

# Germany: SPD leadership officially explores entering coalition with the Christian Democrats

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In January, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) will begin official soundings with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) on the formation of a new federal government. This was agreed unanimously by the party presidium and executive, SPD chairman Martin Schulz announced at a press conference in Berlin on Friday.

The talks about forming a coalition are to proceed quickly and, if possible, be completed by the second week of January. On January 14, a special SPD party conference could then decide on the start of coalition negotiations with the CDU/CSU.

In addition to Schulz and parliamentary group leader Andrea Nahles, the team holding the talks will be joined by the six deputy party chairmen (Olaf Scholz, Natascha Kohnen, Malu Dreyer, Torsten Schäfer-Gümbel, Manuela Schwesig and Ralf Stegner); the new general secretary, Lars Klingbeil; Lower Saxony's state premier, Stephan Weil; the North Rhine-Westphalia SPD chair, Michael Groschek; and the Saarland state vice-premier, Anke Rehlinger.

Schulz once again wanted to commit himself to "no special form of government." However, there are many indications that the SPD would also prefer a renewed grand coalition to other models, such as a cooperation coalition, which was last brought into play by some Social Democrats, or a minority government. Weil and Rehlinger were brought into the talks because they have already negotiated grand coalitions at state level this year, Schulz said.

At the heart of Schulz's considerations is the call for a "stable government." After the failure of the "Jamaica" coalition negotiations (named after the party colours of the Christian Democrats, Free Democrats

and Greens), the SPD wants to "contribute to the formation of a government and a stable government for this country." What the "Jamaica parties have squandered" must now be "fixed in a rational form," according to Schulz, so that "the Federal Republic can be governed stably in the foreseeable future." What was needed is a government that guarantees "cohesion internally and internationally."

The *World Socialist Web Site* has already analysed the developments to which the SPD leadership is responding. Originally, it had opposed the continuation of the unpopular collaboration with the CDU/CSU, mainly for fear of the development of a leftward movement in the working class. After the failure of the Jamaica coalition talks, and under the pressure of the social and political crisis, the SPD has done an about turn. Now, it is pushing to enter government in order to force through the ruling class's right-wing programme, and to thwart the growing opposition in the working class with the help of the unions—in the past week, thousands of workers have demonstrated and taken strike action at Siemens, Air Berlin, Thyssen-Krupp, and Amazon.

Despite hollow phrases about spending more on education and social affairs, Schulz left no doubt that the SPD is preparing to form the most right-wing federal government since the end of the Second World War. "It is clear that we need sustainable solutions in migration policy," he declared threateningly. And further: "That our army has to be better equipped, that is absolutely necessary."

Moreover, Schulz demanded that the European Union (EU) must be "reformed" and "promoted."

What that means was made clear at the EU summit on

Thursday and Friday in Brussels. The EU foreign ministers celebrated the PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) defence pact, marking the official launch of the European Defence and Military Union. This is intended to make the EU more independent of the United States militarily and to enable military interventions independent of NATO. EU Council President Donald Tusk praised the initiative as “bad for our enemies.”

The project of a European military union under German leadership has long been pushed for by the Social Democrats. In its election programme, the SPD was the only party to call for the creation of a European army. In the past few weeks, the acting foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel (SPD), renewed the demand for an independent European military policy under German leadership in a keynote address at the Foreign Policy Forum of the Körber Foundation.

In a comment published in the current issue of *Der Spiegel* under the headline “Desire for homeland,” Gabriel calls upon his party to adopt the political programme of the extreme right in order to push through the return of German militarism. He demands that reactionary political conceptions such as “Identität” (“identity”), “Leitkultur” (“leading culture”) or “Heimat” (“homeland”) should not only move the political right but also social democrats. He explicitly states that the decisive question was not the “redistribution of wealth” but “cultural issues and the question of identity.”

For its part, the Left Party has once again demonstrated that its support for the right-wing course of the SPD. Parliamentary group leader Dietmar Bartsch commented on Schulz’s press conference with the words: “I think that enough has been said. There is now a clear mandate from the voters. ... We should act in the German Bundestag [parliament], and they may now get it together and present a coalition agreement.” Just a week ago, he welcomed Gabriel’s great power speech: “We support Sigmar Gabriel and would like to see that quickly become government policy.”



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