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A year of electoral uncertainty Germany turns the page on Merkel

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Angela Merkel, at the head of the German government since 2005, will leave her position after the federal elections on 26 September. While this departure seems to be a foregone conclusion, the election also heralds other, more structural changes, which will affect even the tectonics of the deep forces of the German political system. After the weeklong psychodrama in which the CDU-CSU was unable to reach a consensual agreement on its candidate to succeed Angela Merkel, the election on 26 September could very well represent a major political turning point. With six important regional elections in 2021^[1], the changes underway have the potential to reshape the country's political landscape in a major way. The consequences for the 'stability' that has characterised the German political system since 1949, however, remain difficult to analyse.

The "super election year" 2021 is taking place in a special context. Under the influence of the pandemic, the two major parties that govern together in the "grand coalition", the SPD and the CDU-CSU, continue to plummet in the polls. While more and more Germans are holding Angela Merkel and her government responsible for the mistakes of the anti-Covid strategy and especially for the slowness of the vaccination campaign, several members of her party (CDU-CSU) have been accused of having received large "commissions" in connection with the public authorities' acquisition of hygiene masks. Beyond the government's record at stake lies the question of the renewal of a political class that has been in power (together or separately) since 1949.

As a first direct effect of the scandals mentioned above, the polls are forecasting a CDU-CSU score below 30%

of the vote – unheard of in Germany and unimaginable until a few months ago. A second and – until recently – unexpected effect is that this score could open the way to a government majority without the CDU-CSU – a first since 2002. However, and this is the third point to remember, the weakness of the CDU-CSU is not to the advantage of the SPD. The oldest democratic party in Europe still active no longer exceeds 20% of the vote in the estimates. Together with the weakness of the CDU-CSU, the German political landscape is facing a real transformation. But the nature of this transformation remains unclear – unlike the upheavals seen in France or Italy, the party Bündnis 90 – Die Grünen (The Greens), founded in 1980 and present in parliament since 1983, is preparing to fill the void left in the centre after the erosion of the two historical parties (SPD and CDU-CSU). The Greens, who currently participate in eleven of the sixteen regional governments, now seem to be in tune with the expectations of the 'silent majority' in the centre and their candidates are widely acclaimed.

THE GERMAN POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE FACE OF STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN SOCIETY

A brief look back: Faced with the chronic instability of the governments of the "Weimar Republic" (1918–1933), the authors of the German "Basic Law" of 1949 sought above all to combine two principles: They wanted to guarantee the expression of the greatest possible democratic representativeness, hoping in this way to rally a large majority of the population to the democratic system. This representativeness had to be combined with a system that ensured a high degree of governmental stability, framed by the federal system of control and multiple checks and balances. In fact, while allowing regular democratic alternation, this

^[1] Elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate took place on 14 March. Saxony-Anhalt will vote on 6 June, and on the same day as the federal elections on 26 September, regional elections will be held in the city of Berlin (a state on its own), Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

parliamentary system has given Germany a remarkable stability, similar to the French presidential system of the Fifth Republic[2]. While these provisions continue to contribute to the stability of the system, they have not been able to prevent the disappearance, over the last 30 years, of clearly identified political milieus and the disintegration of the link, often generational, that the major parties had forged with their electorate. To explain this shift, we must take into account the structural transformation of Western societies since the mid-1970s. Modern societies have become more mobile, more fluid and less static, and no longer reproduce the quasi-automatic socialisation of citizens in a political environment, allied to one of the two major political blocs[3]. Since 1990, Germany's two major parties have lost 40% of their members, and activists over the age of 60 represent more than half of the registered members. Needless to say, their way of doing politics no longer matches the new generations' expectations of transparency and participation.

Even if the core vote base of each of the two political blocs still seems to exist - in 2005, more than 60% of unionised workers voted for the SPD and more than 75% of practising Catholics opted for the CDU-CSU - it now represents only 10% of CDU/CSU and SPD voters[4]. The deeply embedded social forces that structured the political field are fading away in the face of the growing individualisation of society and the very idea of having collective actors (the parties) committed to the 'collective good' of society no longer seems to correspond to an atomised society where everyone tries to privilege his or her own interests.

This slow structural transformation led in 2017 to a parliament composed of seven parties (CDU-CSU[5], SPD, AfD, FDP, Die Linke, Bündnis 90 - Die Grünen), and constituencies won directly by six different parties (except the FDP). As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find structural majorities, combining a 'big party' from the centre-left or centre-right with a small liberal party from the left or right, to govern. Moreover, Angela Merkel's long tenure as chancellor from 2005 to 2021 was mostly spent in the centre of the political spectrum, where the CDU-CSU was forced to ally itself with the social democrats of the SPD. Many

observers believe that Angela Merkel's longevity as leader of Germany has been possible only at the cost of programmatic pragmatism, geared towards managing current affairs. By avoiding ideological or visionary debates, and without a clear 'course' defined by the government, Angela Merkel has further contributed to the disintegration of the political camps mentioned, and part of her electorate now asks for ideological orientation.

The first to pay the price of this middle ground centrism were the Social Democrats of the SPD, which seems unable to reproduce the synthesis that allowed it to achieve its historical success. The victories of Willy Brandt and Gerhard Schröder became possible as the party managed to integrate voters beyond its working class social base, adding progressive intellectual circles (teachers, journalists and professors) to its electorate. Given the tensions and divisions that underlie German society today, the SPD is failing to reproduce this type of integration of different social strata. Instead of converging on the SPD, some of Angela Merkel's disaffected voters have radicalised, and the more progressive part is moving towards the Greens.

In addition to this fluidisation of the structural components of society, new material divisions divide the German society since 2002. With Gerhard Schröder's reforms, the (western) German model of a relatively generous welfare state, difficult to reform because of the corporatist co-management between trade unions, employers and politicians, has been modernised. The result is a much more dynamic society and economy. Although it has not been able to provide a satisfactory response to the environmental and climatic problems that are of concern to a growing part of the electorate, this new economic dynamic has produced a share of "working poor", suffering from the new situation. Politically, this has resulted in the lasting establishment of Die Linke (the left), currently credited with 7 to 9% of votes, and an SPD that is torn between voters in the centre (whom it covets, because it is with them that elections are won) and voters on the left (whom it must not lose to Die Linke).

For fifteen years, Angela Merkel's CDU has taken

[2] Germany has had eight chancellors since 1949, France eight presidents since 1958.

[3] For obvious historical reasons, the third force - the communists - who exercised a dominant influence in Italy and France played no role in the Federal Republic (FRG), except as an 'enemy' against which all the forces in place were united.

[4] Ralf Thomas Baus: *Parteiensystem im Wandel. in: Zur Zukunft der Volksparteien. Im Plenum Kompakt. Hrsg. von der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2009, S. 12*

[5] Although associated in a single parliamentary group in the Bundestag, the CDU and the CSU are two distinct parties, with the particularity that the CSU limits its presence to Bavaria only, whereas the CDU agrees not to intervene in its territory and therefore limits itself to the 15 other Länder.

advantage of this situation, to establish itself even more in the centre, where the party has won elections. For different reasons than the SPD, but in a similar manner, the CDU abandoned its right wing with these manoeuvres. The national-conservative electorate found itself disoriented, looking for alternatives - and this explains the birth of the far-right AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). Currently torn between a national-conservative and economically ordo-liberal wing (the 'former' CDU voters) and one that is openly neo-fascist, which brings together the disaffected from all over the country, the AfD is currently taking an even more radical turn in its programme by advocating the return of the Deutsche Mark and the end of the European Union. This is coupled with a policy that wants to prevent all immigration. The regional elections in the eastern Länder, followed by the federal elections, will show whether the party has passed its zenith with a programme such as this.

THE POLITICAL FORCES AT WORK

Assessing the state of the political forces in Germany in spring 2021 remains a difficult exercise. According to the latest polls (April 2021), the Bundestag will once again comprise seven parties. The two traditionally major parties CDU-CSU and SPD are now projected to have a combined share of only 44%. This means that the "grand coalition", which has supported three of Angela Merkel's four terms in office, the two major political forces that have structured Germany's political life (together or on their own) since 1949, would no longer have a majority (together!) to elect a chancellor and govern the country.

