

AfD & Germany's Collapse: Brain Drain and Business Escapes Are Real | Dr. Stephan Ebner

The AfD just won local elections in Germany. Why? Well, not only Ukraine is currently going under, Germany is following, with its economy and social structure in deep dive. This is what explains the rise of the AfD—something the Pro-War Parties in the German establishment try to deny so hard, they rather tarnish AfD voters as "racists" rather than looking into their actual grievances. Dr. Stefan Ebner, an international lawyer working across the US, Germany, and Taiwan, discusses the AfD's rise in Saxony, Germany's political and economic decline, immigration, war with Russia, the EU, energy policy, the judiciary, and why professionals and businesses are leaving Germany. The law office of Dr. Stephan Ebner: <https://lanaapma.ch/unser-team/> Our Links: Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 AfD victory and Germany's decline 00:08:43 AfD as opposition to the political class 00:10:33 Verfassungsschutz and German democracy 00:12:07 Election outlook and direct democracy 00:18:05 Nazi comparisons, war and Ukraine 00:23:03 Leaving Germany and brain drain 00:27:13 The EU, Brexit and sovereignty 00:36:20 War anxiety, arms exports and the SPD 00:41:09 Energy policy and Germany's economic future 00:45:32 Immigration, Iran and Israel 00:50:14 Rule of law and Germany's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today I'm talking again to Dr. Stefan Ebner, an international lawyer working in the US, Germany, and Taiwan, who has a keen interest in German politics. Hence, we are going to talk about the landslide victory of the AfD in Saxony. Stefan, welcome.

#Stephan Ebner

Thank you so much, Pascal, for having me.

#Pascal

Yeah, thank you so much for coming back. And you've been observing the rise of the AfD, but also the decline of Germany. Can you maybe talk a little bit about how these two—I mean, in my view, the two go hand in hand. What about you?

#Stephan Ebner

I couldn't agree more. The one could not be without the other one. And to be honest, it's terrible what we are witnessing. I myself, I'm German. I'm from an old German family. And I have run away, to be honest. I'm not in Germany anymore. I don't have a house there anymore. I have sold everything. I now live in Luxembourg and in Switzerland because it's unbearable in Germany at the moment. First of all, we are taxed. We are taxed by the government in a way that is not fair anymore. We purely work for the government. That is terrible. We have fees, social security fees. You have to pay for health insurance. You have to pay, in any matter, for an army of public officials. And there is no end. There is no end. So what have we done?

We had two offices, one in downtown Frankfurt, a main one at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, at Pariser Platz. And we have closed both of them, and we have opened one in Luxembourg City and one in Basel. And we are very happy there, to be honest. It is a huge, huge difference. The safety is much better. Security is much better. We don't have that many mass immigrants as we have in Germany. Me, for example, I have been the victim of a crime, of a robbery in Frankfurt, downtown. I have been robbed by a drug addict. He has pulled out a knife. So we are always very keen in Germany that we have such strong gun laws. Okay, criminals don't care. They take a knife and rob you. And I haven't witnessed something like that in Luxembourg or Switzerland at all.

And we are recommending to all of our clients, especially to high potentials, leave the country. Leave it now. Seriously, that's our general advice. Leave the country as soon as possible. And if you think to come to Germany to be a professional, think twice. Yeah, it's not worthwhile. The only thing you will find there is pain, is pain. And if you are a high achiever, you will be deeply disappointed. And maybe a last point, and then I will throw the ball to you again in regard to the election and to AfD. To be honest, we also think that AfD is the last hope of Germany. And we cannot understand why the public, why German media are saying that all people who say AfD is a solution, that they are fascists or right-wing extremists. That's rubbish, to be honest.

#Pascal

You know, so I'm a paying member of the Social Democrats, right? So I situate myself, like, clearly on the left. And I cannot understand how it is that in Germany, obviously, social pain is so strong. And the pain is not just about immigration, right? It's also about, as you said, the price level, what everything costs, how much money you make or that you don't make, and that people have work at all, that they are not free to eat anymore as they want, that they're told by the government what kind of electricity they have to buy, and all these kind of things. You know, just the stuff that makes life really, really hard for the little guy and the little girl. And now we've got a party that says, guys, we want to solve that. Guys, the things that hurt you is what interests us. And the mainstream parties, CDU and SPD especially, they just tell people that that's not what's important.

What's important is to have a war with Russia and to support Israel in its genocide in Gaza. Yes. And then they don't understand why that doesn't ring very well with the base. And we are at the point

where that party that says, like, guys, okay, I'm going to care about what you care about, that party now makes 44% of the vote. And the rationalization by the other side is, those are Nazis. How is it that one part of German society is so much out of touch with the other part? How is that possible to you?

