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The European elections in Germany: the Greens move ahead of the SPD

Kamil Frymark

The CDU won in Germany in the European elections which were held on 26th May. The CDU recorded 28.9% of the vote (6.4% less than its result in 2014) to secure 29 seats (5 seats less). The Greens came in second with 20.5% of the vote (+9.8%) and 21 seats (+11). The SPD took third place with 15.8% (-11.5%) and 16 seats (11 seats less. The Eurosceptic AfD occupied fourth position with 11,0% (+3.9%) and 11 seats. The remaining places were taken by the Left with 5.5% (-1.9 %) and five seats and the liberal FDP with 5.4% (+2,0%) and five seats.

In Germany there is no electoral threshold in the European elections. The following parties, which are not represented in the Bundestag ,will enter the European Parliament too: Die PARTEI – *Party for Labour, Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Promotion of Elites and Grassroots Democratic Initiative*– 2.4% of the vote, two seats; the Free Voters – 2.2%, two seats; the Animal Protection Party – 1.4%, one seat; the Ecological Democratic Party – 1%, one seat; the Volt – 1%, one seat; Pirate Party – 1%, one seat; the Family – 0.7%, one seat. Voter turnout reached 61.4% (in 2014 it was 47.9%).

Commentary

- The Greens have scored their best result in the country-wide elections since the party was founded in 1980. It was due to the fact that the protection of the environment and climate was defined as the most important challenge for the EU and that it became the main issue in the election campaign. The Greens have managed, better than any other party, to mobilise young voters: in the age group of 18-24 the party obtained a better result (33%) than the grand coalition parties (the CDU/CSU-SPD) and the FDP combined. For voters aged 25-34 the Greens were the party of first choice. The party has also benefitted from a rise in popularity (already apparent in the state elections in Bavaria and Hesse in 2018), a change in the party leadership and through placating internal party disputes.
- The European elections were the third elections, following the elections to the Bundestag in 2017 and the Hesse parliamentary elections (in October 2018), in which the CDU/CSU and the SPD recorded the largest losses in terms of the number of voters. Both for the CDU/CSU and the SPD the results of the European elections have been the greatest failure in post-war history of the parties in country-wide elections. In both parties this will

strengthen the rivals of the party leaders – Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer in the CDU and Andrea Nahles in the SPD. The poor performance in the European elections will also intensify the personal debate about the leadership, particularly before the elections to state parliaments to be held in autumn in the eastern states (Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia). It places the SPD in a particularly difficult position. For the first time, the SPD took third place in country-wide elections, behind the Greens, and its failure in the European elections was exacerbated by the loss of its leading position in the Bremen parliamentary elections (which were held in parallel with the European elections).

- The SPD leadership will be increasingly pressed to withdraw from the coalition with the CDU, in the face of further poor results that are anticipated in elections to be held later this year. A pretext for leaving the government may be provided by the evaluation of the coalition agreement, which is set to take place at the SPD convention in December. A likely scenario is that Kramp-Karrenbauer will be entrusted with the mission of forming a new coalition government, possibly composed of the Greens and the FDP. It is also possible, especially if the negotiations with new coalition partners fail, that snap elections will be held. This scenario would present advantages for the Green Party, which has seen a record surge in its support and has the smallest party grouping in the Bundestag at present.
- The European elections have indicated an increase in support for the Eurosceptic AfD in Germany's eastern states, where state parliamentary elections will be held in autumn. The AfD is the strongest political force in both Brandenburg, which has been governed by the SPD since 1990, and in Saxony, where the party obtained 25.3% of the vote and finished ahead of the ruling CDU (23%). In Thuringia, where the SPD is in power, the AfD garnered 22.5%, losing marginally to the CDU (24.7%).