

## Germany: Erika Steinbach has again divided Christian Democrats

On 9 September during the session of the CDU management, Erika Steinbach, a CDU MP and the head of the Federation of the Expellees (BdV) caused indignation among her colleagues when she suggested that the German invasion of Poland was provoked by the Poles. On the Day of Small Fatherlands, celebrated on 12 September, she criticised her fellow party members for their lack of commitment to Christian Democratic values. Thus Steinbach once again divided Christian Democrats but both the party's governing body and the CDU parliamentary group are trying to prevent an escalation of the conflict and to cut short speculation about a rift in the CDU.

During the session of the CDU management, Erika Steinbach defended members of the council of the Escape Expulsion Reconciliation Foundation appointed by BdV. Responding to charges that they represent revanchist views she pointed to the link between the partial mobilisation in Poland in March 1939 and Hitler's attack. Following her colleagues' indignation, Steinbach declared that she would not stand to be re-elected for a position in the party management.

During the annual celebration held by the Federation of the Expellees, Steinbach stated that she had never denied Germany's responsibility for the outbreak of World War II. At the same time she hit back at her fellow party members by saying that they are short-sighted and not faithful to their ideals as she referred to their criticism of anti-immigrant statements made by Thilo Sarrazin and their attitude during the debate about problems with the integration of immigrants. In her opinion, turning away from conservative constituents and evading a discussion about right-wing values creates space for the establishment of a new political party.

In order to diffuse the conflict and dismiss accusations of marginalising conservative politicians in CDU, Angela Merkel stated that she was satisfied with Erika Steinbach's work in parliament and wanted her to continue holding her position of a human rights spokeswoman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group. Thus, by granting Steinbach a vote of confidence, Angela Merkel is strengthening Steinbach's position in the CDU. It proves that the German chancellor is seriously considering speculations about a possible split in the CDU and the establishment of a new conservative party that would locate itself to the right of the Christian Democrats. An attempt to maintain Steinbach in her position in the CDU parliamentary group is intended as a clear signal for conservative voters that they are still represented by the party. <ciechan>