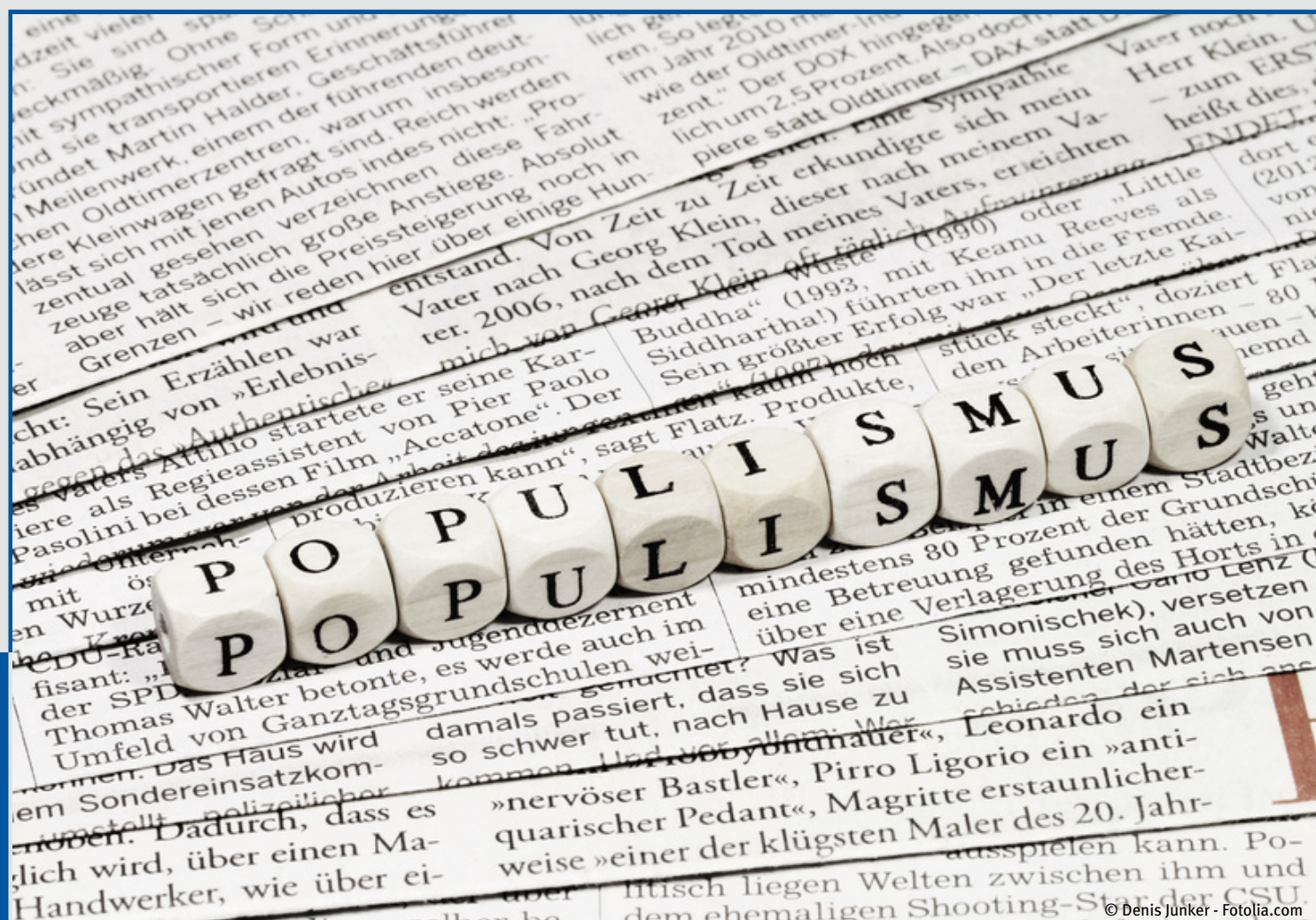


**David Bebnowski / Lisa Julika Förster**



# Competitive Populism

The 'Alternative for Germany' and the influence of economists

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**shortened version**



**Competitive Populism –**

**The 'Alternative for Germany' and the influence of economists**

If a right-wing-populist party were to be built in Germany, it would be lead by a strong and polarising tribune. At least until recently this had been a popular prognosis; for good reasons, since in other countries in Europe leading figures such as Joerg Haider or Geert Wilders shaped the image of populist forces. A right wing populist party in the Federal Republic of Germany would hardly come into existence without a charismatic leader, who could mesmerize people with his specific aura.

But when the 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD)<sup>1</sup> was founded, while openly entertaining right-wing-populist arguments (overview: Häusler 2013) which attracted many supporters from former, smaller right-wing-populist parties, this was entirely different. At its head there is not a beery, hypertonic jack-of-all-trades but the seemingly ascetic economist Bernd Lucke. As to his personality and overall appearance he is neither a stirring rhetorician, nor does he possess the shimmering eccentricity of the dyed-blond Wilders or the personable quality of the always smiling and deeply tanned Haider. He appears to be serious, almost tame, unflashy and is, as we know from press coverage, a devoted evangelical Christian (Ankenbrand 2013). But why is this surprising constellation in the AfD?

This is hardly a mere coincidence. One result of this study is that an answer to this seeming paradox rests in the fact that Bernd Lucke is an economist. If one is to regard the composition of the initial supporters of the AfD it is striking that he, being an economy professor, represents crucial parts of the party: Among the 64 initial supporters there are 18 economy professors. Not all of them are party members, but some of these acclaimed economical scientists are in charge of high

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<sup>1</sup> In this summary we go with the German acronym AfD, which translates into Alternative für Deutschland.

posts in the party. Bernd Lucke and Hans-Olaf Henkel are the two top candidates in the elections for European parliament, Joachim Starbatty ranks on fifth position. Adding to this, the party in the German state of Hamburg is lead by the economist Jörn Kruse and until November 2013 the same applied to the party in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia under the leadership of Alexander Dilger. The question about the function of Lucke in and for the party can be extended across those economists in general: What drives them towards the AfD and which components do they add to the party? The aim of the research project 'Critique of the Euro in Germany – A Qualitative Analysis of the Supporters of the Alternative for Germany against the background of the Controversial Discourses on the Euro Crisis' was to find an answer to these questions; the research project was conducted by the Institute for Democracy Research, Goettingen and was sponsored by the Otto Brenner Foundation.<sup>2</sup>

We conducted nine interviews with economists who, from the very beginning, supported the AfD. In order to contrast their views we interviewed two other economists, who are close to German unions, and who argued against the political agenda of the AfD. In addition to this we interviewed the social scientist Wolfgang Streeck and another political scientist. The selection criteria for both of them was that they both drafted distinct critiques of the Euro. Another interview was conducted with an economist, who even though he was more in favor of the views of the AfD, did not support it.<sup>3</sup>

### **The “Euro Crisis” in Germany – Paradoxical Accordance Between Political Camps**

While political developments in 2012 showed that economists actively engage in politics by spearheading the founding of a new party (Bebnowski/Kumkar 2013), this phenomenon was only marginally covered in the growing body of literature on the AfD. The reason for this seems to be quite simple: it all has to do with the

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<sup>2</sup> This paper embodies a summarized version of the project's final report, which will be published by the end of April 2014 as Working Paper of the Otto Brenner Foundation (OBS-Arbeitspapier) at [www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de](http://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de).

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Wolfgang Streeck the names of the persons are anonymized. They are indicated by naming the particular group and a number (i.e. AfD 3).

lingering “Euro Crisis”, the programmatic stronghold of the party. By definition crises unfold against the background of highly problematic experiences and arouse uncertainty. Aside from discursive fluttering they seem to call for political decisions to restoring order (Koselleck 1973; Makropoulos 2013). Therefore it should not surprise us too much that economic experts raise their voices in an economic crisis. But regarding the rifts in discourse that are normally likely to build in times of crises, it is paradoxical that the heated debates about the crises of finance, public debt and the European currency seemed to converge in a peculiar consensus.

Aside from the AfD the rather left leaning social scientist Wolfgang Streeck pleads for dissolving the Euro Zone in his influential book, which initiated strong controversy (Streeck 2013a; Ders. 2013b, Habermas u. a. in: Blätter 4-9/2013). In response to this, the German Left Party (Die LINKE) battled over its position in the ongoing Euro Crisis. Its vice-chair Sahra Wagenknecht formulated a strong critique on the currency union, which also resulted in claiming to abandon the Euro (Caspari 2014).