The big loser in these projections seems to be the CDU-CSU. Estimated^[6] with a share of between 27 and 30% of the vote, the party is a long way from the 41.5% obtained in 2013. With the open competition fought by the two presidents of the CDU (Armin Laschet) and the CSU (Markus Söder) for ten days, the party is now without an undisputed leader, without a clearly identified project, and faces the worst crisis of confidence on the part of its members and voters since the end of the Helmut Kohl era. Even though the party's executive committee has finally endorsed its chairman

(Laschet) to carry its colours in the elections of 26 September, the length of the decision-making process (since 10 April), the way in which the party's internal divisions were exposed (the verbatim of internal meetings was commented on live on twitter), and the mediocre score finally obtained by Laschet (only 31 of the 46 votes of the executive committee, even though he had already been informally nominated as the CDU-CSU's candidate), will leave their mark.

Behind this dramatic situation for the CDU, one tends to forget the even more alarming figures for the SPD. This party only represents 15 to 17% of the vote in the average of polls. No poll currently sees it winning more than 20%, far from the 41% obtained by Schröder in 1998, and this despite the fact that it designated its candidate for the chancellor, current finance minister Olaf Scholz, some time ago and also has published its pre-programme.

The big winners of this transformation in the centre of the political spectrum are the Greens. Currently forecast to win between 20 and 23% federally (compared to 8% in 2017), they clearly stand for a modernisation of society, both economically and ecologically, and defend the idea of an inclusive, open society that respects individual freedoms. They could become the true heirs of the centre-left and centre-right parties, even if their record in Baden-Württemberg and Hesse, the two Länder they govern with the CDU, leads one to be cautious about their innovative strength in the face of the incremental weight of the structures in place.

With all due caution five months before the election, it must be admitted that the consequences of such a result would be considerable: if a new participation of the Greens (after 1998-2005) in the government seems to be a given, no one is in a position to say in what form. A coalition between the conservatives of the CDU-CSU and the Greens, as predicted in the polls for several months now and desired by many voters, would be a novelty in itself. However, with the current weakness of the CDU, it is no longer certain to have a majority in parliament. What are the alternatives then?

[6] Poll dated 17-18 April

By adding the seats of the FDP Liberals, currently polling at 9%, the majority thus formed (CDU-CSU, Greens, FDP) would become more evident, but would it be more stable? Such a coalition would remain a high-risk undertaking, as the parties differ so much in their political positioning, in their political identity and culture, and of course in their electorate. Nobody in Germany has forgotten that after the last elections in 2017, the negotiations that were already well advanced between these parties failed due to the incompatibility of the positions defended by the FDP and the Greens. This uncertain situation also allows speculation about the possibility of a coalition without the participation of the CDU-CSU, which would be a first since 2005. In this perspective, it is above all the configuration between the Greens, the SPD and the FDP that is discussed today. This 'traffic light' coalition (red - yellow - green) is currently in power in Rhineland-Palatinate. The government led by Minister-President Malu Dreyer (SPD) was re-elected for four years on 14 March. The 'traffic light' coalition would also have a majority in Baden-Württemberg after the elections of 14 March, but the outgoing green Minister President of the Land, Winfried Kretschmann, prefers to continue his coalition with the CDU.

At the federal level, this kind of configuration (Greens, SPD, FDP) has never existed and especially FDP leader Christian Lindner seems hesitant about a constellation that would leave even less room for the FDP to achieve its priorities. If the Greens could claim the chancellorship, the FDP would find itself the smallest partner, facing the two centre-left forces (Greens and SPD) that share a number of economic and fiscal policy priorities. While they advocate the 'return of the state', with more efficient regulations and tax reform, towards a greater contribution of high incomes and wealth, the FDP has just adopted a programme built around 'individual responsibility', which calls for a reduction in state interventionism, including lower taxes.

This leaves the option of a "left wing pact", a coalition between the Greens, the SPD and Die Linke, which would establish a real political alternative. The Greens would have the largest number of seats and appoint the chancellor. This coalition, still clearly behind the

pact of the Greens and the CDU in the polls, runs up against the still tense relations between Die Linke and the SPD, but also against the question of whether Die Linke would be ready to take on the responsibility of entering a government. This would mean revisiting many of the party's distinctive dogmas, especially on foreign and defence policy. However, the new party leadership (Janine Wissler and Susanne Henning-Wellsow) seems to be preparing the ground for a turnaround by establishing the slogan that there would be a 'responsibility to govern' for the left, so as to 'limit the damage' and defend the cause of their voters.

With at least five possible coalitions (excluding cooperation with the far right), Germany is entering a very open political situation. Much will depend on the key players in positions of responsibility and on their political courage or caution to dare new, partly atypical alliances, and finally on their strength (after the elections) to impose them on their respective party delegates. Despite all this new diversity, an alternative to Angela Merkel's 'pragmatic centrism' is not a given.

THE DIVIDING LINES OF THE CAMPAIGN: THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR PROGRAMMES

So who are these players who will be negotiating together after 26 September to form a government for Germany, and what are their agendas? The main battle now emerging will be in the centre, between the CDU-CSU and the Greens, with a minor role for the SPD.

The SPD

As the first party to nominate its "chancellor candidate", the Social Democratic Party had to face mockery at first (why propose a chancellor if you have 15% of the vote?). But even if this is not yet reflected in the polls, Olaf Scholz seems optimistic. Currently finance minister (since 2017) in Angela Merkel's government; he was mayor of Hamburg, first secretary of the SPD under Schröder, then labour minister in the first Merkel government in 2005. He plays a clever game between his role as a pillar of the government and loyal supporter of Angela Merkel in the health crisis, and the regular publication of a few proposals, some of which

are surprising to say the least, which he promises to carry out if the SPD succeeds. The latest is the creation of a European army "in the distant future", to be deployed under the responsibility and control of the European Parliament, following the German model of the *Bundeswehr* controlled by the *Bundestag*.

Other proposals that break with the German policy of the last fifteen years, and which seem more feasible in the near future, also concern European policy (establishment of a more substantial common budget, possibly linked to the possibility of joint borrowing; establishment of a European unemployment insurance; development of a model for taxing GAFAMs at global or European level, etc.). Voters may wonder, however, why Scholz saved his proposals for the election campaign, when he had four years to work on them. On the other hand, given the on-going tension between the 'popular' and 'intellectual' components of the SPD, the proposals on European policy are not necessarily likely to bring voters back to the SPD in large numbers. Taken together, there is a great deal of similarity with positions of the Greens (overall certainly more innovative). Both are compatible in substance, converging around the proactive approach of a strong state that provides the means to finance its idea of the future.

The Greens

The weakness of the SPD, but above all the dismal spectacle of the "clash of egos" within the CDU-CSU, provided the Greens with a perfect entry into the campaign. The party has produced a 132-page manifesto that reads like a government programme. The idea of massive public investment to launch a "social-ecological transformation" is at the forefront. For ten years, the party plans to invest around €50 billion annually, which will be financed through debts and an increase in income tax. In addition, a tax on large fortunes will be reintroduced (a 1% tax on assets over €2 million). These massive investments will serve to reduce CO2 emissions by 70% by 2030 (instead of the 55% reduction currently planned). To allow the necessary public debt, the Greens also want to review the constitutional provision that currently prohibits it (see insert).

Debt brake

The principle of the "debt brake", enshrined in the Constitution in 2009 following the European sovereign debt crisis and the Greek bailout, prohibits the federal state from borrowing more than 0.35% of GDP from one year to the next. This principle can be lifted in emergencies - it was indeed put on hold in 2020 (debt of 1.54% of GDP) and in 2021 because of the health situation, and this argument will also be used for the 2022 budget (Olaf Scholz is planning €80 billion of new debt in his draft budget). However, unless something changes, the Constitution will again become binding with the 2023 budget. In this case, the German federal budget would be short by an estimated €30-60 billion per year. A "typically German" debate about the possibility of changing (or not) this constitutional principle could well dominate the campaign and the forthcoming duel between the Greens and CDU-CSU.

The money thus invested should enable Germany to catch up with its public infrastructure, while at the same time modernising it (access to very high speed internet, extension of the rail network, equipment with terminals for electric cars). Money would also be used to transform agriculture and invest in public services, particularly in hospitals and schools.

Beyond the sums being committed, we can see what is emerging as the main social cleavage today, concerning directly the Greens: the party is popular and even has a majority among urban, ecological, liberal (left-wing), open-minded voters. Those who see themselves as the losers of globalisation, living in remote areas, who seek their salvation in an often-nationalistic protectionism, often reject it. This contemporary division between the *somewheres* and the *anywheres*[7] that is currently occurring in most Western democracies tends to merge, but only partially, with the materialist divide. However, it is gaining a new dynamic through its inscription in a (partly) new (or even very old) software, that of identity-based nationalism. It can be seen at work in the eastern *Länder*, which still lack the political reference points established since 1949 in the West,

[7] This distinction is the basis of the book by David Goodhart (2017): "The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics".

but it is also making its way into the rest of the country. It directly threatens the Greens' liberal, European and internationalist identity.

The programme of the Greens attempts to straddle both sides of this divide and to propose a compromise. In particular, the chancellor's candidate, Annalena Baerbock, who has established herself electorally in Brandenburg, is careful to multiply positive associations with the *Heimat*, the countryside and the province so dear to many Germans. The programme seeks to define an ecological transformation that is socially balanced and sustainable at the same time. Among other things, the Greens want to modernise the terms and conditions and increase the level of social welfare ("Hartz IV"). Different programmes should be merged and increased. The minimum wage is to be increased to 12€, and single-parent families are to be given special support.

On foreign and security policy, the Greens have not gone back on the painful aggiornamento started under the Schröder government, with Joschka Fischer at the head of German diplomacy. Although the dogmatic and sometimes violent debates around anti-militarism and pacifism of the 80s and 90s remain far away, it will be interesting to see how the party will position itself on the reform of NATO, on the latest Franco-German projects in terms of defence industry, but also in relation to the NordStream2 gas pipeline, which the Greens have rejected. The party also defends the most progressive and pro-European position in the German debate and readily claims positions contrary to the "defensive pragmatism" that seems to have guided Angela Merkel for sixteen years when it came to European affairs.

In addition to a very solid and realistic programme, which does not fail to address the major challenges of the day, the Greens have especially impressed Germany with their choice of candidates. Given their potential in the polls (and the weakness of the other parties), the party is proposing a candidate for the chancellorship for the first time in its history. In contrast to the other two parties, the Greens are betting on innovation. By proposing Annalena Baerbock, one of the party's two co-presidents, who, at 40 years of age, has never held

an executive mandate, the party is taking risks. But instead of defending itself, it is turning these elements to its advantage, "*leaving the status quo to others*", as Annalena Baerbock herself explains. Above all, her appointment was made quietly and without a rift, in a joint decision claimed by the two co-presidents. The fact that Robert Habeck, who is more popular in the polls and has experience as a minister in a regional government, agreed to step down to clear the way for Ms Baerbock shows, if proof were needed, that the 'cockfighting' staged by the right is not the only way to do politics. Robert Habeck's act is certainly more in line with what the citizens expect, and even if the chances of the Greens to reach the chancellery remain slim, the choice of Annalena Baerbock seems more intelligent: she has higher support amongst party members, who will mobilise en bloc behind her. She stands out from all the other candidates because she is young, but also because she is a woman and asserts her status as a mother of two young children. On the national political scene since 2017 (she has been a member of the Bundestag since 2013), she impresses beyond her party because of her commitment and seriousness, her knowledge of issues at stake and her ability to negotiate difficult compromises. In this, she even reminds Angela Merkel, but moreover she shows great ease in front of the cameras, having achieved in 2020 the highest number of invitations of all political actors to the television talk shows that Germans love and that define a good part of the political agenda of the country.

The CDU-CSU

While the Greens, whose past has forged the image of a non-conformist party, with a sometimes "chaotic" militant base that was always ready to impose its "principles" (anti-authoritarian, adept at direct democracy within the party) against the pragmatic considerations of "Realpolitik", are playing a perfect score, the CDU-CSU has sunk in recent weeks. This party, for which governmental responsibility is part of its DNA, is a "governing machine". Accustomed to well-prepared internal decisions, negotiated in the "back rooms" (*Hinterzimmer*) of the various federations and bodies that make up the strength of the CDU/CSU across the country, the party has surprised Germany

with a sudden fiery conflict over its candidate for the chancellorship.

