

# Germany: Christian Democrats and Greens form coalition government in Frankfurt

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The German state of Hesse and the city of Frankfurt were always a stronghold of the Greens and have played a trailblazing role in the history of the party. It was in Frankfurt that Joschka Fischer (later to lead the Greens in the federal coalition government) and his “Sponti” group engaged in street battles with the police. Here the radical ecologists around Jutta Ditfurth (the so-called “Fundis”—fundamentalists) set the tone for the Greens. Here, also, they were displaced by Fischer and the “Realos” (the pragmatists) inside the Green Party. And in 1985, it was here that Fischer was the first Green politician to take the oath of office and join the Social Democrat Party-led state government under Holger Börner.

Now again the formation of a so-called “black-green” (Christian Democratic-Green Party) coalition in Hesse’s banking metropolis has a symbolic character. Although Frankfurt is not the first municipality in which the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Greens have formed a coalition—they are already governing in Cologne, in other cities in North Rhine-Westphalia and in Kassel—never before has such a coalition sent such a political signal. Frankfurt is considered a model for future “black-green” collaboration at the state and federal level. As the *Frankfurter Rundschau* noted, what was “long a reality” is now an established fact: “No longer are the Greens a left-wing party, but they have arrived in the political centre ground.”

On May 9, the Greens’ local party organisation in Frankfurt voted by a large majority to sign a coalition contract with the CDU. The CDU party congress the previous day had already voted 100 percent to accept the contract. So after nearly six weeks of negotiations, the first black-green city government was agreed in Frankfurt. The mayor, Petra Roth (CDU), called it a “coalition of realism.”

Despite its losses in the March 26 local elections, the CDU had remained the strongest party, while the Greens increased their share to win 15.3 percent of the vote. The SPD experienced a dramatic collapse, ending with only a 24 percent share, their weakest result in postwar history. The Left Party won 6.6 percent.

Already in the run-up to the local elections, the CDU and Greens had held exploratory discussions over future collaboration. After the election, the Greens virtually threw themselves at the CDU’s feet. As soon as the election was over, Green Party leader Jutta Ebeling, who will head the city alongside Mayor Roth, said: “A coalition with the CDU would be a venture that one must accept, especially at the local level.... Otherwise one would be continuously in opposition.”

Five years earlier, a similar attempt had failed because Joschka Fischer (then foreign minister) did not want to burden the SPD-Green Party coalition in Berlin and because there was resistance among the Green’s rank and file. Frankfurt was governed informally in a four-way alliance of the CDU, SPD, the Greens and the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP).

Already in this constellation, the CDU and the Greens frequently took a similar line on many issues. For example, in relation to cultural policy, in an effort to save on wage costs the city government tried to privatise the Frankfurt *Schauspielhaus* (theatre) in opposition to considerable resistance from the workforce and the *betriebsrat* (works council). Larger privatisation projects, such as of garbage disposal and the municipal power supply company, likewise met with the agreement of the Greens.

The Greens were also not opposed in principle to the sale of Frankfurt’s tramway network to an American financial investor, which would then have been leased back to the city as part of a cross-border deal. This project failed in the end because of broad resistance from the general population.

The current coalition contract seamlessly continues the orientation of the CDU and the Greens to defending the interests of big business and the *Mittelstand* (medium-sized enterprises).

The Greens primarily gained admittance to the coalition through their agreement to lower business taxes, something that lies close to the heart of the CDU. Business taxes are the most important source of revenue for the municipalities. Through these tax breaks, the CDU and the Greens will ensure that the banks—many of which have their headquarters in Frankfurt and have recently announced record profits—and the corporations can keep up to an additional €52 million in their coffers. For smaller firms and the *Mittelstand* a support programme worth €30 million has been agreed.

The Greens justify all this with the claim that in return they have secured €35 million for school buildings maintenance and better equipment and €20 million to employ more personnel in child day-care facilities. How all this is to be financed, however, remains unclear, since the city’s tax receipts will be reduced by the lowering of business taxes. Either ordinary citizens will have to pay for it in other ways, or the projects will “unfortunately not be carried out, due to financial difficulties.”

In the area of security, the Greens have agreed to a further favourite project of the CDU, the introduction of a “volunteer police service.” Starting from 2007, some 90 volunteer policemen, trained on high-speed courses, will start patrolling the city.

The Greens have also abandoned their environmental pretensions. A very visible expression of this was the loud protests of environment groups during the Greens' membership conference. Many felt betrayed by the party for which they had laboured hard over decades of election campaigns. Despite their promise to the contrary in the election campaign, the Greens have voted to accept the "Riederwaldtunnel," a motorway tunnel project to the east of Frankfurt.

A mutual pact of silence was agreed on the central environmental question in Frankfurt—the development of a new runway for Frankfurt Airport in the middle of a forest—which has been ferociously disputed for years and where the Greens had previously taken a rejectionist stance. The CDU will make no public statements in favour of it, and the Greens will not publicly oppose it—and the building of the runway will be left to take its course.

The Greens and CDU are preparing further attacks on social spending with their demand for strict budget reorganization, for more "self-reliance and responsibility" and against "social spending transfers."

In CDU circles, the association with the Greens in Frankfurt is being welcomed. After a black-green coalition failed to materialise following last September's federal elections, and in the spring in Baden-Württemberg despite some initial advances, the new CDU-Green municipal authority in Frankfurt is considered a welcome symbol of the extended coalition possibilities of the CDU should its alliance with the Social Democrats fail in Berlin.

According to CDU bundestag (federal parliament) deputy Hermann Gröhe, who in the 1990s regularly met with his fellow Green bundestag members in order to explore the possibilities of collaboration, one should not underestimate the developments in Frankfurt. He is pleased that "following their loss of power the Greens have not moved to the left but have oriented to the centre."

The Hesse state premier, Roland Koch (CDU), also sees areas of agreement with the Greens in matters of principle, like the rejection of "social spending transfers," "respect for the individual" and the demand for "more self-reliance and responsibility," for example in the fields of private health and retirement provisions.

The collaboration of the CDU and the Greens in Frankfurt is all the more remarkable since the CDU in the city and especially in Hesse stand on the far right wing of the party. When Roland Koch won the state elections in 1999 with an anti-foreigner campaign against granting immigrants dual nationality he was fully supported by the Frankfurt CDU.

The CDU regional organization in Hesse was shaped by Alfred Dregger, the most prominent representative of the "Stahlhelmfraktion" ("steel helmet faction"), the extreme conservative wing of the CDU. He coined the slogan "liberty instead of socialism" employed by the CDU in its 1976 federal election campaign. In the 1970s, he was a vehement proponent of the *Berufsverbot* (employment ban), which prevented members of the German Communist Party and other radical organisations from being employed as civil servants, including in teaching jobs.

On May 8, 1995, Dregger signed the appeal "Against Forgetting," together with the right-wing extremists Jörg Haider,

Gerhard Frey and Franz Schönhuber, which was directed against characterizing May 8, 1945—the capitulation of Nazi Germany—"one-sidedly as a day of liberation," since on this day the "suppression in the east" had also begun.

A pupil of Dregger for many decades was Manfred Kanther, a leading member of the Hesse CDU. As an uncompromising advocate of "law and order" as federal interior minister under Helmut Kohl, he acquired the soubriquet of the "black sheriff." Chiefly responsible for the party finance scandal that engulfed the CDU in Hesse, he showed no scruples when it came to evading the law.

The Greens justify their coalition with this right-wing party by claiming that in Frankfurt the CDU are of a different milieu, and that much is in flux. But it is the Greens, above all, who are changing. The former party of protest has never questioned the basis of capitalist society, but initially dreamed about the "taming" of capitalism, in which the destruction of the environment, the danger of war and other excrescences could be controlled.

In the meantime, the former protesters have become well-off physicians, attorneys, architects, teachers, small businessmen or successful "eco-developers." The Greens are a party of the better-off *Mittelstand* and compete with the CDU and FDP for the same layers of voters. Their present collaboration with the CDU is the logical consequence of their social and political transformation.

The new city administration in Frankfurt serves as yet another important symbol. The CDU has ensured that the departmental head of construction, an FDP representative, is to remain in office while the social democratic departmental heads must go. Although no one is yet speaking of a "black-green-yellow" (CDU-Green-FDP) coalition in Frankfurt, for the Christian Democrats this could become important next September. Friedbert Pflüger, their leading candidate in the Berlin city elections, only stands a chance of displacing the SPD-Left Party coalition of Mayor Klaus Wowereit (SPD) if he were to receive the support of the Greens and the FDP in the German capital.



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