

**The stability and flexibility
of Christian democratic
values in the government
programs**

Germany – CDU/CSU

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June 2021

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Abstract: *Christian Democracy, just like other political ideologies, has a solid value orientation. Naturally, values tend to change in the light of the dominant norms of the current society. However, there is also a general expectation that some „core values” are so significant that they should be more resistant to the alterations of times. One of the decent ways to analyze the stability and flexibility of these value orientations is to look at the government programs of political parties. In the article below, the most significant European Christian Democratic parties, CDU and CSU will be investigated by looking at the Düsseldorf Guidelines from 1949 and the Government program for 2017 elections highlighting some central similarities and differences.*

Keywords: *Christian Democracy, CDU, CSU, government program, political ideology, German politics*

Introduction

In our era, we are inclined to focus on great personalities, heroes, and anti-heroes of politics. Several political scientists emphasized the personalist trends of current politics; nowadays, symbolically speaking, we tend to vote on politicians, not on parties and politicians attract attention, not party politics. Still, political parties are not dead, and they produce a kind of output that is more durable than the ever-changing speeches of the politicians, namely party programs. In these documents, it is possible to find a relatively stable set of policy orientations, values, and norms the political party wishes to represent. Every political party has its values and norms but in the case of Christian democratic parties, it might be even more crucial to focus on them as the “Christian”, in itself, points to a solid value orientation.

This article includes the analysis of an “old” and a “new” government program of the most significant European Christian Democratic party, the German Christian Democratic Union (Christlich Demokratische Union, in short, CDU). CDU was established in 1945 after the end of the European Second World War as an interdenominational Christian party. Its party members partly came from former German political parties, such as the Catholic Centre Party, the German Democratic Party, the German National People’s Party, and the German People’s Party. From 1949 the first zenith of the party began which is usually named after its leading politician, Konrad Adenauer as Adenauer era. Several historical documents are worth being investigated, for instance, CDU’s social policy called the Ahlener program (Ahlener programm) from 1947, or the party’s economic policy that advocated “social market economy” from 1948. Here, the Düsseldorf Guidelines (Düsseldorfer Leitsätze) from 1949 will be examined as it offers a comprehensive summary of the principles that CDU claimed at that time.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that CDU is closely tied to its sister party, the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, in short, CSU); they are in the same faction in the Bundestag, and their recent government programs are common. This is the case in the second analyzed document which is the Government Program by CDU and CSU 2017-2021 (Regierungsprogramm 2017-2020) titled “For a Germany that is good to live in” (Für ein Deutschland in dem wir gut und gerne leben)^a.

The central question is whether these Christian democratic government programs changed or not and if yes, in what ways. Obviously, there can be several reasons behind the stability and flexibility of the government programs (for instance diverse solutions are necessary after a world war and in a peaceful period). This article wishes to detect the similarities and differences without evaluating the moral content of these phenomena. First, the Düsseldorf Guidelines, then the Government Program for 2017-2021 will be examined. An overview of the main emphases and the structure of the documents will be presented. Furthermore, the most important issues and their solutions will be also detected in order to point out the similarities and differences between the two programs.

^a For the analysis, the German and the short English summary was also utilized.

Düsseldorf Guidelines

The Düsseldorf Guidelines represented the principles and policies of the CDU that began its campaign for the 1949 elections. It focused on four topics: economic, agricultural, social policy, and housing. Out of these four topics, economic views dominate the document, around the three quarter elaborates on this issue while the rest three remain relatively shortly articulated. This was not by accident. After the Second World War, German territories suffered, and the priority was to rebuild the nation through its economy. The Düsseldorf Guidelines interpreted the situation as it was close to collapse, but thanks to currency reform, and more importantly to the economic policy of the CDU, work performance increased, and human labor regained its meaning.

