

# Do Angela Merkel and Germany have a joint future?



The new German government is in operation since a few weeks now but there is trouble brewing afoot in Berlin. Unexpectedly, the right wing AfD is pretty quiet at the time.

## **The CSU remains the arsonist**

Those who have hoped the CSU (the Bavarian sister party to the CDU of Angela Merkel) will concentrate on governing the country after the forming of the government are utterly wrong. With the elections ahead in Bavaria, Horst Seehofer wanted to gather his voters and attract those who have left CSU for the AfD with the powerful comment “The Islam does not belong to Germany”. He even doubled within this context by adding “People of Muslim Belief belong to our country”. Just like one could take his belief and values off before going out on the streets. It certainly appears Horst Seehofer is able to abandon his belief and

Christian values scarifying them to preserve his own power.

If you look into the history of Europe and Germany – and therefore Bavaria – you soon will discover Horst Seehofer wants to make the pure opposite of history to become reality. Whether by ignorance or on purpose is hard to determine, however based on facts the Bavarian Blusterer simply is wrong – “fake news” might be the right term. During the early Middle Age Arabs and the academic people from their countries brought an enormous amount of knowledge to the backwardly European countries. People actually have to thank the Muslims for the following flourishing of Europe. They benefitted from countless innovative products and a vast knowledge transfer from the Occident into the countless by monarchs oppressed, socially underdeveloped and by a faint educational system inhibited countries of Europe. A startling detail: the majority of the academics originate from Chorasán – an expanded Afghanistan – and Iran, namely from the former intellectual stronghold Bagdad.

Angela Merkel took a clear position, criticised and rectified Horst Seehofers statement – who received it thin-skinned but did no longer make such unqualified statements.

### **Settlements within CDU still not finished**

Angela Merkel has many areas with the need for improvement within her own party, too. While the Chancellor tries to convey she has understood the vote and is working on improvements her Health Minister Jens Spahn is backstabbing her. It took him just three appearances – perceived by the people concerned as big-headed and ice-cold calculated arrogance – to destroy Angela Merkels recently planted crop of hope. “Hartz IV does not mean poverty” was his first statement causing backlashes from many sources but also support by those who do not like governmental interventions (Hartz IV is the German unemployed support and welfare system introduced by the SPD in earlier times and a constant annoyance since it does not cover the rapidly increasing cost of life). With his second appearance Jens Spahn talked against the liberalisation of the abortion law unveiling his lack of knowledge and tact. Just a few days later he wanted to comply with his promise to create 8000 new jobs in health care and wanted to speed up the homologation of education certificates of nurses and doctors from other European countries. Again, the Health Minister unveiled he is unprepared since today it already is impossible to convince more than 1000 nurses from EU

countries per year to come to Germany – also due to the questionable working conditions and much too low salaries in Germany. The situation is critical since many German nurses and doctors leave for better jobs in other countries like Switzerland. Based on these facts counting on foreign nurses and doctors seems to be questionable on two levels: these people leave a vacancy in their home countries and the problem in Germany becomes the burden of the foreign workers – the question is how long this can be done. Even more problematic is the continuous decrease of the quality in nursing which gradually becomes life-threatening, particularly with cheap foreign workers. Voices rise Jens Spahn is pulling wool on people's eyes.

Even CDU exponents oppose the young politician and reveal there's much to learn for Jens Spahn. At least, with his thoughtless, unemotional and erroneous appearances Jens Spahn is keeping all these issues prominently on top of the agenda of the Grand Coalition. However, the local CDU parties and the local party members have not yet understood the troubles of the German society, thus their ignorance could become a bigger problem than expected. The CNT Alliance visited some Kreisveranstaltungen (party gatherings) of the CDU in first semester of 2018 and discovered the mostly elderly party members are interested only in issues securing their own wealth. Other issues were just briefly touched by the politicians on stage.

All this is a bit more than a tendency towards right. Like the strategy paper presented the group "WerteUnion" (Union of Values) beginning of April with lots of criticism for Angela Merkel. With this paper the opponents request a re-positioning of the CDU from the middle towards the right and fiercely oppose Angela Merkels refugee policy. Within this conservative manifesto they request the "return to the core values" of the CDU. The main part of the manifesto focusses on the Islam and migration. Again, it seems much easy for the authors of this manifesto to leave their Christian values behind (refugees) and putting them back in the centre of attention (Family) by demand. It doesn't come as a surprise Jens Spahn sending a greeting to the approximately 100 people of this manifesto.

Interest to enthuse new members and to focus on younger people or migrants does not exist – in the contrary: our questions regarding rejuvenating the CDU or to include new members originating from foreign countries were quietly, but definitely opposed even with some discomfort. It seems Angela Merkel does not recognize the "Small AfD" among their own people – or she tolerates them on

purpose.

### **Little fuss from the SPD**

The partner in the coalition, the SPD, did not stir issues up after they've started governing. During the coalition negotiations the SPD has secured the Ministries of Finance, Justice and the Foreign Ministry besides others, much to the displeasure of those people in CDU and CSU who were keen on these jobs as well. With these ministries the SPD owns quite some power and the ability to steer the government: an excellent success for the negotiators of SPD.

At the other hand the SPD remains in a fuzzy situation not just within its own quest for identity. Several representatives of SPD do not find common ground regarding the welfare programme Hartz IV. Some people around vice president Ralf Steger for instance want to replace Hartz IV knowing the programme was introduced by the SPD but also is the reason for the downfall of the party. At the other hand, the Finance Minister Olaf Scholz wants to keep Hartz IV – since it is some kind of his own child from the time he worked for Chancellor Schröder, the facilitator of Hartz IV. The designated president of the party Andrea Nahles rarely shy of some “Kick-Ass” comments is very quit despite the discussion about Hartz IV and the job market being the opportunity for SPD to position itself clearly. She commented Jens Spahn's intentional slip geared towards media with surprisingly soft voice, but straight into the face. Horst Seehofe and Jens Spahn are after the personal representation but missing out on their duties, and adds: “The primary job of the Chancellor is to sort out the act of government”.

### **Angela Merkel is flagging**

Over the past years Angela Merkel became the symbol for political stability and predictability. She is popular in Germany and abroad but scratches in the paint become visible. Her political style is increasingly perceived as boring and leaden even by her own people. Usually, watched from distance she acts successfully and well balanced even for extensive problems. Angela Merkel is the chancellor of compromises and subtle but also of half-hearted decisions and stalling in front of complex problems. This works fine at the moment since economy runs excellent and tax revenues are on a steady high – both causing additional problems which she isn't regulating. This stability increasingly is perceived as stagnancy which it actually is e.g. if looked at the Digital Offensive launched by the government

many years too late.

Along with a certain fatigue in society towards Angela Merkel – a phenomenon previous chancellor Kohl encountered too – and her style the many postponed “building lots” become visible. Media often simplify the situation and explain the fatigue towards Angela Merkel merely with her misjudgment in the situation with the refugees and her catastrophic and negligent management of this issue. This, however, is just a small part of the real reasons for the poor results of the elections and the steep head wind Angela Merkel is facing. It is the combination of various diverse issues such as the state of emergency in nursing, poverty among the elderly, housing shortage, low wages and this in combination with contemptuousness and ignoring several population groups, particularly those at the far right of the political spectrum. The situation with the refugees therefore is just one part of the picture – but one people easily can discharge their hate and anger. Also because of the right wing party AfD right wing ideas and right wing protesting became “En Vogue” – even the voters of CDU/CSU are going towards the right. In this climate the uprising hostility against the Jews in the German society and the anti-Semitic activities of the past month are not unexpected. The internal policy of Angela Merkel was meant to be visionary and creative but it looks more like uncertain, delayed, reactive, and unveils many large problem.

## **Rumble at the right**

The “old” parties still underestimate the right wing AfD. The equally underestimate the potential of right wing populism and the count of German citizen having conservative/right wing thoughts – even within CDU and CSU. For example, much disregarded by politics the right wing union “Zentrum Automobil” gained six mandates during the last works committee elections in March 2018 at the Daimler (Mercedes) plant in Untertürkheim (Stuttgart) – with the result of 13.2% they achieved a similar result like the AfD during the election last year, the Bundestagswahlen. The “Forschungsgruppe Wahlen” stated approximately 15% of the members of the politically social unions did voted for AfD instead for SPD during the last Bundestagswahlen. A result pretty much replicated during the works committee elections at Daimler.

The statements by some of the exponents of the works committee of the IG Metall union: right wing ideas today are little visible but are spread subliminal throughout the whole company and, therefore, it’s expected to see a further rise

of the “Zentrum Automobil”. The confronted union IG Metall got us evasive responses only. It seems this issue is hushed up. Time will tell whether Angela Merkel tactics to sit such problem out are the successful tactics for the unions. Looking at the general tendency in the country towards the right we believe Angela Merkel and the unions both are playing with fire.

### **Some more foreign policy?**

During the past Germany was known for a little consolidated, imprecise and often lacking foreign policy. Domestic policy always was more important and it still is. The country focuses on economic foreign policy driven by the industry and its lobbyists, and otherwise relies on symbolic policy geared towards the media.

This image could slightly change. One of the first official acts by Heiko Maas, the new foreign minister, was his visit to Israel. His predecessor Sigmar Gabriel several times acted awkwardly and Angela Merkel didn't want to become involved but Heiko Maas clearly, pragmatically and quietly put down some counterpoints. On top of it he clearly took position against the lighting up anti-Semitism.

Despite his appearances sometimes being perceived as nicely stage-made he did not make his own life easier since expectations are high now. The quick and friendly meet up with the French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Israel stirs up some hope Germany – after months of naval-gazing – finally will take over responsibility in Europe and the World. Moving from inactivity towards political creation with the friendly support by France.

### **The future of Angela Merkel**

Foreign policy slowly picks up speed but Angela Merkel seems to have a hard time with her country. It no longer seems to be the Germany she knows. She seems to lose more ground contact the more she tries to understand the problems of society therefore losing more and more ground contact while facing fronts she has to fight. In the Bundestag CDU/CSU and SPD have to heavily deal with a number of parties, all of them having gained more than 5% of the votes. On top there is the AfD, the strongest party in the opposition owning an uncomfortable agenda – some of it even being attractive to her own party members.

With their vote for the Grand Coalition the SPD members have saved it and also

saved the faces of SPD as well as the CDU/CSU. The SPD finds herself in a disruption and renovation process, even more so than the CDU. On top of it the parties of the opposition got stronger and this comes together with the incapability or the active reluctance of the governing parties to tackle the urging problems in the country in all consequence.

A forecast about the future of Angela Merkel and, therefore, of the German bipartisan system seems to be tricky. Though, the recent Grand Coalition steers towards the end of the factual bipartisan system in Germany. And people in Germany will be even more discontent for the next elections in 2021. The question how CDU/CSU and SPD will score is eligible. And whether the right wing AfD will establish itself as the third constant in the party landscape. The other question is whether the other parties will see the signs. Some media are singing the swan song for Angela Merkel forgetting she is not for nothing the most powerful woman in this world. It will be interesting to see how she will cope with the erosion on several fronts. It is not the end of Angela Merkel but she and her party are showing heavy signs of wear.

\*Ajmal Sohail contributed to this article.

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