Democracy is destroyed by people's distrust of politicians. It's different in Germany, and that's why it works, says a political scientist from Oxford

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In most countries, people don’t trust politicians, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. This has led to public protests against the government measures.

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It needs social democratic parties to have more success in the elections. Their decline could lead to an increase in support for the far right and a threat to democracy, says Dr Othon Anastasakis, Director of South East European Studies at the University of Oxford, in an interview with HN. The fact that the moderate left, i.e. the Social Democrats, dropped out of the Czech Chamber of Deputies in the October elections is bad news.

"I am therefore glad that the Social Democrats won the elections in Germany or that the Socialists are in power in Spain. It's a need. The reason for this is the fact that we need both the right and left centre to be strong," emphasizes Anastasakis, who was a visiting professor at the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics in Prague in October.

In Germany, the Social Democrats surprisingly won the September elections and are likely to end the government of the conservative CDU/CSU bloc after 16 years. Its leader, Angela Merkel, did not run for election, although she is still the most popular politician in her country. Social Democrat Olaf Scholz is likely to become chancellor.

In France, for example, the situation of social democracy is more similar to the Czech ČSSD – the traditionally strong moderate left has practically disappeared and politics is dominated by centrist President Emmanuel Macron and various right-wing forces, from conservatives to the extreme right.

In recent years, the main theme of right-wing populist parties such as France’s National Rally or Germany’s Alternative for Germany has been opposition to migration. In the Czech Republic, the ANO movement and Tomio Okamura's SPD also bet on this before the recent elections. A possible next major migration crisis would probably help similar parties.
The question is whether the 2016 deal between the EU and Turkey, which effectively stopped migration through Greece to Europe, will last. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly threatened to terminate the treaty and send a large proportion of the roughly four million refugees in Turkey to Europe. **In early 2020, Turkish authorities partially did so** when they drove migrants directly to the Greek border for some time.

According to Anastasakis, however, the agreement between the EU and Turkey is likely to continue to work. "I think Erdogan will continue to abide by the agreement to stop migration. That's because it needs money and investment from the union to help Turkey's economy, which is in much worse shape than before. Moreover, the agreement to stop migration is the only real basis for Turkey's relations with the Union. Everything revolves around it, everything else has failed, such as the talks on Turkey's accession to the EU. Erdogan will continue to threaten from time to time to withdraw from the deal, but he will not do so," the Oxford professor estimates.

According to him, it is therefore in the interest of the EU states that the treaty with Turkey works and thanks to it continues to be able to detain refugees on Turkish territory. In exchange, the EU provides financial assistance to Turks to ensure decent living conditions for refugees or migrants there.

"In order to avoid the worst, we are often willing to accept a bad outcome," Anastasakis points out, noting that EU countries should not leave aside, for example, the poor conditions in which asylum seekers live in refugee camps in Greece, for example. According to him, it is also unacceptable for states such as the Czech Republic to refuse to participate even symbolically in a common policy and not to take at least a few refugees into their territory.

Anastasakis points out that public opinion in the EU is still partly under the influence of the great migration crisis of 2015-2016. More than a million asylum seekers arrived in Europe. In the long run, however, migration has been linked to Europe since ancient times. "Migration was not invented in 2015, it is a phenomenon that is many hundreds of years old. The crisis in Syria was an exceptional event," Anastasakis stresses.