

GERMANY

Elections in sight

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• GERMANY already held elections at the beginning of this year, during which the Federal Assembly chose Frank-Walter Steinmeier as the nation's President for the next four years.

The role of President, however, is purely representative and protocolary.

It is in fact the Federal Chancellor – currently Angela Merkel – who holds the reins of government, and is in charge of making important decisions, together with other cabinet members.

As such, this September 24 the country will decide whether or not Merkel will continue to hold the position, or if she will be replaced.

On that date, the German people will be called on to choose members of the Bundestag, the country's Federal Parliament, responsible for exercising the will of the people, passing federal laws, and choosing the nation's Chancellor.

Recent polls put Angela Merkel in the lead, who if reelected will serve as Chancellor for the fourth time.

The German official, also leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – in coalition with the Christian Social Union (CSU) – recently presented her government program, focused on stemming the tide of migrants to the country.

In a recent press conference Merkel noted that her plan is designed to unite the country, offering well-being and security for all. At the end of the legislative term, we want the people to be better off than they were at the beginning, she noted.

Meanwhile, the 72-page document also addresses employment, one of the most important issues currently affecting Germany, with a 5.7% unemployment rate. Merkel, who stressed the importance of providing jobs for all, promised to reduce the figure by 2.5% before 2025.

Increasing security measures, expanding benefits for families, and tax cuts also feature in the Chancellor's proposal.

In the event that Merkel is reelected, the CSU announced that the country will accept a maximum of 200,000 asylum seekers per year.

For the time being, Merkel's closest rival appears to be 61 year old leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Martin Schulz.

Schulz, who served as President of the European Parliament for many years, believes that he has the best program for the future of the country, and stressed the need to reestablish the continent as a place of freedom, security, and respect for rights.

The SPD candidate is proposing to expand social policies, and combat



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tax evasion and exploitative employment contracts.

A recent poll showed Angela Merkel as leading the vote with 39%, 15 points ahead of Schulz, who has lost support in recent weeks.

PROSPERITY FOR ALL

The latest figures show that the German economy grew 1.9 percent in 2016, representing its best perform-

ance in the last five years.

In this sense, during this year's G-20 Summit entitled "Shaping an Inter-connected World," held last July 7-8 in Hamburg, Germany, Merkel called on the group's leaders to focus on achieving sustainable and inclusive economic development, while also stressing the need for markets to "remain open," and better trade agreements that protect consumer, social, and environmental rights. •

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