “But here in Saxony (the state) or especially in Dresden, we don’t have these problems yet. But... we see what happens in France, in Belgium, in the Netherlands, and we don’t want to wait until this happens here.”

Over the last decade, many European countries have seen a rise in anti-Muslim populism, but Germany seemed somewhat inoculated - a combination perhaps of history and economics. But that’s not the case any more. The Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris have clearly galvanised the movement; the march after the killings was the biggest yet with banners reading “Yesterday Paris, tomorrow Berlin.”

But, it’s more than just a reaction to the tragic events in France that is fuelling the growth of Pegida. At the march I attended, I heard people complaining about, in quick succession – immigration, the euro, the Greek bailout, terrorism, the biased media and Syrians. And of course the “Islamisation” of Germany; though it’s often not the first issue mentioned by Pegida supporters.

Pegida supporters argue that labelling them racists or xenophobes (or Nazis) is just an easy way of shutting down any political debate to the right of centre; that Germany’s dark history means right-wing expression is gagged. What everyone I speak to marching for Pegida agrees on is that the political elite are out of touch. Even a counter demonstrator admits that German Chancellor Angela Merkel constantly saying that there is “no alternative” [to freedom of movement within the EU] frustrates people.

Demonstrators have been nicked-named the “Pinstriped Nazis” by their opponents because of the middle class, middle aged in their ranks. It’s not the full picture; there are certainly people here who wouldn’t be out of place at an English Defence League rally. Pegida describe their protests as “evening strolls” through Dresden as part of their strategy to make mass protest feel more civil.

Ronnie Bensch perfectly fits the description of “pinstriped”. This is his second march, and he looks slightly uncomfortable as he walks along quietly with his briefcase in hand. “The government spends a lot of money on asylum seekers, and this money is gone then. And it’s not there for us, for ordinary people,” he says. I asked Ronnie if he doesn’t feel sympathy for asylum seekers? “Yes, but I think 80 per cent of refugees come for economic reasons, so they’re not actually war refugees, that’s my opinion on it.”

The history of Dresden, the east German city where Pegida was born, may also be a factor in its rapid rise. Peter Sculenkorf, 42, who plays music at each demo to the counter-crowd, argues that some older marchers are resentful Russian speakers who are “naturally xenophobic”, as he describes them, because of their sheltered life in the former east Germany. “This city, during the GDR time was cut off from information, we called it the valley of the people who don’t know anything (“the Valley of the Clueless”) because there was no possibility for them to receive West German broadcasting.”

The frustrations of those who flock to Pegida’s banner might be wide-ranging, but that’s not how it feels to those on the other side. The march rolls on, passing very close to one of Dresden’s mosques. Monday’s evening prayers have been cancelled because of Pegida. The city has a tiny Muslim population, but one that is feeling increasingly under-siege. Sara Tayal, 27, is originally from Egypt and studies Molecular Biology in Dresden.

“I now avoid going to the city centre on Mondays. The hardest part is that if I want to participate in the demos that are anti-Pegida I have to make sure I am in a big group and that we have some males just to be sure that I am safe. Especially because I have my hijab.”

Sara’s friend Youmna Fouad, 25, nods along. The hijab is a rare sight in Dresden. Youmna says it means people have always looked at her like she was “an alien” but that wasn’t really a problem. But now she says they look at her like she is a threat.

I wonder, since the former leader Lutz Bachmann says he has no problem with Muslims, if he feels any guilt that mosques are closing on Mondays and people like Sara are scared to go out. “Show me one that is scared” he challenges but declines my offer to see a photo of Sara and her friends. “They don’t have to be scared” he says.

In the end he asks us to stop the interview. (Bachmann thought my line of questioning was unfair. Pegida don’t appreciate the media generally – they use the phrase “*Lügenpresse*”, the “lying press”).

The sheer number of Pegida marchers on the streets means some politicians at least think there could be more to them than racists with “hatred in their hearts” as Angela Merkel has described them. They’ve already met with one right-wing political party, the AfD (Alternative



for Germany), and there had been talk of a meeting with the ruling Christian Democrat party.

But that photo of their founder dressed as Hitler means the movement will be scrambling for a less problematic figurehead. It was “a joke” according to Bachmann’s press team, but one that may see them filed as Nazis for good.

*This article was first published by Prospect Magazine.*

**Catrin Nye** is a correspondent and documentary maker for the BBC. For the last five years she has specialised in issues affecting minority communities in the UK investigating asylum, immigration detention, radical movements and life in British Muslim communities among other issues. Her most recent documentaries involved travelling on aid convoys to Syria, looking at the emergence of the Caliphate and the rise of the far right in Germany.

# How Newcastle United Won Against Pegida & Associates

*By Chi Onwurah*

When I heard that Pegida were to hold their first demonstration outside Germany in Newcastle I was utterly downcast. I knew about Pegida, marching in their thousands through German cities against the supposed 'Islamisation of the West', claiming not to be racist or Islamophobic but, when the media could get someone to speak, expressing the most hateful views.

I knew that Chancellor Merkel had used her New Year's Address to speak out against Pegida more forcefully than our Prime Minister has ever condemned Islamophobia, but I also knew there were concerns in Germany about the political impact of such huge demonstrations as well as real fear in local Muslim and immigrant communities.

Of all the cities in all the countries in all the European Union why did they have to choose mine? Did they believe their bigoted message of division and distrust would fall upon fertile ground amongst Geordies? Was Newcastle, associated in most peoples' minds with coal, railways, football and a friendly accent, now going to be seen as Pegida's standard bearer?

Then the BBC reported why Newcastle was chosen and I laughed out loud. Pegida thought we were a soft target because there were 'few Muslims and few left-wingers'. They clearly did not know our city. Yes Newcastle's Muslim population at 6.3% is much lower than in Birmingham or Bradford, but they are a long established, much respected, visible and vibrant part of our city and region.

South Shields has been home to a Yemeni British community since the 1890s. Muhammad Ali cemented his marriage vows at a mosque there. As for left wingers, the Labour Party is still for many a part of family culture, we have the highest trade union membership rate in the country and in Tyne and Wear returned 12 out of 12 Labour MPs at the last general election. And not a parochial, inward looking culture – Newcastle was the only city outside the US to honour Martin Luther King in his lifetime and the North East is the birth place of the Fairtrade Movement.

This is not to suggest there is no history of racism in Newcastle. Growing up in the seventies I faced racist abuse and attacks from what was then the National Front and their supporters. There were certainly those who believed that Geordie identity was incompatible with brown skin and made that point forcibly.

I remember very well the feelings of isolation and fear that such physical and psychological attacks caused. But I also remember the surprise and comfort of realising I was not alone as across Newcastle, Tyneside, and the North East people came together to protest against racism, prejudice and bigotry. They helped 'Show Racism the Red Card' and make it unacceptable to be overtly racist in public places.

So I have watched the recent rise in both Islamophobia and anti-semitism with horror, concerned we may be going back when we should be going forward. Even though they clearly knew nothing about our city, would not the very presence of Pegida on our streets inflame community relations at a difficult time? As asked Theresa May, could it possibly be considered conducive to the public good?

I did not, however, call for Pegida to be banned. I felt the freedom of expression arguments were too strong. Their rally would go ahead, but what should our response be? Newcastle Unites swung into action. It is a peaceful, family orientated coalition of left leaning groups that come together in 2012 to combat hate using festivities, music and celebration.

It was not a simple matter to agree the right response, many different groups were involved and some different agendas. Local Labour Councillor and leading figure in Newcastle's Muslim community Dipu Ahad was heavily involved. There were accusations of too much Labour influence whilst some thought any demonstration risked giving Pegida 'the oxygen of publicity' and others were concerned at the involvement of what they saw as extreme left or single issue groups. The announcement by George Galloway that he would come to Newcastle was hugely divisive for many.

But these debates were resolved amicably. By the 28th of February my main concern was that there might not be enough of us to show the world how decisively Newcastle rejected Pegida.

I need not have worried. The sun came out and the people of the region came too – in their thousands. They came to show that being a Geordie is not a question of religion or race. As such, the rally opened with prayers from Jewish, Muslim and Christian faith leaders which also reached out to those of all faiths and none. Speakers included MPs, MEPs, trade union leaders, faith leaders, community leaders, the voluntary sector and Newcastle United Supporter Trust who expressed outrage that football fans who were Muslim might be targeted and football players who were Muslim not appreciated. The football chant 'Newcastle United Will Never Be Defeated' was taken up. The crowd was also particularly appreciative of Arne Lietz the Social Democratic MEP from Dresden where Pegida were born who had come to Tyneside to speak in solidarity.

As I put it in my speech:

"I have never seen Newcastle looking as beautiful as now. You are all colours, all races, all faiths, all ages, all beliefs. They are ugly. Their message is one of hatred, division and fear your neighbour. Our message is one of peace, positivity, supporting your neighbour and looking out for each other. We are here to support each other, they are here to tell us to hate each other. Our message is the stronger, our message will prevail."

Despite Pegida's claims to the contrary they mainly attracted the usual mix of English Defence League, National Front and British National Party stalwarts. There were five arrests, all from amongst Pegida supporters. In contrast our rally had a carnival atmosphere, with singing, dancing, and both moving and hilarious placards. Many in the crowd told me it made them proud to be Geordie. Whilst estimates vary, there were between five and 12 times more of us than of them and the media coverage reflected the sense that Pegida were utterly beaten on the day.

And then Cissé, Newcastle United's Muslim striker scored the winning goal at the match that afternoon: the perfect example of the contribution Muslims make.

We have nothing to be complacent about. Of course Pegida will regroup and may return, better organised and more numerous. But so will we. It was the biggest demonstration of its kind in Newcastle since the 1930s and yet there were many more who wished they could have been there. We have realised that whilst fear and division can be a populist agenda, so is standing together and if not loving then definitely caring about your neighbour. Already there are calls for some kind of legacy, some continuing affirmation of our identity as a city of strong communities living positively and peacefully together.

I did not want Pegida to come to Newcastle but in the end it provided an excellent platform for the values we want to live by. As the football chant goes 'Newcastle United will Never be Defeated'.

**Chi Onwurah** is a British Labour Party Member of Parliament representing the Newcastle upon Tyne Central constituency.

# How Pegida Uses Social Insecurity

*By Gesine Schwan*

The Pegida demonstrations in Dresden have attracted a lot of international media attention and raised considerable concerns about social peace inside Germany. Many people simply cannot understand why Pegida are warning about a so-called Islamisation of the West in a state, Saxony, with so few Muslims; Muslims make up only around 5% of the entire population of the federal republic anyway. Many observers fail to understand why so many people joined the demonstrations (which are now ebbing away) – with, moreover, a substantial number of citizens “from the middle layers of society” alongside the notorious right-wing extremists.

Most commentators share the view that there’s no risk of an “Islamisation of the West”, that the reasons behind or motives of the demonstrations cannot therefore be sourced to their stated goals but that they do point to genuine anxieties that need to be addressed. How does all of this fit together?

This is not that hard to grasp because, over the decades, we’ve managed to assemble a rich fund of pieces of historical evidence about and numerous scientific analyses of such fears – in Germany, Europe and internationally. The analytical field of study is research into prejudice. Going by the example of the horrendous experience of the murder of Jews, of Nazism and anti-semitism, we’ve known a lot about prejudice and resentment for a long time and should be able to apply this knowledge to what’s going on now.

These pertinent researches have overwhelmingly shown that the causes of prejudice, often overlain with aggressive resentments, do not lie with religious, cultural or ethnic minorities but in the social and psychic sensitivities of people harbouring such prejudices. It’s been known for decades that anti-semitism does not rest upon the Jews but is especially strong in areas where there are few or even no Jews (any longer!). This is true too for xenophobia and, equally, for hatred of Muslims or Islam. So this flares up particularly strongly in places where one has little or nothing to do with Muslims in the flesh – as work colleagues or at the local sports club – and has no human relations with them.

Prejudice and resentment are most readily directed at groups which might feel threatening – because they “threatened” “Jewish world domination” once upon a time, now they “threaten” “Islamisation of the West” – but are, in fact, too weak to defend themselves against such vicious attacks. Prejudice and resentment erupt, above all, against those which, in the minds of these prejudiced groups, are rejected or disrespected by broad swaths of society. That’s how resentment and prejudice can feel embedded among the broad mass of people. So Pegida can communicate effectively and successfully the cry “we are the people” originally used against the communist dictatorship. They feel at one with wide circles of Germans in their hostility towards Islam – not entirely wrongly according to opinion polls.

That helps explain why people from “the middle layers of society” taking part are not that odd. Historically, the followers and voters of the Nazis were not the poor – these were organized by the social democrats, unions and communists and could see a positive future

in front of them. It was very different with people threatened by fears of falling down the social ladder and humiliated by unemployment – many of them members of the middle layers, partly also of the educated middle class which feared for the future and were not immune to anti-semitism, quite the contrary.

Of course, societies with a broad middle class and no great social gulfs within them are a propitious setting for liberal, moderate politics and democracy – as the history of political ideas for the last 2000 years teaches us. But when the gaps between rich and poor grow ever larger and the middle class starts to fear it could be crushed between these two extremes, when individuals begin to feel threatened by a more precarious position and social decline at any time – then, this fear and trembling prompts them to seek to vent their anger and rage on people posing no risk to them.

Given the ever greater global gulfs not only between but within North and South, Europe has embarked upon a dangerous development which many Germans cannot take on board because they think they're living on an island of the "economically blessed". The refugee floods won't stop that quickly, let's be clear. If we cannot say swiftly and frankly, this is what we can expect, what we can deal with and the kind of practical solidarity we can show locally as well as globally, then fear and hostility will increase both at home and elsewhere to the extent that we may no longer be able to control them.

What's more, given German history, anybody who doesn't take on board the murderous potential of prejudice and aggressive resentment, who ignores the fact that the object of resentment can be switched because its root cause is actually very different – that person is acting irresponsibly. Many of my Jewish friends feel as threatened by anti-Muslim as by anti-semitic prejudices. The declarations by the central council of Jews about Pegida prove that.

*An earlier German version of this column was published by DIE ZEIT.*

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# The Pegida Brand: A Right-wing Populist Success Product

*By Dieter Rucht and Simon Teune*

Many protest movements grow up first of all well away from the glare of public attention. They create an infrastructure of communication and mobilization, gradually expand the number of their supporters and their public appearances and, thereby, finally, gain national or even international visibility. The labour movement, women's movement and ecological movement are examples of this.

In other cases, a protest movement appears to come from nowhere and, with its very first activities, captures the limelight. The wave of protest against the German Hartz IV labour market reforms in 2004, the Occupy demos in 2011-12, the "Monday vigils for peace" in the summer/autumn of 2014 as well as the current Pegida movement: these all fall within the category of movements which – much to our astonishment – flare into life and rapidly die away like shooting stars.

How to explain the dynamics and attractiveness of the protest movement that caught our breath recently? Pegida, started as a Facebook initiative by Lutz Bachman and a few like-minded people in October 2014, grabbed an inordinate amount of attention across Germany within just two months even though, compared to other protest movements, it was just a medium-sized one. According to police data, Pegida got 25,000 supporters out on the streets of Dresden, its place of origin, just once. Putting aside Legida in Leipzig, Sugida in Suhl and Bagida in Munich, they could assemble fewer than 1000 in other places while counter-demos, especially in the western part of the republic, trumped supporters of Pegida branches several times over.

If one wants to understand "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West" as a socio-political phenomenon, then one has to deal, economically speaking, with the terms of its production and distribution. So, we're concerned here with the raw materials behind the protest and their processing and marketing along with a media echo chamber – without which Pegida would scarcely have been able to set itself up. We'll approach these three elements in what follows below.

## **The Raw Material: Racist Resentments And Abbreviated Criticism**

Pegida's success in mobilizing and agenda setting rests on channeling discontents which up till then had barely been seen on the streets. The demonstrations effectively became an open forum for resentments which – as in the "German circumstances" found by conflict studies researchers in Bielefeld – had been identified over many years in broad sections of the population. Anti-Muslim racism is spreading far and wide. You can see it not only in the long-standing weird mini-parties such as 'Pro Cologne'. Its popular base had become obvious earlier, in the book sales of Thilo Sarrazin, in the success of the 'Politically Incorrect' blog and, not least, in the headlines of best-selling news media.

What's more, there's a widespread disenchantment with established politics. It shows up as a generalised criticism of people in politics with the basic feeling of being deceived and lied to. Until Pegida emerged, people vented this discontent among a small circle of friends or in online comments beneath news reports. A large portion of Pegida supporters had virtually no experience of protesting until the "Monday promenades". Pegida gave shape to this raw material of dissatisfaction and resentment and obviously enabled it to manifest itself publicly.

### **The Production Process: Street Protest As A Stage For Right-wing Populist Resistance**

Pegida reduces multi-layered and, in many ways, ambiguous social realities to a few simple truths (Poster: "FRG = Dictatorship"). There's only right and wrong, us down below and them up on top, adherents and enemies. Put psychologically, they cannot tolerate ambiguity or the readiness to recognize and accept other views. This Manichean philosophy comes out in a virtually liturgical protest. Protest as indictment, self-assertion and solution in one. The Monday protest serves to reaffirm oneself in a hostile landscape. Assemblies are staged as the articulation of an authentic and single-minded will that is expressed in speeches, programmatic demands, choruses, flags and banners. The proof of the pudding appears to arise from the mass of the assembled yea-sayers as in the motto: Since we're the people, we must be right. Anybody saying the opposite must be a traitor to the country. So, one banner reads: "Economic refugees and traitors, quit Germany!" The movement and its meaning remains confined to the assembly. Outside the demos, there's no Pegida, its supporters are not linked together.

During the evening promenades, the protesters don't simply style themselves as victims of a false politics but of a failed system (Banner: "The system is finished – we are the change.") Thereby, the criticism of the governing classes and media doesn't come from a processed, well-argued disputation – as in the case of opponents of nuclear energy or of the Stuttgart 21 plan; rather, it repeats suppressed "truths". It's not by chance – or so we can see from analyses of what Pegida's Facebook community consumes in the media – that top of the pops is not only right-wing web-sites such as Politically Incorrect but also proponents of conspiracy theories. Pegida here is similar to the (now run-down) "Monday vigils for peace" at which criticism of "toe-the-line media" first saw the light of day.

The other side of this victim's role is an imagined act of self-empowerment. Here the cypher of resistance plays a key role. A hand-painted banner ranks Pegida among the historic moments of resistance; without words, it just says: "1953, 1989, 2014-15." The author of this resistance movement is "the people": homogeneous, with just one interest and single-minded (Banner: "One people, one homeland, one nation"). This people is supposedly threatened from two sides: first, through "the foreigners", who ruin its soul and culture, and then through the social and political elites who ignore the will of the people and twist facts to guarantee and expand their benefits in kind. The populist, racist spirit of self-defence against cultural "infiltration" is the brand essence of Pegida: and that goes for almost all parties from Die Linke to the NPD, from intellectuals to indigenous milieus.

### **Marketing: Worried Citizens**

Pegida's offering obviously fell onto fertile soil. The seed didn't need much time or feeding to grow. There was no need of great effort, long statements or well-known protagonists.



What helped, rather, was the absence of these factors or the impression that “ordinary people” had just come together with no great preparation, without the assistance of extant organisations, to give vent spontaneously to their welled-up anger. In their 19-point programme, Pegida’s organisers insisted upon compatibility with the views of the common people. This interpretation was taken up by a large number of observers. Thus Frank Richter, head of Saxony’s central body for political education, in a chat show: “In my view, 90 percent of the people out there are actually worried citizens with a lot of concerns on their minds.” That creates the impression that Pegida on the whole is just a harmless social movement whose small, less refined, brainless residue is negligible. It’s scarcely of any concern to those publicly demanding understanding for the Pegida demonstrators that these supposedly harmless citizens are propagating a populist consensus.

