

Editorial

“A stronghold of right-wing extremism?” – this was the title of a conference organised by the Hannah Arendt Institute in September 2017 which was supposed to place recent developments in the Free State of Saxony into a cross-regional and international comparative context. Moreover, some of the contributions are the result of a research project on “right-wing motivated (hatred-)violence in Saxony” funded by Saxony’s Ministry for Social Issues and Consumer Protection and Saxony’s State Ministry for Equality and Integration. Among others, this explains the project’s narrow topical focus on ways of xenophobe mobilisation while most of all neglecting political parties, electoral behaviour and the intellectual environment of right-wing extremist militancy. A considerably broader range of issues which, according to the topic of the conference, must be discussed is supposed to be covered by a copious volume which will be published in the context of one of the Hannah Arendt Institute’s publication series.

Purposefully, the topic of “xenophobe militancy” is somewhat vague. The concept covers a broad range of ways of behaviour: from non-violent, only verbally aggressive street protest as far as to planned-systematic and politically motivated violence. Both ends of this continuum may have contact to each other without always being intended by non-violent protesters: the Dresden political scientist and Pegida expert *Maik Herold* in his contribution demonstrates on the one hand that, concerning the hostility towards foreigners and Islam they articulate, Pegida followers who were interviewed in the context of surveys in 2015 and 2016 are not so far away from the average figures for overall society as suggested by public media reports on the demonstrations. On the other hand, the latter is a kind of meeting like-minded people in the street, which way widely spread resentments have become socially acceptable, thus contributing to “a brutalisation of the debate”. In his opinion, the strong rise of xenophobia-motivated violence in 2015 is due, among others, to the fact that “the public presentation and articulation of xenophobe and anti-Islam prejudices in the streets and on the squares of the Republic, which were even increased by rabble-rousing speeches, were then indeed understood by some as a call for action”.

Whereas Pegida, due to constant mobilisation in Saxony’s capital, stands out and is the reason for the Free State’s role within this segment of political action, comparative considerations in other fields produce more differentiated findings. At the peak of the “refugee crisis” of 2015/16 the political scientist *Tom Manne-witz* from Chemnitz quantitatively assessed the anti-asylum protests, which not seldom came along with riots, in all of Germany’s eastern federal states and based on both official and civil-society surveys. Concerning Saxony, his findings are twofold: on the one hand, in the Free State in the years 2015/16 there were more demonstrations on the topic of asylum/refugees per one million inhabitants than in any other German federal state – independently of being infiltrated

by right-wing extremists or not. On the other hand, the biggest number of violent right-wing extremist anti-asylum protests per one million inhabitants did not happen in Saxony but in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (2015) and Brandenburg (2016). The biggest number of right-wing extremist protest actions against refugee hostels – again per one million inhabitants – happened in Saxony-Anhalt (2015) and Thuringia (2016). In the latter federal states right-wing extremism also appealed to the biggest groups of the population by help of such events. Thus, although at the peak of the refugee crisis Saxony may indeed have been a stronghold of anti-asylum protest in Germany, as a centre of right-wing extremist agitation it is somewhat less significant than other federal states in East Germany.

Indisputable is one of the findings of Dresden political scientist *Anna-Maria Haase* in her analysis of the “Reichsbürger and Selbstverwalter” scene. Per 100,000 inhabitants, in early 2018 the biggest number of them was found in Saxony, closely followed by Thuringia and Bavaria. The cases she analysed make no claim to being representative but underline the heterogeneity – emphasized by the security services – of this scene when it comes to its relationship to right-wing extremist associations and ideologies. Part of their activists is not at last driven by commercial motivations. However, Haase states, this is no reason to ignore the possibly xenophobe background of criminal offences committed by “Reichsbürgers and Selbstverwalter”. For, she says, a great number of possibly offence-related “information channels” as well as “ideological overlaps between right-wing extremists and “Reichsbürgers/Selbstverwalter” can be identified. Only “a more experienced recording practice by the security services” over a longer period will show how borderline cases in the grey area between right-wing extremism and the “Reichsbürger and Selbstverwalter” scene should be dealt with in the future.

The contribution by Dresden political scientist *Sebastian Gräfe* is dedicated to the militant, NS-prone scene. He compares violent groups in Saxony to those in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). Between these two federal states there is a quantitative gap: in Saxony in 2016, compared to the population number the “neo-National Socialist scene” was “four times as big as in NRW”. A qualitative consideration, on the other hand, produced a number of common grounds: in both federal states several formations were subject to bans, among them “Nationale Sozialisten Chemnitz”, “Nationale Sozialisten Döbeln”, “Nationaler Widerstand Dortmund” and “Kameradschaft Hamm”. All these groups had in common that they were racist, nationalist, striving for an authoritarian Führer-state, rejecting the liberal-democratic constitution, anti-capitalist, that they were glorifying National Socialism and anti-Semitism. Also typical was their action-oriented appearance, by way of which they delimit themselves from the sub-culture on the one hand and from political party-organised right-wing extremism on the other. Spontaneous demonstrations and campaign-like actions under changing names (such as “Volkstod”) are supposed to make state intervention more difficult. In NRW, neo-National Socialists appear locally more violent than in Saxony, which suggests a stronger delimitation from non-militant forces. In both federal

states the bans made the scene change: neo-National Socialists made alliances with right-wing extremist parties. In NRW almost all of the concerned activists joined the party “Die Rechte”. Most of the neo-National Socialists in Saxony, on the other hand, joined the NPD youth organisation, and some of them joined the party “Der Dritte Weg”. This way they succeeded with being protected by the party privilege. In both federal states, in the course of the debate on refugees NS-prone groups succeeded with connecting to protests by broader circles of the population.

The contribution by Dresden political scientist *Maximilian Kreter* is dedicated to an important medium of xenophobe militancy: “Rechtsrock” – right-wing extremist rock music. After giving an overview of this scene in Germany in general and Saxony in particular he comes to the following conclusion: concerning “these bands, with 15 per cent on average (since 2001)” the Free State makes “a considerable share of the overall-German volume” and by some active bands contributes “considerably to the modernisation and diversification of the scene”, even if “stars of the scene” not seldom come from the West. Then, by way of a comparison of two bands, “Blitzkrieg” from Chemnitz and “Heiliger Krieg”, located in Saxony since 2014, he analyses the contents: Whereas “Blitzkrieg” presents “classical right-wing extremist rock music”, “Heiliger Krieg” appears as the “vanguard of the scene”. In terms of politics and music, however, both bands represent the same (sub-cultural) movement and appear as the mouthpieces of “xenophobe militancy” both in Saxony and in Germany as a whole.

Uwe Backes

