
GERMAN ASYLUM ROW RENEWS THREAT TO UNSEAT MERKEL

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Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel is facing a renewed showdown over migration from her Bavarian allies that could unravel the grand coalition government in Berlin.

Despite Merkel having clinched a tenuous deal at an EU summit last week to keep asylum seekers registered elsewhere from travelling into Germany, her interior minister Horst Seehofer late on Sunday night (1 July) threatened to resign.

The dispute risks upending a coalition between Merkel's centre-right CDU (Christian Democratic Union) party and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU (Christian Social Union), also headed by Seehofer.

The two sides met over the weekend to tease out the details behind Merkel's deal with Greece and Spain to return asylum seekers caught at the German-Austrian border.

Merkel had hoped it would ease tensions and quell a brewing rebellion within her weakened fourth-term government, which she only cobbled together earlier this year after months of haggling - and was only her second-choice coalition after the first option broke down during talks.

But Seehofer was said to be unimpressed with her plans, which are rooted in the Dublin regulation, the EU asylum law that determines who is responsible for processing protection claims.

Negotiations had ended around 2AM in a stalemate on Monday with Seehofer telling reporters that "we'll have more talks today with the CDU in Berlin with the hope that we can come to an agreement. After that, then we will see."

The two are set to meet again on Monday in a last ditch effort to sort differences.

Trouble was also brewing within Seehofer's CSU, with some on the board reportedly unhappy with his unilateral plans to start turning away asylum seekers at the border in defiance of Merkel.

Merkel opposes any such moves over fears it could unravel the Schengen passport-free travel area and pose an even greater existential threat to the European Union.

The historic partnership between the CDU and CSU in place since the World War II now hangs in the balance, once again.

Either Seehofer capitulates on Monday or Merkel will face his CSU replacement, a minority government, a new coalition, a no-confidence vote, or possibly even new elections to unseat her

13-year rule.

The latest twist in Germany comes amid renewed efforts over the past two weeks to find a solution to stem so-called secondary movements, EU jargon that describes asylum seekers who have registered their claims in one EU state but then travel to another to settle.

It also comes ahead of autumn elections in the conservative and wealthy southern German region of Bavaria, where Seehofer's hard-line stand on migration is said to appeal to the far-right AfD voter base.

"Germany has been holding its breath for two weeks because of this internal conflict. We finally need to start looking to the future," Daniel Guenther, the CDU premier of Schleswig-Holstein state, told German ARD television.

Bavaria was a key transit point for the some one million refugees that arrived in Germany in 2015. Germany at the time had also waived the Dublin regulation for Syrian nationals to relieve pressure on Hungary and Greece.

Despite the rhetoric, Merkel still appears more popular in Bavaria than the state's CSU premier Markus Soeder, according to one poll held earlier this month. However, another ARD poll had also said most Germans support Seehofer's plans.

Kaynak/Source: