

German Christian Democrats' election programme calls for increased state powers

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On Monday, the leaders of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union government parties presented their election programme in Berlin. Chancellor and CDU Chair Angela Merkel and CSU leader Horst Seehofer gave brief statements about the 67-page document and affirmed their political unity at a joint press conference.

All of the parties represented in the Bundestag (parliament) have now presented their programmes for September's general election.

The most significant thing about the CDU/CSU programme is that it does not for the most part differ from those of the other parties. Asked on Monday what distinguished the CDU/CSU manifesto from those of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, ARD correspondent Tina Hassel replied, "Good question. The consensus is undoubtedly greater than the differences."

Under the heading, "For a Germany in which we live well and happily," the so-called "Union" parties said they aimed to achieve full employment by 2025. They wrote that they wanted to cut taxes for average income earners by 5 billion euros in total. They pledged to gradually abolish the "solidarity surcharge" over the period 2020 to 2030. They also called for a "Baukindergeld"—a government grant scheme to help families to build homes. Under this scheme, a family that buys a property will receive a yearly subsidy of 1,200 euros per child over a period of ten years. The manifesto also pledged to increase child benefits and children's tax allowances.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) election programme similarly pledges to abolish by 2020 the solidarity surcharge (introduced in 1991 following German reunification) and provide relief for those with mid-level incomes by imposing a higher tax rate on

people with incomes above 76,200 euros instead of the current level of 54,000 euros. In place of the CDU/CSU's Baukindergeld, the SPD is calling for the introduction of a "family tax rate" as an additional option to taxing spousal income.

These social promises, which can also be found in the election platforms of the Greens and the Left Party, are all subject to an "affordability criterion." They are essentially a cover for a massive increase in military spending and a tightening up of domestic security. This is clearly reflected in the almost identical calls for the "recruitment of 15,000 new police officers" and better police equipment and training.

As in the SPD election programme, military rearmament stands at the centre of the CDU/CSU programme. This is justified with the words: "The world seems to be out of joint in many places. Authoritarian state systems are on the rise, seemingly stable states are broken."

Even in Germany's "neighbourhood," the platform goes on to say, the territorial integrity of Ukraine is "jeopardized by Russian aggression." Noting that the new American administration has not yet defined its position on many foreign policy issues, it adds, "The times when we could completely rely on others are quite a way past."

Then comes the crucial formulation: "We Europeans must take our fate into our own hands more consistently than before. That is why the CDU and CSU want a strong, self-confident and dynamic Europe: A Europe able to protect its interests and meet its international responsibilities; A Europe that can also defend freedom, security and prosperity..."

After a few clichés about the EU as a "peace project" that emerged as "the lesson of the disastrous man-made catastrophes of the First and Second World Wars," it

states: “We must understand our shared geo-strategic responsibility for freedom and peace and for dealing with conflicts in our neighbourhood. That is why the EU engaged in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and why we are fighting together for the Paris climate accord.”

This reference to the defence of the Paris climate agreement is directed against the US government and the decision of the Trump administration to withdraw from the agreement. Growing opposition to Washington also shapes the following point in the programme: “We support the proposal for a European Defence Union and a European Defence Fund. We are committed members of NATO and work for its success. But the EU must arm itself independently if it wants to survive. Europe must provide an effective security guarantee for the internal and external security of its member states.”

Then follows a demand for the defence of fortress Europe. “Europe must protect its external borders effectively against illegal migration, strengthen the Frontex border protection agency and complete the European asylum system. Until the protection of EU external borders works, we will maintain internal border controls.” This is linked to the establishment of a European police force. “The EU urgently needs a better exchange of information between the security services of its member states,” the platform states.

The SPD, the Greens and the Left Party agree with this expansion of the state’s powers at home and abroad. Their criticisms of the Union parties are directed against its social programme, which they call excessive and unrealistic. The SPD, the Greens and the Left Party are attacking the Union parties from the right.

Martin Schulz, SPD chairman and the party’s candidate for chancellor, described the Union parties’ election programme as a “superficial mish-mash of ideas” that was completely unrealistic and could not be for paid for. The promise to bring full employment to Germany by the year 2025 was not to be financed and therefore irresponsible, he said.

The Left Party also accused the Union parties of “unaffordable electoral promises.” Party leader Katja Kipping declared, “All these promises are blank cheques that will bounce after the election.” The CDU/CSU manifesto lacks any information on funding, she said.

This right-wing criticism of the Union parties makes clear that there is no choice in the Bundestag election in September. On the important question of increasing the internal and external powers of the state, all of the parliamentary parties agree. In any case, all of the parties are already working together in various coalitions at state and local level. The time when workers could vote for better living conditions and social justice is long gone.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) is the only party to advance a socialist programme in the Bundestag elections. It declares openly that poverty, oppression and war can be overcome only if their cause, capitalism, is eliminated. The SGP is not seeking ministerial office in an SPD or “left” government, but fights for the establishment of an international movement of the working class to expropriate the large banks and corporations and reorganize society in accordance with egalitarian, i.e., socialist, principles.



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