#Stephan Ebner

I have no real explanation for you. Probably because they have been in power for decades. They thought that they are very special, that they are saving the world by protecting the environment. So if you come to Germany, you will hardly only see wind turbines. We have more wind turbines than human beings here. And are they efficient? No, they aren't. We are buying nuclear power from France because we don't have enough energy. Energy is so expensive here. But we don't have any nuclear plants anymore in Germany. But France does. So it's just ridiculous. We don't have any real explanation for that. It probably stems back to Germany's history, to the Second World War, which has not been really...

#Pascal

Sorry, it frustrates me so much, because what happened to the SPD? What happened to Willy Brandt's party? What happened to the party that once upon a time not only did social democracy, which is like cheaper prices and social security networks and so on, on the one hand, and Ostpolitik on the other? What happened to that part of the left? Because Olaf Scholz, the last SPD chancellor of yours, he was an abomination, right? He was just a carbon copy of Merz, or Merz a carbon copy of him. And Merz is from the CDU. What happened to the SPD?

#Stephan Ebner

It's dead. We don't see it anymore. And the members of the SPD, they have joined AfD because they probably have seen that the SPD will not make any difference anymore.

#Pascal

The voters, the voters, the little guy on the street who used to put some hope into left-wing, like, working-class rhetoric. They find that now in the AfD, right?

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely, they do. And you have mentioned another topic that is really, really of importance here: the war with Russia. We are at war with Russia. We are paying billions and billions and billions to Ukraine. And the average German citizen doesn't want that. We don't want that. We had a war with

Russia, and it was terrible. It did not work out. And we have no interest in fighting Putin at all. And we do not think that Putin would attack NATO. And these conventional parties in Germany, they are terrible. In war mode, they want to fight Russia, and they tell us lies in the media.

We don't believe the media anymore. There is no free media in Germany. I'm sorry. They are telling us that Putin is attacking Leipzig Airport and that there are guns hidden in our forests for Russian troops. We don't believe that at all. If Putin wants to conquer Germany, they could just go through with their tanks. So that's ridiculous. And we think that this is just the first step. Now we're just paying money, and it won't take too long. Then we will bring German soldiers back to the East. And that is something we don't want. And they don't care. But AfD cares.

#Pascal

They say we will not be involved with Russia. Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. So your view is that—or is it your view that the AfD is kind of the political amalgamation now of all of the people who feel completely sold out by the current political class and this kind of—I don't even know which term to use in order to describe them—the CDU, SPD, FDP, that are so much on this neoliberal, neoconservative, like, marching-order line that's coming from Washington. And that's the opposition, the political opposition movement, kind of the natural opposition movement, which also goes together with, on the left, you have BSW, right? But they're much smaller, but they are also kind of this, like, let's not do that anymore party, right?

#Stephan Ebner

Mm-hmm. Absolutely. And even more, we have a lot of intelligent people, eager people, industrious people, high potentials that say we need change. We cannot just go on. We need to change. And AfD is the only party that really offers change. And they don't care if they are probably right-wing or something like that. If you have to vote for a right-wing party to get change and to save your country, well, you will vote for that party and you don't care.

#Pascal

Yeah. I mean, the CDU is also considered right-wing, or at least right of center, a conservative party, right? Now, why is it that people call the CDU, you know, right conservative, and the AfD extreme right? Why is it that your Verfassungsschutz, your Office for Constitutional Protection or the Protection of the Constitution, is officially investigating them or keeping them under observation for right extremism? What is that part of the AfD that so many people associate with something very bad?

#Stephan Ebner

Can you describe that? I'm happy to. Nobody takes the Verfassungsschutz, the protection forces for the Constitution, seriously in Germany anymore. It is something you only find in Germany. You hardly find any other country globally that has something like that. And if you look at the Verfassungsschutz, they are led by the political parties, by the little political parties. And if you imagine the situation, it's ridiculous. It's like a bad joke. You have the CDU in power, and Chancellor Merz is telling the Verfassungsschutz what they should do.

And now Mr. Merz has a problem with AfD because the German people vote for AfD. So what do you think? Do you think that the Verfassungsschutz is neutral? We don't think so. We think that's a means to fight political opponents. And we think that's a big issue because that is not a democracy anymore. We see it more as a tyranny than a democracy. We have a leading party that is using means of the state, officers, police officers. We have paid them with our money to fight the party the gross majority of Germans is voting for. That is really scary. That is scary.

#Pascal

Now, you know, Saxony is a state in the east, and it has now 34—it voted 43.8% for AfD in Saxony. So roughly 44. The estimation is that the AfD support in other parts of Germany, especially in the West, is lower. But when will we see that? When will the next elections be in this land? And what do you guess, like in the West, how large is the support for the AfD approximately from the surveys we have?

