

The migration problem in German politics

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The Social Democrats, who co-form the government coalition in Germany, demanded that Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) provide explanations concerning abuses while asylum and refugee status are being granted by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). This is because of the escalating scandal in one of the local branches of the office, in Bremen. According to information from the media, the former head of the Bremen branch illicitly guaranteed international protection to at least 1,200 people in 2013–2016. Some of those involved in this mechanism probably accepted bribes, and all of them acted in coordination with one of the law firms specialising in asylum processes. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Horst Seehofer (CSU), to whom the BAMF reports, suspended the operation of the Bremen branch of the office and ordered the decisions it has issued since 2000 to be reviewed. According to the Social Democrats, these measures are insufficient; in part because there are rumours that Merkel has known about the catastrophic situation at the office since at least 2017. For this reason, a section of the opposition, the AfD and the FDP, are insisting on the establishment of an investigative commission to examine the actions taken by the government during the migration crisis.

Commentary

- The asylum policy and migration crisis have once again become the most important political issue in Germany as a result of the scandal at the Bremen branch of the BAMF. The SPD is trying to capitalise on the situation to weaken the Christian Democrats, regardless of the fact that they are coalition partners and also the greatest rivals on the political scene. The president of the Social Democrats, Andrea Nahles, mentioned that in October 2015 the competences to coordinate the migration crisis (and thus a great part of responsibility for this current situation) were taken over by the Chancellor's Office from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Furthermore, if an investigative commission is formed, the Social Democrats are trying to get rid of its label of an enthusiastically pro-immigrant party, appealing for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to be added to the list of safe origin countries, dissociating themselves from the open-door policy or enabling immigration to Germany using the asylum system.
- Further information on the operation of the BAMF reveal how overburdened the asylum system is and the scale of the anomaly. The AfD and FDP view this as an opportunity to attract voters concerned about the functioning of the state. It is very likely that the attention of public opinion will remain focused on the BAMF and the consequences of

the migration crisis for a long time, even though at present it seems rather unlikely that an investigative commission will be formed. Support from 25% of the Bundestag members is necessary to establish the commission. Thus the FDP and AfD are missing five votes. There are people in the Green Party, the Left Party and even among the Christian Democrats who believe that the idea itself is well-grounded but would prefer not to decide to back the motion brought by the AfD or FDP.

- The BAMF scandal is also a source of strong discomfort for the incumbent Minister of Internal Affairs, Horst Seehofer, who is also the president of the CSU. A local election of key importance for the CSU will be held on 14 October in Bavaria. One of its the main demands is to limit migration and streamline asylum and deportation procedures. The mess at the office which reports to Seehofer creates the impression that the head of the CSU is incompetent, even though these irregularities took place at a time when he was not in charge of the office.