

# Worries on the horizon for Angela Merkel

From climate change and trembling spells to a trembling government, German Chancellor Angela Merkel faces many challenges as she returns to office post-vacation.



Chancellor Angela Merkel sat down on Wednesday as she welcomed Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda in Berlin to the tune of military bands playing national anthems outside the chancellery.

This was the third time she has chosen to sit for such a state reception following the three trembling episodes that occurred during public appearances in June and July. The instances, which made international headlines, raised rumors about the state of her health. She addressed those concerns directly on Tuesday during her first post-holiday appearance at a reader forum hosted by the *Ostsee-Zeitung* newspaper in the northeastern coastal town of Stralsund.

While answering questions from the roughly 200 audience members, German magazine *Der Spiegel* quoted her as saying, "I do understand that people have these questions and that some of them worry. That's why I have a duty to assess

whether I can fulfill my tasks well, or whether something is affecting me so much that I perhaps can't."

Merkel has already said she would not contest another general election, and there were signs this week that the notoriously reserved chancellor was beginning to open up emotionally in the final leg of her tenure. "I have always managed to find a space where I can be sad without having to tell the entire public about it," she said. Without such spaces, she added, it would be "very difficult to always be happy in public."

### **Breaking up the coalition?**

There are plenty of signs that the tail end of the Merkel era could be among the most challenging. While the next general election is scheduled for 2021, political circumstances could yet bring it about earlier.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), junior partners in her coalition government, is still struggling in the latest opinion polls, scoring between 12% and 14%. It is also in the process of choosing a new leader after the resignation of Andrea Nahles in June, following the party's abysmal result in the European elections.

The choice could prove fateful, since a more left-leaning SPD chief could theoretically drag the party out of the coalition in order to fight a new election, possibly betting on a future alliance with the increasingly popular Greens and the socialist Left party.

Merkel was a little prickly when this possibility was brought up at Tuesday's reader forum, saying that she hadn't heard any suggestion of an impending breakup from the SPD ministers in her cabinet, the SPD Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, or the Social Democrats' three interim party leaders.

There were, she added, more important things to discuss anyway: "Every day we discuss the question: What would happen if? We have to discuss the question: What should we do now?"



But Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) could have its own problems looming. Many in the CDU's ranks seem to have cold feet about her successor as party leader, Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who, as things stand, would be the CDU's candidate for chancellor.

Those worries were likely not assuaged by a June Emnid survey of some 1,000 German voters from different parties that showed Kramp-Karrenbauer's rival, Friedrich Merz, who narrowly lost the run-off election to become CDU party leader, garnering nearly twice as much support as her as a potential candidate for chancellor.

### **Upcoming problems: Climate crisis and the 'black zero'**

As far as immediate concerns go, Merkel has also been confronted by the Green party's growing popularity and the topic of climate change topping the political agenda.

In response to Green party leader Robert Habeck's suggestion earlier this week that the state should consider taking on some new debt to pay for major investments in climate-protection projects, Merkel (through her spokesman Steffen Seibert) insisted that the government could achieve all the necessary climate goals within its current budget. "That too is sustainability," Seibert said in Monday's regular press conference.

*Read more:* Germany's Green leader sorry for linking Angela Merkel's shaking to climate crisis

Balancing the state budget has become something of a fetish for the Finance Ministry under Merkel, regardless of which party has occupied the minister's seat. She and her current finance minister, Scholz, have been on the same page

when it comes to maintaining Germany's precious fiscal "black zero."

"We can manage the necessary tasks without taking on more debt," he said on Monday.

But debt could conceivably become a point of contention if a future coalition were to involve the Greens and Merkel's CDU under either Kramp-Karrenbauer or Merz.

Nevertheless, Merkel's financial caution did not stop her from underlining to the Stralsund audience that she had been "touched" by Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future climate campaign.

---

Source:

<https://www.dw.com/en/worries-on-the-horizon-for-angela-merkel/a-50025036>

[Disclaimer]