



# BULLETIN

No. 59 (59) • October 30, 2009 • © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski (Editor-in-Chief), Łukasz Adamski, Mateusz Gniazdowski,  
Beata Górka-Winter, Leszek Jesień, Agnieszka Kondek (Executive Editor),  
Łukasz Kulesa, Ernest Wyciszekiewicz

---

## Germany's New Government: Consequences for Foreign Policy

by Ryszarda Formuszewicz

*Since Angela Merkel has become chancellor for another term, the present German foreign policy line will be continued. The change of the CDU's coalition partner is reflected above all in the formulations used in the coalition agreement of 26 October to describe the government's intentions. One can expect, however, that all three parties forming the new coalition will compete in the foreign policy sphere. The introduction of new elements to Germany's international activeness will be among the priorities for the FDP taking over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

Foreign policy was not an issue of dispute during the coalition negotiations. This was so on account of the relative similarity of the parties' programs and of the liberals' openly declared desire to maintain the existing course in Germany's external relations. However, for the FDP, and especially for its leader and new foreign minister Guido Westerwelle, the strengthening of the party's image in the sphere of foreign policy, seen as the traditional domain of this party, is of fundamental importance. The possibilities for the FDP to conduct its own foreign policy are limited by the rivalry between the German chancellor and the foreign minister, rivalry that is typical of German politics. The strong position of the German chancellor, who is empowered to determine policy guidelines, as well as the experience and international position Merkel has achieved during the previous term, favor the continuation of Angela Merkel's primacy. Especially in the EU policy, the FDP's aspirations may remain unfulfilled given the CDU's influence, which has been strengthened by the appointment as EU commissioner of Günther Oettinger, the Christian-Democratic prime minister of Baden-Württemberg. Despite Westerwelle's stronger political position (as party leader and deputy chancellor) compared to his predecessor Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the liberals' prospects of realizing their plans are strongly dependent on close cooperation with Chancellor Merkel. It is certain that the actions of the new foreign minister are going to be subjected to critical assessment by the opposition, the more so as the parliamentary group of the SPD—the largest opposition party—is headed by a former foreign minister.

**Consequences of Appointments.** Westerwelle's field of maneuver is also narrowed by the fact that the post of defense minister was entrusted to Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, minister of economics in the previous government. In contrast to the FDP leader, zu Guttenberg specialized in foreign relations as a CSU parliamentarian. Under his stewardship, the Ministry of Defense will set the tone for debates on security policy, the future of NATO and, above all, Germany's engagement in Afghanistan. In Germany's dialogue with the United States, zu Guttenberg will most probably be viewed as the second most important German partner, after Angela Merkel. This is favored by the pro-American stance of the new defense minister, as well as by his good contacts with both Republicans and Democrats in the USA. Under the circumstances, this nomination, which was to a great extent affected by party politics, is interpreted as a positive signal for the American partners. The removal from German territory of American nuclear weapons—a postulate included in the coalition agreement and one that is very important to the FDP for symbolic and public relations reasons—could be made more difficult by the new defense minister.

The assumption by representatives of the FDP and the CSU of two ministries of key significance for foreign policy creates yet another plane for rivalry between the two parties, which also form a coalition in the Bavarian Land government. By entrusting responsibility for the Afghan mission to

a CSU politician, Angela Merkel limits the risk of disloyalty from members of that party and consolidates Christian democratic forces in the face of the stronger opposition. Making use of the new minister's popularity and communicative skills to ensure greater support for the Afghan mission—which is unpopular with a significant portion of society—was a successful move from a tactical perspective, as a debate in connection with the prolongation of the Bundeswehr's mandate in December is planned. The appointment of the person to be special ambassador (Sonderbotschafter) for contacts on Afghanistan with Germany's international partners, as provided for under the coalition agreement, will be a test of Westerwelle's influence. The candidate is to be designated by the foreign minister.

The FDP has relatively wide possibilities in the sphere of foreign economic cooperation, as its representatives are heading the Ministries of Economics (Rainer Brüderle) and of Economic Cooperation and Development (Dirk Niebel). Especially in the latter case, close coordination of action with the Foreign Ministry is to be expected, given that the liberals had called for the elimination of the separate ministry in order to ensure greater cohesion of German foreign policy. The FDP can modify criteria for granting assistance in keeping with its own priorities, for example by tying it more closely with progress in democratization or by taking into account the changing economic potential of aid recipients. This ministry also plays an important role in the German concept of an integrated approach to security problems. The minister of economic cooperation and development has been a member of the Federal Security Council since 1998. In this Council, the FDP now has four seats out of nine. The FDP will also invest in international cultural policy, as for the first time a minister of state has been appointed to deal exclusively with this area (Cornelia Pieper).

Irrespective of restraints in the pursuit of foreign policy, the Ministry under the liberals will be playing an important role in domestic policy. In keeping with a solution introduced by the SPD, one state secretary (Martin Biesel) will be responsible for coordinating the work of all ministries headed by FDP representatives.

**Foreign Policy Prospects in the Light of the Coalition Agreement.** The French-German partnership will continue to play an important role in the European integration process. Relations with France are described as "exceptional," and specific areas for cooperation are also mentioned (education, climate protection, outer space, security and defense). The significance of relations between the two countries is emphasized by the meeting between Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy immediately following the swearing-in of the government on 28 October 2009.

The role of Russia in the international security system is stressed. No mention of "strategic partnership" in describing bilateral relations is unlikely to limit German-Russian contacts. A tactical division of roles between Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Justice can be expected. Westerwelle will most probably strive to maintain a positive climate for economic cooperation, while Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, known for her criticism of the Khodorovsky case, will be condemning human rights violations and thus helping to pursue the FDP's call to increase the role of values in foreign policy.

**Polish-German Relations.** The coalition agreement contains a declaration of a will to continue consolidating close friendship and cooperation with Poland as reflected in the FDP's electoral program. A new message for Poland (and also for German society) is the assurance that efforts would be made to ensure that German-Polish cooperation becomes a source of new impulses for European unity. The coalition agreement, just as the previous one, calls for making use of the opportunities offered by the Weimar Triangle. This time, however, a new context is provided thanks to support for Westerwelle from Hans-Dietrich Genscher, one of that forum's initiators. Joint actions are possible in such spheres as energy policy or security and defense—singled out as areas of partner cooperation within the EU. Moreover, Germany continues to support the development of the Eastern Partnership. Good prospects also seem to be in store for economic and cultural cooperation. In his inauguration statement at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Westerwelle emphasized that he understood deeper cooperation with Germany's eastern neighbors primarily as a rapprochement between societies, and the new minister's first foreign trip destination is Warsaw.

The German coalition partners have confirmed that the work of the Flight-Expulsion-Reconciliation Foundation and financial support for German cultural heritage in Eastern Europe will be continued. The federal government commissioner for culture and the media, Bernd Neumann, responsible for negotiating with Poland on the Foundation, has kept his post.