



## POST-MERKEL GERMANY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Social Democrat politician Olaf Scholz was approved as the new Federal Chancellor of the country by voting in the 20<sup>th</sup> term Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany on December 8<sup>th</sup> 2021. Olaf Scholz, who won 395 of the 707 votes used in the 736-member Bundestag, officially took the oath of office as the German Chancellor. Thus, the era of Angela Merkel, who left an important mark in the political history of both Germany and the European Union (EU), by serving as chancellor uninterrupted for 16 years, came to an end. Here's how the future of Germany after Merkel will be shaped with the new Chancellor Olaf Scholz is a subject that needs to be discussed.

In fact, in the 2021 German Bundestag elections held on September 26<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) surpassed the ruling Christian Democratic Union Party (CDU). Of the 45 political parties that participated in the Bundestag elections, which took place with a turnout of 76.6%, only 8 parties passed the 5% threshold and took their place in the 20<sup>th</sup> term Bundestag. According to the official results of the German Federal Election Board, in the 20<sup>th</sup> term Bundestag, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) has 206 seats with 25.7% of the votes, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) 152 seats with 18.9% of the votes, the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) 118 seats with 14.8% of the votes, Free Democratic Party (FDP) 92 seats with 11.5% of the votes, Alternative for Germany (AfD) 83 seats with 10.3% of the votes, The Christian Social Union (CSU), the sister party of the CDU 64 seats with 5.2% of the votes, the Party of the Left (DIE LINKE) 39 seats with 4.9% of the votes, and the Southern Schleswig Constituency Union (SSW) 1 seat with 0.1% of the votes. Despite being in the second place in the 2017 German Bundestag elections, the SPD, which had the heaviest loss of votes in its history, came first in 2021 with an increase of 5.2% compared to the previous elections, which can be considered a big win for both the party and Scholz. In addition, the fact that Olaf Scholz, as the prime minister candidate of the SPD, was able to complete the coalition negotiations with the Greens and FDP in a short time seems to be an important success.

The success of Scholz, who won the Bundestag elections, depends on the policy he will follow from now on. First of all, Prime Minister Olaf Scholz can prioritize reducing the negative effects of the pandemic on the country's economy, by increasing the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to shake the whole world. Already, Olaf Scholz, as the Finance Minister of the country prior to the election, played an important role in the creation of the EU's

750 billion euro bailout fund against the pandemic. The SPD, FDP and the Greens jointly submitted to the German Bundestag the law to strengthen vaccination measures against the COVID-19 pandemic and amend other regulations regarding the pandemic on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2021. Both Germany and the EU continue to be among those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the latest report of the World Health Organization (WHO), the total number of confirmed cases across the EU reached 88,925,399, of which 1,569,599 died as of December 5<sup>th</sup> 2021. In addition, 396,429 new cases were recorded in Germany, the second country with the highest number of new cases detected in the last week in the world as of December 5<sup>th</sup> 2021. From this point of view, Olaf Scholz will give priority to the fight against the pandemic, both in order to fulfill the billions of euros of recovery fund he has started to implement against the pandemic in his country and in the EU, and considering the latest situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in his country.

In terms of domestic politics, another priority of Olaf Scholz is to try to prevent the increasing right-wing extremism in the country in recent years. Olaf Scholz also called for the whole of Germany to react against far-right provocations during the election campaign. Almost like many EU countries, the increasing right-wing extremism in Germany in recent years continues to pose the greatest threat to security and democracy in the country. For instance, according to Germany's Federal Organization for the Protection of the Constitution's (BfV) data, the number of far-right sympathizers in the country was 25,350 in 2018, while it reached around 33,300 in 2021. It is known that about 13,300 of them are prone to violence, and 22,357 crimes were committed by far-right sympathizers in the country alone in 2020. Moreover, it is seen that the activities of far-right political parties in Germany are gradually increasing. Currently, there are far-right parties in the country such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), German National Democratic Party (NPD), Third Way Party (III. Weg), Right (Die Rechte), Republicans (REP) and Deutsche Conservative. The AfD, NPD and III. Weg parties have attended the 2021 Bundestag elections. The AfD, which entered the German Bundestag for the first time with 94 seats in the 2017 Bundestag elections, and the European Parliament with its 11 seats in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, won 83 seats from the 20<sup>th</sup> term Bundestag.

