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Germany. Geopolitics of Migration: The Chancellor Merkel's Tragedy in Five Acts

Abstract: This article describes the German approach to the migration crisis that has been going on in Europe for several years in terms of the policy pursued by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. This policy has been described as a tragedy consisting of five acts. The ineffectiveness of politics in relations with Turkey and the failure of German society to adapt to the phenomenon of illegal immigration as a permanent state of violation of the applicable law to which Germany is attached were presented in a particular way.

Keywords: Angela Merkel, Germany, migration, migration policy, Turkey

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł opisuje niemieckie podejście do kryzysu migracyjnego, trwającego od kilku lat w Europie pod kątem polityki prowadzonej przez niemiecką kanclerz Angelę Merkel. Niniejsza polityka została opisana jako tragedia składająca się z pięciu aktów. W sposób szczególny została ukazana nieudolność polityki w relacjach z Turcją oraz nieprzystosowanie się niemieckiego społeczeństwa do zjawiska nielegalnej imigracji jako permanentnego stanu łamania obowiązującego prawa do którego Niemcy są przywiązani.

Słowa kluczowe: Angela Merkel, migracja, Niemcy, polityka migracyjna, Turcja

International migration occurs whenever people change their state of residence. Their explanatory factors are of different nature: political, religious, economic or demographic. In the context of the 21st century, complementary causal elements are at work under the effects of internationalisation and globalisation¹.

¹ On the factors and concepts of international migration, cf. [Dumont 2018].

Today, as in the past, international migration has multiple effects, including on the internal geopolitics of the countries where immigrants arrive. Indeed, Germany's² migration policy has been affected by the migration flows of 2015. Previously, Chancellor Angela Merkel, in office since 22 November 2005, seemed to be unsinkable. Then her image among Germans collapsed, as proved her electoral failures in 2017-2018 and then her decision on 29 October 2018 to resign as president of her political party and the announcement that she would not stand in Germany's next elections nor seek to renew her mandate as chancellor in 2021. In order to understand this turnaround, which was unforeseeable in 2015 according to the media, it is necessary to describe the five acts of what we can call "the tragedy of Chancellor Merkel".

Act One: Weak signals

Any geopolitical analysis must consider what is known in future-oriented studies as "weak signals", i.e. minor events, perceived as petty or unimportant, and yet likely to exert a significant influence in the long term. Germany has experienced two weak signals, the first one due to the refusal to be seen, the second one due to a poor geopolitical analysis of the Middle East.

The first weak signal, which certainly predates Chancellor Merkel, since her beginnings date back to the 1970s, is what I have called a "demographic winter", i.e. the total fertility rate in Germany has fallen significantly and lastingly below the replacement level fertility³. As early as the 1980s, i.e. before German reunification, it was foreseeable that Germany's working population would decline because, even if the employment rate were to improve, for example by raising the retirement age, the birth deficit would be too great to halt this foreseeable decline.

The data of this weak signal is well documented. Indeed, Germany (FRG + GDR), which had well over a million births in the 1960s, and even over 1.3 million in some years, had fewer than 800,000 births in 1975 and 1976. Although the number of births rose to 900,000 in 1990, it fell back to less than 700,000 in 2005, the year in which Ms. Merkel became Chancellor, to less than 700,000 in 2013, i.e. at its

² The author warmly thanks Mr Henri Reynaud, former French ambassador, for his precious advice.

³ The fertility rate necessary for women in one generation to be replaced in the next generation, i.e. about 30 years later; as a result, a hundred women are replaced by a similar number of a hundred women. The threshold for the replacement level fertility is 2.1 children per woman in countries with high levels of health and hygiene.

lowest level since the Second World War. The intensity of Germany's demographic winter is such that, every year since 1972, the country has recorded more deaths than births, with, in most cases, large discrepancies of more than 100,000. In years when the net migration is not high enough to compensate for the excess of deaths over births, Germany's population declines compared to the previous year. This was the case before German reunification from 1975 to 1979, from 1983 to 1986, and then from 2004 to 2011. Most German political leaders do not attach adequate importance to this weak signal data. Although Chancellor Merkel supported the efforts of Ursula von der Leyen, who served as Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth from November 2005 to November 2009, this issue is not sufficiently high on the agenda.

It is true that, after the end of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Germany welcomed hundreds of thousands of "late resettlers"⁴ (*Spätaussiedler*) into its workforce. Then, from 2008 onwards, the crisis that hit Spain and Greece in particular saw the arrival of replacement immigration from these countries, thus offsetting the German sub-replacement fertility that had occurred in previous decades.

However, the sustained low birth rate is a weak signal because it heralds, *ceteris paribus*, a considerable need for immigration in order to halt the decline in the working population and thus to sustain the German economy; it is true that this economy outsources certain tasks, particularly to the countries of Central Europe or elsewhere, but this is only part of the solution.

In Germany, Alfred Sauvy's thought that indifference to demographic issues is particularly distressing among politicians, in view of the responsibilities they take upon themselves; Alfred Sauvy's thoughts in this matter are summarised thus by his daughter: "Demography is a very simple science which consists in anticipating that children aged twelve will be twenty, eight years later. But the obvious character of this calculation rarely interests politicians, whose horizon is often limited to the next Election Day, rather than the future, and to the popularity of their decisions rather than their consequences" [Sauvy-Wilkinson 1999: 2].

Another weak signal will come in 2011, when Ms. Merkel already has six years of experience as a chancellor. An armed geopolitical conflict begins in Syria, at the

⁴ I.e. persons considered to be of German descent under the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949, but previously living in the USSR.

time of what has been called the “Arab Spring”. Even if it has internal causes, it is largely fuelled by external powers, something that European countries refuse to admit, since they seem to see in Syria’s geopolitics merely the same factors⁵ that led to the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia or Mubarak in Egypt. The German government, like that of other European countries, is convinced that the regime of Bashar el-Assad will be quickly overthrown. Therefore, to follow what it believes to be the meaning of history, from 2011, the European Union will issue the first sanctions against Syria, in the name of ideological principles⁶ that are far removed from the realities on the ground and quite close, without admitting it, to the American neo-conservative school that was blamed for the intervention in Iraq in 2003. Chancellor Merkel is obviously not the only one responsible for the attitude of the European Union. But she was involved in this insufficient recognition of the importance of the rise of the “Islamic State”, which was neither rapid nor unforeseen [Dumont 2015a], as well as in the Western incomprehension of the geopolitical characteristics of Syria.

In February 2012, while the United States has already closed its embassy in Syria, several European countries, namely Belgium and the United Kingdom, followed by Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, recalled their ambassadors to Damascus for “consultations” and prepared a new set of European sanctions against this country governed by Bashar al-Assad. As for Germany, it announced that it did not intend “for the moment” to fill its vacant post of ambassador to Syria. A “moment” that has lasted ever since, as the website of the embassy, more than six years later, still displays “Temporarily closed”⁷. It should be noted that no similar measures have been decided in the many other countries whose political regime is also authoritarian. In March 2012, France closes its embassy in the belief that it will be able to return within a fortnight since it considers that the regime of Bashar al-Assad should be quickly replaced [Dumont 2016a: 117-120]. And Germany seems to remain inert vis-à-vis Turkey which contributes to the violence in Syria by greatly facilitating the arrival of jihadists recruited from Europe and, more generally, the jihadist activities on the financial and military level and as regards the medical care for Islamist fighters.

⁵ This is by no means the case; cf. [Dumont 2012].

⁶ The same principles also explain the military intervention in Libya from March to October 2011.

⁷ Precisely *Temporarily closed*, cf. [<https://www.embassypages.com/ambassade1156/08.11.2018>]. On the other hand, the Czech Republic and Romania have kept their embassies in Damascus open.

However, these different positions, far from facilitating peace, contribute to the destabilisation of Syrian territories, which could only lead to a massive exodus of its population. Thus the two weak signals that were not observed were the certainty that Germany was going to experience labour shortage and that participating, even indirectly, in stirring up violence in the Middle East could only lead to an exodus from the territories concerned, and therefore to a forced emigration, not a freely chosen one.

Act Two: Syrian despair and geopolitical exploitation by Turkey

Indeed, throughout the years 2011-2016, armed violence will be stirred up, at least periodically, in Syria by many foreign players. Even if Germany is far from being among the most intrusive countries involved in the conflict, it is contributing to it by its own decisions, marked by a certain emulation of the French foreign policy led by Laurent Fabius⁸, or by the decisions in which it participates within the European Union. As a result, Syria is experiencing a migratory outflow which, from 2011 to 2016, affected around a third of its population, not including a second third of IDPs. Syrian civilians, in order to ensure their survival, flee the country to the nearest territories where their safety can be guaranteed: Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Most remain close to the Syrian border as they hope for a quick end to the conflict that would allow them to return home. Others, or the same ones, also remain in this geographical proximity so that they can periodically travel to Syria to see their family or friends who have remained in the country or to check on the state of their property or land in their country.

However, many of these exiles are driven to despair, to no longer believe in the possibility of a peaceful life in the Middle East in a context where a multiplicity [Dumont 2015b] of military actors are active, actors who do not seem very willing to stop fighting, especially since they benefit from significant support, direct or indirect, from foreign powers. In addition, there is an entity created in 2006 in Iraq which slipped into Syria to spread its violent Islamist ideology, i.e. the “Islamic State” [Dumont 2015a]. So there is a tangle of local violence, regional implications and actors from beyond the Middle East who take part in all that. The conflict also appears to be global because the “Islamic state” recruits, in the name of its ideology, all over the world.

⁸ Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development of the French Republic from May 2012 to February 2016.

In 2015, the despair of Syrians is exacerbated by the Palmyra affair. Certainly, on 20 August 2014, US President Barack Obama made a speech calling for the eradication of the “Islamic state”, which he likened to a “cancer”, and organised the global coalition to defeat ISIS.

However, despite its failure in Kobané taken over by YPG (People’s Protection Units composed essentially of Syrian Kurdish groups) at the end of January 2015, the “Islamic State” continued to progress in Syria, managing to conquer Palmyra. Some of its troops went even as far as the south of Damascus. Thus, in May 2015, the Syrians can only conclude that no force within the coalition prevented the “Islamic State” from directing its troops towards Palmyra, whereas it would have been easy to bombard them during the hundreds of kilometres of desert they crossed. Was it negligence or intentional wrongdoing? No one knows. But, for the Syrians, the conclusion of this new drama is bitter: if the international community has allowed the “Islamic State” to advance as far as Palmyra, the day when other Syrian cities, even Damascus, will be under military pressure from the “Islamic State” which, it should be remembered, resorts to suicide bombers, no one will come to their rescue. The conquest of Palmyra therefore has a fundamental impact, even if the media mainly focus on the cultural heritage of Palmyra. For there were civilians in Palmyra. Some were murdered by the representatives of the “Islamic State”, sometimes in abominable conditions, such as the beheading on 18 August 2015 of the former director of Palmyra’s Antiquities, Khaled al-Assad, a world-renowned archaeologist and expert on the ancient world. Thus, in the 2014-2015 period, not only has the “Islamic State” not been fought in a “relentless” manner, but it has not even been truly contained.

For Syrians who are in Syria (at home or internally displaced) or already in a country of first refuge, Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, the message is clear: the hope of being able to return home in the short term is dwindling.

