

German Court Refuses to Ban Neo-Nazi Party



Berlin, January 18 (RHC)-- A German court ruled against banning the country's far-right National Democratic Party, the NPD, although the group has frequently been called anti-constitutional. The party has been described as a neo-Nazi organization supporting an ethnic-based nation state and anti-Semitism.

"The NPD intends to replace the existing constitutional system with an authoritarian national state that adheres to the idea of an ethnically defined 'people's community,'" the German constitutional court said, adding that the party identified with National Socialist (Nazi) personalities and demonstrates "an affinity" with its mindset. German intelligence has also described the party as racist and anti-Semitic.

Yet the court refused to ban the neo-Nazi group, ruling that it is not relevant enough to threaten democracy in the country. "The NPD pursues anti-constitutional goals, but at the moment there is an insufficient weight of evidence to make it appear possible that their behavior will result in success," said head judge Andreas Vosskuhle.

The party is estimated to have 5,000 members and currently has 338 local council seats, a small fraction of local political positions. In the 2013 general election, the party fell far short of gaining enough votes to enter the German parliament.

While the NPD's popularity has been waning recently, the far-right populist party, Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has been growing in influence amid a wider resurgence of right-wing parties across Europe in the midst of an immigration crisis and terrorist attacks. AfD has even used the famous image of Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara in its campaigning posters.

Playing on xenophobic fears of refugees and Europe's economic struggles, the AfD was able to make significant gains in the recent state elections, and has around 15 percent support, according to polls. There is a fear that the party will have a greater influence in the October national election.

The 16 state governments that filed the case against the NPD criticized the court ruling but accepted the decision. "(The NPD) makes a lot of effort to endanger our basic free democratic order and is certainly an annoyance in its openly anti-constitutional attitude," said Green Party spokesman Volker Beck. "But it is not a real danger to our rule of law and our democracy."

Despite Germany's notorious past with far-right nationalist groups and laws to prevent extremism, political parties can only be legally banned if there is hard evidence they would threaten democracy.

Since the end of World War II, only two parties have been banned in Germany: a communist party and a successor to the Nazi Party. In 2003, there was also an attempt to ban the NPD, but it failed following allegations of government informants infiltrating the party.

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