From a foreign policy perspective, Olaf Scholz will try to reconsider relations with both Germany and the EU, especially with

the USA. Because it can be seen that the crisis of trust between the USA and the EU during the Donald Trump era continues in the USA President Joe Biden era. After the AUKUS agreement signed between the USA, UK and Australia in September 2021, Canberra's cancellation of the Australia-France submarine agreement caused the reaction of Paris and Brussels. In a speech on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, Olaf Scholz, said that he would make his first foreign visit to France, stated that "it is important for the EU to act strong and sovereign in order to shape the world of the future", points out that Berlin would try to reconsider the EU's foreign policy approach together with Paris in the coming period. However, at a time when the world's center of gravity shifts to the Indo-Pacific region and the USA-China rivalry becomes increasingly evident, it can be predicted that the Olaf Scholz administration will try to both protect the interests of the EU and continue its traditional alliance with Washington, together with the Paris administration, rather than acting alone.

In addition, undoubtedly, another important issue that the Olaf Scholz administration will face in foreign policy will be the relations between Berlin-Beijing and Brussels-Beijing. Because in recent years, the growing economic influence of China in the EU in general, and in Eastern Europe in particular, with a number of infrastructure and investment projects, is causing concern for the EU countries, especially Germany. Therefore, Germany has been criticizing China for Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and East Turkestan problems and human rights in recent years. In fact, in May 2019, when France had determined its strategy for the Indo-Pacific region entitled "France and Indo-Pacific Security", in September 2020, Germany adopted the policy doctrines regarding the Indo-Pacific region entitled "Germany - Europe - Asia: Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Together", showing that they attach great importance to the formation of the Indo-Pacific region.

In summary, at a time when the whole world is shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and global geopolitical and geoeconomic competition is increasing, the domestic and foreign policy of Olaf Scholz, who was elected as the Chancellor of Germany, the largest economy in the EU, may affect not only his country, but also the EU. How the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will shape his policy will depend on issues such as economic stability in the country and the refugee problem, as well as other issues that have gained regional and global importance, in addition to the above-mentioned issues.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Russia Vladimir Putin visited New Delhi on a working visit at the invitation of the Prime Minister of the Republic of India Narendra Modi. The leaders took part in the XXI. annual Russian-Indian summit on which a wide range of issues of bilateral interests was discussed. The parties signed several documents on cooperation in economy, energy, military and security, science and technology, culture, and other areas (Kremlin.ru, 06.12.2021).
- During the first international strategic communications forum held in Kyiv, NATO Assistant Secretary-General for Public Diplomacy Baiba Braze stated that safe and democratic Ukraine was the key to Euro-Atlantic security. Therefore, NATO stands ready to support reforms in Ukraine. The forum was organized by the Center for Strategic Communications and was attended by NATO and EU diplomats, Ukrainian officials, and representatives of Ukrainian NGOs (Ukrinform.net, 07.12.2021).
- The Georgian Foreign Ministry reiterated that Georgia would not participate in a regional meeting in the so-called 3+3 format. At the same time, the Ministry expressed Georgia's intention to offer Baku and Yerevan its own format of talks to keep the peace. The main reason behind Georgia's unwillingness to participate in the 3+3 format is deterioration of relations with Russia and unresolved issues regarding Georgia's territorial integrity (Georgia Today, 09.12.2021).
- The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid a state visit to Kazakhstan, where he had a meeting with his Kazakh counterpart Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The two countries signed a declaration on allied relations. The President of Kazakhstan mentioned that bilateral relations reached a new level. He added that the governments of the countries would take the strongest possible measures in order to bring the trade volume to \$3 billion in the near future, and then increase it to \$10 billion (Qazaq TV, 06.12.2021).
- Tashkent hosted the Central Asia + Italy Ministerial meeting, where the Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the International Cooperation of Italy Luigi Di Maio. The Ministers noted the importance of building closer contact and expressed mutual interest in further expanding and strengthening trade and economic cooperation taking into account Kyrgyzstan's GSP+ status. They also considered the situation in Afghanistan and mentioned the importance of joint cooperation in providing humanitarian assistance (Kabar, 09.12.2021).
- The Military Committee of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) had a videoconference session, where participants discussed challenges and threats to military security in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia. The Committee decided to further improve military infrastructure in Tajikistan's territory for the sake of deploying CSTO coalition forces. The participants also considered issues of the CSTO's military potential for UN peacekeeping operations. The sides agreed to coordinate joint actions to neutralize the security challenges and threats (BelTA, 08.12.2021).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The agricultural sector of Kazakhstan attracted \$1.3 billion investments in 2021. Capital investments in the sector increased by almost 50%. Support mechanisms mainly came from the state through preferential loans. In 2020, the state financial institution Agrarian Credit Corporation financed 75 investment projects worth more than \$105 million. In 2021, over 7,000 entrepreneurs received support for more than \$478 million. The funds were used for spring field and harvesting works, purchase of equipment and cattle, and opening of farms (Qazaq TV, 08.12.2021).
- Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan plan to strengthen economic cooperation. Kazakhstan remains one of the key investors in Kyrgyzstan's economy. The accumulated volume of capital investments since 2005 has exceeded \$1 billion. Trade turnover between the two countries for nine months of 2021 amounted to more than \$680 million. The countries intend to increase the volume of mutual trade up to \$1 billion through the creation of wholesale and retail centers on the territory of Kyrgyzstan (Qazaq TV, 08.12.2021).
- Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran have agreed on a new project establishing a transit route connecting the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea. Over the next four months, Iran will send pilot shipments to Azerbaijan through the Astara border, as well as to the Eastern European countries via Georgian ports of Batumi and Poti on the Black Sea. The pilot shipment will allow identifying obstacles before the final trilateral meeting to establish a mechanism of time and cost reduction (AzerNews, 09.12.2021).
- Authorities and business communities of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had a meeting in Nur-Sultan within the Uzbek-Kazakh business forum and the Uzbek-Kazakh business council. Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov and Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Roman Sklyar participated in the forum. The parties voiced mutual readiness to actively interact in creating favorable business conditions through a joint "Road Map". The parties inked \$5.9 billion worth of trade contracts and bilateral agreements (Kun.uz, 06.12.2021).
- High-Tech Park of Belarus demonstrates significant growth in exports. In January-September of 2021 the export of services by resident companies of the park surged by 25% and exceeded \$2.3 billion. Moreover, in the third quarter of 2021 the export of services amounted to about \$764 million, up by \$160 million year-on-year. In 2020, the High-Tech Park reported exports worth \$2.7 billion. Main markets of the park include the USA, Southern Cyprus, Great Britain, Ireland, and Russia (BelTA, 08.12.2021).
- According to the joint statement of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, the Eurasian Economic Union and India will start talks on the establishment of the free trade agreement. The sides also urged the increased role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in international affairs, comprehensive development of the Organization's contacts with the UN and its specialized agencies. Moreover, they supported the establishment of official ties between the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Union (TASS, 06.12.2021).

