

Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel is the favourite in the German general elections on 22nd September

61.8 million Germans, i.e. 400,000 less than in 2009 are being called to ballot on 22nd September next to renew the members of the Bundestag, the lower chamber of parliament. 3 million young people will be voting for the first time, i.e. 4.8% of the total number of voters. Amongst the latter 12.4 million are over 70 (20.10%), whilst 9.9 million (16%) are under 30.

38 political parties are running in the federal election 9 of which are represented in the two chambers of the present parliament. The German political landscape, which has been stable for a long time (4 of the 6 parties represented in the Bundestag have been there since 1949), has developed over the last 20 years. The Greens emerged in 1993 and the reunification of 1990 witnessed the entry of the Democratic Socialist Party into parliament (PDS), which then became the Left Party in 2007 (DL). This year two new parties are running: the Pirate Party (P) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The polls undertaken over the last few years in Germany reveal that there is a confidence crisis regarding the elites and at the same time these same elites have lost some of their authority, notably after the international economic crisis. The citizens for their part no longer trust finance dominated capitalism.

Never have the Germans so wanted the outgoing government to remain in place after this election (65% of them in March), i.e. the highest score since 1994. Nearly three-quarters of those interviewed say they approve the action taken by outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian-Democratic Union, CDU). Unemployment which lies at 6.8%, rising wages, and public finances, which have also returned to stability, are not necessarily factors that will push the Germans towards political alternation.

Just one month before the election the main issue is not really whether Angela Merkel will win rather than to wonder with whom the chancellor will govern. Neither of the two "traditional" coalitions (alliance between the CDU and the Democratic Liberal Party (FDP) on the one hand and between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens (DG) on the other) – do not appear to be likely after the ballot on 22nd September next.

Grand coalition? An all time first union of three parties? But who knows that the answer to this question might be. The balance of power between the five main parties will decide the colour (s) of the next German government.

A country in relatively good economic health

With 0.4% of growth in 2013 and 1.8% forecast next year, Germany is in relatively good health. Unemployment totals 6.8% of the working population, i.e. 2.89 million people, the lowest figure since the country's

reunification. Some regions like Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria have an almost full employment rate. Long term unemployment (more than 12 months without work) has dropped by more than 40% since 2007. At the same time the number of beneficiaries of the social minima has decreased by 800,000 people.

Domestic consumption has increased partly thanks to a recent rise in wages (2.5% in 2012). According to the government's fourth report on poverty and wealth dated March 2013, after having increased between 2000 and 2005, revenue gaps have been declining since 2007 and poverty has stabilised due the healthy employment market.

The GfK barometer, which monitors the country's consumer confidence rose in July from 6.5 points to 6.8 points, i.e. its highest level since September 2007. The IFO business index also rose: 104.4 in May and 106.2 in July.

The country's public accounts (Federal State, Länder, communities and social insurance coffers) are in surplus (+2.2 billion €, i.e. 0.1% of the GDP in 2012) for the first time in five years. This can be explained by the high level of employment and the increase in fiscal revenues after an increase in company profits.

Nearly three-quarters of the Germans (72%) also believe that 2012 was a good year and nearly all young people (17-27 ans) (95%) qualify their personal situation as "very good" according to the pollster TNS Infratest.

These economic results are Angela Merkel's major asset. She *"reassures the Germans who do not expect their chancellor to have visions about the future of Europe. The last time a German leader had vision was in the 1930's and we all know what that led to. The thing that interests the Germans is that their cars are selling well in China,"* analyses Wigan Salazar, Communications Director for MSL.

Berlin's economic results find explanation in Germany's industrial specialisation in the capital goods sector which has helped the country to take advantage of an increase in demand in the emerging countries and to export a major share of its production. For the very first time, in December 2011, exports rose beyond the 1000 billion € mark. *"In 2007 two thirds of the German trade surplus came from trade with its European partners, five years later three quarters of that surplus, which has remained the same in terms of its value, comes from the rest of the world,"* maintains Olivier Passet an economist for the consultancy Xerfi.

The German dynamic is firmly established of course in political and economic choices and can be explained

by several structural and cultural factors. It is also the result of the salary freezes over the last few years and of the Agenda 2010 – a series of measures introduced by the previous government led by Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party, SPD) in the 2000's which aimed to revive the country's competitiveness thanks to greater flexibility on the labour market. In January 2005 the Hartz 4 Bill toughened criteria concerning the receipt of unemployment benefit (length of payment 12 months instead of a previous 26, 18 months for those over 55). Beyond that period people would receive a long term benefit which totalled 382€ per month – attributed according to a means test. Six million people receive the Hartz 4 allowance.

The Social Democratic opposition likes to recall that German prosperity is due to the reforms initiated by Gerhard Schröder and points to the growing inequality between rich and poor and the increase in the pauperisation of workers which has taken place under Angela Merkel's government. Seven million employees are deemed poor (an hourly rate below 8.50€, and 1.3 million even earn less than 5€) and nearly half of new work contracts are for a limited period of time. Finally one German in seven says that he feels poverty as a threat.

Finally Germany is facing a fertility crisis. In 2011 the number of births fell to its lowest level since the Second World War (663 000) and demographers believe that the German population (82 million people) may fall below 60 million inhabitants by 2050. The country is already experiencing labour supply problems. According to the OECD Berlin will have to recruit 5.4 million qualified workers by 2025. *"Germany needs an annual provision of 200,000 qualified immigrants in terms of its labour requirements,"* indicates the manager of the German Employment Agency, Frank-Jürgen Weise.

In 2012, Berlin received one million foreigners, the highest level in 17 years. Amongst these the number of Europeans from the south (Spanish, Italians, Greeks and Portuguese) increased by 8% in comparison with the previous year (34,000 people in all). In 2011-2012 the German government facilitated the acknowledgement of foreign diplomas and relaxed the criteria regarding residence permits for highly qualified people. Thanks to migrants the German population increased in 2011 for

the first time in 10 years. At the beginning of August in a bid to counter the penury of labour in certain sectors the government published a list of intermediary jobs available (electricians, nurses etc ...) to workers from outside of the European Union, which was a first in Germany's history.

Angela Merkel, an asset for her party

"Angela Merkel does not dominate the biggest German political party, she alone embodies it," reads an article in the daily Die Welt published in November 2012. *"She falls within the average, she achieves good results. Everyone can identify with her and this is the recipe for her success. She is her party's programme,"* stresses Professor Dr Edgar Wolfrum, a historian at the University of Heidelberg. The outgoing Chancellor, appointed the most powerful woman in the world for the third year running (and for the 8th time in 10 years), nicknamed the Teflon Chancellor, is exceptionally popular in terms of German history (70% approval rate on the part of her fellow countrymen). According to the polls if the federal elections took place based on a uninominal direct vote she would win with 60% of the vote against 23% for her main rival, Social Democrat Peer Steinbrück. In the opinion of her fellow countrymen Angela Merkel symbolises stability and strength; she is also the best defender of German interests. *"Angela Merkel's advantage is that she responds to problems pragmatically without ideology. Germans trust the CDU to create jobs,"* analyses Richard Hilmer, director of the pollster Infratest Dimap. The outgoing Chancellor was re-elected as head of the CDU on 4th December last during her party's congress in Hannover by 97.94% of the vote, i.e the highest score since 2000. *"The CDU will design its campaign on the theme of the crisis saying – "Look, Germany is being managed soundly. And this is what Angela Merkel personifies perfectly,"* analyses Gero Neugebauer, a political expert at the University of Berlin.

The outgoing Chancellor is therefore her party's trump card in the electoral campaign. Just a few weeks ago a dispute started over the fact that she would not be able to complete her mandate if she won on 22nd September next. In his book entitled *"The Hesitating Chancellor"* published at the end of the April, Nikolaus Blome, head of the political department of the daily *Bild*

Zeitung, wrote that Angela Merkel might be the first chancellor since the end of the Second World War to relinquish power voluntarily. In 2015 she will turn 60 and if she is re-elected it will also be ten years since she came to power, a time she qualified in the past as "the acceptable maximum". The outgoing chancellor maintains however that she will go to the end of her third mandate if her fellow countrymen allow her to remain in office.

Although Angela Merkel's popularity is real, it does not necessarily radiate onto her party however. In 2009 the CDU achieved its lowest score ever. The party is indeed struggling to attract young voters and those living in urban areas. Amongst the ten leading towns in Germany only Düsseldorf has a CDU mayor (Dirk Elbers). *"If the CDU intends to remain popular, it must take on board changes in reality. We cannot simply say: it 's good because it has always been like this and this is why nothing should change,"* declared Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU).

Angela Merkel has however taken her party forwards pleading for example for the extension of homosexual rights or a rise in immigration which is proving vital to compensate for the decline in labour due to the low fertility rate – without however successfully convincing its members. On 22nd March last the Bundesrat, the upper chamber in the German Parliament, adopted a draft bill which gives homosexuals the right to marry and adopt, a text that still has to be adopted by the Bundestag. On 6th June the Federal Constitutional Court granted same sex couples identical fiscal rights on a par with heterosexual couples (a retroactive measure as of 2011). MPs approved this amendment on 27th June. Angela Merkel knows that she will not be able to put off a debate on this issue but her party, which is the only one to oppose same sex marriage and adoption, is still against any kind of development in this area.

Elections are not won on results, no matter how good they are. The outgoing Chancellor knows this, *"Germany is doing well, Germans have to take advantage of this,"* she repeats. Her strength lies in the lack of any alternative to her programme – a lack which she carefully grooms as she works unrelentingly in reaping to her benefit themes and also opposition

Social Democrat proposals: the capping of rents (a measure whose cost is estimated at around 25 billion €), the development of nurseries, improvements to the internet network etc .. Political analysts are ironic in their comments about the CDU's 127 page programme entitled "Together for the future of Germany" which offers everything put forward by the SPD, less the tax increases.

Since, unlike the leftwing opposition, the CDU is against any rise in taxes. Another notable difference between the right and the left: Angela Merkel does not want a unitary minimum wage, which in her opinion would damage business competitiveness – instead she defends a minimum wage per activity sector and per Land. "Many countries in Europe have a much higher unemployment rate than us because wages and results at work differ greatly," she maintains.

The outgoing Chancellor has increased the bonuses granted to families. If she is re-elected to office she is promising an increase in mothers' retirement pensions (6 billion € have been budgeted for this). In January 2014 mothers of children born before 1992 (discriminated against in comparison with those who had children after this date) will receive an additional minimum pension of 650€ per year. Angela Merkel also promised a rise in family allowance of 35€ per month, i.e. 7.5 billion € in spending in order to boost the German birth rate. She also wants to invest in roads and urban development to a total of 25 million €.

No further debts, this is the CDU's main goal. "The consolidation of public finance and growth are two sides of the same coin when it comes to restoring confidence," declared Angela Merkel in Davos on 25th January last. "In my opinion there is no opposition between sound finance and growth," she indicated to the daily *Le Monde* on 2nd July last.

Her party remains deeply attached to the independence of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the separation of the monetary and budgetary policies. The outgoing Chancellor believes that the European states should not receive "free" aid, i.e. without promising to adopt vital reform for the consolidation of their public finances. "Long term each country can only live on what it produces. Well being on credit is no longer

possible. This has to be clear to everyone," indicated Angela Merkel. "I have always said that we should take one step at a time. We have already achieved some results: deficits have almost halved in Europe. It is not the time to lose our patience," she stressed in *Le Monde*. "These are not German ideas but the precepts of a policy to guarantee the future. The reform policy and consolidation in support of growth are the focus of consensus across Europe and are based on the decisions adopted unanimously by the Member States," indicated Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble in an article published on the same date, 23rd July 2013.

The outgoing Chancellor is however trying to change the image of being the policeman of Europe which Germany has donned. To do this she chaired the European Conference to counter Unemployment that took place on 3rd July last in Berlin where she promised that Berlin would take on the training and employment of 5000 young people per year from Spain. Unemployment in Europe's southern state is of concern to the Germans because indeed it is a mid-term threat to the union of the euro zone. "Germany will only do well if Europe is doing well, this is why we have a leading responsibility to fulfil our duty," declared Angela Merkel.

Has the Social Democratic Opposition already lost?

The SPD has placed social justice at the heart of its programme. The party believes that the elections will be played out on wage equity, the reduction of under-paid, insecure jobs and greater justice in terms of access to education and the future of the healthcare system. "Freedom, justice, solidarity. I would like to be the Chancellor for these values," maintains Peer Steinbrück, the SPD's candidate for Chancellor. The theme of social justice does not mobilise the electorate very much as proven in previous electoral campaigns since voters struggle to believe that the opposition might be able to put an end to the present crisis or to manage it better than Angela Merkel. The Social Democrats are offering neither an economic model nor a social alternative nor a real project for credible emancipation during these times of reduced social mobility. Moreover Peer Steinbrück has always supported the reforms launched whilst Gerhard Schröder was in office. He has however promised the post of Labour and Social Affairs

Minister to Klaus WieseHügel, chair of the building, food industry and environment union IG Bau who is against pushing the age of retirement up to 67.

From an economic point of view the SPD is against the austerity policy imposed by Ms Merkel. *"With you and many others in Germany and I want to leave stagnation behind for progress. After 22nd September I want to take responsibility for a more unified Europe in which we shall be good neighbours,"* declared Peer Steinbrück adding *"we support budgetary consolidation but we want to complete it with growth."* The Social Democrats believe that the reduction of economic imbalances in Europe should not be the sole responsibility of the States in deficit. *"The surplus in our payments accounts are the deficits of the others; since the introduction of the euro we have cashed in 500 billion € more than we have spent. Like any other intelligent business leader we must invest some of it,"* declared the SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel. The main opposition party supports the coordination of the economic and fiscal policies of the euro zone States, banking reform, which would separate speculative activities from those of the retail bank and finally they support the creation of a European ratings agency.

The SPD wants to create a European Monetary Fund based on the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) which would restructure the debts of States in deficit. Supporters of Eurobonds the Social Democrats want to introduce a tax on financial transactions. *"Europe cannot function unless it stands by those in trouble,"* maintains Peer Steinbrück in an interview in the daily Le Monde on 9th April. *"Saving, and only saving – this will not solve the crisis for the countries in difficulty,"* he repeated on 17th August last in Berlin where he was celebrating the party's 150th anniversary.

The SPD is fighting for the introduction of a minimum salary of 8.50€/hour on 1st February 2014 (a measure that would involve 6.8 million employees across the country) and a solidarity retirement pension. *"Not only is it fairer from a social point of view but it makes sense economically since it creates buying power,"* declared the SPD candidate who maintains that these measures would bring 7 billion € into the country (via an increase in taxes levied and the end of payment of certain allowances to the poorest workers). The Social Democrats want to develop the right to vocational training and increase the number of schools that can host children for the entire day in order to facilitate the lives of working parents. They also want to introduce quotas to enable women to access posts of responsibility and create a post of Secretary of State responsible for

women and parity in the next government.

Peer Steinbrück is promising a reform of household taxation by abolishing the parental education allowance and re-introducing wealth tax by bringing the maximum tax rate up to 49% on revenues over 100,000€ (it lies at 42% on revenues over 53,000€ and 45% on those over 250,000€). The SPD wants to ban property owners from setting rents over 10% of the tariffs put forward in boroughs with the same type of housing and more widely they will not be allowed to increase rents by more than 15% over 4 years.

The Social Democrats want every child born in Germany to be able to become German and yet retain the nationality of his/her parents. Children born in Germany of foreign parents must indeed choose at the age of 18 between the German nationality and that of their parents. If they do not do this they obligatorily lose their German nationality at the age of 23. *"I understand all of those who want to live long term in Germany without giving up their roots. We need a modern nationality code,"* declared Sigmar Gabriel, who said accepting dual nationality will be the first measure adopted by a leftwing government (allying the Social Democrats to the Ecologists). The polls show that the obligation to relinquish the nationality of their parents is one of the reasons why many young Turkish speakers living in Germany quit the country.

Peer Steinbrück was appointed as the Social Democrat candidate for the position of Chancellor on 28th September 2012. On 9th December his candidature was accepted unanimously by the party's leadership and confirmed by 93.45% of the vote during the party's congress in Hannover. Former Finance Minister in the grand coalition government led by Angela Merkel (2005-2009), Peer Steinbrück is a member of the SPD's rightwing. During the campaign he steered his discourse to the left partly encouraged by the Chancellor who excels in taking over proposals put forward by the Social Democrats. Although his excellent reputation as a manager and his experience as Germany's treasurer Peer Steinbrück has reassured the more centrist voters, the opposition party's programme adopted by the 600 delegates at the Augsburg congress, entitled *"For a new balance in our country"* is considered to lie far to the left.

On his appointment Peer Steinbrück occupied much of the political landscape – not so much for his proposals for the future of the country but rather for the faux-pas (present or past) which even destabilised his own camp. At the beginning of the year the press revealed that his participation in various seminars and conferences had brought him 1.25 million € in revenues since November 2009. Peer Steinbrück also holds

the record in parliament for the number of speeches delivered at external conferences (89 in all) and is the MP who received the highest amount of money in fees: conferences were paid at a rate of 14,065€ on average (7,314€ in real earnings after tax). Given this polemic the SPD candidate defended himself saying that there was nothing illegal in this activity and declared that he had donated part of his income to charitable organisations. He recalled that he had participated in 250 conferences, notably in schools without receiving any money at all. Peer Steinbrück has attended conferences during periods of parliamentary debate and has used his parliamentary membership card to travel there free of charge on public transport. *"Doesn't this country have more important problems to debate than looking into the way I use my rail card?"* he asked. Some weeks later Peer Steinbrück maintained that the German Chancellor was not paid enough. *"Practically every director in a savings bank in North Rhine Westphalia earns more than the chancellor,"* he stressed. In February he used the term *"clown"* to qualify Beppe Grillo, the leader of the Five Stars Movement (M5s) in Italy, and former President of the Italian Council Silvio Berlusconi (People's Party for Freedom, PdL), giving the impression that he was criticising the way the Italians had voted on 24th and 25th February. In the spring we learnt that the family in whose living room he sat for the recording of a TV programme was in fact part of that of an SPD leader and that the woman hosting the opposition candidate was a party member herself. Finally on 4th August last Peer Steinbrück did not hesitate to say that Angela Merkel had had *"a personal and political socialisation that was totally different from the Germans who had experienced European integration since the beginning of the 1950's"* when speaking of the chancellor's lack of passion for European policy. These comments were interpreted as stigmatisation by the population from the eastern part of the country, causing a scandal and quite paradoxically the Left Party found itself ardently defending the Chancellor.

Hence the SPD candidate has made many faux-pas and clumsy blunders but the most serious has undoubtedly been the dissension which has emerged on several occasions between the various leaders of the party. Peer Steinbrück also had to call for *"everyone, including*

the party's chairman to rally loyally and constructively over the next 100 days behind the candidate for the chancellery and his campaign" in the daily Der Spiegel. Undeniably the SPD candidate is suffering from a weak image, notably amongst women. If the CDU leader is more popular than her party, the opposite is true in terms of the SPD. Peer Steinbrück faces two major problems: on the one hand he has to highlight how his offer differs and put forward an alternative programme without criticising the extremely popular Angela Merkel and on the other he has to convince the electorate that his party has a real growth strategy that can guarantee greater social justice thanks to a better distribution of the revenues of labour, since the time of redistribution via social transfers is now over.

Who will be kingmaker?

The Free Democratic Party at the crossroads

Created in 1948 and the kingmaker for many years in the German elections, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which achieved its highest score in the 2009 election (14.6% of the vote) is now fighting for survival. In part it holds the key to the elections. The FDP candidate to the chancellery is Rainer Brüderle.

In Germany the FDP is the only party to promote individual freedom and responsibility like it would a market which is a difficult position at a time when citizens, affected by the socio-economic crisis, are asking for greater State involvement. The FDP wants a relaxation and simplification of the tax regime and is against the introduction of a minimum salary, synonymous in the long term of greater poverty. It even said in July that it was against the extension of the solidarity tax put forward by the outgoing Chancellor (*Solidaritätszuschlag*), introduced in 1991 to help the development of the eastern part of the country and which ordinarily is due to disappear in 2010. This tax brought in 13.6 billion € in 2012.

Liberal from both the economic and social point of view the party's leader, Philipp Rösler says he supports the acceptance of dual nationality in Germany: *"Finding labour is one of the greatest challenges to the German economy. National citizens will not be enough to cover our needs. I am convinced that we shall need more qualified labour from abroad. And dual nationality is an additional factor to attract that labour,"* he stressed.

The party also supports equality of same sex couples. According to Jack Janes, chair of the Institute for Contemporary German Studies and the Johns Hopkins University "10% of the Germans are philosophically liberal."

Rainer Brüderle maintains that Peer Steinbrück's programme would cost the country 40 billion € because of the tax increases he is advocating. The head of the FDP's list is trying to frighten certain voters by saying that to form a government the Social Democrats would in fact be obliged to join forces with the Left Party to achieve an absolute majority.

The two rightwing parties seem in fact to be sharing roles in the electoral campaign: the CDU aims to attract the electorate in the centre (and those on the left who might be disappointed by Peer Steinbrück) whilst the FDP is trying to convince those Germans more on the right and those who might be tempted by the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a euro-sceptic party created by Bernd Lucke. The ideal situation for Angela Merkel (and for the Liberals) would be for the majority of voters to use their first vote for the CDU and the second for the FDP.

Are the Greens going to benefit from the revival of ecological awareness?

After experiencing a slight downturn in the polls at the beginning of 2013, notably threatened by the Pirate Party, the Greens have now caught up in the polls. The party achieved several satisfactory results during this legislature which is now coming to an end. For the first time ever they held the leadership of a Land – Baden-Württemberg – where Winfried Kretschmann, has been Minister-President since the regional elections on 27th March 2011. They also won the town-hall of Stuttgart, Germany's 6th biggest town, where Fritz Kuhn became the first ecologist mayor of a regional capital on 12th October 2012.

On 17th and 18th November last during the party's congress in Hannover, Cem Ozdemir and Claudia Roth were re-elected as the ecologists' leaders for the next two years. However the latter was rejected during the primary elections that took place in the same month to appoint the heads of list in the electoral campaign. 15 candidates were running - Jürgen Trittin, leader of the Greens parliamentary group and representative of the party's leftwing and Katrin Göring-Eckardt, deputy leader of the Bundestag and representative of the rightwing won the election.

Formerly a party of protest the Greens became a government party in 1998 and are now the most bourgeois party in Germany: their electorate are the most qualified and have revenues higher than the

German average. The first ecologists have aged: 80% of them were under 35 in 1980 against only one third of them at present. They have succeeded professionally and are socially well adjusted: in 1980 more than 2/3 of them (70%) deemed their personal economic situation as "bad"; 60% of them now declare that they are satisfied. Although they have slipped to the right the Greens are different from other bourgeois voters in that they defend liberal values: defence of the environment of course, but multi-culturalism, male/female equality and equal rights for all couples.

Although the ecologists invited SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel to their congress on 26th and 28th April in Berlin (and Claudia Roth was one of the guests at the SPD congress in Augsburg on 13th and 14th April) it is not entirely impossible that 2013 will be herald the end of the exclusive alliance of the ecologists with the SPD. More than half of the party's members (54%) say they can imagine governing with the CDU led by Angela Merkel.

The party is still divided between the supporters of market liberalism and those who are more in favour of strengthening the Welfare State. For her part the outgoing Chancellor declared in the newspaper, *Bild am Sonntag* last spring: "Our relationship with the Greens has developed. We can say that it has normalised. Whilst in the past there were insurmountable differences, the tone is now different and dialogue is simple." The issue of taxation (the Greens support an increase in taxes) is however a major difference between the two parties and Angela Merkel would certainly only choose to govern with the Greens as a last resort.

We should note that in the federal elections of 1998 and 2002 more than half of the Green electorate voted first for the SPD against only one third in 2009.

The ecologists support the introduction of a minimum salary (of 8.50€ per hour) and an increase in taxes. They want to raise the maximum threshold of 42% to 49% on revenues over an annual 80,000€ and progressively introduce wealth tax starting with a levy of 1% on wealth over 1 million €. They want to reassess the Hartz 4 allowance paid to the long term unemployed and to guarantee a pension of 850€ monthly for those who have worked over 30 years or who have raised children.

The Greens would also like to step up energy transition and would like renewable energies to cover all electricity consumption by 2030 and in 2040 transport and heating consumption. Renewable energies cover slightly less than 20% of Germany's requirements at present.

What is the future for the Left Party?

The Left Party (Die Linke) achieved extremely mitigated

results during the last regional elections. It was chased out of several regional parliaments, notably in western Germany and became a party of the Länder again in the former GDR (and in the Saarland).

The party has also been shaken on several occasions and notably because of serious allegations of anti-Semitism. Its leadership insisted on including Israel's right to exist in its electoral programme in these elections. Recently its former leader Oskar Lafontaine asked for the relinquishment of the euro in order to help the countries in the south of Europe. *"The Germans have not yet admitted that Europeans in the south, including the French will, sooner or later, be forced by their present misery to battle with German hegemony,"* declared who he was Finance Minister at the time when the euro was adopted. *"In the 1990's I thought that wage coordination oriented towards productivity was possible and I agreed with the creation of the euro; however the last few years have shown that such a policy has no chance of being implemented,"* indicated Oskar Lafontaine in justification of his change in position over the single currency.

The Left Party indicated that the opinions of its former leader, who is not running in the elections, do not reflect the party line.

The Left Party adopted an electoral programme which is 100% social during its congress in Dresden on 14th and 16th June last. It has been estimated at 180 billion €. The party is suggesting to bring the upper income tax band up to 53% and to make an exceptional European levy of 75% on the share of revenues and wealth over 1million €, measures which in its opinion would bring in 10 billion € and enable an increase in the Hartz 4 allowance from 382€ to 500€ per month and create a minimum pension of 1050€. The party supports the introduction of a minimum salary of 10€ per hour (which would be raised to 12€ in 2017) and is asking for the nationalisation of the banks and a reduction in working hours down to 30 hours weekly.

On a European level the Left Party wants the introduction of eurobonds and the democratic control of the ECB. It is asking for the adoption of a common social policy by the Economic and Monetary Union.

A supporter of the abolition of NATO it wants to ban all involvement by the Bundeswehr abroad and all deliveries of arms by Berlin.

A new political offer

The Alternative for Germany (AfD)

"We want to put an end to the outrageous infringement of democracy, legal and economic principles that we have experienced over the last three years because Angela Merkel's government maintains that there is no alternative solution," maintains Bernd Lucke, the co-

founder and spokesperson of the new party, created on 6th February last by Frauke Petry, Konrad Adam and Bernd Lucke. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), is a name selected in response to the outgoing Chancellor. *"Now there is an alternative solution,"* repeats Bernd Lucke. The latter was a CDU member for 33 years before leaving the party in 2011 after the approval of the plan to save the euro.

The AfD, which believes that the country is undergoing the most serious crisis in its history, is based on three key elements: Berlin must no longer guarantee the debts of the other Member States; the single currency must be relinquished ("dissolved" in a controlled and gradual manner, with each State being free to quit the euro, enter into another monetary association or to introduce its own parallel currency) and a referendum must be organised regarding any further relinquishment of sovereignty by Germany to the European Union. The AfD believes that the euro zone brings together powerful national economies which are too different. The abolition of the euro would enable the creation of more flexible regional monetary unions that would bring together countries with the same economic power as Germany. Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and Austria might rally in a northern euro zone. *"Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Portugal and in all likelihood France should leave the euro,"* maintained Bernd Lucke in the magazine Focus on 22nd April last adding *"if the euro disappears Europe would not disappear however Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble would fall."*

The members of the AfD want to put a stop to all financial aid to countries in the euro zone which are not trying to manage their public finances. *"We merely give money to those who have accumulated the most debt and not to the poor,"* stresses Bernd Lucke. *"We must fight for the good of all rather than find solution that benefits a certain number of countries, including Germany whilst others are suffering,"* he also said.

The AfD is also campaigning for a simplification of the tax system, an immigration policy that will attract the most talented, the commitment of German troops outside of NATO and it is against the subsidised policy in support of renewable energies which, in the party's opinion, costs the Germans a great deal of money.

The party might convince the electorate two thirds of whom are against the payment of financial aid to the bad boys in the euro zone, but the Germans are mainly supportive of the single currency (70%). However even without achieving the 5% threshold of votes cast, which are obligatory to be represented in parliament, the AfD might handicap the outgoing chancellor. Its presence in the political debate obliges Angela Merkel to maintain her policy line and reject any relaxation in

her European policy before the elections.

The AfD does however suffer from a problem of positioning: the picture of Bernd Lucke on the front page of the weekly *Der Spiegel* with the leader of the Left Party was certainly not the best idea for the party's campaign. Recent comments by Lucke, who deplors the electorate's ignorance ("*Only a minority of people worry about major issues and understand them to a certain degree. When you speak with people in the street we have seen that around 20% of the electorate are really interested in the economy and the euro and even then they only have approximate knowledge,*" he regretted) will not strengthen the party's popularity. "*They have not found the right person to lead them,*" indicated Manfred Güllner, director of the pollster Forsa when speaking of the AfD.

The Pirates

"*The Pirates express the discontent that comes from the very heart of German society, which is frustrated with the political debate,*" analyses Stefan Seidendorf of the Franco-German Institute of Ludwigsburg. Undoubtedly it is for this very reason, their successes based on the electorate's discontent, remain fragile. Their electorate, who increasingly appreciate that their candidates really embody the values they are defending, like the way the pirates do politics: little ideology but freshness and authenticity in their beliefs and their programme – together with a weak hierarchical organisation. The pirates are asking for total freedom on the internet; free public transport; the renationalisation of the water, gas and electricity networks; free access to culture and information; a maximum of 15 pupils per class; the right to vote as of 14 years of age; free school canteens; a basic salary guaranteed for all and the privatisation of religion.

The Pirate Party (P) emerged in Germany in May 2009 when a petition was launched on the net by Franziska Heine who was against the government's project to deny internet access to suspected paedophiles. The text collated 134,000 signatures and was delivered to the Bundestag before the government finally gave up its project. The party claims to have 30,000 members half of whom come from the Greens, the FDP and the Left Party. Bernd Schlömer, an executive civil servant in the Defence Ministry is their leader elected by 66% of the vote.

Although they made their debut in four regional parliaments after elections in the Länder over the last two years the pirates do have two major handicaps: they put forward very few real political proposals and do not seem very well prepared to exercise power nor to manage crises which is sometimes necessary as in

any organisation. Participation in power is incidentally an open question to them.

The German Political System

The German Parliament is bicameral, comprising a lower Chamber, the Bundestag and an upper Chamber, the Bundesrat.

The elections, whereby the members of the Bundestag are appointed, take place every four years according to a mixed system that combines the single majority vote and the proportional list vote. Every voter can cast two votes. The first of these (*Erststimme*) enables the voter to make a single choice and appoint a candidate as MP in the constituency (*Wahlkreis*) where he lives (the country has 299 constituencies); the MPs elected in this manner win a direct mandate ranging from two seats in Bremen, four in the Saarland up to 64 in North Rhine Westphalia. The second vote (*Zweitstimme*) enables the voter to choose a political party represented on a list of candidates across the "*Land*" (Germany has sixteen *Länder*). The seats are attributed according to the Sainte-Laguë method. The percentage of the second vote decides on the number of seats that are given proportionally to each party and ultimately the balance of power between the parties in the Bundestag. 323 MPs were elected in this way in 2009 and 315 in 2005.

Only the parties which have won over 5% of the votes cast nationally or with three direct mandates on a single vote can be represented in the Bundestag. If a political party wins more direct mandates in a Land than the number of seats granted to it according to the number of second votes it still retains the number of surplus mandates (*Überhangmandate*). This explains why the number of members in the Bundestag is variable.

On 2nd July last the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe deemed the system of additional mandates unconstitutional if they number rose beyond 15. The law was modified so that national additional mandates could be compensated for so that the Bundestag would reflect as best possible the distribution of the second vote. This new rule might bring the number of MPs sitting in the Bundestag up to 650 or even 700.

34 political parties are running in the elections on 22nd September next 9 of which are represented in the present Parliament and are running in the 16 Länder. The German electoral system aims to guarantee a stable parliamentary majority and to avoid the fragmentation of the political landscape which the country suffered under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), when most parties represented in Parliament made the formation of a government almost impossible. The present system makes it almost impossible for a party to form a government alone.

General elections in Germany
22nd September 2013

In 1949, 11 political parties were represented in the Bundestag, in 1957 there were only four and only 3 between 1961 and 1983 (with the CDU and the CSU forming just one party this comprised the SPD, CDU/CSU and the FDP). In 1983 the Greens succeeded in rising over the 5% threshold of votes cast and entered Parliament – they were followed in 1990 by the Democratic Socialist Party (PDS), which was born of the Unified Socialist Party (SED) from the former GDR (the former communist MPs entered the Bundestag one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall) – the PDS was the Left Party's predecessor.

6 political parties are represented in the Bundestag:

- the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), founded in 1945, led by outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel in office since 2005 – 194 MPs;
- Christian Social Union (CSU), created in 1946 and led since the end of 2008 by Minister President of Bavaria Horst Seehofer – has co-operated electorally with the CDU since 1953. According to their agreement the CDU does not put any candidates forward in Bavaria and the

- CSU only runs in this *Land*. The CSU has 45 seats;
- the Social Democratic Party (SPD) founded in 1863, is Germany's oldest political party – led by Sigmar Gabriel – 146 MPs;
- the Free Democratic Party (FDP), created in 1948, led by Philipp Rösler – was for a long time the kingmaker in the German elections. It took part in all of the CDU governments in the 1980's and 1990's ; in the 1970's it also took part in the government coalitions led by the SPD. It has 93 seats;
- the Left Party (Die Linke) – a far left movement – formed on 16th June 2007 after the merger of the Democratic Socialist Party (PDS), that came from the Unified Socialist Party (SED) of the former GDR, with the Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), a movement created on 22nd January 2005, which brings together the former communist elite and those disappointed by social democracy. Led by Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, the party has 46 MPs;
- the Greens formed after the merger in 1993 of the Alliance 1990 – a civic rights movement in the former GDR and the Ecologist Party – 68 seats.

Reminder of the federal election results of 22nd September 2009 in Germany

Turnout: 70.80%

Political Parties	Majority election			Proportional Election			Total seats
	No. of votes won	% of votes won (%)	No. of seats	No. of votes won	% of votes won (%)	No. of seats	
Christian Democratic Union –Christian Social (CDU-CSU)	17 047 674	39,4	218	14 658 515	33,8	21	239
Social Democratic Party (SPD)	12 079 758	27,9	64	9 990 488	23	82	146
Free Democratic Party (FDP)	4 076 496	9,4	0	6 316 080	14,6	93	93
Left Party	4 791 124	11,1	16	5 155 933	11,9	60	76
Greens	3 977 125	9,2	1	4 643 272	10,7	67	68
Others	1 275 823	3		2 786 902	6		

Source: http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_09/ergebnisse/bundesergebnisse/index.html

The German parliament also has an upper Chamber, the Bundesrat, comprising members of the governments of the 16 Länder. Each region has at least three votes; those with more than 2 million inhabitants have four votes; those with more than 6 million, 5 votes and finally those with more than 7 million have 6 votes. In all the Bundesrat has 69 members.

The most recent poll by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, published on 17th August last forecasts that the CDU will win 41% of the vote on 22nd September far ahead of the SPD, which is due to win 25%. The Greens are due to come third with 13%. The Left Party is due to win 8% of the vote and the FDP only 5%. Together the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats are due to win 46%

of the vote – against 38% for the left (social democrats and greens). *“Those who think that these elections have already been decided upon and that Angela Merkel will remain Chancellor whatever happens may find things very different after the polling stations close. The result of the election is everything but certain,”* stressed the outgoing Chancellor. The poll published by ZDF television can but confirm her fears since this revealed that nearly three-quarters of the electorate (72%) were not ruling out choosing a party other than the one they say they are going to vote for on the day.

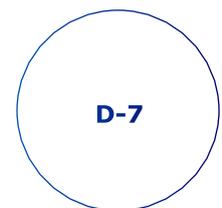
“The federal elections are always played out in the last six weeks,” maintains Nils Diederich, a political expert from the Free University of Berlin. The last month in the campaign will therefore be decisive.

Angela Merkel still ahead in the polls but the gap with the opposition is closing up just one week before the German elections

61.8 million Germans are convened to ballot on 22nd September to appoint the members of the Bundestag, the German lower chamber of parliament.

Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) is dominating the polls and just one week before the vote, she is still the main favourite. The gap between her party and the leftwing opposition, formed by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens has closed up slightly over the last few days.

The CDU has focused its campaign on continuing growth and budgetary discipline, the development of investments, the strengthening of aid to families and the rejection of any further taxation. Social justice and greater European solidarity are the main themes in the SPD’s programme.



“There is no desire for change in Germany,” writes Ulrike Guérot, director of ECFR’s Berlin office. Angela Merkel’s victory seems to be decided but the issue of who will sit with her government remains. Everything will of course depend on the balance of power that emerges on the evening of 22nd September. Will the Liberals (FDP) be thrown out of the Bundestag? What will the result for the Greens be? Can the Left Party (Die

Linke) block (or save) the situation for the leftwing? Is the Alternative for Germany (AfD), an anti-euro party able to achieve a surprise result and make things hard for the German right?

The Archbishop of Freiburg-im-Breisgau (Baden-Württemberg) and President of the Episcopal Conference of the Bishops of Germany, Bernard Zollitsch, warned the Germans against voting for this party. *“Our future*

lies in Europe and not in a return to Nation States. I hope that we have overcome this question for the duration and there are just the nostalgic few who will not enter the Bundestag," he declared. "Things are not bad enough for the Germans to vote for an anti-euro party. Germany is in good health and people do not fear for their jobs or their retirement pensions," maintained Carsten Koschmieder, a political expert from the Free University of Berlin.

The outgoing Chancellor would like to continue her government coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) but it cannot be guaranteed that the latter will achieve the 5% threshold necessary to be represented in the Bundestag. This is a paradox since Germany has probably never been as liberal as in 2013. The FDP, which in the previous elections on 22nd September 2009 achieved the highest result in its history (14.6% of the vote), is standing as the party of the "normal family with a father and mother who work and who have two children – the family whom everyone talks about in the newspapers," according to their leader Philipp Rösler. Like the outgoing Chancellor he is against any further tax increases but unlike her he is not benefiting at all from his participation in government since 2009.

Angela Merkel might well win the elections and yet find it impossible to form a government majority unless she joins forces with the SPD in a "grand coalition" which, according to the polls, most Germans would like to see (52%).

Peer Steinbrück, former Finance Minister in the Grand Coalition led by Angela Merkel between 2005 and 2009, indicated that he would not take part in this. The SPD has indeed lost out because of its alliance with the CDU: the party achieved its worst ever score in history (23%) in the elections on 22nd September 2009. "Given that I have governed in a grand coalition, I would really not be credible if I excluded this option," indicated the outgoing Chancellor in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 17th August last.

Will Germany be governed next by a unique coalition of three parties? Just one week from the elections the re-election of the outgoing CDU/CSU- FDP coalition is far from guaranteed. As for a union of the SPD and the Greens, only 37% of the population supported this

idea in the last poll published by Infratest Dimap, i.e. far from the absolute majority. Since the two parties have categorically said a union with the Left Party (Die Linke) is absolutely out of the question the leftwing does not seem to be in a position to win.

Angela Merkel in the lead...

Three-quarters of the Germans say they like the outgoing Chancellor (72%). If the German Chancellor were to be elected by direct universal suffrage, 55% of the men and 65% of the women would re-elect Angela Merkel to office, whilst 33% of men and 24% of women preferred her rival Peer Steinbrück. Seven Germans in 10 (70%) say they appreciate the Chancellor (less than half – 47% – feel the same about the SPD candidate according to a poll published by Infratest Dimap at the beginning of September). Angela Merkel is counting on her popularity and on the confidence placed in her by her fellow countrymen in this campaign. The polls show however that the Germans are more convinced by Angela Merkel's personality (sober and pragmatic) than by the results produced by her government or her programme. Moreover transforming her popularity into votes is not guaranteed. Since 2002 the polls undertaken just one month before the general elections have always credited the CDU with a higher result than the one it finally achieves in the ballot box.

"You know me," said the outgoing Chancellor concluding a television debate on September 1st which brought her face to face with her rival. "Germany is strong and it should remain so" read the CDU's campaign posters on which Angela Merkel's is omnipresent.

By 21st September *Mutti* (Mum), as she is called in Germany will have made a tour of Germany. She will be visiting two towns a day – i.e. 56 public meetings in all – and will end her campaign in her stronghold of Straslund on the shores of the Baltic Sea. She will direct her discourse towards the need for a rigorous management of public finances not forgetting social justice. She will recall the results of her four years in government: growth of 0.7% in the second quarter of 2013, rising household consumption, a recovery in investments, rising salaries (3.8% in 2013 and 3.6% planned in 2014), unemployment of 6.8% – the lowest figures since the country's reunification (nearly

2 million jobs created since 2009) –, in budgetary surplus since 2012 and a public debt below the euro zone average (declining slightly this year). Germany has maintained its triple 'A' and is the only EU country not to have de-industrialized and not to have lost any market shares. Finally Berlin has just risen two places in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) report on world competitiveness; the country rose from being sixth to fourth after Switzerland, Singapore and Finland.

The German IFO's business climate index, (7000 businesses), rose again in August to lie at 107.5 (106.2 in July); the six month business forecasting index illustrated a similar increase (112 against 110.1 July). *"Many people are doing better than four years ago,"* *"We are the anchor which is stabilizing Europe, its growth motor and we want to continue with this. In no way should we endanger this role,"* repeats the outgoing Chancellor, who during her New Year's greetings on January 1st quoted this saying by Democritus: *"Courage is the beginning of action, happiness its end."*

"The CDU is there to you to fulfill your dreams," said Angela Merkel on 14th August in Seligenstadt. *"For Germany" "Together for success", "Opportunities for all!"* are some of the CDU's slogans, which does not question its victory on 22nd September.

The SPD has tried to distinguish itself from the Chancellor's European policy but the euro zone and debt crisis are not an issue of political division. *"The policy undertaken to manage the European crisis has failed,"* declared Peer Steinbrück. The left has accused the government of not wanting to reveal how much it has cost to help the countries in difficulty. But when Peer Steinbrück maintains that *"if he had been Chancellor, the aid plans to the countries in the south of Europe would have included recovery measures,"* Angela Merkel argues that he approved the plans decided by her government when they were in office together. She criticizes Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005) (SPD) for having accepted Greece's entry into the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) in 2000. *"The crisis took several years to emerge due to errors made when introducing the euro. Greece for example should never been admitted to the euro,"* she declared in Rensburg on 27th August.

Angela Merkel does not hesitate to laud the reforms introduced by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder which led to the country's recovery in terms of competitiveness as they made the labour market more flexible. Paradoxically the credit for the reforms introduced by the Social Democratic chancellor is given to the outgoing leader as the SPD attempts to distance itself from them since they were seen badly by a major share of the party's electorate who accuse the left of having contributed and of having tolerated financial capitalism. *"There are errors that have to be corrected in the Agenda 2010,"* stresses Peer Steinbrück.

The opposition candidate has also tried to cause problems for the chancellor regarding the revelations made by Edward Snowden, a former consultant of the USA's National Security Agency (NSA), over the electronic surveillance programme PRISM which the USA used to spy on the governments of Europe. 500 million elements of German data are said to have been collated monthly by the American agency. *"Chancellor Angela Merkel swore to protect the German people but their fundamental rights have been infringed,"* declared Peer Steinbrück to the daily Bild. The SPD have succeeded in launching a committee responsible for a parliamentary inquiry on the issue. But someone close to the chancellor, responsible for the secret services, published a document showing that Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), former Foreign Minister (2005-2009), former Deputy Chancellor (2007-2009) and present leader of the SPDs' group in the Bundestag, had signed an agreement with the USA when he was director of the Chancellery in 2002 and that the SPD had known about the NSA's activities for a very long time.

We should note that the Pirate Party (P), which is focused on issues concerning the movement of data, has not really taken advantage of the PRISM affair.

Peer Steinbrück is violently against any intervention in Syria after the chemical attack on 21st August last in the outskirts of Damascus, blamed on Bashar el-Assad's forces. His party maintains that this *"would strengthen divisions in the international community and would make any bid to appease the situation in this region of the world impossible."* The outgoing

chancellor has indicated that the Syrian government has to be sanctioned but, aware that most Germans are against any interference, she has not give her approval to any intervention. *"There will be no military intervention on the part of Germany,"* declared Angela Merkel on 9th September last.

Traditionally the foreign policy does not motivate the German electorate and the electoral campaign is mainly focusing on social issues.

... but the gap between the left and right is closing up

"The vote may be very tight," repeats the outgoing chancellor. Just one week before the election the leftwing forces are indeed recovering slightly, but still lie far behind in the polls.

Peer Steinbrück performed honourably during a TV debate in which he faced Angela Merkel on September 1st and re-broadcast on the four main channels. To date TV debates have not influenced the final election results (the first dates back only to 2002 in Germany).

Peer Steinbrück criticized the outgoing chancellor over her social policy and promoted one of the SPD's leading ideas: the minimum wage of 8.5 € per hour which the SPD plans to implement as of February 1st 2014. *"In Germany there is a low wage sector which exists nowhere else in Europe. 7 million Germans earn under 8.5€ per hour,"* he declared. The outgoing chancellor supports a negotiated minimum wage with the social partners per industrial sector and per Land. Since 2009, agreements have been signed in industrial sectors like construction and public works. This covers around 3 million people. Peer Steinbrück deems the measure put forward by Angela Merkel *"unequal"* because *"not all wages are involved."*

However the SPD refused to commit to its policy on retirement pensions. It has promised that each worker will be able to retire at 63 if they have contributed for 45 years and maintains that anyone who has contributed for 30 years should receive a minimum retirement pension of 850 €.

The SPD recently modified its discourse on taxes. *"We want to increase taxes but not all of them and not for everybody; believe me we shall not make the German business tax burden any heavier,"* declared Peer

Steinbrück on 19th August last. The SPD says that a tax increase would only affect 5% of the Germans. Ten days ago the SPD leader, Sigmar Gabriel indicated that his party might give up on tax increases if the fight to counter tax evasion and unofficial work brought in enough money. This made his ecologist partners angry accusing their ally of lacking courage of forgetting its campaign commitments and of trying to promote the introduction of a grand coalition after the federal election.

Peer Steinbrück has promised to counter tax evasion mercilessly which, in his opinion, is costing Germany 150 billion € per year, i.e. 16% of the total fiscal revenues. He said that he supports the introduction of a federal tax control authority as well as international measures. He seems to admit that it would be difficult to hope and that it would even be impossible to win the next elections if he said there would be tax increases.

Peer Steinbrück, mainly selected for his economic competences, has several handicaps in this campaign. He has a poor image notably amongst women, he has difficulties in standing apart from the rest (Angela Merkel excels in picking up – to her advantage – the themes (and proposals) of her rivals' campaigns) and in putting forward an alternative programme without criticizing the extremely popular chancellor. Finally he finds it difficult to convince the electorate that his party has a real growth strategy that will guarantee the greatest possible degree of social justice whilst redistribution via social transfers is now impossible.

"Those who think that this election has already been won may wake up in a Germany with a government in which the Left Party will be taking part," repeats Angela Merkel. The SPD has however said that it would not join forces with Die Linke: *"Berlin must be a stable international partner to settle the euro crisis and because Germany belongs to NATO,"* declared Peer Steinbrück. Katrin Göring-Eckardt, the Greens lead candidate (with Jürgen Trittin), spoke of Die Linke's irresponsibility in terms of foreign policy: *"we cannot foresee any cooperation with it."*

The Left Party comprises, amongst others, the former SPD members who quit their party in protest against the reforms introduced by Chancellor Schröder. The differences in opinion between the two leftwing parties have always been

great and they are even greater than those between the SPD and the CDU. *"The Germans would not understand an alliance that brought the SPD and the Left Party together, they want a stable government,"* maintains Oskar Niedermayer from the Free University of Berlin.

Recent polls have revealed a slight rise in voting intentions in support of the SPD. However this goes hand in hand with a decline for its ecologist allies. Voters seem to be scared about the tax increases planned for in the Greens' programme. Katrin Göring-Eckardt insisted on reassuring the public declaring that 90% of German households would see a reduction in their taxes if her party came to power. The Germans have also disliked the Greens manifest neglect of environmental issues. *"The Greens made the strategic mistake of choosing social justice as the central issue in their electoral campaign,"* analyses Manfred Güllner of the pollster Forsa.

Whilst it governs in 9 of the 16 *Länder* (and that they govern in four others in a coalition), the SPD is struggling to find the means to convert its regional domination into one that is national.

"The SPD continues to say that everything is going badly but the Germans are satisfied with their situation and they would like to know what Peer Steinbrück will do to improve matters," stresses Christoph Moss, professor at the IT School of Iserlohn.

The Institute for the German Economy in Cologne has assessed the electoral programmes put forward by the main political parties. In its opinion the most expensive (160 billion € per year) is that of the Left Party. That of the SPD would total 60 billion € and that of the CDU 11.8 billion €. The institute's director, Michael Hüther, has said that apart from the fact that the fiscal promises on the part of the two leftwing parties would destroy 300 000 jobs, this would also lead to a growth contraction of 0.7%.

According to the latest poll published by Infratest Dimap the CDU is due to win the election easily with 41% of the vote. It would be followed by the SPD with 27%, the Greens 10%; the Left Party 8% and the FDP, 5%. With 3% of the vote the AfD would be under the 5% threshold necessary to be represented in the Bundestag.

The outgoing chancellor is due therefore to undertake a 3rd mandate as the head of Germany. *"The electorate want normal leaders who follow a line and who stick to it. Angela Merkel is predictable, sincere and clear,"* maintains Ulrich von Alemann, a political expert from the University of Düsseldorf,

One fifth of the electorate says that they have not yet made their choice. Finally the turnout rate will also be important. This is, as in most European countries, has been constantly declining for the last 40 years – to the point that the non-voters could become Germany's "leading party" on 22nd September.

Angela Merkel's Triumph

"Merkel mächtig wie nie" («Merkel more powerful than ever») is the headline in the daily Bild Zeitung. *"Over 40%, it isn't an electoral victory. It is a demonstration of power. Power has a name: Angela Merkel"* reads the headline in Die Zeit. *"Germany is Angela Merkel's country"* declares the weekly Der Spiegel. Together with the Christian Social Union (CSU) led by Horst Seehofer the outgoing party led by the outgoing Chancellor, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in office since 2005, did indeed achieve a result on 22nd September that rose beyond all of its supporters' hopes (41.5% of the vote and 311 seats, which is 117 more than in the previous election on 22nd September 2009). This is a greater victory than forecast in the most optimistic pre-electoral polls. Angela Merkel, who nearly won the absolute majority, has become the third German chancellor to win three mandates as head of government after Konrad Adenauer (1949-1963) and Helmut Kohl (1982-1998).

Her main rival, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Sigmar Gabriel but headed in the election by former

Finance Minister (2005-2009), Peer Steinbrück, did not, contrary to expectations, benefit from the rise in

Results

General elections in Germany
22nd September 2013

turnout. It won 25.7% of the vote and 192 seats (+ 46), i.e. below the 30% mark it had set itself as a goal. This is its second lowest result since the end of the Second World War after 23% won in the previous elections of 2009.

The Free Democratic Party (FDP) led by Philipp Rösler, the CDU's government partner, finds itself excluded from parliament. It won 4.8% of the vote i.e. less than the vital 5% of the vote necessary to enter in the lower chamber. The Left Party (Die Linke), on the far left, led by Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, came third but did register a decline in support winning 8.6% of the vote and 64 seats (+ 18). "Who would have thought in 1990 that this party would be the country's third political force?"

said a happy Gregor Gysi. The Left Party drew ahead of the ecologists led by Jürgen Trittin and Claudia Roth, which have clearly lost ground winning 8.4% of the vote and 63 seats (- 5).

The Alternative for Germany (AfD), recently created by Bernd Lucke was the source of surprise winning 4.7% of the vote, which is nevertheless insufficient to enter the Bundestag.

Turnout was slightly higher than in the previous elections of 22nd September 2009 (+ 0.7 points) totalling 71.5%. One quarter of the Germans voted by post, a record in the country's history. Four years ago one fifth of the electorate chose to vote like this (21%).

Election Results of 22nd September 2013 in Germany

Turnout: 71.5%

Political Parties	Majority Election			Proportional Election			Total seats
	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats	
Christian Democratic Union (CDU-CSU)	19 769 502	45,30	235	18 157 256	41,50	76	311
Social Democratic Party (SPD)	12 835 933	29,40	59	11 247 283	25,70	133	192
Left Party	3 583 050	8,20	4	3 752 577	8,60	60	64
The Greens	3 177 269	7,30	1	3 690 314	8,40	62	63
The Free Democratic Party (FDP)	1 028 322	2,40	0	2 082 305	4,80	0	0
Alternative for Germany (AfD)	809 817	1,90	0	2 052 372	4,70	0	0
Others	4 069 269	7,40	0	3 307 545	11	0	0

Source: http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_13/ergebnisse/bundesergebnisse

"We can be extremely happy at this result because it is fantastic. We have shown what we are capable of. Together we shall do everything so that the next four years will be successful for Germany," declared the outgoing chancellor when the results were announced.

Angela Merkel undertook a brilliant electoral campaign. Of course she promoted her results as head of Germany but she especially excelled in taking as her own the themes and proposals put forward by the social democratic opposition which did not succeed in offering any real alternative to her programme or convince the electorate that it could do better than Angela Merkel in terms of managing the crisis.

The outgoing Chancellor succeeded perfectly in developing her image as a woman of humble consensus, who is hard working and pragmatic, which reassured her fellow countrymen. "Stability", "Security", "Continuity" read the CDU's campaign posters on which Angela Merkel's face appeared.

"The Germans don't know what she wants but their confidence in her is unshakeable and if the boat rocks she is the only one they want at the helm," maintains Gerd Langguth, author of a biography of the outgoing chancellor.

Conversely the SPD's electoral campaign was a catastrophe. The candidate representing the party's rightwing, chosen because of his economic competence, went unheard when he put forward extremely leftwing measures which he previously fought against. Peer Steinbrück made blunder after blunder.

But Peer Steinbrück was not the only one to bear the blame for the SPD's defeat. His party did not always support him and during the campaign many internal disputes occurred. In the daily *Der Spiegel* Peer Steinbrück called *"for everyone, including the party's chair, to rally loyally and constructively"* behind him. He did not manage to escape the trap set for him by the outgoing chancellor: how indeed could he show that he was different and put forward an alternative programme without criticizing popular Angela Merkel? The SPD also proved that it was unable to manage the legacy of

the reforms included Agenda 2010 introduced by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005 (SPD), since these were perceived badly by a major share of his voters who accused the left of having helped create (and tolerate) financial capitalism.

Finally from a strictly personal point of view Peer Steinbrück decidedly had little chance in the vote. In May 2005 he lost the elections in North Rhine Westphalia, a defeat which caused the chancellor at the time, Gerhard Schröder to organize the early general elections which brought Angela Merkel to power. In the elections on 22nd September 2009 Peer Steinbrück was beaten again in the constituency of Mettmann -I (district of Düsseldorf, in North Rhine Westphalia) and he only owed his entry into the Bundestag to the German electoral system. On 22nd September he was again beaten in this constituency by his Christian Democratic rival Michaela Noll, who won 50.5% of the vote against 33.3% for the Social Democratic candidate.

However, the SPD was not alone in its defeat. The ecologists recorded a clear decline. They were also caught up in the outgoing chancellor's trap. After the accident at the nuclear power station of Fukushima Daiichi in Japan following the earthquake and the tsunami on 11th March 2011, Ms Merkel announced her decision to end civilian involvement in the nuclear industry in 2022, thereby depriving the Greens of one of their main electoral war horses. During this electoral campaign the ecologists neglected environmental issues and positioned themselves on socio-economic questions. *"The Greens made the strategic mistake of choosing social justice as a central issue in their electoral campaign,"* analysed Manfred Güllner of the pollster Forsa. The ballot boxes proved him right. Finally the investigation into the movement's tolerance of pedophilia requested by the Greens from researcher Franz Walter certainly did not help the party at the end of the campaign. The researcher indicated in an article in the *Tageszeitung* that the ecologist leader Jürgen Trittin had signed the platform of the Alternative Initiative and Green's list which demanded the decriminalisation of sexual acts between children and adults if these were not

violent (or without the threat of violence) in 1981 when he stood for election on the town council of Göttingen.

"If the Free Democratic Party were not to enter parliament I would deplore it," declared Angela Merkel during the electoral campaign. The outgoing chancellor will not be able to repeat the previous government coalition and now has the choice between two movements: to form a grand coalition with the SPD or an alliance with the Greens. The first option seems the most likely.

It is not certain that Angela Merkel deplores the situation. *"If the Chancellor ends up with an absolute majority it will be a close one and it will not be easy for her,"* indicated Carsten Koschmieder, a political expert from the Free University of Berlin. *"I am convinced that secretly she hopes that she has not won an absolute majority,"* stresses Franck Decker from the University of Bonn.

If it enters government the SPD will have little room to manoeuvre in the face of someone who knows how to manage power without really sharing it. The CDU might however accept some changes in direction in its policy, notably from a fiscal point of view.

According to a poll by Infratest Dimap for the TV channel ARD 57% of those interviewed said they wanted a grand coalition between the two main political parties. The Germans who are extremely attached to the idea of consensus indeed view cooperation between the two parties as the best configuration to lead the Federal Republic.

"The ball is in Angela Merkel's court, she has to form her majority," declared Peer Steinbrück. In 2005 negotiations to form a government between the CDU and the SPD lasted five weeks.

Aged 59 Angela Merkel was born in Hamburg before her family left to live in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). A physics-chemistry graduate from the Karl-Marx University of Leipzig she worked for the Central Institute for Physics and Chemistry in East Berlin until 1990 the year in which she became the deputy spokesperson for the last government of the GDR led by Lothar de Maizière (CDU). In that last year she joined the CDU

after the merger of Democratic Awakening (DA), a movement she joined in December 1989, with this party. She was elected MP for the first time in December 1990 and appointed the following year as Minister for the Family, the Elderly, Women and Youth in the government led by Helmut Kohl (CDU), who then nicknamed her "the lass" (*Das Mädchen*). Elected as chair of the CDU in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in 1993, a post she occupied until 2000, Angela Merkel was appointed the following year to the post of Minister for the Environment, the Protection of Nature and Nuclear Safety. In 2000, she took over as her party's leader a post she has been re-elected to time and again ever since (the last time was on 12th December 2012 with 97.94% of the vote ie the highest result in 12 years). After the elections on 22nd September 2002 won by the SPD Angela Merkel took over as the leader of the opposition as she became the chair of the CDU's parliamentary group in the Bundestag. Three years later she became the first woman, the first protestant and the first citizen from the former German Democratic Republic to rise to the post of Chancellor. She was however obliged to lead a grand coalition rallying the CDU and the SPD. She led the CDU to victory in the elections on 22nd September 2009 thereby remaining as head of government, which she led this time in an alliance with the FDP.

The woman the Germans now call *Mutti* (mum), was designated the most powerful woman in the world for the third successive time this year (and for the 8th time in ten years by the American magazine Forbes) and therefore succeeded in pulling off a hat-trick as she won the general election a third time round enabling the CDU to achieve its best score in 23 years..

Since the end of the Second World War Germany has only had 8 chancellors. The re-election of Angela Merkel after 8 years as head of the country confirms the stability of the Federal Republic.

This is due to last for the next four years whatever the government, in Germany and also in Berlin's relations with its European partners. *"I do not believe that there will be any great difference whatever the coalition that is formed. We shall*

have the same European policy as before putting forward the message: we want countries to implement the necessary reforms," analyses Marcel Fratzscher, chairman of the German Economic Research Institute (DIW).

Energy transition, renewal of infrastructures, the fight to counter demographic decline, the development of investments – these are some of the challenges that Angela Merkel faces in her third term as head of Germany.

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