

Leaders of German left condemn ‘peace rally’ over far-right involvement

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Renegade former leader of Die Linke among organisers of rally opposing western weapons exports to Ukraine

A “peace rally” due to take place in Berlin this weekend condemning western weapons exports to [Ukraine](#) has been criticised by the leadership of the leftwing party Die Linke for failing to distance itself from far-right groups that have announced their attendance.

Police expect about 10,000 people to take part in Saturday’s rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate, which is co-organised by a renegade former leader of Die Linke, Sahra Wagenknecht.

A counter-protest supported by politicians and public intellectuals including the Nobel literature prize-winner Herta Müller has been registered in Berlin for Friday afternoon.

In a TV interview on Wednesday, Wagenknecht said she did not want to see neo-Nazi symbols at her protest, but she fell short of uninviting groups of a nationalist persuasion.

“We have made clear that rightwing extremist symbols have no place at this rally,” she told the public broadcaster ZDF. “But of course, everyone is welcome who wants to demonstrate for peace with an open heart.”

Wagenknecht set out the theme for her rally in a “manifesto for peace” published earlier this month, in which she argued that western military support for Ukraine’s defensive effort was merely prolonging a conflict that would inevitably be settled at the negotiating table. Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s demands for fighter jets and long-range missiles could drag [Germany](#) into a nuclear war, it warned.

The manifesto’s original 70-odd signees were mostly prominent figures of the soft-left western German peace movement of the 1970s and 80s, including the singer-songwriter Reinhard Mey, the centre-left EU commissioner Günter Verheugen, and the former head of the German Protestant church Margot Käßmann. The open letter’s co-author, the journalist Alice Schwarzer, was once Germany’s most prominent feminist icon.

In the weeks since its release, however, the manifesto has also been embraced by the far right. Among the half a million signatures since added to the online petition is that of Tino Chrupalla, a co-leader of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, while a link to the manifesto has been shared online by Hans-Christian Strache, the disgraced former leader of Austria’s far-right Freedom party.

Groups from the rightwing extremist spectrum, including Saxony’s Freie Jugend youth movement and the neo-fascist magazine Compact, have encouraged participation in Saturday’s gathering on their social media channels.

While Wagenknecht's condemnation of such support has remained ambiguous, her party has distanced itself from the event. "After intensive consultation, the party leadership has decided not to join this callout," said Die Linke's federal chair, Tobias Bank, criticising the lack of a clearly drawn line of separation from "well-known Nazis" mobilising supporters for the rally.

Kässmann also announced she would not join the rally, decrying the lack of condemnation of "nationalist and misanthropic persons and groups".

Even without their participation, Saturday's rally is likely to mark a further fusion of old left and nationalist protest groups, which was a hallmark of the *Querdenker* protests against lockdown measures and vaccine mandates during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last weekend, a rally organised by the *Querdenker* scene mobilised about 10,000 protesters outside the annual Munich Security Conference, police said. A second protest march made up mainly of leftwing protesters drew about 2,700 people.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago, more than 100,000 people took to the streets of Berlin in protest. Organisers had expected 20,000.

Days before the invasion, Wagenknecht portrayed the threat as an invention of western media, telling the broadcaster ARD: "We can be happy that Putin isn't what he is portrayed to be, namely a crazy Russian nationalist who gets high on moving borders. If that were so, negotiations would probably be pointless."

According to a survey by the pollster Forsa released on Wednesday, only 22% of Germans believe Putin is interested in negotiations, though a majority of AfD supporters hold that view.

Philip Oltermann

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