

Angela Merkel's Triumph

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Results

"Merkel mächtig wie nie" («Merkel more powerful than ever») is the headline in the daily Bild Zeitung. "Over 40%, it isn't an electoral victory. It is a demonstration of power. Power has a name: Angela Merkel" reads the headline in Die Zeit. "Germany is Angela Merkel's country" declares the weekly Der Spiegel. Together with the Christian Social Union (CSU) led by Horst Seehofer the outgoing party led by the outgoing Chancellor, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in office since 2005, did indeed achieve a result on 22nd September that rose beyond all of its supporters' hopes (41.5% of the vote and 311 seats, which is 117 more than in the previous election on 22nd September 2009). This is a greater victory than forecast in the most optimistic pre-electoral polls. Angela Merkel, who nearly won the absolute majority, has become the third German chancellor to win three mandates as head of government after Konrad Adenauer (1949-1963) and Helmut Kohl (1982-1998).

Her main rival, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Sigmar Gabriel but headed in the election by former Finance Minister (2005-2009), Peer Steinbrück, did not, contrary to expectations, benefit from the rise in turnout. It won 25.7% of the vote and 192 seats (+ 46), i.e. below the 30% mark it had set itself as a goal. This is its second lowest result since the end of the Second World War after 23% won in the previous elections of 2009.

The Free Democratic Party (FDP) led by Philipp Rösler, the CDU's government partner, finds itself excluded from parliament. It won 4.8% of the vote i.e. less than the vital 5% of the vote necessary to enter in the lower chamber. The Left Party (Die Linke), on the far left, led by Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, came third but did register a decline in support winning 8.6% of the vote and

64 seats (+ 18). "Who would have thought in 1990 that this party would be the country's third political force?" said a happy Gregor Gysi. The Left Party drew ahead of the ecologists led by Jürgen Trittin and Claudia Roth, which have clearly lost ground winning 8.4% of the vote and 63 seats (- 5).

The Alternative for Germany (AfD), recently created by Bernd Lucke was the source of surprise winning 4.7% of the vote, which is nevertheless insufficient to enter the Bundestag.

Turnout was slightly higher than in the previous elections of 22nd September 2009 (+ 0.7 points) totalling 71.5%. One quarter of the Germans voted by post, a record in the country's history. Four years ago one fifth of the electorate chose to vote like this (21%).

Election Results of 22nd September 2013 in Germany

Turnout: 71.5%

| Political Parties | Majority Election | | | Proportional Election | | | Total seats |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| | No. of votes won | % of votes won | No. of seats | No. of votes won | % of votes won | No. of seats | |
| Christian Democratic Union (CDU-CSU) | 19 769 502 | 45,30 | 235 | 18 157 256 | 41,50 | 76 | 311 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|-------|----|------------|-------|-----|-----|
| Social Democratic Party (SPD) | 12 835 933 | 29,40 | 59 | 11 247 283 | 25,70 | 133 | 192 |
| Left Party | 3 583 050 | 8,20 | 4 | 3 752 577 | 8,60 | 60 | 64 |
| The Greens | 3 177 269 | 7,30 | 1 | 3 690 314 | 8,40 | 62 | 63 |
| The Free Democratic Party (FDP) | 1 028 322 | 2,40 | 0 | 2 082 305 | 4,80 | 0 | 0 |
| Alternative for Germany (AfD) | 809 817 | 1,90 | 0 | 2 052 372 | 4,70 | 0 | 0 |
| Others | 4 069 269 | 7,40 | 0 | 3 307 545 | 11 | 0 | 0 |

Source: http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_13/ergebnisse/bundesergebnisse

"We can be extremely happy at this result because it is fantastic. We have shown what we are capable of. Together we shall do everything so that the next four years will be successful for Germany," declared the outgoing chancellor when the results were announced. Angela Merkel undertook a brilliant electoral campaign. Of course she promoted her results as head of Germany but she especially excelled in taking as her own the themes and proposals put forward by the social democratic opposition which did not succeed in offering any real alternative to her programme or convince the electorate that it could do better than Angela Merkel in terms of managing the crisis.

The outgoing Chancellor succeeded perfectly in developing her image as a woman of humble consensus, who is hard working and pragmatic, which reassured her fellow countrymen. "Stability", "Security", "Continuity" read the CDU's campaign posters on which Angela Merkel's face appeared.

"The Germans don't know what she wants but their confidence in her is unshakeable and if the boat rocks she is the only one they want at the helm," maintains Gerd Langguth, author of a biography of the outgoing chancellor.

Conversely the SPD's electoral campaign was a ca-

tastrophe. The candidate representing the party's rightwing, chosen because of his economic competence, went unheard when he put forward extremely leftwing measures which he previously fought against. Peer Steinbrück made blunder after blunder.

But Peer Steinbrück was not the only one to bear the blame for the SPD's defeat. His party did not always support him and during the campaign many internal disputes occurred. In the daily *Der Spiegel* Peer Steinbrück called "for everyone, including the party's chair, to rally loyally and constructively" behind him. He did not manage to escape the trap set for him by the outgoing chancellor: how indeed could he show that he was different and put forward an alternative programme without criticizing popular Angela Merkel? The SPD also proved that it was unable to manage the legacy of the reforms included Agenda 2010 introduced by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005 (SPD)), since these were perceived badly by a major share of his voters who accused the left of having helped create (and tolerate) financial capitalism.

