

The German Traffic Light Coalition Faces Numerous Challenges

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After brief and discreet coalition talks, Olaf Scholz became Germany's ninth Chancellor and the fourth from the Social Democratic party. Scholz will head a tripartite coalition, the first of its kind in the history of the Republic (at the federal level) – “the traffic light coalition,” referring to the colors of the constituent parties. The starting position of the Scholz government will not grant it one hundred days of grace: the fourth wave of COVID-19 has hit Germany, and in foreign affairs the Chancellor will have to deal with the refugee crisis on the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarus border, and with the crisis between Ukraine and Russia, which threatens to deteriorate into a military conflict. In the shadow of the outgoing Merkel era, which will accompany the new Chancellor at least at the outset of his term, the platform of the incoming government states that Israel's security is part and parcel of the country's approach. It also stresses support for talks towards a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the 1967 borders, criticizes the ongoing threats to Israel and terror against its civilians, and calls for a halt to unilateral moves that hinder the peace efforts.

The fundamental points of the traffic light coalition formed in Germany are ambitious. Still, the very fact of their formulation is an achievement, given that they involve three (center left) parties that speak to different sections of the population. From that aspect, each of the partners can credit itself with achievements in areas over which they fought in the elections. The motto of the coalition agreement, “Dare More Progress,” and the sub-heading indicate an alliance of freedom (position of the Liberal party), justice (Social Democrats), and sustainability (Green party). The intention is not to adopt a policy of small steps. The absence of the reforms that characterized the outgoing government is supposed to be replaced by a program to modernize the economy/industry “unlike anything that Germany has seen in the last hundred years” (according to the leader of the Liberal party and the Treasury Minister).

The test of the new government will be its ability to balance the ecological/climate crisis and the continuation of economic prosperity, so as to ensure the well-being that German society enjoyed in the Merkel years.

The German public itself is not expecting too much change, that is, innovation accompanied by prices that affect their standard of living, and are not ready for the paradigm shift that they will have to accept if the new government seeks to comply with the supreme target of the Paris Agreement – a temperature rise of one and a half degrees – and its consequences. Some of the objectives set by the government, including 80 percent green energy and 14 million electric vehicles (there are currently 400,000) by the end of the decade do not at present seem achievable in view of the government's promise to promote ambitious plans in housing, health, pensions, and other costly issues. This is accompanied by their commitment to budgetary restraint. It is not clear where the resources needed to realize these objectives will come from.

A prominent change with respect to the previous government, which bears the Green party stamp, is in the field of human rights and policy on arms exports. The seventh section of the platform is titled "Germany's Responsibility to Europe and the World," and involves an ambitious objective that echoes the lengthy deliberations about Germany's involvement and investment in the international arena. Notwithstanding public support for greater German influence, there is no willingness to increase resources and involvement in regions of crisis, partly because of the residual effects of the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan on Germany's involvement in that country.

The Government's Guidelines regarding the European Union and Foreign Affairs

The European Union: The EU is the basis of peace and prosperity, where German interests are defined in light of European interests (an interesting statement in view of the discussion in recent years about defining German interests). The objective is to set up a federal European alliance (i.e., to retain the state element), and there is also talk of the need to reinforce EU institutions. In this context, support for making the Commissioner for Foreign Policy and Security into the Foreign Minister of the EU, and at the same time repeating Germany's support for the need to pass resolutions on foreign and security matters with a proportional majority instead of a

consensus, ties the hands of the EU at international level (the chance of realizing these objectives in the current circumstances within the EU is not great). There is support for the determination of the EU to maintain the rule of law (more than a hint of the government's support for taking steps against Poland and Hungary, which are challenging the supremacy of European law and working against the independence of the legal system). Striving for "strategic sovereignty" will enable the EU to operate independently and thus reduce its dependence and vulnerability in strategic areas – energy, raw materials, and digital technologies – and also enable it to be a player in the international arena. The incoming government has renounced its support for establishing a European army, in favor of cooperation between the national armies. Against the background of support for strengthening ties with France (the destination for Scholz's first official visit, like his predecessor's), it remains to be seen whether Scholz will continue to support the inclusive approach of Merkel, who preferred compromise in order to retain the framework of 27 countries, or whether he will lean toward the position of President Emmanuel Macron, who supports the exclusive approach, namely promoting the process of integration with the countries that are ready to do so in the fields of foreign affairs and security.