As if flying over a seething crater, media folk viewed the spectacle half fascinatedly, half fearfully. They were wholly unused to the situation that – unlike with the demonstrations against Hartz IV and the Occupy movement – the actors pretty well turned away from the cameras and mics. This state of affairs won the movement media visibility rather than diminished it. The initial refusal of Pegida pricked the curiosity of the media, aroused investigative ambition and even led the tabloid press to make its expected welcome relatively restrained or even non-existent. But, for Pegida & Co, a bad press was a good press; it could come on as a standard-bearer for freedom of opinion against the collective ‘liar press’.

Pegida is a successful product. Here a political offering met a corresponding demand in the context of a favourable economic climate. At Pegida’s press conference on 19 January 2015 it was said: “We won’t change our name.” Pegida had “become a brand.” In the interim that even lead the inventors to try and license the brand name against unwelcome hangers-on. The registered association Pegida can only chalk this up as a partial success. Most of all, a huge bubble of public awareness drove Pegida’s market value up high. The Pegida event changes the political landscape even if the protests may be ebbing away. Over the medium term, Pegida is making it easier for other actors to position their products in its wake. One of the beneficiaries could be the Alternative for Germany AfD which can more readily present itself as a moderate alternative. For the extreme right, after many failed marches which never gained more than 6000 participants, Pegida was a relaunch of massive street protests and a successful campaign for establishing a right-wing extremist interpretative framework that can range from “sham asylum-seekers” via “traitors” to “liar press.” Anybody actively courting the Pegida brand buys all this with it.

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# AfD And Pegida: Understanding Germany's New Populist Right

*By Frank Decker*

For most of its history, the Federal Republic of Germany proved to be a blank space on the map of European right-wing populism. The rise of the euro(pe)sceptic Alternative for Germany (AfD) could change this. Having come up just short of crossing the five percent threshold in the 2013 federal elections, the newcomer achieved its first remarkable electoral success in the European elections in May 2014, winning 7.1 percent of the vote a little over a year after the party's founding. Even better electoral showings were obtained by the AfD in subsequent regional elections in the east German states of Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia in late summer. Support was more limited in Hamburg's state elections in February 2015 (6.1 percent) but was enough to allow the party to enter its first west German state parliament.

If the advent of right-wing populism in German's party system, thereby more accurately reflecting the (west) European norm, elicited a fair degree of interest but little concern among foreign observers, the subsequent rise of the movement Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) that brought thousands of people onto the streets of the Saxon state capital of Dresden week after week caused the same observers to rub their eyes in astonishment. Originating in a Facebook group, Pegida quickly established offshoots in other east and west German towns as well as even some foreign cities (Vienna, Copenhagen, Newcastle). Not only did their number of participants pale in comparison to those gathering in Dresden but protesters also found themselves significantly outnumbered by counter-demonstrations. The impact of the latter was ambivalent in the sense that they only heightened media attention on Pegida to an unwarranted extent. Ultimately, Pegida was and is a highly regional (east German and Saxon) or local (Dresden) phenomenon. That right-wing populism finds a more fertile environment in the former GDR compared to the western part of Germany is also reflected by the respective electoral fortunes of the AfD.

If that is indeed the case, the question remains, however, as to why the more visible and widespread presence of Germany's populist radical right along with its build-up of organizational structures are a recent phenomenon. Work in the comparative field of study has demonstrated that certain crisis constellations in society – what American historian Lawrence Goodwyn refers to as “populist moments” – are usually a prerequisite for the spawning of such parties and movements. In the AfD's case, the euro and financial crisis played that role. It opened the window of opportunity for a new eurosceptic party whose primary policy demands – a controlled dissolution of the monetary union and the rejection of a further deepening of the European integration process – lent themselves to the attachment of a broader right-wing populist platform to it.

According to polling data, AfD voters rank immigration alongside social security and a stable currency atop the list of topics that determine their choice at the ballot box, with the three issues on a roughly even par. While differences with the general electorate are not particularly sizable on the latter two issues, AfD voters were more than three times as likely

to mention immigration as a decisive topic. The party therefore has a dual incentive to place special emphasis on this policy area. The inherent danger of this course lies in the potential erosion of a clear division between the AfD and the extreme right. Whether the party would survive the inevitable internal confrontations that would occur as a result of a radicalisation of both its platform and the way it appeals to voters is up for debate.

Compared to the AfD, Pegida is a phenomenon that is more difficult to grasp. The usage of traditionally leftist forms of political participation by a middle-class/conservative organisation is by itself rather unusual. Existing observations and studies conducted among participants of its demonstrations indicate strong similarities with the AfD's electorate as male participants, the middle aged as well as people with an academic degree and a middle class income are significantly or slightly overrepresented. According to a study published by political scientist Hans Vorländer, a significant majority (62 percent) of participants in the Dresden protests lacked any partisan affiliation. Among those who did mention a partisan preference, the AfD came out on top with 17 percent ahead of the CDU (9 percent) and the extreme-right NPD (4 percent). Mirroring this, 76 percent of AfD voters voiced sympathy for Pegida in a representative poll – compared to a share of 21 percent among all voters. Even among non-voters, the share of Pegida sympathisers was substantially lower at 36 percent.

Official manifestations of solidarity and support towards Pegida or an invitation for cooperation were lacking on the AfD's part owing to the party's fear of being linked to potential extreme-right tendencies within both the organisation and among the participants of its protests. It would not be inaccurate though to interpret Pegida as a product of the same right-wing populist mood present among large swathes of the east German electorate that helped gain the AfD double digit shares in state elections during the late summer of 2014. Whether Pegida would ever have emerged and attracted the kind of sizable crowds it did without previous AfD accomplishments at the ballot box appears questionable. The strongly conservative political environment of Saxony, connections to organised far-right movements, and the specific pride some Dresdeners take in their city being a victim of allied bombing raids may be contributing factors; taken by themselves they do not serve as a sufficient explanation though.

The motivations driving AfD voters and Pegida participants can possibly best be characterised through the dual term of insecurity/anxiety. Insecurity refers more to the social situation, meaning apprehensions about a decline in income, while anxiety aims to describe emotions of cultural alienation, the loss of a familiar social order and its moorings. That a fear of foreigners is not necessarily at its most pronounced in those areas home to most foreigners is not a new finding. The rise of Pegida has served as a powerful fresh reminder of it though. If the AfD played a central role in the genesis of Pegida by paving a right-wing populist path, the party could at the same time now be the reason for the rapid implosion of the protest movement. Dissatisfaction and a general protest sentiment held by "mad as hell" citizens have found their way into the party system through the AfD, providing them for the first time with a continuously perceptible, politically effective voice.

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# Pegida In A European Landscape

*By Claudia Chwalisz*

“We are the people.” Like other right-wing populists across Europe, Germany’s Pegida is the latest to advance this Manichean view of societal change. The ‘Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident’ claim to be reacting to the alleged threat of *Überfremdung*: that indigenous culture is being tainted by too many foreign influences. The last time this word was used by a political group in Germany was by the Nazis.

Unlike its European neighbours, Germany has avoided this type of uprising for a long time, most likely for a combination of historical and economic reasons. Its sudden emergence has shaken the German political system; Angela Merkel even made mention of the group in her New Year’s Address, saying it was “full of coldness, prejudice, even hatred.”

While its rise has been shocking, Pegida shares many characteristics with other right-wing populist parties across Europe. As an ideology, populism tends to pit a pure and homogeneous ‘people’ against a corrupt ‘establishment’ and dangerous ‘others’ who are together seen as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice. It is a very black and white way of seeing the world; it overlooks the murky grey area of compromise that goes along with the complexity of governing.

Like populist parties in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria, Pegida defines ‘the people’ as a national community sharing ethnic and cultural attributes. The most imminent threat, in their eyes, comes from Islam. Anti-immigration is thus the central pillar of their stance, as ‘immigrants’ and ‘Muslims’ become conflated as the dangerous ‘others.’ By way of illustration, one of Pegida’s co-founders and its former leader, Lutz Bachmann, called immigrants “scumbags” and “animals” on Facebook.

Clearly their worries are not just about the numbers – as only around five per cent of Germans are Muslim and it’s less than one per cent in Saxony where the group originated. It is the qualitative, not just the quantitative threat of immigration that matters. It is also a perceived threat, as Dresden, like other parts of Europe where populists have flourished, has experienced very little immigration itself. Research has shown that the fewer opportunities individuals have to come into contact with perceived ‘others,’ the less chance they have to dismantle pre-conceived notions about the differences between them. This leaves them easily convinced by negative imaging and stereotypes.

In Germany, as in other European countries, looking to immigration as the source of society’s ills is merely a symptom of a greater malaise. Immigrants are the scapegoats; reducing immigration and coercing integration are the seemingly ‘easy’ answers to restricting societal change. Yet these demands don’t get to the heart of the problem. Low growth, ageing populations, and rising levels of inequality have left Europeans in a state of uncertainty, concerned and disgruntled about their jobs, their pensions, their futures, and their children’s futures. A feeling of misanthropy takes over as trust in politicians to deliver prosperity and security plummets. Instead of the intricate mix of social policies and financial regulation needed to ensure solidarity and rebalance power between the vast majority and the economic elites (i.e. housing and land policy, investment in skills and

vocational training, raising the minimum wage, regulating corporate governance structures, etc.), Pegida and other populists have offered a 'common sense' and 'simple' solution that feeds off of their feeling of disillusionment.

Yet instead of framing their discontent in the inclusive terms of society, populists talk about the 'people,' indicating that there is an 'us' and a 'them.' Targeting the root causes of inequality does not make the list of demands. Instead, foreigners are blamed for either stealing jobs, or draining the welfare state (which paradoxically they can't logically be doing at the same time), and for 'tainting' the native culture. The political class is not to be trusted, neither is the 'lying press' (another German word last used by the Nazis). It is a politics of anger and of grievance. Having someone to readily blame removes the necessity of understanding the facts and complexity of multi-level governance in a globalised world. It can equally prevent one from developing a feeling of empathy.

Like other populists across Europe, Pegida supporters also try to differentiate between supporting 'real' asylum-seekers and integrated immigrants from 'fake' economic migrants who they claim want to drain the welfare state without contributing to society. The need to make this sort of distinction is fuelled by myths about the number of asylum seekers entering the country, and about immigrants unfairly milking the welfare state.

In addition to largely misplaced economic fears, Pegida is fuelled by a cultural argument, that too much diversity, and particularly the influence of Islam, creates social problems. It is likely for this reason that support for the movement is concentrated amongst highly educated males, with above average incomes. This is similar to support for the Swiss People's Party, the Austrian Freedom Party, and the Danish People's Party which were able to arise in countries where the economy is doing relatively well and which have lower levels of inequality. However, there is equally a sizeable proportion of supporters with far right and extremist attitudes who, as Catrin Nye wrote, would not be out of place at the equivalent of an English Defence League rally. For some, immigration is more of a symbol of disrupted communities, undermined national identity, and a declining feeling of belonging than about economic fears per se.

It's true that the battle against populists won't be won by forcing facts down people's throats. Saying that immigration is great for the economy when someone feels their culture is being threatened doesn't square the circle. At the same time, there needs to be a louder narrative about immigration that is factually based; that thanks to living in a globalised world, as part of the single market, with growing numbers of opportunities and cheaper flights, people are able to move around much easier than in the past; that immigrants are needed to fill in gaps in the labour market; that in ageing societies immigrants are helping sustain the economy to pay for healthcare, pensions and public services; and that we cannot or should not judge people by their nationality or religion rather than by who they are as individuals, contributing to our shared society.

This debate takes place in a different context from previous immigration waves, such as with the Jews in the early 1900s and with post-colonial immigration. At the start of the twentieth century, identity was indeed rooted in the concepts of race and empire. Today, the dissolving sense of common identity has more to do with the erosion of common values in an increasingly individualistic society. However, immigration itself has not been the reason behind the huge economic and political shifts experienced across Europe over

the past century. Politicians and commentators blaming immigration for the disintegration of communities only perpetuate this myth. Reframing the narrative starts by helping tackle the symptoms of populism.

More importantly, it is the underlying drivers of populism that need to be addressed in the long-term. This means getting to the heart of the social and economic inequality that is fuelling fear and anxiety about decline. It also means rebalancing the political power between the people and the elites to ease the political disaffection and distrust in the political system.

There is reason to look to new democratic innovations, such as randomly selected citizens' forums or participative conventions, which could be helpful in numerous ways. Not only are they more representative, but they have the potential to bring together those who consider themselves as 'the people' and the dangerous 'others' (politicians, the press, and foreigners) to remind 'the people' that those 'others' are human too. This may not in itself resolve the feeling that a native culture is being tainted. But, over time, it could help illuminate that there are no simple solutions to complex problems.

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# Europe's Populist Pandora's Box

*By Rene Cuperus*

In Europe, the populist Pandora's box has been opened. From Athens to Dresden, Paris to Madrid, we are seeing strong signs of a people's revolt against the established order everywhere. A pan-European crisis of political trust and representation comes to the surface, focussing mainly on the presumed dark sides of migration and European integration. Nearly everywhere in Europe, the challengers of mainstream politics are gathering in the waiting rooms of power – an ominous, sinister prospect and a symbol of the instability of European society.

Despite this deafening alarm, government policies are ignoring the populist elephant thundering through European societies. At its peril, the European establishment is only paying lip service to measures to halt this tide sweeping Europe; the main course of mainstream politics remains totally unchanged.

Austerity politics; the permanent reform of the post-war European welfare states with thereby the undermining of social protection and collective security; the different treatment of corporate interests versus the interests of the average citizen; the continuing deepening and centralising of EU-integration amidst a tsunami of Euroscepticism; the laconic attitude towards the effects of mass migration: all of this is fuelling anti-establishment discontent and social resentment. From Greece to the UK, from Norway to the Netherlands. Democracy seems for populists; leadership for technocrats.

Less than a year ago, I suggested that Germany appeared to have escaped this wave of populist protest sweeping across Europe. The German experience stood in contrast to that of neighbouring countries, such as France with Marine Le Pen's National Front, Austria with its legacy of Jörg Haider, the Dutch populist laboratory with Pim Fortuyn's postmodern populism and the anti-Islam populism of Geert Wilders, or Sweden and its radical-right Sweden Democrats. I painted a picture of Germany surrounded by "the demons of history": the return of nationalism, the rise of Euroscepticism, and the growth of anti-migrant xenophobia.

But that was before the emergence of Germany's Pegida movement, self-described "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West". The populist surge has finally reached the European Union's leading nation.

Twenty years ago, few would have predicted that German cities would see marches against foreigners, with people chanting '*Wir sind das Volk*' and carrying German national flags (not European ones). What is more troublesome is that the German Pegida movement – unlike the populist movement in the Netherlands for instance – includes some far-right extremists, who even perpetrated violent attacks on asylum seekers' camps. Neo-Nazi groups have joined the Dresden and Leipzig marches alongside ordinary German *Wutbürger* – those 'angry people' who feel left behind, not represented but betrayed by the political and media establishment. The presence of a big 'neo-Nazi milieu', especially in (former) East Germany, makes a populist revolt in Germany far from an innocent event.

Therefore, it has been quite impressive that the German *Gutmenschen* were able to mobilise enormous crowds against Pegida. Especially in the big cities of the former West Germany, the anti-Pegida (NO PEGIDA) demonstrations overwhelmingly outnumbered the Pegida marches. The *anständige* (decent) Germans wanted to show the world that post-war Germany is “*tolerant, vielfältig und weltoffen*” (tolerant, multicultural and open to the world). Even the populist tabloid BILD severely attacked Pegida. The ‘*Pegidisten*’ were demonised as Nazi-like stupid *Ossis* (East Germans), who are tarnishing post-war Germany’s good name.

These pressures by mainstream Germany have had a great impact. The German Pegida movement seems to be well past its peak. It has never really been able to expand from Dresden to other big cities in Germany, but now its entire expansion seems to have stopped in its tracks. (Internationally, the Pegida label is mostly used by far right extremists – as in Antwerp, Copenhagen or Newcastle – but these are marginal events, which will suffer badly when the German movement itself is seriously weakened). Internal problems in the Pegida leadership and successful pressures of demonization have damaged its attractiveness and following in Germany itself.

The outcome is that a possible joint venture between the anti-euro parliamentary party AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and the extra-parliamentary Pegida movement, which could have given a boost to anti-establishment forces in Germany, has been thwarted.

The fact remains, however, that even in Germany the populist Pandora’s box has been opened. The pan-European crisis of trust in political representation has come to Berlin as well. Even to Germany, a country in good economic shape. And a country that, for historical reasons consists of a strong anti-populist *cordon sanitaire* in politics, media and the *Grundgesetz* (constitution). Even Germany has proven to be not immune to the populist revolt of angry and alienated citizens.

One would have expected that this unprecedented populist threat, all over Europe, would have given rise to greater degrees of caution and concern. But Europe’s establishment appears curiously unmoved. Much of it pays only lip service to populist discontent and the fraying of democracy and its institutions. Instead, establishment politics and its cosy circles of policymakers continue with business as usual – as if there were still a stable, harmonious society, with a great capacity for flexible adaptation and permanent reform.

National austerity politics, the ‘Disciplining Union’ of the Eurozone, TTIP, the ECB’s Quantitative Easing programme, Juncker’s recent call for a European army: hubris is still governing Brussels and the national capitals. Mainstream politics is ignoring the populist elephant which is thundering through European societies.

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# Pegida's Spirit Haunts France – With No Response Yet

By Renaud Thillaye

Pegida may have caught everyone by surprise in Germany, but its spirit is unfortunately all too familiar to French people. With the Front National's enduring presence and future prospects, anti-Islam, anti-immigration, anti-establishment views of the world have been casting a long shadow over French politics for more than thirty years now. This may paradoxically explain why a movement like Pegida has little chance of taking off in France. However, the long-standing failure of mainstream parties to respond to the Front National voters' core concerns should compel French politicians to try something new, and give German ones food for thought.

## The Good News

The prediction that Pegida would be offered an open boulevard in France after the terrorist killings in Paris early in January did not come to pass. A first planned protest in Paris on 18 January was not authorised by the police because of the hate dimension of the initiative. The title given to the march was "*Déséquilibrés, égorgeurs, chauffards... Islamistes hors de France*" which translates as: "Insane, slaughterers, roadhogs... Islamists out of France". Some gatherings took place in Bordeaux, Montpellier and Toulouse, but numbers remained fewer than 100. Behind the initiatives were the controversial essayist Renaud Camus (who champions the concept of "great replacement" in the same way as Thilo Sarrazin does) and radical organisations such as *riposte laïque* (which set up *apéritifs saucisson-pinard* a few years ago) and *la Ligue du Midi* (Southern French regionalists).

Strikingly, the Front National has been keeping its distance from Pegida and has not encouraged its development in France. Two years ago, Marine Le Pen already avoided getting too closely associated with the massive anti-gay marriage protests. Clearly, these grassroots, decentralised movements are seen as disruptive for her 'de-demonisation' strategy and her ambition to govern France in the near future. She cannot afford being seen as backwardly Islamophobic and homophobic at a moment when she is trying to incorporate ethnic minority and gay elements into the party's leadership.

This also shows that she is well-informed about the state of French public opinion and takes great care to be in tune with it. What the polls reveal, indeed, is a high level of anxiety regarding Islam, but also the ability to distinguish between its radicalised elements and ordinary Muslim citizens of France. As an Ipsos/Le Monde survey disclosed at the end of January, 53% of French people thought then that France was "at war". Out of these 53%, 'only' 16% targeted Islam as the enemy while 84% of them pointed at "jihadist terrorism". Perhaps more striking was the declining proportion (though abnormally high compared to other religions) of those who thought Islam was not compatible with "the values of French society": from 74% in 2013, this figure dropped to 51% after the killings.

