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European policy in the coalition agreements of political parties in Germany – continuation or change after the 2021 elections?

Helmut Kohl's maxim "what is good for Europe is good for Germany" has set the course of European policy of the Federal Republic of Germany for decades. It meant that European interests would take precedence, and the economic, social, cultural and political development of the European Union would translate into the corresponding development in Germany. This paradigm changed in 1998, during the term of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the rule of a coalition of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and the Alliance 90/The Greens (B90/die Grünen). It was when Germany's individual interests, which might not always be the same as European interests, were openly addressed. Nevertheless, the Chancellor still managed to continue European unification while articulating the strong position of Germany on the European stage. The advanced commitment to German interests in the European Union at the time also marked the tenure of Chancellor Angela Merkel and subsequent government coalitions.

The article aims to provide an overview of the European policies² of two successive German government coalitions: the first one composed of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, and the second one including the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Alliance 90/The Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), as defined in their respective 2018 and 2021 coalition agreements. Although such agreements are not formally binding for any federal government's European policy, in practice they determine its fundamental directions, which is why they deserve to be examined in more detail.³



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² Germany's European policy is typically defined as the policy toward the European Communities/European Union, the purpose of which is to influence the direction and scope of European integration (Rittershofer, 2007, p. 230; Schmidt, 1995, p. 286; Cziomer, 2013, p. 19).

³ According to Articles 23, 45, 52, 59, 65, and 73 of the revised Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949, the basic powers concerning European policy are entrusted to the federal organs of the state, namely: the Federal Chancellor, the Council of Ministers, the Bundestag (Federal Parliament) and the Commission on European Union Affairs, the Bundesrat (Federal Council) and the European Chamber, as well as the Federal President. The Federal Constitutional Court also plays an important role in European policy (*Ustawa Zasadnicza...*, 1997, pp. 95–98, 125, 133, 137–139, 143, 149–151).

The article is divided into several parts corresponding to the content of the two coalition agreements and the research questions posed with respect to their analysis, namely: (1) What was the background to the formation of the two coalition agreements?; (2) How did the government coalitions address the issue of Germany's responsibility for Europe and the European Union?; (3) How did the coalitions of the CDU/CSU and SPD and then of the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP view the European Union and its core values?; (4) What was the position of both coalitions on deepening European integration?; and (5) How did the two coalitions view the expansion of the European Union? The analysis spans the 2017–2021 period, beginning with the announcement of the results of the 2017 Bundestag elections and the formation of the CDU/CSU and SPD government coalition and ending with the next elections and the formation of the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP government in 2021. The main research hypothesis is that the European policies presented in the coalition agreements of March 2018 and December 2021 are similar, which means that the Olaf Scholz government continued stressing the importance of European integration for the peace, freedom and prosperity of Germany and other member states, as well as the importance of its deepening and expansion of the European Union.

The article employs a comparative method, which made it possible to present how the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition, and the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP coalition viewed European policy, and to highlight the differences and similarities of these two approaches. Content analysis was also used to examine and interpret the government coalition agreements of 2018 and 2021.

I. Formation of the 2018 and 2021 government coalition agreements behind the scenes

The CDU and CSU garnered 33% of the vote in the Bundestag elections on September 24, 2017, which translated into 246 seats; the SPD won 20.5% (153 seats); the FDP won 10.7% (80 seats); and the B90/die Grünen won 8.9% (67 seats). Anti-system parties from the right and left wings of the German political scene, namely Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD, with 12.6% of the vote and 94 seats) and the Left (Die Linke, with 9.2% of the vote and 69 seats), also entered the Bundestag for the 19th term (*Bundestagswahl 2017...*, 2017). The formation of as many as six parliamentary factions undermined the domination of the two major parties (support for the CDU/CSU fell by 8.6 pp compared to the 2013 election, and that for the SPD fell by 5.2 pp), strengthened the position of the mid-size parties (support for the FDP rose by 6 pp, and for B90/die Grünen by 0.5 pp), and resulted in a Bundestag with parties rejected as coalition partners by others (AfD and Die Linke) (Kubiak, 2018, pp. 19–20).

Initially, the CDU and CSU approached the FDP and B90/die Grünen about forming a government. Due to differences on issues such as the future of the EU, migration policy (mainly the introduction of a so-called annual admission limit), energy policy, environment protection, transportation, agriculture and finance, the Liberals broke off negotiations (Domagała, 2017; Carstens, Gutschker, Haupt, Rosenfelder, Zastrow, 2017). Aware that their failing to find a coalition partner would result in early elections,

in late November, the Christian Democrats turned to the Social Democrats, who were reluctant to form a government with them. The talks were held in a tense atmosphere, under pressure to reach a consensus as soon as possible, which was not easy given the existing differences in the political platforms of the two parties (again, mainly those concerning migration policy). Eventually, the ability of the parties to cooperate constructively prevailed. The text of the coalition agreement entitled *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Solidarity for Our Country*⁴ was agreed on February 7, 2018 (Frymark, Gotkowska, 2018; Berres, Gruber, Preker, Albert, 2018). The Bavarian Christian Democrats were the first to adopt the agreement, following a vote within the party's executive board,⁵ national group,⁶ and CSU faction in the Bavarian Landtag⁷ (*Koalitionsvertrag nimmt erste...*, 2018). The CDU adopted the agreement by an overwhelming majority at the party's congress in Berlin on February 26 (nearly 97% of the 975 delegates voted in favor, 27 voted against) (Lepiarz, 2018; *CDU-Parteitag stimmt...*, 2018). In view of the campaign the Social Democratic youth waged against the adoption of the agreement and the formation of a coalition government, the outcome of the vote among SPD members was not a foregone conclusion. What spoke for the agreement to be accepted was the fact that, despite the poor performance of the SPD in the Bundestag elections, the agreement contained postulates that were important for them and, among other things, made it possible to gain real influence over the European policy of the new government, including appointing the minister of foreign affairs. This would not have been possible had the CDU and CSU not made concessions and agreed to strengthen the position of the Social Democrats in the government (Ciechanowicz, 2018). The agreement was supported by 66% of the approximately 378,000 SPD members who took part in the mail-in ballot (Milosz, 2018; Klormann, Finkenwirth, Caspari, 2018).

The CDU and CSU garnered 24.2% of the vote (197 seats) in the 2021 Bundestag elections; the SPD won 25.7% (206 seats), the B90/die Grünen – 14.7 (118 seats), the FDP – 11.4% (91 seats), the AfD – 10.4% (83 seats), and the Left – 4.9% (39 seats). The results clearly indicated that support for the CDU/CSU dwindled again (by 8.8 pp compared to the 2017 election, with the CDU getting 7.8 pp fewer votes than in the previous election, while the CSU received 1 pp more). About two million CDU/CSU voters who were dissatisfied with the economic and international policies, and the departure of Chancellor Angela Merkel, voted for the SPD, while about 1.05m voted for die Grünen. Support for the AfD and the Left also fell (by 2.2 pp and 4.4 pp respectively) while it went up for the SPD (by 5.2 pp), the B90/die Grünen (by 5.8 pp) and the FDP (by 0.7 pp) (*Bundestagswahl 2021*, 2021; *Niemcy po wyborach...*, 2021). It was the latter three that decided to join the government coalition, the first since 1957 to consist of three parliamentary clubs.

It took five weeks to draft the document titled *Dare more progress. An Alliance*

