

Zwischen Stillstand, Politikwandel und Krisenmanagement. Eine Bilanz der Regierung Merkel 2013–2017, Reimut Zohlnhöfer, and Thomas Saalfeld (eds.), Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2019, 663 pp., €64,99 (softcover), €44,99 (e-book).

Angela Merkels third government (2013–2017) was Germany's third *Grand Coalition*. Whereas the first *Grand Coalition* (1966–69) was sought by influential groups inside the Social and the Christian Democrats for years, the second one (2005–09) was, in the words of one of its leading protagonists, no romantic marriage but an episodic civil partnership. It was more forced on the parties by their principals, the voters, and the circumstances than wholeheartedly strived for by both partners. The coercive character of the coalition was then even more pronounced in the third *Grand Coalition*, which the editors rightly distinguish as a „coalition of the driven“ – driven by unwelcome voter instructions, the refugee crisis (since 2015) and a fear of public opinion which enabled the rise of the AfD.

Zwischen Stillstand, Politikwandel und Krisenmanagement is the newest volume in a by now well-established and acknowledged series which takes stock of German governments. The series started in 2003 with an assessment of the first red-green coalition (1998–2002) under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and evaluated every other government since then. *Spiritus rector* of the project is Reimut Zohlnhöfer (Heidelberg University), Thomas Saalfeld (Bamberg University) joined the project in 2015 with *Politik im Schatten der Krise. Eine Bilanz der Regierung Merkel 2009–2013*, the fourth volume in the series.

The anthology has a structure that stood the test of time in previous volumes: The editorial sets the general theme of the volume. It asks whether the „reform thesis“ or the „blockade thesis“ better characterizes Merkel's second *Grand Coalition*, a research question faithful readers already know from the volume about Merkel's first *Grand Coalition*. A first part follows, dealing with the basic conditions of governing: party strategies, external shocks (euro and refugee crises), voting behavior in the *Bundestag*, coalition management, corporatist settings, the Supreme Court as a – as it turns out, non-existing – veto player. The *Bundesrat* is missing, but this is certainly due to the fact that it was also without blockade potential during the time period in question. Other than in the predecessor volume, this book contains a valuable contribution by Franzmann about the opposition parties – those inside (Greens and Left Party) and those outside parliament (FDP and AfD). The first part is completed by two political leadership studies: Helms/van Esch/Crawford describe Merkel in her third term as a „conviction leader“; Keplinger characterizes her in a pointed critique as a leader in mutual agreement with the liberal media.

The second part then examines the greatest challenges of the coalition and the answers the government found. It comprises analyses of thirteen policy areas which were more (asylum and migration, internal security, transportation a.k.a „PKW-Maut“, employment a.k.a minimum wage, social affairs, european affairs) or less salient (taxes and budget, federal-state finance relations, health, education, environment and energy, foreign affairs) during the *Grand Coalition*'s term. The conclusion is drawn by head editor Zohlnhöfer. He states a mixed policy record for the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition which turned away from (neo-)liberal reforms in its economic and employment policy, but got more liberal in its social policy where it adopted i.a. the „marriage for all“ (same-sex marriage). With regard to the greatest challenge of the term, the record is also mixed: Merkel's decision to open the borders for refugees in September 2015 stands for the liberalisation of the asylum regime, but this liberalisation was subsequently amended by a more repressive law-and-order policy. Altogether, neither the „reform thesis“ nor the „blockade thesis“ could be proved persistently.

The omnibus volume at hand, which comprises 27 contributions on nearly 700 pages, provides a comprehensive overview of the third *Grand Coalition*'s politics and policies. The 39 authors, 26 male and 13 female, represent a qualitatively superb sample of well-established professors, non-tenured faculty, and young academics. Most are from German universities, but

three are located in the United States, and one author each is from Austria, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For students of German politics, wherever they come from or go to, the book is indispensable.

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