
GERMAN GOVERNMENT AGREES ON MIGRATION COMPROMISE

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06.07.2018

Deutsche Welle (5 July 2018)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives have reached an agreement on asylum policy with the center-left SPD. There had been tensions over plans to turn away certain migrants at the border.

The leaders of Germany's three-way governing coalition agreed on a deal concerning migration and asylum policy after German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a deal with Interior Minister Horst Seehofer to introduce tougher controls at Germany's border with Austria.

Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), Seehofer's Christian Social Union (CSU) and the center-left Social Democrats (SPD) compromised on a deal to counter illegal immigration into Germany as well as introducing tougher asylum policies. The compromise comes on the heels of a migration policy spat between Merkel and Seehofer that threatened to topple the government.

What they agreed on:

SPD leader Andrea Nahles said there would be no unilateral action concerning migration, but that there would be quicker processes for handling asylum applications according to the Dublin agreement, which regulates asylum policy across the European Union.

The leaders agreed on ditching so-called transit centers to process incoming asylum-seekers, rather there will now be "transit processes in police centers," CSU leader Seehofer told reporters. If migrants are not able to be taken to a "transit accommodation area" at the Munich airport, Germany's federal police will process arriving migrants at their existing facilities along the border, the government said in a statement.

Leaders hail compromise

Nahles told reporters following the meeting that the parties agreed to a "package [of measures] for the reorganization of asylum policy" and that it was a "good solution."

Seehofer, whose threat to leave his post as interior minister put the future of Merkel's government in jeopardy, appeared satisfied with the deal. "You're looking at a very happy interior minister," he told reporters.

Merkel's government stays together: Migration had threatened to tear apart Germany's

government, as well as Merkel's own party. Seehofer had offered to resign as interior minister due to the split between him and Merkel on what to do with asylum seekers. However, it appears now that Seehofer is on board with Germany's solution to migration. The fact that Merkel's grand coalition partner, the SPD, is on board as well eases tensions immensely.

Germany's recent migration history: During Europe's refugee crisis in 2015, Germany took in nearly 890,000 migrants from non-EU states. Merkel received much criticism for the move, and anger over her policy led to the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Migration to Germany has since dropped dramatically to around 280,000 in 2016 and has continued to decrease.

Merkel's row with Seehofer: Last month, Seehofer put together a still unpublished "migration master plan" that involved rejecting any migrant already registered in another EU country at Germany's border. Merkel opposed the plan before it was presented to other parties, hoping for an EU-wide solution to migration. The disagreement led Seehofer to offer his resignation as interior minister earlier this week, which consequently spawned negotiations that led to Thursday's compromise.

Germany, Austria vow to close immigration route: Earlier on Thursday, Seehofer met with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to discuss migration. The two stated their desire to close the so-called southern route as a means of limiting the arrival of migrants and refugees to northern Europe from the Mediterranean. Kurz had previously voiced concerns about Seehofer's plan to erect transit centers along the border, which could have resulted in large numbers of asylum-seekers amassing in Austria.

Transit centers - too much for Merkels coalition partner SPD?

Merkel, Orban butt heads over migration: Merkel had a more contentious meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Berlin on Thursday, with her describing Orban's stance on migration as "a problem." She also urged for people seeking refuge to be treated humanely, noting "we must always remember and never forget that this is about human beings." Orban argued it was more humane to remove incentives for refugees to come to Europe by closing the borders.

Orban lays into Merkel's refugee policy

What does this mean for the EU? The compromise could help Merkel in migration negotiations with other EU member states. She is hoping to forge bilateral deals with several EU countries for the rapid return of migrants who had previously registered or applied for asylum there. Some agreements may be more difficult than others □ Hungary and the Czech Republic have already expressed opposition to such a deal.

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