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Friedrich Merz elected Germany's Chancellor in the second round of voting

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On 6 May, in the second round of voting, the Bundestag elected Friedrich Merz (CDU) Germany's Chancellor, with the support of 325 out of 630 MPs. The repeated vote was necessary, as for the first time in German history a chancellor candidate failed to secure the required absolute majority in the first round. The CDU/CSU–SPD coalition holds 328 seats, yet Merz received only 310 votes, indicating that 18 MPs from the governing coalition did not support him (the ballot was secret). This is interpreted as a sign of dissatisfaction among some parliamentarians with the results of the coalition negotiations and the cabinet appointments. To allow a second vote on the same day, the agenda had to be amended with the approval of two-thirds of those present. The CDU/CSU and the SPD reached an agreement with the Greens and Die Linke to avoid cooperation with the AfD. Ultimately, all parliamentary groups unanimously supported the change.

The confirmation of the new chancellor only in the second round of voting is considered a defeat for Merz and a sign of his cabinet's weakness. It also serves as a warning that during his term, he will have to contend not only with strong opposition from the AfD but also with sceptics within the coalition ranks.

Commentary

- **The new government commences its work in a weakened condition.** The CDU/CSU–SPD coalition will face strong opposition in the Bundestag, as well as dissent within its own ranks. This will complicate the implementation of some parts of the coalition agreement, especially the more controversial ones, such as migration and social welfare policy. Additionally, the need for a swift second vote forced the Christian Democrats, who have formally avoided cooperating with Die Linke since 2018, to abandon that stance. However, Merz could not afford delays or further erosion of his position, as each passing day would have deepened doubts regarding his ability to maintain a majority and govern effectively.
- **Merz's failure to secure a majority in the first round of voting serves as a warning to the leaders of the incoming coalition.** This outcome stemmed from discontent among some MPs from both the CDU/CSU and the SPD. The Christian Democrats were critical of the outcome of coalition negotiations with the SPD, especially the fact that the latter party, despite its electoral defeat, was awarded seven ministerial posts, matching the CDU's share. The new chancellor's approach also provoked resistance: he bypassed regional

party leaders when appointing ministers and failed to consult with them. This discontent was further compounded by criticism of the planned reform of the debt brake (see ' *Agency on credit. Germany releases the debt brake*'), which was passed during the previous legislative term but after the election. It drew criticism from some CDU/CSU politicians, particularly regarding its design. Within the SPD, dissatisfaction stemmed from the allocation of cabinet positions the party received, as well as the dominant influence of Lars Klingbeil's aides (Klingbeil is the incoming Vice Chancellor and Minister of Finance). Former SPD ministers and their supporters expressed frustration over the lack of compensation for the ministries they lost.

- **The new government will be determined to implement its agenda, particularly the points related to curbing illegal migration and spurring the economy.** However, the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition agreement does not herald a fundamental change of course but rather an adjustment of Germany's approach to current domestic and international challenges (see '*Course adjustment: the CDU/CSU–SPD coalition agreement*'). Fulfilling the coalition's objectives will largely depend on the personalities and influence of individual ministers. Both parties have partially opted for figures from outside the political sphere, often with managerial or expert backgrounds. In the case of the SPD, candidates from the younger generation dominate. This is intended to create the impression of a fresh start and emphasise the substantive profile of the incoming cabinet (see Appendix).
- **The coalition cooperation between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats is expected to be difficult.** This is evidenced not only by the challenges in electing the chancellor but also by the growing pressure – on the CDU/CSU from the AfD, and on the SPD from Die Linke and the Greens. A continued lack of improvement in the economic situation could further intensify this pressure. Next year's elections in the eastern federal states of Saxony-Anhalt (governed by the CDU) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (governed by the SPD) will add further tension. In both instances, polls indicate a possible victory for the AfD.

APPENDIX. The allocation of ministries and their expected staffing

Office	Party	Office holder
Federal Chancellor	CDU	**Friedrich Merz** – party leader
Head of the Federal Chancellery	CDU	**Thorsten Frei** – Secretary of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag
Minister of Finance	SPD	**Lars Klingbeil** – party co-leader
Minister of Defence	SPD	**Boris Pistorius** – incumbent Minister of Defence
Minister of Foreign Affairs	CDU	**Johann Wadephul** – Deputy Head of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group for Foreign and Security Policy
Minister of the Interior	CSU	**Alexander Dobrindt** – Deputy Head of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag
Minister of the Economy and Energy	CDU	**Katherina Reiche** – CEO of Westenergie (a subsidiary of E.ON), former CDU MP
Minister of Digitisation and State Modernisation	CDU	**Karsten Wildberger** – Director General of Media-Saturn-Holding GmbH and CEO and HR director of Ceconomy AG
Minister of Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth	CDU	**Karin Prien** – Deputy Party Leader and Minister of Education of Schleswig-Holstein
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs	SPD	**Bärbel Bas** – President of the Bundestag in the previous term
Minister of Transport	CDU	**Patrick Schnieder** – Deputy Head of the Committee for Transport and Parliamentary Secretary of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the previous Bundestag term
Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety	SPD	**Carsten Schneider** – incumbent Minister of State or East Germany and Equivalent Living Conditions
Minister of Justice and Consumer Rights	SPD	**Stefanie Hubig** – Minister of Education of Rhineland-Palatinate since 2016
Minister of Health	CDU	**Nina Warken** – Parliamentary Secretary of the CDU parliamentary group in the previous Bundestag term
Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development	SPD	**Reem Alabali-Radovan** – Minister of State for Migration, Refugees and Integration in the SPD-Greens-FDP government
Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Building	SPD	**Verena Hubertz** – the SPD places great hopes on her; she has been an MP since 2021 and serves as Deputy Head of the SPD parliamentary group responsible, among other things, for the economy, climate action and energy, construction, and housing
Minister of Agriculture	CSU	**Alois Rainer** – an MP from Lower Bavaria
Minister of Research, Technology and Space Exploration	CSU	**Dorothee Bär** – former Minister of State for Digitisation