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# GERMAN GREEN PARTY: THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL AGENDA

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### Abstract

The purpose of the article is to present the evolution of the political agenda of the German Green Party (*Die Grünen*) between 1980 (establishment of the party, its first program manifesto – *Das Bundesprogramm*) and 2017 (recent German federal elections program – *Zukunft Wird aus Mut Gemacht. Bundestagswahlprogramm*). The research was conducted on the basis of the literature and the comparison of the two mentioned program manifestos. The hypothesis of the work is that the successes of the Greens in West Germany mainly result from the ideological, program, and strategic reorientation of the party that took place at the turn of 1980s and 1990s.

### Key words

German Green Party, Die Grünen, The Greens, Germany, Bundestag elections.

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## 1. Introduction

Green (ecological) parties emerged began to appear on the European political scene in the late 1970s and 1980s. Their formation coincided and was a consequence of significant changes in social values of the inhabitants of highly developed countries, the progressing ecological threats, and the disappointment of the young generation with the consensual politics of the two dominant political doctrines in Western Europe – social democracy and Christian Democrats. The characteristic features of the emerging Green parties were the reluctance to mainstream parliamentary politics, which – according to activists – was unable to work out effective solutions to the ecological problems facing mankind at the turn of

the 20th and 21st centuries. Initially, their demands concerned only environmental issues. Then Greens formulated the other elements of the political agenda: attitude to economic policy, a vision of the political system, a vision of social justice, methods of solving social conflicts, the desired model of foreign policy (Carter, 2007; Castells, 2010; Gahrton, 2015; Grant, Tilley, 2018).

In Western Europe, the German Green Party (*Die Grünen*), established in 1980, has a special tradition, position in the political system, and relevance. Its first election successes in the 1980s, followed by participation in governments at the regional and central level (coalition with the SPD in 1998–2005), showed the growing importance of post-material values among Western European societies including

concern for the environment which is increasingly devastated by industrial and technological development (Kaelberer, 1998; Tranter, Western, 2009).

The purpose of the article is to present the evolution of the political agenda of the German Green Party (Die Grünen) between 1980 (establishment of the party, first program manifesto – Das Bundesprogramm) and 2017 (recent German federal elections program – Zukunft Wird aus Mut Gemacht. Bundestagswahlprogramm). The research was conducted on the basis of the literature and the comparison of the two mentioned program manifestos.

## 2. Results and discussion

The German Green Party (Die Grünen) was founded in 1980 in the process of institutionalizing many grassroots ecological movements. Waclaw Miziniak mentions seven stages in the process of forming the German Greens – from the birth of the first West German environmental organizations to the final elaboration of the political program (Miziniak, 1990). The first stage (1950–1971) consisted of the activities of spontaneously created ecological organizations and initiatives expressing the need for an active role of society and the state in protecting the increasingly degraded natural environment. Apart from ecological demands, there were often pacifist (opposition to the war in Vietnam, disagreement with the presence of American troops in Germany), anti-nuclear (opposition to the construction of nuclear power plants), anti-capitalist (opposition to the market economy, which in the opinion of activists was responsible for the exploitation of nature) and counterculture (pansexual slogans, undermining the applicable moral norms). A significant part of the activity of environmental activists was broader and enormously influencing non-parliamentary politics of the New Left. This movement postulated a radical transformation of society and the state, inspired by the works of neo-Marxist philosophers of the Frankfurt School, primarily Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer (Heywood, 2017).

The remaining six stages of the German Greens formation process included: numerous formation of local ecological initiatives focusing on specific issues, such as preventing the storage of radioactive waste (1971–1977); establishment of the first West German environmental party – Grüne Liste Umweltschutz (1977); formation national ecological federations and the first attempts to develop a joint program (1977–1979); establishment of the first federal environmental organization (1979); the constitution of the Green party and its first participation

in the elections to the Bundestag (1980); expansion of the structures of the Green party, development of the program and first successes in the elections to the Bundestag and the European Parliament (1981–1984) (Miziniak, 1990).