#Stephan Ebner

So we will have the next votes in the East, and we expect comparable results here. So the AfD will win, and they will be close to absolute power. It is true in the West, the support is not as big as in the East, but we still expect votes and results around 30%, over 30%. So still, we hope at least that the AfD will be the strongest political party there as well. Because the old parties don't have any solutions; they just say we will keep on as we have done before. Chancellor Merz has threatened AfD with the so-called Bundeszwang. That's a legal matter in the German constitution where every federal state has to follow the Bund, the Federation, at the end of the day.

We never had that before in history. That's totally new to us, and it's ridiculous. He simply says, "We don't care what has happened in Sachsen-Anhalt. We are in Berlin, and you still have to do what we say. Otherwise, we will fight you legally." So he does not care about the vote and the opinion of the German people that has clearly given a result. He just says, "I will keep on. I'm in charge. You cannot get rid of me that easily. I will keep on the way I have done it." And that is some kind of arrogance and being far away from reality that is hard to accept.

#Pascal

It's also what's going to increase the voting share for the AfD even more. A wise leader would say, like, "I hear you. There are real problems. We hear you. We are going to change things." But again, can we talk again? Because the AfD is a party that contains a lot of ideas, political ideas from many different sides, from the left, from the right. I mean, yes, right doesn't make much sense anymore today, but we still need a couple of categories in order to differentiate, you know, political ideas, traditions, let's call it. One of the things that surprises me most about the AfD is that it still, to this day, in its manifesto, has a long passage dedicated, several pages, to direct democracy, which it wants. On the other hand, for social affordability and so on, then it also has this migration issue where it is clearly on the right and would support less migration or sending people back. Where do we stand there on these different strains that the AfD contains?

#Stephan Ebner

They do exactly say what the average German citizen wants to hear. So first of all, Germany lacks direct democracy. We always invite the Swiss people directly, who have a lot of direct democracy. And do you know what the official explanation in the German legal system is why we don't have that much direct democracy in Germany? Why? It's basically the professional politicians say that the average German citizen is too stupid to understand complex political issues. Can you imagine that? We pay taxes around 50%. We have to work every day. We abide by the law. And our leaders say, well, but you are too stupid. You don't have a say here.

#Pascal

Can I share an anecdote with you from my teaching experience? For five years, I taught a class on European politics at Temple University Japan Campus. And every single time, I dedicate one lecture to direct democracy, and I usually give Switzerland as the example of how it works, just to explain what the difference is between voting for a person and voting for an idea, a yes or a no on an idea versus just which head do you want in parliament. And then I try to kind of sell this, right? It's not a bad idea. It's like I present it in a positive light. And then at the end, I let the class vote: would you want this system in your country today? Yes or no? In five years, not once have I had a class vote, yes, I want it. They always said no. And when I interview people, I say, why did you say no?

The standard answer is, you know, this can work in Switzerland where people are well-educated. But in my country, people are too dumb. They vote wrong. Really? Okay. So this is not just an issue of politicians. This is an issue of, I would call it, like a kind of elite mentality. Yeah, I know best, but the others are dumb. So it's quite deep inside people, this kind of idea. And this is also why in Germany, I mean, a lot of politicians are probably saying, like, no, no, no, no, no, this cannot—I mean, this would lead to wrong decisions, right? Like Brexit and so on is usually the other example. Yeah. What do you think that this vote will now do? Because the elites seem to be shocked. They seem to be quite, not just shocked, but afraid, scared.

#Stephan Ebner

Scared. That's the right word. They are scared. And I think we will get into a very tough, rough time now because that trend will proceed. We will see AfD win again and again. And the current, let's say, regime won't back down that easily. So they will fight back. They are already planning again and saying, well... Let's forbid AfD. Isn't that a great idea? We just forbid it, and then all problems are solved. We have around 44% of voters that say, we like AfD, something has to be changed, but now we forbid AfD and everything will be fine.

Of course, people will be frustrated, and that will not only go away, and it will become more and more people. We have seen that firewall issue. The conventional parties always said, "We build a firewall. We won't work together with AfD." What was the result? Well, a lot of people say that's not fair. What is wrong with AfD? Democracy and firewalls, that doesn't work. You have to talk to everybody. We will vote for AfD. So we think things will get very, very difficult in future in Germany.

#Pascal

The standard answer is, look, had there been a firewall with the Nazi Party back in the early 1930s, we wouldn't have had the tragedy of the Second World War. Can you maybe, for people who compare the Nazis of the 1930s with AfD of the 2020s, how do you try to convince them that that's not the same thing?

#Stephan Ebner

It doesn't make any sense to me at all. It's a completely different time. And we have so many people that are members of German society—physicians, lawyers, judges—that are active in AfD. I hardly understand.

#Pascal

The thing is, you had a lot of these groups as well in the Nazi Party. So that's, I mean, what's in terms of—how would you propose it?

#Stephan Ebner

In terms of content, well, with AfD, we don't have a party that says, well, we are above all. We are the super race, and we want to conquer all of the world and the East to be the rulers of mankind. We don't have that here. We have people that have very conservative views, and they say there is too much mass immigration, and we want to focus on the German people. And I think that's totally different to what the Nazis did. And I see more comparisons with the MAGA movement in the US

with President Trump, where you have somebody who says, "America first." And that definitely is something the Germans want. We want a leader that says, "Germany first." We look at our German people, and then we look after others. Yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, but if I understand you correctly, your vision of that is Germany first inside Germany, not Germany first in Europe or in the world, right? This is a localist idea of politics.

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely. And no wars. In our constitution, we have a passage that says the German people, no matter what Germany is doing, has to contribute to peace between all nations. And AfD is saying that. AfD is saying, "We won't send money to Ukraine. We want to stay neutral, maybe looking at Switzerland again." And what is our current government doing? They are sending billions and billions to Ukraine, fueling that conflict nobody is interested in. And I can tell you from my personal practice as an international lawyer, whenever we were active in Ukraine, it was a nightmare.

There is no other country in the world that is that corrupt as Ukraine, to be honest. I could name you cases anonymously where not only the mayor of a city, but his wife, then their children, and then their nephews, has reached out to my client investing in Ukraine for bribes. And to be honest, as a German citizen, I don't understand why we should support a country that obviously lacks the rule of law, that is highly corrupt, and that leads to escalation with Russia. We would like to buy cheap gas from Russia so that our economy works, and we don't want to send drones, tanks, or money to fight Putin. And the AfD is exactly saying that.

#Pascal

Now, I mean, back to where we started, basically, you know, the decline of Germany that's now actually leading to people actively leaving. Just for people to understand, like, what is the situation now for you and for others when you think about, you know, how to organize the next 10, 20 years of your professional life? I mean, Germany, as you said, is for you not on the cards anymore, is it?

#Stephan Ebner

Not anymore at all. And leaving the country is a euphemism. They are running away. They are running away, yes. And we have so many people, myself as well, that put all their money out of German accounts because we don't have to look that far into the past. And we had German regimes that had built up walls around their borders and things like that. And we are not sure that the current government, if there is more fire on it and they have further issues, that they will reach out

to funds as well, and that your property is not safe anymore in Germany. We have laws that the government can take your property if there is a probable cause for that. So it's really a problem. And we are overrun by clients from Germany that want to go away.

#Pascal

Really, as a law office, you have tons and tons of clients who want to leave.

#Stephan Ebner

Yes, indeed. And it is always clients, we would say, that are high potentials, that have the possibility to leave without problems, and clients that have the financial means to leave—some rich people.

#Pascal

Yeah, and for those who it is relatively easy to jump ship, it is very, very hard for a welder or a plumber somewhere to just leave. But anyhow, so the working class, again, the working class is, like, locked in, right? So that's why they also have the most to lose. But another point—what was my other point? The other point was that...

#Stephan Ebner

Sorry, now I lost my... No problem at all.

#Pascal

Yeah, I can just... There was a question on the tip of my mind about... not just about leaving Germany, but... Sorry.

#Stephan Ebner

No problem at all.

#Pascal

I hope you'll come back. Surely, I... Tell me maybe a little bit then about how you organize that, right? Because relocating isn't easy, right? Also for businesses, right?

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely. It all starts with a new source of income. So if you are an employee, you will have to look for a job abroad. If you cannot keep your job, you are in a difficult position. Or if you are self-employed, you will have to look whether you can find clients in Luxembourg, in Switzerland, for

instance. And as soon as that is ensured, it is not such a big issue, especially within the EU. You just move, you get registered with the city, you say goodbye to German tax authorities, which are most cruel globally. So the IRS, for instance, in the US is a kitty compared to German tax authorities. And then you are a citizen in Luxembourg City or in Basel or in Zurich. And especially young people who are not bound in Europe by family ties, for instance, they often go to the US. We see a lot of them going to the US, to Canada, and more and more also to Asia, to Taiwan, to Singapore, which cannot work in the long run as well because it's a brain drain. Yeah, these people won't come back. Yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, so Germany is going through a brain drain, or a brain drain is starting. My question came back: when the EU came up with a great idea of putting sanctions, anti-Russian sanctions, on citizens of the EU, and even worse, I mean, sanctioning two Swiss people, but also a German citizen in Germany, Hüseyin Doğru, I mean, that must have been quite a shock. Is that also one of the things that goes through your mind, that you're also under threat, not just by Berlin, but by Brussels?

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely, absolutely. The average German person hates the EU. There are sayings like, "There is nothing good that comes from the EU. They don't care about our views. They are just bothering and annoying us." And we don't know what the EU is doing if it starts to decline, if we have more members that want to get out. I mean, Brexit was just the beginning. The UK, the British, they aren't stupid. They had their problems, of course, but it probably has a reason why they got out. And I bet if you ask the average German person on the street, they would also say, "We would like to leave the EU." And AfD is saying exactly that. AfD is very critical in regard to the EU.

#Pascal

Do you think that, I mean, there can be mixed opinions on the EU, and especially within, well, the liberal class and so on, you still find a lot of support for it. And the EU, you know, when it comes to the common market and so on, or the freedom of movement, I mean, the EU did do us a solid favor on the European continent. On the other hand, when it comes to regulatory overreach, that's the other side. The 44% of people who voted for the AfD, do you think that most of them would probably support a German exit from the EU? Absolutely.

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely. No further explanation necessary, absolutely. And again, these are not stupid, only stupid or primitive people who don't understand what is going on. These are hardworking people that care for their families and that are scared and that have now witnessed the EU for a long time, and that don't believe that the EU can work in the long term and that we have to get out of that again. Yeah.

#Pascal

It was believed for quite a while that the Brexit example would set a negative example and would actually show other countries that exiting the EU is a horrible procedure and it will only hurt you. And for a while, I must say, people like Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen, they stopped talking about exiting the EU and they started talking about reforming it. Now we are 10 years later, and actually the UK kind of shows that, well, it wasn't pretty, but whatever. They're kind of free now to decide things for themselves. Not everything, not everything. There's still a lot of trouble with Northern Ireland, and the economic negotiations never went away. But how do you think the Brexit example is now, 10 years later, being looked at by this block of AfD voters?

#Stephan Ebner

Yes, as a prominent example, they say, well, it has worked with them as well. Their economy has not been destroyed, and now they are free again, and we want to be free as well. And there are a lot of people that say the EU cannot work. Why can't it work? Because they think that if you try to form a larger nation with such countries, it is very hard to do that without force. And of course, we cannot do that with force anymore. We don't want that. But if you look at the US, for instance, they had their civil war as well.

So they had to use force to have their nation they have today. And here in the EU, we have seen every country has their own parliament. As soon as they are supposed to give power away, they say no. That's human nature. If you are a decision-maker, a human being in such a country, no matter whether it's, I don't know, Malta, France, or Spain, and you are supposed to give away power for a greater good for the EU, you will find a thousand reasons why you will not give away power. And maybe there is a point in that. Yeah.

#Pascal

And your freedom to decide on a local level what is good for the local level, right? But, you know, the whole European continent kind of struggles with this question: how to organize itself. And we have countries like France that are highly centrally administered, right? Basically, even local school curricula are written in Paris. And we have examples like Switzerland, where we have this principle of subsidiarity, saying, like, whatever can be dealt with on the lower level should be given to the lower level, right? And that includes budget and so on. And Germany is somewhere in the middle there because you, on the one hand, have strong Länder; on the other hand, you also have, like, some central authority, although it is supposed to be weak. But even in Germany, we saw the tendency toward integration, didn't we?

#Stephan Ebner

We did, we did. And I think Germany is a very difficult, difficult example. Why is that so? A lot of people say Germans aren't democrats. So Germany has never wanted to be a democracy. If you look back, who brought democracy to Germany? That has mainly been the U.S., the Allies. In 1945, the last system Germany had voted for was not a democracy at all. So it's very, very difficult in that regard. And a lot of people, I think a lot of people, many people in Germany, they still look for some kind of leader they can follow. It's somehow in their DNA. And the AfD is giving these leaders, yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, but that's what the other side is saying. Look, these people just want a strong man like the guy with the mustache. And mustache guy will come back from the AfD. That's their fear.

#Stephan Ebner

Yeah, but it does not need to be in that way. Just look at the U.S. again. They have voted for Trump probably because Trump is a strong man, a leader who says, "America first, and we will do it that way," because a lot of Americans maybe have been looking for a strong leader as well. I don't see a problem with that. If a people wants that, let them have their leader if they do not wage war on others. And to be honest, we don't feel that with AfD at all. Who should they wage wars on? If you see the situation the Bundeswehr is in, they are hardly capable of defending the country at all. They said, well, we put now a lot of money into the Bundeswehr.

What is a law? What is a lie? To be honest, we do a lot of defense law, and we have seen nothing of the Sondervermögen for the Bundeswehr at all. All this money goes into the social systems, where we have that illegal mass immigration, people who have never paid a dime into our social systems and that have to be given free health insurance, free housing, Bürgergeld, whatever you can think of. So, for instance, I don't fear at all that AfD could get radical and wage war on its neighbors and go to Poland. We don't feel that at all. And we think it's quite different to the time after 1933.

#Pascal

You know, I watched a video recently that another Swiss made, and he made this very good point that if you take the fears of both sides seriously and you talk about the fear behind the opposition to something or the support for something, then maybe you get to the bottom of the social anxiety. And maybe in the German case too, you can argue that fear of war motivates people to vote for the AfD, and the fear of war motivates people to rally against them. But on the other side, it's the fear that Vladimir Putin tomorrow will knock at the doors of Berlin, right? Therefore, we have to gear up for war in order to prevent it. So, is it a fair observation that at the moment in Germany, war is on everybody's mind?

#Stephan Ebner

It is, absolutely. And we have spoken about that recently. We are seeing huge investments in the defense sector. We are building weapons again. And that is maybe more comparable to the time after 1933: really deadly weapons. So, in the U.S. military, they always talk about lethality, and German weapons used to be quite lethal. There is no week where there isn't a paper on my desk as a lawyer where a German corporate group is sending highly destructive weapons from Germany to Africa.

#Pascal

Why Africa?

#Stephan Ebner

Really? Personnel mines, everything you can think of, even chemical weapons. But that doesn't get into the newspapers at all. And the German government says, well, we don't know everything about it. Why are they looking away? Because German automotive is going down the drain. And we need some new industries where we can be high achievers. And one of these industries is the defense sector. German corporate groups know how to produce deadly weapons. And we have around, I think, 60 to 80 companies. And conflicts, wars in Africa at the moment where they use children as soldiers, where they burn down villages and all. And what do you think? How much do we hear about that in German news? Yeah, nothing at all. It's about money. Yeah.

#Pascal

This used to be the place where parties like, you know, the German SPD or the Swiss Social Democrats fought against, you know, weapons exports and for weapons export restrictions. And to be fair, the Swiss Social Democrats still fight for that. They still have ongoing—not rallies, but political programs—against weapons exports. But I think the SPD has given that up, hasn't it?

#Stephan Ebner

Absolutely. You see some kind of confusion between CDU and SPD. They are pretty much the same. They don't really have a profile anymore. They are just giving paroles, saying we need to work more. We need to be more productive to just keep the status quo, to keep themselves in power, to keep their own officers in the good positions to get money out of that. It's a real swamp, and people understand that. People are not stupid. People see that, and they say we need a change. And that, I think, is everything what the vote has been about. And the real terrible, terrible thing is that it's totally legitimate that a people votes. And if we have 44 percent that vote for AfD, that's it. And AfD should get into power. But the current regime is now saying, no, we won't. We won't work together with them. And I don't understand that. What kind of democracy is that?

#Pascal

And of course, we must say, like, the 44% are in one of the 16 Länder, right? So in one Land it is 44, which is a big majority, but it is not more than 50%. So, I mean, the democratic process has to play itself out and, you know, the balancing of these different groups. But if this continues, then do you think that the anti-war stance of the AfD will remain? Because one of the fears or the criticisms I've heard is that on the national level, the AfD is already quite centrist, quite in line, whereas on the local level, they kind of still keep to their basic convictions. Do you think that if the AfD on the national level comes into or came to power, that something would change vis-à-vis Russia?

#Stephan Ebner

Yes, I'm absolutely sure the war in Russia would be over for Germany. But to be honest, what I don't think is the export of weapons, of German weapons into the world, will stop. That won't stop. That will continue. It's about money, and they won't interfere with the industry. So that will continue no matter who is in charge.

#Pascal

The productivity of Germany is going down, and much of it is connected to this energy issue. Do you see realistic avenues to kind of diversify Germany's energy needs again? Because by now it's, you know, the whole spiel of the other side was to say, like, "Well, we were dependent on Russian oil, and now you're dependent on American oil. Wonderful." And you don't even have the Middle East anymore, because that one has been blown up by one of Germany's friends. Yeah. Where do you see that one going?

#Stephan Ebner

We need a mix. We need a mix composed of conventional energy sources. We need renewables as well. We have enough resources in that regard so far, but we also need nuclear power again. I think there is no way around that. And we have first people who think about that, Markus Söder from Bavaria, who says that that could be a route as well. So we won't come around that anymore. It is not possible that a leading industrial nation like Germany has such expensive energy prices. And Germany cannot rescue the whole world with separating their household waste. That is something I don't understand as well. If you don't separate your household waste for recycling, people will definitely slap you right in your face in Germany. It's a psychosis. It's crazy.

#Pascal

But now we've changed it to a moral issue, like a little local moral issue with the energy issue. But you kind of connect them.

#Stephan Ebner

Nuclear power, yeah, they somehow belong together. And on the other side, we have nuclear warheads at Fliegerhorst close to Koblenz, around 20 to 25, and nobody complains about that. The whole discussion is ridiculous in my eyes. So if you look at Japan, if you look at many other countries, South Korea and so on, you see that they have a mix, and they have not shut down nuclear power. Why is Germany different?

#Pascal

No, you know, the moment I will start believing that they're serious about the ecological agenda is when they start talking about, you know, filters, air filters in tanks, and the reduction of air flights of the Air Force and so on. That's when I will start taking it seriously. As long as that entire sector is completely excluded, even from the discourse, I will assume that there's something iffy with it. Not that we don't have problems. But where do you now think that Germany still can go? Let's assume that there's a change of heart, the tide is turning. And where would be the place to look for a future of the German economy?

#Stephan Ebner

We need a radical change. We cannot compete with Asia anymore. We cannot compete with the US anymore. We need to get back to the roots. So, for example, my employees here in Germany, they usually get 30 days' vacation by contract, paid vacation. And additional to these 30 days, they have around 30 to 40 days' sick leave. It's really that rough. It's terrible. So a lot of people don't want to work here anymore. And if I look at my Taiwanese employees, they maybe have five days of paid vacation in their contracts, and they don't take that. We need a total change of mind, and we need to work hard again. Yeah.

#Pascal

I mean, as a social democrat, I must say this is something that I like, actually. I think paid leave is a good thing for the working class, but it puts a burden on the other side, yes. But when we look at the geopolitical picture, the Iran war, of course, also undermined a lot of the viability of this entire energy mix that Germany and a lot of Europe has created. Where do you think that AfD voters—how do they think about the Iran war? And what is the discourse inside that quarter about, you know, the Middle East or West Asia? Because on the one hand, the AfD says, like, we don't want immigrants. And when they talk about immigrants, they often mean people from West Asia. They mean Syrians. They mean also Central Asia, Afghans, and so on. On the other hand, Iran now is a huge issue, isn't it? So how is that looked at?

#Stephan Ebner

Well, we could maybe clarify it a little bit. AfD is not only saying we don't want immigration at all. They say we are happy with immigration, but legal immigration. And of course, we would like to

compete with all nations globally that the brightest heads get into our country. So we don't want illegal mass immigration where people come into our country to take advantage of social security systems. And in doing so, they simply say the Ukraine war is a huge mistake. There is no German interest in the Ukraine. We should back down from that. And if we back down from that, the war would end sooner or later by a Russian victory. And they wish to have an amicable relationship with Russia. So we don't want to fight Russia. We want to stay friends with Russia. And we want to stay friends with the U.S. as well. And some people say that's not possible. We say this is possible. Look at other countries, Switzerland, for instance. You can stay neutral to a certain extent. So stop the war. Yeah.

#Pascal

And where is the AfD on the Israel and Iran question?

#Stephan Ebner

Well, they see that critically as well. They say that has been a war of unjustified attack. We don't want that at all. But on the other hand, they say, well, that has been the U.S., that has been Israel, partners of ours. Should we cease all contacts because of that? Would that help us? Would that help the German people? So I think they want to stay neutral to some extent as well, but they don't want to participate in that.

#Pascal

Okay, okay. No, this is quite interesting. Because the AfD actually did, at the top leadership, Alice Weidel and so on, they did criticize Israel, didn't they?

#Stephan Ebner

To some extent, yes. Yes, they did.

#Pascal

But that's probably the kind of topic where, within the AfD, you will find very different opinions, I suppose.

#Stephan Ebner

Of course, of course. And it is always very difficult for Germans to criticize Israel to some extent. And if you do that, you are usually called a fascist as well. Yeah, but what we see in Gaza and these things, I think nobody is a fan of that. And that shifts, of course. But here again, we don't see a party with the AfD that says, well, let's fight them and we want to join war because we are a Nazi

party and we love wars and fighting people. They are very, very reluctant in that and see that critically as well. So that's why many people don't see any comparisons with the NSDAP, for instance, the Nazis, which is why we get really annoyed when we hear that in the news that, well, AfD is the new Nazi party and so on. I think that's not fair.

#Pascal

No, it is not fair. Because the reflex of the people in power at the moment—not just the people in power, but, you know, that kind of slice of society that looks at itself as represented by those in power—that slice compares anyone who doesn't belong to them immediately with the Nazis. So the Nazis are the AfD. The Nazis are also in the Kremlin, right? Because Mr. Putin is Hitler, right? So anyone who's not on your track is of the Mexican people, the mustache man inside and outside. And this is kind of a not very healthy way of approaching conflict.

#Stephan Ebner

Yes, not at all. And I would even go far further. It's quite primitive. And people aren't that primitive nowadays anymore. They have the internet. They have newspapers, newspapers from abroad. And if you come with the Nazi bat and just smash people on the head, you should not be surprised if they fight back and if they are annoyed by you and if they don't vote for your party anymore.

#Pascal

Correct me if I'm wrong, but calling somebody a Nazi in Germany is still a crime, right? I mean, you can sue for that. But we've seen several people comparing the AfD with Nazism, and that's okay within the mainstream discourse, isn't it?

#Stephan Ebner

Not really, not really. Especially Nazi comparisons are being dealt with very strictly within the German legal system. But here again, the German legal system is not neutral anymore. Not at all. We see a lot of corruption. We always hear there is no corruption in Germany. Unfortunately, there is corruption. And unfortunately, we mainly have judges and federal prosecutors who do what the leading parties want them to do. Yeah. And that is probably a reason why they are not prosecuting that. But even in public, even if you are a professional politician and it is a public discussion, you could get prosecuted for that if you say, well, you are a Nazi. Yeah. You are like Göring or like Hitler.

So that is another proof that we have big issues here in Germany and that this is not only a problem of the leading politicians, of Merz, Klingbeil, and so on. It goes way, way deeper. That goes into the administration, that goes into the judiciary. For instance, we as a law firm, we do not advise our clients anymore if they have to file a lawsuit in Germany. Why don't we do that? That is a lucrative business, and we would love to do that. Why don't we do that anymore? Because we don't get good

judgments in Germany anymore. I often had the case that I told my client, well, according to German law, you are right. We will go to court and we will fight that through, and you will get your title and you will win. And what did we get at the end of the day?

A political decision. And I was sitting in front of the CEO and told them, well, I cannot explain that. It's against the law, but we cannot do anything about that because you cannot really fight that if you're with a higher court in Germany. And that CEO said, "That cannot be true. I'm in Germany, rule of law and so on. It must be your fault, Dr. Ebert. It was your fault." That is a very difficult situation as an advisor. That's why we said, we don't do that anymore. We refer to litigators, to other law firms who cope with that pain, still cope with that pain. And we don't do that anymore. And these are signs, warning signs for us, that have led us to the decision to leave that country and to not work together with German companies anymore.

#Pascal

Yeah, there's a lot of cases like this. The problem there is always that, okay, on the one hand, one party claims, okay, the law is on our side. The other party then claims the same, and the judge makes a decision. One party will always be dissatisfied and say, like, hey, you bent the law. But we do have cases also like Ulrike Guérot, who was thrown out of her university and took that to the judges, right? Her lawyers were very confident and said the same like you, and it ended up doing nothing, I mean, and being decided against her. This is a very, very complicated affair. But overall, what you're saying is that a lot of people like you, you're feeling that things are not going well also in the tradition.

#Stephan Ebner

Not at all. The rule of law is really endangered. We get political decisions often. It is difficult to be an entrepreneur in Germany. So why should you stay in Germany anymore if you can just go to Luxembourg or Switzerland, a few hundred kilometers to the west? You can be a lawyer there as well. You can be a physician there as well. And I think it will not take that long, and Germany will be bled out. You won't have any high potentials anymore. You won't have people that pay a lot of taxes. And then we will see what will happen. Will we have new civil unrest, for instance? I mean, we have very strong gun laws, we hear that always. But trust me, every second German citizen has guns as well. You can get guns in Germany if you want to, even legally. You just need a lawyer, for instance, that helps you with that. So we have a lot of people with guns as well. And that's scary. That's really scary.

#Pascal

Yeah, that's a recipe for some very, very nasty things down the road. But look, Stefan, thank you very much for all the updates from your side. Thank you. If people want to find you, where should they go?

#Stephan Ebner

Just look on the internet. You can type my name into Google, and you will probably see some websites and information. And we are always happy to talk to you, of course. Feel free to reach out.

#Pascal

Okay. If you need a law office somewhere around the world, Stefan is there for you. Dr. Stefan Ebner, thank you so much for your time today.

#Stephan Ebner

Thank you so much for having me, Pascal. Have a good one.