

Germany's CDU presents its vision of how the European Union should be managed in future

Marta Zawilska-Florczuk

The congress of Germany's ruling Christian Democrats was held on 14-15 November in Leipzig. Alongside social issues (the introduction of a minimum wage) and education, the event was primarily devoted to European politics. The CDU's resolution on its vision of how the EU should be managed in future stressed the party's pro-European course, while also setting out the conditions for maintaining that course. The Christian Democrats declared their support for the creation of a so-called political union within the EU, as well as a 'union of stability' within that. Reform of the treaties is intended to be the instrument for creating this political union. For this purpose, a European convention will be established. France will remain Germany's key partner on the path to changes in the EU. Although the resolution is a document adopted by the party, we can assume that it will form the basis for the German federal government's future action on the European arena.

A political Union: changes to the treaty

According to earlier statements made by members of the federal government, the CDU will push for change to the EU treaties, which have "proved to be insufficient in some areas." The Christian Democrats want to convince the other EU countries of this as soon as possible, and to bring about the establishment of a European Convention (composed of representatives of all the EU member states) with a "clearly defined mandate"; this would include the addition of a Stability and Growth Pact to the European treaties. Because the resolution does not specify the details of the Convention's mandate, it is not known whether this would include strengthening the role of the European Parliament and EU Council by giving them the right of legislative initiative, as the CDU has requested. The Christian Democrats favour changing how the President of the European Commission is elected; instead of by Parliament, he would now be elected directly by EU citizens. The CDU also proposes the creation of a post of Commissioner for savings, who would monitor the use of the states' resources and the initiation of essential restructuring measures by those states, subject to a procedure of controlled debt reduction. The Commissioner will have "the right to intervene in cases where the state fails to meet its obligations." The resolution also envisages reducing the number of regulations issued by the European Commission, as well as a reduction in duplications. To this end, the Commissioners are supposed to have permission to intervene in the functioning of the Directorate General, and a Council for checking compliance with legal standards is to be created. Furthermore, the Christian

Democrats' concept involves changing the allocation of seats in the European Parliament to "reflect the populations of the member states to a greater degree than hitherto."

According to the CDU, some changes could be made at the initial stage by intergovernmental arrangements (as in the case of the euro or the Schengen agreement), which would then be entered into the European treaties. The Christian Democrats have also clearly opted to allow those countries which are "willing and able to move forward faster" to develop more quickly; and in doing so, they favour the option for the creation of various political entities within the EU's single legal and institutional order.

An important regulation provided for in the document is the introduction of an option for a eurozone member state to voluntarily withdraw from monetary union, if "it shows no desire or will not be able to keep the rules associated with the use of the single currency." Such a state would have the same status as those countries that have not adopted the euro.

A Union of stability: a new concept of management

The CDU plans to strengthen the European Commission's role in putting back the budgets of those countries that violate the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact in order. The first step in this direction would be mandatory consultancy from the European Commission to the governments of indebted countries, and then the Commission's supervision of the use of budget and EU funds. Only if these measures have no effect would funds from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) be released; this is ultimately to be transformed into a 'European Monetary Fund'. The basis of German consent to activate this mechanism would be that "the state using it will meet stringent conditions relating to financial and economic policy, and that the German Bundestag will give its prior approval." The Christian Democrats favour restoring the independence of the European Central Bank (which they believe should not buy the bonds of indebted countries), as well as a strict separation of monetary and fiscal policy.

In turn, the European Union's Court of Justice should be strengthened with the option to "effectively oblige individual states to comply with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact, and to punish all breaches of these regulations." The Christian Democrats have also raised the idea of introducing a so-called 'debt brake' to prevent countries throughout the European Union (and initially, at least, in the eurozone) from becoming excessively indebted. They would also make signing the appropriate regulation into the individual states' constitutions a condition for these states' future accession to the eurozone.

Further enlargement of the EU depends on its internal situation

The CDU's resolution authorises a change of emphasis in the Christian Democrats' approach to the further enlargement of the EU. The accession of new countries into the EU is made dependent primarily on the Union's ability to adopt them, and only secondarily on whether they meet all the accession criteria. The Christian Democrats have firmly ruled out the possibility of Turkey joining the European Union. A privileged partnership is intended to

serve as an alternative to full membership, and will be the closest possible form of EU cooperation with this country.

Conclusions

1. The concepts presented in the resolution on changing how the EU is run tend towards the creation as postulated by the Christian Democrats of a political union, and thus a deepening of the integration of the countries concerned. This is effectively an acknowledgement that further integration could lead to the emergence of two separate political bodies within the EU, despite the declared will to maintain its legal and institutional coherence. The driving forces behind such a 'union within the union' would still be Germany and France. The document also highlights the importance of cooperation with Poland within the Weimar Triangle.

2. The resolution's content demonstrates the CDU's strong conviction that the German economic model is exemplary. This is why the causes of the crisis mentioned (including excessive debt and the competitiveness of some eurozone countries) have not as yet included the German economy's steadily rising trade surpluses; many economists have emphasised the fact that the single currency and the restraint of wage rises in Germany have contributed to its increasing share of exports in the European market, at the expense of exports from other eurozone countries. There is also the strong belief that the remedy for the eurozone's troubles is to strengthen the mechanisms for control and to punish violations of the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact. The changes to the system of EU governance put forward by the Christian Democrats are intended to bring about unconditional submission to the rules laid down by states with strong and healthy economies.

3. This resolution can be expected to form the basis of the German government's European strategy, despite the expected criticism from the opposition SPD and the Green Party. The document reveals the Christian Democrats' aims to change the EU's institutional system: to reduce the relative role of the European Commission, and strengthen that of the European Council, the EU Council and the European Parliament. In the future, we may also expect demands to change the system of voting in the European Central Bank. At the request of Chancellor Angela Merkel, among others, the idea of distributing votes in the Governing Council of the ECB according to the strength of the individual member states' economies (which is supported by the majority of CDU politicians) has been temporarily abandoned. The postponement of the final decision in this matter has been based on the fact that it could cause too much controversy in other EU member states. The plan to change the Union's institutional system, to force through direct elections for the head of the European Commission, and to make the distribution of seats in the European Parliament more closely reflect the population in the member states are all aimed at strengthening Germany's position as the most populous EU country.