The Greens were portraying themselves as an “anti-party” criticizing the West German establishment (Michalak, 2011), a party rejecting the division into right and left, aspiring to overcome barren – in their opinion – disputes over secondary issues for the country’s future. They opposed the traditional politics based solely on the activity of the parties which claimed a monopoly in shaping the social reality. They were created for the advocates of change, not only in the anthropocentric way of thinking about the surrounding nature but also in the understanding of democracy and the relationship between citizens and power (the postulate of participatory grassroots democracy and democratization of larger areas of the social life than before) (Jaraus, Milder, 2015).

From the very beginning of functioning of the German Green party, there was no agreement among its activists as to the desired shape of the two areas of the party’s operation. One was the ideological orientation; the other one regarded the preferred forms of political activity and attitudes towards participation in parliamentary politics. The first problem concerned the spirit in which the party’s program should be built – “deep” or “shallow” ecology (Barry, 1994). The second one was associated with controversy regarding the degree of integration and cooperation with other parties, well-established on the West German political scene – primarily the center-left SPD, with which there was the best chance of working out common program points and a possible coalition in the federal states or at the central level (Barry, 1994; Doherty, 1992). The two areas of dispute – theory and practice – were closely related.

In this way, a visible problem emerged from the very beginning – the demands of some activists, related to “deep” ecology, seeking a radical reconstruction of the relationship between man (state, economy) and nature – condemned to failure the possibility of implementing at least some moderate postulates of “green politics”. The two mentioned problems – a different attitude to the “shallow” and “deep” ecology and the mainstream party – led to a significant division among the German Greens. It was reflected in the formation of two factions – Realists and Fundamentalists (Fundnis). This division was a natural consequence of the first significant election successes of the Greens, primarily in the 1983 elections to the Bundestag, as a result of which the party introduced 28 deputies to the Bundestag (Miziniak,

1990). It should be noted that the essence of the division into realistic and fundamentalist trends did not apply only to the German Greens but to all major ecological parties in Western Europe (Doherty, 1992; Kwidziński, 2015).

Realists proposed a strategy of “small steps”, which was to come down to the implementation of the main program postulates through cooperation with other parties in the parliament. They were opposed to radical program points, such as the total negation of the free market economy or the ecocentric vision of politics. They were also open to possible coalition talks and compromises, which, according to them, did not have to mean giving up the principled postulates included in the program documents. Realists were convinced that only cooperation could lead to an increase in the significance and relevance of the party on the West German political scene, and, consequently, to the prospect of effective implementation of ecological postulates. The Realists faced a serious problem in the first years of the Greens’ activity. On the one hand, they had to be credible for this part of the party’s activists emphasizing uncompromising anti-establishment slogans and far-reaching postulates of social change. On the other hand, they had to take into account that the chances of implementing at least some postulates increase in the circumstances of political cooperation with the political mainstream. The most important politicians from the Realist faction were Joschka Fischer and Otto Schily (Miziniak, 1990).

Fundamentalists positioned themselves in opposition to Realists. Their basic feature was their program-uncompromising attitude, an aversion to any modification of the postulates, which in their case related to elements of “deep” ecology, ruled out the possibility of any coalition talks. The main representatives of the Fundamentalists were Jutta Ditfurth, Milan Horacek, Rudolf Bahro, and most of all Petra Kelly, who became known not only as a charismatic politician but also a political writer and theorist (Miziniak, 1990). In her works, she combined ecological, feminist, socialist, and pacifist elements, largely contributing to the enrichment of the theory of ecologism (Richter, 2015).