Economic Policy

The central notion of the document was the social market economy which is treated as a performance of free and capable people that is brought into order. The goal of the social market economy is to achieve the highest standard of living. Still, this results not just in economic benefit, but in social justice for all as well. As the Düsseldorf Guidelines suggests, this idea is sharply contrasted to the state-based planned economy and the free liberalistic interpretation of the economy. Some would argue that it is between the two; it is a proponent of fair economic policy in order to foster the welfare of the entire nation; still, it rejects strong intervention to the economy which needs to be free to flourish. But why is it a better alternative than the two other systems? Why does it result in the welfare of the nation? First of all, in this system, the merits are rewarded since it promotes competition, it is based on the freedom of the market (prices are also set by the market), private and common ownership. Second, stability and predictability prevail as everyone is under the same law. These legal measures should set equal opportunities, fair competition, and the possibility for cooperation. Third, the state remains in touch with the economy and through organic means of comprehensive economic policy (for instance tax policies, legal simplifications, central supervision of the monetary system, anti-monopoly measures), it safeguards against economic crises and mass employment. Finally, it promotes

foreign trade, the inclusion of foreign aids (e.g. the Marshall plan), and German competitiveness in the world market.

Based on the Düsseldorf Guidelines there are specific policies of the social market economy which – as a result – would rebuild the country and lead to welfare. Among others, these norms should be taken into account:

- Special attention should be given to smaller businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses should have equal starting conditions as other ones.
- Laws should support transparency and standardization.
- Responsible monetary policies are a must.
- Wages and working conditions should be based on a fair and inclusive bargaining system.
- Technology and the economy are connected. Technology and science should be treated as economic resources; they should be utilized for economic purposes, for instance, to create jobs. These are foundations of progress and to utilize them, intellectual properties should be defended.
- German competitiveness in the world market should be considered a priority.
- German merchant fleet should be reestablished, together with the shipbuilding industry supported by special funds.
- Capital is a necessary component of economic development.
- Private ownership is essential, it should be protected by constitutional law. The main idea behind this idea was that personal freedom depends on economic independence which rests on private property.
- The social market economy should be supported by the people. In a democratic country, it is not allowed to force an economic system on the citizens, without their consent.

To sum it up, CDU proposed several direct (but not numerically detailed) measures to breathe life into the economy. Yet, parallelly, it was articulated in a new system under the name of social market economy which wished to overcome both plan-based economy and laissez-faire liberalism.

Agricultural policy

A well-managed agricultural policy was proposed by the Düsseldorf Guidelines, to have flourishing agriculture which is a crucial factor in the development of the whole

nation. Probably the most “radical” measures of CDU were suggested here: prices might be set, export should be limited, cooperation should be prompted, a whole legal and advisory system is necessary to be set up, the new credit system should offer long term loans, taxation must be supportive, technology and mechanization should induce the development, training should be organized. Still, this longing for effectivity should not overshadow the fact that the main factor for increasing performance is the human being. The agricultural policy was closely related to the rural way of life which represents and upkeep traditions. Furthermore, already in 1949, this document underlined the significance of the “climate” question: it drew relation between economy and climate, promoted reforestation and not just because it an important source but it is a value too (as it expresses, it is the lung of the entire soil) which must be protected.

Social policy

Considering the Christian democratic values and norms, the topic of social policy is the most thought-provoking part of the document. Düsseldorf Guidelines highlighted the essentiality of Christian responsibility and was a proponent of community-based freedom^b and genuine human dignity. There is no doubt that CDU was at the side of democratic order in which all the rights and duties are set and protected by law. It proposed a reorganization of social justice based on a comprehensive social policy for all.

For CDU it was vital to set that Christian work order is based on the dignity of the working person and not on labor. Human labor is not a commodity but a moral achievement that is the basis for the physical and spiritual development of the human being. In a well-working economy and society, human beings cooperate. This economic cooperation needs a reorganization based on the partnership of entrepreneurs and employees. In the bargaining process, mutual responsibility for the common work should be kept in mind. Trade unions and professional associations are also supported as they are organs of public life.

Regarding working conditions, the Düsseldorf Guidelines argued for correct wages; again, not for the profit itself, but for the possibility to have a cultural life and to maintain families. Enough free time should be given, and holidays (including Sundays) should

^b It contrasts both the liberalistic interpretation of individual freedom and the exceeded community baseness of communism.

be kept as a day of rest. Moreover, working conditions should be set as not to harm the freedom of choosing jobs and the freedom of movement.

