

Post-war ‘taboo broken’ as far right becomes German state kingmaker

Berlin: A German state premier was elected with the support of the nationalist Alternative for Germany and Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives on Wednesday, shattering the post-war consensus among established parties of shunning the far right.

Thomas Kemmerich, a little-known liberal Free Democrat, became the first state premier elected with the support of the AfD, with whom Merkel’s conservative Christian Democrats sided to the disgust of her national coalition partners.



AfD parliamentary party leader Bjoern Hoecke, right, shakes hands with Thomas Kemmerich of the Free Democrats, in Erfurt, Germany. *CREDIT: AP*

The CDU and all the other established parties have previously ostracised the AfD over what they say are racist views held by some of its members.

Merkel’s Social Democrat national coalition allies accused her CDU of

backtracking on a pledge never to cooperate with a far-right party. The CDU rejected the accusation, saying it was not responsible for how AfD lawmakers voted. Wednesday's ballot was secret.

"The events in Thuringia break a taboo in the history of political democracy in the Federal Republic," SPD Finance Minister Olaf Scholz tweeted. "Very serious questions arise for us with the CDU's federal leadership."



Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, leader of the German Christian Democrats. *CREDIT: GETTY*

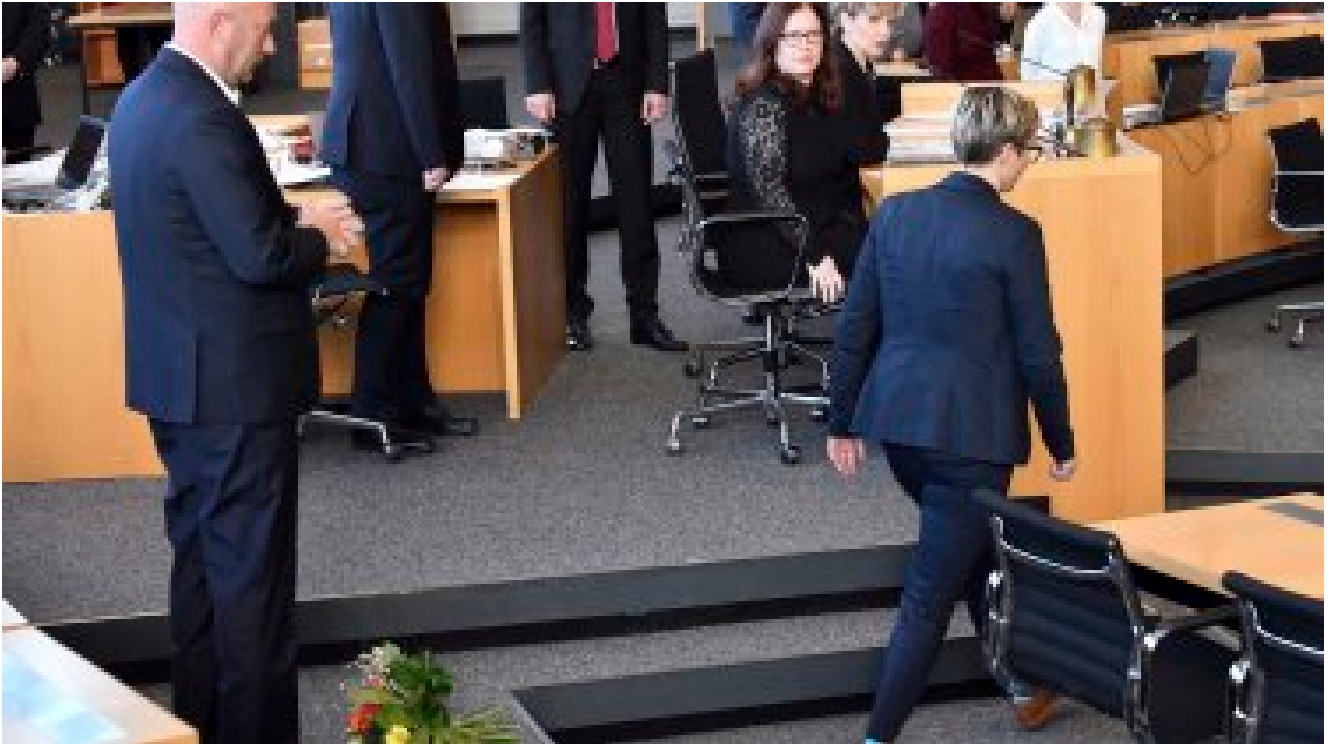
The unprecedented alliance provoked outrage from across the political spectrum and put on the spot CDU party leader and Merkel's heir apparent, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who had sworn off any cooperation with the AfD.

AKK, as she's known, disavowed the state party's decision and urged Thuringia to hold a new election.

"This is not a good day - not for Thuringia, not for Germany's political system," she told reporters during a visit to Strasbourg, DPA reported. Meanwhile, protesters gathered in front of CDU headquarters in Berlin.

The leader of the FDP, Christian Lindner, said his party would never cooperate

with the AfD and instead would seek to form an alternative coalition government.



Die Linke's Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, right, walks away from Thomas Kemmerich of the Free Democrats, after throwing a bouquet of flowers in front of him, in Erfurt, Germany. *CREDIT: AP*

The shock vote in Thuringia reveals how the AfD has upended German politics with its presence in all of Germany's 16 states. The eurosceptic populists gained momentum on wide-spread discontent with Merkel's immigration policy, which opened the door to more than 1 million mostly Syrian refugees.

"The vote on the new premier minister in the state of Thuringia marks a new milestone in German politics and bears the potential of more shockwaves in national politics," said ING economist Carsten Brzeski.

Kemmerich won 45-44 against Bodo Ramelow, the outgoing premier of The Left party. Ramelow's leftist coalition failed to secure a majority in an October regional election.

Kemmerich, whose FDP is the smallest party in the regional assembly, said he would launch talks with the CDU, SPD, and Greens on forming a government.

SPD national leader Norbert Walter-Borjans spoke of an "unforgivable dam burst,

triggered by the CDU and FDP”.

Source:

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/post-war-taboo-broken-as-far-right-become-s-german-state-kingmaker-20200206-p53y8t.html>

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