The impression of a perplexing congruence takes form on closer inspection. The first claim of the AfD in its election program reads as follows: “We demand an organized dissolution of the Euro-currency-union. Germany does not need the Euro. For other countries the Euro is damaging.” (alternativefuer.de). And Wolfgang Streeck concludes: “Counter to the predictions of its founders, until today the currency-union has been everything but an instrument [Vehikel] towards an ‘ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.’” (Streeck 2013b: 76) Accordances are also to be found in the cure of the *malaise*. In conclusion the AfD, as well as Wolfgang Streeck, suggest dissolving the currency-union to be able to reinstall the price mechanism between single currencies. Just as in the theory of optimum currency-areas by Robert Mundell, the instrument of inflation is pictured to provide an option for balancing asymmetrical effects, i.e. a booming economy in one state of the currency union, while another suffers from high unemployment. Should this

option not be available, it would result in rising numbers of unemployment in those countries that are less “competitive” (Mundell 1961: 664).

This is exactly what is happening in the Euro-zone today, as can be observed in Spain and Greece with catastrophic results such as pauperization, a defluxion of the young, peaking suicide rates and an increase in diseases like HIV, (Fernandez 2013, Tsomou 2013, Die Welt 21.2.2014). According to Streeck the reason for this lies within the construction of the Euro. It is for this reason “that it compels governments of member states [...] on the neoliberal instrument of *internal depreciation*: on increasing productivity and competitiveness by flexibilizing labor markets, lower wages, longer work hours, a higher labor force participation and a welfare state, which is reconstructed towards recommodification.” (Streeck 2013a: 237) Also in the AfD this argument is featured prominently for demanding the dissolution of the currency-union. Hence: “internal depreciation is murderous.” (AfD 7) In accordance with various speeches by party members and in certain interviews it was said that no foreign power could dictate Greece how to disentangle from the crisis, which is why the country has to be allowed to leave the Euro-zone. In regards to this a member of the AfD stated: “the minimum would be that one would not try to keep a country such as Greece in it, whereas we can see that it serves no purpose. This is not in the interest of Greeks nor it is in ours [Germany].” (AfD 6)

### **From Keynesianism and Ordoliberalism...**

But do Streeck and the AfD *really* mean the same? Obviously not. The differences can be illustrated along the schools of economic-theory the agents relied on. Before leading over to the position of the AfD, the argumentative line of Streeck and those economists close to the unions shall be explained.

In the interview Wolfgang Streeck relied on Keynes, who was responsible for the post-war currency-regime employing linked exchange rates with a common

reference value. As is generally known, Keynes argued in favor of a synthetic anchor currency, which he named “Bancor”. The USA made sure that the Dollar occupied this role. Exactly this, as Streeck pointed out, resulted in a drawback for the western currency- and economic-systems. In Europe, it ought to be possible to return to Keynes initial considerations by establishing a super-national anchor currency; which “could be [...] the Euro. Surrounding it would also exist national currencies in those countries needing them, which could be linked with the Euro” (Streeck). Countries not fitting into a hard-currency-regime, could, if other countries agreed, adjust their monetary parity from time to time to their economic competitiveness, as a last resort. There could also exist a European monetary fund, which could help by providing credit. Countries participating in such a regime could keep some fiscal sovereignty. But the regime would be embedded in international regulations and institutional arrangements, as was suggested by Keynes. “The inflation of a currency in a deficit-state implies the sacrifice of export-chances for the strong countries; this could, however, be agreed upon, since it would be much worse, if one of the weaker countries would collapse.” (Streeck)

At this point it becomes clear that a system of mutual insurances and possibilities for intervention in the economies is preferred. It would be possible to intervene into the economy to stabilize it, even if this would jeopardize short-term benefits. In this Streeck is close to an economist sympathizing with the unions – although he was in favor of keeping the Euro: “A country such as Germany would have had to stimulate its domestic demand in order to raise its rate of inflation, whereas countries like Greece, etc., would have had to be more restrictive, for lowering their rate of inflation.” (Union 1). By saying this he opts for a possibility, which is discussed at least as a possible solution for solving an economic crisis in a currency union by Mundell (Mundell 1961: 659). In brief: While both prefer diametrically opposed positions for solving the dilemma of the Euro-zone, they show a similar understanding of politics and economy. The similarity rests in the idea that both realms are closely interlocked. Disequilibria could and should be limited by orchestrated political interventions aiming for general stability in the economic

cycle. Long-term stability ranks over the highest revenue. To put it in other terms, it would be important, “that we do not have a state controlled by the market, but a market controlled by the state.” (Union 2).

However, the anchor for the economic solutions in the ranks of the AfD is markedly different. Here, among the AfD affiliated economists, reigns an entirely different model of the relationship between politics and economics. This model draws on the assumptions of regulatory policy employed by German Ordoliberalism, which the greater part of the interviewed economists affiliated with the AfD follow. The interlocation of politics and economics is replaced by a sharp separation, since both spheres supposedly follow contradicting arguments. “The relationship of economics and politics? From my point of view politics would have the task, the first task, to establish a judicial frame of order for economics [Ordnungsrahmen]. And this has to be done by laws, which can be enforced. And they would have to leave the economy alone. And the economy would have to function according to policies. And it had not to permanently try to circumvent this.” (AfD 5) Even if the separation from Keynesianism cannot completely function to separate AfD-affiliated economists and the other groups, their solutions follow these ordoliberal assumptions quite distinctly. The problem identified by AfD-affiliated economists for this reason lies within the observation that politicians of the Euro-zone impinge on the principles of a self-regulatory economy. The political measures directed to protect the Euro break with the separation of economics and politics and are thus seen as scandalous. “One thing is the no-bailout-clause in Article 125, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, was crassly dismissed. In the following time there were other crass breaches of law and because I am a supporter of the constitutional state [Rechtsstaat] I was very concerned.” (AfD 6)

Crucial in all this is not only that the scenarios for solving the crisis are fundamentally based on market-principles, but that these considerations are given priority over political assumptions on how to deal with these problems. All too generous interventions into the laws of the market are rejected. This corresponds



with the self-definition of a “dismal science” “because in a thousand variations we keep telling the same story, namely that some wishful thinking is simply not practical. This is our role, this is why we are so extremely unpopular as economists.” (AfD 1)

That Southern European states in the Euro-zone suffer from the effects of the Euro thus is interpreted as a result of its poorly structured and consequently uncompetitive economy. Hence the responsibility for the problems, along with the solutions is solely in the hands of these countries. The problem is to be found in the peculiarities of its economic cultures and paths of development of the respective states. “The only Post-Ottoman country that is successful is Turkey [...], because it went through Prussian reform” (AfD 7). The reason for the problems in Italy were, “that the productivity is too small in these countries. In Italy during the past ten to twelve years, the increase in productivity was virtually zero. And the wage increase was 20 to 30 per cent. So every product is too expensive by about 30 per cent and therefore not competitive.” (AfD 4)

What becomes clear in all of these statements, is that Southern European countries ought to employ reforms following the model of Germany’s “Agenda 2010”<sup>4</sup> in order to regain competitive advantages. Instructive in this regard is that ten of the economic initial supporters of AfD signed the “Hamburg Appeal” (Hamburger Appell), a manifesto initiated by Bernd Lucke in 2005. In it the case is made against political interventions into the economic cycle, conversely “drastic and painful reforms” (Funke/Lucke/Straubhaar 2005) are urged. The sociologist of economy, Sebastian Thieme, argues that it is a demand for widespread economic liberation, hence it “aspired to establish a transformation towards a market society.” (Thieme 2013: 62)

The union-affiliated economists and Streeck conversely strive towards a different goal. The latter associates the dissolution of the currency union with the hope “to

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<sup>4</sup> The Agenda 2010 was a bundle of neoliberal reform programs in Germany, which was orchestrated by the Social-Democrat-Green coalition at the beginning of the millennium. Included were a recommodification of social welfare and retirement plans.

enable the remainders of the nation-state provisionally, and to use them in order to decelerate [Entschleunigen] the quickly spreading capitalist land grab.” (Streeck 2013a: 255) Among the affiliates of AfD however it is very clear that their solutions derive from following market rules: From the point of view of Streeck the dissolution of the currency union is a *means* to *limit* market forces. For the AfD however it is a *result* of economic competition.

