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*Business as Usual: The Implications of the German Election on Europe and the EU*

“If you want to predict how someone will act in the future, just look at what they have done in the past.” Congressman Jim McDermott imparted this advice when I worked as an intern in the U.S. House of Representatives. Politically speaking, this mantra can be applied beyond Washington D.C. as a guide to forecasting how any public figure will vote and what policies they will endorse. As Angela Merkel ascends to an historic third chancellorship, questions arise regarding the implications that these elections have for Europe as a whole. Reflecting on the Congressman’s advice, it can be anticipated that in terms of Germany’s leadership, Europe should expect more of the same.

Angela Merkel’s tenure has been marked by pragmatism with a slow, deliberative, and centrist approach to policy making. Her decisions are a product of careful calculations and seldom result in any major surprises. This consistent style of governance on top of the glaring absence of European affairs from her campaign both suggest that Ms. Merkel’s foreign policy and EU platforms will remain relatively unchanged. The vast margin of victory achieved by Ms. Merkel’s CDU party (its greatest since German reunification) would make any dramatic change politically hazardous. One should expect the same commitment to austerity with regards to the Eurozone financial crisis, the same emphasis on maintaining the stability of the EU, and the same negative outlook on EU expansion to candidate countries such as Turkey. This amounts to foreign policy cruise control as Germany switches its focus inward to tackle various domestic issues that were put on hold due to the Euro-zone crisis.

Chancellor Merkel’s personality and the current political reality within Germany make it a near certainty that we will see minimal change to the present foreign policy being pursued. As a scientist by profession, Ms. Merkel knows that it would make little sense to change the experiment when you have repeatedly achieved the desired outcome. The question should not be what implications this election has on Europe, but rather how Europe will respond to four more years of status quo.