During the four decades of the Greens’ functioning on the German political scene, their program has significantly evolved and changed under the influence of internal factors (dynamics of the German political system, relations of factions within the party itself) and external factors (international politics, geopolitical situation). The first program created in 1980 was a compromise worked out by sometimes significantly different circles, from ecological socialists (Ökosozialisten) and activists sympathizing

with ultra-left organizations, to moderate activists, for whom the priority was not a radical reconstruction of society, but only liberal politics in line with the spirit of “sustainable development” of the state and economy (Ökolibertaren). The clearest, however, was the division into Realists and Fundamentalists, two factions with strong personalities and charismatic leaders – J. Fischer and P. Kelly (Jaraus, Milder, 2015).

The disputes, not only on the agenda but also more broadly – ideological ones – led to the fact that the first program manifesto of the German Greens, created under the influence of both Realists and Fundamentalists, was inconsistent and had the character of general priorities. Among them, however, there were “four pillars of green politics”, defining the Greens in the initial phase of their activity, being the common denominator of the Greens’ political agenda, and intended to determine the meaning and direction of their activities. These pillars were as follows: “ecological wisdom”, grassroots democracy, social justice, and nonviolence (pacifism) (Carter, 2017).

In the 1980 program, the Greens emphasized their opposition to nuclear energy – they called for the immediate suspension of work on nuclear energy and the dismantling of existing reactors. Moreover, they proposed the transformation of the economy into one with a “dynamic circular”, they pointed to the need to build an “ecological quality economy”, in which profits should be limited by the well-being of all living creatures. They opted for the production of durable and repairable consumer goods, instead of disposable products, wider use of recycling in the economy, abandoning technologies that permanently disturb the ecological balance. In the context of ecology, they devoted a lot of attention to changing urban trends into “greener” and more friendly to residents solutions (including promoting low-rise buildings, expanding green zones and quiet zones in cities, extending bicycle paths, abandoning the construction of expressways in recreational regions, replace road transport with the railway to reduce exhaust emissions) (Das Bundesprogramm, 1980).

In the area of social, economic, and internal policy, the Greens advocated reducing working hours to 35 hours a week while maintaining the current income, equal earnings of men and women in the same workplace, supporting the economic independence of women, and guaranteeing an 18-month childcare leave, supporting single parents with their offspring (Das Bundesprogramm, 1980).

In the initial phase of their activity, the Greens were the most radical in the field of defense and foreign policy – their demands were associated with

pacifism and anti-militarism. The party called for the dissolution of the Bundeswehr, the withdrawal of American troops from Germany and Western Europe, Germany's exit from NATO, and the creation of a nuclear-free zone throughout Europe. However, the Greens did not seek to change the geopolitical status quo in Europe, accepting the existence of two German states. All these radical postulates, inconsistent with the geopolitical situation, were to be implemented under the new "ecological foreign policy" based on pacifism (Das Bundesprogramm, 1980).

The political agenda of the Greens resulting from their first program in 1980 was built under the influence of both Fundamentalists and Realists. The slogan "unity in diversity" promoted by party leaders was to express the conviction that the differentiation of views within the organization serves its development in the spirit of pluralism and democratization, and in itself can be a model to be followed by mainstream parties. However, the future showed otherwise. Ultimately, "unity" took precedence over "diversity" – already in 1985–1988, Fundamentalists largely lost their importance after Joschka Fischer joined the government of the Hessian Landtag with SPD politicians, and J. Drotz left the board (Doherty, 1992). Three main factors contributed to the weakening of the Fundamentalist faction at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s: the first major electoral successes of the Greens in the federal states and the necessity to undertake coalition talks; changes in the attitude of the party's electorate to more liberal views; and fusion of Die Grünen and East German Bündnis 90 oriented towards the politics of pragmatism (Doherty, 1992).

The real increase in the importance of the Greens, but also the unequivocal end of the influence of the Fundamentalist faction, came in 1998–2005 when the Greens co-ruled Germany for the first time at the federal level. The "red-green" coalition of the SPD with the Greens led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has shown that environmental groups can actively shape the state's policy and demonstrate coalition capacity if they give up some of their radical agenda points. The greatest challenge to the credibility of the Greens was international and defense policy, an area in which at the beginning of its activity this grouping was characterized by extreme – for the then conditions – views consistent with the doctrine of "ecological foreign policy". Significantly, the then leader of the party, J. Fischer (and at the first leader of the Realist faction), received, in addition to the position of vice-chancellor, the portfolio of the minister of foreign affairs. Moreover, the "red-green" government made some decisions, mainly in the field of international policy, which completely contradicted

the original pacifist program of the Greens (decisions on military interventions in the Balkans and the Middle East, close military cooperation within NATO). This was the cause of serious ferment among party members. As a result of the government coalition of the Greens with the SPD, there has been a significant reorientation, not only of the program but also of the ideological position (Blühdorn, 2009; Miszczak, 2012).

To illustrate the far-reaching ideological evolution and a significant departure from the elements of "deep" ecology, it is worth discussing briefly the program manifesto formulated by the German Greens before the elections to the Bundestag in 2017. This program consisted of ten priority areas devoted to climate protection, electromobility, sustainable agriculture, European integration, family issues and intergenerational solidarity, social security, refugees, equating the rights of women, men, and sexual minorities, personal and civic freedoms, and migrants (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

Ecological postulates in the current political agenda of the German Greens focus on counteracting the "climate catastrophe", as some contemporary environmental activists call the man-made violent warming of the climate. The 2017 program included postulates related to this area the energy transformation, such as building an economy based solely on renewable energy sources by 2050 at the latest (and in the power industry by 2030), shutting down the twenty most polluting German coal mines by 2020 and introducing zero-emission transport by 2030. All this is to make the energy and economy more "green", ecological, and environmentally friendly (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

The agenda of the Greens invariably gives a lot of attention to the protection of animals. This was also reflected in the 2017 program, which stipulated that by 2030 a special system of certification of animal products should be introduced to protect animal welfare. Also, the Greens' postulates in this regard include a complete ban on the industrial breeding of animals in large farms (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

In the area of social policy, the Greens propose a model of a welfare state that actively interferes with economic processes, helps all excluded groups, people belonging to minorities (ethnic, racial, sexual), and creates a policy of supporting families with children. The main postulates in this regard included: earmarking 12 billion euro for pro-family policy, supporting women's economic independence, more support for single parents, higher investments in the education system, reform of the pension system towards more solidarity, and equal opportunities and

wages of women and men in the workplace (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

In the 2017 program, the Greens take a broad stance on an issue that has aroused great controversy and has been discussed in recent years in Western Europe – immigrants and refugees. Regarding these two groups, the Greens propose building the foundations for an “immigrant society” (Einwanderungsgesellschaft). According to the Greens, the German government should provide immigrants with a possibility of free existence, provide conditions for social integration, liberalize the law on refugees and immigrants, introduce the “right of soil” (commonly referred to as birthright citizenship) (Zukunft Wird..., 2017). In this respect, the Greens are not only tolerant of the existence of a multicultural society, but also in the vanguard of political groups whose agenda includes supporting immigrants and equating their rights with German citizens.

Apart from ethnic minorities, another minority group that the Greens pay attention to is homosexual (non-heteronormative) people. The protection of their rights has been one of the primary demands of the Greens from the very beginning of their existence on the political scene. The efforts of the Greens to legalize same-sex marriage and the possibility of adoption of children by homosexual couples remain unchanged (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

In the area of security and defense policy, the Greens are traditionally close to anti-militarist positions, but to a much lesser degree than in the 1980 manifesto. The party calls for a significant reduction in spending on the military and defense policy, opposes excessive surveillance of citizens by the services (instead calls for targeted monitoring of threats), and opts for tighter regulations on the possession and use of firearms (Zukunft Wird..., 2017). In the context of European affairs and foreign policy, the Greens argued for the democratization of the institutional system of the European Union and for increasing the competences of parliaments in creating the EU policy. They expressed their dislike of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada, which – according to the Greens – lowers the standards of products, especially food products (previously, for the same reasons, the Greens expressed their opposition to a similar agreement between the EU and the United States – Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP). The Greens emphasized the need to counteract tax dumping in the EU. They also advocated a ban on the export of weapons to countries engulfed in armed conflicts and the abolition of agricultural subsidies for European farmers that they considered unfair to protect the competitiveness of

agriculture from Africa and low-developed countries (Zukunft Wird..., 2017).

