
GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER SIGMAR GABRIEL CONFIRMS HE WILL NOT BE PART OF NEXT GOVERNMENT

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Germany's Social Democrats have made their first big announcement the day before they present their ministers in the new coalition government. There will be no cabinet post for erstwhile leader Sigmar Gabriel.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel confirmed on Thursday that he will not be part of Chancellor Angela Merkel's new coalition government.

The decision was made by the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) leadership, Gabriel said, adding that he was told of the decision late on Wednesday.

"I will continue to be a directly elected member of the German Bundestag," Germany's top diplomat said in a statement posted on Twitter, "but now the time ends in which I carry out leading political duties for the SPD."

"(Serving my party) has been a big honor for which I am deeply grateful," he said.

The SPD will work together with Merkel's conservatives in a second-successive grand coalition, after the party's membership agreed to the coalition deal last Sunday.

How did it come to this? The SPD's decision to demote Gabriel is thought to have been spurred by the foreign minister's public falling out with former party head Martin Schulz. Gabriel accused Schulz of breaking his word and showing a lack of respect when reports surfaced that the then-SPD leader was vying for the foreign minister job.

Who will succeed him? The SPD is slated to announce Gabriel's successor on Friday, as well as their other cabinet appointments. According to reports, Thomas Oppermann, leader of the SPD's parliamentary party, is the favorite to head the foreign ministry.

The new chancellor will be the same as the old one: Christian Democrat (CDU) Angela Merkel. It will be her fourth term as leader of the German government and the third time she heads up a grand coalition between the CDU, its conservative Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Social Democrats (SPD). It is also expected to be her last term as chancellor.

A party and government stalwart: Gabriel has been Germany's vice chancellor since 2013. He served as environment minister in Merkel's first grand coalition between 2005 and 2009, and as economy minister from 2013 to 2017 as part of the outgoing coalition. He took over from Frank-

Walter Steinmeier as foreign minister at the beginning of last year.

dm/rt (dpa, Reuters)

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