### **...to Competitive Populism**

These considerations are more than mere attempts at a critique of ideology. The market-logical discussion patterns, which are applied by AfD-affiliated economists, are able to provide the groundwork for right-wing-populist policy. This can be shown in the following remarks of AfD's second top-candidate in the election for European parliament, Hans-Olaf Henkel:

*I did live long enough in France to know about the ambivalent feelings, which are entertained there about the greater neighbor. And I also know the recipes with which it is tried to make this painful difference in size<sup>5</sup> disappear. Part of these effective means is, besides the Euro, the idea of a centralized economical government, which is strong enough to adjust the speed of reform and innovation of Germany's industry to the slower level of French and Southern European velocity. In other words: instead of the weaker catching up with the performance of the stronger, as is done in sports through discipline and ingenuity, ideally regarding the strong as a role model, here the slower is whispering to the faster one if he might lower his pace as inconspicuously as possible in order to make the nasty inequality disappear. (Henkel 2012: 188 pp.)*

In this passage it is remarkable how aptly Henkel connects competitive results with a more general belief of being superior and a self-diagnosed French inferiority complex. Germany is given positive qualities; it is the superior athlete – who is playing by the rules – deriving his competitive advantage through discipline and

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<sup>5</sup> In the German original the word „Größenunterschiede“ plays with the meaning of the word „Größe“, which in English translates as well into „bigness“ as into „greatness“, so that there are multiple meanings to this sentence.

ingenuity by following the laws of economy. In contrast, France cunningly tries to pull out of competition and dodges fair athletic comparison. The rationale of competitiveness thus provide a huge opportunity for contemporary “ideologically flexible” (Häusler 2013: 16) populism of the right middle-class. By relying on the rationale of economic success it becomes feasible to position oneself in identity-populist ways via a “cultural denigration of the ‘other(s)’” (Priester 2012: 6). According to Henkel France *is* inferior and is in no way able to catch up with Germany in a sound manner. Seemingly coherent, this results in Henkel’s claim to divide the Euro-zone into a “hard” North-Euro and a “soft” South-Euro, thereby “also reflecting differences in mentality of the respective countries” (Henkel 2012: 26). This maneuver helps to reframe feelings of economic superiority in essential nationalistic stereotypes.

In addition to this, the adjustment politics to economic patterns has another crucial aspect. What has to follow from this quite logically is a crystal-clear front towards the politicians in charge, who are not able to fully follow an economic rationale (Walter 2013: 313, 323 pp.; Bebnowski 2013a: 156 pp.). From this it is only a small step to another crucial ingredient in the populist agenda: the *identification of a corrupt elite*, which acts to counter to the interests of the people (Priester 2012: 4 pp.) And it is exactly this that happens in the AfD’s case.

So it is said, that, if politics would have just listened to economic experts, the problems would not have developed. In fact many economists had been speaking out in euro-critical “manifestos”, among them, over time, were more and more of the AfD-affiliated economists (Vgl.: Ohr/Schäfer 1992; Vaubel et. al. 1998; Krämer/Sinn 2012). Thus, from their perspective, it really seems justified to accuse politicians of acting irrationally. In the friendliest scenario the politicians simply are framed as being clueless or inept. Accordingly a “complete lack of interest in fundamental questions” (AfD 7) could be observed. “Politicians to a high degree simply are dilettantes.” (AfD 8) Hence the reason for the commitment of a high number of economists in the “Alternative” rests upon, “a greater historic

consciousness of the dangers” (AfD 1) of the situation. In order to solve these problems it is recommended to closely follow economic expertise. “And if politicians would at least use the expert’s opinion unbiased [...], they only use it to reinforce what they want anyway. In other words: The use of professional competence is deficient and this had motivated me additionally to engage here [AfD].” (AfD 8)

