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QI Panel:

The German Elections and the Future of Europe

February 27th, 2025

12:00 - 1:00 PM ET

Anatol Lieven 0:38

Hello. Welcome everybody. I am Anatol Lieven, director of the erasure program here at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. The Quincy Institute, as I'm sure many of you know, but some of you perhaps do not, is a rather new institute in Washington, DC, five years old now, which advocates for restraint and in us, foreign and security policy opposes interventionism, especially military interventionism and adventurism, and argues for when possible, it isn't always peace and cooperation in international affairs. Before introducing today's panel, just wanted to flag a webinar in a week's time, but at 10am EST on trumponomics and their implications for America's place in the world today. By the way, if you have questions, please put them in the Q and A at the you see the button at the bottom of your screen, and I will pass on as many of them as I can in the time to the to the members of the panel.

So today, it's a great pleasure to introduce a highly distinguished panel on something rather important that happened this week, as you may have heard, which is the German Federal elections, leading to the well forthcoming creation of a new German coalition government, and the implications of this for Germany, for Europe and for German and European relations with the United States and US policy to discuss this. There is Wolfgang Streeck, he is Director Emeritus of the Max Planck Institute, a member of the British Academy and of the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, and one of the leading thinkers and writers not just in Europe but in the world today, on contemporary political economics and especially the consequences of globalism. His books include Critical Encounters: Capitalism, Democracy, Ideas, and his most recent book is Taking Back Control? States and State Systems After Globalism, which came out in November. Molly O'Neal is a long standing retired now a member of the US Foreign Service and a non resident fellow here at the Quincy Institute and an expert in US foreign policy and the affairs of Europe. And Thomas Fassbender is a German journalist who was for many years, partly overlapping with me, a German correspondent in Moscow. He is now the chief of geopolitics at the Berlin and Zeitung. He is the author of several books, including a biography of Vladimir Putin and his latest book, so far only in German. Unfortunately, the Eurasia complex, why and how the future slipped away from the West, was published this month. Congratulations, Thomas.

So well to begin on the whole, the most of the election results conformed pretty closely to the opinion polls with as they had been coming out in the previous weeks, there was one major exception, which was which surprised people, which was how well the Left Party, Die Linke did. And so I'd like to begin by asking you, Wolfgang, how do you see the reasons for this? Why did

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they? Did they do so well compared to expectations? And what do you think this says about attitudes, especially among German youth, because they got a very, very high youth vote, and the future of German politics.

Wolfgang Streeck 5:13

Can you hear me now? Yes, yeah, thank you for having me now, voting of young people. And that was basically young people vote is highly unpredictable because you do not have a tradition for the individual to vote for a particular party. So it's very volatile. Just if you look three and a half years ago at the last federal election, then the marvel of for for the commentators, was that about 25% of the young voters voted for the greens, and 25% voted for of all 10 of all parties. For the for the liberals, for the for the FDP, yeah, now liberals in FDP are completely out of range for young voters. They they've just abandoned them. This new generation of young voters votes for two different outsider parties. One is dealing 25% among voters between 18 and 24 vote for the links, but I but at the same time, 21% of the same group vote for AfD. Yeah, it's, it's against us, somewhat symmetrical to the green FDP polarization that we observed last time. Now, if you, if you look at this age cohort, now, you have to look at the 25 to 34 years. Group, that group, the AfD, is still is stronger than it was in the 18 to 24 year, namely 23% whereas left voters were almost sort of disappear, or very, very, very much cut down, like 15. So what I want to say is, do not attribute too much, too much important to to this event. It is not like earlier elections.

Studies in the United States show that the first that when you vote for the first time, a habit is fixed that this generation will carry through the end of their lives. So that in the if in the 1930s you voted for Roosevelt, you would vote for the Democrats until you die in the 1980s Yeah, that is no longer that is no longer the case. There's too much, too much volatility in the thing. So I would, I would, as far as the vote goes, I would not attribute too much importance to this. What I, however, think is it does make a difference is that they now have a parliamentary group of about 10% of the seats and in Parliament, which gives them a blocking vote on all decisions that require a two thirds majority and And like always, if you move on from the raw material of votes to the consequences for the practical everyday life in Parliament. And then you look at this for so multi party system like in Germany, you see that even a very narrow margin among the electorate can have important political consequences at the level of of practical quality. In this case we will probably talk about this also is the 17,000 votes that were missing for BSW to also join the Parliament, which would have meant that you would have needed a three party coalition, rather than a two party coalition, to form a government, which would be an entire different game to what we are seeing now, yeah.

Anatol Lieven 9:06

Thomas, it's widely been seen as a heavily anti establishment vote, especially among the youth. Is this something that you you agree with, and do you see this continuing in German politics, and of course, when it comes to AfD, but also perhaps Die Linke is Germany following in the path of France that the center is irreversibly, if gradually shrink. And of course, from point of

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view of AfD, how long do you think the brand Mala, the firewall against them can be maintained?

Thomas Fasbender 9:52

Well, to start with, the one comforting result for me was the fact that voters allowed. Germany, her Governability for the next coming years, I wouldn't say the next necessary, not necessarily the next four years, but at least the coming years, maybe one, maybe two, by a two party coalition. This is related to the fact that the BSW actually, as you said, marginally, was voted out of Parliament. They try to get into parliament. But I don't think that their chances, their legal chances, are really very high. So we have, on the one side, we have a Governability. Thank God, it needs to be said. On the other side, we have a clear polarization across the political spectrum, across the age cohorts. It expresses itself less or differently in different age cohorts. But what we have is, roughly speaking, we have 20% very establishment critical people on the right, and we have about 20% let, let's say slightly less government critic people on the left, but definitely anti right people on the left. So you have 20% anti left people on the right, and you have 20% anti right people on the left, which was accelerated by the Kampf gegen the fight against the right demonstrations over the previous weeks, the three or four weeks immediately prior to the elections, which made it clear that we have a part of part of the population, 20% who will stick to the right wing views.

And we have a part of the population 20% about 20% which and I take left and greens in to altogether which definitely will defend left wing positions in between 60% about, well, somewhere about 60% those, those parties who call themselves Democrats, it is larger in fact, because the Green Party can be legit, legitimately be called democratic, absolutely, but it still represents, it's at the same time a leftist and a Democratic Party here, if we assume that the AfD is not 100% a Democratic Party, you just give them this, this, say, widely distributed judgment about the party, I would not necessarily share it. But we have this polarization, and now the big task ahead is for the governing parties, the governing coalition, to recreate a sort of consensus, to revitalize a consensus around the center somewhere the center left, the center right, but somewhere around the census on which the country can build, can can build a political future. Because, as you said, the danger is that if, if now the in future governing coalition will not manage to satisfy or to alleviate the the dissatisfaction to p to appease the the unrest among among parts of the population, with respect to migration, to with respect to integration of foreigners, with respect to security, then we may face a very dangerous also dangerous for our democratic future ahead.

Anatol Lieven 13:28

Molly, what do you think are the implications of this for Germany's external policy and relations with the United States, and how do you think these election results and this new coalition will be viewed by the Trump administration.

Molly O'Neal 13:43

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Well, I all I can say is that today, Trump has announced 25% tariffs on EU good. So I think that's not a good indication that a rapport is in in the prospect, I agree with everything that's been said already about the outcome. I'd like to just throw a couple of other ideas in. I agree that. I think the American establishment on Foreign Affairs is definitely aware, and you saw that Constanza Stelson Mueller article in the Financial Times, I guess saying that, making clear, and I think this is shared across the board, among people who have been strongly transatlanticist in the States, is that this is a tremendous importance, that this coalition actually is formed, and that it's restores some kind of, you know, reverses the decline of these, all of these mainstream parties, because, you know, I think this is like a near death experience for the SPD. I mean, as we've all seen, it's the lowest vote for them since 1887.

And if you look at the potential in the future for such a coalition to be formed, you know, so called grand coalition, the only way it was formed this time is because of the fluke of BSW falling below the 5% threshold. So I I'm afraid you may be looking into the nearest future at something that looks more like Austrian politics, where there's really two big parties, both of which are on the right. One really strongly on the right, maybe analogous to AFD, and the other one also on the right. And so if that happens, really, that just shows, I think if that, if that's a, you know, something that could happen, or might, you know, has some kind of a serious probability of happening, I think it really does revolutionize, you know, the whole transatlantic relationship, just as, for example, when or if Le Pen's party comes to she wins the presidency. Both of these things are really important and consequential for the United States as well.

