

As anti-Islam marches grow in Germany, counter-protests swell also

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) The Cologne Cathedral is the most visited landmark in Germany. And in December, its massive towers, their lights bolstered by a brightly illuminated Christmas market, are even more striking than usual.

So when church officials turned off those lights last night in opposition to Pegida, an anti-Islamization movement that has rocked Germany in recent months, they sent a powerful message about what they believe are mainstream German values in the 21st century.

"We don't think of it as a protest, but we would like to make the many conservative Christians [who support Pegida] think about what they are doing," the dean of the cathedral, Norbert Feldhoff, told the BBC.

In Berlin, city authorities also extinguished the lights at the Brandenburg Gate and the TV tower at Alexanderplatz. And counter-protests against Pegida are growing, both in Dresden and across the country, as many see Germany's history as a lesson for speaking out against intolerance.

"A look at our past and economic sense tells us Germany should not spurn refugees and asylum-seekers," former chancellor Helmut Schmidt wrote as part of an anti-Pegida campaign by politicians and public figures in the newspaper Bild.

The Dresden-based Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) has drawn thousands to its Monday night marches—last night saw the biggest turnout so far with 18,000. But Monday night's counter-actions underscored the views of the vast majority of Germans who accept migrants and refugees.

Germany has seen a surge in asylum applications, including from war-torn Syria. And Germany has let the refugees—and many other foreigners—in. Germany is one of the most tolerant nations in Europe, according to this year's Transatlantic Trends survey at the German Marshall Fund of the US. It had the

highest percentage of respondents, for example, willing to have less restrictive refugee policies, at 31 percent.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel appealed to her country to reject this movement.

“Do not follow people who organize” such events, she said during her annual New Year’s address, “for their hearts are cold and often full of prejudice, and even hate.”

Despite that plea, slightly more protesters showed up yesterday than to the last protest, which drew 17,500 people right before Christmas.

Yet counter-protests are also growing, including in Berlin, Cologne, and Stuttgart. Yesterday, there were 3,000 anti-Pegida protesters in Dresden, the heart of the movement.

While the counter-demonstrators were outnumbered in Dresden, in the rest of the country, the turnout was the inverse. Some 5,000 counter-demonstrators marched against a few hundred Pegida supporters in Berlin. The same was true in Cologne.

The staying power of Pegida in Dresden underlines a gap between East and West Germany, in which the former faces higher unemployment, exclusion, and crucially, far lower rates of immigration.

“East Germany hasn’t experienced migration as much as the rest,” says Hajo Funke, a political science professor at the Free University Berlin. “They have not interacted with [migrants] so much, so that’s one reason why they can better project their fears and frustrations onto migrants.”