The United States: In spite of earlier fears of a change in policy, the incoming coalition, surprisingly, has stressed the transatlantic partnership and NATO as a central pillar of German security, the friendship with the United States as a central pillar of international activity, and the desire of the European Union to participate in forming a shared position on shared objectives – protection of the liberal order, climate matters, artificial intelligence, and policy toward China.

China: Relations with China must be shaped on the basis of partnership, competition, and rivalry, with respect for human rights and international law. As criticism of Merkel's policy toward China, the new government is calling for "Europization" of policy. While continuing to support the "one China" policy, there is support for Taiwan's participation in international organizations and for cooperation with it. The interest in developing ties in

the Indo-Pacific region is stressed. Germany's economic dependence on the Chinese market will force the government to balance between the need to protect economic interests and criticism of China's human rights record.

Russia: The incoming government's platform includes a call for a shared and coherent EU policy toward Russia, with readiness for constructive dialogue in order to promote stable and meaningful relations. There is also a call to Russia to refrain from efforts to destabilize Ukraine.

Turkey: The platform notes that Turkey is a neighbor of the EU and a member of NATO, and these constraints must be considered when deciding policy on Turkey. The EU does not intend to open new chapters or to close chapters already opened in the negotiations regarding Turkey's membership – a statement that could draw a response from President Erdogan, who may have accepted the fact that it is unrealistic to expect Turkey to be accepted to the EU, but is still protesting and pressuring, on the subject of refugees, for example.

Peace and stability in the Middle East: Germany has a "central" interest in the region, and wants to develop bilateral relations and promote regional relations. The platform of the incoming government includes a demand for the continuation of processes of democratization, and an aspiration to promote "climate cooperation" with selected partners in the field of technological innovation (potential for Israeli-German cooperation, as well as regional). Against the background of what is described as a "humanitarian catastrophe" in Syria and Yemen, the platform undertakes to provide a "high level" of aid and calls for continuation of the so-called Berlin process and UN efforts to achieve peace in Libya. Relations with the EU's southern neighbors are described as "a central interest," but it is not clear how they will be promoted in view of the lack of resources and proper attention from the EU.

Iran: Continuing the policy of the previous government, the coalition supports a return to the nuclear deal, which means compliance with the obligations of the partners. There is also a call to Iran to honor its

commitments to the IAEA. Iranian conduct – the threat to Israel, the missile program, the aggressive regional policy, and support for terrorism – endangers peace and security and must therefore stop. There is criticism of the human rights situation in Iran and a call to release political prisoners. The platform mentions interest in promoting confidence building measures and relations between Iran and its neighbors in the Gulf, as well as regional partners – a task that requires more involvement by Germany and the European Union.

Israel: Continuing Merkel's position, the incoming government mentions Israel's security as "the country's reason of state" and support for talks promoting a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. It also criticizes the ongoing threats to Israel and terror against its population. There is a call to cease unilateral steps that hinder the peace efforts, including construction in the settlements, which is contrary to international law. (The issue of human rights and the Israeli government's intention to introduce a more active arms export policy than its predecessor could interfere with bilateral relations.) The Palestinians are called on to avoid the use of force and to work to promote democracy, rule of law, and human rights. The new government intends to provide supervised aid to UNRWA to prevent misuse of the funds. The normalization between Israel and Arab states is welcomed, together with criticism of attempts "that are not devoid of antisemitic motivations" to condemn Israel in the UN.

Jewish life, the fight against antisemitism, and remembering the Holocaust: While promoting initiatives to reflect the diversity of Jewish life (this year Germany marks 1700 years of Jewish presence), the platform includes a commitment to fight antisemitism in all its forms, including by strengthening an institution headed by the official leading the fight against antisemitism. There is also an intention to enrich the content of Holocaust Memorial Day, strengthen education on the Holocaust, and work for the digitation of collected Holocaust material.

Conclusion

Coalition agreements and declarations of intent are not legally binding. Sometimes, the study of a platform at the end of the government's term reveals deviations from the original intentions due to constraints and changing circumstances, both internal and external. The challenges facing the incoming German government, particularly the climate challenge, lead to a paradigm shift and demand systemic changes that will take German society out of its comfort zone. Success will be measured by the votes cast at the end of its term of office.

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