

German grand coalition plans expansion of surveillance state

Ulrich Rippert
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The coalition deal agreed between the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), after two months of talks, proposes the expansion of state surveillance and the apparatus of repression. Democratic rights are to be restricted, while the police and intelligence services will be strengthened. This also applies to the German army.

The build-up of the security apparatus is directly connected with another central point in the agreement: the intensification of punitive austerity policies in southern Europe and in Germany. It is made crystal clear in the agreement that budget consolidation policies must be intensified.

The incoming government expects strong opposition to this cost-cutting programme. The coalition partners are therefore strengthening the state apparatus, even though representatives of the coalition promised the opposite when former NSA contractor Edward Snowden uncovered the mass surveillance activities of his former employer.

Rather than strengthening the rights of citizens, the future government is massively expanding the surveillance of the population by German intelligence agencies. In the coalition agreement, they call for the reintroduction of the storing of data and the creation of a comprehensive surveillance apparatus.

According to a March 2010 ruling by Germany's constitutional court, data storing breaches the right to privacy of communications via post and telecommunications guaranteed in the German constitution. In future, Internet providers will be obliged to store records on customers' usage for months, even when there is no suspicion or surveillance order against them. State security organs have the right to access these records on demand. After six months,

this will allow them to confirm who telephoned whom, and where a mobile phone was used.

The storage of data was introduced by the previous grand coalition in 2007. The interior minister in the SPD-Green Party coalition, Otto Schily (SPD), prepared the law. After the constitutional court declared the law to be in breach of the constitution in 2010, the Merkel government attempted to reintroduce the comprehensive collection of data in a slightly altered form, but this failed following opposition from the justice minister of the CDU's former coalition partner, the Free Democrats.

The coalition agreement states: "We will reorganise the EU red lines on the retrieval and use of telecommunications data." This suggests that data will be stored in data banks subject to very few restrictions. In addition, it states in the coalition agreement that the storage of data by telecommunications firms will be carried out with servers in Germany.

The surveillance by German intelligence agencies is just as threatening to the ordinary citizen as that carried out by NSA. The claim that the German agencies are bound by clear legal regulations and that they will stick to these is utter nonsense. This merely serves to justify the comprehensive surveillance of the population.

The close connections between the German intelligence services and the extreme-right NPD and the right-wing NSU terrorist group have underlined how far to the right these authorities are, and how they evade any democratic control.

The term "transparent" appears 25 times in the coalition agreement, but parliamentary control of the intelligence services and army is to be restricted rather than strengthened. The parliamentary control commission is to shrink to nine or possibly even seven members.

Instead of control, the coalition agreement strives for the centralisation and strengthening of the intelligence services. The domestic intelligence agency (BFV) will take on the function of a central agency for the agencies within each state. Its technical abilities for analysis are to be improved. In addition, the federal police are to be built up and given more powers for the “surveillance of telecommunications sources.” The federal agency for IT security (BSI), which already works as an unofficial intelligence agency, will be expanded along with the cyber defence centre.

In parallel with the strengthening of the intelligence services, the rights of citizens are to be restricted. As a result, the right of association is to be “reformed.” It will be easier to ban organisations, and a ban will have more widespread consequences. This could also affect political organisations.

The dismantling of citizens’ rights and the building up of the intelligence services go hand in hand with a stronger military presence. The new government intends to increase Germany’s role within NATO. According to the coalition agreement, defence cooperation is to be expanded, and Germany will participate in the procurement and maintenance of new weapons systems.

In particular, the agreement supports the establishment of a missile defence system. In addition, it calls for a “Strengthening of cross-department cooperation in recognition of a more effective foreign and security policy, whose success requires civil and military instruments to complement each other.”

The coalition agreement underscores the significance of Germany’s participation in the Afghanistan war and commits to an appropriate participation of Germany within the framework of the advisory mission under the leadership of NATO. This means that the German army will continue the war in Afghanistan on the side of the US after 2014; the much-promoted withdrawal of German troops by the end of 2014 has proven to be worthless.

The brazen abandonment of democratic rights by the incoming government is also shown in its treatment of the federal parliament, which has been shut down since the summer.

Since the formation of a government has now taken more than 12 weeks, and the coalition partners intend only to announce the ministers after the SPD

membership vote on the agreement, no committees have been formed. These are essential for the working of parliament.

Instead, a grand committee with 47 members has been convened, for which there is no legal basis. In this context, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote of “an employment ban for 584 deputies” and called it “a blatant, convenient defiance of parliament.”

Political differences between the parties involved are not the reason for the drawn-out process of forming a government. They have worked together closely for years. This applies not just to the CDU, CSU and SPD, but also to the Greens, who have joined a coalition in the state of Hesse with the CDU, and the Left Party, which has constantly offered to collaborate with the SPD and Greens.

The real reason for the delay is that the incoming government is planning massive attacks on the population in all areas and is preparing to suppress the anticipated opposition. The drawn-out vote by SPD members, involving regional conferences and meetings at which leading social democrats hail the coalition agreement, is aimed at providing a pseudo-democratic cover for the government and the coalition treaty.



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