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## Germany at the polls – what Europe can expect

### Abstract

In the run up to the federal elections on 22 September 2013 eyes across Europe are on Germany. The country is playing a crucial role in solving the euro crisis and its next government will strongly influence the future guiding principles on how to create competitive and stable economies in the eurozone. Therefore, it comes as a surprise that for most of the election campaign EU topics have not been in the limelight. Both the coalition government and the opposition parties have tactically refrained from campaigning on the future direction of the eurozone as a large part of the public supports Chancellor Merkel's policies. Despite opposing views on several key questions concerning the management of the euro crisis in the party manifestos, no fundamental change in policy can be expected under a different coalition government. In any case, the Conservatives, Free Democrats, Social Democrats and the Greens are not as far apart from each other as indicated in their manifestos. Therefore, the overall direction of the current course – fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and competitiveness – is likely to prevail, albeit with different priorities and measures according to party preferences.

### 1 Introduction

The German Federal elections are taking place at a time when Germany is experiencing a 'unipolar moment' in the crisis-stricken EU.<sup>1</sup> The country has managed to withstand the economic and financial impacts of the euro crisis and has maintained its role as the largest economy in the eurozone with relatively healthy public finances, comparatively stable economic growth and a solid export performance. Based on this economic power, Germany has exercised decisive leadership in the euro crisis, a leadership that has been recognized by the other member states. Germany is thus at the heart of the solution to the crisis. However, the country's concrete crisis management has not remained unchallenged.

Those governments in Southern Europe that are the most affected by the crisis, such as Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, are increasingly struggling to balance their policies between the demands of their creditors and a public opinion that is expressing very strong criticism of the euro crisis management. A large part of the public and political opposition forces in these countries blame Germany for increasingly imposing its economic preferences on others in the eurozone. According to them, the German insistence on a policy of conditionality based on stringency and fiscal consolidation in return for financial rescue packages has a causal role in the ongoing economic crisis in their countries and the deteriorating social situation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vitorino, António: Foreword. In: Möller, Almut and Parkes, Roderick (eds.): Germany as Viewed by Other EU Member States. EPIN Paper No. 33. June 2012. p. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Tzogopoulos, George: It's Germany Stupid! The Greek-German Misunderstanding. In: Möller, Almut and Parkes, Roderick (eds.): Germany as Viewed by Other EU Member States. EPIN Paper No. 33. June 2012. pp. 6–9.

The Franco-German partnership has been caught in this battle of ideas about the best remedies for the eurozone. Only when Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande made efforts to stimulate the partnership by presenting proposals for closer economic coordination in the EU at a meeting in May 2013 did the relationship start to normalize again.<sup>3</sup> However, both remain at odds on the right balance between austerity and growth and the role of competitiveness. While Merkel has emphasized that austerity and growth do not oppose but condition each other<sup>4</sup>, Hollande wants to boost the economy through additional public spending<sup>5</sup>. Having been through its labour market reforms ten years ago under the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder, Germany today finds it easier to make the case for reform with its French counterparts. Paris, then, is struggling to drive a reform agenda in the domestic context. It is not only the French leadership that is trying to cope with the new German power in the eurozone. Although eurozone countries such as the Netherlands, Finland and Austria are perhaps quite happy that Berlin has taken over the role as the ‘bad cop’, upholding common principles of fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and conditionality in the crisis management, an increasing number of member states see Berlin not so much as key to the solution but as part of the problem.<sup>6</sup> Berlin is not only criticized for insisting on austerity policies but also for what is perceived as a moralistic and arrogant undertone when giving instructions on how to bring European economies back on track.

Given Germany’s leadership role in managing the euro crisis, as well as the headwind that the Merkel administration is facing from certain member states, the federal elections in September 2013 have moved into

the limelight of European interest. For many observers across Europe, the elections in Germany are seen as a strong indicator of the future guiding principles on how to create competitive and stable economies in the eurozone. This is also one of the reasons why at the EU summit in June 2013 pressing questions ranging from the establishment of a banking union to the improvement of European competitiveness were postponed. The EU remains in limbo until the German electorate casts its vote. The questions that arise are, then, what can Europe expect from the federal elections and would a different coalition government pursue a fundamentally different euro policy and take a different stance on EU integration?

## 2 Mapping the political landscape in Germany

Although public perception of the federal elections predominantly concerns the duel between Chancellor Angela Merkel and her contestant Peer Steinbrück, German voters – in contrast to France and the United States for example – do not elect their chancellor directly. Instead, they elect members to the Bundestag on the basis of a hybrid personalized proportional system;<sup>7</sup> they then choose the head of government. Due to the fragmentation of the German party landscape in past years, there is in any case the need to forge a coalition of at least two parties to win a majority, thus giving smaller parties the role of a potential ‘kingmaker’. As six parties are expected to win seats in the Bundestag, there are at least four possible coalition outcomes, ranging from center-right to center-left.

Chancellor Merkel is calling for a continuation of her conservative-liberal coalition government consisting of her Christian Democratic Union, CDU (Christlich

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<sup>3</sup> Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung: France and Germany – Together for a Stronger Europe of Stability and Growth. Press Release No 187/13. 30 May 2013. Online: [http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/\\_Anlagen/2013/05/2013-05-30-dt-frz-erklaerung-englisch.pdf;jsessionid=78FB05EDFA5F6ED84039212FF06922BE.s1t2?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/2013/05/2013-05-30-dt-frz-erklaerung-englisch.pdf;jsessionid=78FB05EDFA5F6ED84039212FF06922BE.s1t2?__blob=publicationFile&v=5) [Retrieved: 16 July 2013].

<sup>4</sup> Die Bundesregierung: Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel zu den Ergebnissen des G8-Gipfels und zum Europäischen Rat am 27./28. Juni in Brüssel. 27 June 2013. Online: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Regierungserklaerung/2013/2013-06-27-merkel-g8-eu-rat.html> [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

<sup>5</sup> Élysée: Intervention du Président de la République devant le Parlement européen. 5 February 2013. Online: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/intervention-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-le-parlement-europeen/> [Retrieved: 13 August 2013].

<sup>6</sup> Möller, Almut: Key to the Solution, Part of the Problem – Germany Needs Better Public Diplomacy within the EU. DGAP Standpunkt No. 2/2012. DGAP.

<sup>7</sup> The eligible voters have two separate votes that can be cast independently of each other. The first vote is cast for one of the candidates in the constituency and the second vote is cast for one of the party lists in the federal state concerned. Based on the number of members of parliament elected, parties then bargain until one has a majority and this then chooses the chancellor.

Demokratische Union Deutschlands), its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union, CSU (Christlich-Soziale Union Deutschlands), and the Free Democrats, FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei). In the past four years, Merkel has been able to consolidate the national budget, achieve record employment levels and navigate the country relatively safely through the euro crisis. However, overall, the track record of her last legislature presents a mixed picture, with a coalition full of discord and much unfinished business in areas such as energy, childcare and health.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, her party has stabilized at around 41 per cent in the polls (see Appendix) since early 2013 and has a comfortable lead ahead of its main competitor, the Social Democratic Party, SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands).<sup>9</sup> One of the main reasons for this strong result is Merkel's unassailable personal popularity. She has the reputation of being competent, likeable and credible, as well as having the ability to lead.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Germans appreciate the way in which she has navigated the country calmly and in a consensus-oriented and pragmatic way through the euro crisis, while many other European countries are struggling with public debt, economic recession and unemployment.<sup>11</sup>

However, the constellation of a future coalition government will remain nebulous until election night. One of the major factors of uncertainty is the miserable state of the CDU/CSU's current coalition partner, the FDP. In the past four years, the party has not only been paralyzed by infighting over posts but has also distanced itself programmatically from its liberal

values. In addition, due to federal budget constraints, its main electoral promise to lower taxes could not be realized. As a result, the FDP has faced a constant struggle to exceed the five per cent electoral threshold in the polls, risking its representation in the German Bundestag.<sup>12</sup>

The opposition party SPD has nominated Peer Steinbrück, a finance minister in a former grand coalition led by Angela Merkel, to contend for chancellery. However, rarely has a candidate had such a bumpy start to his electoral campaign as Steinbrück. Famous and popular for his straight talking, he has verbally overshoot several times in the election campaign, thus often making him seem inappropriate for a potential head of government. More fundamentally, in contrast to Angela Merkel, Steinbrück comes across as technocratic and arrogant rather than caring, an image that has immensely benefited Angela Merkel. Consequently, the SPD still polls only at around 26 per cent.<sup>13</sup> It has furthermore been questioned whether the party manifesto, with its emphasis on social equality, is in tune with a candidate who is an outspoken advocate of the drastic welfare reforms passed under the former SPD Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, which alienated major parts of the social democratic electorate in the 2009 federal elections. Nevertheless, by making social equality the key campaign topic, the SPD has demonstrated a good nose for the decisive topics of this year's electoral campaign.<sup>14</sup> Provided that the party can play out its competence in the field of social policy and clearly reveal the differences between it and the CDU/

<sup>8</sup> The following articles give a detailed overview of the coalition government's track record: Aretz, Eckart: Vom Charme der Hausmannskost. tagesschau.de. 22 August 2013. Online: [http://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/parteien\\_und\\_programme/unions-wahlprogramme100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/parteien_und_programme/unions-wahlprogramme100.html) [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

Rose, David: Leidvolle Jahre trotz Wunschkoalition. tagesschau.de. 22 August 2013. Online: [http://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/parteien\\_und\\_programme/fdp-bilanz100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/parteien_und_programme/fdp-bilanz100.html) [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

N. N.: Vier Jahre Schwarz-Gelb – diese Pläne sind gescheitert. Focus Online. 19 July 2013. Online: [http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bundestagswahl-2013/tid-32423/bilanz-der-regierungsarbeit-vier-jahre-schwarz-gelb-diese-plaene-sind-gescheitert\\_aid\\_1047460.html](http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bundestagswahl-2013/tid-32423/bilanz-der-regierungsarbeit-vier-jahre-schwarz-gelb-diese-plaene-sind-gescheitert_aid_1047460.html) [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed list of results of polls conducted by the six major German polling institutes since the beginning of the legislative period in 2009, see Sonntagsfrage Bundestagswahl. Online: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/index.htm> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>10</sup> Infratest dimap and ARD: ARD-DeutschlandTREND April 2013. p. 10. Online: [http://www.infratest-dimap.de/uploads/media/dt1308\\_bericht\\_01.pdf](http://www.infratest-dimap.de/uploads/media/dt1308_bericht_01.pdf) [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>11</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center published in May 2013, 74 per cent of Germans interviewed say that Merkel is doing a good job of handling the EU economic crisis. (Pew Research Center: The New Sick Man of Europe: the European Union – French Dispirited; Attitudes Diverge Sharply from Germans. May 13, 2013. p. 33. Online: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/05/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-European-Union-Report-FINAL-FOR-PRINT-May-13-2013.pdf> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>12</sup> Sonntagsfrage Bundestagswahl. Online: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/index.htm> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> This is also underlined by the fact that Chancellor Merkel incorporated the main demands of the SPD, such as a minimum wage and caps on rent increases, in her election manifesto.

CSU, the SPD could score well. Most interestingly for observers from the outside, a critique of Chancellor Merkel's euro crisis management has not been raised to the top of the campaign agenda by the SPD. SPD strategists do not believe that Merkel and her CDU/CSU are vulnerable on this issue given the strong public support for her policies.

The SPD's preferred coalition partner is the Green Party, Alliance '90/the Greens (Bündnis '90/Die Grünen), currently standing at around 11 per cent and thus scoring slightly above its record result achieved in the last federal elections of 2009 (10.7 per cent).<sup>15</sup> Partly related to the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima in March 2011, electoral support for the Greens rose due to the party's longstanding credibility and resistance to nuclear energy. This is also reflected in the results of federal state elections which could see the party install the first ever Green state prime minister in one of Germany's economic powerhouses, the federal state of Baden Württemberg. There had been public speculation about the possibility of a 'black-green coalition' with the CDU/CSU, but this has become less likely due to the party's shift to the left in its manifesto in which it clearly commits itself to, for example, a statutory minimum wage and the introduction of a wealth tax.

The Left party (Die Linke), then, is considered something of a 'pariah' in the Bundestag due to its socialist past in the former German Democratic Republic. After a surprising success in the federal elections in 2009 (11.9 per cent), the party has experienced a steady downturn in the past few years. Severe infighting and leadership problems have contributed to a row of electoral defeats in federal state elections, particularly in the west of Germany, where the party is still struggling to become an established political force. Consequently, although the Left party stabilized at around eight per cent prior to the federal elections,<sup>16</sup> it is no more than a small minnow in the election pond. All the other major parties have ruled out forming a coalition government with it. Nevertheless, with its strong focus on social policy, the party is likely to hurt the SPD by pulling voters away from it.

In addition to these six established parties, two new parties are aspiring to make it into the Bundestag for the first time. The Pirate Party (Die Piratenpartei) is predominantly concerned with issues revolving around internet policy.<sup>17</sup> After a successful period in which the party succeeded in entering four parliaments in federal states across the country, public support has dropped to three per cent in recent polls,<sup>18</sup> mainly due to personnel disputes and internal conflicts. The inability of the Pirate Party to profit from the recent revelations regarding the NSA spying scandal is an adequate indicator that it will face severe difficulties in entering the Bundestag in September.

The Alternative for Germany, AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), which aims to provide an alternative to Merkel's euro policies, is campaigning for Germany to leave the eurozone. However, it is unlikely that the potential spoiler in the euro debate will fulfil its ambitions at the ballot box and be voted into the Bundestag in the upcoming elections. The party is far off from the success of other populist, anti-euro parties, such as Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement or Gert Wilder's Party for Freedom in the Netherlands. Not only has the euphoria and media attention of the AfD's foundation faded, but more importantly the party is struggling to get its message across in the election campaign. As a large part of the German population is currently content with the government's euro crisis management, the AfD can only react to atmospheric changes in the population or unexpected events, such as a resurgence of the euro crisis. Nonetheless, the party could be an obstacle to the re-election of the center-right coalition government as it appeals to many traditional supporters of the CDU/CSU and FDP.

### **3 What is on the agenda? Relevant election topics and parties' positions**

After the launch of the parties' election manifestos, the electoral campaign developed in slow motion over the summer. The opposition parties have largely struggled to convey their different positions to the public and the media and add controversy to the election campaign. However, some topics have emerged that resonate

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<sup>15</sup> Sonntagsfrage Bundestagswahl. Online: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/index.htm> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> This includes issues such as the protection, the overall freedom and the transparency of the internet.

<sup>18</sup> Sonntagsfrage Bundestagswahl. Online: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/index.htm> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

most with the voters. The parties have so far focused primarily on the social justice debate and – closely related to it – on tax policy. Whereas a credible energy and environmental policy in managing the ‘Energiewende’ (energy transition) is now featuring as a topic and the euro crisis management has become a subject of debate, albeit only towards the end of the campaign, foreign, health and education policy do not feature significantly. To what extent the revelations in the NSA spying scandal, which have caused public outrage across the country, will damage the Merkel administration remains to be seen. A history of mass surveillance under Nazi and Communist dictatorships has made Germans particularly sensitive to perceived infringements of personal privacy. The scandal over the development of the euro Hawk armed drone system, as a result of which Defence Minister de Maizière came under intense pressure and was interrogated by a special parliamentary committee, will most likely not influence the outcome of the elections.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1 Social inequality

While the strong German economy is making headlines across Europe, growing social inequality is one of the central themes of this year’s federal elections. Fuelled by several studies that shed a critical light on social justice in Germany, this issue has received great attention in the public debate in Germany in past years.<sup>20</sup> In 2011, the Bertelsmann Foundation argued in a report that the growing inequality in income (leading to income

poverty and child poverty), access to education and access to regular forms of employment were the most pressing deficits.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, atypical forms of employment, such as temporary, part-time, interim and low-paid jobs, are on the rise. In 2011, 25.1 per cent of all employees worked in such employment, leading to growing insecurity and precarious income situations often assisted by public transfer payments.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, with a share of 22.2 per cent, Germany has the seventh largest low-paid sector in the EU.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it comes as no surprise that despite economic growth and record employment levels, many Germans feel that there is an ever-increasing social inequality. According to a survey conducted by the opinion polling institute Allensbach, 64 per cent agree that in the past three to four years social justice in Germany has decreased.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is highly likely that the solutions offered by the different parties to tackle social inequality will strongly influence the outcome of the elections.

A central proposal by the opposition parties, the SPD and the Greens, is the introduction of a statutory minimum wage fixed at 8.50 euro. As a concession in the social justice debate, the CDU/CSU and FDP have given up their general resistance to a minimum wage and have promised to introduce further minimum wage levels in sectors and regions in which wage dumping can be observed. However, both parties

<sup>19</sup> After Germany’s armed forces had already spent more than 660 million Euros on the Euro Hawk programme, the project was finally stopped by de Maizière in May 2013 as it transpired that the project would need an additional investment of 600 million Euros, thus revealing the ministry’s lack of transparency on costs and viability (see: Dempsey, Judy: Germans Play for Time in the Debate on Drones. The New York Times Online. 22 July 2013. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/world/europe/23iht-letter23.html> [Retrieved: 30 August 2013].)

<sup>20</sup> Alongside the PISA studies, other international education studies (i.e. the Euro-Student Report and the UNICEF study: Educational Disadvantage in Rich Nations) also identify Germany as being at the bottom of the pile regarding social equality. Moreover, the Bertelsmann Foundation published a study in January 2011 in which Germany ranks only in the middle of the field.

<sup>21</sup> Bertelsmann Foundation: Soziale Gerechtigkeit in der OECD – Wo steht Deutschland? Sustainable Governance Indicators 2011. 2011. Online: [http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-19E5E335-3DF9D0BE/bst/xcms\\_bst\\_dms\\_33125\\_33126\\_2.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-19E5E335-3DF9D0BE/bst/xcms_bst_dms_33125_33126_2.pdf) [Retrieved: 14 July 2013].

<sup>22</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt: Niedriglohn und Beschäftigung 2010. Wiesbaden. 2012. p. 7. Online: [https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressekonferenzen/2012/niedriglohn/begleitmaterial\\_PDF.pdf;jsessionid=1F7DB36EAAE0A59DC451F6CAB211736C.cae1?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressekonferenzen/2012/niedriglohn/begleitmaterial_PDF.pdf;jsessionid=1F7DB36EAAE0A59DC451F6CAB211736C.cae1?__blob=publicationFile) [Retrieved: 14 July 2013].

<sup>23</sup> According to Eurostat, low-wage earners are defined as those employees earning two thirds or less of the national median gross hourly earnings. Hence, the threshold that determines low-wage earners is relative and specific to each Member State. In Germany, this wage amounts to 10.20 Euros. See: Eurostat: Earnings Statistics. 2013. Online: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Earnings\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Earnings_statistics) [Retrieved: 9 August 2013].

<sup>24</sup> Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach: Was ist gerecht? Gerechtigkeitsbegriff –und –wahrnehmung der Bürger. 12 February 2013. p. 3. Online: <http://www.insm.de/insm/kampagne/gerechtigkeit/was-denkt-deutschland-ueber-gerechtigkeit.html> [Retrieved: 14 July 2013].

reject a statutory minimum wage and wish to leave the decision on the appropriate level to the negotiation process between the social partners. Furthermore, the Social Democrats and the Greens have advanced firm plans for substantial changes to tax law. They aim to enhance social redistribution, upgrade public spending on education and infrastructure, and contribute to budget consolidation. As an example, the two parties propose to raise the peak income tax rate from 42 to 49 per cent, introduce a wealth tax and increase the final withholding on investment income from 25 to 32 per cent. Tax proposals from the coalition government of the CDU/CSU and FDP are less clearly formulated. Both parties emphasize the primacy of fiscal consolidation but insist that tax increases are not needed because they have already taken decisive steps in the right direction. Moreover, the recent tax evasion scandal involving former football star and Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoeneß<sup>25</sup> and the growing debate concerning tax havens in general have added another dimension to the topic of social justice. All parties stress the importance of better enforcement and more aggressive measures against tax evasion or tax crimes – also at the EU level. On this issue, the SPD candidate, Steinbrück, has developed the most pronounced stance.

### 3.2 How to manage the Energiewende

All major political parties agree to realize the Energiewende that manifests Germany's exit from nuclear power by 2022 and the shift towards renewable energy as a major source of energy supply. So far, however, the government's quick response to the

nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima in March 2011 has been followed by a bumpy implementation phase. Investments in renewables, especially in electricity grid infrastructure, have been delayed; energy efficiency has to be improved further, particularly in the area of building refurbishment.<sup>26</sup>

Even though the complexity behind Germany's ambitious energy transition aims will not produce easy campaign statements, the topic is playing a role in the electoral campaign as each party has to prove to the electorate that it will be a credible transition manager. Despite a broad party consensus on the necessity of the Energiewende, noteworthy differences in the parties' proposed policies can be observed. This becomes clearly visible in relation to rising electricity prices. Energy affordability has become a major problem since the expansion of subsidized renewables has led to a strong market reaction with another significant electricity price hike expected to be announced just shortly before the elections. Although all major parties agree that a reform of the Renewable Energy Sources Act (EEG)<sup>27</sup> is inevitable to address this problem, the parties' strategies differ. While the Greens and to a lesser extent the CDU/CSU insist on reducing the current exemptions for energy-intensive companies from paying the EEG levy<sup>28</sup> and electricity taxes, the FDP wants to maintain most of them. Instead, along with the SPD, it calls for a reduction in the electricity tax. The CDU/CSU, FDP and SPD agree that coal and gas power plants should remain part of the energy mix as a back-up power source in times of low renewable

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<sup>25</sup> In April 2013, it was publicly revealed that former football star and Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoeneß had been under investigation for tax evasion on an undeclared large Swiss Bank account. In the meantime, Hoeneß has turned himself in to the tax authorities and charges have been brought against him by the public prosecutors.