Based on the idea that all citizens have the right to work, and that it is the basis of the reconstruction of the country, CDU wished to move towards full employment. The party was aware of the increased importance of women's work and claimed the same rights for women, but it wished to protect them and the youth from the harms of the sometimes cruel working system. Furthermore, the party was aware that several groups – especially after the war – were not able to conduct work. Towards them, for instance, war victims (including their family, widows, disabled), and other unemployed citizens and their families, protection, care, and solidarity should be exercised. Social insurance should promote public health and the welfare of the insured, taking into account the possibility of integration of the displaced person. To establish individual properties and promote individual livelihood, CDU supported fair land reform.

Although in a short form, the Düsseldorf Guidelines wished to improve the relationship between peoples of Europe and facilitated the unification of a new Europe. As a concluding idea, it proposed that the basis of a healthy social order is a successful economic policy.

Housing

The housing program also had a significant emphasis in the Düsseldorf Guidelines. Interestingly, it is not treated as just an economic problem, it is “holistically” treated as an issue that causes physical, spiritual, and moral problems. It is a basis for reconstruction, therefore, an urgent task that should be solved in a short period. Cooperation, state and municipality funds, rationalization of prices, tax support, and increased production of materials should foster permanent housing (for instance in multi-story rental houses). Now let us see the new government program which makes it possible to compare the two.

“For a Germany that is good to live in”

At the first glance, it is clear that the *Gouvernement programme by CDU and CSU 2017-2021* is much longer than the Düsseldorf Guidelines. The “new” program is 76 pages, and the number of characters is around two and a half times more than the “old” one's.

This is even more interesting in the light of the fact that the economic policy presented in the Düsseldorf Guidelines was theoretically investigated in length. One of the factors behind the growth might be the fact that the new government program is more comprehensive in a way that, compared to the Düsseldorf Guidelines, it consists of several new topics. Not counting its introduction, it is divided into nine chapters, these are the following^c:

- Good jobs for today and tomorrow – full employment for Germany
- Focus on families and children
- Equality of living conditions throughout Germany
- Prosperity and quality of life
- Opportunities in the digital age
- For a strong Europe
- Security and home abroad
- A healthy climate today and tomorrow
- What holds our country together

Based on the content and the structure of the document, the economic questions are also central in this program but here social issues are much more emphasized than in the Düsseldorf Guidelines. Concerning the new issues, some hints have already appeared in the old program about technology, protection of forestry, and a unified Europe, but in the new one, these topics are investigated in a separate chapter. The question of security and the concluding chapter which elaborates on the idea of what holds Germany together can be treated as entirely new issues. Even though there are serious differences considering the length of the chapters (for instance the first and the fourth chapter are far longer than the others) all these topics are unfolded in detail. Not just principles but political goals and their very specific policy means are included which results in a much specified and “direct” way of proposing ideas than it was in the Düsseldorf Guidelines. Instead of a lengthy summary on all the nine topics, some significant and interesting aspects of the new program will be highlighted mentioning the similarities and differences compared to the old one.

^c For the titles of the chapters the English summary of the program was used.

Economic policy

Although the historical reality in which the government program has been written differs from the end of the 1940s, several principles are common. The new program also expresses the will to reach full employment, highlights the importance of preserving jobs and creating new ones in the modern fields, wishes to manage a responsible state which is based on prudent laws and “thin” bureaucracy. Although it does not contain as many references as the Düsseldorf Guidelines, the new program also stands for the social market economy, private property, free trade, freedom of businesses, social justice, solidarity, it intends to rely on families (and children) and considers small and medium-sized businesses as the backbone of society. And even though the views regarding the possibilities of the digital age are far more detailed here the idea that technology should support the economy is the same.

According to the government program, one of the central goals is to reach a sustainable growth of the economy. Naturally, climate issues and their relation to the economic sphere appear more frequently in the new program. Protecting the environment is a key priority for CDU/CSU home and worldwide. Technology and research need to be facilitators of these developments to create sustainable and market-based solutions (renewables, green tech). Institutionalization and global cooperation should serve these aspirations as well in which Germany should be an exemplary actor. The question of immigration appears in the economic policy of the CDU/CSU, but it is far from being in focus. The new “Skilled Workers Immigration Act” will aspire to control the immigration process which considers the benefits of the economy.

Families and children

The government intends to focus on families and children, for which it enumerates several policy measures. For CDU and CSU the family is the foundation of the whole

^d Although the new government program detects problems, dangers (for instance global issues, threats from left populist and radical forces) it emphasizes that, based on the living conditions, welfare and security, Germany is in its best form in the history.

^e This issue has a separate chapter that contains for instance the question of digitalization, industry 4.0, 5G, gigabit society, electric cars, e-government solutions, data protection, e-health, sustainable technologies.

society which deserves the protection of the constitution. Family policies should include tax exceptions, financial supports (for instance housing benefits), young workers should be protected, part-time jobs should be encouraged, and childcare facilities (for instance kindergartens) should be built to reintroduce women to the labor market. Protection should also extend to all children to prevent children poverty.

What is new in this government program is the direct emphasis that it does not prescribe any particular family models. It acknowledges that there are different ways of living together (including patchwork families) and believes that people should decide how to live. At the end of the chapter, it is emphasized that the ideas and policies should result in a culture of families in Germany.

Social responsibilities of the government

Based on the program, the government will take plenty of responsibilities; compared to the “simplicity” of the Düsseldorf Guidelines, this perspective seems to assume a very broad, and proactive state. In Germany, equal living conditions should be possible everywhere: from the south to the north, from the west to the east, from the urban to the rural areas. This includes labor and social security, proper housing, infrastructure, education, healthcare^f, and rich cultural life^g. It does not mean that uniformity is promoted; on the other hand, the diversity of many different traditions and mindsets are treated as treasures that need to be preserved and enhanced. One of the greatest emphasis here – just like in the old program – is on the necessity of supporting the rural areas. This document also highlights the values of rural areas as the basis of agriculture, food (local goods), and forestry. This great contribution should be kept and supported by direct funds (partly from the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy). Sustainability (e.g. like protecting eco-systems) and competitiveness must go hand in hand with each other. Regarding moral questions, CDU/CSU is on the side of the integrity of creation, therefore rejects cloning and supports animal welfare as they are our fellow creatures.

^f Interestingly, this government program in 2017 called an attention to the necessity of having an able healthcare in order to act properly in an international health crisis.

^g It is a cultural nation in the European tradition that has rich cultural heritage, but it is open to build bridges and open doors.

Employment is a top priority in the new government program. Well-working education and training are necessary for high employment but it is far from being enough; young workers, women, craftsmen should receive help if necessary. Legal instruments, for instance, collective bargaining agreements should be made to have the possibility of flexible working hours. Solidarity and material help should be exercised towards long-term unemployed while upkeeping the possibility of reintegrating them – through training – into the labor market. The opportunity of having temporary jobs is also supported. As a valuable part of society, who deserve recognition from the rest of it, elderly people should receive secure pensions.

Just like the Düsseldorf Guidelines, this program emphasizes that men and women deserve the same wage for the same work. However, here, equal participation of women by quota is supported to reach equal representation for women in the management. Although several achievements have been met in and beyond the labor market, it is far from full equality. Just like for women, for the minorities, protection should be given which includes freedom of sexual self-determination.

Foreign policy and security

Foreign policy and security are almost entirely novel topics compared to the content of the Düsseldorf Guidelines which only mentioned the necessity of unification of Europe and prompted ideas to link Germany to the world economy. In this document, Germany seems to be one of the leading actors of Europe and the whole World. CDU/CSU wants a strong, confident, and dynamic European that is able to solve its conflicts and continues to serve as a peace project. The party demonstrates its commitment to the EU (and its friendship towards France but mentions for instance Poland too, as a part of the Weimar Triangle), NATO, and other regional/international organizations. United States of America and Israel are natural allies of Germany while Russian interference, especially in Ukraine, should be combated. Both in domestic and international politics CDU/CSU is committed to the protection and promotion of human dignity, human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and tolerance.