Against this ambivalent background, the Front National has successfully managed to rearticulate old positions around a more reassuring narrative. It stands

for *laïcité* (secularism) and republican values against the supposed left-wing communitarians. The party defends the idea of a colour-blind society and has excluded some of its outspokenly racist elements. It argues that immigration needs to slow down essentially for humanitarian reasons. The subtext, nevertheless, has not changed much: “we will protect you against Islam”.

## Huge Challenges

It may therefore be reassuring that Pegida won't make it in France, but it is hugely worrying to see the Front National prospering on the back of widespread anxiety vis-à-vis Islam. A lot needs to be done still to strengthen trust between Muslims and non-Muslims in France and to solve the identity crisis which affects both groups in a tougher economic and social context.

Indeed, Islam is too often a default identity for young French people of North African and West African origin who do not feel fully accepted as French citizens. Moderate Muslims are also tempted to turn more radical when they see (rightly or wrongly) their faith and religious practice being treated suspiciously and cornered in a society with a very strict approach to secularism. The social decay and lack of public services manifest in some suburban areas with a high concentration of immigrants is another obvious factor behind this trend. Hence it did not come as a surprise that the minute of silence tribute to *Charlie Hebdo* was not well respected in the schools in these areas.

On the other side of the spectrum, the popular success of some publications warning against France's loss of soul testifies to the ill-ease in which the white lower middle-class finds itself today. Last year renowned public intellectual Alain Finkielkraut argued in *L'identité malheureuse* (Unhappy identity) that France had given up defending its culture in the name of egalitarianism and diversity. Polemicist Eric Zemmour published *Le Suicide français* (French suicide), a violent attack upon immigration. In January, on the very day of the attack against 'Charlie Hebdo,' Michel Houellebecq's new novel, *Submission*, came out. The author imagines an Islamist party taking power in France in the near future. In mid-February the book was topping fiction sales in France, Germany and Italy.

What these parallel trends reveal is politicians' failure to devise a fresh, encompassing vision of French identity that would reassure all groups about their capacity to live together. In a recent essay, political scientist Laurent Bouvet characterises the current situation as one of 'cultural insecurity'. There is a void, according to Bouvet, which only the state can fill. Public services need to return to abandoned territories, be it Parisian suburbs or 'semi-urban' areas where the Front National vote is particularly high. *Laïcité* (secularism), republican values and genuine implementation of republican ideals are the only possible glue that will give people a sense of commonality and confidence.

The diagnosis is compelling, but one wonders whether such abstract rhetoric and traditional recipes can do the trick. Strikingly, Nicolas Sarkozy's initiative of a debate on 'national identity' in 2009 did not get anywhere. True, many suspected a political manoeuvre to court Front National voters. However, the actual discussions that took place could only reaffirm French values in a very abstract way that left many frustrated.

Perhaps it is time for French politicians to try new recipes. Fostering a common identity also needs practice and shared experiences. It should not be left to football to bring people of differing backgrounds together. That is where initiatives such as a national voluntary service, youth exchanges or mentoring systems between well-off and deprived areas, community organising and local citizen assemblies have a role to play. Without these efforts to tackle mutual suspicion, there is no doubt that Pegida and the Front National on the one hand, and radical Islamist preachers on the other, will retain their appeal.

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# Pegida: Poland Takes Stock

*By Paweł Świeboda*

Pegida's rise has been watched with much attention in Poland. The phenomenon tends to be regarded as a reaction to globalisation and a way of fuelling debate about its discontents. Polish observers note that although Pegida's leadership is of dubious reputation, its demonstrations attract many disenchanted members of the middle class. Pegida is therefore seen as a reflection of the different pressures that have built up within German society.

Attention is drawn to the fact that xenophobia had preceded Pegida, with most references being made to the 2010 book by Thilo Sarrazin (*Deutschland schafft sich ab*), where he called liberal policy towards the Muslim minority "a self-elimination of the state". Polish observers are also aware that Pegida is strongest in Eastern Germany, where right-wing views are particularly pronounced, as observed by the recent report of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (*Die Mitte im Umbruch*). Concern about Pegida in Poland is all the greater given the pro-Russian attitudes of its leadership. Lutz Bachmann, Pegida's ex-leader, has been quoted as saying that the German government is fuelling conflict with Russia instead of searching for accommodation with Mr Putin. Such views cannot go down well with Polish public opinion, deeply worried about the spread of Russian influence within parts of the European political spectrum.

The second stream of Polish reactions to Pegida has to do with attitudes towards immigration across Europe. Poland is a country of both emigration and immigration, with the latter phenomenon only gradually growing in strength. The Islamic community is estimated to be no more than 30,000 in total. Poland's elite is acutely aware of the need to prepare for an eventual increase in immigration, which is made more urgent by the country's changing demographic structure. However, in the broader discourse, Pegida's rise is sometimes interpreted simplistically as a failure of multiculturalism and "openness" to immigration. This is in line with Pegida's own claim that European governments supposedly have no idea how to handle Islamic fundamentalism.

Finally, there is the question of Pegida's direct resonance in Poland. For the moment, the influence is rather muted. It is clear that Pegida's leaders clearly intend portraying themselves as a movement whose influence spreads beyond Germany, with anti-Islamic demonstrations in Copenhagen, Malmö or Vienna. However, Polish journalists noted attentively that although protesters in Dresden last year waved Polish flags, those who did so did not speak a word of Polish.

The founders of the Polish branch of Pegida say that the movement has arrived in Poland through a growing realisation that something wrong is happening to Europe and everyone has to stand up against it. In anonymous interviews, they warn that Islamisation is a challenge to the European system of values, free choice and free speech. Pegida aims to "open people's eyes to an entirely new problem", they say. This is meant to explain the chosen methods, by means of which Pegida supposedly wants to awaken people to act in the defence of their culture, habits and national legacy.

The Pegida Facebook page in Poland has about 4600 supporters at the time of writing. They include many Poles living abroad. The first entries date back to the time of the terrorist attacks in Paris and claim to expose the “truth” about Islam. Asked about whether the movement will surface on Polish streets, one of their founders has told *Gazeta Wyborcza* that it will happen “in due course”. The leaders of Polish Pegida describe themselves as realist, not racist, and claim to carry out their activities with a sense of responsibility.

Polish nationalists interpret the birth of Pegida as an awakening of national ferment in Germany, long suppressed after the last World War and part of a wider phenomenon in Europe. They also see it as a protest by German society against indoctrination and a refusal to accept the elite’s logic of diversity and tolerance. They note that apart from the slogan of national “awakening”, which controversially goes back to the 1920s, Pegida has also adopted the “we are the people” slogan of the democratic opposition in the former GDR.

