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## Germany

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# Coalition Survives To Fall Another Day

by Uwe Friesecke

By raw political blackmail, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder succeeded, at the last minute, in securing a majority of three voices in the Nov. 16 Parliament vote on the deployment of German Bundeswehr troops to Afghanistan, by coupling this vote with a vote of confidence on his government. Thus, he forced back together the Social Democratic-Green party (“Red-Green”) government—but that does not guarantee this coalition will last until the next Federal elections due in September 2002. Rather, the continuation and probable widening of the war in Asia, the Middle East, or Africa, will wear down the coalition, and force early elections.

But, the war developments are not the only source of crisis, and further crises within the government camp are pre-programmed; it is because of the shocks coming from the economy, which are already visible. The rise in unemployment to more than 4 million before year’s end, and the multi-billion-deutschemark deficit in the Federal budget, caused by the erosion of the tax base, are harbingers of what is to come. Chancellor Schröder, his Parliamentary Whip, and his party’s general secretary, will not be able to impose party discipline by threatening to call a vote of confidence, a second time.

The joy of the Red-Green deputies over their success in the Bundestag’s vote will be short-lived. For, in reality, the events of early November demonstrate how great the opposition in their own ranks has grown against the political tack Schröder and his Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer have taken. In a free vote, up to 30 Social Democratic and Green deputies would have voted against giving a far-reaching authority to the German government, to deploy the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan. They would have demonstrated the uneasiness among their party bases and among the population in general, over the government’s policies. But, it is exactly this opposition, which the Chancellor and his Foreign Minister do not tolerate, ever since they coined their regrettable line about “unconditional solidarity” with America. In this respect, the Chancellor has remained true to himself, and ironically, the true heir of his predecessor, Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl.

From the beginning, critical questions, on how to judge the events of Sept. 11, and about the U.S. government’s reaction, have been suppressed by all means. According to Bundestag deputies, there has never been an open debate about this—not even behind closed doors. This method of govern-

ing will prove fatal for Chancellor Schröder and his government. It may help keep power in the Berlin intrigues for a short time, but, in the long run, no policy for the good of Germany can be carried on, with the level of denial of reality exhibited by the Chancellor.

### Trapped In Their Own Chaos

But early November demonstrated, that the situation within the opposition Christian Democratic Union and Free Democratic Party is not much better, vis-à-vis how the German government should have reacted to the terror attacks. Trapped in the chaos they created themselves, the CDU leadership can be happy that they didn’t have enough votes to topple the Chancellor. Now, they can at least put their hope in the factor of time, which is working against the Red-Green government, which the opposition can not challenge either politically or in terms of leadership.

In the Bundestag debate, immediately before the confidence vote, the opportunity was squandered to put before the German public, what the government knows about the background to Sept. 11, and what the German and the American governments really intend to do in deploying the Bundeswehr. Berlin would only repeat, like a prayer wheel, that Germany must contribute to the war on terrorism.

The possibility, that the true authors of the terror attacks must be sought among American extremists—as has been widely discussed in France—and that the events of Sept. 11 have been part of an attempted coup against the U.S. government itself, has been declared taboo by Berlin, given its demand for “unconditional solidarity” in the U.S. fight against international terrorism. Furthermore, during the debate, some claimed that the war was nearly over, and the Bundeswehr was only needed for humanitarian missions.

Reality is different. Chancellor Schröder has now been given the authority he requested from the Bundestag, to keep his promise of “unconditional solidarity.” The war in Afghanistan is not over by far, but will now enter the much more dangerous phase of a ground war. It is also clear, that the military actions may be widened to engulf the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. The comments during the Bundestag debate by post-Communist Gregor Gisy, that Germany’s Fuchs tanks (which are for use in nuclear-, biological-, or chemically contaminated areas) would not be deployed to Afghanistan, but more likely to Iraq, is very much justified.

After the lamentable failure to face reality by both government parties, and also the Bundestag opposition in Berlin, who will guarantee that the Bundeswehr, and Germany’s politicians, will not be drawn into a “Clash of Civilizations,” which the German government professes to be avoiding? All this is evidence, that Schröder’s success in the Nov. 16 vote was not only the beginning of the end of his coalition, but also marks the point, where the German political class, and German soldiers with it, step into the quicksands of a geopolitical adventure, casting all warnings aside.