

Migrants threatening Merkel

Artur Ciechanowicz

The migration crisis has begun to chip away at support for the CDU/CSU and Angela Merkel. According to an opinion poll conducted by INSA on 28th September, support for the Christian Democrats fell from 42% to 38.5% over a month. In the popularity ranking commissioned by *Der Spiegel* Angela Merkel (CDU) occupied fourth position, following Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) and President Joachim Gauck. In June Merkel had been in first place. The number of people who believe Germany's migration policy is appropriate is also decreasing. In an opinion poll conducted on 25th September by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 24% of the respondents thought that Germany was doing too much for migrants (two weeks earlier 17% had claimed this); 40% believed that Germany is doing as much as it should for migrants (in the previous survey this had been 57%). The anti-immigration and eurosceptic political party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has been capitalising on the growing discontent with the migration policy pursued by Angela Merkel and the Christian Democrats. The AfD, following its division in July 2015, was supported by only 3% of the population according to the surveys, whereas at present it can count on 6%.

Commentary

- The mounting discontent results from increasingly visible problems linked with migrants resident in Germany and the increasingly visible helplessness of the government. There are large-scale fights involving representatives of different ethnic and religious groups in refugee shelters. With regard to the lack of places in these shelters certain federal states (Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg) are considering taking unused private property in exchange for financial compensation and adapting it in order to accommodate migrants. Despite the fact that border controls have been restored on the border between Germany and Austria, the number of migrants crossing into Germany has not fallen. Between 13th and 27th September 150,000 migrants arrived in Germany. 77% of Germans think that Germany's asylum policy is chaotic (18% disagree). 57% estimate that such an influx of migrants increases the threat of criminality and terrorism (37% disagree with this).
- Angela Merkel's fall in popularity is accompanied by growing criticism of the German chancellor from within her own political background – not only the Bavarian CSU, which ostentatiously supports the policy of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, but also prominent CDU politicians such as the head of the ministry of foreign affairs Thomas de Maiziere and the party's vice-president Thomas Strobl. A section of Christian Democratic politicians fear that the migration policy pursued by Chancellor Merkel will cause the

party to lose power in 2017. Also President Joachim Gauck has challenged the government's policy, even though he had previously generally called for solidarity with refugees. In the speech he made on 27th September Gauck warned that Germany's capacity for aiding migrants is limited.

- The measures taken by the grand coalition aimed at solving the crisis remain short-term and ambiguous. On 29th September the German government adopted a series of draft laws which, as declared, are aimed at unburdening the federal states, improving asylum procedures and curtailing the flow of migrants to Germany. The planned changes will decrease the attractiveness of the German asylum system for people from the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the government is focusing on the quicker and more effective integration of migrants by making it easier for them to access the jobs market. In consequence, the German asylum system will still be used by financial migrants from outside Europe as a gateway for the welfare system and the jobs market.