

German state government of Baden-Württemberg shows solidarity with Austrian right-wing coalition

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In a particularly friendly manner and with a massive media presence, Erwin Teufel, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) minister president of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, recently extended a welcome to Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel. As they shook hands, Teufel stressed that he had invited the Austrian head of government to set an example in opposition to the diplomatic boycott of Austria imposed by the European Union (EU).

Only two weeks earlier, during the EU meeting in Portugal, the European heads of state had decided to uphold the boycott of the coalition between the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the radical right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ), led by Jörg Haider. The European Union decided it would review its position in regard to Austria only after receiving the reports of three civil-rights experts on the situation in the country.

Minister President Teufel emphasised his disagreement with what the EU political and diplomatic sanctions were “doing” to the Austrian people. He added that the Austrian people had to feel “degraded” by such treatment. At a subsequent press conference, he let it be known that he had from the outset regarded the position taken by European governments with respect to Austria as “wrong, hurtful, unfair and counterproductive”. Schüssel replied, “True friends can be recognised in hard times. We will never forget this.”

Following a formal dinner, Teufel exclaimed, “We boycott the boycott!” Applauded by nearly one hundred representatives of the Swabian establishment—industrialists, university chancellors and chairmen of the regional councils—he declared, “We agree with the aims of your government ... let us drink to the success of the Austrian government.” Among the

guests in attendance was Rolf Schlierer, head of the radical right-wing Republikaner Party (REP), which is represented in the Baden-Württemberg parliament.

This demonstrative embrace of the Austrian government, including its extreme right-wing coalition partner, by the government of Baden-Württemberg is significant in a number of respects. First of all, it is a deliberate affront to the foreign policy of the German federal government, which, together with the other states of the European Union, is taking part in the boycott. Secondly, the prime minister of Baden-Württemberg not only spoke out against the boycott—the effectiveness of which is dubious—but declared his agreement with the aims of the coalition government in Vienna.

“Foreign policy is the prerogative of the federal government,” says the German constitution, and such has been the standard practice up to now. Although there have previously been initiatives undertaken by individual states, they have remained within the framework of federal policy. For one state to push its own foreign policy in contradiction, and even defiance, of the federal government is a new phenomenon. With this initiative, Teufel aims to lend more weight and set a precedent for regional sovereignty.

Together with Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg is the state with the highest per capita income and lowest rate of unemployment in Germany. Most of the supply industry for car manufacturing is located in the area around Stuttgart. Together with parts of the processing industry, the companies in the region form a tight ring of prosperous, large and medium-sized industries.

Not long ago the governments of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg led an aggressive campaign against

subsidies for less prosperous regions, declaring they were no longer prepared to financially support regions lacking in infrastructure.

On the issue of recklessly defending regional assets and interests, they agree with Jörg Haider. The rational core of the demagogic speeches and campaigns led by the head of Carinthia's provincial government and former chairman of the Austrian FPÖ consists in defending the wealth and prosperity of the social elite of the region, and creating a bulkhead against the claims of other regions, as well as socially disadvantaged layers.

Haider is not opposed to European alliances. What he wants to achieve is an alliance of the rich against the have-nots. His diatribes against the European Union are not directed against the mighty economic and financial interests who set the tone in Brussels. As the minister of Carinthia he has loyally participated in the work of European committees.

But his policies are directed against all attempts to weaken the influence of the wealthier regions or limit the rights of the regions and federal states in regard to the redistribution of income between regions. Hence his opposition to a European social charter. In respect to this issue, Haider has the full approval of Munich and Stuttgart.

Haider's rabble-rousing propaganda against immigrants and his call for a "law-and-order state" must also be seen in this context. Regionalism, racism and the demand for an authoritarian state go hand in hand. With the planned expansion of the European Union eastwards, social differences within the EU will intensify. It will no longer be possible to resolve the resulting conflicts by balancing social and political interests, but only by repressive force on the part of the state.

This is why Haider's politics are finding more and more of an echo in other European countries. The Haider phenomenon is spreading. Following the election success of the FPÖ, the headline of the main paper of Umberto Bossi's separatist Northern League in Italy was: "Haider and the League, elective affinities". In the Flemish part of Belgium, the propaganda against Wallonians carried out by the right-wing Vlaams Block is gaining influence. In Germany the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), led by Minister President Stoiber, has been playing a leading role in

this respect for some time now.

This is the context within which Haider's statements, made in an interview with the daily paper *Tagespiegel*, must be seen. The paper quoted him as saying: "I have experienced times when Mr. Stoiber and myself organised events together and when he was very keen to be seen with me." Asked about this, he became more concrete. "Today, in office as minister president of Bavaria, he doesn't like for it to be remembered that during a lecture evening with me he publicly stated that the CSU would rather work together with me and the FPÖ than with the ÖVP." In any case, Haider continued, it was clear how well Stoiber reacted to anything which he (Haider) came up with ... "because he copies it".

The state chancellery in Munich quickly rejected Haider's statements as "inappropriate and false". But such denials cannot conceal that it was the chairman of the CSU who called for a coalition between the ÖVP and Haider as far back as last year autumn.

This political course is, however, a source of dispute within the CDU/CSU. Helmut Kohl's refusal to retire from active politics is, not least, founded on the fact that he sees his life work endangered as the European Community is increasingly called into question. CDU minister presidents from the poorer states, especially those in the East, naturally have a different opinion regarding subsidies than those in the more prosperous South. And, finally, there is a wing inside the party that remains faithful to the social views of Catholicism, a traditional lynch-pin of CDU politics.

Following the resignation of Kohl, who as chairman of the CDU had held together the most diverse tendencies for 25 years, factional disputes are emerging. It looks as if the CDU and CSU could suffer the same fate as the British Tories and the French Gaullists, which have fallen apart over the European question.



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