
BERLIN'S FEAR OF AfD SLAMS BRAKE ON EU LEGAL MIGRATION REFORM

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Right-wing populism and the political mood change in Germany are having a direct knock-on affect on EU-level legislation making on migration.

Last September, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) came from nowhere to win 94 seats - the first time the far-right entered the Bundestag since the 1950s. Germany's mood towards immigrants and refugees has also since frosted following a fraught coalition deal to secure Angela Merkel's fourth term in office.

At the EU-level, lawmakers at the European parliament are now struggling to push through reforms on asylum and migration policies once supported by Germany.

Among them is the now-stalled efforts to revamp the Blue Card, a scheme designed to lure highly-skilled workers from outside the EU. The European Commission proposed the reform in 2016 to make labour market access more flexible, noting some 756,000 unfilled vacancies for highly-skilled ICT professionals are expected by 2020.

The Council of the EU, representing member states, and the European Parliament are in behind closed door talks to reach a deal. But those efforts now appear dashed.

Claude Moraes, a British socialist MEP who is steering the Blue Card file through the EU parliament, told EUobserver on Thursday (26 April) that Germany is leading the blockade after having initially supported the reforms.

"It is not being blocked by central and eastern European countries, it is being blocked and outright rejected by Germany," he said.

Moraes, who chairs the parliament's civil liberties committee, said Germany's U-turn on the Blue Card proposal was timed precisely after the elections.

"It was a consequence of the AfD, the change in government, the fact that a new immigration bill is coming out," he said.

The reformed proposal of the Blue Card directive demands EU states harmonise the rules. Harmonisation requires them to drop their own national schemes and adopt one in line with EU law.

But EU states apart from Italy and Portugal are said to oppose harmonisation, while France is said

to be warming up to the proposal after initial doubts.

"The German government just wants the Blue Card to remain parallel to their national schemes," noted Moraes.

Efforts by the Bulgarian EU presidency to reach some sort of compromise also appear futile. Moraes said the presidency had proposed to form complementary national schemes "as a last ditch effort".

It meant allowing EU states to use alternative national schemes outside the scope of the Blue Card. The idea is said to have been supported by Austria, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, and Slovenia but not Germany.

"Even this proposal was rejected outright by Germany," said Moraes.

At a loss

The commission is also at a loss. Paraskevi Michou, the commission's director-general on migration and home affairs, told MEPs earlier this week that they are trying to figure out how to advance the file.

She also noted that talks among the EU co-legislators have not even started on other big files like the asylum procedures regulation.

"When you want to use Dublin, when you want to have efficient procedures you cannot be without this regulation," she said.

Michou announced 15 May as an internal deadline for broader compromises to be reached on the outstanding asylum files in order to meet a public June deadline when EU states are supposed to sort a political agreement on Dublin.

Dublin determines the member state responsible for processing asylum claims but has sparked political rifts among national governments given outstanding divisions on solidarity and responsibility sharing.

Kaynak/Source: