

I had already met Thien* before but did not know he was bisexual before encountering him in the LGBTQ+ group of our university. He is currently 23 years old and is studying social work at the Catholic University of Eichstätt.

Personally, he feels affected by the rise of Right-Wing Populism in Germany mainly out of two reasons. Firstly, he perfectly fits into the image of the “other” as his parents are Vietnamese. Even though Thien has the German citizenship and was born in this country, he is often confronted with people not accepting him as a “proper” German. Secondly, his sexual orientation comes into play which makes him prone to offense by the political right. As Right-Wing Populists, in the German case the AfD, tend to oppose an open society that becomes to “colourful”, he feels threatened by these opinions in more than one way. Thien views the developments of the past few years with disappointment. He also pointed out the events at Chemnitz during last summer and that he was shocked about riots like this happening right in the middle of Germany.

At the end of August 2018, a man was stabbed in the Saxonian town of Chemnitz. After it had become public information that the two suspects were probably of foreign decent respectively refugees, a large number of protesters gathered in the town centre and a violent riot broke out. Some of the protesters could clearly be identified as Neo-Nazis as they were doing the Nazi salute in public. In Germany, this is crime. In addition to that several acts of violence against refugees and people from non-German descent occurred. Later, the Saxonian police was accused of having underestimated the danger and sheer amount of people taking part in the process. Already since the reunification of Germany in 1990, there have happened several acts of violence against foreigners. Right-Wing extremism has been a problem in former Eastern Germany for almost three decades now.

Since the AfD has successively been elected into several regional parliaments, the situation has worsened, according to Thien. He grew up in Nuremberg, where he never had to face severe xeno- or homophobic attacks as a teenager or a young man. After having been to Eichstätt for some time, he experiences his hometown in a different way. Some time ago for example, Thien saw a middle-aged German man harassing a juvenile Person of Colour at the main station of Nuremberg. The man was obviously drunk and pulled back by a woman, apparently his significant other. However, she did not comment on his racist behaviour but was only worried about him making a scene in a public place.

Another time, Minh overheard some xenophobic comments of an apparently homeless drunk German on the metro. Among other racist utterings, the man uttered, that soon foreigners will work under the Germans and “serve” them

Luckily, Thien was not personally affected by the event but still experienced the situation out of first hand as a bystander. In both cases he was extremely shocked and stressed that such situations had never happened, when he was younger. “Rather than anxiety or anger, it is more disappointment, I feel towards the German society”. According to the student one would have expected such behaviour only by clearly identifiable skinheads until a few years ago, especially in public. Now the hate seems to come from the middle of society, by normal people. Thien identifies the success of the AfD as one the key drivers for the increase of racism

and hate against foreigners across the whole society. “Utterances which had made you a Right-Wing Extremist until a few years ago, have now become socially acceptable. That is why I am worried about future developments”.

In Thien’s opinion especially members of society who are not directly threatened by Right-Wing Populist views and politics, should actively position themselves against it. From foreigners, refugees, Muslims or transgenders it is expected to act against the forming right. The rest of society not that much which is why it would be a great signal to stand against the Populist as a unified civil society.

Regarding the European elections coming up at the end of May, Minh absolutely sees a lot of potential for a success of Right-Wing Populist parties, especially in countries like Austria, where they are already governing. The way the general population views the European Union will change; quite likely towards the negative.

In the end we also discussed about whether the sheer existence of Right-Wing Populist forces, in the German again the AfD, is to be considered an exclusively negative development. Thien stated, that their ideology is to be denounced. However, the political debate, especially about internal affairs, seems to be revived again by such strong opinions on the political right. On the one hand, the rest of the political parties must also position themselves towards political issues. A lively debate about politics is a crucial element of any democracy. On the other hand, a larger part of the population discusses about political than for many years. Also this activation of voters can be viewed as something positive. “Nevertheless, one should watch out that this fresh wind does not turn into a storm, that nobody is able to control anymore.”

* The name was changed by the editor.

The interview was conducted on 1st May 2019.