



# BULLETIN

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## FDP's Program and German Foreign Policy after Bundestag Elections

by Ryszarda Formuszewicz

*Most likely, after the 27 September Bundestag elections the Christian Democratic parties CDU/CSU will form a coalition with the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), in which case the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs will go to the FDP chairman Guido Westerwelle. As the liberals' program basically concurs with that of the now-ruling Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, that nomination will have no significant impact on Germany's foreign policy. On the other hand, if a CDU-FDP government is formed, this could provide a broader scope for implementing the Christian Democrats' program because the liberals' position will be weaker than the SPD's position in the present coalition.*

**Forecast of Election Results and of the Composition of a New Ruling Coalition.** Poll results offer no basis on which to predict unequivocally the composition of a coalition that will rule in the German Federal Republic after the September election. Neither can such forecasts rely on the different parties' results in the elections to the European Parliament at which the turnout was lower than at Bundestag elections. The Christian Democrats' victory in that election (the CDU/CSU's 37,9%, to the SPD's 20.8%) combined with the high support for Chancellor Angela Merkel shown in opinion polls indicate that the CDU and the CSU will remain in power.

While it cannot be ruled out that the Christian Democrats will continue cooperation with a weakened SPD, a coalition with the FDP, which runs third in the polls, appears more likely. In the EP elections the latter registered the highest increase in support (up 4.9 percentage point in comparison with the 2004 elections) of all German parties and the number of its MEPs rose from 7 to 12. If a coalition of the Christian Democrats and the liberals is formed, Guido Westerwelle will assume the office of Vice-chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**Foreign and European Policy in the FDP's Program.** Foreign policy features importantly in the liberals' election strategy which highlights the FDP's track record of governing and its high competency and effectiveness in international relations. This is combined with the building of Westerwelle's image as one who would continue the policy of his party predecessors who served as Ministers of Foreign Affairs, particularly of Hans-Dietrich Genscher (who held the office in 1974–1992).

The FDP is firmly integration-oriented. In the EP it belongs to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). The party supports the Lisbon Treaty reforms, endorses the deepening of integration—including within the framework of initiatives proposed by a narrower group of Member States ("enhanced cooperation")—and opts, in a long-term perspective, for the EU's transformation into a federation. The liberals believe the Union should be a global actor with its own diplomatic service and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The FDP champions a stronger EP, higher involvement of the national parliaments in the making of EU law, and the introduction of EU-wide referendums. At the same time, it insists on observance of the subsidiarity principle in the functioning of the EU and on streamlining the European administrative structures. Unlike the Christian Democrats, the liberals acknowledge the long-term prospect of Turkey's full membership in the EU but they also allow for the privileged partnership formula, should the negotiations fail.

The FDP foreign policy program highlights the disarmament issue, hence the party's approval of Barack Obama's proposals to that end. The FDP insists that that the favorable—as it perceives it—climate in international relations should be taken advantage of to continue the process of reduction of

military potential—in particular to decide on the NATO forum on ultimate withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Germany. It wants a future German government to be more active in furthering international security, predominately by proposing its own peace initiatives. It firmly objects to plans to install elements of the U.S. anti-missile shield in Poland and in the Czech Republic.

It also responds favorably to Russian disarmament proposals. The liberals accord Russia a special position in Germany's foreign policy and they emphasize Russia's importance for the European security system. The FDP's position on this issue does not diverge to any significant extent from that of the SPD. Despite the stern rhetoric the FDP has used when in opposition, accusing Russian politicians of conducting policy on the basis of realities-defying geopolitics concepts and publicly denouncing Russia's negative stance on Eastern Partnership, it nevertheless objects to perceiving Russia as a strategic adversary of Germany. Besides, the party has close links with German big business which traditionally lobbies for the deepening of relations with Russia and frowns at criticism of that state.

The FDP favors a rapprochement of East European and South Caucasus states with the EU and it considers possible, in a long-term perspective, Ukraine's accession. On the other hand, it holds that, like Georgia, Ukraine falls short of the NATO membership criteria. At the same time, the liberals criticize the SPD for making the enlargement of NATO by the above two states contingent upon Russia's position.

**Forecast of the Future Government's Foreign Policy.** Assuming the CDU/CSU remains in power, the forming of a new ruling coalition after the elections will not bring about a fundamental modification of Germany's foreign policy—not with the German elites' consensus on main policy principles. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that cooperation between Merkel and Westerwelle will be more efficient than the rivalry-ridden political collaboration of Merkel and Frank Walter Steinmeier, the SPD leader and present Minister of Foreign Affairs. The coalition of the CDU/CSU and the FDP can be expected to see more cooperation. After a decade in opposition the liberals will find it to their advantage to pursue a strategy of building up their image as a responsible, moderate party capable of governing, and they have traditionally regarded foreign policy as their preserve. At the same time, with FDP's position in the government weaker than the Social-Democrats' in the present government, the Christian Democrats will have gained a broader scope for carrying out their own program.

In European policy the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition will presumably make the EU budget a matter of its special interest. Now that Germany's debt is soaring as a result of the economic crisis, the coalition members can be expected to make concerted efforts to reduce their country's burdens. With liberals demanding that a proportion of CAP funds be shifted to other European policies, the pressure to reform the common agricultural policy will increase. Of all the countries aspiring to EU membership only Croatia can count on support for its accession in a near perspective, as can—should they wish for it—West European states: Iceland, Norway, or Switzerland.

As regards German-Russian relations, the replacement of coalition member will enable the Christian Democrats to emphasize more strongly the respect for democracy and the rule of law. As the FDP's relevant position is close to the CDU's and CSU's, the Russian partner can be expected to receive a more cohesive message on that issue, than to date.

**Prospects of Polish-German Relations.** In its election program the FDP has emphasized the need for deeper Polish-German relations patterned on relations with France. This is part of a broader framework of a "generational task" to wipe out divisions between "old" and "new" EU members. Yet it should be remembered that in the future government Chancellor Merkel will be much more knowledgeable about the Polish issues than Westerwelle. Prospects of cooperation with Germany in furthering Eastern Partnership look good. Also, the FDP expects Poland to contribute to the building of European security policy.

The implementation of the anti-missile shield agreement with the U.S. could be a factor encumbering the bilateral relations. In the sphere of European policy, matters of EU budget and common agricultural policy reform loom as chief potential conflict-generating issues. With the FDP politicians endorsing the need to build the Northern Gas Pipeline, the German government's support for that project will not change.

The FDP supported in the Bundestag the setting up of the "Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation" Foundation, but in the dispute over the filling of seats on the foundation board it argued that a nominee of the Federation of the Expellees should not encumber Polish-German relations. However, in the future the liberals' position on controversial historical policy issues is likely to be more aligned to the Christian-Democrats' policy.