

# Who will run Germany – and the EU?

As always the mainstream UK media ignore the gripping power struggles going on in Germany and the EU. You would have thought the media's enthusiasm for all things EU and the geographical proximity of these countries to us would merit some news and analysis to balance the intensive coverage they give to the USA across the vast Atlantic.

Three years ago Mrs Merkel announced she was standing down as Leader of the CDU, the largest German party in the government coalition which had supplied her as Chancellor of Germany since 2005. She implied her successor would become the CDU's candidate for Chancellor in the 2021 general election, though Mrs Merkel intended to remain in the all powerful number one job for the time being.

The party duly elected AKK in 2018 who presided over poor election results and then decided she would resign in February 2020 before ever fighting a general election to try to become Chancellor. The CDU agreed to hold a new contest to choose a replacement this spring. The virus interceded making it difficult to hold a party conference for the traditional in person voting. The election was put off until December 4th. This date has now also been cancelled, with the lead candidate complaining the further delay is to damage his chances, whilst the party establishment claims the further delay is another CV 19 inspired move. They apparently do not wish to turn to the obvious alternative of a postal ballot.

There are three main candidates for this all important post. After two women in a row as Leader and with the transfer of Mrs Von Der Leyen from the German Cabinet to the role of President of the Commission, this time all three are men. Norbert Rottgen is a self styled centrist and keen enthusiast for a strong EU along German federal lines. He is currently chairman of the Federal Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. Armin Lashet is another so called centrist who can also accept Merkel's drift to the Greens and the left. He is also a strong Catholic which affects his political views and is Minister President of North Rhine Westphalia. Friedrich Merz is said to be the current front runner. He moved into the private sector some years ago, and is more right of centre than Merkel or the other two candidates.

The media may have sensationalised and trivialised the campaign, or the candidates may be doing that for themselves. Mr Lashet has been criticised for his opposition to gay marriage, though he now has a deputy on his ticket to soften this. He has also attracted hostile attention for his attitude to girls under 14 wearing headscarves. He is thought to have handled the pandemic poorly in his state. Mr Merz has also been criticised for one of his answers on homosexuality, and has his critics for supporting leitkultur, the promotion of German culture for migrants. He claims to be an economic liberal who has in the past attracted flak for his wealth and for flying himself around in his own plane. In the wings stands Mr Soder, leader of the Bavarian CSU sister party and Prime Minister of Bavaria, who might fancy putting himself forward to be Chancellor were the votes at the general election to

give him a chance or more importantly were he able to do a deal with whoever does become leader of the far larger CDU party. He is the most popular candidate for Chancellor in some polls,

The polls show that during Germany's response to the virus – which has gone better than other large European countries – the CDU have risen , with the Eurosceptic AFD falling back to around 10%. The Greens have sustained ratings close to 20%, leading people to assume there would have to be a CDU/CSU/Green government next time. It is a moot point whether the much lower virus impact came from better actions by government or from a different response of people in Germany to the threat or even just a different pattern of virus transmission but it has helped the CDU as the lead party in government.

Mr Merz thinks that a more authentic Conservative message would help win back lost votes and contain the electoral damage to the CDU from the Greens and AFD. His two other opponents are more willing to praise green policies and prepare for a different coalition. Whilst there are different degrees of EU enthusiasm all three will wish to see Germany as the leading country in the EU. All three would assume good lines of communication and influence directly into the Commission with their former Cabinet colleague or party friend in control there. It is surely time for the mainstream media to show us these people and interview them about their intentions were they to come to power.