Polish commentators have no doubt that the rise of Pegida has met with a firm and unequivocal reaction in Germany, with Chancellor Merkel saying she would not allow the spread of hatred and the justice minister Heiko Maas calling Pegida a “shame on Germany”. It is noted that mainstream politicians and commentators perceive Pegida as an attack against liberal democracy. Poland herself is not entirely spared of political extremism, although this tends to become more vocal only occasionally with the Independence Day demonstrations becoming their main focal point. Therefore Poland will watch attentively not only the evolution of Pegida itself but also the type of conclusions that are drawn from its rise within Germany’s debate about itself.

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# It's The Failure Of Modern Liberalism That Has Propelled UKIP's Rise

*By David Goodhart*

UKIP's recent success has triggered a cry of pain from liberal Britain. But responsibility for the rise of this modern populism lies substantially at the door of those self-same liberals.

To borrow from Tony Blair any sensible response that wants to be tough on UKIP must be tough on the causes of UKIP. And what is that cause? It is for the most part the excesses and blind spots of contemporary liberalism. The modern social and economic liberalism, that dominates all the main political parties, has produced an economically abandoned bottom third of the population with no real chance of ever gaining a share in prosperity; and an even larger group who feel a vague sense of loss in today's atomized society in which the stability of family and the identity of place and nation has been eroded.

UKIP voters are a compound of those ignored, abandoned and laughed at by the metropolitan liberals who, despite some party differences, dominate our public and cultural life. UKIP certainly has a xenophobic fringe, and seems to have hoovered up most former BNP voters, but for the most part UKIP voters are just socially conservative, economically and culturally marginalized people who do not recognize themselves in any of the main parties. Many of the same factors seem to apply to Pegida in Germany; it is more of a single issue movement but that single issue is emblematic of the same alienation from high liberalism.

The gap that has opened up between the secular liberal baby boomer worldview that dominates our party, governmental and social institutions and the political and psychological intuitions of the ordinary citizen is the new cultural/class divide in Britain.

The liberal baby boomers tend to be universalistic, suspicious of most kinds of group or national attachment, and individualistic, committed to autonomy and self-realisation. They are often geographically and socially mobile and comfortable with rapid change. Such liberals might care about harm to people and about justice but, as the American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has pointed out, they don't "get" what most other people also get - loyalty, authority and the value of stability and continuity in communities.

Modern liberalism imposes the worldview, and economic interests, of the mobile, graduate, elite on the rest of society. And the rest of society often doesn't like it, as the surge in support for populists like UKIP and Pegida makes clear. Why has so much time been spent in recent British politics on expanding and reforming higher education, and so little on sorting out our chaotic vocational training system - leaving us with an apartheid system between the graduates of good universities and the rest? Because it reflects the lives and interests of that baby boomer graduate elite, of which the political class is one part.

Why have we failed to build enough houses or sort out the welfare system? Because the interests of the liberal baby boomer elite are not sufficiently engaged.

And the biggest single slice of wrong-headedness concerns the security and identity issues - most of which boil down to the common sense notion of "fellow citizen favouritism". This is not about race or hostility to "the other" it is about fairness, the belief that in general the interests of a British citizen, of whatever colour or creed, should come before a non-citizen.

But universalist, baby boomer liberalism in its embrace of large scale immigration, its enthusiasm for judge-made human rights law and for "non-discrimination" between EU citizens, ends up minimizing the distinction between national citizens and outsiders. Liberal rights based ideology has too little sense of the contribution that people need to make for societies to work.

This communitarian critique of liberalism is not illiberal but post liberal, it claims that people are moral particularists not universalists, and they care about the citizen/non-citizen distinction. That means agreeing that all humans are equal but not all equal to us; our obligations and allegiances ripple out from family and friends to stranger-fellow-citizens and only then to all humanity. Charity begins at home, even if it doesn't end there. That's why we spend 25 times more on the NHS than on development aid.

This critique also places great value on the social glue of national identity that modern liberalism takes for granted or disdains as a throw-back to ethnic exclusivity. But the glue is in fact a product of modern societies. It has been moulded over centuries, to create a sense of interconnection and mutual regard between citizen-strangers.

That sense of mutual regard now happily co-exists with racial and gender equality but it can also be damaged by over rapid change and ethnically segregated towns. And large Muslim minorities raise these issues particularly acutely as PEGIDA in Germany has highlighted.

A widely agreed, open national story, one of the most important aspects of social glue, is not some projection of the tribe onto modern societies but rather a valuable unifying asset in more diverse, individualistic societies. It is the erosion of national citizenship in the name of universal values that is reigniting racist "Golden Dawn" tribalism.

If modern liberalism is too disdainful about myths of lost intimacy, and too thoughtless about social glue, it is also wildly idealistic about choice and freedom.

Freedom does not already exist inside individuals ready to burst out once the constraints have been removed; it has to be nurtured within the bounds of human nature. This is what the 1960s revolution did not understand. Or rather the 1960s consisted of two movements closely entangled. There was the rights revolution for women and minorities that represented a leap forward in freedom and equality. But there was also a more "emancipatory" impulse to reject obligation and tradition that fuelled a surge in various social pathologies, from crime to the breakdown of the family that we are only now recognizing and recovering from.

Conventional liberalism does not like the idea of the common good because - in all but basic things like peace and physical security - it does not know how we can arrive at it in diverse, individualistic societies with many conflicting interests and ideas of the "good".

Yet it often then smuggles in its own very clear view of the good society. As I have described, it has a bias towards universalism and individualism, it places a relatively low value on stability and continuity, indeed it is ambivalent about the idea of community which is something to be celebrated in the abstract but escaped from through geographical or social mobility in practice. The idea of the good life turns out to be something that looks very like the life of today's metropolitan upper professional.

British elites have always been good at adapting to survive. But by bringing together the dissatisfied of Tunbridge Wells and the downtrodden of Merseyside, UKIP has presented the political class with a formidable challenge that cannot be met by a few policy wheezes. The rise of UKIP requires modern liberalism to better understand itself, and its limitations, and see itself through the eyes of those left behind by globalisation and those who cannot or do not want to forge a career in the professions or the creative industries.

Most people are rooted in communities and families - 60 per cent of the population live within 20 miles of where they lived aged 14 - often experience change as loss and have a hierarchy of moral obligations. Too often the language of modern politics ignores the real affinities of place and people. Those affinities are not obstacles to be overcome on the road to the good society; they are one of its foundations. People will always favour their own families and communities; it is the job of a post liberal politics to reconcile such feelings with fluid, open societies in which people expect high degrees of individual autonomy. Modern liberalism's failure, to date, to achieve that reconciliation has left a large Nigel Farage-shaped hole in our politics.

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