Another possibility though is to quickly link considerations about the interests of politicians and dark forces in the background with all this. Accordingly the ESM is now a “permanent institution, because Schäuble wanted to create additional European institutions for erecting a memorial for himself” (AfD 6). This pattern of discourse where politicians create political policies against people’s will on their personal behalf is a common observation.<sup>6</sup> Hans-Olaf Henkel’s reasons about a “French Euro-Mafia” (Henkel 2012: 10), IMF-president Christine Lagarde were to be “Sarkozy’s Trojan horse” (ibid.) in the meticulously planned French scheme “to finally dispose of a ‘hard currency’ like the old Deutsch-Mark was” (ibid.: 9). Whereas in the interviews, arguments about a corrupt deal between France and Germany can be observed, similar chauvinist positions are not to be found. But the division of people from the elites is nevertheless accomplished by relying on the grim interests of politicians. Politicians and pressure groups of all stripes “hunker with another all the time, they have dug their teeth into the imagination that the Euro cannot and must not be dissolved.” (AfD 5) “[T]he Germans, I think, did not fully apprehend the costs of the Euro for themselves. [...] Which is good for politicians, because people only become enraged about something they know about. But as an economist one obviously knows what it is.” (AfD 8)

This last quote clearly illustrates what role ‘the economy’ occupies in the AfD. Economic solutions deliver a possibility to articulate alternative options, which are seemingly free of distorting political ambitions and by themselves are depicted as

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<sup>6</sup> For this it is also interesting that i.e. Joachim Starbatty includes an entire chapter on the politicians responsible in his book “Crime Scene Euro” [Tatort Euro] (Starbatty 2013: S. 50 ff.).

being completely rational and not ideological (Bebnowski 2013b, Ders. 2013a: 156 pp.). In this way the possibility of positioning oneself within an alternative political agenda, against the lofty class of professional politicians in the German and European parliaments, who act counter to the interest of the people, emerges. It is due to this that the AfD appears as the proverbial “Alternative”.

### **The AfD as a German Phenomenon**

Let us return to the starting point of this endeavor: The influence of economists as well as Bernd Luckes top rank in the party can be explained by the possibilities economic patterns of discourse provide for positioning the AfD against their political competitors. By deducing political recommendations from economics the AfD is able to build a straight, solely rational and seemingly ideological-free line against the other parties. All this however implies more than a mere economization of differences. Narrowing it down to one point, the economy is the generator of argument in the AfD, more pointedly *economic rationality is its agenda*. Aside from defining the positive aspects of Europe first and foremost by relying on the “European market” in the interviews this can be shown by reviewing the AfD’s stance on immigration policy. By no means does it follow a straightforward and jingoist trajectory. Alongside the assumption that immigrants from East-European countries pose problems for integration – according to Bernd Lucke they quickly would form a “social residue” – the right for free movement is demanded for people seeking asylum in Germany.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of an economic competition between regions this obviously is not contradictory. This is due to the fact that a competitive advantage can be gained not only by orchestrated immigration of highly qualified professionals, but also by integrating asylum seekers into the workforce, by doing so it could relieve pressure from public finance through lowering welfare costs.

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<sup>7</sup> People granted asylum in Germany are bound to the districts they live in and can only apply for jobs in a radius of a few kilometres.

Thus far the economists are not only coincidental catches for the populist vote but the crucial factor in the AfD. Only they make the surprising alliance (Kemper 2013; Häusler 2013) of jingoist right-wing-populists, affluent upper-middle-classes and the pauperized working-class possible, as can be observed in events by the party as well as in the shift of votes in the elections for German parliament.<sup>8</sup>

Quite crucially the aim to keep the rate of inflation low, which was employed by the former German central bank, is presented as a model by the AfD-affiliated economists. This specific monetary policy provides a link to cling to the affluent upper-middle-classes, which became increasingly alienated by the FDP (Liberal Party) and the CDU (Christian Democrats). “In my understanding those [supporters and members of AfD] are many free entrepreneurs and self-employed workers, who built a private pension plan. Or have to hand down a *Mittelstand* enterprise to the following generation. Or who have to sustainably secure real capital, who want to think in an inter-generational way.” (AfD 2) But due to the social reforms of the Agenda 2010, less well-off citizens also have to privately save money for their retirement plans. A scenario of raising inflation alongside negative interest rates on capital, which could be envisioned due to monetary policy of the ECB, also threatens them. Moreover, since pensions are not automatically protected against inflation they are further threatened. All this does not yet include the danger posed by a possible liability for the protective policy of the ESM, which indeed would gobble up huge sums of German tax money. Furthermore tolerance for such measures is low since policies to save banks in the past couple of years did not lead to noticeable changes in the behavior of the finance industry, but on the contrary resulted in new bonus payments and envisioned new speculative bubbles.

