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The CDU Congress in Hannover

Angela Merkel still the leader of the party

The 25th Congress of the Christian Democratic Union, organized on 3-5 December 2012 in Hannover, proceeded according to the scenario. The delegates once more elected Chancellor Angela Merkel to be the chairperson of the party and the record support which she achieved (almost 98.0%) was widely commented in the media, also in Poland. Before the election campaign for the Bundestag election, which will take place in September, the Congress fulfilled its primary purpose: it showed that the party will remain on its previous course and that it is homogeneous and definitely supports A. Merkel.

The Federal Congress of the CDU (*der Bundesparteitag*) assembles at least once every two years and is the most important formal body of the party. Its powers include, among others, establishing the main political line of the party, passing the party's program and statute, as well as appointing the party's board: the chairperson, his or her deputies, the treasurer and the Secretary General, the further 7 members of the Presidium and the further 25 members of the Federal Board. The Congress is the most important opinion exchange platform between delegates from different parts of Germany. It is a body in which various political options within the party clash. However, fundamental political decisions are made by the board of the party and its faction in the Bundestag.

The choice of Hannover for the venue of the Congress was not coincidental. The state election in Lower Saxony, taking place on 20 January 2013, will constitute the last serious test of strength before the Bundestag election in September. The Congress of the Greens was supposed to take place there on November 16-18, as well as the SPD Convention on December 9.

The host of the CDU Congress was the Prime Minister of the Lower Saxony government, David McAlister. The situation in Lower Saxony resembles that at the federal level. The power belongs to the CDU-FDP coalition led by D. McAlister, the CDU is clearly leading in the election polls and the PM himself is the most popular politician in Lower Saxony. However, the local Christian democrats are anxiously scrutinizing the liberal FDP, which balances on the verge of the election threshold in election polls. Therefore, the election in Lower Saxony will be extremely important for all the parties, because the results of the state election may be later reflected in the election at the federal level.

The motto of the CDU Congress was “Stronger Germany. Opportunities for everyone!” (*Starkes Deutschland. Chancen für Alle!*). The leader of the party, Angela Merkel, referred to this motto when she emphasized that “the Christian democratic - liberal coalition has been the most effective government since the reunification, because the unemployment rate is the lowest since 1990 and the number of those keeping their job is the highest”. She listed the achievements of the government, such as: the highest expenditures for science and education, the battle against unemployment and successes in battling the crisis. She emphasized that thanks to her government “Germany after the crisis is stronger than before”. A. Merkel declared that her government plans on continuing the previous policy and will lead Germany “safely along a marked out path”. The Chancellor also referred to the challenges which Germany and Europe will face in the coming years. The most important task for Europe is to end the crisis in the eurozone: “This is why I will use all my strength so that Europe may survive the most important trial since the signing of the Treaty of Rome 55 years ago. (...) I want the euro to free itself from the crisis stronger than it was before”, apart from that - the growing competition on the part of the economies of China and India. Among the main challenges in internal policy she listed: writing off the country’s debts, a turnaround in energy policy (the CDU sees a great opportunity in making the technologies related to the modern methods of generating energy an “export hit” of Germany), demographic changes or the sphere of the Internet. Moreover, she once again expressed the need for more control over finance markets and declared a government intervention in relation to the pension reform for elderly women who gave birth to a child before 1992, in order to compensate for the time devoted to bringing the children up. She also joked about the difficult cooperation with the liberals within the coalition. In her speech, A. Merkel mainly talked about the principles that she will follow, without presenting any specific plan of action. The media considered the speech as moderate in tone and the delegates gathered in the hall accepted it with enthusiasm.

Another important objective of the Congress was to conduct an election to the party’s management bodies. As expected, A. Merkel was once again chosen to be the



chairperson of the party (she has been the leader continually since 2000), but the result she achieved was truly amazing: her candidacy was supported by 903 out of 922 of the voting delegates (19 were against, 3 abstained), which is 97.94%. This is the best result a CDU chairperson has achieved since the reunification of Germany in 1990 (in 2010 A. Merkel got 90.5% of the delegates' votes). Horst Seehofer, the chairperson of the twin CSU, jokingly described it as a "Cuban result" (*kubanisches Wahlergebnis*). There are several factors that contributed to the excellent result of A. Merkel: 1) the position of A. Merkel within the party is undisputed, 2) currently, there is no other politician in CDU popular enough to compete with her, 3) the potential party opposition focused in the right wing was "mollified" by previous arrangement (*Betreuungsgeld* and the unofficially established negative position of the party towards the equalization of taxes for homosexual partnerships and married couples); 4) on the eve of the Bundestag election campaign, the delegates wanted to show the unity of the party and strong support for its leader. The Chancellor was overtly satisfied with such a good result, however, it should not obscure the failures she suffered this year: the fall of Christian Wulff - the President she supported, the election of Joachim Gauck, the failure of the CDU in the state election in North Rhine-Westphalia and, consequently, the resignation of her close associate, Norbert Röttgen, from all his posts, as well as the constant criticism of the conservative wing of the CDU (and the CSU) towards the government's family policy. The Congress also accepted all five candidacies (previously there were four deputies elected, but an adequate amendment to the statute was adopted during the convention) for the deputy chairpersons of the party. These were: Volker Bouffier (83,4%), Julia Klöckner (92,9%), Armin Laschet (67,3%), Ursula von der Leyen (69%) and Thomas Strobl (68,3%). The results of the two female deputy chairpersons were especially stirring for the delegates. U. von der Leyen, the Minister of Labor in the Federal government, achieved a surprisingly poor result, most likely because of her support for the implementation of parity for women in companies, for which she was constantly criticized by the right wing of the party. Many were also surprised by the excellent result of J. Klöckner, being the youngest in the group, who is considered to be a potential successor of Chancellor A. Merkel. Even now she is nicknamed "Merkel's girl", as a reference to young Angela Merkel, who was called "Kohl's girl" in the first half of the 1990s. The fact that there are three women among the six most important posts in the party and two women among the six Prime Ministers of state governments delegated by the CDU testifies to the modernization which the German Christian democrats underwent within the last two decades. In the 1990s CDU was jokingly called "the Union of elderly gentlemen", where the only important woman in the party's Presidium was Rita Süßmuth. The need for the rejuvenation of the CDU and implementation of parity for women was discussed during the party congress in Karlsruhe (1995), without any relevant results.



The delegates gathered during the Congress also discussed the most important political problems. After a very balanced debate the Congress, with a majority of almost 2/3 of the delegates, passed a resolution opposing the equalization of taxes for married couples and homosexual partnerships. This was a great success of the conservative wing of the party. The CDU showed its support for the traditional family model. On the other hand, the open discussion concerning homosexuals points to a change of atmosphere within the conservative CDU. Also the non-confrontational formula concerning parity for women in companies was accepted. Moreover, it was declared that during the current term of the Bundestag, the government will take measures towards adopting a more beneficial method for calculating pensions for those women who gave birth to a child before 1992. The necessity to turn the attention of the party to immigrants was also pointed out in the discussion. It must be emphasized that the atmosphere of the debate was friendly.

The Congress was also concerned with the approaching election campaign. The chairperson of the twin CSU, Horst Seehofer, who supported the election of Angela Merkel with enthusiasm, declared strict cooperation of the two Christian democratic parties during the election campaign: "If we stand side by side and work hard, we can make 2013 a golden year in the history of Christian democrats." The chairperson of the parliamentary faction of the CDU in Bundestag, Volker Kauder, boasted about the successes of the party and the government and did not hesitate to attack the opposition parties - the SPD and the Greens. The party's Secretary General, Hermann Gröhe, discussed the main premises of the final resolution of the congress entitled "Stronger Germany. Opportunities for everyone!", which depicted the Christian democratic vision of the economic development of Germany based on the premises of social market economy (text of the resolution: <http://www.hannover2012.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/121205-beschluss-starkes-deutschland-chancen-fuer-alle.pdf>). The resolution was adopted unanimously.

25. The Federal Congress of the CDU has to be considered very successful for the party and especially for Chancellor A. Merkel. The CDU presented itself as a modern, homogeneous and victorious party, firmly supporting the policy of the government. An important message was sent to the voters: we are prepared for the election, our goals are strictly defined and we will achieve them under the leadership of A. Merkel. A party which, as a result of internal modernization, managed to rejuvenate its management and began focusing more attention on the issue of parity for women, this time noticed the need to open to the immigrants. At the same time, the delegates confirmed the importance of the traditional principles of the Christian democratic policy: family and social market economy. Critics accuse the Christian democrats of propagating actions aimed at stressing the unity of the party and support for the government. The excellent result of Angela Merkel reflects, in



their opinion, the lack of a serious alternative for her within the party. Self-satisfaction and even stagnation in the face of modern challenges was emphasized. Some observers point towards the CDU's loss of their specific profile and transformation into a typical party of power trying to maintain the status quo and avoid difficult challenges. On the other hand, during the debate concerning the equalization of taxes for married couples and partnerships, the critics noticed significant differences between the party's conservatists and modernists.

There are about 10 months left before the election. The CDU is clearly the leader in election polls, but the Christian democrats are worried about the poor results of the liberal FDP. Will it be possible to create a black-yellow coalition after the election? What will be the answer of the social democrats? On December 9, a convention of the SPD took place in Hannover, during which Peer Steinbrück was officially nominated for an SPD candidate for Chancellor. Taking into consideration the aversion of the left wing of the SPD towards him, P. Steinbrück achieved a very good result - 93.5% of support. However, the support for A. Merkel within her party is even greater.

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