
MERKEL URGES DIVIDED GERMANS TO PULL TOGETHER IN 2019

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BERLIN (Reuters) - Acknowledging that her government disappointed many Germans in 2018, Chancellor Angela Merkel sought to pull the country together for 2019 with a call for solidarity and cooperation to overcome deep political divisions.

In her New Year speech, Merkel said she recognized that many Germans bemoaned the ruling coalition that took office in March, an alliance of her conservative bloc and the center-left Social Democrats (SPD), which has been blighted by infighting.

But she added: We will only master the challenges of our times if we stick together and collaborate with others across borders.

Germany is still feeling the impact of Merkels 2015 decision to leave open the countrys borders to more than 1 million refugees, mainly fleeing war in the Middle East.

Resentment at that decision helped feed the rise of the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD), which surged into the Bundestag for the first time at last years federal election, fracturing the countrys political landscape.

Merkel has given up the leadership of her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), but wants to remain chancellor for the remainder of the current legislative period through to 2021 - a goal she referenced again in her New Years speech.

A poll on Sunday showed a majority of those surveyed Germans who expressed an opinion supported her staying on as chancellor for the full term.

Merkel stressed what she called Germanys values of openness, tolerance, respect and said the country would work towards global solutions when it starts a two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council from Jan. 1.

Merkel has sought to defend the Western order on which Germany depends and which U.S. President Donald Trump has destabilized by pulling out of international agreements on climate change and Irans nuclear program, and with tariffs.

She said she was committed to making the European Union more robust and capable of taking decisions.

And with Britain, we want to maintain a close partnership despite the withdrawal from the European Union, she added.

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Kaynak/Source: