

Election Lands Germany at a Crossroads at Which We All Have Arrived

By Conrad Black

The German elections confirmed that Germany, traditionally the most powerful country in Europe at least potentially, since Bismarck founded the German Empire in 1871, has arrived at a crossroads, bringing Europe and the Western Alliance with it.



The leader of the rightist Alternative for Germany, Alice Weidel, at Berlin, February 23, 2025. AP/Michael Probst

The chancellor-elect, Friedrich Merz, has won a great personal victory, as he was defeated for the leadership of the Christian Democratic Union by Angela Merkel 20 years ago, and retired from politics throughout

her four ultimately unsuccessful terms as federal German Chancellor. Herr Merz's successful return at the age of 69 is a vindication of his more conservative, less environmentally alarmist, more Alliance-minded, views.

For 40 years Herr Merz's chief political inspiration has been President Reagan. Germany has followed Italy and the United States and to some extent France in a move to the right, and in Germany, this is particularly emphasized by the dramatic success of the Alternative for Germany, an unambiguously conservative movement that appears to have gained 20 percent

of the popular vote but is still ostensibly ring-fenced by the other parties as a pariah with racist or even Nazi overtones.

Germany, along with Italy, Hungary, and probably soon France, are re-examining postwar Europe's heavy indulgence, for notorious historic reasons, of the working and agrarian classes: Economic growth and meritocratic advancement have been capped by an income redistribution and social safety network that placate the historically turbulent masses of Europe at the expense of economic growth.

The great German economy is stagnant and is wheezing under the weight of the Merkel and Scholz governments' appeasement of the climate change militants, represented in the political arena by Germany's powerful Green Party, fourth after the Christian Democrats, Alternative, and Social Democratic parties. On top of ideological matters, human rights have been raised as an issue in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, particularly by Vice President Vance in Europe last week.

That's when he questioned whether the ineffectuality of the principal European nations toward illegal immigration and the practices of arresting and charging people and overturning elections in some countries over peaceful dissent from official policy were compatible with the democratic principles on which the Western Alliance was found and conducted to victory in the Cold War. This has left much of Germany and other Western European countries bristling at the supposed American impudence over dictating what constitutes an acceptable level of personal and collective liberty. It is a reasonable question.

Another crossroads where the entire West must consider options is in the composition and direction of the Western Alliance. Francis Fukuyama, who appears to be still convalescing from his premature proclamation of the end of history nearly 35 years ago, has just written that President Trump has shamefully betrayed the cause of human freedom and shattered

the Western Alliance as a result of being mesmerized by President Putin.

Mr. Fukuyama's reflections are almost as ludicrous as those of the former national Intelligence director, James Clapper, eight years ago that Trump was an intelligence asset of the Kremlin, whose interventions had won the 2016 presidential election for him. Mr. Clapper was discredited partisan dishonoring a supposedly nonpolitical agency; Mr. Fukuyama has been a generally serious political and social commentator.

President Trump made it clear in his first term that the United States was not prepared to pay the defense bills for Germany opposite Russia while Germany made itself an energy vassal of Russia by becoming completely dependent on Russian natural gas. The incoming chancellor has promised that Germany will pay its full share for its defense.

The incoming chancellor appears likely to roll back some of Frau Merkel's more extreme and self-punitive energy measures, but he bristles at the impeachment of the quality of German and of much European democracy and appears to believe that Mr. Trump is prepared to give Putin more of Ukraine than he has been able to win on the battlefield, though there is no evidence of this.

During the Cold War, German neutralists were a constant contender in German politics and produced the argument that the United States should do most of the burden-sharing in defense of the West because Western Europe and Germany in particular did most of the risk-sharing, being on the edge of the Soviet bloc. This, of course, was specious, but up to a point the United States had put up with it in order to maintain its containment strategy and lead the West to a bloodless victory in the Cold War and Germany itself to reunification.

Germany owes its swift election as a full ally of its former

wartime enemies to the statesmanship of President Eisenhower, and its reunification to the statesmanship of President Reagan. Prime Minister Thatcher, President Mitterand, and General Secretary Gorbachev all opposed a united Germany.

The overreaction to Mr. Trump's recognition, unique among current Western leaders, that along with preventing a Russian reabsorption of Ukraine, our principal objective in the Ukraine war is to bring it to a swift and sufficiently satisfactory conclusion that we can induce Russia to take its distance from the potentially fatal embrace of Communist China.

Under the Merkel regime, of which incoming Chancellor Merz and Mr. Trump both substantially disapproved, it was an open question whether Russia or Germany would be a more reliable and useful ally for the United States.

It should be possible to sort all this out, get a peace in Ukraine that gives Mr. Putin enough to avoid complete humiliation, with Ukraine's security guaranteed by the principal Western European countries who, if tested, would be able to invoke the North Atlantic Treaty's Article V to gain American support, while the United States leads rebuilding efforts in Ukraine in exchange for exportation to it of strategic minerals. This was President Zelensky's idea.

In Germany the burning question is whether a two-party grand coalition will be possible. If on the final results, the only parties to meet the 5 percent threshold necessary for representation in the Bundestag are the Christian Democrats, Alternative for Germany, SPD, Greens, and the Link (effectively communists from the old East Germany), then such a coalition will be possible between the CDU and either the SPD or the Alternative.

A coalition with the outgoing SPD would seriously limit the new chancellor's ability to implement a conservative program.

A real effort should be made to see if the Alternative for Germany is sufficiently housetrained to be a coalition partner. The two parties have agreed on the great issue of immigration, and the most insightful comment of the German leaders on the Alliance has come from Alternative's co-leader, Alice Weidel.

Ms. Weidel remarked that the United States can have a docile Germany and pay most of its defense bills, or leave Germany to pay its own defense bills but live without the assurance that Germany will do what the United States tells it to do. This, too, is a choice that will have to be made at the crossroads where we have all arrived.

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