



The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung presents:

KAS Germany Update
Current Issues in German Politics

No. 23 – February 2005

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I. Elections 2005: CDU strongest party in Schleswig-Holstein

After 17 years, the coalition of Social Democrats and Green Party no longer holds a majority in Germany's most northern state, Schleswig-Holstein. But although the CDU with their top candidate **Peter Harry Carstensen** became the strongest party, the only female governor (*Ministerpräsident*) in the country, **Heide Simonis** (SPD), will stay in office—because of a unique twist in the political system of Schleswig-Holstein. These are the February 20 results: CDU 40.2% (+5.0% compared with the last election five years ago), SPD 38.7% (-4.4), FDP 6.6% (-1.0), Greens 6.2% (+/- 0), SSW 3.6% (-0.5), Others 4.7% (+1.0). The SSW—the South-Schleswig Voters Union—is the party of the Danish minority and as such, it is exempted from the 5% minimum usually required to gain seats in parliament. This privilege has been agreed upon by all parties under the condition that the SSW does not abuse its disproportional power.

However, according to these results, neither CDU/FDP nor the SPD/Green Party bloc holds a majority of seats. The only viable solutions are either a Grand Coalition of CDU/SPD (under the leadership of the strongest partner, the CDU) or a minority government of SPD/Greens, tolerated by the SSW. Clinging to power, the latter is what **Mrs. Simonis** is going for, clearly neglecting the wish of the majority of the people who voted her out of office and exploiting the fragile minority rights of the SSW. Not surprisingly, there have already been several only thinly-veiled threats that the SSW might be stripped of its privileges if it supports a minority

government. "The SSW should not act as political referee. If they are to use their privileges for such massive politicking, they should very well be treated as a regular party in the future—including the 5%-rule," said the *Ministerpräsident* (governor) of Hesse, **Roland Koch** (CDU).

The strong showing of the CDU came as a surprise—shortly before election day, polls had predicted a clear SPD/Green majority. Accordingly, the opposition leaders in Berlin interpreted the unexpected weakness of the Simonis government as a good sign for the two most important upcoming elections: the election in Northrhine-Westphalia in May, where the last Red-Green majority on state-level is at stake, and of course the federal elections in 2006. **Volker Kauder**, secretary general of the CDU, said that the SPD had lost yet another election on the long road to 2006. SPD chairman **Franz Muentefering**, however, said that the SPD had finally managed to turn the tables: "If you remember how bad our situation was in 2004, nation-wide and in Schleswig-Holstein, the fact that **Heide Simonis** will continue to govern is a great victory. The SPD has finally left the valley of darkness." In response, Mr. Kauder quipped that Mrs. Simonis might be able to hold on to power because of the SSW, but hers was "a government of losers."

II. Fischer Scandal: Foreign Minister about to fall over visa affair?

German foreign minister **Joschka Fischer** (Green Party) is facing the gravest crisis of his career since photographs of his streetfighting days surfaced in 2001. In March 2000, Mr. Fischer issued a directive regarding the criteria for granting visas—"when in doubt," he ordered, "decide in favor of the applicant." In recent weeks, four accusations have been formulated: 1. This directive gave illegal immigration and criminal groups organizing human trafficking a massive boost. The directive made it much easier to access Germany and thus—because of the Schengen Agreement—all of the European Union. 2. Mr. Fischer neglected the long-standing warnings from the Ministry of the Interior and the federal police regarding these consequences. 3. Mr. Fischer's then-undersecretary, **Ludger Volmer** (Green Party), was involved in improper business relations with companies working for the visa bureaucracy. (Mr. Volmer has subsequently stepped down from all his functions in the Green parliamentary group.) 4. Mr. Fischer refuses to speak and defend himself against these allegations.