Immigration is again a new issue in the government program. The document strongly opposes illegal immigration, approves the strengthening of the Frontex border agency, supports the establishment of an entry/exit register, and would complete the European

Asylum System. Refugee agreements should be made and kept with Turkey and North African countries. Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia should be declared as safe countries of origin, and – in the case of refused asylum – repatriation or (if necessary) deportation should be exercised. The living conditions of countries of origin must be improved (for instance it suggests an African Marshall plan) to provide proper living conditions in the home countries. Although CDU/CSU “wants the number of refugees who come to Germany to permanently remain low” (For a Germany..., 2017, p. 10), and upholds the possibility of deciding who to live with, it emphasizes Europe’s common responsibility for refugees. Those who are given the right to live in Germany should be helped to integrate into society to prevent segregation and the appearance of parallel societies. Security and freedom must be maintained for all. Potent police and Bundeswehr supported by modern technologies are necessary to fight against terrorism, cyber-terrorism, and all instruments that would threaten the stability of Germany or Europe.

Values

The government program professes the Christian image of man, and the idea that human dignity is inviolable; these are the same values the Düsseldorf Guidelines claimed. CDU/CSU is a pragmatic political force that represents Christian social, liberal, and conservative ideas. The document highlights not just the Christian-Jewish heritage but, probably interestingly, the influence of the Enlightenment as well. Obviously, the party union is on the side of democracy, and as a people’s party, it wishes to represent every individual in Germany. It is the partner of other parties (for instance it promises to modify pension only in cooperation with other parties) but has strong convictions.

The government program believes that “Germany is characterized by wonderful unity in diversity” (For a Germany..., 2017, p. 12). To the question of what holds the society together, the document underlines diversity and Leitkultur, the culture that defines Germany as a nation. German language, German laws (which abide by all citizens), equal rights, and traditions are bonds of the nation. It is patriotic but strongly opposes anti-Semitism, xenophobia, intolerance, and discrimination. Working for the community and volunteering are acknowledged as essential elements that forge cohesion in society. Civil organizations, churches, and for instance, sports clubs also have their

own special and contributing roles. Religious freedom should be given to all denominations, including peace-loving Muslims, in this case, negotiation and dialogue are promoted. Yet, hate speech, political influence from abroad, and interrogations are not tolerated.

Conclusion

As presented above, there are several similarities and differences between the Düsseldorf Guidelines and the Government Program of CDU/CSU for 2017-2021. In short, the old program focuses mainly on economic policy, especially on the social market economy, and wishes to reorganize the economy to rebuild the nation and provide welfare. Still, in short statements, it provides some serious insights regarding social policies, here the Christian democratic principles are strongly present. The new government program shares common values in several aspects, especially in economic policies and some social issues (for instance in almost all elements of social market economy, the idea of social justice, solidarity, Christian view of man, the importance of family). However, some new values appear or values that are more emphasized in the new program than in the old one (for instance diversity, the rejection of xenophobia/hate speech, the will to represent values in world politics).

Still, in my opinion, the greatest differences are present in two other ways. First, in the new program, the elaborated topics are not just very broad, but very specific as well. This might result in a feeling that the Düsseldorf Guidelines is “consumable” and formulates a coherent perspective, while the new program is less applicable in this regard. Though it is indeed more useful if someone wishes to focus on specific values, policy fields. Second, the new program is far more “creative” in the way of providing very specific policy instruments to solve very specific policy problems^h, which again has its advantages and disadvantages. If a policy instrument is very closely tied to a policy problem in a government program, it informs the voter more and might hold the government more accountable. Still, on the other hand, this could tie the hands of the

^h For instance it, proposes the use of women quota to attain women equality, or the introduction of automatic braking systems for the trucks in order to prevent accidents on the subways.

later government by a great amount and might cause challenges in fast-changing policy fields.

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