In this context, Turkey, despite receiving substantial subsidies from the European Union as a country with official candidate status since 3 October 2005, wants the EU countries to remain discreet about its support, at least indirect, for the “Islamic State”, and for Islamists in general, or about the increasingly repressive nature of its regime. Turkey therefore sees a way to put pressure on the EU by facilitating the way for large numbers of migrants to Europe, which has been formulated several times by the President of the Turkish Republic, in the context of the balance of power between Turkey and the EU, a kind of threat that can be summarised as

follows: “If the EU continues to be distrustful or even hostile towards Turkey, the latter has a weapon at its disposal, the migratory tap” [Perouse 2018]. With this in mind, the Turkish government lets smugglers with a turnover of billions of dollars operate in broad daylight, for example in Izmir.

By using, especially in 2015, refugees as weapons [Dumont 2015b], i.e. as a means of pressure on the European Union, Turkey becomes, according to the formulation then used by the director of Frontex, a “motorway for migrants” [*Le Monde* 2016a].

Act Three: generosity or opportunity?

Over the years, in Germany, there have been regular requests in employers’ circles for even more open doors for immigrants who can work. In 2015, Chancellor Merkel is still very popular in Germany, but much less so in Europe. She therefore sees in the reception of migrants a double opportunity: to satisfy Germany’s economic needs and to give herself an image of generosity contrary to the one left after the euro crisis.

In the summer of 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel, invoking the humanitarian emergency in Syria, announced that she would not close German borders to the Syrian refugees, which will lead to a considerable increase in immigrants and asylum seekers in particular. Precisely, on 29 August 2015, she asks the Germans to trust her by declaring: “*Wir schaffen das!*” (We will succeed!) [in welcoming hundreds of thousands of immigrants]. On 5 September 2015, a historic declaration by the German government announces the opening of borders and the reception of asylum seekers blocked in Hungary, which is equivalent to the suspension of the Dublin regulation which assigns responsibility for processing asylum applications to the first European country the asylum seeker has entered.

In particular, given the unilateral nature of this decision, taken without any consultation or even without informing its European partners who participate in two common organisations, the EU and Schengen [Dumont, Verluise 2016], no other European country, not even France, is following suit. As the other European countries are not following in Germany’s wake, Merkel’s open-border policy brought pressure over Germany, and more particularly over the Länder closest to Austria and therefore Hungary, i.e. the countries where the Balkan route⁹ leads.

⁹ The Balkan route actually covers several roads, for example from Istanbul to Sofia in Bulgaria, or from Turkey to Greece to reach, via the Balkans, Belgrade, then Budapest or Ljubljana and the other countries of the European Union.

Following the decision of 5 September, the already significant number of daily arrivals is increasing to several thousand per day. However, the Chancellor presents the events as a temporary and exceptional phenomenon.

Underneath the generosity displayed and praised by the media, the motives are more prosaic: finding labour force for the German economy as fewer generations reach working age due to the sub-replacement fertility resulting from the “European demographic winter”; taking into account the fact that it was becoming extremely difficult to apply the Dublin regulation, i.e. to implement the procedures for sending immigrants back to their first country of entry, given the large number of migrants. However, in September 2015, many pundits and politicians consider that Germany “saved Europe’s honour” and is therefore Europe’s moral conscience.

But where are the morals when you have one part of the responsibility for the fact that people are living in a situation of desperation which forces them to leave their country, and another part of the responsibility for the fact that these same people are exploited by smugglers¹⁰. For it is not a question of freely chosen emigration, but of emigration that is essentially forced.

Chancellor Merkel’s call¹¹ for open border migration policy is all the more striking in that, as Germany no longer has diplomatic relations with Syria, it is impossible for Germany to have the information that would enable it to easily detect the many fake Syrian passports that can be bought and sold on the black market.

Between September 2015 and March 2016, the number of asylum applications in Germany reached record levels. It had been particularly high (400,000) in 1992 as a result of the wars in the former Yugoslavia and again reaching 150,000 in 1996;

¹⁰ Indeed, other solutions could have been implemented in the form of humanitarian visas and/or temporary protection. In the words of the European Council Directive of 20 July 2001: temporary protection is “a procedure of an exceptional nature ensuring, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection for such persons, in particular if the asylum system is also likely to be unable to cope with such an influx without causing effects contrary to its proper functioning, in the interests of the persons concerned and of other persons seeking protection”.