Lastly, economic rationality is the backer of the openly right-wing-populist side in the AfD. Surely there is a way of presenting oneself superior to the other by insisting on the competitive advantage of Germany – just as Henkel did in his aforementioned statement. More generally, the discourse on public debt shaping

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<sup>8</sup> Shift of votes toward AfD: 430.000 of FDP (Liberal party), 340.000 of Die LINKE (Left Party), 290.000 of CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Party/Christian Social Union), 210.000 former non-voters. See: [wahl.tagesschau.de](http://wahl.tagesschau.de) (14.03.2014).

the debate about rescuing the Euro seems like it was outlined for affect-driven usurpation. Obviously indebtedness (*Verschuldung*) is followed by powerful moral associations, which in German language already can be seen in the semantic similarity to the juridical term *guilt* (both debt and guilt are translated into *Schuld*) (See: Graeber 2012). For this reason it is easy to envision Germany not only economically and fiscally but also legally and morally superior to the Southern European states. Increasingly so, since rebuilding social welfare along the lines of the Agenda 2010 in Germany frames it as a role model for other countries. Framed as “Export-world-champion” (*Exportweltmeister*), which secures the Euro’s stability through its bonds, Germany in this account appears almost larger than life. Tactically this was anticipated by the AfD-slogan for the election to European parliament, which says “Mut zu D-EU-tschland” (Courage to/for Germany). Thus the logic of economic competition induces attractiveness for jingoist positions, and economists lay the groundwork for it. Keeping in mind their attempts and measures to exclude openly right-wing party members, as was also stated in the interviews, one is tempted to quote the famous saying by Karl Marx: 'they don't know it, but they are doing it'.

Certainly the AfD is an entirely German phenomenon, which could explain why it seems to be so difficult for their supporters to align with other Euro-sceptic forces in European parliament. A competitive populist party with regards to the Euro *could only* come into existence in Germany. There can be no doubt that only in the hegemonic country of the Euro-zone that is being called “winner of the crisis” (*Krisengewinnler*), surplus-country and “export-world-champion”, is competitive populism able to succeed. By stating this it also is instructive to mention that Germany’s most famous writer of right middle-class grudges, Thilo Sarrazin, is also an economist and a former banker of the German central bank. In his latest book he declares the image of equality between humans as obsolete.

However, as important as it is to point towards the dark side of AfD, one cannot stop here. A simple, disdainful and undifferentiated accusation of the AfD as being

right-wing-populist surely will not do the trick. If we are to take their views seriously, there is no way around stating that left or modest political forces at least helped to open the door for the AfD. Thus a famous quote by Walter Benjamin could be altered to explain AfD's relationship with leftist political agents: 'Every right-wing-populism bears witness of missed chances for the left'.

Well, this seems rather obvious; isn't the AfD right to say that political elites distanced themselves while rescuing the Euro? It is somewhat difficult to explain what exactly lurks behind the acronyms ESM or EFSF. Likewise it is hardly surprising that bailing into the ESM into the billions, raises sorrows in Germany. In spite of Angela Merkel's calming stance on politics, policy at no time is neutral or completely rational but often enough the subject of emotion. Because of this it is surprising that left political agents only reluctantly communicated these sorrows, especially since it had not had to be done as the AfD did it. Moreover since a tactical chance rested on the observation that *material* interests of the affluent upper-classes harboring self-employed enterprises are linked with the lower-middle-classes, which are reliant on private savings due to Agenda 2010.

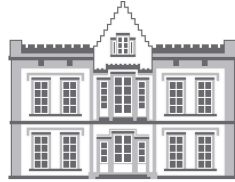
A haughty attitude towards the ugliness of AfD's populism will not at all suffice. Like other populist contenders before, the AfD can also be regarded as an indicator showing that something is indeed wrong between the ruling and ruled (Walter 2012; Priester 2007: 28). And the AfD's flexible competitive populism will be much harder to battle than the countless plump nationalist attempts that came before. This is indeed something to worry about.

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