But currently, I think the mindset of the Trump administration is very much more on the notion that it's possibly a salutary shock if the Europeans will decide to shoulder responsibility for their own defense, at least their conventional defense. And so that does seem to be an impact which is visible, but what an palpable with Mertz merits his remarks about finding independence from the United States. I thought that was really a watershed that any transatlanticist politician would have said that, and I understand why he said it. But what I'm afraid of is that this kind of self assertion of the European Union, or Europe as a whole, European NATO membership, let's say, or the European Union, or both. This kind of assertion is is very much dogged by these problems of collective action. It's not clear who is the leader. I mean, Macron would like to set the agenda. Now, I believe Maris will try to set the agenda, and he'll try to also form, restore that tandem with France, and maybe also work closely with the Commission, although I'd like the German opinion of both of you experts about whether the merits von der Leyen tandem is really very likely. I gather there's a lot of differences among them.

And coming back to the migration issue, if I had to explain, the BSW is falling short relative to this rise of Die Linke, which is no one really. It was in the polls, by the way, it was in all the latest polls that they were going to cross the threshold. The reason, though, for their bounce, I would impute this to their stance they took on the when merits made that resolution about migration. Back in January, Die Linke took a principal stand of a man, and they were out on all of the demonstrations. Sahra Wagenknecht had a nuanced and to some extent, I think it turned out to be not a not a very it turned out to be not an effective stance that she took was that we need we BSW, we need to understand the public is very concerned about this migration issue, and we

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need to find a some kind of a accommodation for that public opinion. It turned out that was a smarter stanza that wasn't a smart stance. The Die Linke tactically was, I don't know it was tactically or because their principles are their principles, but they stood much more unambiguously for shutting out the AfD and for keeping Germany open, no fortress, no no discrimination. And among young people, I believe that is something that they care about, or at least those that went to Die Linke.

Anatol Lieven 19:05

Thank you. Yes, but Wolfgang, I mean, the problem there is, of course, I mean, if migration becomes, is becoming, you know, one of the critical issues, and if, in fact, left and right are totally divided on this subject. I mean, how in the long run, can Germany be governed? I mean, how can you have any sort of coherent national policy?

Wolfgang Streeck 19:35

You won't, you won't have it. That's the answer. And let me say that if you go back to the BSW fatality and this, in this election, they tried, and I can testify to that they try to define a position that would combine. Uh, openness to immigration with, uh, limitations to immigration, uh, understanding that there are a lot of people in the German society who are not afraid of the the Turkish grocer. The Turkish grocer is a fantastic enrichment for our for our society, but they are afraid of the idea of unlimited immigrant Now that raises a very complicated problem of constitutional rights, of international agreements and all of this, of the law at the border, all of this. The BSW didn't have enough time to discuss this because, because it's a young party, it is. It had to fight an election that was half a year earlier than the original election. They had to build up 16 federal state organizations. So then they got into a trap.

And the trap was that, as Molly mentioned, the discussion on immigration shortly before the election was one where the majority, which have no no agreement among themselves as to what to do, was able to pretend that they were together fighting the new Nazi the new Nazism, the new 1933 sort of in the in the form of the of the AfD and and that increase that they had very interesting concept this year, election turnout was seven percentage points above the 2021, election, which is, as you know, elected society, which is quite, quite an amount. We have an 84 or 83% election turnout and the young people that came in, sort of what they heard in in the news and everywhere, was that there are people, bad people, who want to send their pals down to Turkey or Afghanistan with whom They had perfectly excellent relations, and then they wanted to defend them very, sort of morally very, very applaudable, but for electorally sort of disaster for a party that knows that without some sort of accommodation between the desire for a limitation on immigration, on the one hand and the necessary openness of that society on the other hand, that without such a thing, this issue is ungovernment.

And if you remember what Germans, German parties of the center did in the past was they sort of rhetorically delegated that issue to the European Union, knowing that the European Union is absolutely unable to deal with it, because in the European Union regime of Dublin, the idea is

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that countries where These immigrants come in for the first time, are responsible for them, and then they get distributed, although they all want to go to Germany. So the idea is that Italy, France, Greece, or whoever sort of do the job for the Germans, while the Germans are celebrating themselves to have open borders and be a society without border that could never work and could never work.

So so I put this on the list of issues of which I expect that this new government, Governability. Thomas mentioned that that this new government will be unable, will be unable, to solve a series of extremely tricky problems that, if I may say that, and then finish this longish, longish lecture, the most of these problems have accumulated over a decade in in the wonderful years of Angela Martin, when we basically sort of consumed the heritage of the earlier sort of prosperous West German, West German society. And then we slowly, slowly, slowly ate away at it and let it decay. Let it decay. And then now we come to an election where at a record low. We see the confidence of the electorate in the political parties the state and the and the official media. You never had in in the in the voting, in the in the polls, a lower score in the in the sense of, who do I trust? Who do I trust? They they don't trust, trust them anymore, on this capital around the government, I congratulate them for the job.

Anatol Lieven 25:08

Well, I mean on that score, Thomas, is this a grand coalition, or is this a permanent coalition? Words, if the determination still is to keep AFD out, and if it is impossible to create a left wing coalition with a majority, does that mean that, in fact, Thomas that that forever until they can't do it anymore. It will be a coalition between the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and the greens, if the CDU and and SPD can't, you know, can't get a majority together. What do you think?

Thomas Fasbender 25:54

I'm not told there's nothing forever, never in life. That's That's the good thing. Look to Austria today an interesting aspect. They formed. They formed a three party coalition with a strong emphasis on a harsh migrant migration policy. They formed this coalition with two purposes, first of all, to keep the to keep the FPÖ, the Austrian, the Austrian AFD, to put it simply, out of government, and the second to pacify their voters, to make sure that the other that the non populist parties show that they can deal with migration and integration Whatever it takes. It's a very interesting template, actually, that that will certainly be read very tentatively by the Social Democrats and the CDU in Germany when starting their coalition the negotiations, we have to see how it works out. The the the test of times will be, can the can the established parties manage the issues of migration, of integration, of economic recovery, justice, etc, and that is, it's up to a test. We, I wouldn't say, lost, but we spent 16 years under Angel America by keeping keeping up the hope that all will be fine without migration. With migration, we keep open borders, we keep our ideals high. And the way it worked out, it worked out, yeah, we're having a heap of problems. Populists on the left and on the right are rising.

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And let me add one thing, one aspect on the BSW, the big the problem for one of the reasons for the BSW was they ran high on the peace ticket, because, against the backdrop of NATO, Western governments supporting, not a full out, but basically an open end support of Ukrainian of the Ukrainian defense war of the Ukrainian military target to recover their occupied lands, etc. That was that that motivated part of their fellowship, part of the electorate, to give them high marks. Then came Trump, and since Trump election, we have among the German electorate, a large part of the German electorate, a sort of firm conviction that, well now Trump will manage peace. Yeah. So the the eternal war danger is is by far not seen as seriously, as as as dangerously than it used to be five months ago. So before four months ago, three months ago, before the November elections, that contributed, for a good part to the failure of the BSW. And then the second problem here is not only the German government.

All the European governments, they find themselves now between a rock and a hard place, because migration, all migration issues are considered national issues. Honestly, nobody in Germany really gives gives a long thought to what the Spain Spaniards and the Portuguese and even the French have to deal with when, when, when it comes about migration. The thing is, how do we manage our borders, our German borders, and the Austrians think like think alike, and the Hungarians think alike. Everybody, on the other hand, everybody understands that for European future in the world, in a multi, multipolar world, there is no national way. Yeah, Germany, Austria, Spain, as nations as 100 years ago, it's absolutely not even a point to discuss. It's useless. So governments will be torn, and I don't see a way out here. Governance be torn more and more between two completely different approaches, approaches as claimed by the by their by their electorate, deal with migration on a national level, deal with. The status of Europe and the power of Europe and its influence on a European level. And I must say, I do not see a way out here.

Anatol Lieven 30:11

No indeed. I mean Molly, if you were to take European leaders seriously, possibly, in some cases a mistake. If you were to listen to what some of what Friedrich Metz has been saying about the Ukraine war and and European independence, one might think that there would be an attempt by this coalition and by other European leaders actually, to try to wreck the Trump led peace process in Ukraine, and even although they say this and then immediately backtrack on it, Starmer in Washington today, I mean, even try to go on supporting Ukraine without the US. How serious do you think is the German and European split with Washington or with this administration in Washington over Ukraine?