¹¹ Admittedly, the opening of Germany’s borders is followed by a series of restrictions: on 13 September 2015, suspension of the Schengen agreements and reintroduction of controls at the border with Austria; Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro are added to the list of “safe countries of origin”; family reunification suspended for two years for holders of subsidiary protection. But this does not cancel out the effects that have already been unleashed.

then it reached a very low level in 2008 with 28,000 applications. The conflicts in the Middle East, but also the difficulties in the Balkans, will see the number rise to over 120,000 in 2013. Eurostat does not provide monthly figures, but the annual figures speak for themselves: 476,510 asylum applications in 2015 and 745,155 in 2016, against 202,645 in 2014¹². Over the two years 2015-2016, the number of first-time asylum seekers will therefore be well over one million, 1,221,665 to be exact. Indeed, Syrians (or those presenting themselves as such) form the largest flows of asylum seekers in Germany¹³, both in 2015 (36% according to Eurostat¹⁴ figures) and in 2016 (36% according to Eurostat¹⁵) and again in 2017 (25%¹⁶), i.e. 158,655 Syrian applicants in 2015; 266,250 in 2016 and 48,970 in 2017, respectively.

Act Four: an outflow but lasting impacts

Then, the massive influx of immigrants to Germany seems to be coming to an end, as the number of asylum seekers will decrease sharply in 2017 (222,560) and 2018.

This decrease in the number of asylum seekers is explained by three sets of geopolitical developments that took place in 2016, only one of which is due to Chancellor Merkel. The first one is the closure of the Balkan route. This decision, taken on 24 February 2016 by interior ministers convened by Austria, was decided outside EU bodies, independently of Germany, and contrary to statements expressed by the European Commission. It will be applied as of March 2016 by Austria, in consultation with the other countries brought together, i.e. Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro and Kosovo. This closure limits the entry of migrants into the European Union and makes potential future migrants understand that they can no longer trust the smugglers who were “selling” this Balkan route to them. Hungary, for its part, had decided to apply the Schengen rules, which require all persons entering the European Union to have identity documents allowing them to enter [Dumont 2016-2017]. In addition, Austria decided to restrict the entry of migrants to its territory to 80 asylum seekers per day and 3,200 people in transit. EU Member States Slovenia and Croatia, as well as Serbia and Macedonia also announced quantitative limits for migrants.

¹² Figures from the Eurostat website [12.11.2018].

¹³ Compared to the population of the countries, Hungary and Sweden have a higher percentage.

¹⁴ Eurostat 44/2016 – 4 March 2016.

¹⁵ Eurostat 46/2017 – 16 March 2017.

¹⁶ Eurostat 47/2017 – 20 March 2018.

The second reason for the drop in the number of asylum seekers is the agreement negotiated by Chancellor Angela Merkel with Turkey and signed by the European Union and Turkey on 18 March 2016. This agreement consists to pay the Turkish government to abandon its geopolitical instrumentalisation of migrants, which it had hitherto indulged in, in order to obtain advantages from the European Union. In this balance of power, the European Union agreed to pay 6 billion euros to Turkey, granting the reopening of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union (which means above all the maintenance of pre-accession funding which represents around 1 billion euros per year), promising to abolish visas for Turkish nationals wishing to travel to Europe, and limiting the question of possible returns from Greece to Turkey to a so-called "one for one" agreement limited to 72,000 people. This means that for every Syrian sent back to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian would be resettled from Turkey to the EU, up to a maximum of 72,000 people¹⁷.

From then on, the Turkish government changed its policy of turning its country into a "motorway for migrants"; it decided to thwart the action of the smugglers who systematically organised the sending of migrants to Europe. The very rapid success of this operation confirms the extent to which this government was previously favourable to the actions of the smugglers.