As a result of the Fischer directive, about 250,000 additional people per year entered Germany—and their visas were mostly issued in only four embassies: Kiev, Moscow, Pristina, and Tirana. Especially the visa practice in Kiev has sparked frequent warnings about illegal immigration and abuse of visa privileges. CDU chairwoman **Angela Merkel** charged that **Mr. Fischer** had "ignored this massive abuse of visas, fostering forced prostitution, illicit work, and

organized crime." The opposition in the *Bundestag* (German parliament) has installed an investigative committee, whose chairman **Eckart von Klaeden** (CDU) wanted to subpoena Mr. Fischer as soon as possible. The Red-Green coalition, however, blocked this early subpoena and insists on due process, giving Mr. Fischer additional time for preparing his defense.

Apparently, this strategy of silence and stonewalling has backfired. For the first time in four years, **Joschka Fischer** is no longer the most popular politician in Germany. Recent polls see him falling to rank two, second to the *Ministerpräsident* (governor) of Lower-Saxony, **Christian Wulff** (CDU). At the elections in Schleswig-Holstein, representatives of the Green Party complained about an adverse "Fischer effect," and the campaigning Red-Green coalition in Northrhine-Westphalia has been showing signs of uneasiness. In fact, the chairman of the SPD in NRW, **Harald Schartau**, became the first high-ranking Social Democrat to criticize Mr. Fischer's tactics and to call for a quick and thorough investigation. It is to be expected that further details about the affair and the dubious business connections of leading Green officials will come to light in the next few weeks.

III. NATO's Future: Chancellor presents irritating proposals in Munich

February was the month of transatlantic rapprochement. The Bush administration's "charm offensive" has been widely commented upon—first the European tour of the new Secretary of State, **Condoleezza Rice**, then the presentation of "New Rumsfeld" at the Munich Security Conference, and finally the main event, **President George W. Bush's** visit to Europe. The symbolism could not have been stronger: the days of the controversy over Iraq are past, now it is time to unite and take on the challenges and opportunities of today—together. Alas, amidst all these glorious celebrations of common ground and mutual respect, there was one slight dissonance, one off-key note. This was German **Chancellor Schroeder's** halfbaked deliberations on the future of NATO, presented in Munich.

To be sure, the chancellor did not deliver his speech himself, for he was ill. Defense minister **Peter Struck's** (SPD) reading, however, added to the awkward effect **Mr. Schroeder's** ideas had on the audience. The main thesis was that NATO "is no longer the place for strategic dialogue" for the transatlantic partners. Also, the (low) quality of the current dialogue "does not represent the growing weight of the European Union, nor is it a sufficient basis for transatlantic cooperation in future tasks." Issues such as the death penalty, climate change, the International Criminal Court etc. should be discussed in a new forum of debate within NATO. In order to develop structures for a more efficient, more political NATO, Chancellor Schroeder suggested the creation of an "expert commission"—something he has done quite frequently on troublesome

domestic issues in order to defer responsibility from his cabinet to "independent bodies."

The response to these proposals was overwhelmingly negative. Germany's European partners were miffed that they had not been informed beforehand, while EU and NATO leaders took issue with the underlying analysis. "One should not dramatize undramatic things," said **Javier Solana**, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and NATO secretary general **Jaap de Hoop Scheffer** resolutely opposed the idea of a "reform commission." American officials also dismissed Schroeder's proposal; what was needed today were actual commitments to the challenges at hand, not airy-fairy suggestions on institutional reform. Even in Germany, reactions were highly critical of Schroeder's initiative. His die-hard followers among the pacifist and anti-American Social Democrats and Greens were disappointed that **Mr. Schroeder's** latest apparent critique of the shape of NATO and the transatlantic alliance faltered so readily. The conservative opposition on the other hand bashed Mr. Schroeder for risking transatlantic rapprochement with inconclusive provocations. The foreign policy expert **Wolfgang Schaeuble** (CDU) said that in light of the recent change in tone in Washington, Mr. Schroeder's blunder "is exactly what we do not need right now."

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