

The US presidential election: the view from Germany

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Chancellor Angela Merkel congratulated Donald Trump on his victory. She emphasised that she felt relief to see the end of an election campaign characterised by 'confrontations hard to bear'. She commented that Germany's ties with the United States of America are deeper than with any country outside the European Union and offered Trump close co-operation, on the condition that common values would be respected. Lower-ranking politicians from both the government coalition and opposition parties openly expressed their disappointment and concern about the outcome of the election in the USA. The German minister of foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said that the result was not what most Germans had hoped for. Franz Josef Jung congratulated Trump on his victory on behalf of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, adding that from now on Europe must become more self-reliant in its foreign and security policy. According to the German minister of defence, Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), on the one hand Trump will insist Germany become more engaged in NATO and, on the other, Europe will have to rely on itself more than previously in the area of defence.

Before the election, the Republican candidate was perceived negatively due to his criticism of the functioning of NATO, praising Brexit, and his sceptical approach to climate protection. Politicians from German parties represented in the Bundestag declared that Donald Trump's victory would not be a desirable scenario for Germany, and the minister of foreign affairs even called him a 'hate preacher' (Hassprediger).

Commentary

- Two main topics have dominated politicians' comments. Firstly, Donald Trump's success is relativised and presented merely as an effect of defiance among citizens who feel disillusioned with the establishment. In this context, there's an urgent need to diagnose the fears of German citizens and address them adequately before the upcoming parliamentary election in Germany. Secondly, trans-Atlantic relations are expected to deteriorate, especially given the fact that 45% of Germans have a negative attitude towards the United States.
- It is commonly believed that the outcome of the election will negatively affect the spheres in which close co-operation of the two countries is a must: the military and trade sectors. Furthermore, Trump's protectionist announcements cause a sense of uncertainty in German economic circles; following his victory it is highly unlikely that the TTIP free trade agreement will be signed. However, the co-operation of law enforcement

agencies in the fight against terrorism seems not to be at risk.

- Politicians and commentators have focused mainly on looking for analogies between the situation in the USA and Germany. Donald Trump is presented as a personification of the tendencies and views that are represented in Germany by the anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic party the AfD. Trump's victory (but also the high support for Bernie Sanders among the Democrats) is viewed as a symptom of the crisis of the US political system and the helplessness of both parties in the face of new challenges. German politicians have voiced concern that Trump's victory in the USA might mobilise the section of the German electorate that have not taken part in elections so far and contribute to growing support for populist groupings.