The third major geopolitical event explaining this drop in the number of asylum seekers in countries such as Germany or Sweden is the geopolitical evolution within the Syrian conflict itself. The changes in the civil war situation in Syria modify the Syrian refugee flows. Due to the regaining of control of various cities by the government of Bashar al-Assad, the geographical perimeters of the Syrian civil war shrank between the end of 2015 and 2016, as a result of the Russian military intervention¹⁸, officially decided at the request of the Syrian government from September 2015, and the acceleration of fighting led by the Syrian army, the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian troops. In the light of a good geopolitical analysis, all this support – which greatly facilitated the task of territorial reconquest by the army of Bashar el-Assad against various militarised groups supported by other countries – was not unpredictable.

In 2016, the Syrian territories enjoying relative calm or even hope for a future calm are more vast than in 2015. Syrian population can see that it is possible to stay in their

¹⁷ In practice, this part of the agreement has been very poorly implemented.

¹⁸ Without omitting the action of Russian diplomacy to limit or even to stop the sending of arms and munitions by Turkey or Qatar to certain rebel groups.

homes, with the decline in military violence and an ending civil war, and prefers to stay in Syria rather than to flee abroad. Incentives to leave therefore diminished between 2015 and 2016, and even more so in 2017 and 2018; some Syrian refugee populations in Lebanon or Jordan are even considering returning to their country. The case of Aleppo is, in this respect, revealing of this situation: the hope of stopping rebel fire on Western Aleppo and the reconquest of Eastern Aleppo, then the concretisation of this hope, with the end of the battle of Aleppo on 22 December 2016 signifying the end of clashes within the city, encouraged the populations first of all to leave less, then others to return, despite the difficult living conditions within the city.

However, in Germany, the impact caused by the arrival, especially from September 2015 to March 2016, of such a large number of migrants in such a short period of time is considerable. The problems that Germany is facing correspond to one of the ten laws of population geopolitics that I have designated as the “law of numbers” [Dumont 2007]: when the number of asylum seekers was not very different from previous years, the planned procedures were implemented without major difficulties. When the pressure of numbers becomes considerable, the nature of the phenomenon changes and the situation becomes difficult to manage, even for a country like Germany, which has accepted to receive many people presenting themselves as asylum seekers and to finance the consequences.

Faced with the very high number of immigrant arrivals, some regions and municipalities are finding it difficult to organise the reception of newcomers. There are long queues in front of first reception centres (*Erstaufnahmezentren*), temporary camps and a lack of administrative services in several German localities. Germans do organise themselves into reception committees, distribute food and clothing and refer asylum seekers to the relevant administrations and language courses. But the German authorities are apparently overwhelmed and have difficulty in registering all asylum applications. And then the procedures lead to a backlog of cases in the courts. Other observations include the difficulties of administrations in simply registering and monitoring immigrants, the violence caused by immigrants in Cologne on the night of 31 December 2015, the attacks¹⁹ in Berlin

¹⁹ According to a Hungarian intelligence note, “it has been established that more than ten members of the terrorist cell responsible for the attacks committed in Paris on 13 November 2015 and in Brussels on 22 March 2016 stayed on or transited through the Hungary territory between July and November 2015, taking advantage of the flow of migrants”; cf. « Comment les terroristes se sont infiltrés en Europe » [How terrorists infiltrated Europe], [*Le Monde* 2016b].

and elsewhere, not to mention the problems linked to integration of migrants within the German society²⁰.

At the end of 2015, former German President Gauck summed up the situation as follows: “Many people are worried and wonder how Germany will be able to remain open to refugees in the future, if thousands more people arrive on top of those already here. Will we be overwhelmed one day? [...] Will our prosperous and stable country be pushed to a breaking point? [...] Let me quote (a representative of a municipality): “Professionals and volunteers have come to a standstill. Our backs are against the wall. [...] And remember that this is a statement from someone who helps, who plays an active role, not from someone who looks passively and complains. We want to help. We have big hearts. But our means are limited.”

Germany is a law-abiding society and is committed to respecting its legal system. Some Germans find it difficult to accept that a significant proportion of the 620,000 asylum seekers whose applications were rejected in the period 2015-2017 have not all left Germany, and are therefore in an irregular situation and thus off the administration’s radar. The departure of some of them, particularly Afghans, to France, a country which grants asylum [Leschi 2018] more generously to these nationals, does not, by any means, eliminate all situations of illegality.

Accordingly, the decline in asylum applications and immigration flows in Germany in 2017 and 2018 compared to 2015 and 2016 does not mean the end of questions in Germany about how migration flows have been managed, nor the end of the consequences of these flows.

Act Five: the outcome: a dire atmosphere

The outcome is particularly clear when the German parliamentary elections of September 2017 are approaching. According to a poll published in the daily *Bild*, 81% of Germans consider that Berlin, under the leadership of Chancellor Merkel, has been too complacent with Turkey. It is true that, in addition to the asymmetrical agreement of March 2016 mentioned above, Germany has silently accepted very violent remarks from Erdogan or his ministers. Germany did not react to meetings organised in Germany in favour of the AKP party, where Turkish officials made

²⁰ Which can be objectively measured by the fact that Turks living in Germany (and in Europe) – including a growing number of bi-nationals – vote much more frequently for Erdogan’s AKP Islamic party than actually Turks living in Turkey.

speeches that were very hostile to German values and very belligerent towards the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP).

As a result, the federal elections of September 2017 are marked by a sharp fall of the Christian Democratic Party and the historic breakthrough of the AfD party (*Alternative für Deutschland*), opposed to immigration with, according to the results of the seats distributed proportionally in the *Bundestag*²¹, 12.64% of the votes. As Heinrich August Winkler went on to write, “the entry of the AfD into the Bundestag is a turning point in the history of Germany” [Winkler 2018]. 32.93% of the votes go to the CDU/CSU compared to 41.54% in 2013. The centre-left SPD, with 20.51% of the votes, is at its worst level since the Second World War, compared to 25.73% in 2013. The FDP liberals return to the Bundestag and surpass the 10.75% mark against 4.76% in 2013. The Greens increase their votes slightly, with 8.94% against 8.45% in 2013. Finally, the radical left, Die Linke, is credited with 9.24% against 8.59% in 2013. Angela Merkel, in order to remain chancellor, obtained a majority in the Chamber of Deputies thanks to the formation, which was very difficult to put in place, of a coalition with the SPD.

In the following months, the issue of immigration remained on the agenda. On 16 April 2018 an alleged anti-Semitic attack took place in Berlin. It was filmed by a young non-Jewish Israeli Arab, wearing a yarmulke to gauge antisemitism in the city. In the subjectively filmed footage, individuals attacked the young man with a belt and shouted “Jew!”. The main alleged perpetrator, who turned himself in to the police, is a young Syrian refugee who lived in a migrants' centre near Berlin.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, interviewed on 22 April 2018 by the private Israeli television channel *Channel 10*, is forced to reflect on the rise of antisemitism in Germany and its causes: “We have a new phenomenon, as we have many refugees, among whom there are, for example, people of Arab origin who bring another form of antisemitism into the country”, she explained. “The fact that no crèche, no school, no synagogue can be left without police protection appals us all”, the German Chancellor added.

²¹ Who elects half of the 598 deputies. The other half of the deputies are elected according to a majority vote in 299 constituencies. It should be noted that with a voting system for legislative elections in line with that currently existing in France, the AfD would probably not have any deputies. On the other hand, according to the German voting system, in France, the Front national (Rassemblement national) would have won several dozen seats in the French legislative elections of June 2017.

In May 2018, a scandal broke out at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF, the German equivalent of the French OFPRA), whose Bremen branch is suspected of having improperly granted asylum to some 1,200 foreigners between 2013 and 2016 without carrying out the necessary checks and without due diligence. The director of the office as well as other persons were suspended and indicted, but Germany is questioning the chain of responsibility, which could go as far as the Chancellor Merkel.

On 26 August 2018 in Chemnitz (Saxony), a 35-year-old German of Afghan origin was fatally stabbed five times, presumably by two young foreigners, one Syrian and one Iraqi. The next day, thousands of demonstrators marched under the slogan that the government should guarantee “the security of all citizens”. In September, other demonstrations took place again in Chemnitz and Köthen (Anhalt). Some of the demonstrators, carrying German and AfD party flags and placards such as “Stop the flow of asylum seekers” or “Defend Europe!” [*Le Monde* 2018] chanted also “Merkel must go”.

One month later, on 25 September 2018, it was the defeat of a man very close to the chancellor, Volker Kauder, who was running for a new mandate at the head of the CDU-CSU group in the Bundestag and who had held this position for thirteen years, that is to say since Merkel’s debut in the chancellery. Even though in Germany the majority deputies are relatively free in relation to the executive branch, this result can be seen as a slap in the face to Chancellor Angela Merkel by her parliamentarians and thus as a sign of the decline in her authority within her own camp.

On 29th September 2018, it is the inauguration of the Great Mosque of Cologne in the city centre, built by the branch of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Ankara DİTİB (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği*) or Turkish-Islamic Union of Religious Affairs. Thousands of Erdogan supporters waving the Turkish flags gather at the new mosque, shouting “Who’s the biggest? Turkey!”. Germans – including part of the Turkish diaspora – wonder what loyalty such Erdogan supporters have for Germany since many of them seem to favour a foreign country rather than their homeland of choice²².

Then Chancellor Merkel’s “disrepute” [Uterwerde 2018] among her voters is indirectly confirmed. On 14 October 2018, in the Bavarian elections, the CSU loses

²² Such a discussion may concern other diasporas as well, in various countries [cf. Dumont 2007].

10.5% and falls to 37.5%, while the other major traditional party, the SPD, falls below the 10% (9.7%), and the AfD enters the Bavarian regional parliament with 10% of the votes. In this context, the election results have led German companies to fear a kind of boomerang effect, i.e. that Germany's migration boom in the years 2014-2016 will lead to a less attractive environment. Thus, some companies "fear that internal immigration disputes could affect Germany's image and discourage skilled workers from coming to work here" [Boutelet 2018].

On 28th October 2018, the regional elections in the Land of Hesse will produce results similar to those in Bavaria, with the CDU scoring around 10% lower. Following this election, the AfD party is now represented in all the regional parliaments of all the Länder. It can no longer be considered as a party of Eastern Germany alone. The day after the CDU's poor election result, Chancellor Merkel announced that she would not be standing for re-election in December 2018 for the presidency of her party and that she would not be seeking re-election as Chancellor in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

Such an outcome is initially based on a refusal to see weak signals, thus on a political approach that is essentially anchored in the short term. As one analyst puts it: "The Chancellor has given up every attempt to put her policy in a long-term perspective" [Winkler 2018]. The political skill shown by Angela Merkel in taking power and staying in power, in managing certain issues and crises, cannot hide her insufficient understanding of the fundamental realities of her country, the geopolitical balance of power and the logic of migration. In particular, to think about the freedom of movement is to think about the fact that emigration must be free and unrestricted. This means, on the one hand, not committing acts likely to contribute to forcing people to emigrate and, on the other hand, fighting smugglers who exploit people's poverty and their dire situation.

The tragedy of Chancellor Merkel is insufficient action on the most critical structural problems of Germany, the difficulty of considering the future risks, the freedom of peoples to be themselves and the geopolitical parameters of immigration. The tragedy of Angela Merkel raises another question, because we must "discuss the share of German responsibility in the very worrying state of today's Europe" [ibid.] and for example the restrictions placed on the free movement of Europeans because of the "slow agony of the Schengen area" [Su, Romain 2018; cf. Dumont 2016b; *La Tribune de Genève* 2016]. Is not Merkel's tragedy also the tragedy of an EU that has badly implemented the freedoms and values it claims to cherish and uphold?

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