<sup>26</sup> Löschel, Andreas; Erdmann, Georg; Staiß, Frithjof & Ziesing, Hans-Joachim: Expertenkommission zum Monitoring-Prozess "Energie der Zukunft" – Stellungnahme zum ersten Monitoring – Bericht der Bundesregierung für das Berichtsjahr 2011. Berlin, Mannheim, Stuttgart. December 2012. Online: <http://www.bmwi.de/BMWi/Redaktion/PDF/M-O/monitoringbericht-stellungnahme-lang,property=pdf,bereich=bmwi2012,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf> [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

Berberich, Simon Che: Die sieben verflixten Probleme bei der Energiewende. Focus Online. 21 March 2013. Online: [http://www.focus.de/immobilien/energiesparen/tid-30226/strompreis-netze-widerstand-die-sieben-verflixten-probleme-bei-der-energiewende\\_aid\\_945081.html](http://www.focus.de/immobilien/energiesparen/tid-30226/strompreis-netze-widerstand-die-sieben-verflixten-probleme-bei-der-energiewende_aid_945081.html) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

<sup>27</sup> The German Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz, EEG) was designed to increase the share of renewable energy sources in the supply of electricity. The key elements of the EEG are preferential connection to electricity grids for systems that generate power from renewables, preferential purchase with a fixed feed-in tariff, transmission, distribution and compensation for this power generated from renewables, and the nationwide equalization of the electricity purchased and the corresponding tariffs paid. The EEG was the initial spark for a tremendous boost to renewable energies in Germany.

<sup>28</sup> The EEG guarantees a fixed feed-in-tariff to renewable energy producers that cannot always be achieved on the electricity market. The difference is then compensated by the EEG-levy that is financed by the final electricity consumer. Recent developments, such as the weakening of European Emission Trading and the drop in prices for hard coal and natural gas as a result of the boost to renewable energies, have contributed to a fall in the total spot price for electricity, thus increasing the costs for the final consumer.

electricity production. The CDU/CSU and FDP even advertise the construction of new and efficient power plants. In contrast, the Greens argue strongly for a withdrawal from coal mining by 2030 and have made the sourcing of the electricity supply from 100 per cent renewable energies by the same year the first priority in their party manifesto.

The urgent pressure to provide additional storage capacities, as well as to expand and modernize energy grids, is acknowledged by all major parties. The opposition parties, the SPD and the Greens, also propose the introduction of new governance structures, including the bundling of energy competences in one ministry and the launch of the 'German Grid Corporation' assigned the responsibility of grid expansion, modernization and synchronization under public control.

Interestingly to external observers, the European dimension of this debate does not play a role in the campaign. This comes as a surprise as the German EU Commissioner for Energy, Günter Oettinger, has frequently asked the German government in the past months to improve coordination of its plans for the Energiewende with a common EU energy strategy.

#### **4 What about the EU? No worries, 'Mummy' Merkel will take care of it**

Domestic issues, such as the Energiewende and the question of social justice, have been the predominant topics for most of the election campaign. But how important is the EU and Germany's role in the campaign and how do issues pertaining to the EU resonate with the German electorate?

One can observe an increasing Europeanization in the parties' election manifestos. In comparison to previous election programmes, there has been more reference to the EU as an actor. The European dimension is increasingly reflected in policy issues such as taxation, research and employment. Every major party has anchored its commitment to the European integration

process in an individual chapter and sketched out proposals for the institutional reform of the EU. There is consensus among the major parties that reforms should not only aim to improve economic and monetary governance, but also address the democratic deficit by enhancing legitimacy and accountability.

In practice, however, the European dimension of the German electoral campaign has remained weak. As many countries in Europe are struggling with the impact of the financial, economic and sovereign debt crisis and eurozone governments are discussing measures to fix the dysfunctional Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), one would expect a controversial debate in Germany, one of the key players in overcoming the eurozone crisis. Instead, the federal election campaign seems strangely detached from the political drama that surrounds it and the debate has hardly taken place beyond intellectual circles. This is in stark contrast to other election campaigns in European member states in the past two years in which key European topics, such as the stance towards the Euro, deeper economic integration or fiscal consolidation, played a decisive role.<sup>29</sup> But Germany, the country that has a key role in solving the euro crisis, is different in this respect. The population is still not feeling the impact of the crisis. On the contrary, fuelled by comparatively stable economic growth, a strong export performance and record employment levels, there is a feeling of complacency in the country that 'the German model' is crisis-resistant. This is also reflected in a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in May 2013, in which 77 per cent of the Germans interviewed described their personal economic situation as 'good' or 'very good' in comparison with only 51 per cent of other Europeans.<sup>30</sup>

Germans have placed their trust in the Chancellor's crisis management. She comes across as diligent, hard-working and modest and thereby represents a type of politician that generally goes down well with the German public, particularly in times of crisis. People feel that

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<sup>29</sup> Governments in crisis-stricken EU countries like Greece, Spain, Italy or Cyprus were voted out of office because of their failing crisis management. In the French presidential elections, François Hollande succeeded by promising to shift the balance in the Eurozone towards more growth-friendly policies while the Dutch electorate confirmed Mark Rutte's course of fiscal consolidation in order to comply with the requirements of the EU's SGP.

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research Center: The New Sick Man of Europe: The European Union – French Dispirited; Attitudes Diverge Sharply from Germans. 13 May 2013. p. 13. Online: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/05/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-European-Union-Report-FINAL-FOR-PRINT-May-13-2013.pdf> [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

‘Mummy’ Merkel is taking care of the euro troubles and that she offers the proper remedies. In polls, 65 per cent believe that she has acted decisively and taken the right measures in the course of the euro crisis.<sup>31</sup> Many share her view that conditionality and compliance with rules are crucial pillars for getting Europe back on track. The far-reaching structural reforms that the other crisis-struck countries now have to implement in order to reanimate their economies are seen as inevitable – a cure that helped Germany to recover from being the ‘sick man of Europe’ and that can therefore only be good for the rest of Europe. In addition, Merkel’s recent attempts to make combating youth unemployment a top priority for the EU<sup>32</sup> and to spur investment in SMEs in Greece, Spain and Portugal<sup>33</sup> have given voters the positive sense that Germany is contributing to alleviating the woes of its fellow Europeans. Criticism that Germany is increasingly acting as a hegemon in Europe, playing to its own interests while lecturing others, is often met with astonishment or denial.<sup>34</sup>

These findings indicate why German attitudes towards the EU and the euro have remained favourable. 60 per cent of Germans still support the EU as an institution and 54 per cent believe that European economic integration has strengthened the German economy.<sup>35</sup> Another 51 per cent favour the delegation of more authority to the EU in order to address Europe’s economic problems.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, although the common currency has been in serious danger and Germany is the Eurosystem’s largest

net creditor, 66 per cent of the German population want to keep the Euro.<sup>37</sup> In this setting, it comes as no surprise that the major opposition parties, the Greens and the SPD, have decided not to make the euro crisis a battleground for the election campaign. Both parties have found it hard to differentiate their euro policies from Merkel’s coalition government’s as they supported all the major rescue measures in the Bundestag. The Left party, which has been harsher in its criticism of the government during the euro crisis, recently confirmed its overall commitment to the common currency and therefore does not add much controversy to the debate.<sup>38</sup>

Only in the final straight of the election campaign has the SPD started to criticize Chancellor Merkel’s management of the euro crisis and put the topic at top of the agenda. Still lagging behind the CDU/CSU in the polls with around 15 points, the SPD has been in urgent need of a game-changing topic for the election campaign. When finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble publicly reinforced the need for another rescue package for Greece at a campaign event in Northern Germany five weeks before election day, the SPD seized the opportunity to exploit this sensitive topic and since then has accused the coalition government of obscuring the real costs of the euro crisis for the German taxpayer and of having pursued failing crisis management.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, while the German public approves of Chancellor Merkel’s crisis management, as well as her insistence on conditionality and fiscal

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<sup>31</sup> Infratest dimap and ARD: ARD-DeutschlandTREND April 2013. p. 23. Online: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend1716.pdf> [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

<sup>32</sup> Die Bundesregierung: Konferenz zur Förderung der Jugendbeschäftigung in Europa am 03.07.13. Berlin. 2013. Online: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2013/07/2013-07-03-pk-jugendarbeitslosigkeit.html;jsessionid=BD5865BF563DC2EB75E9C566417D611D.s4t1> [Retrieved: 16 August 2013].

