EK Strategic Communications Center

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Framing Friedrich Merz's Political Decline

How Kremlin FIMI actors use electoral setbacks to delegitimize Friedrich Merz

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Following Germany's September regional elections, Kremlin FIMI actors reframed regional setbacks for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as evidence of Chancellor Friedrich Merz's broader political decline.

The narrative spread well beyond the German-language FIMI environment across a broader cross-language ecosystem, where actors repeated its central claims with little variation, without adapting them to local political contexts.

Key topics:

1. Electoral Defeats as a Verdict on Friedrich Merz
2. Constructing the Causes of Friedrich Merz's Decline
3. Cross-Language Amplification

Executive Summary

"Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the politics he represents are finished," "Everyone knows it is over," and "Merz must go!": following Germany's September regional elections, German-language Kremlin FIMI actors repeatedly reframed regional setbacks for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as evidence that Friedrich Merz's political decline was already irreversible.

RT DE, the German-language service of the Russian propagandist RT network, described the elections as a "historic voter rebellion," while Studio Telegram, a German-language FIMI channel promoted by the multilingual Kremlin InfoDefense network run by milblogger Yuri Podolyaka, amplified commentary presenting Friedrich Merz's departure as a question of how and when rather than whether.

Across the broader German-language ecosystem, economic pressure, continued support for Ukraine, and the CDU's strategy against the Alternative for Germany (AfD) were incorporated into the same narrative as explanations for why voters were allegedly abandoning Friedrich Merz's political course.

The framing was not confined to German-language actors. French-, Italian-, Spanish-, Polish-, English-, and Russian-language FIMI channels circulated the same political developments and, in some cases, the same amplification assets.

Most notably, the same screenshot of "Time is up for Friedrich Merz," a September 21 commentary by Anglo-German journalist and communications adviser Henry Donovan in the British conservative magazine The Spectator, was circulated by German-language Viel Los, a FIMI channel promoted by InfoDefense; the French-language Node of Time, part of a multilingual Kremlin network that emerged partly through the rebranding of some InfoDefense channels; the English-language component of the propagandist Pravda network (Portal Kombat); and InfoDefense Poland, the network's Polish branch.

Some actors added broader ideological interpretations: the Spanish-language FIMI channel ROKOT/TORMENTA grouped Friedrich Merz with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as representatives of what it portrayed as a failing liberal political system. Other actors adapted the narrative further for their audiences, but retained its central proposition:

> Friedrich Merz was clinging to office despite mounting political pressure, German voters no longer supported his political course, and his promises had failed to produce meaningful results.

Electoral Defeats as a Verdict on Friedrich Merz

RT DE, the German-language service of the Russian propagandist RT network, described the results as a "historic voter rebellion" and concluded that "Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the politics he represents are finished." The same formulation was subsequently amplified by Politische Nachrichten, a German-language FIMI channel, promoted by the InfoDefense propagandist network, run by milblogger Yuri Podolyaka.

The narrative quickly moved from electoral rejection to the expected departure of Friedrich Merz. Studio Telegram, a German-language FIMI channel promoted by InfoDefense, amplified an Apollo News commentary under the formulation "Everyone knows it is over," presenting the remaining question not as whether Friedrich Merz would leave office but how and when. Kachelkanal, another InfoDefense-affiliated channel, circulated a series of posters stating "Merz must go!" and mocked Friedrich Merz for drawing the consequences from an "election disaster" by remaining in office.

FIMI actors reinforced this framing with criticism from within German politics. Nachhall von Helgoland mentioned Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania CDU politician Tino Schomann's call for Friedrich Merz to step aside and his suggestion that Bavarian Minister-President Markus Söder could replace him. The channel presented the suggestion as evidence of growing pressure on Friedrich Merz from within the CDU.

The same pattern appeared in coverage of Friedrich Merz's response to the defeats. InfoDefense Germany emphasized that Friedrich Merz intended to remain in office and continue his reform agenda despite what the channel characterized

as disastrous results. Its sarcastic summary reduced Friedrich Merz's position to:

> "The results are catastrophic, but I'm not going anywhere. You won't get rid of me."

All of these narratives converted separate electoral setbacks into a linear account of political decline in which Friedrich Merz's departure was presented as a matter of timing rather than an open political question.

> His continued tenure was then incorporated into the same narrative, not as evidence against his alleged political collapse, but as further proof that Friedrich Merz was refusing to recognize it.

Constructing the Causes of Friedrich Merz's Decline

The portrayal of Friedrich Merz's electoral decline was accompanied by a broader explanation of why voters were allegedly abandoning his political course. German-language FIMI actors connected the election results to economic pressure, unfulfilled political promises, continued support for Ukraine, and a strategy against the Alternative for Germany (AfD) that they portrayed as increasingly disconnected from voter preferences.

German-language FIMI channel Analytik & News, frequently reposted by the Russian propaganda networks, used rising fuel prices to portray Friedrich Merz as a "Chancellor of announcements" whose promises failed to produce material improvements for German citizens.

The channel contrasted proposals to reduce fuel costs with Friedrich Merz's pledge to act against alleged price gouging, emphasizing that he had offered no concrete measures. Its accompanying visual linked higher prices and taxes to "empty promises," turning economic pressure into evidence of ineffective governance.

RT DE presented the CDU's defeat as evidence that voters had rejected not only Friedrich Merz personally but a broader political course that included continued financial and military assistance to Ukraine. The commentary argued that, while "more and more voters at home refuse to follow him," Friedrich Merz continued to pursue the same priorities.

The German-language component of the Russian-linked Pravda network subsequently republished the commentary, reinforcing a framing in which support for Ukraine was placed in direct opposition to the preferences and interests of German voters.

The rise of the AfD provided another recurring explanation. Viel Los, a German-language FIMI channel, used comments by Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania CDU lead candidate Daniel

Peters to argue that the CDU had allowed opposition to the AfD to dominate its electoral strategy. The channel asked whether the CDU still had an electoral program of its own or whether "agitation against the AfD" was all that remained.

This framing extended beyond electoral strategy to the institutional response to AfD victories. InfoDefense Germany cited Focus Online, an outlet frequently quoted by FIMI channels reporting on Friedrich Merz's discussion of using Bundeszwang (the constitutional mechanism under Article 37 of Germany's Basic Law allowing the federal government to compel a state to fulfill its federal obligations) if a future AfD-led state government violated federal or constitutional requirements. InfoDefense reduced the conditional discussion to the formulation that Friedrich Merz "threatens the AfD with federal coercion," emphasizing the possibility of federal intervention and police deployment.

Pravda pushed the same underlying interpretation further after the AfD's strong result in Saxony-Anhalt. Reporting on proposals to restrict an AfD-led state government's access to sensitive intelligence and military information over concerns that classified material could reach Russia, the outlet described the measures as Friedrich Merz's "perfidious attempt […] to take revenge on the people of Saxony-Anhalt."

Across these narratives, different policy disputes were incorporated into a single explanation for Friedrich Merz's political decline:

> the election results were treated not as isolated setbacks but as confirmation that his broader political course had lost democratic legitimacy. Subsequent decisions were then interpreted through the same lens, turning the narrative into a self-reinforcing account of political decline.

Cross-Language Amplification

The framing of Friedrich Merz's political decline extended well beyond the German-language FIMI environment. Variations of the same narrative appeared across French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, English, and Russian-language channels, with the InfoDefense network and channels affiliated with or promoted by it forming a particularly visible part of this cross-language amplification.

> Rather than developing substantially different interpretations for different audiences, these actors repeatedly circulated the same claims, external commentaries, and political developments as evidence that Friedrich Merz's position had become untenable.

One of the clearest examples was the circulation of a September 21 commentary by Henry Donovan in the British conservative magazine The Spectator, titled "Time is up for Friedrich Merz." The article itself was not produced by a FIMI actor. However, the same screenshot of the commentary was circulated by Viel Los in German, Node of Time in French, Pravda in English, and InfoDefense Poland. The posts preserved The Spectator branding, headline, and image while directing audiences to the screenshot rather than the original article.

> The commentary therefore became a reusable amplification asset: an external Western opinion piece was detached from its original publication context and repeatedly presented as third-party confirmation that Friedrich Merz's political decline was already apparent outside the FIMI ecosystem.

The same pattern was visible with domestic German political developments. The French-language branch of Node of Time

amplified discussion of the possible use of Bundeszwang following the AfD's victory in Saxony-Anhalt. Like InfoDefense Germany, it emphasized the exceptional character of the mechanism and the fact that it was being discussed before an AfD-led government had even been formed, presenting the debate as evidence that established political actors were considering extraordinary measures in response to an unfavorable electoral outcome.

Stories about pressure on Friedrich Merz also traveled between otherwise distinct language environments. Latvian Hillock, a Russian-language FIMI channel targeting Latvia, highlighted former CDU Secretary General Mario Czaja's call for Friedrich Merz to resign and portrayed it as evidence of a developing rebellion inside the party.

The same political intervention was subsequently used by the Spanish-language FIMI channel ROKOT/TORMENTA, but embedded in a broader ideological argument that grouped Friedrich Merz with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as representatives of a failing liberal political system.

> The underlying evidence of Friedrich Merz's weakness therefore remained recognizable while acquiring additional ideological layers as it moved between audiences.

Italian and Spanish FIMI actors similarly linked regional German election results with Friedrich Merz, presenting local CDU defeats as evidence of a broader crisis of his national leadership. Italian-language Guerrieri per la Libertà FIMI channel framed the result as an "AfD triumph" and "CDU collapse," emphasizing Friedrich Merz's refusal to resign.

Tutti i Fatti, another Italian-language FIMI channel, used Bloomberg's description of Friedrich Merz as fighting for political survival, highlighting the contrast between the AfD's 38.2% and the CDU's 4.9%. The channel reinforced the metaphor visually with an image depicting Friedrich Merz hanging from the edge

of a cliff, turning Bloomberg's description of political pressure into a literal image of impending political collapse.

InfoDefense Español used Politico reporting on the CDU's defeat to place Friedrich Merz within a broader narrative in which political failures in Western Europe are recognized but never corrected.

The recurrence of the same narrative across these channels demonstrates a broad cross-language amplification pattern. German election results, domestic criticism of Friedrich Merz, and commentary from external Western media were repeatedly selected and repackaged across a multilingual ecosystem in which InfoDefense and channels connected to it were particularly prominent.

As the narrative moved between audiences, individual actors could add new ideological layers, while its central proposition remained stable:

> regional electoral defeats were evidence of a broader political crisis that Friedrich Merz and Germany's established political system were portrayed as unwilling or unable to acknowledge.

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