ELECTIONS: WHAT SHOULD GERMAN EU POLICY LOOK LIKE?

- 21.09.2017

EurActiv (21 September 2017)

The outcome of the German elections will also shape the future of the EU. What do German associations, unions and civil society organisations demand from the future government with regards to EU financial, social and trade policies? EURACTIV Germany reports.

Suspense is high ahead of the German Bundestagswahl, not only in the country itself but also in the rest of Europe. The refugee crisis, the financial crisis, Brexit in the past years, the pressure on the EU has been stronger than ever and reforms are badly needed.

For European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, however, this situation also presents a window of opportunity, as he said during his State of the European Union speech last week. Juncker sees today as the starting point to build a more united, stronger and more democratic Europe.

And French president Emmanuel Macron is already pushing ahead with his reformist EU vision, proposing a deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union and the introduction of a European economy and finance minister. He also presented plans for a joint eurozone budget with which economic crises like the one in Greece are to be mitigated.

The future of the EU will depend on whether Macron gains the support of the new German government. Other important fields will be a joint stance towards Turkey as well as questions about the European security agenda.

Many German politicians, as well as associations and organisations, have voiced their preferences and support for more European integration and reforms, despite obviously having different viewpoints on specific topics.

What do they expect from the future government with regards to EU policies?

MEP Rainer Wieland: For a closer Union of European peoples

We expect the ruling parties to re-orientate their actions towards the roots of European integration, towards its values and goals, said MEP Rainer Wieland (EPP), who is also president of the German unit of the Union of European Federalists. The aim of European integration has to be an ever closer union of the European people and ultimately a democratic-constitutional federal state, Wieland says.

Rainer Wend: We need a German federal ministry for European integration

German EU policies and the instruments used are still on the same level as in the past century, according to Rainer Wend, president of Europäische Bewegung Deutschland (EBD), the German unit of lobby group European Movement International. He wants the future government to include democratic and representative associations and organisations from all social spheres into the shaping of its EU-policies.

Wend further proposes a federal ministry for European integration. This ministry would be responsible for the coordination of European policies in the chancellery and should nurture relations between Berlin, Brussels and all other EU capitals. German diplomatic efforts must not only appear in the form of classic foreign policy, but should aim to create a European Public Diplomacy going beyond state actors and promoting EU-wide dialogue, he claims.

His colleague Frank Burgdörfer from the EBD board finds it very disappointing that the candidates, party advisors and the media have so far shunned the debate about upcoming major developments for the future of the EU.

Klaus Müller: We need consumer protection standards in free trade agreements

Consumer interests must be at the core of trade negotiations, argues the Germany-wide consumer protection agency Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband (vzbv). With regards to free trade agreements like CETA, which provisionally entered into force on Thursday (21 September), or the Jefta-deal with Japan, vzbv Chairman Klaus Müller said: Consumer rights and standards have to be protected also under trade deals. Otherwise, these arent good agreements.

Gabriele Bischoff: Social stabilisation within the EU is overdue

The German Trade Union Confederation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB) demands that the Economic and Monetary Union finally be sufficiently stable, for instance via fiscal capacities, says Gabriele Bischoff, head of EU-policies at the DGB board and member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Social stabilisation within the EU is overdue and social basic rights have to enjoy priority over economic freedoms, she thinks.

In addition, the DGB demands that democratic decision-making within the EU should be strengthened. The organisation thus proposes transnational candidate lists for EP-elections and defends the principle of EU Spitzenkandidaten. Last but not least, planned investments have to be increased and sufficient public spending for social causes has to be facilitated, Bischoff adds.

Hans Peter Wollseifer: There are no nationalist solutions

Project Europe deserves to be protected, promoted and developed, believes Hans Peter Wollseifer, president of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH). After all, the EU has brought peace, security and great prosperity for Germany and all other member states. Wollseifer says he is concerned about the growing tendencies towards isolation, adding that current challenges like security policy and the handling of global migration flows simply cannot be solved on national level.

Florian Rentsch: We need a guiding principle for the banking sector

SME-banks provide loans to the Mittelstand and we are middle-sized enterprises ourselves! This

is a fact that is often overlooked, not only on German but also on EU-level, explains Florian Rentsch, chairman of an association of German SME-banks(Verband der Sparda-Banken). He calls on the German parties to develop guiding principles for the German banking sector: Despite many good initiatives, such a guiding principle still does not exist.

Kaynak/Source: