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Germany: the SPD is in favour of a grand coalition

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SPD members have voted for the reestablishment of a grand coalition with the CDU in a postal vote which was held from 20th February to 2nd March. 66% of those voting supported the decision to form a grand coalition, with turnout at 78.3%. On 14th March Angela Merkel (CDU) is set to be reelected by the Bundestag as the head of the government.

Commentary

- The decision made by SPD members has determined the establishment of a new government and ended a political crisis lasting close to half a year. It began when, following the election of 24th September, none of the parties obtained the support required in order to form a government on its own and the then head of the SPD Martin Schulz announced that his party would not enter a coalition with the CDU this time. Only after the failed negotiations between the CDU/CSU, the liberal FDP and the Green Party and pressure from President Frank-Walter Steinmeier did the SPD change its position.
- The result of the vote within the SPD has revealed the depth of the internal division. In 2013 75.9% of party members voted in favour of the coalition. Ahead of and during the vote, the SPD youth wing – Jusos – actively ran a campaign calling for the rejection of the coalition with the CDU/CSU. The chairman of the Jusos Kevin Kühnert in a short time became the leader of the opposition within the party and the party leadership was forced to take his opinion into account. Determined to prevent the schism in the party, the SPD leadership will seek to underline its independence and demonstrate assertiveness in its co-operation with the CDU/CSU in the new government. However, the lack of a party leader who would be able to lead the party to victory and a rather bland political platform –issues with which the SPD has been struggling for many years – remain unresolved. It also remains an open question whether the leader of the Bundestag parliamentary grouping of the SPD, Andrea Nahles will succeed in stopping the fall in support for the party. Nahles is set to be elected party leader on 22nd April.
- So far the SPD has not announced which politicians will represent it and take the six ministerial positions in the government. It is only known that there will be three women and three men. Olaf Scholz, who is acting as the provisional leader of the party, is believed by the media to be a shoo-in for the position of finance minister. There speculation that the most important ministerial position allocated to the SPD –foreign minister – may be taken by Katarina Barley, the former secretary general and the present head of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Barley,

who calls herself a ‘universal weapon’ of the SPD, did not take any prominent positions in the party or the state administration until 2015 (when she became secretary general).