Along with the evolution of the program, the electorate of the German Greens also evolved. Undoubtedly, it should be recognized that there is some feedback between a given political party and its electorate. On the one hand, it consists of the fact that citizens choose parties that reflects their views and aspirations (the function of representing political parties). On the other hand, the views of voters are to some extent shaped and modified by politicians themselves in the process of socialization of the electorate and communication with citizens. This is shown by the example of the German Greens – as a result of changes in world views in their base electorate, there have also been changes in the political program and strategy of the party to more centrist positions (Carter, 2007).

### 3. Conclusions

Following the political activity of the German Greens from their inception to the present day, as well as analyzing their two distant program documents from 1980 and 2017, it should be stated that this grouping has evolved in terms of both ideology and program, as well as the practiced political strategy. Initially, the Greens were close to political fundamentalism. This is evidenced by their ideological roots (radical and counter-cultural movement of the New Left), program elements (significant influence of ecocentrism on program postulates, contesting the free market economy, aversion to representative forms of democracy, design of a new international policy in line with the “ecological foreign policy” and rejecting the classic Realpolitik) or creating an anti-establishment “anti-party” reluctant to enter into closer relations with Germany’s political mainstream.

It should be noted, however, that since the very beginning of the activity of the German Green Party, moderate factions (Realists, eco-liberals) have existed, which have ultimately dominated the party’s functioning in terms of the program and political strategy. The best example was the “red-green” government and the leading position of J. Fischer in it. So the Greens finally succumbed to what Krzysztof Zuba (2015, p. 26) calls “the mainstreamization of radical movements”, i.e. integration with mainstream politics.

On the other hand, due to several decades of the Greens’ activity in Germany, the German party system has been “greened”. The two groups with the greatest political relevance – CDU / CSU and SPD – have opened up to environmental issues to

mobilize a part of the electorate for which ecological demands are an important motivation for political elections, and to facilitate possible coalition talks with the increasingly relevant Green party. This process can be observed in all political systems of Western Europe, as well as in the European Union, where the environmental policy adopts more and more ambitious plans. An example is the European Green Deal proposed by the European Commission in 2019, which provides, among others, introducing the “circular economy” – an original element of the German Greens program (Communication from..., 2019). So the potential of “political blackmail” of European Green parties, combined with changes in social values (towards those of a post-material nature) and growing environmental problems, lead to the introduction of elements of “green politics” into the political mainstream.

Today, issues directly related to the narrowly understood ecology occupy a smaller part of the political agenda of the German Greens, but they belong to the priority areas which define this grouping as compared to other German parties. The Greens’ agenda is part of the broader “social ecology”, invariably containing the postulates of grassroots democratization of many areas of the social life, social justice, emphasizing the freedom of the individual, civil liberties and the right to self-realization, equality of minority groups, opposition to the neoliberal vision of the free market and pacifism. Despite the traditional contestation by politicians of the Green party against the division into right and left, the listed components of the political agenda of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen make it clear that the party is placed on the left side of the political scene. The Greens’ agenda includes both “deep” and “shallow” ecology elements, but the “deep” ones are much less emphasized since the Fundamentalist faction has less influence on the party’s functioning.

Summing up, the most important areas of political transformation that the Green party has undergone throughout the four decades of its functioning are the departure from fundamentalism in favor of pragmatism, an ideological transformation towards a political center, the associated increase in coalition capabilities and an increase in political relevance, and the expansion of the electorate with new, less radical social segments (Blühdorn, 2004).

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