Molly O'Neal 31:06

You know, I think this issue of Europe as a as an actor, an autonomous actor, in a multi polar order, is something that is serious. In other words, that there's a, I think that's one of the two responses to Trump's gambit on, you know, opening those negotiations with Russia is to doubt the American commitment to Article Five and and therefore, to look at possibilities of building the capabilities, defense capabilities of Europe, but I don't agree that it will be done at a

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European level. I would like to see that, but I don't see neither Germany nor France or anybody else. Certainly, Britain is not even in the EU and they're an important player. So I do see it having requiring some collective action and agreement accord to be reached among Europeans, and that is why member states not the commission or not the council. So that's why Macron held his meetings. Just you know, immediately after the talks had happened in Riyadh, and then Macron and now Starmer are trying to persuade Trump to leave them at least some space to be involved in a peace initiative and to protect some sort of core requirement for the sovereignty of Ukraine. So I think that's the gambit that we're going to see the Europeans individually take.

But now there's a range of opinion in Europe, which is, I don't really see how they coalesce around a plan that would actually have potential to weigh, would have weight with Americans. And I also see the Trump administration, to some extent. I mean, it seems obvious to me the Trump administration would like to relegate the EU to the margins of any any discussion. And you saw, for example, that Secretary of State, Rubio canceled a meeting that he had agreed to with Kyle Kelleys, who's coming to the States, I think, in the next days. So I just, and it's the only reference I ever hear the Trump administration make to Europe. European Union is on the trade front, and there is very hostile I don't think they've come, I don't know if they've even come to understand that there has been a political project of Europe, and that that is a real and maybe they do understand it, but they've decided that the United States is advantages better served by these bilateral arrangements. So so I am so what I agree that the Europe, this whole Ukraine thing, is the the overtures made by the United States have really produced a world of changing, kind of a systemic, kind of challenge for the Europeans.

So I don't know, and I don't I'm doubtful that there, there's going to be a meaningful role for Europe in the end, in the in sort of trying to, trying to at least decelerate or have some kind of influence upon the process. I think that's what they're trying to do. I don't really think they could imagine that they're going to be able to thwart the entire process, plan that Trump has. On the other hand, they may be relying on President Trump to be not very constant in keeping up his objectives. You know, he does seem to be, for example, I don't think anybody was expecting that there would be the signature of these, this agreement by Zelensky on this, on this mining of strategic minerals. I don't know if that really adds up to anything, but someone in Europe may be thinking. At least some of the players in Europe may be thinking that this produces more leverage on Trump to stay in the conflict. So have I answered any of your questions?

Anatol Lieven 35:10

Insofar as one can, of course

Wolfgang Streeck 35:15

Yeah, I think, I think I fully agree with Molly on, on her on her assessment of the future of the European Union in this in this game right now, being sort of shocked by what happened in Washington, the traditional governments, or the governments in Europe, or the mainstream of

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European international politics, they are really trying to convince themselves and their citizens that this requires a sort of pseudo NATO response to Russia by rearmament all over the place, and then sort of integration of Europe under a joint command. I mean, everyone who thinks about this twice knows that a joint command of France and Germany over European army is just a total no go. This is absolutely impossible. Yeah, we know this, but, but then then we are now hearing that we have to arm heavily in order to push back attack that our defense minister in Germany schedules for five years from now. How does he know this? And how does he know the and what is even worse, if you look at the statistics from the CYPRI in in Stockholm, then the major European nations right now, even after three years of war and after a sort of spectacular increase in the in the Russian war economy, we are now spending four and a half times as much as Russia on defense, on so called defense. Now we are going to double this, and according to our defense minister, it's going to be eight times as much as Russia, maybe seven times in five years.

How in the world can it be realistic that Putin, or whoever follows him, would decide sort of to march into Berlin for the second time since 1945 to do whatever he wants to do there? Nobody knows, doing trade with Germany is absolutely more better for Russia than conquering it, then that seems to be completely clear, but it shows you, it shows you how inept the European strategic geopolitical discourse is when it comes to coping with New this new situation, why not think about a new organization for the European state system that allows the major nation to sort of work in a Eurasian, Eurasian context, work out relations with Russia and the states around Russia in a sort of new OEC arrangement, where you have all sorts of sort of established confidence, building measures, mutual supervision, all of these things as an alternative, both to dependence on the United States and to the sort of completely mad idea that the European Union could become a second United States, sort of armed to the teeth and threatening Russia, of all places whose trade they absolutely need in order to remain prosperous nation.