⁴ Ger.: *Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land.*

⁵ Ger.: *Vorstand.*

⁶ Ger.: *Landesgruppe.*

⁷ Ger.: *Landtagfraktion.*

for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability⁸ (beginning on October 21). The negotiations, that were carried out by more than 300 politicians working in 22 working groups, were concluded not only surprisingly quickly, but also discreetly; negotiation details (such as that the negotiators, who had strong arguments, struggled for hours with the wording of the coalition agreement, and that it was difficult to find an agreement on issues such as climate policy) were confirmed only after they were completed. The agreement was presented on November 24 and then voted on (*Analizy. Niemiecka umowa...*, 2021; Budras, Geinitz, Löhr, Schäfers, 2021; *Niemcy: SPD, Zieloni i FDP...*, 2021). The Social Democrats were the first to adopt the document at the party's digital convention on December 4. Of the 608 votes cast, 98.8%, or 598, were in favor, 7 were against and 3 voters abstained. The FDP held a similar convention, where the agreement was adopted by an overwhelming majority (92.2%, or 535 votes in favor, 37 against). The B90/die Grünen party was the last (Dec. 6) to agree to sign the coalition agreement and form a joint government through a digital referendum (of the 71,150 votes cast, 86% were in favor, 11.6% against, and 2.4% abstained) (*Rząd Scholza. Umowa...*, 2021; *Niemiecka umowa koalicyjna – plan...*, 2021; *Zustimmung der Delegierten/der Parteibasis...*, 2021). The agreement was officially signed by representatives of the coalition parties on the following day.

Both documents are quite extensive. The coalition agreement between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats dated March 12, 2018 is 175 pages long, with the most references to European policy featuring in the preamble (pp. 4–5), Part I. *A New Awakening for Europe* (pp. 6–10), VIII. *Managing Immigration – Demanding and Supporting Integration* (pp. 103–108), and XII. *Germany's Responsibility for World Peace, Freedom and Security* (pp. 144–162).⁹ The direct reference to European policy in the title of the document and in Part I, as well as multiple mentions in other parts of the agreement, testified to the CDU/CSU and SPD government prioritizing this policy. At the same time, the provisions were worded so as to leave room for interpretation for the coalition partners, which Chancellor Angela Merkel, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz intended to take full advantage of.

The December 7, 2021 agreement of the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals ran to 144 pages, with the most references to European politics in Part VII. *Germany's Responsibility for Europe and the World* (pp. 104–125).¹⁰ Although some references were also found elsewhere in the document, the SPD, FDP and B90/die Grünen government was clearly focused on domestic policy, including climate policy and economic policy (due to the negative impact of the pandemic on the German economy).

II. German Responsibility for Europe and the European Union

The government coalition formed after the 2017 elections devoted much more space in the coalition agreement to German responsibility for the European Union,

⁸ Ger.: *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit.*

⁹ Ger.: I. *Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa*, VIII. *Zuwanderung steuern – Integration fordern und unterstützen*, XII. *Deutschlands Verantwortung für Frieden, Freiheit und Sicherheit in der Welt.*

¹⁰ Ger.: VII. *Deutschlands Verantwortung für Europa und die Welt.*

and Europe in general, than its successor. In the document with the resounding title: *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Solidarity for Our Country*, the CDU, CSU and SPD stressed that Germany owed much to Europe, and explained that this was one reason why its success was important to Germany. They added that “a strong and united Europe is the best guarantee of a good future in peace, freedom and prosperity” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 6). They wanted Germany to fulfill its European responsibility “in a spirit of partnership and mutual solidarity,” which was linked, among other things, to the coalition parties’ taking an active part in the debate on the future of the EU, involving German citizens in this debate, and strengthening European integration. In this way, the CDU, CSU and SPD wanted to make Europe more citizen-oriented and “more transparent and gain a new trust” (*neues Vertrauen gewinnen*) (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 6, 10).

The coalition of the SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP made vague promises that Germany, as the largest member state of the European Union, would assume “a special responsibility by serving the EU as a whole,” and added that it would form a government that would “define German interests in light of European interests” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104). In the agreement, titled *Dare more progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, the coalition partners declared that they sought close cooperation with their democratic partners in the spirit of multilateralism (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104). The CDU, CSU and SPD also spoke about the multilateral international cooperation that should continue (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 144).

III. The European Union and its core values

The 2018 coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and SPD described the European Union as a historically uniquely successful project of peace that “links economic integration and prosperity with freedom, democracy and social justice” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 6). The parties stressed that the EU must renew and preserve its values and strength, as this was the only way “to guarantee a future in peace, safety and prosperity” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 4). The agreement, entitled *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Solidarity for Our Country*, argued that both Germany and the European Union faced serious challenges, such as the UK’s departure, refugeeism and immigration that were putting European partnership and solidarity to the test, and the still present aftermath of the economic crisis, namely unemployment, that could be overcome with a renewed, strong, democratic, competitive and pro-social European Union. Postulating the need for a new beginning in Europe (*Aufbruch für Europa*), the coalition partners also stressed their readiness to defend “the fundamental principles of freedom and democracy that were anchored in the European treaties against any attack by political parties and movements” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 6). The CDU, CSU and SPD stressed that the EU was not fully using its political and economic potential and had “too little self-confidence” and thus formulated the need for a “new culture of responsibility that raises Europe’s credibility as a partner in the

Western world and improves our position with emerging powers” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 144).

According to the coalition agreement titled *Dare more progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP viewed the European Union as a historic project of peace and freedom (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104). The parties also perceived a democratically consolidated, capable and sovereign EU as the basis for prosperity. They advocated an EU that “protects its values and the rule of law both internally and externally and stands up for them with determination” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104). In this context, the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals attached particular importance to the effective protection of the fundamental EU values, namely those enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). The coalition partners, aware that it might be difficult to face up to the current challenges, such as preserving democracy, at the national and EU levels, advocated cooperation with various international organizations (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, pp. 104–105).

1. Rule of Law

Of the six core values that are fundamental for the European Union, both party coalitions devoted considerable space in their respective agreements to freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The CDU, CSU and SPD linked the latter primarily to the enlargement of the European Union. In this context, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats stressed that, while they support the Western Balkan states moving closer to the EU, they attach particular importance to the development of the rule of law as part of this process. The complete fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, and therefore compliance with the law, was viewed as a prerequisite for bringing Western Balkan states closer to the organization (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 8, 149). On account of the deteriorating situation in Turkey in terms of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, the CDU, CSU and SPD were reluctant to close some, and open further chapters in the accession negotiations with Turkey (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 150–151). The rule of law also featured in the 2018 coalition agreement with regard to this principle being enforced in Germany, in the context of raising citizen awareness and trust and preventing extremism, and “even more consistently than before” in the European Union (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 6–7, 119, 123).

This issue was yet stronger addressed in the coalition agreement between the SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP. The parties announced that, working within the framework of the Council, they would “more consistently enforce and further develop the application of existing rule of law instruments (rule of law dialogue, rule of law check, conditionality mechanism, infringement procedures, recommendations and findings under Article 7 procedures)” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105). They called on the European Commission, “as guardian of the Treaties, to use and enforce the existing rule of law instruments more consistently and promptly, including the rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), via Articles 260 and 279 of the Treaty on the Functioning of

the European Union” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105). In the agreement, the coalition partners also declared to support the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report with independent expertise. The SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP also wanted the European Commission to initiate proceedings against systemic violations of the Treaty by bundling individual proceedings against a member state in the event of violations of the rule of law (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105). Speaking of violations of the rule of law in Poland, the three parties said they would agree “to the European Commission’s proposals on the reconstruction fund plans if conditions such as an independent judiciary are secured” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105).

2. Respecting human rights

Respect for human rights is another fundamental value of the European Union that was repeatedly mentioned in both coalition agreements. In the agreement titled *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Solidarity for Our Country*, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats stressed that human rights are universal and indivisible. Among other things, they supported abolishing the death penalty and banning torture, protecting and strengthening the rights of women and children, and labor and trade union rights. They stressed their struggle against human and organ trafficking, and against exclusion and violence based on sexual orientation (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 155). Representing and strengthening the rights of women, children and marginalized groups, such as LGBTI, was also addressed in the coalition agreement signed by the SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP. The parties to the agreement stressed the key importance of equal participation in political, economic and social life, strengthening the rights of women and girls, as well as full, equal access to education. They promised to develop a comprehensive action plan for gender equality with the participation of civil society and to back it financially (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 120).¹¹ Importantly, the parties wished to see minority rights strengthened not only at the national level, but also internationally, especially in the EU (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 117).