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the statement of the meeting between German finance minister Schäuble and his Portuguese counterpart Vítor Gaspar on 22 May 2013 (Online: <http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/EN/Pressemitteilungen/2013/2013-05-22-meeting-schaeuble-gaspar.html> [Retrieved: 13 August 2013]), the credit agreement for the financing of SMEs in Spain on 4 July 2013 (Online: <http://www.bmw.de/DE/Presse/pressemitteilungen,did=583526.html> [Retrieved: 16 August 2013]) or the signing of an agreement for the creation of an investment fund for Greece on July 18, 2013 (Online: <http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Pressemitteilungen/Finanzpolitik/2013/07/2013-07-17-PM57.html> [Retrieved: 13 August 2013]).

<sup>34</sup> Möller, Almut: Will the Merkel Method Survive Re-election? *The World Today*. Volume 69, Number 7. August/September 2013. pp. 28–30.

<sup>35</sup> Pew Research Center: The New Sick Man of Europe: The European Union – French Dispirited; Attitudes Diverge Sharply from Germans. 13 May 2013. pp. 24 & 34. Online: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/05/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-European-Union-Report-FINAL-FOR-PRINT-May-13-2013.pdf> [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Die Linke: 100 Prozent sozial - Wahlprogramm zur Bundestagswahl 2013. 2013. p. 49. Online: [http://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlen2013/bundestagswahlprogramm/bundestagswahlprogramm2013\\_langfassung.pdf](http://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlen2013/bundestagswahlprogramm/bundestagswahlprogramm2013_langfassung.pdf) [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].



consolidation, the potential costs of the euro crisis remain a sensitive issue among the public. Thus, it can be expected that the SPD will continue to exploit this topic until election day. However, one has to be rather sceptical about whether such a ploy could really boost the SPD's polling results as it seems certain that the party would also confirm another rescue package for Greece. Nevertheless, the re-discovered issue of the costs of the euro crisis might contribute to draw traditional voters away from the CDU/CSU and FDP and into the arms of the Eurosceptic AfD. This could be important as the outcome of the elections is still unpredictable.

## 5 Convergence or differentiation on key EU-topics?

Despite the fact that EU topics – apart from discussing the costs of the euro crisis and the coalition government's crisis management – have so far not received much attention in the election campaign, they are of high relevance for future government policy and are therefore closely observed in the rest of Europe. So what can the rest of Europe expect from the major parties if elected? In which policy areas do the parties differ most and where will policy convergence be most likely?

### 5.1 Banking union

The financial crisis has revealed the deficiencies of the financial markets and the need for a regulatory framework. The most important aspect in this regard is the introduction of a banking union. With the votes of the CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD and the Greens, the Bundestag has already confirmed a Council decision of December 2012<sup>40</sup> to place the future supervision body within the European Central Bank<sup>41</sup>. The parties also agree that this body should focus solely on large, international banks. Control over Germany's

cooperative banks and the small state-owned savings banks should be delegated to national authorities and thus be protected from the interference of Brussels as these are considered crucial for the financing of SMEs that form the backbone of Germany's economy.<sup>42</sup> It is precisely this issue, on which all major German parties agree, that is the most controversial in negotiations at the EU level.

The most controversial issue is whether to introduce joint liability mechanisms within the framework of the banking union. On the one hand, the coalition parties of the CDU/CSU and FDP oppose the mutualization of liability risks and therefore reject a pan-European deposit guarantee scheme. Instead, the CDU/CSU is calling for EU-wide minimum standards for national deposit guarantee systems. Furthermore, both parties are rather sceptical about a comprehensive resolution fund. The CDU/CSU makes the use of European Stability Mechanism (ESM) funding for the recapitalization and restructuring of banks conditional on the working ability of the supervisory body and highlights – in line with the FDP – that the national private sector and the member state affected should take initial responsibility. On the other hand, the SPD and the Greens are clearly in favour of joint liability arrangements. While the SPD favours a pan-European restructuring fund but remains silent about a European-wide deposit guarantee scheme, the Greens clearly advocate a strong banking union including both mechanisms. Moreover, the Greens have endorsed the idea of introducing a debt and size ceiling for banks by increasing equity capital dependent on their size.<sup>43</sup> All in all, however, it is questionable whether the opposition parties, if elected, would push too heavily for a pan-European resolution mechanism given the widespread opposition and constitutional concerns in Germany.

<sup>39</sup> Donahue, Patrick: Germany Must Pay for Euro, Merkel's SPD Challenger Says. Bloomberg. 26 August 2013. Online: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-25/germany-must-pay-for-euro-merkel-challenger-steinbrueck-says.html> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

Pop, Valentina: Why did Schaeuble Break the Greek Bailout Taboo? EU Observer. 28 August 2013. Online: <http://euobserver.com/political/121210> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

<sup>40</sup> Council of the European Union: Council agrees position on bank supervision. 17739/12 PRESSE 528. 13 December 2012. Online: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/134265.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/134265.pdf) [Retrieved: 13 August 2013].

<sup>41</sup> Deutscher Bundestag: Europäische Bankenaufsicht bei EZB beschlossen. 12 June 2013. Online: [http://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2013\\_06/2013\\_327/01.html](http://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2013_06/2013_327/01.html) [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

<sup>42</sup> Schulz, Christian: What Germany's Parties are up to. Berenberg Macro Views. 17 July 2013. p. 5. Online: [http://www.berenberg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/berenberg2013/Publikationen/Macro\\_News/Economics\\_07-2013-17\\_German\\_campaign\\_platforms.pdf](http://www.berenberg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/berenberg2013/Publikationen/Macro_News/Economics_07-2013-17_German_campaign_platforms.pdf) [Retrieved: 27 August 2013].

<sup>43</sup> Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013. 2013. pp. 59–60. Online: [http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Gruenes-Bundestagswahlprogramm-2013.pdf](http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Gruenes-Bundestagswahlprogramm-2013.pdf) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

## 5.2 Fiscal union

Acutely high sovereign debt and constructional flaws in the eurozone have revealed the need to strengthen the EMU. So far, the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) has been tightened and both the Fiscal Compact and the European Semester have been introduced as additional measures in order to enhance fiscal consolidation.

In recent years, the Merkel government has made it clear that these actions have to be followed by the finalization of a fiscal union.<sup>44</sup> However, the debate has become more and more messy. Angela Merkel has recently been more cautious in putting forward comprehensive proposals for what a future fiscal union could look like – partly because the delegation of budgetary competences is a topic that does not go down well with traditional conservative voters. Thus, not only the CDU/CSU but also the FDP have remained very vague in their election manifesto statements in order to ensure enough room for manoeuvre in the future domestic debate and negotiations at the EU level. Nevertheless, both parties follow a similar leitmotif regarding their EU policy – the establishment of what they have coined a ‘stability union’. In their election manifestos, the coalition parties highlight the importance of strict adherence to the enforced SGP, the Fiscal Compact and the European Semester and demand the introduction of sanctions. In particular, both parties consider public debt reduction and compliance with the newly-introduced European-wide debt brake essential in order to strengthen the euro and ensure price stability.<sup>45</sup>

The opposition parties, the SPD and the Greens, are far more pronounced in their proposals and call for

further integration in the eurozone. At the institutional level, they want to establish an economic government for the eurozone which is controlled by the European Parliament. Such a modified institutional framework would ensure that all measures taken in the area of economic and budgetary policy are democratically legitimized. More specifically, the Greens also propose the introduction of a new EU commissioner for monetary and economic affairs who would preside over the Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings.<sup>46</sup> However, both parties remain rather vague on the extent to which they are willing to move budgetary competences to the European level.

The central point of contestation is certainly whether joint liability should be established. The CDU/CSU and FDP reject any form of mutualization of debt, such as the introduction of Eurobonds or a European Debt Redemption Fund, because they fear that German taxpayers could incur unlimited liability for other indebted countries in the eurozone.<sup>47</sup> This is in contrast to the SPD and the Greens which both advocate – with the Fiscal Compact, the European Semester and the enforced SGP now in place – a limited form of debt mutualization. In particular, they call for a Debt Redemption Fund, pooling of all public debt that exceeds the 60 per cent objective of the SGP. According to the Greens, such a fund should be financed by a European-wide capital levy. In the long term, the Greens go even further and aim at the issuance of common Eurobonds as they believe this instrument to be the most suitable means of ending the confidence and funding crisis in the eurozone. Moreover, the party wants to convert the ESM into a European Monetary Fund in order to make it a permanent and effective rapid action mechanism with binding regulations.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Merkel, Angela: Interview in ARD. 7 June 2013. Online: <http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Interview/2012/06/2012-06-07-merkel-ard.html> [Retrieved: 7 August 2013].

<sup>45</sup> CDU & CSU: Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017. 2013. pp. 12–13. Online: [http://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/cdu\\_regierungsprogramm\\_2013-2017.pdf](http://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/cdu_regierungsprogramm_2013-2017.pdf) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

FDP: FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013. pp. 82–83. Online: [http://www.fdp.de/files/408/B\\_rgerprogramm\\_A5\\_Online\\_2013-07-23.pdf](http://www.fdp.de/files/408/B_rgerprogramm_A5_Online_2013-07-23.pdf) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

<sup>46</sup> SPD: Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017. pp. 104–105. Online: [http://www.spd.de/linkableblob/96686/data/20130415\\_regierungsprogramm\\_2013\\_2017.pdf](http://www.spd.de/linkableblob/96686/data/20130415_regierungsprogramm_2013_2017.pdf) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013. 2013. pp. 59–60. Online: [http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Gruenes-Bundestagswahlprogramm-2013.pdf](http://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Gruenes-Bundestagswahlprogramm-2013.pdf) [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

<sup>47</sup> CDU & CSU: Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017. 2013. p. 13. FDP: FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013. p. 82.

<sup>48</sup> SPD: Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017. p. 105.

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013. 2013. p. 57.

### 5.3 Growth or/and austerity

The CDU/CSU and FDP underline the importance of improving competitiveness in the eurozone as a prerequisite for boosting economic growth. Therefore, they call for enhanced economic coordination at the European level.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the CDU/CSU wants to decide on a ‘Competitiveness Pact’, in which EU member states together with the Commission agree on concrete and targeted measures and investments in future technologies, education and research. This also includes the promotion of the German dual education system<sup>50</sup> in other EU member states. Nevertheless, both parties insist that structural reforms are of the utmost importance for improving competitiveness and guaranteeing solid fiscal consolidation. Therefore, they stress that financial support should be granted to crisis-ridden countries only if they demonstrate willingness to reform.

The opposition parties, the SPD and the Greens, criticize what they believe to be a one-sided emphasis on austerity by the government. Instead, they underline the importance of stimulating growth and strengthening the social dimension of the EU. To foster European-wide sustainable growth, domestic demand and fairly paid employment, the SPD proposes the launch of a European Investment and Construction Fund. This fund, financed by the revenues gained from the financial transaction tax, the re-structuring of the EU’s structural funds and the upgrading of the European Investment Fund, should stimulate investment in education, research, infrastructure and youth employment.<sup>51</sup> The Greens – although not to the extent in the election campaign of 2009 – are holding on to their comprehensive ‘Green New Deal’ as a master plan to make sustainability the foundation for European competitiveness. For this, the

financing of ecological investment in renewables and European networks constitutes an essential pillar.<sup>52</sup>

In line with the domestic dimension of the debate, both the SPD and the Greens emphasize the importance of solidarity and social justice at the EU level and call for a ‘Social Union’. This entails the introduction of a social progress clause in the EU primary law in order to ensure equal social protection, pay conditions and workers’ rights, as well as fighting wage and social dumping in all EU member states. In addition, the SPD supports the expansion of workers’ participation and the upgrading of social dialogue at the EU level. Within the framework of a newly-established ‘Social Stability Pact’, the SPD and the Greens seek to introduce minimum standards for social and educational spending, as well as minimum wages.<sup>53</sup>

Both parties’ demands for a ‘European Taxation Pact’ that would aim to introduce minimum standards and minimum assessment thresholds for income and corporation taxes, as well as a European-wide capital levy to finance European debt reduction, are also highly influenced by the question of social justice.<sup>54</sup> Through this means, both parties aim to combat tax havens, tax fraud and tax evasion, as well as to prevent a ‘race to the bottom’ in the pan-European tax competition.

### 5.4 EU governance

Alongside institutional reform proposals to stabilize the eurozone, there has also been a European-wide debate about the general future shape of EU governance. Interestingly, the CDU and CSU do not explicitly outline their vision for such a future institutional set-up. Although the chapter on Europe is featured prominently at the beginning of the joint election manifesto, neither

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<sup>49</sup> CDU & CSU: *Gemeinsam erfolgreich für Deutschland. Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. 2013. p. 14.  
FDP: *FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013*. p. 78.

<sup>50</sup> The German dual education system combines education in vocational schools and practical work experience in companies where training takes place. The close cooperation between vocational schools on the one hand and chambers of commerce and industry associations on the other hand ensure that the work and the teaching are matched. The dual education system in countries such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands is seen as one of the major reasons for their relatively low youth unemployment rates in times of crisis. Therefore, this education system is seen as a role model for other European countries heavily affected by youth unemployment.

<sup>51</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: *Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013*. 2013. p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. pp. 105–106.  
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: *Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013*. 2013. p. 291.

