

Greens and Social Democrats in Stuttgart, Germany, seal coalition pact

Dietmar Henning, Peter Schwarz
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On April 27, the Greens and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Baden-Württemberg presented their coalition agreement to the general public. Following recent state elections, the Greens are set to fill the post of prime minister in the south-western German federal state for the first time in their history.

The coalition agreement promises “new policies and, above all, a new political style”. The focus is actually on style. The agreement makes clear that in terms of actual policy little will change in the state, which has been governed by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) for the past 58 years. Numerous high-sounding goals are formulated within the treaty’s 83 pages, but it remains remarkably vague as far as their practical implementation is concerned.

Priority is given to four areas of policy. According to the introduction of the coalition agreement, these are: “Ecological and social modernisation of the economy and society, creation of better educational opportunities for all, sustainable consolidation of the state budget, and more public participation in decision making”.

The term “environmental and social modernisation of the economy” amounts to a curtsy to the business lobby, although embellished with a few green trimmings. The new government is strongly committed to promoting Baden-Württemberg as a leading industrial and business centre, and promises medium-sized and large companies total support.

“Pushing for business start-ups”, “Strengthening the small firm sector”, “Revamping funding programmes”, “Investing in research and development” and “Promoting modern and transparent foreign business” are some of the sub-headings in the contract.

The big automotive concerns—dominated by Daimler, Porsche and Bosch in Baden-Württemberg, and for decades setting the political agenda there—have nothing to fear from the new government. Nils Schmid (SPD), set to assume the key position of finance and economy minister in the new government, assured them, “Every Baden-Württemberg state government obviously has petrol in its blood”.

The coalition treaty is explicitly committed to “forging close cooperation among all companies, business associations and chambers of commerce, trade unions and other stakeholders”, and offers them active dialogue and constructive cooperation. According to the treaty, this will prove “a geographic advantage for our state”.

Education policy is set out under the heading “Education for all”. But apart from the abolition of student tuition fees of €500 per semester, the agreement says little. The coalition partners

claim that “free service (is) important” when it comes to childcare. However, the Greens rejected abolition of kindergarten fees because the state could not afford it. According to the *Spiegel* magazine, the Greens consider such ideas examples of “social democratic excess”.

Boris Palmer, the Greens’ city mayor in Tübingen, told the magazine *Greenpeace* during the coalition negotiations that everything “basically comes down to restraining demands for spending—and the SPD is more favourably disposed to spending, than I’d like them to be”.

Reduction of teaching posts is also part of the Greens-SPD agenda. During the coalition negotiations, the two parties considered abolishing 1,500 teaching jobs. The agreement fails to mention a concrete number in this regard. However, in order to cover the necessary financing of additional spending on schools, the agreement states, “we will use budget resources that will be available due to falling pupil numbers”.

The coalition treaty promises an end to staffing cuts and, instead, increased employment in only one particular sector of the public services: the police force. Under the heading “Protecting security and freedom”, SPD and the Greens pledge to “improve police presence in the region” and “ensure that sufficient numbers of junior police will be trained well in advance of their requirement”.

The real core of the coalition agreement is found in the chapter entitled “Sustainable Budgets”. All the coalition’s commitments are to be subject to this goal.

“After 57 years of CDU government, the country is facing huge indebtedness”, notes the agreement. “In the previous legislative period alone, approximately €11 billion in additional loans were contracted to cover budgetary requirements and participatory interests in the EnBW (power company) and LBBW (state bank)”. If future pension obligations and debts tabled for inclusion in the budget are added together, “Baden-Württemberg shows a record deficit—the worst of Germany’s 13 most densely populated states”.

The new government is fully committed to observing the so-called “debt brake” imbedded in the Constitution, as well as eventually attaining a “zero level of structural debt in the state budget”. To this end, all ministerial departments are to be assigned mandatory savings targets in a “Financial Plan 2020” programme.