Finally from a strictly personal point of view Peer Steinbrück decidedly had little chance in the vote. In May 2005 he lost the elections in North Rhine Westphalia, a defeat which caused the chancellor at the time, Gerhard Schröder to organize the early general elections

which brought Angela Merkel to power. In the elections on 22nd September 2009 Peer Steinbrück was beaten again in the constituency of Mettmann -I (district of Düsseldorf, in North Rhine Westphalia) and he only owed his entry into the Bundestag to the German electoral system. On 22nd September he was again beaten in this constituency by his Christian Democratic rival Michaela Noll, who won 50.5% of the vote against 33.3% for the Social Democratic candidate.

However, the SPD was not alone in its defeat. The ecologists recorded a clear decline. They were also caught up in the outgoing chancellor's trap. After the accident at the nuclear power station of Fukushima Daiichi in Japan following the earthquake and the tsunami on 11th March 2011, Ms Merkel announced her decision to end civilian involvement in the nuclear industry in 2022, thereby depriving the Greens of one of their main electoral war horses. During this electoral campaign the ecologists neglected environmental issues and positioned themselves on socio-economic questions. *"The Greens made the strategic mistake of choosing social justice as a central issue in their electoral campaign,"* analysed Manfred Güllner of the pollster Forsa. The ballot boxes proved him right.

Finally the investigation into the movement's tolerance of pedophilia requested by the Greens from researcher Franz Walter certainly did not help the party at the end of the campaign. The researcher indicated in an article in the *Tageszeitung* that the ecologist leader Jürgen Trittin had signed the platform of the Alternative Initiative and Green's list which demanded the decriminalisation of sexual acts between children and adults if these were not violent (or without the threat of violence) in 1981 when he stood for election on the town council of Göttingen.

"If the Free Democratic Party were not to enter parliament I would deplore it," declared Angela Merkel during the electoral campaign. The outgoing chancellor will not be able to repeat the previous government coalition and now has the choice between two movements: to form a grand coalition with the SPD or an alliance with the Greens. The first option seems the most likely. It is not certain that Angela Merkel deplores the situation. *"If the Chancellor ends up with an absolute major-*

ity it will be a close one and it will not be easy for her," indicated Carsten Koschmieder, a political expert from the Free University of Berlin. *"I am convinced that secretly she hopes that she has not won an absolute majority,"* stresses Franck Decker from the University of Bonn.

If it enters government the SPD will have little room to manoeuvre in the face of someone who knows how to manage power without really sharing it. The CDU might however accept some changes in direction in its policy, notably from a fiscal point of view.

According to a poll by Infratest Dimap for the TV channel ARD 57% of those interviewed said they wanted a grand coalition between the two main political parties. The Germans who are extremely attached to the idea of consensus indeed view cooperation between the two parties as the best configuration to lead the Federal Republic.

"The ball is in Angela Merkel's court, she has to form her majority," declared Peer Steinbrück. In 2005 negotiations to form a government between the CDU and the SPD lasted five weeks.

Aged 59 Angela Merkel was born in Hamburg before her family left to live in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). A physics-chemistry graduate from the Karl-Marx University of Leipzig she worked for the Central Institute for Physics and Chemistry in East Berlin until 1990 the year in which she became the deputy spokesperson for the last government of the GDR led by Lothar de Maizière (CDU). In that last year she joined the CDU after the merger of Democratic Awakening (DA), a movement she joined in December 1989, with this party. She was elected MP for the first time in December 1990 and appointed the following year as Minister for the Family, the Elderly, Women and Youth in the government led by Helmut Kohl (CDU), who then nicknamed her "the lass" (*Das Mädchen*). Elected as chair of the CDU in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in 1993, a post she occupied until 2000, Angela Merkel was appointed the following year to the post of Minister for the Environment, the Protection of Nature and Nuclear Safety. In 2000, she took over as her party's leader a post she has been re-elected to time and again ever since (the last time was on 12th December 2012 with 97.94% of the vote ie the highest result in 12 years). After the elections on 22nd September 2002

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won by the SPD Angela Merkel took over as the leader of the opposition as she became the chair of the CDU's parliamentary group in the Bundestag. Three years later she became the first woman, the first protestant and the first citizen from the former German Democratic Republic to rise to the post of Chancellor. She was however obliged to lead a grand coalition rallying the CDU and the SPD. She led the CDU to victory in the elections on 22nd September 2009 thereby remaining as head of government, which she led this time in an alliance with the FDP.

The woman the Germans now call *Mutti* (mum), was designated the most powerful woman in the world for the third successive time this year (and for the 8th time in ten years by the American magazine Forbes) and therefore succeeded in pulling off a hat-trick as she won the general election a third time round enabling the CDU to achieve its best score in 23 years..

Since the end of the Second World War Germany has only had 8 chancellors. The re-election of Angela Merkel after 8 years as head of the country confirms the stability of the Federal Republic.

This is due to last for the next four years whatever the government, in Germany and also in Berlin's relations with its European partners. *"I do not believe that there will be any great difference whatever the coalition that is formed. We shall have the same European policy as before putting forward the message: we want countries to implement the necessary reforms,"* analyses Marcel Fratzscher, chairman of the German Economic Research Institute (DIW).

Energy transition, renewal of infrastructures, the fight to counter demographic decline, the development of investments – these are some of the challenges that Angela Merkel faces in her third term as head of Germany.

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