

German scholar in Vima: A coalition government between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats is the only way forward

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Cornelia Woll emphasizes in an interview that the two parties must first agree on urgent issues, such as defense spending, while giving Friedrich Merz a month to get rid of the constitutional debt brake.

The winner of the German elections, [Friedrich Merz](#), has a "window" of one month to get rid of the debt brake with a constitutional reform by the outgoing Parliament, estimates Cornelia Woll, president of the Hertie School at the University of Governance in Berlin.

The [German](#) academic believes that after the far-right emerged as the second largest parliamentary force, a coalition government between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats is the only way forward, and that the two parties should first agree on urgent issues, such as defense spending, before reaching an overall agreement on the government program.

In her interview with Vima, Dr. Woll notes that Merz's political flirtation with the far right failed and resulted in the strengthening of the Left.

Friedrich Merz declared that Europe must be “strengthened as soon as possible, so that step by step we can truly achieve independence from the USA.” Is this the answer to the economic and social problems of Germany and Europe?

Germany was shocked by what happened at the Munich Security Conference and by the rupture in the transatlantic relationship, which it insisted on more than other partners, such as France. The idea that you can no longer rely on the transatlantic relationship is common ground among the centrist parties, and this means that we in Europe must quickly offer an alternative. So Germany must invest in defense, which is very difficult with today's budget constraints.

Merz is pressing for an agreement on how much Germany can invest in defense. And that requires managing the complicated issue of the debt brake, which is a constitutional requirement. To change the constitution, a two-thirds majority is needed, which exists today, but will not exist when the new parliament is formed. So Merz has a “window” of one month to reform the constitution. He might use the outgoing parliament, in an extraordinary session, to get rid of the debt brake.

What are the prospects for a coalition agreement between the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD)? Could the Greens also be part of the government coalition?

The CDU/CSU and SPD coalition is actually the only option. Both parties know that they will have to agree. So they will have to compromise on certain issues, such as immigration, which Merz highlighted during the election campaign, moving ever closer to the demands of the far right, with which the SPD does not agree. So Merz will have to retreat and return to the center.

Another important issue for the SPD is basic income, which they tried to promote, but Merz was against it during the election campaign, so they will have to find a compromise on that. On other issues, such as investment in the German economy, I think there is overlap and I believe that - as happens in these kinds of negotiations - the parties will put pressure on each other but will reach a compromise by Easter, as Merz said.

As for the question of the Greens participating in a compromise, the answer is no as a political party. They don't need to sit at the table, they will be in the opposition and that is good because they will have a clear role. The Greens support some positions that the SPD also has, which are a legacy of the previous coalition government, and Merz should perhaps respect this, especially in their strongest points.

So without the Greens, the government will be stronger?

It is much more difficult to build a coalition with three partners than with two and there is a greater likelihood of conflicts. Of course, technically, the CDU and the CSU are two parties but they belong to the same family. There have been similar Grand Coalitions in the past. Two parties in the same government is manageable. Tensions are created, there are negative effects, but it is better than three. With three parties it is very difficult because there are limits to how far everyone can move and reactions are created that strengthen the far right and the far left as everyone in power looks the same and the electorate is given the impression that there are no other alternatives.

Will the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) support bills? Especially if there is a problem in the government regarding immigration?

This is the delicate issue. It was taboo for a center-right party to ask for votes from the far right. This taboo was broken when Friedrich Merz made his move on immigration. I suspect that breaking this taboo will be more difficult to do with a coalition government in which the SPD participates. I don't expect that to happen, but who knows, the government's term is long.

Did Merz's political flirtation with the AfD on immigration play a role in the election result, and in what direction? Did it bring votes to the CDU/CSU or did it backfire?

We are studying it, but there is the impression that it was a political gamble by Merz, who wanted to move further to the right in order to emphasize his difference from the outgoing government and adopt some of the far-right's arguments in the hope that he would win votes from the AfD. Obviously, this did not work, he did not get votes from the AfD. But it had an unexpected result. It significantly strengthened the votes of Die Linke (The Left), which emerged as the progressive bloc against this flirtation.

Die Linke reacted quickly by saying that it would never work with the CDU because of this flirtation. With its position, Die Linke achieved a large increase in its percentage and indirectly hurt the Greens because it took votes from the progressive space. The Greens were seen as a party in power that would be willing to co-govern even with the CDU, so all this hurt them.

AfD leader Alice Weidel has declared that her party will be the winner of the next election. Do you think there is a chance of that?

It is a scenario that other European countries are also facing. It often happens when the Center is not clearly visible, as in France where there is a government that is neither left nor right - the Macron government - and the opposition comes only from the extremes. In the next elections, what will be the alternative to those who will govern? We know that voters sometimes want change and rotation. It would be very dangerous if the only change and alternative were the extreme right.

The very difficult task that this government faces is to show that it understands the protest that one-fifth of the country expressed by voting for the AfD, and to address it without borrowing or copying the rhetoric of the far right.

In the map of the election results, we see that Germany is divided into east and west as in the era of the Wall, but now the far right prevails in the east.

On the map we see which party is first in each region. But it would be wrong if you thought that the far right is a phenomenon of the east and that something else is happening in the west. The far right was the second party in many regions in the west. The far right has more power in the countryside than in the urban centers. Also, in Bavaria, border areas in the east vote more for the far right. It is a phenomenon that is not explained exclusively in terms of east-west. It is explained in relation to the differences between urban centers and rural areas, in relation to gender and age (more young men vote for the AfD than young women).

The vote (for the far right) is reinforced by concerns about the economic future, about their prospects. This is something that needs to be addressed much more than the "flag" of immigration, which is also an important issue and requires an answer, but the most urgent issue is the economic one.