



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

The rise in popularity of the German far-right - self-delusion ahead of a significant election year

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party conference held in Magdeburg in the east of the country took place on the wings of research showing the growth of this ultra-right party.

The summit of right-wing populists, however, left a gap regarding the answer to what the AfD's policy would really be if it were lucky enough to be in a position to participate in decision-making in some future elections.

The primary task of the AfD's national conference, attended by around 600 delegates from across Germany, was to select candidates for the European Parliament elections, which will be held in the spring of next year.

The election of Maximilian Krah (46) as the leading candidate (Spitzenkandidat) indicates that he is popular among the broad membership, despite his weaker position in the party leadership.

The victory of populists within the populist party

The success of this controversial member of the European Parliament, as the future holder of the AfD candidates list, is a small victory for populists within the populist movement.

Given this, it would be reasonable to assume that the AfD will demonstrate its most extreme side during the upcoming European elections, but it does not seem this will be the case.

This summer's polls alarmed the German and European public, as they showed an extraordinary growth in the AfD's popularity, which ranges between 20 and 23%, twice as much as in the last parliamentary elections when it won 10.3%.

Ultra-right, anti-migrant and anti-EU activists from the AfD have grown on the wave of favourable government policies towards the influx of migrants, particularly during pandemic crisis periods, and social discontent due to rising prices and inflation since the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

According to research, AfD has become the second political force in Germany, behind the conservative bloc led by the opposition CDU.

Great expectations without much foundation

The expectations within the AfD that the elections for the European Parliament would be fruitful have been based on a wave of increased ambitions, so in the election procedure at the party congress in Magdeburg, it was projected to win more than 20 seats in the EP.

That would be twice as many as the current 11 MEPs. But this calculation could prove to be correct only if the survey results on the significant increase in the popularity of the AfD were an unquestionable fact.

This has already been done by the optimistic delegates at the Magdeburg congress, but things are not going so well for them.

Among the surveyed Germans who supported the right-wing AfD, there is a large number of those who are unlikely to repeat that support in the European Parliament vote.

According to Wolfgang Merkel, the German political scientist, such are at least half of the total pool of percentages that the AfD receives in surveys. We are talking about protest voters, who probably will not repeat the lightly given statement to public opinion pollsters in

the elections.

Tino Chrupalla, AfD co-leader, warned about this in Magdeburg and said that "they must observe the research results "with humility".

Self-isolation of the AfD

The election of the first candidate, Mr Krah, may in itself be the reason for the decline of cohesion within the AfD and thus the support in the upcoming European elections, particularly the elections in the three eastern German states of Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia, in a year.

The European Parliament is investigating Krah for embezzlement with European funds, and his views and the political background of a distinctly anti-EU politician do not assure that the AfD could have allies at the EU level for its radical policies.

After all, former allies from EU countries, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party, for example, announced that it "has been sacrificing relations with the AfD for the sake of good interstate relations".

Matteo Salvini's Italian right-wing, who, instead of the AfD, have been searching for more moderate partners at the level of the Union, acted similarly.

The AfD is rapidly transforming from a typical, anti-EU populist party into a movement where political ideas are dominated by conspiracy theories, such as the one about the "Great Replacement", according to which the political establishment deliberately opens the doors of Europe to non-white migrants to suppress the white race.

Confusion has been growing within the AfD about the main directions of the policy, primarily about the EU, at the same time as radicalisation.

Confusion regarding the EU

The final document of the Magdeburg Congress excluded the previous formulation that the EU should disintegrate and offered a new, milder one, which advocates for a federation of European nations, a community of interests that "preserves the sovereignty of member states".

Confusion also dominated the procedure for electing candidates for MEPs because that step was taken before the AfD Congress adopted its policy programme towards the EU, so potential MEPs did not know at the time of the election what kind of policy they would represent in Brussels if they were elected.

The economic consolidation of Germany after the last crisis year is not favourable for AfD's prospects in the future elections for the European Parliament, particularly in the three provinces in the east, where this party has more support than the rest of the country.

The energy supply has stabilised, so due to the efficient replacement of Russian suppliers and full gas reserves, the economy and the population will not have to worry during the coming winter.

AfD's opposition to support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia remain isolated. Germany has become one of the leaders of a broad coalition of supporters of Ukraine with a large allocation of money and contingents of weapons to Kyiv after the initial indecision.

Even though the rise in popularity of Germany's ultra-right has shocked many, both at home and in Europe, the AfD's latest decisions suggest that the party has already been spending capital it has not yet acquired. It has created internal confusion and

confrontations, where the radical populist current is dominant, with which no one in Germany, apart from a few significant advocates in Europe, wants to cooperate.