

Presidential Election in Germany

30th June 2010

RESULTS

Christian Wulff, the new German President

The victory achieved by Christian Wulff, the candidate who stood for the government coalition led by Chancellor Angela Merkel that rallies the Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) and the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), can be said to be "minor" as he won the German Presidential election that took place on 30th June.

Christian Wulff was elected after a 3rd round of voting with 625 votes out of the 1,244 delegates at the German Federal Assembly (Bundesversammlung) that brings together the 612 members of the Bundestag, the lower Chamber of Parliament and an equal number of representatives from the 16 Länder, MPs from the regional Parliaments and personalities from civil society. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens candidate, Joachim Gauck won 494 votes. 121 delegates, notably from the Left Party (Die Linke) abstained.

Although on paper the government coalition had a 21 vote lead over the opposition in the Federal Assembly Christian Wulff failed in the 1st round of voting winning 600 votes. The absolute majority of the votes (623 votes) was necessary to be elected. Delegates in the government majority withdrew their support from C. Wulff. In the 1st round Joachim Gauck won 499 votes, Die Linke candidate Lukrezia Jochimsen won 126 votes and Franck Rennieke, the National Democratic Party of Germany's (NPD) candidate, 3 votes. 13 people abstained.

The 2nd round of voting was in itself a setback for the Chancellor. Christian Wulff came out ahead with 615 votes, but this was still less than the absolute majority required to be elected. Joachim Gauck won 490 votes and Lukrezia Jochimsen, 123 votes.

Hence it was in the 3rd round when a simple majority was sufficient to be elected and after Lukrezia Jochimsen withdrew that Christian Wulff was appointed to succeed Horst Köhler (Head of State who resigned on 31st May last) as head of Germany.

52 year old Christian Wulff is a law graduate from the University of Osnabrück and was a lawyer before devoting his career to politics. A CDU member since he was 19 he became the leader of the "youth" branch of the CDU in his Land of Lower Saxony in 1983 before joining the CDU's regional management committee two years later. In 1994, he became the leader of his party in Lower Saxony and in 1998 he became the Federal Vice-President of the CDU.

Elected regional representative of Lower Saxony in 1994 he became Minister President there in 2003, a position he was re-elected to during the regional election on 27th January 2008. Christian Wulff resigned from this post just a few weeks before becoming a candidate in the race for the Presidency of the Republic. He was replaced by David McAllister as head of Lower Saxony.

Christian Wulff is the youngest President in the country's history, the second Catholic to occupy this post and the third after Gustav Heinemann (SPD), 1969-1974, and Roman Herzog (CDU), 1994-1999 to be elected in a third round of voting.

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"The Chancellor was counting on this presidential election to make a new start and regain popularity in the polls after having sunk to the bottom. But this did not happen," said Oskar Niedermeyer, political scientist at the Free University of Berlin. "I did not perceive enough dissidents to endanger the election of Christian Wulff although government policy over the last few months has caused a lot of bad feeling," forecast (quite rightly) political scientist Nils Diedrich, from the Free University of Berlin before the election. "It is psychological defeat and a loss of prestige for Angela Merkel," he said after the results.

Three days after the vote Christian Wulff's election does indeed appear to be an undeniable sign of the

weakness of the government in office which struggled to mobilise all of the representatives in the coalition. However even though it was a narrow and dull victory it remains so because it again revealed the division on the left.

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