
CSU'S SEEHOFER OFFERS TO STAND DOWN OVER BORDER BANS

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02.07.2018

EurActiv (2 July 2018)

The leader of Angela Merkels Bavarian allies, the CSU, offered to step down from his ministerial role and party leadership during a fiery closed-door meeting on Sunday (1 July).

At a meeting of the CSU leadership, party leader Horst Seehofer, who is also Merkels Interior minister, said he saw no alternative to turning some migrants back at the German border, a CSU source said, a position that could escalate his conflict with the chancellor.

The CSU, a sister party of Merkels CDU, is due to decide whether the deals on migration Merkel brought home from a 28-29 June EU summit in Brussels are enough to satisfy the party, which is determined to secure a tougher immigration policy.

Nine months after elections that saw her lose votes to the far right, a weakened Merkel was forced to turn to European Union neighbours to help resolve a conflict with her allies which could bring down her three-month-old coalition.

But Seehofer, told party colleagues that a discussion he had had with Merkel late on Saturday evening had been fruitless, according to a party source, and was adamant that there was no alternative to exclusions at the border, which Merkel opposes.

There were fresh signs on Sunday that the two leaders, entrenched in their positions, may fail to resolve their differences. Seehofer said the matter was also affecting the credibility of his role as party leader and is planning to give a statement to CSU leaders, party sources said.

However, a press conference on his decision was delayed until Monday, after party hard-liners urged him to seek a new show-down meeting with Merkel.

The CSU party, facing a stiff challenge in Bavaria from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in Octobers regional election, is determined to seal off its right flank.

Earlier this week, EU leaders hammered out a deal to share out refugees on a voluntary basis and create controlled centres inside the European Union to process asylum requests.

Merkel said in an interview with ZDF television that the formal agreements and verbal commitments she had secured from her EU partners would have the migration-stemming effect the CSU wanted to achieve, but in a more European-minded fashion.

She reiterated her determination to act in a way that was not unilateral and that are not to the detriment of third parties □ highlighting her continued opposition to Seehofers demand to turn

back refugees at the border.

The sum of all we've agreed is equivalent to what the CSU wants – that's my personal view, but the CSU must decide for themselves, she said.

It is also sustainable and in accordance with the European ideal. Europe is slow, and we aren't yet where we want to be. * In my view Europe will be held together, otherwise free movement could have been in danger, she added.

A document circulated by Merkel to coalition allies on Friday night outlined repatriation agreements with 16 countries and proposed reception centres in Germany where migrants would undergo an accelerated asylum procedure – measures that represent a significant hardening of her 2015 open-door asylum policy.

Right direction

But the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, whose Prime Minister Viktor Orban has long sought to position himself as Merkel's nemesis in the immigration debate polarising the continent, later said they had signed no bilateral agreements on repatriation.

The CSU's leadership were tight-lipped as they arrived at their party's Munich headquarters to discuss Merkel's deals. But earlier, Bavaria's premier Markus Soeder, mindful of the October regional elections, was positive.

It goes absolutely in the right direction, he said but added he would keep up the pressure to obtain more clarity on the details.

While most analysts expect Merkel to survive the clash with the CSU, it is unlikely to be the last occasion on which the sister party seeks to distance itself from a chancellor it sees as too centrist for its own supporters.

The document circulated by Merkel to her coalition partners after the summit said 14 countries had agreed on a political level to take back some migrants who had passed through other EU countries on their way to Germany.

I understand that this is a dramatic attempt to save her own position, but absolutely there is no agreement, Jacek Sasin, a senior Polish government official said, on public television on Sunday.

In the interview, Merkel said she regretted any misunderstandings, but that she had been given political commitments, and had not said any deals had been signed.

Kaynak/Source: