

Kramp-Karrenbauer to lead the CDU

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The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) elected a new party leader during its party congress in Hamburg. The new leader is Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (often known by her initials, AKK), who won the votes of 517 delegates, beating Friedrich Merz with 482 votes. Kramp-Karrenbauer was born in 1962 to a large family. In 2009, she was nominated as the minister for Labour, Family, Social Policy and Sport of Saarland, and in 2011 she became the minister president of that federal state (which has a population of around 1 million). In 2011, she was the first female leader of the CDU in Saarland. She has been a member of the CDU, including its youth organisation, the Junge Union (Young Union), since 1981. Since 2001, she has been one of the five deputy presidents of the Women's Union (Frauen Union) as part of the CDU. She has been a member of the CDU's presidium since 2010, and on 26 February 2018 she was elected as secretary general of the CDU, achieving the best result in the party's history (98.87%). AKK is a Catholic who proclaims her religion in public. She is a member of the Central Committee of German Catholics. AKK's key strengths include her political experience, leadership skills and the skill of conducting effective election campaigns. As minister president of Saarland she earned the reputation of being a successful organiser at the time of the migration crisis and a politician who effectively responded to the scandals which emerged while she was in office (for example, one concerning the underestimated costs of construction of the federal state's museum in Saarbrücken). AKK is perceived as a continuation of Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy; this makes her both stronger and weaker.

Commentary

- Kramp-Karrenbauer's victory means a change in the style of governing the party. Already as the CDU's secretary general (since February 2018) she sparked a debate inside the party and announced that the grouping's proposals would be taken into account in the government's work to a greater extent than under Angela Merkel's leadership. The party will be run in a more collective manner, and collaboration with the chancellor should also be more harmonious; Kramp-Karrenbauer was hailed by Chancellor Merkel as her successor. It cannot be ruled out that Merkel will hand over her office to Kramp-Karrenbauer in the middle of her term, thus making her stronger than the other candidates and parties ahead of the next election to the Bundestag in 2021.
- The CDU led by Kramp-Karrenbauer will strengthen its conservative profile. Her views concerning the role of the family or homosexuals' rights are more conservative than those of Angela Merkel. She was opposed to guaranteeing equal status to homosexual

and heterosexual marriages. She is also opposed to maintaining the option to hold dual citizenship for children originating from immigrant families who were born in Germany and has appealed for the imposition of an obligation to choose citizenship. She also wants to introduce an annual social service (in place of the liquidated conscription) which would be obligatory for all permanent residents of Germany, including refugees of various statuses. This is intended to make citizens and potential prospective citizens more connected with the German state.

- Kramp-Karrenbauer represents the social wing of the Christian Democrats in economic policy. She has appealed for a tax reform that would lift the burden off the middle class. She wants to increase the minimum wage, intensify the presence of women in the economy, including by means of statutorily imposed parities. At the same time, she has promised to strive towards maintaining a balanced budget.
- As regards energy policy, Kramp-Karrenbauer wants Germany to maintain the goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy transformation in the transport, construction and agricultural sectors. She is more critical about the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline than the incumbent chancellor; she believes that while withdrawing Berlin's support for the project would be an overly radical move, it would be possible to reduce the quantity of natural gas transported via the pipeline under construction. She has emphasised the need to maintain gas transit via Ukraine.
- Kramp-Karrenbauer is a newcomer on the international political scene. The main lines of the Christian Democrats' foreign policy will be continued. It may be expected that the new leader of the CDU will make efforts to establish closer co-operation with France (for example, she was the first candidate to support Macron's plan concerning the creation of a European army) and will be more open to reforming the eurozone, even though her support for a deeper integration of the eurozone will not mean consent to the community as a whole sharing debts and will be limited due to CDU's strong resistance to thoroughgoing reforms. Kramp-Karrenbauer recognises the need to improve the Bundeswehr's level of armament and wants to gradually increase Germany's defence budget to the level of 2% of GDP.
- As regards Russia, she wants to maintain the sanctions and, after the developments at the Sea of Azov, she was considering whether it would be reasonable to impose a maritime blockade in the EU on Russian ships stationed in this sea. She is also opposed to Russia's return to G8 as long as Russia continues its military operation in Ukraine. She has criticised the USA for its migration policy and protectionism and has also appealed for an intensification of co-operation with the individual states instead of with Washington DC. She emphasises that the USA is not only Trump's presidential administration but also "strong institutions and a vigilant civil society."
- Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer has not made any statement concerning Poland. Considering her personal and professional experience, she will seek co-operation mainly with France. It cannot be ruled out that this will also happen at the expense of Central Europe (for example, as regards the EU's budget issues). Kramp-Karrenbauer may be willing to soften the criticism addressed to the Visegrad Group states concerning migration policy. She supports the 'flexible solidarity' system which is interpreted by her

as the engagement of all EU member states in all its activities albeit with a different level of intensity: “in the case of Hungary this might mean that it will accept, for example, Christians from endangered areas.”

- The survival of the present German government depends not only on the new leader of the CDU but also on the stance the SPD will take, since the latter party may decide to leave the coalition. During the campaign preceding the election for CDU leader, the Social Democrats expressed much milder opinions about Kramp-Karrenbauer than about her counter candidates. She was previously in government coalition with the Social Democrats in Saarland and knows many of them personally. On the one hand, this will facilitate the work of the grand coalition, while on the other this will not allow the division line between the CDU and the SPD to be defined anew; this blurs the differences between the political manifestos of these two parties and is detrimental to both parties, especially the SPD. Should the SPD decide to leave the government, the chancellor will be changed and a new government coalition will be formed which will likely include the Green Party and liberals from the FDP who are disinclined towards Kramp-Karrenbauer (she broke up a coalition with them when she was minister president of Saarland). If the establishment of a new coalition is unsuccessful, a snap election will be held, which would be beneficial to the Green Party whose support levels have been record-high in polls conducted over the past few months.