I just think that that the the situation, and and then let me say, if you see someone like like Macron, who has basically played all his cards domestically and lost, lost every game. Now he thinks that by calling people to the to the Elysee, he can sort of present to the rest of the world, the big new European unifier after Napoleon and and what you what you see is he goes to Washington yesterday and and I saw this press conference and this meeting that they had as a Trump playing, playing a very crucial, a very cruel game, yeah, very cruel and humiliating him in front of the press, by by, by saying all these stupid things. And Macron had to jump up to jump up and and pretend that he believes this, yet he was grateful.

Anatol Lieven 40:02

Yeah, but it's just the same with Starmer. You know, Starmer has played all his cards already, basically, and he hasn't, you know, he hasn't even been in power for a year yet, and I think he's trying to distract attention also by pretending to play this great role on the world stage. I mean, we look forward to what Trump will do to him today in Washington. Suppose it will be very nice. I mean, it's funny, because, of course, we're all, all of us old enough. Oh, dear, we're all so old.

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Most people aren't. But to remember Gorbachev, and you know his vision of a common European home and the Gorby Mania with which this was received. So, I mean, Thomas, does anyone remember Gorbachev in Germany now? Does anyone, I mean, be on this panel, you know, retain this sort of vision for Europe, and Germany and Europe.

Thomas Fasbender 41:03

I'd rather say hardly, because there are quite a few people who even accuse themselves of having fallen into the trap of Gorby, of the Gobi mania in Those days, having believed that Russians can be trustful and and not deceiving and now pretending to have learned the truth again. The big danger is we're all falling, not those here in this group, but we in Germany, at least, most people, my colleagues, politicians as well, they fall into the trap of this old saying of the generals, who always plan the next war based on the elections lectures of the previous ones. So the previous wars, you can take a mix of the war before 1945 plus the Cold War, and there you have there's only one antagonist from a from a German, from a Western European point of view, which is Soviet Union slash Russia, and that's why we try to always put put Putin in the mold of an old Soviet politician who only wants to recreate the Soviet Union.

So sometimes I get the impression that my contemporaries in my profession, they they're glad about the return of the good old times, the good old days when you knew who the enemy was. And these people are very sure who their enemies. They will buy 1000s of tanks, probably to defend against the future invasion. And I'm always mocking I ask, Well, are you sure the Russians will as the last time stop at the elder. Will it not be the Rhine? Will it not be the channel? Maybe they want to conquer the British islands. And it's really necessary to joke about this. It's necessary to be sarcastic because, because otherwise you don't have a chance to break up without sarcasm. You have don't have a chance to break up these prejudices about the necessarily evil Russia which has shown its evil since, since, oh, before Peter the Great Of course. As long as we don't get out of it, as long as we see Western Europe in this traditional antagonism towards towards despotic Russia, we will not manage anything at the same time.

And now it becomes interesting at the same time, Trump has understood, as I understand, I was at the CPAC Conference in Washington last week, as I understand the whole, the whole the whole project is this is no American isolationism. This goes far beyond. This goes into a revitalization of a European Judeo-Christian, European based civilization. Yeah, he this has much more. Sounds much more like hunting than the clash of civilizations. And so what JD Vance says, what Trump says, what even, what even Elon Musk says and others and I interpret the policies of the new US administration in large as grass, as reaching out to realign Russia. We because Russia is sort of part of our civilization, to realign Russia with this large Western position, and now the poor Europeans with their petty principles of rule based world order, they get in between and become America, of course, which they don't familiar, but they become a nuisance, sort of. And they far from understanding that they have become a nuisance, but they help us in their own position. So I'm, of course, exaggerating a bit, but I see the poor Europeans getting into a poorer and poorer position, and the the Trump logic, just winning, winning the table.

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Anatol Lieven 44:54

Yes, I mean, one thing that does, I must say, deeply irritate me about some of the Europeans. You. Because they always, you know, like to pride themselves on this that, oh, you know, we have a sense of history is when you get people like Pierre Saron in France talking about Russia as our ancient enemy. Of course, I imagine what he was thinking about was the Battle of Leipzig. The only problem was the Russians were indeed on the opposite side from France. But then, of course, so were the Prussians and the Austrians and the British and the Swedes. Although, from his point of view, it must be said that at least the Saxons were on the right side of the lightning. No. I mean, it's enough to really, oh, Lord, yes. Where was I? But Molly? I mean, from that point of view, I sometimes get the impression because what you know, Vance's remarks at Munich, which caused this in a dreadful flurry, and was universally portrayed as, you know, Vance, Vance against Europe. But actually, what he was doing was quite different. He was, you know, I think really setting himself up, not so much the Trump administration, as the leader precisely of a conservative International. You know this, you know, he, of course, is a convert to Catholicism. And like many converts, he's literally become more Catholic than the Pope.

