

The End of Sovereignty 2009/12/14



LONDON/BERLIN/ATHENS (Own report) - German government advisors are insisting on concerted efforts to politically neutralize British EU-skeptics. As explained in a recent paper published by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), the British Conservatives' attitude will have a "decisive influence on helping to set the EU's future radius of action," because the ambitious possibilities in EU foreign policy making, opened through the Lisbon Treaty's coming into force, will depend, to a certain extent, on London's cooperation. It is expected that the elections scheduled in May will bring a government change - from Labor to Conservative. The chairman of the conservatives, a flexible "Euro-pragmatist," is taking a Euro-skeptic position because of the balance of forces within his party, according to the authors of the SWP paper, but he can be brought to oppose his party's EU-critical wing. The main reason for British EU-skepticism is the fear of the loss of the country's sovereignty. This is not unjustified, as can be seen in the controversy around Greece's national debt. The German chancellor is threatening Athens that the EU needs to consider whether it should impose an austerity budget on Greece - if necessary, even against the will of the elected parliament in Athens.

Globally Designed

According to a recent paper published by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), London should be more firmly integrated into EU foreign policy, if for no other reason, than for Britain's political economic significance. The authors explain that "Great Britain, the second largest economic realm in the EU, with London being a hub of international finances" could definitely not be ignored "because of its globally designed foreign and security policy." [1] Because of the United Kingdom's well known EU-skepticism, continental European countries have paid "little attention" to London. That was a mistake. It would "behoove" EU members to insist on the British government's firm engagement for Brussels after the Lisbon Treaty takes effect. Attempts should be made to gain influence on the Conservatives, since they will probably win parliamentary elections in the spring.

EU-Pragmatism

Because of the growing popularity of the EU-critical forces, the SWP describes the current development within the Conservative Party as "somber." "The new generation of the Conservative parliamentarians will further strengthen the EU-skeptical camp." Therefore it will "sooner or later" be necessary to seek a closer integration into the EU. To achieve cooperation with the current party leader, David Cameron, is not out of the question. Up to now, his EU-skeptical statements have "mainly been out of consideration of internal party power struggles," whereas he, himself, tends more toward "conservative EU-pragmatism." This has become clear already through his backing off from holding a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. The SWP authors suggest that on the basis of this sort of "conservative EU-pragmatism" Cameron could "use his party leadership position, to place the [EU-skeptical - gfp] rank and file under pressure." Of course Cameron's previous "failure to settle accounts with the hard-liners of his party sends a signal" even "to the dyed-in-wool optimists that there is still a lot of work to be done." But it is worth the effort to attempt to continue to marginalize the EU-skeptics.

Constructive Potential

According to the SWP document, various extraneous circumstances are advantageous to this project. The paper points out that the possibilities of the British Conservatives influencing the European Parliament have been "weakened" since they broke off from the European People's Party, forming a new group ("European Conservatives and Reformists") this year. The authors are also of the opinion that the US government, which is so important to Great Britain, is, under the Obama administration, increasingly seeing "Britain's significance within the EU as a constructive rather than a conflict potential." Therefore the conditions are not disadvantageous for taking action against the EU-skeptics. One cannot avoid the task of forcing the EU-critical circles into

retreat, because even if Labor - against all expectations - does remain in government, it can "not be excluded that the national viewpoint, will not come to the fore" - meaning the EU-skeptical tendency. That is why, in any case, an "open debate" with and in Great Britain around the extension of EU activities must be initiated. The SWP authors' suggestions concerning how this should be done remain non-committal and rather ambiguous.

Austerity Policy

The main reason for British EU-skepticism remains the fear that in the future the EU could usurp the sovereignty of the nation-states and blatantly rule the member states, even Great Britain from abroad, bypassing the elected national parliaments. That this fear is justifiable can be seen in the recent developments in Greece. Greece's national debt has reached about 120 percent of its BNP, which is twice what is allowed under the EU's Stability and Growth Pact. Several EU states, including Germany, are exerting strong pressure on Athens to reduce the level of debts at all costs. Whether this is a justified demand, is a matter of dispute. The Prime Minister of Luxemburg, Jean-Claude Juncker considers "the perspective being painted by some, as if Greece is on the brink of national bankruptcy, is at variance with my observations." [2] Axel Weber, President of the German Federal Bank, on the other hand, demands that Athens impose a rigid austerity policy, that would also drastically cut salaries. [3]

Still Independent

The German chancellor is demanding that Brussels should be granted new rights of intervention into central areas of national sovereignty, for such cases. If, for example, an elected parliament refuses to enact substantial cuts in wages, Brussels must have the power to order these cuts against their will. "National parliaments do not like to have things imposed," observes Angela Merkel and demands "we have to discuss this type of problem." [4] The extent of this sort of intervention, particularly affecting the smaller EU nations, placing them under de facto direct control of the EU hegemonic powers, in particular Germany, has been anticipated by the Greek Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou. According to Papandreou, the country's sovereignty is under threat for the first time since 1974, through the external pressure on Athens to reduce its level of debts at all costs. In 1974 the military dictatorship in Greece was replaced by a parliamentary democracy. Papandreou added that Athens itself must institute the reductions demanded by Berlin and others. This is "the only way to insure that Greece does not lose its independence." [5]

[1] Martin Kremer, Roderick Parkes: Großbritannien: "Being nice to a sceptic?" SWP-Aktuell 66, Dezember 2009

[2] EU macht Druck auf Griechenland; Handelsblatt 10.12.2009

[3] Bundesbank fordert Griechenland zum Sparen auf; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 10.12.2009

[4] EU verweigert Griechenland Soforthilfe; Spiegel Online 10.12.2009

[5] Bundesbank fordert Griechenland zum Sparen auf; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 10.12.2009

© Informationen zur Deutschen Außenpolitik

info@german-foreign-policy.com