The analysis of the 2021 coalition agreement demonstrates that the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals also addressed the issue of respect for human rights with reference to asylum seekers. They proposed “aligning asylum procedures, including standards of care and accommodation for asylum seekers, and ensuring that full benefits are granted only in the responsible EU member state.” The coalition parties demanded that asylum procedures, mainly at external borders, and repatriation, be implemented in accordance with European human rights standards. The parties also stressed that human rights must be respected in third countries where asylum-seekers reside (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 104).

This issue has also been taken up by the CDU, CSU and SPD. In their coalition agreement *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Sol-*

¹¹ Civil society, together with other partners, was also to work with the parties to protect human rights around the world. As emphasized, “in doing so, we are guided by our values and interests” assigned member state (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 113).

identity for Our Country, the parties stressed Germany's commitment to the right of asylum and the fundamental values enshrined in the Basic Law (*Ustawa Zasadnicza...*, 1997, Articles 16a, 18, pp. 87, 89, 91) and to its obligations under the European Union's asylum policy (*Traktat o funkcjonowaniu Unii Europejskiej*, Articles 67(2), 78 and 80, 2016, pp. 73, 76–77, 78; *Karta praw podstawowych Unii Europejskiej*, Article 18, 2016, p. 397), the Geneva Convention on Refugees (*Konwencja dotycząca statusu uchodźców...*, 1991), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (*Konwencja o Ochronie Praw Człowieka...*, 1993), as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (*Konwencja o prawach dziecka...*, 1991) (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 103–104). The main emphasis was placed on comprehensively combating the causes of flight from countries of origin (including asylum seekers), humanitarian engagement in regions affected by various types of crises, and EU member states jointly sharing their responsibility (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 8). In this context, the coalition agreement repeatedly referred to organization and control, which were related to, among other things, effective protection of the EU's external borders, the creation of acceptance, decision and repatriation institutions for the acceleration of asylum proceedings, and the introduction of an annual limit on the number of immigrants admitted into Germany, ranging from 180,000 to 220,000 (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 15–16).

Since the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is not binding for states unless they are acting under EU law, the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP wanted the implementation of rights under the Charter in the future to be enforceable before the Court of Justice of the European Union, even if a member state “acts within the scope of its national law” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105). The parties to the coalition agreement also supported strengthening the European Court of Human Rights and insisted that its judgments be implemented in all member states. They stressed that “the EU sanctions mechanism must be used consistently and better coordinated with our international partners” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 116). In this context, the coalition demanded that the Council of Europe remain the guardian and protector of fundamental human rights (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 148). In order to consistently strengthen the protection of these rights at the level of the European Union, the CDU, CSU and SPD stressed their support for the EU's accession to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,¹² which the Lisbon Treaty obliges the EU to do anyway (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 155). The Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals spoke out in the same vein in the document *Dare more progress. An Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability* (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 116).

The coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals also attached importance to ensuring that in order for EU foreign policy to be effective and credible it remains focused on promoting and strengthening human rights¹³ “as the most important shield

¹² See: *Europejska Konwencja Praw Człowieka po nowelizacji przez Protokół nr 11, 14 i 15 z Protokołem nr 1 oraz Protokołami nr 4, 6, 7, 12, 13 i 16* (2021), https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_POL, 15.01.2024.

¹³ In addition to human rights, the parties also mentioned the EU's commitment to peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and sustainable development.

of individual dignity” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, pp. 108, 114). In view of human, women’s and minority rights being massively eroded in Turkey,¹⁴ the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP stressed their intention not to close any chapters, or open new ones in the accession negotiations with Turkey (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 122). The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats spoke in the same vein in their 2018 coalition agreement. At the same time, the coalition parties stressed that Turkey was an important partner of Germany and a neighbor of the EU, connected by multiple and varied relations, so they were particularly interested in good relations (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 150). The SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP specified that they intended to “breathe life into the EU-Turkey dialogue agenda and expand exchanges [of experience and information] with civil society” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 122).

IV. Deepening European integration

In the coalition agreement *A New Awakening for Europe. A New Dynamic for Germany. A New Solidarity for Our Country*, the CDU, CSU and SPD were clearly against protectionism, isolationism and nationalism, and spoke in favor of increased international cooperation. The parties wanted Germany to actively participate in the debate on the future of the EU and in strengthening European integration (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 8). This topic was further explored in the coalition agreement between the SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the FDP, in which the parties stated that they intended to use the debates at the Conference on the Future of Europe to carry out reforms, including changes to the treaties. According to the coalition partners, the conference should lead to a convention and to the subsequent further transformation of the European Union into a federal European state (*das föderale europäische Bundesstaat*), “which is decentralized an organized according to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104).

The two German government coalitions under discussion emphasized in their respective agreements that the European Parliament should be strengthened. The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats addressed this issue in the context of strengthening the EU’s capacity to act (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 6, 8–9), while the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals saw this strengthening in terms of granting the EP “its right of [legislative] initiative; preferably in the Treaties, otherwise inter-institutionally” and using the Community method (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 104). In the agreement titled *Dare more progress. An Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, the coalition partners supported a uniform European electoral law with partially transnational EP lists and a binding procedure for appointing leading candidates (*Spitzenkandidatensystem*) for the office of President of the European Commission; they also wanted greater transparency in the work of the Council of the European Union. In addition, they promised to increase qualified majority voting in the Council. They also suggested strengthening the CJEU by introducing a single, longer term of 12 years for the Court’s judges (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 105).

¹⁴ Ger.: *massiv abgebaut*.

V. Enlargement of the European Union

The two government coalitions did not devote much space in their coalition agreements to EU enlargement. The CDU, CSU and SPD stressed that “the EU’s enlargement policy remains important for promoting peace, stability and cooperation,” adding that the organization “must ensure its ability to act through internal reforms” (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, p. 8). The SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP shared similar views, observing that “in parallel with the accession negotiations, the EU needs to improve its absorption capacity” (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 109).

The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats made three rather succinct references to the need for Western Balkan countries to meet the Copenhagen criteria before joining the EU in their agreement. The coalition partners highlighted the need for these countries to become more democratic, reform the rule of law and combat organized crime and corruption. At the same time, the parties declared that they supported Western Balkan countries joining the EU and the efforts they had already made to this end (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 8, 17, 149). The agreement of the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals also mentioned their support for the accession process of the Western Balkan countries and the reforms they have to carry out to meet all the Copenhagen criteria. The SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP supported Albania and North Macedonia in opening the first negotiating chapters, the decision to liberalize visa regulations for Kosovo citizens, and continued negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia. The coalition partners additionally backed up the EU’s efforts to draft and conclude an agreement that would permanently stabilize relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and attempts to achieve lasting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, building on respect for territorial integrity and overcoming ethnic divisions (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 109).

The Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals, in *Dare more progress. An Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, indicated that they were working together with EU member states to further develop the Eastern Partnership. They stated that states such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, which are seeking EU accession, should be able to move closer through consistent constitutional and economic reforms (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 121). The CDU, CSU and SPD did not address the issue of accession of candidate countries from Eastern Europe and the Transcaucasus in the agreement. It is true that Ukraine is mentioned, but only in the context of Russia’s annexation of Crimea (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 149–150).

Both government coalitions took a stand on the EU accession process of Turkey. The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats stressed that they were particularly interested in good relations with a country that is not only a neighbor of the European Union, but also an important partner with multiple, diverse links with Germany. The coalition partners stated that the state of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Turkey had long been deteriorating. Accordingly, in the coalition agreement, on two occasions they objected to opening new negotiation chapters and closing others, and to liberalizing visa regulations for Turkish citizens, until the negative trends are halted and shortcomings are reversed in accordance with the international obligations of Turkey (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, 2018, pp. 17–18, 150–151). Very simi-

lar content was found in the agreement of the SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP. In addition to the issues mentioned in the 2018 agreement, the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals also pointed out that Turkey is a NATO partner of the EU and Germany. They further promised to revive the EU-Turkey dialogue (*Mehr Fortschritt wagen...*, 2021, p. 122).