Um, and he, I mean, he, I think see exactly sees this new vision. Uh, indeed, perhaps including Russia, of America and Europe are coming and coming together along completely new ideological lines. Do you think this has, do you think this is going to play an important part in the future of U.S. conservative thinking?

Molly O'Neal 46:56

Well, um, certainly that that outlook is shared by uh, both uh, Vance and I think is even more exaggerated in the case of Steve Bannon, who I know was also at the CPAC conference. So yes, I think these people, it is very much coming out of that Huntington book. You know that there's a natural affinity and a civilizational divide between the Christian Well, you might say Judeo Christian world. And, and even Bannon does use that term, even though, to be honest, I wonder, anyway, yeah. So what I think is the case, you know, is, I mean, it's pretty obvious that in the AfD, for example, like all of these populist right parties, is one of the features of their program is rapprochement with Russia, you know, and it wasn't much attention wasn't paid to it in this particular election. Or at least, I didn't get that sense.

The only party that tried to run on that really was BSW, which is for reasons Thomas said, Didn't turn out to be that salient of an issue, because Trump's overtures to Russia. So but, but you have that in Romania, of course. You have it in Austria, of course. And you have it even in Britain, with the Farage party. There are all of these are in the same, in the same vein. So it is a sort of a conservative, religious, sort of a frame or kiss in it, or international, like certainly Hungary has a or bond shares the same, the same, the same position. So because of the slow, you know, the seeming momentum of these populist right parties in Europe and their that shared value system that is, you know, that makes them tend to admire Russia, for example. I do think that this, I mean, I the only other type of conservatism we have, which is our traditional one in

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America is based upon small government and liberties, which, of course, Vance did nod to that. But interestingly enough, he used that to bludgeon Europeans. So that was kind of interesting.

But anyway, yes, I think it does seem to be the leading trend in conservatism in the United States now, and because Vance is young and he's able, and we'll have to see, but there is a possibility that he will be continuing on in this same vein and in the in the next election.

Anatol Lieven 49:32

Some questions from the floor that the first of which I'll since answer myself, I think, which, which is Given the disastrous results of the previous grand coalition for the SPD. Why are they so keen to join the CDU again? Are they masochists? Well, I think the answer to that, which we would all give, is that unless the CDU is going to form a coalition with AFD, Germany simply cannot be governed otherwise. You know, that's the only possible government that can be a. Another question for Thomas or Wolfgang, but I think, really, for all of us everywhere, who may, once upon a time, have you know, belonged to the liberal consensus. But is there, is there any sense in the German establishment? I mean the wider establishment, including the intern, the intellectual and cultural establishment, that they have made mistakes, that they have made serious mistakes over the past generation or so, or in fact, is the overwhelming mood simply to double down?

Thomas Fasbender 50:38

Wolfgang. You know the German establishment much better than I do.

Wolfgang Streeck 50:43

Yeah, and I think they don't think like that. That would require a sense of historical thinking. I think that was last present in the German government under Helmut Kohl, who used to think about the longer term history of Germany since the war and where it might be going now we have sort of artists in short term pseudo solution, yeah, and then they are sort of advised by Spin Doctors of of all sort who have no idea of the underlying structural, fundamental problems. And if they had such ideas, they would be silent about them, because it would discourage their masters. Their their masters are masters of hiding the very fundamental problems that all these aside.

One thing in the election campaign that was completely interesting was that Germany was discussed in terms of Germany, if it was discussed at all, but that, for example, the fiscal crisis of the state was not just a German problem. It was, it's a problem of Italy. It's one of it's one of Sweden, even France, Britain. Yeah, everywhere, everywhere and and, rather than thinking that there might be some sort of common dynamic underlying this that might have to do with globalization, the capacity or states to tax their societies, yeah, with the growing demands in these societies for repair work with respect to the damages left by advanced capitalism, including the energy and the environmental transformation, yeah, that this was a general

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problem that is not available for short term solutions in this whole election campaign. For example, the fact that our government and the governments of these other societies have been able to survive by pretending that they did not have to regularly maintain and and repair. For example, the the physical and social infrastructure the schools is Germany is declining in international in the in the PISA rating, from rating to rating, nobody feels responsible to address the underlying problems, which very often are, or to large extent, are financial problem.

