

Parliamentary supervision of the German government's European policy strengthens

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On 27 February, the Bundestag voted for the second aid package for Greece worth 130 billion euros. 496 of the 591 MPs voted in favour of Germany's participation in the aid package, 90 voted against and 5 abstained from voting. Angela Merkel for the first time failed to gain a majority within the coalition – 17 representatives of the Christian Democrats and the Liberals opposed the government's proposal, and 3 abstained. The motion was backed by the SPD and the Green Party. The Left Party voted against the package.

On 28 February, the Federal Constitutional Court declared that the parliamentary body in charge of making especially urgent decisions concerning the EFSF anti-crisis facility included too few members, which limited the Bundestag's right to co-decide on rescuing the eurozone. It ordered that their number should be increased and that the composition of this body should reflect the balance of forces in parliament. The body which the Bundestag voted for the appointment of in October 2011, along with the act introducing the EFSF, was to consist of nine members of the parliamentary budget commission and to act on behalf of the Bundestag on decisions which require for example the urgent allocation of more funds for this facility. In special cases, the government could also consult its stance on the EFSF only with this body instead of with the entire Bundestag.

Commentary

- These two events are of key significance for Germany's financial decisions concerning the EU, and will force the government to co-operate with the Bundestag as a whole in the decision-making process in this area. The fact that the coalition members have no common stance means that Merkel will not be able to count only on the Christian Democrat and Liberal MPs during the next votes on European issues, for example the implementation of the European Stabilisation Mechanism. The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court has also forced the government to co-operate more closely with the Bundestag as a whole on Germany's stances in European policy (similarly as with the Federal Constitutional Court's decisions concerning the laws ratifying the treaty of Lisbon of 2010 and its first judgment concerning the EFSF of September 2011). This judgment, which found the composition of the body unconstitutional and ordered an increase in the number of its members will reinforce parliamentary supervision of German European policy but at the same time slow down the decision-making process.

- The lack of a majority within the coalition is a manifestation of dissatisfaction from part of the Christian Democrats and Liberals with the European policy conducted by Merkel and another sign of the weakness of this internally divided coalition. Still it came as no surprise. The names of the MPs who oppose the anti-crisis policy adopted in the eurozone and the subsidies for Greece were already known before. This stance also fits in with public sentiments – 60% of respondents believe that Germany should not grant further aid to Greece. More proof for the lack of a complete agreement on Germany's stance on the aid package can be found in the statements of members of the government: the minister of internal affairs (CSU) and the minister for the economy (FDP), in whose opinion Greece should leave the eurozone.
- Despite this lack of unanimity among the Christian Democrats and the Liberals in this important issue – which European policy certainly is – one should not expect that the coalition will be disbanded or that a vote of no confidence in the chancellor will be held, which the Green Party has been insisting on. The tense situation in the EU and the results of the polls, according to which the FDP would fall below the 5% electoral threshold if elections were held soon, are forcing the CDU, the CSU and the FDP to remain in the coalition until the scheduled elections in 2013.