These savings measures will focus on jobs in the public service. “We will subject the tasks of state administration to a comprehensive review”, runs the wording of the treaty. It continues, “Our primary goals are a citizen-oriented

administration, reduction of bureaucracy, and regulation of standards. We expect that these revisions and new provisions will amount to a further significant contribution to medium-term fiscal consolidation”.

The SPD and Greens are largely in agreement on these issues. Despite being the strongest party, the Greens have left the key ministries to the SPD, which is more experienced in government affairs and better prepared to oversee cuts in social services. Besides the “prestige ministry” of economy and finance, the SPD will occupy the ministries of the interior, justice, labour, education, culture, and European affairs and integration. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper describes the future interior minister, Reinhold Gall, as “a conservative of the old school still operating in the Baden-Württemberg SPD”.

While the Social Democrats are dealing with the arduous business of government, the Greens will be more active in promoting the “new political style”—the green varnishing on the right-wing programme. They will take over the prime minister’s office, as well as the ministries of the environment, transport, consumer protection and research. They also receive a post as “state councillor for civil society and civic participation”. Franz Untersteller, the future environmental and energy industries minister, will be responsible for, among other things, the energy group EnBW, which is 45 percent owned by the state and supplies half of its electricity from nuclear energy.

The only issue on which the SPD and Greens are not in agreement is the project “Stuttgart 21”. At issue is disagreement over the construction of the Stuttgart central railway station. Opponents of the building effort mobilised public outrage over the high cost of the new construction project, its environmental consequences, and the arrogance of the ruling establishment in promoting it. The Greens joined cause with this protest wave, riding it to the top of the popularity polls. Now they are finding it difficult to tactfully dispense with the enthusiasm they once professed having.

The SPD supports the new central railway station, having strong economic interests in the project. They argue that abandoning the project would cost the state more in compensation for existing contracts than its contributions to the total construction costs.

In the coalition treaty, the two sides resolve the issue by calling for a referendum on the matter, which they promised voters during the elections campaign. However, the state constitution requires such a high turnout for this kind of referendum (one third of all eligible voters must reject the project), that a successful outcome for the protest movement is considered virtually impossible.

The Greens still hope that the project will prove to be too expensive or too inefficient in the so-called “stress test”, adopted by an arbitration commission led by Heiner Geissler (CDU). “If the total cost of the Stuttgart 21 project—including costs resulting from the stress test and arbitration proposal—exceed the agreed cost cap of €4.5 billion”, says the coalition agreement, “the state will not contribute to the additional costs”. This puts the decision about whether or not to proceed with the project largely in the hands of the railway department.

Winfried Hermann has taken over Stuttgart’s ministry of transport in order to push through the controversial project. The

Green member of the federal parliament formerly headed the parliament’s transport committee, where he cultivated good relations with the two main proponents of the project: railway director, Rüdiger Grube, and Federal Transport Minister Peter Ramsauer (Christian Social Union). The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented: “Both felt they had always been treated fairly (by Hermann) and have already congratulated him”.

Voters, who were promised a genuine change of policy after the Greens had assumed government, are in for a shock. But whoever is familiar with the background of the Greens and future Prime Minister Winfried Kretschmann should not be surprised.

Kretschmann, who describes himself as “an avowed Catholic” and advocate of “conservative values”, was among the leaders of the Eco-libertarians in the 1980s, a right-wing section within the Green Party. The Eco-libertarians espoused “ecological humanism” and were heavily influenced by anthroposophy (spiritual philosophy of Rudolf Steiner). They strictly rejected socialist ideas, advocating instead an ecologically based market economy. In the name of “subsidiarity” (local government), they demanded the withdrawal of the state from the social field, and criticised social movements of the twentieth century for spawning a “mentality of dependency”.

Some of the leading Eco-libertarians later moved to the Free Democratic Party. Their main theorist, Thomas Schmid, began his political career in Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Joschka Fischer’s anarchist group, and is now editor of Axel Springer’s right-wing national newspaper, *Die Welt*. Schmid is still close friends with Kretschmann.

Except for the faces and party colours, little change can be expected in Baden-Württemberg, despite the landslide in the parliamentary elections.



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