<sup>54</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. p. 71.  
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: *Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013*. 2013. pp. 294–295.

party gives any indication of their view on the future course of European integration. Does this finding indicate – as some critics have suggested – a lack of ambition in Merkel’s EU policy?<sup>55</sup> It rather seems that the Chancellor is taking the political schedule of the EU into consideration. Other member states have already indicated that they do not wish to address this issue before the European elections in June 2014 because they fear anti-European sentiment. Therefore, given the lack of momentum, Merkel has stated that her party will address questions on EU institutions and the finalization of a political union only when drafting its manifesto for the European elections in 2014.<sup>56</sup> Overall, however, the CDU and CSU are clear in their commitment to the gradual delegation of competences to the EU. As early as her speech at the Charles University in Prague in 2012, Angela Merkel highlighted her wish to upgrade the European Commission into a form of European government.<sup>57</sup>

The other major political parties are more clear-cut in their proposals on the future of EU governance and the convergence in their approaches is clearly visible. According to the election manifestos of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP, the European Parliament should be strengthened considerably and given comprehensive legislative initiative.<sup>58</sup> All the parties appreciate the increasing personalization of the European election campaign. Starting with the European elections in 2014, each party family will list a top candidate for the post of President of the European Commission and will present the party’s election programme to a European-wide public. It is expected that democratic accountability and legitimacy will improve because the President will be elected and controlled by the

European Parliament. In addition, the SPD and FDP propose transforming the Council of the EU into a second chamber representing national interests and at the same time upgrading the European Parliament by giving it equal rights in the legislative procedure.<sup>59</sup>

The SPD and FDP favour a European Convention to tackle the most pressing institutional questions but are aware that the leeway afforded by existing Treaties should first be used to the full extent. In contrast, the Greens insist on the importance of instituting a public European Convention that reflects the composition of society and includes all relevant stake-holders.<sup>60</sup> Although the CDU/CSU has not tackled this issue in its party manifesto, the party certainly would express a position similar to that of the SPD and FDP. This is also reflected in its party resolution of 2011.<sup>61</sup>

## 6 Scenarios for the next coalition government

Despite the clear lead of Angela Merkel’s CDU/CSU ahead of her opponent Peer Steinbrück and his SPD, the outcome of the federal elections is far from decided. Merkel’s current and preferred coalition partner, the FDP, has been continuously polling around the critical five per cent threshold leaving it unclear whether the party will manage to stay in the Bundestag. Even though it is likely that some CDU/CSU supporters will vote strategically for their liberal peers, this will not necessarily be sufficient to yield a conservative-liberal majority. Consequently, the arithmetic of party percentages makes predicting the future make-up of the next government a complex task. Whatever happens, every future government coalition has to take into account the distribution of votes in Germany’s upper

<sup>55</sup> See Dempsey, Judy: *Das Phänomen Merkel*. Körber Stiftung, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> N. N.: *Wahlprogramm CDU/CSU Union bleibt in EU-Fragen schwammig*. N24, 24 June 2013. Online: <http://www.n24.de/n24/Nachrichten/Politik/d/3052288/union-bleibt-in-eu-fragen-schwammig.html> [Retrieved: 7 August 2013].

<sup>57</sup> *Die Bundesregierung: Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel bei der Diskussionsveranstaltung “Die künftige Gestalt Europas” an der juristischen Fakultät der Karls-Universität*. 3 April 2012. Online: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2012/04/2012-04-03-merkel-prag.html> [Retrieved: 7 August 2013].

<sup>58</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. p. 104.  
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: *Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013*. 2013. p. 287.  
FDP: *FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013*. p. 78.

<sup>59</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. p. 104.  
FDP: *FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013*. p. 78.

<sup>60</sup> SPD: *Das WIR entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013–2017*. p. 106.  
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: *Zeit für den Grünen Wandel. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2013*. 2013. pp. 286–287.  
FDP: *FDP Bürgerprogramm 2013*. p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> *Resolution of the 24th Party Conference of the CDU of Germany: A Strong Europe – A Bright Future for Germany*. 14/15 November 2013. p. 15. Online: <http://www.leipzig2011.cdu.de/images/stories/docs/120105-beschluss-europa-en.pdf> [Retrieved: 3 September 2013].

house, the Bundesrat, as this body has to agree to any major reform that is put forward by the Bundestag. Currently, the CDU/CSU and FDP coalition governments at the state level do not hold a majority and the centre-left majority has not ceased in its efforts to make life difficult for Angela Merkel's government.

#### 6.1 First option: everything stays the same – a CDU/CSU–FDP coalition

If the FDP can manage to pass the five per cent threshold, a continuation of a conservative-liberal coalition is the most likely scenario. Such a constellation will not imply a major policy change on domestic issues. In European affairs, the government would most likely continue with its incremental approach in order to achieve the successful transition from crisis to modest growth. Backed by an election win, a new Merkel government could negotiate from a more comfortable position in order to finally strike a deal on the banking union. The insistence on structural reforms, fiscal consolidation and the improvement of competitiveness in the eurozone would remain key elements of its euro crisis management. However, a slight shift away from the emphasis on fiscal consolidation towards the improvement of competitiveness can be expected.

#### 6.2 Second option: a swing to the left: the SPD and the Greens in a red-green coalition<sup>62</sup>

The alternative red-green coalition favoured by the SPD and the Greens has only a slim chance of taking over power. Both parties would easily agree on a coalition together as they drafted their election manifestos in close cooperation and have put forward similar proposals in many policy fields. Domestically, a red-green coalition would raise income, wealth and other taxes to fund more government spending and introduce a statutory minimum wage. Nevertheless, overall

it would continue with the current course of fiscal consolidation. Although both parties have described EU policies that differ from those of the incumbent government in their election manifestos, they are likely only to adopt a softer rhetoric rather than bringing about substantial change if elected. After all, the SPD and the Greens voted with the coalition government for all major European initiatives in the Bundestag. Also, public opinion supports the insistence on strict conditions attached to financial support in the euro crisis.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the judicial decisions of the German Constitutional Court on the euro crisis management will increasingly limit the leeway for far-reaching decisions. If at all, the SPD and the Greens would push for more growth-stimulating policies and even tighter financial regulation, as well as for a longer-term economic and social vision for the eurozone.

#### 6.3 Third option: back to 2005 – a grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and the SPD

This constellation would be the first alternative to a potential stalemate if neither Merkel's CDU/CSU and FDP coalition nor a red-green coalition wins a majority of seats. Such a grand coalition was already in power between 2005 and 2009 and generally enjoys widespread support among the consensus-oriented German population.<sup>64</sup> However, the SPD will only very reluctantly agree to such a coalition and will negotiate robustly to ensure that the party keeps its own profile. This is because the SPD suffered from the last cooperation and was punished in the subsequent elections.<sup>65</sup> Since then, the CDU/CSU and SPD have drifted apart in their positions, especially on social policies and taxation, which will impair domestic reforms.

With regard to the eurozone, the German position could soften marginally; while the SPD would be likely

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<sup>62</sup> In Germany, the different terms used to describe coalition governments refer to an association between the symbolic colours of the parties in such a coalition – black for the CDU/CSU; red for the SPD; yellow for the FDP; green for the Green Party; red for the Left.

<sup>63</sup> Infratest dimap and ARD: ARD-DeutschlandTREND April 2013. p. 23. Online: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend1716.pdf> [Retrieved: 6 August 2013].

<sup>64</sup> In the DeutschlandTrend poll of July 2013 by infratest dimap, 42 per cent of the interviewees stated that a grand coalition is their favorite coalition constellation for the upcoming Federal elections. Infratest dimap and ARD: ARD-DeutschlandTREND July 2013. pp. 17–18. Online: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend1780.pdf> [Retrieved: 7 August 2013].

<sup>65</sup> The CDU/CSU received only a slightly lower proportion than in the previous election (-1.4 per cent) in the 2009 elections gaining 33.8 per cent of the votes. In contrast, its coalition partner, the SPD, was the major loser in the election receiving only 23 per cent of the total party vote – its worst result ever in a Federal election and the largest percentage loss of any party in German Federal election history in 60 years. See: Ergebnisse der Bundestagswahlen. Online: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/ergebnisse/bundestag.htm> [Retrieved: 28 August 2013].

to push for stricter financial regulation, it would also lend greater support to growth stimuli. The CDU/CSU would not be likely to give up on its insistence on fiscal consolidation, improving competitiveness and rejecting any form of debt mutualization, but the SPD's input could make the overall perception of Germany's policies more inclusive across Europe. From a tactical point of view, this would be an asset to the next Merkel-led government.

#### 6.4 The other options: Wading in uncharted waters

If the election results do not lead to any of these three conventional coalition constellations, negotiations become more complex. The SPD and the Greens have so far always ruled out a coalition with the Left. However, if the CDU/CSU and FDP do not manage to form a government, senior officials from the SPD and the Greens might be tempted to abandon their ideals to form a red-red-green coalition as there would be no other option to gain power together. Such a coalition would certainly be a major surprise and might send shock waves to the financial markets, but the ultimate impact on policy could be similar to that of a red-green coalition with the Left Party sharpening the policy agenda from time to time at the edges, i.e. in social and foreign and security policy.

Although widely debated by the public, a coalition of the CDU/CSU and the Greens has become very unlikely. The Greens have moved considerably to the left in their election manifesto, leaving little common ground for a coalition. In addition, such a coalition could not rely on any support from the Bundesrat in major reform projects. Similar reasons go against a 'Jamaica' coalition<sup>66</sup> of the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the Greens. Even more unlikely is a coalition of the SPD, the FDP and the Greens (a 'traffic light' coalition).<sup>67</sup> The SPD and the Greens would have to entice the FDP into a coalition with major concessions as the FDP holds a different position on many major policy issues. In addition, it is questionable whether the FDP would

risk alienating itself even further from its traditional voters by agreeing to such a coalition government.

### 7 Conclusions: What Europe can expect

The outcome of the federal elections remains unpredictable until election night, given the fragmented party landscape and the constant struggle of the FDP to surpass the five per cent threshold. The state elections in Bavaria, a traditional powerhouse of the CDU's Bavarian sister party the CSU, will take place one week prior to the federal elections and might prove to be an important indicator of the general mood among the public.

In 2012, Angela Merkel stated in her annual summer interview with the public broadcaster ZDF that 'next year's vote will also be about the situation in Europe and what expectations and concepts we have for Europe'.<sup>68</sup> So far, however, EU topics have not been in the limelight of the election campaign but have rather played a subordinate role. Although in the final straight of the election campaign the euro crisis management of the coalition government has been criticized by the opposition, there is no polarized debate in Germany – as a country that has a key role in solving the euro crisis – concerning concrete concepts for the future way out of the crisis. Instead, domestic issues, such as social justice, the Energiewende and the NSA spying scandal, have dominated the public debate.

Even though the major parties communicate opposing views on several key questions concerning the future course of the management of the euro crisis in their election manifestos, there will be no fundamental change of policy substance. The room for manoeuvre by any future coalition government will be constrained by public opinion that supports strict conditionality. The jurisdiction of the German Constitutional Court has set clear boundaries on the degree to which the euro rescue measures in place are covered by the German constitution. In any case, the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD and the Greens are not as far apart from each other

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<sup>66</sup> Based on the different colour associations used to describe coalition constellations a 'Jamaica' coalition stands for a coalition among the CDU/CSU (black), the FDP (yellow), and the Green Party (green). This combination alludes to the colours of the flag of Jamaica.

<sup>67</sup> The term 'traffic light' coalition describes a coalition government of the SPD (red), the FDP (yellow) and the Greens (green). The combination of the parties' traditional colours resembles the colour sequence of traffic lights.

<sup>68</sup> Merkel, Angela: Interview with national broadcaster ZDF. 12 July 2012. Online: <http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Interview/2012/07/2012-07-15-sommerinterview-merkel.html;jsessionid=2056158F02DFCCED76684B3DB78781CF.s4t2?nn=614982#doc557888bodyText1> [Retrieved: 7 August 2013].

as indicated in their manifestos. Therefore, the overall direction of the current course – fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and competitiveness – is likely to prevail, albeit with different priorities and measures according to party preferences. However, in the coming

years all parties are likely to sharpen their vision for the future EU. As a result, one can expect much more controversy to emerge along party lines over European affairs.



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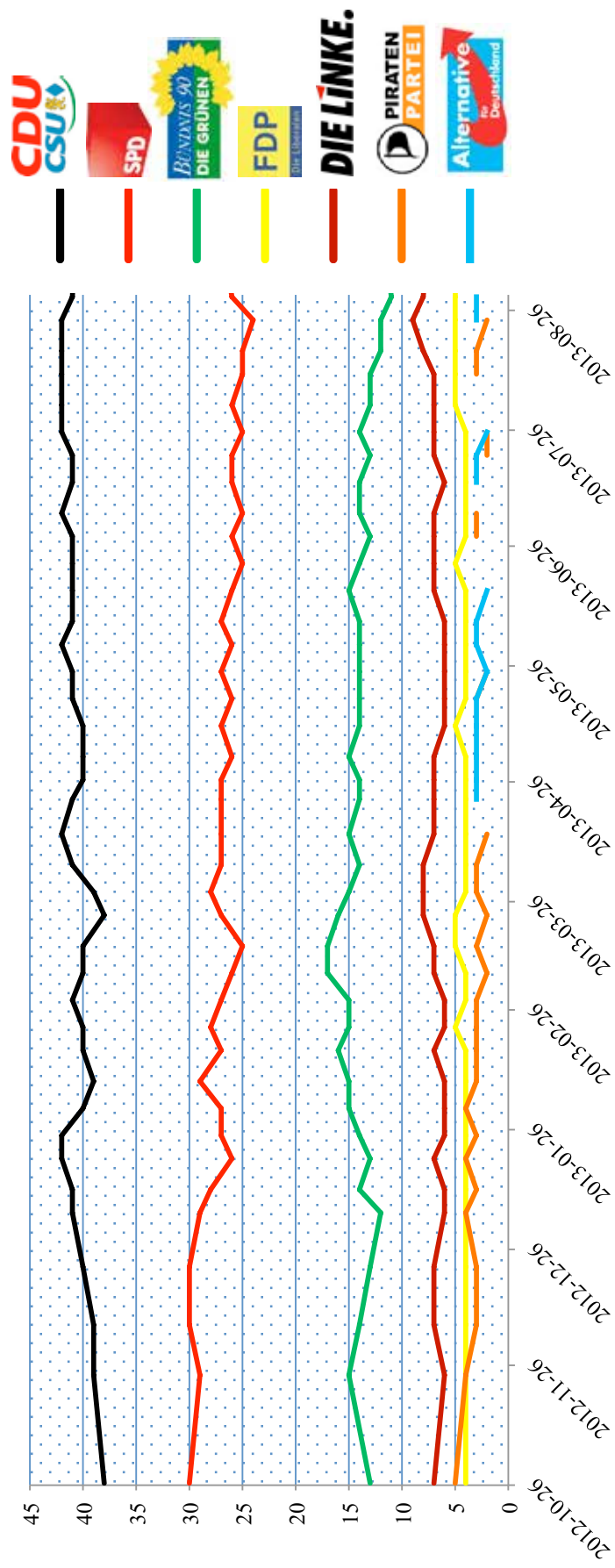
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**Polling results: federal elections**



Source: InfratestDimap