
ANGELA MERKEL NAMES CDU MEMBERS OF POSSIBLE GERMAN CABINET

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In her bid to form a new government, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has tapped a younger rival, some old allies and a cast of moderates for what would be her fourth Cabinet. Could one of them be a potential successor?

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.

That quote, attributed alternately to the ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu and the Renaissance writer and philosopher Machiavelli, might have been on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's mind on Sunday evening as she announced the six members of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) whom she would like to serve in her next Cabinet □ if her grand coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) is approved.

Merkel said she had tried to strike a balance between experience and youthful energy in making her picks.

"I think we've got an effective team that's equal to the demands of the future," the 63-year-old Merkel said, adding that all of her proposed ministers are far younger than she is.

But a youth movement probably wasn't Merkel's main concern in putting together a new team.

Nominating a rival

Of the six names on her list, the one that stands out most is Jens Spahn, the chancellor's nominee for health minister. The 37-year-old not only represents a new political generation, but was also heavily critical of Merkel's welcoming policy toward refugees, and is rumored to have even met with leaders of the CDU's allied Bavarian party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the center-right Free Democrats for informal brainstorming sessions about a post-Merkel political order.

Spahn is something of an oddball in the Merkel-led CDU. He is far more conservative than the chancellor. His nomination drew immediate criticism from the opposition Left party and Greens, who say he's far too close to Germany's mighty pharmaceutical industry.

Among conservatives under 40, Spahn is seen as having the best chance to lead the party some day, and his nomination is being viewed as a concession by Merkel to the party's youth wing, the Young Union, which hasn't always been happy with her centrist policies. It is the first time that Spahn has been offered a job at the ministerial level, usually seen as a precondition for higher

political functions such as party chair or chancellor candidate.

At the same time, the head of the Health Ministry is hardly the most glamorous of posts and, as a member of her Cabinet, Spahn won't have many opportunities to criticize the chancellor. Moreover, if a new grand coalition government is formed as expected next month, Spahn could be somewhat isolated as one of its most conservative members.

Allies and moderates

Merkel may have made a tactical concession by naming Spahn, but she picked allies and politicians who reflect her own moderate, pragmatic style of governing for the other ministries.

The most powerful of the CDU's Cabinet posts, the head of the Economy Ministry, went to 59-year-old Peter Altmaier. The political veteran served as the head of the Chancellery in Merkel's last Cabinet and is regarded as one of her closest political friends and supporters.

Merkel chose Helge Braun for the new head of the Chancellery, where he currently serves as minister of state. The promotion from within the body would promise continuity. To that end, Merkel tapped Ursula von der Leyen, has been part of all of her governments since 2005, to stay on as Defense Minister.

The Agriculture Ministry would go to Julia Klöckner, the head of the CDU in Rhineland-Palatinate and a centrist who is often thought to be on the short list of Merkel's potential successors. Speculation is rife in Berlin that, if she succeeds in forming a new government, Merkel will not see out the entirety of her fourth term in office.

No east Germans

Finally, Merkel nominated the relatively unknown 46-year-old Anja Karliczek to head the Education Ministry.

Karliczek is known for her activism in trying to help women coordinate family and career, and it is impossible to ignore that Merkel's proposed appointments are split equally between males and females. For a party that is often accused of having problems with women in top positions, this is by no means a given. With Merkel herself included, there would be more female than male CDU Cabinet members — a first in conservative German politics.

Last week, Anngret Kramp-Karrenbauer, another potential Merkel successor, was also named the CDU's new party

general secretary. On the other hand, Merkel herself is the lone conservative member of the proposed new government from the formerly Communist East Germany. That has drawn criticism from some observers who see such an absence as a sign that the established political parties have abandoned the east of the country to the far-right AfD party.

For the time being, Merkel's Cabinet members are only proposals. Before the ministers-designate can take up their posts, the grand coalition agreement must be approved — first by delegates to conferences of the CDU and CSU, and then by a mail ballot of the more than 450,000 members of

the SPD. That vote, which is seen as the higher hurdle, will be complete by March 2, after which Germany will know whether it has a new government or not.

Reputedly Merkel's choice as her future successor but lesser known across Germany, Kramp-Karrenbauer heads a CDU-SPD coalition as state premier in Saarland. Economic development that "leaves no one behind" is one of Kramp-Karrenbauer's policy planks. She also backed Merkel's tolerance toward asylum-seekers.

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