

Chancellor Merkel unrivalled in the Christian Democrats

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On 3–5 December the CDU convention was held in Hanover. Chancellor Angela Merkel was elected the head of the party for the next term, receiving the support of 97.7% of her party. This was her best result since 2000 when she became the party leader for the first time. Her deputies were also elected - this group was expanded from four to five people – and the party chairs and the leadership. During the convention a document was adopted which will become the basis of the party's electoral programme. Among the proposals the CDU has announced in this document are: the introduction of the obligation for companies to establish gender parity in their management and supervisory boards, the introduction of a minimum wage in sectors not covered by group agreements and the preparation of an investment programme with regard to land, air and water infrastructure worth 25 billion euros in the future term of the Bundestag. In her speech made at the convention Chancellor Merkel expressed her willingness to continue the coalition with the FDP after the election for the Bundestag scheduled for September 2013. The party's convention is in fact the beginning of the fight for Chancellor Merkel's re-election.

Commentary

- The good result achieved by Angela Merkel was above all meant to demonstrate unity within the CDU ahead of the electoral campaign for the Bundestag which will see the leader of the Christian Democrats in the starring role. The convention also confirmed the Chancellor's strong position as party leader and the lack of any important rivals for her within the party. The popularity of Labour Minister Ursula von der Leyen, regarded as a potential successor of Merkel has, however declined. Furthermore, Merkel's newly elected deputies in the CDU do not have their own political support base within the party.
- Despite the demonstrated unity there are factions of conservatives in the party who contest the current party line. Their criticism mainly concerns the introduction of the policies so far reserved for the Social Democrats and the Greens into the party's programme such as gender parity, the minimum wage, increased state support for the pension system, the elimination of compulsory military service and the withdrawal from nuclear energy.
- In her campaign, Angela Merkel will focus mainly on European issues in order to capitalise on support in society for the anti-crisis policy she has been pursuing on the EU

forum. Merkel will leave internal issues such as energy transformation or welfare policy to trusted politicians, including Volker Kauder and Peter Altmaier, which will enable her to distance herself from concrete solutions and to take on the role of a mediator, should the need arise.

- The incorporation by the Christian Democrats of further issues associated up to now with the Social Democrats and the Greens is intended to win a part of the voters of these parties and to create space for a coalition with one of them after the election. The continuation of the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition is currently rather unlikely due to the weakness of the FDP. Surveys also indicate that none of the traditional ruling camps (neither the Christian Democrats nor the Social Democrats) will be able to build an independent stable majority. In this situation it will be possible to form a grand CDU/CSU-SPD coalition or a coalition composed of the CDU and the Greens. A government formed by the SPD, the Greens and the FDP may be an alternative to the latter option.