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A good country in challenging times - Germany before the elections

I.

Germany is a country which offers a high quality of life, where people can work and live well.

- The great majority of our citizens have never lived as well as they do today.
- Our economy is growing. More people in Germany are in work than ever before. The number of people without jobs is at its lowest since 1991, the unemployment rate is lower than it has been for decades. There is training and work for young people too: youth unemployment is the lowest in Europe.
- Wages and pensions have increased significantly and are still rising. Social security systems are on a sound financial footing for the first time in decades.
- We have a high level of internal and external security in Germany.

We are therefore free to live the lives we choose for ourselves.

The successes achieved by the government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel are benefiting everyone, in particular people in the lower and middle-income groups. Germany still faces problems, however, and there are people who are less well-off or struggling and who we have to help. That is and remains our task.

Germany is a stable country; with a strong democracy based on the rule of law; with an open society and a high level of personal well-being; with freedom, internal and external security, growth and competitiveness, social security, a good education system, an effective infrastructure and unspoilt nature. We are a country with a distinctive, strong identity that offers its people a home and support, even in difficult times.

This is more than just a coincidence. The citizens of this country worked and are working hard to achieve this stability. A massive political effort was required to create an environment in which the creativity and economic dynamism of our country could come to the fore once again. Since a consensus was reached on the implementation of the Agenda 2010, since Angela Merkel and the CDU/CSU took over in government and since the great pension reform of 2007, our country has been moving in the right

direction. In the last four years, confidence in Germany as a place in which to do business and in the stability of its economic conditions has grown steadily and significantly.

We therefore stand by what we have created and achieved with our coalition partners in the last decade. Let me be clear: There will be no turning our backs on our successful policies, no return to the mistakes of the past.

Today we are living in the most beautiful and the best Germany we have ever known, despite the crises and controversies elsewhere. The vast majority of people are happy with their lives. Many people identify with our country out of conviction and are prepared to take responsibility for its future.

We live in peace and true friendship with all our neighbours. Our Country is admired around the world for many things and recognised for what we have achieved and for the values for which our country stands. And when it comes to finding solutions to the crises and conflicts and to meeting global challenges, Berlin is a sought-after partner around the world. All this is cause for gratitude, joy and pride and gives us strength to face the challenges of the future.

Many countries are experiencing wars, crises, instability and uncertainty. Human rights are being trampled under foot, the rule of law disregarded and freedom of opinion and the press threatened. Millions of people are being forced to flee their homes or cheated of their futures by bad political choices, in Africa and the Middle East, in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and in countries which have long served as examples. The world seems to have been turned upside down and international insecurity is only increasing.

Germany must be an anchor of stability in the world. The CDU and CSU offer a guarantee that people can rely on Germany and Europe as partners in these unstable times. We cannot, therefore, stand idly by as our country is criticised and its standing called into question by left- and right-wing populists and radical groups which seek to discredit our democratic institutions and our free press and to divide our country. All politicians must take a bold, firm stance against this development. We must make a commitment to democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law and Europe, on a cross-party basis and regardless of party-political interests. The CDU and the CSU are ready to do this.

II.

A good future

We should not waver in our efforts, or be satisfied with what we have achieved. In a world which is changing so rapidly and which constantly throws up new challenges, we must keep fighting, defending and building.

Germany is part of the global community. Much of what happens in other parts of the world affects us too. We can only do what is best for our country if we react promptly and sensibly to coming changes. We want a good future for Germany, for our children, for our grandchildren and for ourselves. We are laying the foundations for this.

Our prosperity and our quality of life depend largely on steady and sustainable economic growth. Our economy must remain competitive internationally, develop its ability to innovate and create enough new jobs. This is even more important in the digital era and the era of globalisation.

Protecting the climate and natural resources is fundamental to our futures. Both population numbers and prosperity are rising throughout the world. Raw materials consumption and CO2 emissions are increasing accordingly. We must show that protecting the environment is not incompatible with growth and prosperity, but that both can go hand in hand. This is why Europe leads the way in the area of climate and environment protection, this is the reason for the worldwide Paris Climate Agreement.

Security and stability are prerequisites for well-being and economic success. The CDU and the CSU are the parties of internal security. Only a country that has the ability to act independently can guarantee freedom and security. We support the work of the police, the intelligence services, the security services and the army. Germany is committed to the UN, NATO and the EU. We are part of the international alliance against terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking and cyber threats. We are tackling the causes of migration and using development policy and civilian crisis prevention to offer people incentives to stay in their home countries.

We are tackling all forms of protectionism and speaking out for international trade agreements and cooperation. The modern, globalised world in which we live will not tolerate barriers to trade and isolationist foreign policies or policies which prioritise only short-term national interests.

In the social market economy, we are focusing on the strength and the creativity of individuals, both workers and employers. We want to offer all those who are prepared to work hard the chance to better themselves. But we also understand that solidarity and social justice are essential. No one behind should be left behind. We want to give as many people as possible the chance to participate in the life of society and take responsibility for their own futures. That is our European social model, which we stand for and advocate throughout the world.

We want to strengthen the centre of our society and the cohesion of our country. For this reason, let us continue to focus on families and children, small businesses and specialist family firms, volunteering and civic engagement.

The CDU and the CSU have a joint project. A project for the future of Germany: prosperity and security for everyone. We want to protect what we have that is good and create something even better together. Germany is a country of opportunity and potential. Our future has just begun.

III.

Europe: we can safely say yes!

