

# Manifesto of the “Berlin Circle” (May 11, 2016)

## Abstract

In a new position paper by the conservative Berlin Circle within the CDU, 15 politicians demand a change of course from Angela Merkel. According to them, it was important to prevent another “drift to the left” within the CDU. It also addresses relations with Turkey and Germany’s refugee policy.

## Source

I. After the catastrophic election results for the CDU on 13 March 2016, especially in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, to continue like this will lead to the loss of more votes in the future. A ruthless, honest, and self-critical analysis was and remains necessary! Those who gloss over the election results misjudge the difficult situation in which the party finds itself and give the impression that they do not want to draw the resulting political consequences – or even seriously discuss them. The historically worst results in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, which once were the CDU’s strongholds, are bitter for the entire party and represent its most serious setback to date. The causes are not only to be found in refugee policy, but also in the fact that the CDU, with its socio-political course, has created space for a party to the right of it.

The election result is a dramatic continuation of a downward trend that has been emerging for several years. The CDU has lost half a dozen state governments (in Thuringia, Baden-Württemberg, Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Hamburg and North Rhine-Westphalia) without regaining a single position or even winning a new one. In addition, the party has lost about a quarter of its supporters compared to 2013 according to opinion polls. Even though it is gratifying that CDU candidates have been elected Lord Mayor in Essen and Bonn again after many years, this cannot hide the fact that only a few major German cities are still governed by a CDU Lord Mayor. With the loss of numerous state parliament mandates, particularly in Baden-Württemberg, the CDU is losing its political presence on the ground and its structure and ability to work have been weakened.

At the same time, a new party to the right of the Union, the AfD, has emerged, which now sits in six state parliaments (Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony) with predominantly two-figure results and – if Bundestag elections were held tomorrow – would probably enter the Bundestag with a two-figure percentage. The consequences of this development or even the question of a course correction are not sufficiently discussed among the CDU leadership. At the same time, there are considerable differences between the two sister parties CDU and CSU – at least with regard to refugee policy. It is also concerning that at the European level the federal government is losing influence due to its special path in the refugee crisis. This becomes clear, among other things, in the fact that in recent months more and more EU member states have been pursuing a more restrictive refugee policy with reference to their own legitimate interests. The federal government runs the risk of isolating itself.

II. The Berlin Circle has been pointing out for years that the CDU must not neglect its economically liberal and value-conservative voters. The suggestion that conservative supporters have no alternative to the CDU has proved to be a serious error. Although it has often been suggested, it was never our aim to push the party to the right, but to prevent another drift to the left. It appears that the CDU is losing more in the center and to the right than it is gaining in left-wing voters. In reality, therefore, it is not winning new voters, but losing the old ones. The CDU was

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the party of the center, the social committees and the value conservatives. Therefore it became the political home of broad sections of the population. This was its recipe for success as a people's party. The CDU's "modernization," which is now often referred to, creates permanent space for a new party to the right of it. For decades, it was the CDU's declared goal to make every political effort to ensure that no new party could establish itself to its right. Decisions of far-reaching importance and in particular political corrections must first be discussed intensively with the party base before final decisions are taken. If, in the future, the CDU and the SPD cannot even reach a majority together, this will endanger the stability of our democracy.

#### 1. Profile

The more than disappointing election results are also due to the fact that many voters feel the CDU lacks a clear profile. The CDU's programmatic visibility has declined in recent years. The preamble of the CDU's basic program states: "The CDU is the people's party of the center. Even today, the political currents from which it emerged after 1945 are alive in it: the Christian-social, the liberal and the value-conservative." These three traditional pillars are the "brand core" of the CDU, which was criminally neglected. This is why in recent years voters have increasingly lost sight of them.

#### 2. Refugee policy (migration and asylum):

According to a recent INSA survey, 64% of the respondents and half of the CDU's supporters disagree with current refugee policy. If the Greens and the left wing of the SPD in particular applaud the federal government on this issue, the CDU leadership will have to ask itself whether its course still represents its own supporters at all. When it is even suggested that the supporters of the federal government's refugee policy have won the elections (Malu Dreyer, SPD, in Rhineland-Palatinate, Winfried Kretschmann, Greens, in Baden-Württemberg), this turns the situation upside down. The CDU, which is by far the strongest political party in the German Bundestag and also the current Chancellor's party, can certainly be expected to take the needs and concerns of its own voters seriously.

Germany is a country that is hospitable and always ready to help others. It is also a country where people from well over one hundred nations and different cultures usually get along well with each other. But never before in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany has German society been so unsettled and divided as it is today as a result of the influx of refugees. Fear of a loss of German identity and too many foreigners settling here has gripped many citizens.

The current decline in the number of refugees and illegal immigrants to Germany is mainly due to the closure of the borders of the Balkan states and less to the agreement between the EU and Turkey. Criticizing the Balkan states for closing their borders is not in our interest, and nor was it conducive to the CDU election campaign to advocate keeping the Balkan route open a few days before March 13.

The agreement to discontinue internal border controls in the Schengen area was tied to the commitment to secure EU external borders. It is the original task of the EU member states to ensure effective protection of the EU's external borders. The EU must not make itself dependent on other states for the necessary protection of its external borders. Despite all its advantages, the agreement between the EU and Turkey carries the risk of permanently having to make political allowances for the Turkish Government, even in the event of clear violations of basic and human rights.

With the exception of admitting people into the country who are clearly in danger, the vast majority of citizens see

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more risks than opportunities in view of uncontrolled immigration numbering hundreds of thousands. Opportunities arise when integration into society and the labor market is successful and we can be certain of the unreserved acceptance of our legal system and values by all those admitted to our country.

It is completely incomprehensible that those who criticize current refugee policy should be accused of being responsible for the election defeats of March 13. This is downright absurd. For it is not those who point out mistakes who are to blame for them, but those who make them.

### 3. AfD

Of all parties, the CDU lost the most voters to the AfD. The second largest proportion of AfD voters comes from the camp of non-voters, many of whom had previously voted for the CDU. One of the prerequisites for the emergence of the AfD is the fact that the CDU has made room on the right. Incidentally, the AfD was politically dead in the summer of 2015 after its split. It was due to the controversial refugee policy that it regained considerable popularity. Incidentally, it is foolish to insult AfD voters. The aim of the CDU must be to win back these voters. Former Federal President Roman Herzog and former Prime Minister [of Baden-Württemberg] Erwin Teufel rightly say: "One does now draw away voters from successful new rival parties by excluding them as populist and racist." The way to win them back is "by [...] once again conducting controversial debates and positioning oneself on issues that have been swept under the carpet for years out of misunderstood political correctness."

### III. The Berlin Circle demands the following:

The CDU federal executive must urgently discuss the causes of the worrying election results and draw the necessary conclusions for the future course of the party. Constructive self-criticism is at the beginning of new successes. Only an unembellished portrayal of reality can gain approval. Those who uncritically continue business as usual will suffer further losses of votes in the state parliamentary elections in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin in fall 2016, in the state parliamentary elections in Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia in 2017 and in the Bundestag elections scheduled for 2017. The AfD and FDP could benefit from the weakness of the CDU.

The CDU must make the still valid principles of the Christian-democratic agenda visible again in its politics. We must appeal to our voters on the basis of a recognizable Christian orientation with messages on the guiding culture, the importance of responsibility and freedom, the social market economy, internal security, the family, the protection of life and patriotism.

Our goals are:

To protect Germany effectively from the dangers emanating from returning Jihadist fighters. Therefore, the legal prerequisites should be created to deny German citizenship to those persons who fight for a terrorist militia abroad and have another citizenship besides the German one.

The reintroduction of criminal liability for promoting a terrorist organization.

A family policy that focuses on marriage and the family, while at the same time recognizing that values are also lived in other communities.

Turning away from gender ideology

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Continuation of sound budgetary policies, which are an undoubted merit of the CDU; low interest rates and rising tax revenues are favorable conditions for this

Combating further labor market regulations; temporary work and contracts for work are important flexible building blocks leading to more employment and prosperity.

Promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises, e.g. by not burdening and criminalizing large parts of small and medium-sized enterprises with minimum wage regulation. This does not apply to the level of the minimum wage, but to the superfluous bureaucratic requirements and the design of controls. In addition, for example, the inheritance tax law must be written in a way that is favorable to the middle class.

Opposing left-wing demands for tax increases

An urgently needed simplification of the tax code

discussion of the daring monetary policy of the European Central Bank, which leaves savers and investors behind as losers of the zero interest rate policy

the prevention of left-wing redistribution intentions; Germany has one of the most balanced income and wealth structures with a broad middle class in international comparison

a European Union in which nations remain recognizable and in which Britain remains a member

3. With regard to our refugee policy, responsibility for the common good in our state must not fall by the wayside. What is needed, therefore, is a signal that can be heard from afar to the effect that Germany's capacity to admit refugees is also limited. We will now have to decide which refugees we will allow into the country. Sweden and other countries have stated that their capacities have been exhausted. For these countries there is a limit to their capacity to receive refugees, and for Germany, of course, there is a limit. We must also ensure that people do not feel alienated in their own country. Prime Minister [of Hesse] Volker Bouffier is right in saying: "We are not an Islamic country and will not become one."

The signatories:

Veronika Bellmann, MdB

Wolfgang Bosbach, MdB

Klaus Brähmig, MdB

Thomas Dörflinger, MdB

Mark Hauptmann, MdB

Stefan Heck, MdB

Silke Launert, MdB

Philipp Lengsfeld, MdB

Tim Ostermann, MdB

Sylvia Pantel, MdB

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Johannes Selle, MdB  
Patrick Sensburg, MdB  
Christian von Stetten, MdB  
Erika Steinbach, MdB  
Barbara Woltmann, MdB  
Hans-Peter Uhl, MdB  
Christean Wagner, State Minister (retired)

Source of the German original text: „Mit diesem Manifest fordern CDU-Politiker einen Stopp der „Linksdrift“ von Merkel,“ *Focus Online*, August 4, 2016,  
[https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/berliner-kreis-mit-diesem-manifest-fordern-cdu-politiker-einen-stopp-des-linksdrifts-von-merkel\\_id\\_5521903.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/berliner-kreis-mit-diesem-manifest-fordern-cdu-politiker-einen-stopp-des-linksdrifts-von-merkel_id_5521903.html) (last accessed December 7, 2020).

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