Conclusion

Both coalition agreements clearly demonstrate Germany's responsibility for the stability of international relations in Europe, although the document adopted by the CDU/CSU and SPD addresses it more often. Both coalitions linked a strong, value-based and globally-relevant European Union with peace, freedom and prosperity. The agreement of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats viewed the EU as the guarantee for those values, while the Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens – as their foundation. Both coalitions agreed that only a strong European Union would be able to face up to the various challenges, such as the aftermath of Brexit, increased refugeeism, immigration and the economic crisis, addressed in the 2018 agreement, or the outcomes of pandemics, climate change and digitization in the 2021 agreement.

Both government coalitions wanted Germany to actively participate in the debate on the future of the EU and deepening European integration. The agreement of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats did not identify an explicit political goal (*finalité politique*) of European integration, unlike the document of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP, which advocated the transformation of the EU into a federal European state, which is decentralized and organized according to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Both documents addressed reforms of EU institutions, including the need to strengthen the European Parliament; but the 2021 agreement was more precise and left less room for interpretation. The coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals supported, among other things, extending qualified majority voting in the Council of the EU and increasing the transparency of its work, granting the EP the right of legislative initiative, introducing a uniform European electoral law with partially supranational EP lists and a binding procedure for appointing the main candidates for the office of president of the European Commission, and strengthening the CJEU by introducing a single, longer term of 12 years for the Court's judges. The reforms were to be carried out using the Community method, with the reservation, however, that if it was ineffective, the coalition parties would tighten cooperation only with selected EU member states. France was indicated in this context. The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats also advocated making changes in the EU in close German-French partnership, primarily seeking to strengthen and reform the eurozone. However, in supporting the inviolability of the national law, among other things, they weakened French demands.

Both government coalitions attached great importance to preserving and defending democracy and the rule of law, including against any attack by political parties and movements, a provision added by the CDU, CSU and SPD, which must have been a response to the growing popularity of the AfD and die Linke in Germany. Both

coalitions wanted the rule of law to be enforced both inside and outside the European Union. In this context, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats stressed that the complete fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, and therefore adherence to the law, by the Western Balkan states was a prerequisite for their future accession, while for Turkey the same was a necessary condition to close the chapters that had been opened, and to open further ones.

The SPD, B90/die Grünen and the FDP strongly addressed their support for the European Union in ensuring the rule of law, including calling on the European Commission, which guards the treaties, to apply and enforce existing rule of law instruments, including CJEU rulings, more consistently and more quickly, by invoking Articles 260 and 279 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. The parties also promised to support the EC in further efforts to ensure the rule of law, including reconstruction fund payments to be withheld if the independence of the judiciary is violated, which was the case in Poland. The issue of the violation of the rule of law by Poland's government was repeatedly raised by members of the Scholz government, including by the Chancellor himself during an official visit to Warsaw on December 12, 2021, thus becoming one of the main points of contention in Polish-German bilateral relations.

Respecting human rights was another topic repeatedly addressed in both agreements with reference to two issues. One concerned the European Union's enlargement, in particular in the context of human rights violations in Turkey, and it was emphasized that abiding by them was one of the main accession criteria. The other one concerned the issue of how asylum seekers were treated outside and within the EU, including in Germany itself. The CDU, CSU and SPD emphasized that the responsibilities should be jointly shared by EU member states and that acceptance, decision and repatriation institutions for rejected asylum seekers should be established; the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals in turn called for asylum procedures to be aligned, including standards of care and accommodation for asylum seekers, and ensuring that full benefits would only be granted in one country. The 2018 agreement also included a controversial provision, pushed by the Bavarian Christian Democrats, to introduce an annual limit on admissions (from 180,000 to 220,000), which was undoubtedly linked to the strongly polarized approaches of German society to the migration crisis and the growing support for the AfD (including in Bavaria). Still, thanks to the efforts of the Social Democrats, the document specifies that these limits do not and will not violate the right to asylum.

As concerns the enlargement of the European Union, the two coalitions addressed Turkey's and the Western Balkans' efforts to join the EU on several occasions. The coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats did not address the EU ambitions of Eastern European and Transcaucasian states at all, and the SPD, B90/die Grünen and FDP gave only passing attention to them. In their agreement, the latter stated that countries seeking EU accession, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, should be able to move closer through consistent constitutional and economic reforms. This view was based on the belief that the EU must improve its absorption capacity while running accession negotiations. The CDU, CSU and SPD coalition spoke in a similar vein. While arguing that the EU's enlargement policy remains important for promoting peace, stability and cooperation, they added that the EU must first ensure its operational capacity by carrying out internal reforms.

Despite the above differences and the different emphasis in the European policy of the two government coalitions, the European policies presented in the agreements of March 2018 and December 2021 can be deemed similar. This means that the Olaf Scholz government continued stressing the importance of European integration for peace, freedom and prosperity of Germany and other member states, and of its deepening and expansion of the European Union. The analysis showed that the agreement of the Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens actually supported tightening integration more strongly than the previous one, and implied that the new government would initiate and shape community decisions more actively than the CDU/CSU and SPD government. At present, the coalition partners seem to have failed to persuade the most skeptical EU states to their ideas. Therefore, they are developing cooperation with France, which has repeatedly been mentioned, but also with Belgium, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia or Spain, implementing the idea of a 'two-speed Europe' implied in the agreement.

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Summary

The article aims to provide an overview of the European policies of two successive German government coalitions: the CDU, CSU and SPD, as well as the SPD, Alliance 90/die Grünen and FDP, as defined in their respective 2018 and 2021 coalition agreements. To this end, a comparative method was used in the article, making it possible to present the views of the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition and the SPD, Alliance 90/die Grünen and FDP on European policy, and point out the differences and similarities between them. Content analysis was also employed to examine and interpret the government coalition agreements of 2018 and 2021, which were the main research material. The article was divided into several sections corresponding to the content of the two documents and to the research questions posed in their analysis. The study made it possible to verify the hypothesis that the European policies presented in the March 2018 and December 2021 coalition agreements are similar, which means that the Olaf Scholz government continues to deepen integration and expand the European Union.

Key words: German European policy, German political parties, deepening integration, EU enlargement

Polityka europejska w umowach koalicyjnych niemieckich partii politycznych – kontynuacja czy zmiana po wyborach w 2021 roku?

Streszczenie

Artykuł ma na celu przybliżenie polityki europejskiej dwóch następujących po sobie niemieckich koalicji rządowych: CDU, CSU i SPD oraz SPD, Sojuszu 90/Zielonych i FDP, która określona została w zawartych przez partie umowach koalicyjnych z 2018 i 2021 r. W związku z powyższym, podczas pisania artykułu użyta została metoda porównawcza, dzięki której przybliżone zostały poglądy koalicji CDU/CSU i SPD oraz SPD, B90/die Grünen i FDP dotyczące polityki europejskiej oraz wskazane zostały różnice i podobieństwa owych poglądów. Wykorzystana została również analiza treści, która umożliwiła zbadanie i zinterpretowanie rządowych umów koalicyjnych z lat 2018 i 2021, które były głównym materiałem badawczym. Artykuł podzielony został na kilka części odpowiadających zawartości obu dokumentów oraz

postawionym w ramach ich analizy pytaniom badawczym. Rezultatem badań było zweryfikowanie hipotezy, że polityka europejska zaprezentowana w umowach koalicyjnych z marca 2018 i grudnia 2021 r. jest zbliżona, co oznacza, że rząd Olafa Scholza kontynuuje pogłębianie integracji i rozszerzanie Unii Europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: niemiecka polityka europejska, niemieckie partie, pogłębianie integracji, rozszerzanie UE