

ECR reject joins EFDD group

Written by Martin Banks on 11 April 2016 in News
News

Beatrix von Storch, who was asked to leave Parliament's ECR group for suggesting refugees should be shot, has joined Nigel Farage's EFDD grouping.



A German far-right and anti-immigrant MEP who sparked a storm after comments about "shooting refugees" has joined Parliament's EFDD group.

Beatrix von Storch is one of two Alternative for Germany (AfD) party MEPs who were last month asked to leave the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) in the Parliament after reportedly saying that the police should be allowed to use weapons against women and children who enter Germany illegally.

The ECR group, however, [claimed the pair faced expulsion](#) [1] unless they agreed to leave voluntarily.

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In the face of outrage across the political spectrum, von Storch later tried to water down her remarks. According to the German daily Deutsche Welle, she said, "The use of firearms against children is not permitted," before adding that "women are a different matter."

"The use of weapons against them can therefore be permitted within the narrow legal framework."

On her Facebook page, Von Storch blamed the decision to leave ECR on a deal between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and UK Prime Minister David Cameron who, she said, was trying to distance his Conservative MEPs - who are part of the ECR - from the AfD ahead of the June 23 referendum on EU membership.

She will now join the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group, which is jointly led by UKIP's Nigel Farage and Italian deputy David Borrelli.

Marcus Pretzell, the other MEP from the right-leaning AfD who left the Tory-dominated ECR, "does not rule out" joining the EFDD as well.

The remarks arguing that it was okay to shoot illegal migrants at German borders were first made by AfD leader Frauke Petry and later echoed by von Storch.

"We need comprehensive controls to prevent so many unregistered asylum seekers from crossing the border," Petry told a German newspaper.

Pretzell, Petry's partner and AfD regional chairman in North Rhine-Westphalia, also said he wouldn't rule out the use of firearms as a last resort to prevent illegal immigration.

Their comments sparked a storm in Germany, with Bundestag Chair to the Christian Social Union (CSU), Max Straubinger, saying the AfD had "shown its true colours."

"It's statements like these that poison the social climate in Germany and reveal the AfD's radical ideas," Straubinger added.

Many critics were also quick to warn against repeating mistakes in the country's history, referring back to the time when the Nazis came to power on a xenophobic platform.

An EFDD source said, "The group welcomes Beatrix von Storch as a new member.

"We are pleased that such a prominent and respected member of the AfD Party subscribes fully to our Charter and will work with us for a Europe of Freedom and Democracy.

"Our group is open to members that subscribe to a Europe of Freedom and Democracy and acknowledge the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and parliamentary democracy.

"We are in favour of freedom and co-operation among people of different states, as well as respect for

Europe's history, traditions and cultural values. The group rejects xenophobia, anti-Semitism and any other form of discrimination."

The EFDD source said von Storch, [in a February 1 joint press statement](#) [5] of the Board of AfD, of which she is a Vice-Chair, had sought to distance herself from her alleged comments.

In a separate statement, von Storch, "I am delighted to join the EFDD. By making this transition I am sending a signal, all the more clear in the run-up to the British referendum on their EU membership.

"The AfD and the EFDD (centered around Nigel Farage's UKIP) are united in their demand for the introduction of national referenda as means of deciding on important issues. German people, just like the British, should be allowed the opportunity to decide on the EU and Eurozone membership in a referendum. The majority of the people should decide. This, after all, is democracy."

"In light of the ECR leadership's deliberately damaging behaviour towards the AfD in the run up to the regional elections held in Germany on March 13 I no longer wish to continue our cooperation.

"Following the order of Tory leadership, the ECR press office issued an untruthful statement claiming the exclusion of the AfD delegation from the group."

Her statement goes on, "ECR leader Syed Kamall has begun to dispute my committee memberships. I was to give up one of my committees until last Friday. By leaving the ECR group I have anticipated the withdrawal of my committee memberships by the ECR.

"These events have irrevocably damaged what used to be a trustful cooperation with the group's leadership. However, I would like to thank my many esteemed ECR colleagues for the friendship, trust, and collegiality. Our cooperation has always been good and constructive."

She writes, "In the EFDD I have found a political environment best suited for my political work. We are united in our common fight for a liberal economic policy, civil rights, for direct democracy and sovereign member states.

"Similarly, we reject restrictions on free trade through economic sanctions against Russia, and we oppose the creation of new blocks as a consequence of TTIP. Further, the EFDD, in contrast to the ECR, clearly rejects the acceptance of Turkey as an EU member state."

"It is with pleasure that I look forward to a fruitful cooperation with my new colleagues."

About the author

Martin Banks is a Brussels-based freelance journalist

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