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A continuity coalition in Bavaria

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On 6 November in the Bavarian parliament, a coalition of the CSU and the Free Voters (*Freie Wähler*, FW) re-elected the *Bundesland*'s former Prime Minister Markus Söder (CSU) for another term. The coalition has a majority of 112 out of 205 deputies. This is only the second coalition government in Bavaria in a period of over fifty years. In the new cabinet, the FW obtained three ministries, including the post of Deputy Prime Minister, and the associated ministry of economy, energy and agriculture for the party chairman Hubert Aiwanger. In addition, the FW will hold the ministries of education and the environment. The change of government in Bavaria will not affect the balance of power in the *Bundesrat*, where the grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and the SPD currently governing Germany does not have a majority anyway.

In the coalition agreement, the parties have undertaken to pursue a balanced budget, develop road infrastructure (€400 million by 2020), hire 500 new police officers per year, build nurseries and kindergartens, employ 5000 new teachers, and grant additional financial support to families. An important element of the CSU's election campaign was the announcement by the coalition that it would build 10,000 new public housing units by 2025. In addition, the parties intend to create a provincial agency for energy and climate protection, and (as demanded by the FW) to postpone a decision to expand the airport in Munich. A new ministry for digitalisation has also been created.

Commentary

- The similarities in the manifestoes of the CSU and FW and their stable majority in parliament guarantee the continuity of current politics in Bavaria. This is based on a combination of values such as a traditional family model based upon Christianity, a strengthening of internal security, economic development and a pro-family social policy. At the same time the new government will actively engage with the protection of the environment, including adding a commitment to climate protection into the Bavarian constitution and setting environmental targets at the provincial level (consumption of less than two tonnes of CO_2 per person per year by 2050). This is intended to win back the voters lost to the Green party (170,000) before the local elections scheduled to take place in Bavaria in 2020.
- The successful formation of a government increases Prime Minister Söder's chances of becoming chairman of the party. Horst Seehofer, the current chairman and head of the

Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, has to reckon with pressure from the base of the party for him to depart as soon as possible. He is accused, among other things, of having weakened the CSU through his conflict with Chancellor Angela Merkel over migration policy during the summer. The main candidates for his successor, in addition to Söder, include Manfred Weber, the current vice-president of the party, who incidentally is applying for the post of head of the European Commission. The pressure to settle personal accounts within the party, after its poorest electoral showing in the provincial parliament since 1950, has been further increased by Merkel's announcement that she would not stand again for the leadership of the CDU.

- The FW will use their participation in the coalition not only to strengthen their position in Bavaria, but also to present themselves as an alternative to conservative voters unhappy with the work of the Christian Democrats in other federal states. In 2019 there will be elections to the European Parliament (the FW have two deputies in the current EP) and the federal states of Bremen, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia, where the FW will probably run candidates.