

“German leadership must be inclusive. Germany should lead by integrating itself into the group. Anything else generates fears and centrifugal forces, and generates blocks which oppose Germany”

Jan Techau - Director of Carnegie Europe (Euronews.com)

German Elections and the Future of Europe

Germany would hold a national election next week to decide the members of the 18th Bundestag (German Parliament). As a European industrial power and one of the central actors in tackling the Eurozone crisis, surely other EU member states would put their attention on it. However, Europe likely will get disappointed to see a lack of changes from German leadership towards Europe.

In Bavaria State regional election yesterday, the Christian Social Union (CSU) won by a major victory: 49% of total voters (BBC News). CSU (alliance of Christian Democratic Union, Angela Merkel's party) traditionally leads the Bavarian elections since 1954, and this year's election is 6% better than the last result. It became another good news for Merkel after winning public polls on the TV Debate in early September (Spiegel Online). It also shows that there is no such a big “time for change” mood in German voters, although it should not be used to predict any coalition options in Bundestag yet.

If Merkel and the conservative party win majority in Bundestag, she surely would continue her ‘step-by-step’ approach in tackling the Eurozone crisis. It would please the German public opinion, but will spark public unrest in crisis-zone like Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Italy. They demand more financial support from Germany to quickly solve the crisis rather than a slow recovery through tightening public budget. Such a slow approach would maintain a gap between the North Europe (economic power in EU: Germany, France, British) and the South Europe (crisis-zone in EU: Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece).

If Steinbrueck and his Social Democrats Party (SPD) win, the situation would not change greatly. He will have to face negative public opinions towards pro-stimulus policy. This opinion is best described by Ulrike Guerot of the European Council on Foreign Relations: *“Germany will build Europe as its own pace and on its own terms. The others need to swallow and understand this. If they try to rush us, it will take longer”* (Reuters).

Both leading candidates even rarely promote their vision on European and foreign policy. Both agreed that Germany will stay neutral and never play part in military response towards Syria, but gives no further details on the issue.

So, after September election, we likely still have to see the ‘step-by-step’ and ‘lead by example’ leadership from Germany.

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