

AN INSIDE JOB

EUROPEAN SOCIETIES NEED TO LOOK WITHIN TO ACHIEVE REAL SECURITY

AN INTERVIEW WITH
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Anyone in power – or aspiring to be – today cannot afford to ignore a pervasive sense of insecurity that seems to be increasingly taking hold among the citizens of Europe. Greens are no exception and therefore must also provide convincing policies and messages that respond to people's fears and anxieties. We brought together Green leaders from around Europe to discuss how to reclaim this debate from the populist forces who exploit insecurity for their own gains, and how Greens can contribute to bringing about a more informed and positive discussion around security.

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL: What do we refer to when we talk about security today in terms of public opinion? Does this perception correspond to the real sources of insecurity today, in your view?

MEYREM ALMACI: We live in turbulent times. The two major issues of our time are globalisation and immigration. If that is combined with random acts of violence and terror in your neighbourhood or country, then your sense of security gets shaken up and it turns into real fear. Insecurity because of terrorist attacks is something real, so you cannot dismiss it by saying that being killed by a car is much more likely – this is not an answer. You need to acknowledge the real fear of people towards this violence and at the same time respond to it with real answers. We are trying to provide real answers. You have to name those who are terrorists, but not equate them to the whole population or to everyone who is a member of the Islamic community.

But we see that this fear is not being met by real answers which respond to the root causes of this unrest, but rather is being aggravated and stoked by right-wing populist forces. The only recipe they have, in the end, is to go back to a past that never existed – a Europe with new borders and everyone leaving after a Brexit, Frexit, and a Nexit. There is a different answer possible, and it is to acknowledge that every single one of us, Muslim or not, is equally threatened by these attacks. These attackers and terrorists do not discriminate in age or religion – they just randomly attack. So we should stick together and enhance our interconnectedness to be able to face these threats strongly and fiercely. And that includes also some repression and prevention, because that's the only way to tackle this problem.

What we need is a well-balanced policy in terms of security and social cohesion. In our parliament, we proposed an integrated plan for security and solidarity. Providing security means a strong intelligence service and well-organised police services. The second pillar – social cohesion – means connecting our citizens. Preventing people, young people mostly, from becoming isolated. Our goal should be to involve everyone in our country, our community of civilians. From that perspective, we need a stronger commitment from our governments.

FRANZISKA BRANTNER: I agree, security threats are real also in Germany. In Germany, we have

to improve the communication and coordination between intelligence, police, and security institutions of all the different federal states (Länder) and federal authorities. We know this is objectively necessary because we Greens are part of the government in 11 of the 16 federal states and not because we are giving in to ever increasing populist pressure. We need more manpower in the police as well as to improve and expand our prevention programmes. We know that young Germans are joining the war in Syria and Iraq. We need to figure out how they have been so radicalised that they are ready to fight and die, and how to prevent this radicalisation. There is a real security threat here but we must fight the stigmatisation of one religion or one group of people. Terrorists do use refugee routes in order to perpetrate their killings, but that does not mean refugees are terrorists. We need better European cooperation, better exchange of information, and better coordination for the necessary security operations, without ever losing sight that this also requires improved European coordination and cooperation on protecting human rights. We have to internalise and practice J.P. Curran's idea that "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance".

AMELIA WOMACK: How do you replace that culture of fear with one that respects engagement, vigilance, and solidarity? When it comes to security, there are no easy answers. Although we must make security our first priority, using military action to achieve that security must

be a last resort. We have been spending billions, here in the UK, on our trident missile system with the idea of having an independent nuclear deterrent. Those billions would be better invested into addressing rising inequality and ensuring that people have true engagement in our communities, especially because cuts from our government, who are implementing an austerity agenda, are tearing our communities apart.

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At the moment in the UK there is a policy called 'Prevent' strategy, which sounds very progressive in terms of looking at the root causes of radicalisation. But, actually, it's turning our schools, our NHS, and our landlords into border controllers by making landlords, for example, check people's passports and records. This idea of prevention and anti-extremism being injected into parts of our society, although it sounds like it's trying to reduce the root causes, is simply driving a wedge between different groups – particularly Muslim groups – and the rest of society.

ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ: I don't think insecurity is at the core of the public debate in Spain today, but of course, if there is an attack and people see it on the news, their concern increases. The concept of insecurity is widening,

in the sense that people feel it in everyday life, for example through unemployment, poverty, precarity, and threats to welfare. In some cases, we can see very clearly how violence and economic and social consequences of the system go hand in hand. For example, in Spain when an eviction takes place, this often entails violent action on behalf of the authorities. So there needs to be a balance in society; if not then xenophobia and a sense that insecurity is due to migration and refugees can flare up.

But I want to point out that there is a kind of violence which is increasing in Spain and that is violence against women, sexual attacks and gender-based violence. I have the impression that women today feel more insecure than ten years ago. As Greens, we should also make the point that in Europe, the insecurity of women is still an issue and one that no one is talking about. A woman is far more likely to be murdered, attacked, abused, or raped than to be killed in a jihadist attack. And focusing on this aspect could help us as Greens to dismantle this populist vision of security linked to foreigners, and to broaden it to all types of violence and insecurity. Because this is a clear form of violence and insecurity – but as it's not coming from outside, we don't think about it in the same way.

FRANZISKA BRANTNER: This is a big issue in Germany, which is very much linked to the refugee crisis. It is challenging for us Greens to acknowledge that the new arrivals very often do not share our 40 years of feminist debates and the transformation this has brought about in society. Thus it is a challenge to find good answers whilst not trivialising the endemic violence against women still existing in Germany. The German electorate demands from us policies and measures to effectively protect women, and at the same time they expect us to defend refugees, immigrants, and minorities. We have to give plausible and understandable answers to people's fears and expectations. If we fail to do this, we give the populists a free ride.

MEYREM ALMACI: I think we, as Greens, already have the answer to that. The emancipation of women and that of minorities are not mutually exclusive. By being very firm in saying that violence or restricting the freedom of women is never acceptable, you open the possibility to discuss how women can achieve their freedom, and there are different paths to achieving it. What we have to do is make sure there is more diversity in the women's rights movement. But, if you don't name the problem, someone else will name it and generalise it. By naming it, you can bring in the nuances to the debate. If you don't start by very clearly saying that this is not acceptable, no one will feel secure and no one will listen to the next level of your message.

How do we respond to the violent rhetoric and the securitisation discourse that we see unleashed and legitimised by national populist forces today?

MEYREM ALMACI: People like Trump, Le Pen, and Wilders are false prophets. The way to tackle these populists is to try to create a new cohesion at the European level. We have to be clear on who can be our allies in the future to face our threats. We know that Salafism and radicalism is on the rise here in Belgium, yet the country's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia, who sponsors these groups, ignores this. It's good that we are investing in security systems, but if we are looking at prevention, there is a lot of talk but never any walking the walk – there's no budget there. We need to protect war victims from becoming victims of new security legislation. In Belgium, just as in many other European countries, the authorities knew who the needles in the haystack – the terrorists – were. They had them on their radar, but did nothing with that information. The answer is not to make the haystack bigger, but rather to take the needles out of it.

In addition, we do need an emotional answer to fear. For that we have to make sure that we all work together. We know that information about potential attackers is often reported by members of the same community. If we can somehow connect with people who are pro-democracy, regardless of religion or



background, this could be a very strong emotional basis on which to build community in a positive way in a response to the negative discourses of populists.

ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ: I agree that we need to connect with people. As Greens, we are often not very good at dealing with people's emotions, fears, and expectations. We see politics as a rational space but we need to acknowledge that political decisions are made on a basis that is not always rational. In recent years, Green parties have tried to sound more connected to people. In terms of insecurity, we need to acknowledge and recognise people's concerns. I think that Greens are good at conveying the whole picture on many issues. Our proposals are usually comprehensive, cover all aspects and dimensions, and are aimed at eradicating the problem, not alleviating it. If that's the case, Greens should approach the root of terrorism, not only in Europe, but

across the world. It's not just a question of police or security measures, but also a general strategy, focusing on poverty, education, foreign policy, not only in Europe but in other countries, too.

AMELIA WOMACK: In the UK, we've seen the rise of the populist Right and even the rise of the far-right movement, the British National Party, who have been getting seats in local councils, despite the lack of evidence underpinning their ideas. They claim to have silver bullets to absolutely every problem that people face, whereas our approach is more analytical. We have to be very clear that people are facing issues around housing, wages, poverty, access to healthcare – we have to acknowledge that first and foremost. We need to be very clear that we will not allow the failure of our government policies to be blamed on migration or on these groups who are least to blame for our problems. That's always a hard message to get across.

FRANZISKA BRANTNER: We defend our open society and our liberty – that’s what distinguishes us from terrorists. We don’t want to be like them; it’s our responsibility to fight the good fight to protect our values. We are proud of our pluralistic societies, we enjoy the European way of life, and we will not let it be destroyed either by terrorists or by those who try to sell nationalism, discrimination, and hatred as the proper answers to the present insecurity. We have to address inequalities, education, inclusion, and emancipation in our society and, yes, we do have specific security problems to solve. In Germany, it starts with massively improving the working relations of our 16 federally independent police forces and intelligence services.

What would be distinctive about Green measures to address insecurity? What might a Green interior minister, a Green minister of home affairs, or a Green minister of defence do differently? And how would they pay for it?

FRANZISKA BRANTNER: Greens do not rely on populist speculation when something happens. We are the ones asking the difficult questions about why things happen. We have the ambition to improve security by getting the necessary manpower to implement our laws rather than tightening laws unnecessarily. We include all people and we make sure that they can trust our institutions, whatever God they pray to, wherever they come from.

When it comes to defence, we have a European approach. We are developing European defence concepts, looking to create synergies to optimise our defence spending. That is our Green distinctiveness. If I were defence minister I would look and work for shared European answers.

In terms of home affairs, we have a very good track record here in Germany, at the state level. Whenever we have been part of the government, on justice and home affairs, we have put our focus on inclusion, on upholding human rights, we have increased manpower when and where it was needed. We increased the number of police officers, we invested in local police forces, and we improved safety measures and prevention policies locally. We generally need better implementation of the law rather than new security packages every other week. For that to work you need people. Maybe it is easier in Germany due to our financial situation; we don’t have to choose between education and police, we can afford both.

On the prevention front, we are providing inclusive education systems and opportunities for people with different backgrounds. That’s part of the answer, not the full picture. In Germany, experience teaches us that if people don’t trust their institutions, they don’t come and report things, so it’s essential to have faith in the institutions. That prevents terror attacks and that saves lives.

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ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ: I'm not sure which Green would accept such an office! Jokes aside, I think there's a real debate about whether we as Greens should enter into areas where we are not as comfortable to change things, even if it means compromising on our principles. In terms of security policy, be it in defence or in interior affairs, I think that we should always apply the principles of transparency and accountability that are essential for democracy. In Spain, the police forces and the army are often in places where there is a lack of democracy and equal opportunities. As Greens we should also put human rights at the core of any policies and try to give answers to the specific kind of violence being perpetrated against certain groups – such as women, as I stressed earlier. If we do not take this specificity into account in our societies, I think it would be neglecting the reality that there are many different sorts of violence in our society.

MEYREM ALMACI: In terms of the financial implications, there is an aspect that could make a huge difference, and that is stopping the financial flows of radical groups. It is possible at a the European level, yet it isn't being done, because it would also mean addressing the issue of tax havens. It's a question of political will.

We know we could save a lot of money by removing the root of the problem. But the nature of our political systems makes it difficult to have a long-term perspective, so we try to find quick fixes in a short space of time, even if it's more expensive in the long run. I think we are over-spending on security, with symbolic measures that are not necessarily effective, and underspending on prevention. That debate, on what is effective, should be at the centre of Green policy-making.

FRANZISKA BRANTNER: As chairwoman of the crisis-prevention sub-committee in the Bundestag, we will have our next session on the financing of terrorism. It is a priority issue in Germany.

AMELIA WOMACK: Any true review of security, as we discussed, needs to look at the impact of the arms industry and the instances where we are

giving power to some of the most unstable regions on earth. The UK produces 30 billion pounds of arms that is sold to repressive regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, Kazakhstan, and China and it has now also started personnel courses to train people in Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.

We've talked about the social side of security in the UK and Europe, and the fact that more women are killed at the hands of their partners than by terrorists. In the US, more people have been killed by toddlers with guns than by terrorists. The real issues at home and abroad need to be central to our discussions. It's true that we are not just looking at the military but also the social implications of it. Obviously, there are environmental implications of climate change that will decrease our security around the world – the fact that 33 countries are going to be water-scarce by 2040 means that wars in our future are potentially going to be fought over water, not oil. That's one of the key parts of being Green: talking about security and defence in anticipation of what lies ahead. In the UK, our history has been scarred by our involvement in military interventions that undermined our national and international security. The fact that we've always opposed those interventions and sought more grassroots and European solutions is one of the key things that distinguishes us.



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