Already, the failure of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer as party leader (the initial idea was that this confident of Angela Merkel would first gain control of the party, before running for chancellor) has exposed the cracks and tensions that are tearing the party apart from within. She was forced to announce her withdrawal after the fiasco of the regional elections in Thuringia, where part of the CDU wanted to accept the passive support of the far right (AfD), against the explicit indications of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and the national party authorities. Although successful, the price was her resignation. She was then obliged to organise a long and painful process to bridge the internal fissures that had appeared in the party. This ended with the appointment of her successor, Armin Laschet. If Laschet thought that by winning the CDU presidency against the favourite of the conservative wing, Friedrich Merz, he would automatically win the nomination to lead the party in the federal elections, he overlooked the ambitions of Markus Söder, Minister-President (CSU) of Bavaria. While denying his interest in the chancellorship, Markus Söder claimed that 'his place [was] in Bavaria', until the sudden reversal of this position on 10-11 April. By skilfully playing on the fact that he was "available" if the CDU called him, he exposed the party's weakness, the gulf between the "authorities" of an apparently well-organised and well-established party, united behind its president-candidate for the chancellorship Laschet, and deputies who, faced with his lack of popularity, were afraid that they would not be re-elected. There was also the party base who were ready to rally behind Söder's promise of strong leadership, after years spent to search for the best compromise, for which there was 'no alternative' (and which was, most of the time, embodied by Angela Merkel)...

With 44% of Germans and 72% of CDU-CSU voters believing that Söder would make a better candidate than Armin Laschet, the Bavarian capitalized on his personal popularity to launch his full-scale attack on the establishment of the sister party, reminiscent of Matteo Renzi's *rottamatore* in Italy or Sebastian Kurz

in Austria. Armin Laschet, a close associate of Angela Merkel, a member of the German Bundestag since 1994, an MEP since 1999, a regional minister since 2005, then Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia since 2017, one of the CDU's deputy presidents since 2012, party president in 2021, and a long-time veteran of the party's internal workings, had a hard time uniting party officials behind his ambitions.

But the psychodrama, which ended on 20 April with the nomination of Armin Laschet and the rallying of Markus Söder, who promises to "campaign loyally", does not mean that the CDU will disappear in September, far from it. The party still has a good chance of emerging as the 'winner' of the elections, and with a little skill it will be able to impose its boss as chancellor of a coalition government. However, the structural transformations of society, the disintegration of the political environment, the wear and tear of years in power and the difficulty of responding to the major challenges facing the country are all factors that weigh against the Conservatives' ambitions.

This is confirmed if we look at the CDU/CSU's programme. With five months to go before the elections, the party does not yet have a manifesto or an elaborate election programme. By opting for a "participatory" process, the CDU is placing its bets on modernity. An "open discussion" on the proposals put forward by the party promises to involve economic and trade union forces, professional organisations, but also citizens. This discussion will in principle take place on the Internet, but it remains to be seen how the time lost in the nomination of the candidate can make good.

Faced with critics who blame it for its "programmatically vacuum" following the sixteen years of Merkel's government, the objective is twofold. The CDU wants to demonstrate that it represents the "common sense" of a vast majority of "normal" Germans. This would distinguish it from the 'ideological recipes' it associates with the Greens and the left, and of course from the extremist and 'populist' positions of the far right. If this positioning helps the CDU to demonstrate its closeness to the people, the 'participatory' tool must represent a modernity that is not necessarily associated with this party.

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There is a dual risk to this strategy. Defending "common sense" could lock the party into the status quo, far from innovative proposals that are up to the challenges. On the other hand, those who are looking for reference points on the right risk being disappointed again and turn away from a candidate who represents the most pro-European and Francophile trend in the party, in the tradition of Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Kohl.

GERMANY ON ITS WAY TO CHANGE?

A first poll conducted after the appointment of the chancellery candidates has just been published. Although the predicted result of 28% for the Greens and 21% for the CDU-CSU means a radical reversal of the balance of power between the two parties, which would be a true ground-breaker for the post-election political landscape, it is probably still too early to speak of a major trend and observers should expect some variations in the polls in the coming days.

The structural and conjunctural elements presented in this article, while supporting the argument that German politics, short of an earthquake, will very soon undergo profound upheavals, are rather more an invitation to caution. Combined with the institutional factors of the electoral system, they argue for a nuanced opinion. The CDU is not comparable to the Democrazia Cristiana

of the early 1990s, nor is Armin Laschet to Sebastian Kurz (it would have been different with Markus Söder, but he failed to secure the nomination).

With the meticulous and methodical preparation of a programme for Germany and the choice of their candidates, the Greens are establishing themselves as the next generation in the centre of the political spectrum - without this implying however the collapse of the traditional parties, as in France after 2017. The most likely scenario, five months before the elections remains a coalition between the CDU-CSU and the Greens, based on an ambitious and innovative programme, with renewed candidates, but in the German tradition of centrist politics. It would not be surprising if the Chancellor were then to be called Armin Laschet, despite his failed campaign start.

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