

No, Germany and Italy do not share the same EU vision

A couple of weeks ago, **German Chancellor Angela Merkel** (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), and **Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni** (PD, Partito Democratico), met on the occasion of a bilateral meeting, in **Berlin**. During a joint press conference, the two leaders announced that they share the “[same vision concerning the future of Europe](#)”.

The leaders’ statement deserves special attention as it follows another key fact that unravelled European politics, earlier this month. Namely, the announcement of a new coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), in **Germany**.

The latter deal was greeted with relief by many political leaders across the Union, among which Prime Minister Gentiloni himself. According to many analysts, the German agreement paves the way for a relaunch of the European integration process along a more solidaristic path, if compared to the past few years of policymaking in **Europe**.

It is understood that Angela Merkel will give leeway to the reformist vision of Emmanuel Macron, under the influence of a Social Democratic junior partner in the new coalition Government (**GroKo**, short for Grand Coalition).

One could argue that there exists an ideal match between the reformist visions of the centre-left and centre-right governing parties in France, Germany and Italy. To check whether this hypothesis holds, in this article I compare the language and policy items relating to the domain of “social Europe” outlined within the European chapter of the German coalition deal, with the electoral program of the Italian centre-left party, Partito Democratico (PD)

Indeed, the text of the official coalition deal points at the French-German relationship as the political bedrock on which to establish the renewal of the European integration process. Consequently, the “European chapter” of the deal has been interpreted as the blueprint for the most realistic EU-reform scenario.

Coupling the joint statement of Gentiloni and Merkel with the French-German entente sieged by the GroKo deal, one could argue that there exists an ideal match between the reformist visions of the centre-left and centre-right governing parties in **France, Germany and Italy**.

To check whether this hypothesis holds, in this article I compare the language and policy items relating to the domain of “social Europe” outlined within the European chapter of the German coalition deal, with the electoral program of the Italian centre-left party, Partito Democratico (PD).

The pledges of the GroKo parties are enlisted under the second headline (“Wir wollen ein

Europa der Chancen und der Gerechtigkeit”, “We want a Europe of chances and fairness”) of the first chapter, “Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa” (“A new beginning for Europe”) of the [official coalition document](#). For the Italian case, European policies are dealt with in the [second chapter of the electoral program](#). Below, I recall the exact lines or pages of the official documents.

A (German) Europe of chances and fairness

According to the CDU and the SPD, Europe has to be a land of “chances”, wherein youngsters can rely on their hopes. Young generations need to find good jobs and be able to move “without any limits” across the Continent (157-158). Consistently, **the German centre-left centre-right coalition calls for an increased “recognition of mutual educational standards” across countries** (177). However, although “mobility” is highlighted as a cornerstone of Europe, there shall be an effort to hinder the “exploitation of national welfare systems” (176).

When it comes to the discussion of “fundamental social rights” (“Soziale Grundrechte”), the GroKo underlines specifically that it wants to foster the principle of “equal pay for equal work at the same place” (a concept outlined originally by the President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, back in 2015) through a **“social pact”** (164-165). The document stresses the willingness to establish fair “frameworks for employees and employers” and a better “coordination” between “labour market policies”. In this context, the revision of the “Posted workers directive” needs to be concluded swiftly and, possibly, “with ameliorations” (165-169).

More specifically, CDU and SPD pledge for the establishment of a “common framework” for “minimum levels of pay” and “fundamental social security systems”, because “who fights efficiently **social dumping** and social inequalities in economically weaker countries backs as well the German welfare state and economy (“Marktwirtschaft”)” (170-174).

For the rest of what concerns the GroKo deal, SPD and CDU stress the need to establish a common European minimal tax rate for multinationals, such as **Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon**. The latter should not be able to “escape social responsibilities” and play out EU Member states one against each other through “tax-dumping” activities. Last but not least, the German Grand Coalition calls for the conclusion of the negotiations related to the so-called “financial-transaction tax” (Tobin tax).

Among the conclusion of the first chapter (227-285), both parties make room for some specific structural reforms of the EU that are relevant for the social policy-dimension.

For the German GroKo, “stability and growth” are two sides of the same coin. The same holds true for risk sharing and self-responsibility (“Risiko und Haftungsverantwortung”). However, the latter terms turn into the desire for “fiscal control, economic coordination and fight against tax-evasion”, at best

To make it possible for the EU to move ahead along the reform paths mentioned above, the German future coalition Government pledges for the **establishment of “specific financial**

tools (“Haushaltsmittel”) aimed at economic stabilisation, social convergence and structural reforms within the Eurozone” (229-232). The latter “could embody (“Ausgangspunkt”) a future budget for investments (“Investivhaushalt”). It is worth to mention that this rather prominent social investment-frame should become tangible within the definition of the next **Multiannual financial framework (MFF)** of the EU, which will step in after 2020.

Although the mention of a specific Eurozone-tailored “budget for investment” represents a breakthrough, in the following lines the two parties lay out quite clearly that “the Stability and Growth Pact keeps being, as well in the future, the compass”. In other terms, “stability and growth” are two sides of the same coin. The same holds true for risk sharing and self-responsibility (“Risiko und Haftungsverantwortung”). However, the latter terms turn into the **desire for “fiscal control, economic coordination and fight against tax-evasion”**, at best.

Keeping these caveats in mind, the coalition partners are “ready to test the propositions coming from other Member States and the European Commission”. Likewise they “want to transform the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) into a European monetary fund controlled by the European Parliament, anchored to EU law”. However, the **“rights of national Parliaments will not be affected”** by the latter changes.

More (Italian) politics in Europe

Right from the beginning, **the Partito Democratico outlines a vision that is much more political than the German one**: “We need more Europe. And we need more politics in Europe (p.23)”. Likewise, the program mentions the provocative idea of the “United States of Europe” and calls for a “future change of the Treaties of the Union”. However, even without the latter, the EU should establish a process through which European citizens directly elect a President of the EU, chairing both the European Council and the European Commission.

This political vein influences as well the definition of the social-paragraph of PD’s electoral program. Under the headline “Building a Social Union”, the Italian centre-left party argues for a “framework-approach” that is similar to the one suggested by the CDU-SPD in Germany only at first sight.

The document stresses the need to strengthen mobility across Europe and to foster common education and vocational policies. More specifically - and **differently from the GroKo document - the electoral program of the PD goes beyond a strengthened mutual recognition of educational standards**. The Italian centre-left party calls for the development of a “welfare scheme for mobile worker” and for the establishment of a “Children Union aimed at tackling educational poverty”.

In line with its overall political aspirations, the electoral program of the PD goes deeper in outlining social policies. However, the biggest difference relies in the structural changes that the Italian party envisions for the Union as a whole

Comparing the treatment of “fundamental social rights”, it is worth underlining that **the PD stresses the need to establish a fully fledged European insurance scheme against unemployment**. The latter clearly stretches the contours of the - already mentioned - German “social pact”, made of “fair frameworks for employees and employers” and a better “coordination” system between “labour market policies”. Indeed, the Italian centre-left party wants to make room for “subjective rights”, linked to the notion of European citizenship.

In other terms, in line with its overall political aspirations, the electoral program of the PD goes deeper in outlining social policies. However, the biggest difference relies in the structural changes that the Italian party envisions for the Union as a whole.

“Our objective is the transformation of the Eurozone into a fully fledged Economic Union. The latter implies establishing a true political institution at the European level that is able to issue bonds with the aim of sustaining aggregate demand and intervene in the case of systemic risks”, the policymakers write. **This means “sharing sovereignty”** (note, the stark contrast to the German negative-formulation: “the rights of national Parliaments will not be affected”).

Besides, **the PD calls for a set of policies that reach far beyond than what is called for by the GroKo**: the establishment of a European minister for the Economy, the issuing of Eurobonds, fiscal rules that “spur” national investments as opposed to the “Byzantine” complexity of those envisioned by the Fiscal Compact treaty.

Finally, and most importantly, it is worth highlighting the stark differences relative to the future goals and prospects of the **ESM**, on the one hand, and the Stability and Growth pact, on the other one. At first sight, the Italian policymakers seem to be in line with the German idea of transforming the ESM into a European Monetary Fund. Yet, the electoral program specifies that the latter should “not monitor public accounts”, as the EC should continue to be the sole guardian of fiscal prudence. Likewise, **if the Stability and Growth pact appears as a “compass” in the eyes of the GroKo, the PD calls for a revision of the treaty that should make room for a more flexible interpretation of “budgetary balance”**.

Conclusions

The Italian party, **Partito Democratico**, goes much deeper in the definition (and ambition) of **European social policies in the context of a wider reform process of the EU**, than the official German Grand Coalition parties, CDU and SPD. In other terms, with specific reference to the domain of European social policies, there seems to be a significant mismatch between the reform options backed, on the one hand, by the ruling Italian centre-left party, and, on the other one, the German Grand Coalition.

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