

Germany: the SPD has presented its electoral manifesto

Kamil Frymark

At the convention of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) held on 14 April the party's manifesto for the September election for the Bundestag was adopted. The main points in the manifesto are the EU and energy and social issues. The party intends to introduce, at the European level, a restructuring fund for banks (funded through their contributions) and a fund for paying off debts incurred by eurozone countries in exchange for agreeing on structural changes to their economies. The SPD is calling for a reform of subsidies for the ongoing energy transformation (*Energiewende*) in Germany, the reduction of the tax included in electricity bills, and the upholding of tax relief for energy-intensive companies. The third central element of the party's manifesto are social issues. The SPD is calling for the introduction of a minimum wage of 8.5 euros per hour and a minimum pension of 850 euros. They are also calling for the age required in order to benefit from pension schemes to be brought down to 60 years of age (after having fulfilled specific conditions) and for the introduction of dual citizenship. Funding for social expenditure would be guaranteed through increasing taxes to as much as 49% for those who earn over 100,000 euros, by increasing inheritance and property taxes, and by lifting the tax reliefs (including those for hotels owners) introduced by the present coalition.

Commentary

- Social and economic issues will be an important theme of the SPD's electoral campaign. A part of the social demands presented come as the result of a debate within the SPD over the reforms introduced by *Gerhard* Schroeder (Agenda 2010) and provides a correction of their primary premises. Furthermore, a part of the demands echo pre-electoral announcements made by the current coalition (including the introduction of a minimum wage and pension), which will make it difficult for the SPD's unequivocal political message to come across. The presented manifesto pays little attention to foreign policy; it emphasises the further development of relations with the US (including through a free trade agreement between the EU and the US) and with Russia (including through a gradual liberalisation of the visa regime) and the strengthening of partnerships with emerging powers. There are however no detailed references made to European countries.

- The announcement of the SPD's manifesto is intended to be another turning point in the SPD's election campaign, following the appointment of Peer Steinbrück as candidate for Chancellor in September 2012 and victory in the state election in Lower Saxony. In April this year the support for Steinbrück was the lowest since 2005 (32%, half the figure for Chancellor Merkel) and the support for the SPD is oscillating around 26%. The low support for Steinbrück stems from his unfortunate statements about Chancellor Merkel's excessively low salary, her gender as an election bonus and the fact that he called Italian voters clowns.
- After the election, the SPD will seek to form a coalition with the Green Party which has a stable 14% level of support in opinion polls. Should the SPD and the Greens obtain good results in the election however, this will not guarantee that the current coalition leaves power as it has a level of support at approximately 46-48%. The SPD and the Greens would need votes of the Left Party, which is rather an unlikely scenario due to the SPD's opposition to such a coalition. The entry of Eurosceptics from the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party on the German political scene may bring about a substantial change. Should AfD succeed in taking away votes from the conservative camp, a grand CDU/CSU-SPD coalition could be established or an attempt could be made to form a CDU/CSU-Greens government.