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## **REGIONAL GERMAN PREMIER TO STEP DOWN AFTER BACKLASH OVER FAR-RIGHT SUPPORT**

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National party head has also called a vote of confidence in his own leadership.

A regional, liberal German premier announced he will step down and call a new ballot □ a day after facing national backlash for being elected with votes from the far right.

Lawmakers from Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) had voted to install Thomas Kemmerich, from the liberal FDP party, as leader of the eastern state of Thuringia on Wednesday. But Kemmerich and the FDP □ which only has five seats in the regional parliament □ faced immediate criticism from across the political spectrum and accusations that they had collaborated with the AfD.

The surprise result marked the first time a state premier had been elected with support of the far-right party, and drew comparisons to historical tacit support some moderate parties gave to the Nazis.

Kemmerich said at a press conference Thursday that his decision was unavoidable.

"We want to trigger new elections to remove the stain of AfD support from the office of minister-president," he said. It's still not certain that there will be a new regional election since parliament needs to approve this with a two-thirds majority.

National FDP leader Christian Lindner also announced that he would hold a vote of confidence in the party leadership at a special party meeting on Friday, saying that while he feels he can stay on as party leader given Kemmerich's swift resignation, the unusual circumstances warranted such a step.

Lindner said Kemmerich made "the one and only right decision" and insisted the FDP is a "party of the center."

"A cooperation with or dependence of any kind on the AfD must never be an option for a democratic party," Lindner said.

Members of nearly all political parties except the AfD had condemned Kemmerich's election, including Merkel who on Thursday morning called it "unforgivable" and a "bad day for democracy." She insisted the decision "must be undone."

Hours later, Kemmerich announced his election would indeed be reversed, but also accused the far

right of deceiving others: Kemmerich had only thrown his hat into the ring in the third round of a secret ballot to choose the state premier, in which a plurality of votes is enough to win. Left-wing incumbent Bodo Ramelow and his rival Christoph Kindervater — an independent backed by the AfD — had both failed to win the required majority in the first two rounds.

Kindervater won no votes in the third round, indicating the AfD abandoned its own candidate to back the FDP's Kemmerich and prevent Ramelow from winning a second term.

"Yesterday the AfD tried to damage democracy by employing a perfidious ruse," Kemmerich said, adding that "the Free Democrats will continue to fight for a change in politics and against the extremes of left and right."

After an election in October, far-right and far-left lawmakers hold more than half of Thuringia's state parliament seats, making it impossible to form a working majority without either of the parties.

"We have not collaborated, we are not collaborating, and we will not collaborate with the AfD," Kemmerich said.

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