## Society and Culture

- TURKSOY delivered 2,000 books dedicated to illustrious personalities of the Turkic world to Almaty. The handing over ceremony was held in the building of the "Almaty Creative Hub" on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The event was attended by the Chairman of the Union of Authors of Kazakhstan Ulugbek Esdaulet, the Representative of Kazakhstan to TURKSOY Bakritjan Omarov, the general public, and media (Turksoy.org, 10.12.2021).
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$1.3 million transaction technical assistance grant to enhance climate resilience in the Panj river basin in Tajikistan. Climate change models suggest the annual probability of droughts in the country will increase from 3% to over 25% till mid-century. Droughts, in combination with heat stress and increased water demand for key crops, will severely affect agriculture, which is the main source of income for many locals (ASIA-Plus, 08.12.2021).
- The Mayor of Bishkek Aibek Dzhunushaliyev met with the Mayor of Nur-Sultan Altai Kulginov as part of a working visit to Kazakhstan. The sides mainly discussed the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in various areas at the level of the capital municipalities of the two countries. As a result of the meeting, Aibek Dzhunushaliyev and Altai Kulginov signed a "Roadmap for trade and economic, scientific and technical and cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the Mayor's Office of Bishkek and the Nur-Sultan Akimat for 2022-2024" (Turkic World, 08.12.2021).
- The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) delivered a total of 611,200 doses of Sinovac vaccine to African countries. In particular, 400,000 of the total batch of Sinovac doses were delivered to Burkina Faso and 211,200 doses of the same vaccine by Sinopharm were sent to Togo by a military cargo plane of the Ministry of Defence of Turkey. The donation is part of the contribution of the OTS to the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Turkikon.org, 07.12.2021).
- The OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan organized a three-day training course on basic business skills for women in the city of Aralsk in the Kyzylorda region of Kazakhstan. The event was organized together with the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Public Association "Aral Ayelderi" ("Women of Aral"). The training course is part of the Programme Office's longstanding efforts to promote gender mainstreaming and economically related empowerment initiatives for women as a means to promote sustainable development in the host country (Osce.org, 09.12.2021).
- Ukraine opened its honorary consulate in the Turkish province of Kutahya. The new honorary consulate will help protect the rights and interests of Ukrainian citizens, enhance cultural ties and establish people-to-people contacts between the two countries. Currently, Ukraine's honorary consulates in Turkey are also operating in the provinces of Bursa and Canakkale and the district of Dalaman. Besides that, the negotiations on establishing twinning relations between Afyonkarahisar and a Ukrainian city are underway (Ukrinform.net, 08.12.2021).