The same thing applies to what we now see, the crumbling of the bridges, of the roads all the I live. I live on the river Rhine and and you hear that all these bridges that are absolutely essential for the German economy will in the in coming years, have to be replaced if, if you imagine that, yeah, it's our unbelievable the the railway system in Germany, which used to be a miracle of the world, now it's Switzerland, and in Germany, you can never know When you will arrive once you bought a train. And if estimates of what all of this cost in the next 10 years, including sort of the the the entire the entire environmental transformation, and then you add on this, what our defense minister tells us that where we now are spending 40 billion on on, on on defense, in a few years before the Russians come, we will have to spend 100 billion every year. Where the hell is that money coming from? And then, and then they are telling us, well, then we, then we, we change the the debt break, or we allow the European Union to to borrow on its own account, big, and we will be silent on who is going to cover that account. Once, one state or another, sort of defaults because they are no longer solvent, this sort of complete irresponsibility. That's my answer.

And to what you're asking, you are asking too much of them that. That's why too much of what they can do. That's why I am convinced, as I think Thomas was, when he when, when he said that, that it is not, not at all clear whether this government will be in office for four years. The difference between the CDU and SDU is enormous in so many in so many respects. And maybe I can just say something on the numbers. It is not so that that maths has won the election. Matt says, After the complete disaster of the Christian Democrats with a completely so an inept candidate four years ago, yeah, in the last year, one year ago, in the polls, he was at 37% he slowly declined as people observed his performance and his wavering between a centrist policy and demagogue rhetoric, trying to include the AfD, thereby making it stronger, yeah, all of these things, people, then suddenly he's down to 28 or whatever. That's an enormous loss.

And the Social Democratic Party is basically the same. They they had the chancellor in government. They were the dominant force in the in the government that that had to resign, and short is gone. Short is gone now, someone who had never has had an office in government, young man taking over the party and trying to negotiate something with with Matt, who is wounded, for example, he tried to to to untie the dead break, and then overnight, was told by the Christian Socialist Party, or from Christian Social party from from Bavaria, that they would not want to do this next time he appears in front of the presence we never thought about, never thought about it. Yeah, and, and, and this is really, this is a scary it is scary. And in three years, as as was said, in three years, the AfD could be the biggest party in parliament, and then the ungovernability of this society will become so bad that people will lose confidence in the democratic system and and that is what I personally feel.

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Anatol Lieven 58:06

Well, I mean, you know, I mean, this is becoming a cliché, but you, you know, you mentioned the railways. Anyone who has traveled recently on Chinese railways, at least, is, is liable to prefer, at least from that point of view, the Chinese system. It's very striking. But I think I mean one common thing that you do there, see, I mean, all over the place, is more and more voters saying we must concentrate on reform at home. We must concentrate on, you know, trying to restore things at home. And that, of course, will be a huge challenge in the end for this expansionist idea of of of Europe and and of, you know, Germany and Britain and so forth on the world stage. I just, I don't see how that can be sustained. I mean, in in democracies with the electorate.

I mean, the other thing, of course, one sees so much in every European country and and in America too, you become increasingly explicit, is this open contempt for the mass of the population in the security elites. Oh, they're illiterate. But somebody actually said that on CNN the other day, the mass of the American population is illiterate. They don't understand international affairs. Therefore we should basically ignore them and accept, of course, that in the end, they have to pay the taxes which goes to which go to to fund all this. Well, we haven't been very cheerful.

Oh, just one final point. Sorry, from my own experience, but when I was briefly a British journalist in Germany, I think one critical thing, I was so struck by the difference between the people who had. Gone through the war, even if only as children like Cole, but you know who remembered it, and you know had been brought up by their parents to remember it. And the new generation, which does not it was quite, I mean, I mean, that was possibly, for me, the biggest divide in the German population, you know. And of course, the older generation is, well, getting old, right? But the but I mean, the attitude of somebody like AnnaLena baerbock to war is would have appalled somebody like Helmut Schmidt, who was no softy, God knows, but he would have regarded this as irresponsible, you know, teenage irresponsibility to the absolutely last degree anyway.

Sorry, that's my own rather bitter reflections. We are out of time. We could go on talking for a very, very long time, but, and I'm sorry to all the audience whose questions I didn't have time to get to, but thank you all so much. This was a fascinating, if not encouraging, discussion, and I look forward to further discussions in future. So thank you very much indeed.