

Eyes on Germany: Rightward Shift on Migration

Article by Inge Jooris

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Progressives are under pressure to respond to migration as inflows reach record levels and hardliners gain electoral ground. In Germany, the governing coalition is searching for a political answer that could respond to this pressure as well as pull the rug out from under conservative and right-wing forces.

Things are not going well for the governing parties. Voters are fleeing them in droves. The latest poll shows that the governing parties together have only about 32 per cent of the vote. That is 20 per cent less than when they took office in December 2021, and exactly the same as the Christian Democratic CDU, which is Germany's largest political party – as confirmed also by the results of the state elections in Hesse and Bavaria on 8 October.

In Hesse, the Social Democrats, led by Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, had their worst election result ever. The Greens lost the most, with -5 per cent, and the Liberal FDP missed the electoral threshold, as it did also in Bavaria. Even more alarming is the AfD's big gain after months of shining in the polls. Nationally, the far-right party is now polling above 20 per cent, double its 2021 result. In some former East German states, it is even polling above 30 per cent. In Bavaria and Hesse it won 14.6 and 13.1 per cent respectively.

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The government did not take long to react. Just a few days after the Bavaria and Hesse elections, it presented a new "migration package" to simplify deportations but also make it easier to access work. Green vice-chancellor Robert Habeck co-announced the decisions, saying that migration is "a serious test" for the cohesion of the country, and that the government has a duty to "relieve the burden on the municipalities."

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, who recently helped lay the groundwork for the EU's new migration agreement, has now notified the Commission of permanent controls at the borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland. Temporary controls at the Austrian border, which have been in place since autumn 2015, will be extended for another six months.

The state premiers met to discuss migration. It is well known that they want more resources for the reception, care, and integration of the rapidly growing number of refugees. They are demanding at least 10,500 euros per capita per year. They also want better border protection, alternatives to cash payments to asylum seekers, and faster access to work for those who have a legal right to stay. Finally, they request that asylum seekers are involved in community service.

The Christian Democrats have drawn up a 26-point programme that goes even further. Chairman Friedrich Merz demands that Scholz signals that the limit of 200,000 asylum seekers per year has been reached and calls for repatriation and transit centres at the borders.

Scholz has welcomed all of these initiatives. During a debate in the Bundestag, he called on the opposition for "cooperation instead of bickering and power games." In [an interview](#) with *Der Spiegel*, he said that "We must finally deport on a large scale those who have no right to stay in Germany."

The Greens find themselves in a quandary. Migration is not the issue on which they feel most at home. Several parties see them as the party standing in the way of a solution. The CDU/CSU accuses them of constantly denying reality, and is increasingly daring to replace the Greens and Liberals in a government coalition with the SPD. Attacks on the Greens are not only coming from the opposition: in September, FDP general secretary Bijan Djir-Sarai [called them](#) "a security risk for the country".

Harsh criticism towards the government came from the Young Greens, who see stricter migration rules as the wrong way to react to the AfD's rise.

It is not easy for the Greens to find their own line in this political battle. On the one hand, Winfried Kretschmann, the Green Minister-President of Baden-Württemberg, urges the party to adopt a tougher line on migration. In an [interview with SWR](#), he said that "all measures that serve to curb irregular migration must be taken".

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In early October, the Greens' own Federal Working Group on Migration and Refugees had also criticised the party for giving up its humanitarian principles in context of the EU's asylum reform. With the hard line on immigration taking over in domestic politics as well, discontent within the party and at the grassroots level only seems likely to increase.

Now all eyes are on the Green Party's congress in Karlsruhe from 23 to 26 November, where migration will certainly be high on the agenda.



Inge Jooris is a writer and communications consultant. She was previously head of communications at KVS, one of Belgium's largest municipal theatres, and spokesperson for the Flemish Greens. She is current advising Cinquantenaire 2030, a project to transform Brussels' Cinquantenaire Park into Belgium's cultural and scientific hotspot, and follows German politics for the Belgian Green parties, Groen and Ecolo.

Because of her years of experience as spokesperson for the Flemish Greens and her now broader view, we asked Inge Jooris to write a monthly column on the work of the German Greens, drawing on her own experience where possible and looking for lessons that could be useful to all European Green parties.

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