

# German Greens prepare for coalition with CDU

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Last weekend, the Green Party held a congress in the east German city of Erfurt. The aim of the congress was to prepare the party for a series of crucial state, European and federal elections due to take place in the "super election year" of 2009.

Following the formation in Hamburg last April of the first-ever state coalition between the Greens and the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Greens have reacted to the rapidly worsening economic crisis with a further swing to the right. At its Erfurt congress, the party made clear its intent to seek a coalition with the CDU at a federal level.

The most notable event at the congress was the election of Cem Özdemir as the new chairman of the Greens. Özdemir has sat for the Greens in the European parliament since 2004. Previously active in federal politics for the Greens, he was forced to resign from all of his positions in July 2002 following a corruption scandal involving business lobbyists and the CDU politician Moritz Hunzinger. He calls himself a "pragmatic Green" and is aligned with the right wing of the party.

At the congress, Özdemir was elected party chairman with 79.2 percent of the delegates' votes. Claudia Roth was re-elected co-chair with 82.7 percent of the vote. By a margin of 92 percent, the delegates voted to designate two leading party figures, Jürgen Trittin (former federal environment secretary) and Renate Künast (former consumer protection minister), to serve as the party's frontline duo for the federal elections in 2009.

Özdemir is determined to prepare the Greens for a coalition with the CDU. He told one German newspaper: "It could well be that in certain cases the content of Green policies is more compatible with

black [the CDU] than with red [the Social Democratic Party—SPD]." The main condition is that the CDU change its policy regarding nuclear power.

At the congress, Özdemir insisted that the Greens had to re-enter government because only in that way could it exercise responsibility. At the same time, he assured delegates that there was no reason to be ashamed of the years spent by the party in coalition at the national level with the SPD. These years (1998-2005) had proven productive, according to Özdemir.

In fact, the years of the SPD-Green coalition saw an unprecedented attack on the post-war German welfare state, with disastrous consequences for millions of ordinary people.

The new party head is the first chairman of a major German political party with a foreign background. Based on his Turkish descent and his occasional radical ecological rhetoric, a number of commentators interpreted his election and the party congress as a whole as a shift to the left. However, the opposite is the case.

This was made clear by further comments by Özdemir to the press. On November 10, he told the *Hamburger Morgenpost*: "We do not have problems with the CDU if the content and tone are right. We saw that in the state of Baden-Württemberg, where we were quite willing to enter a coalition.... We have the aim of recruiting our voters from different milieus. We also want to provide a political home for voters with conservative values, and to that extent we are also in competition with the CDU."

The Green congress also represented a shift to the right on other questions—above all, with regard to the long-discussed issue of military deployments in general and the involvement of the German army in Afghanistan in particular. The resolution adopted by

the congress states: "Under certain conditions, military interventions can provide a necessary contribution to restraining violence, preventing violence and consolidating the peace."

Having already supported missions by the German army in Kosovo and Afghanistan during its federal coalition with the SPD, the Green Party has now made clear it supports military deployments as a legitimate tool of foreign policy.

In 1998, the price for entry into the coalition with the SPD, then led by Gerhard Schröder, was the Greens' agreement on preparations for the Kosovo war. A future government coalition with the CDU requires that the Greens ditch any remaining pacifist rhetoric, and this is precisely what the delegates in Erfurt did.

Although the world economy is gripped by the worst economic crisis since the founding of the Federal Republic, confronting millions with unemployment and poverty, these problems barely played a role at the Green Party congress. The party's answer to the crisis of capitalism is to attempt to give the system a more ecologically friendly face.

One of the key points decided by the congress was a resolution to completely switch electricity production to renewable energy sources by the year 2030. Auto taxes are also to be aligned with carbon dioxide output. Under the slogan of the "Greens' New Deal," the party proposes to make €15 billion available for the promotion of alternative forms of energy and the reconstruction of the German railway system. At the same time, the party proposes a few minor regulations on financial markets aimed at preventing the most blatant forms of speculation.

The Greens expressed little interest in the impending collapse of the automobile industry and other sectors of the economy. Instead, as Jürgen Trittin stressed, the main aim of the party was to turn the federal election of 2009 into a referendum on the future of nuclear power.

These policies are entirely in accord with the social layers the party represents. A number of studies have revealed that the average income of a Green Party member exceeds that of any other political party. Jürgen Fücks, head of the Greens' Heinrich Böll Institute, gave an interview to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* last week in which he boasted: "From a statistical point of view, we are the party of the better-earners.... The [free market] FDP [Free Democratic Party] is not the

main enemy on all questions. There are areas where the Greens and [neo-] liberals are quite close to one another."

With their party congress, the Greens have prepared the way for a coalition with the CDU or the FDP. Against the background of the severest economic crisis since the end of the Second World War, any such coalition would invariably carry out a policy of budget cuts and austerity on behalf of big business far exceeding that implemented by the former SPD-Green coalition.



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