In many areas, the world seems to be in disarray. Authoritarian state systems are gaining ground, apparently stable States have collapsed. Millions of people have been forced to flee their homes. In the EU's immediate neighbourhood, the territorial integrity of Ukraine is being called into question by Russian aggression. The new US Administration has not yet taken a stance on many foreign policy issues.

The times in which we could rely completely on others are over. We Europeans must take greater responsibility for shaping our own future.

For these reasons, the CDU and the CSU want a strong, self-confident and dynamic Europe. A Europe that is capable of defending its own interests and taking international responsibility. A Europe of freedom, security and prosperity, which - if necessary - can take joint action to defend itself.

Public support for Europe has increased. Tens of thousands of people throughout Europe have taken to the streets in support of the ideas espoused by the 'Pulse of Europe' movement, France and Germany are forging a closer relationship once again. This time we must take the opportunity to create a Europe which is fit for purpose now and in the future.

Peace project Europe

The EU was founded as a response to two breakdowns in civilised values in the 20th century - the First and Second World Wars. Sixty years have passed since then. In those 60 years, no EU Member State has waged war or employed armed force against another. Europe is a peace project. It is a unique success story, the justification for everything we have done and an imperative to take things further: we must acknowledge that we have a shared geostrategic responsibility for freedom and peace and play our part in resolving conflicts in our neighbourhood. That is why the EU

became involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, that is why we are joining forces to implement the Paris Climate Agreement.

CDU and CSU support the proposal for a European Defence Union and a European Defence Fund. We are committed members of NATO and we are working to make the organisation a success. But if it wants to survive in the long run, the European Union must also be able to defend itself.

Europe as a guarantor of security

Europe must be an effective guarantor of the internal and external security of its Member States. In an increasingly globalised world, no country can protect its interests alone, without the support of others.

Europe must effectively protect its external borders against illegal migration, strengthen the border agency Frontex and complete the European asylum system. We will retain internal border controls until the EU's external borders are properly protected.

The EU-Turkey Agreement must serve as the model for similar agreements between Europe and other countries in the region and in North Africa. We have to prevent thousands of refugees from being smuggled halfway across half of Africa by unscrupulous traffickers only to drown in the Mediterranean.

Europe has a shared responsibility for refugees who have been persecuted or are in distress and who therefore are entitled to protection. All European countries must accept their responsibilities in this field.

The EU must therefore introduce a register of people entering and leaving the EU, which it agreed to do in response to our calls, as quickly as possible, so that we know how many third-country nationals are on our territory and so that we can more easily thwart would-be terrorists and people smugglers.

The EU urgently needs a better system for the exchange of information among the security authorities of the Member States, as Islamist terrorism and organised crime know no borders.

A Europe of prosperity

With the common market and the European single market, the EU has created the conditions for a decade-long economic boom in its Member States. Freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labour, laws on State aid and competition and the abolition of border checks have been key factors in that success. In recent

years, some countries have lost their international competitiveness. The result has been ever higher levels of national debt.

We are prepared to play our part in overcoming these problems, in particular the high levels of youth unemployment, because we want the EU as a whole to be successful. This is only possible if we follow the rules that we have agreed on together, such as the stability pact.

We want to achieve lasting stability in the eurozone. The guiding principle has not changed: in the future as well, there can be no debt mutualisation. We are ready to develop the eurozone further, one step at a time, with the new French Government, for example by creating a special monetary fund.

Europe has a responsibility to encourage research and development, to establish a digital internal market and to complete the Energy Union. Europe has the opportunity to become an engine for growth once again. This calls for sustained effort and an acknowledgement that creating jobs and economic growth is fundamental to our future prosperity.

Europe as a community of values

Since its founding, the EU has been a community of values, committed to safeguarding democracy, the rule of law and freedom of religion. The European Charter of Fundamental Rights bans the death penalty and protects human dignity. All the countries which have joined the EU thus far were judged against these criteria.

The United Kingdom has decided to leave the European Union. It is in our interest to retain close economic and political ties with the UK, even after Brexit. We must make it our goal to reduce the negative effects of Brexit on people and the economy. One thing is clear, however: those who leave the EU can no longer enjoy all its advantages.

We acknowledge Turkey's strategic and economic importance for Europe and the complex web of relationships between people in our two countries. We would therefore like to forge even closer ties between the EU and Turkey. People in Europe and Turkey will benefit from close and tailored cooperation. For this reason we want the closest possible cooperation between the EU and Turkey, including close strategic cooperation on foreign and security policy issues. We reject full EU membership for Turkey, however, as the country does not meet the relevant requirements. We have been monitoring the recent developments in Turkey regarding the rule of law, in particular freedom of expression and of the press, with great concern.

IV.

With Angela Merkel as Chancellor and under the political leadership of the CDU and CSU, our country has overcome major challenges over the last decade, both nationally and internationally.

We have shown that we can govern well. Our citizens know this and trust us to address the pressing questions of the future. We want to continue to repay this trust.

The CDU and the CSU want to continue to take responsibility for Germany. On 24 September, the question to be answered is what is the right way ahead for our country. I am convinced: we have the right answers which will enable us to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges which the future brings. If we are to do that, we need bold and clear-sighted policies. Our appeal is aimed at every person in Germany. We are asking people to continue to put their trust in the CDU and CSU and in policies they can count on. We are asking for a clear mandate for a new government: for a Germany in which people can live happily and well, and so that Angela Merkel can remain our Chancellor.