

Resignation of Germany's Minister of Defence

On 1st March federal Minister of Defence Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU) gave up the his ministerial post and other political offices as a consequence of a media scandal related to his doctoral thesis being recognised as containing plagiarism. Guttenberg's departure will have consequences for the government, Bundeswehr reform, and may have an influence on the CDU's results in state parliamentary elections.

The departure of the minister of Defence, the most popular German politician (73% support), will harm the image of the federal government. The support he received by the coalition despite disclosure of having committed plagiarism means that he is still assessed as a prospective politician who in a few years' time may return to active politics. A direct consequence of his resignation was the second government reshuffle in this term. The post of the head of the Ministry of Defence was taken up by Thomas de Maizière (CDU), hitherto Minister of the Interior,. Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) will become the new interior minister. Guttenberg's departure will most probably not stop the implementation of Bundeswehr reform plans already rather advanced. The appointment of a new minister of Defence may however lengthen its period of implementation.

Guttenberg's decision on his resignation (a week after his Ph.D. degree was taken away by the University of Bayreuth), despite unconditional support from Chancellor Angela Merkel and CSU leader Horst Seehofer, puts those politicians in a very difficult situation. Before the upcoming elections to state parliaments the Christian Democrats will try to demonstrate their efficiency and ability to manage political crises, which is the reason why the appointment of the new minister took place so quickly. <jus, zawil>