

The German and UK elections – some political arithmetic that affects the talks

The pro EU media and papers in the UK wrongly reported both the UK and the German elections. They told us Mrs May and the Conservatives lost the UK election, whilst Mrs Merkel won the German election. It is a good idea instead to consider the actual results, now we know the final tally of top up seats in Germany.

Let's take the popular vote first of all. Mrs May and the Conservatives won 42.4% of the popular vote. This was up by 5.5 percentage points from 2015, and was the highest proportion of the vote taken by the Conservatives since Mrs Thatcher in 1983. That was a Conservative win.

In contrast, Mrs Merkel's combined vote for her CDU party and her coalition sister party the CSU fell by 8.6 percentage points to just 32.9%, a new low. Mrs Merkel's own CDU only polled 26.8%.

Mrs May stayed as Prime Minister, with many more seats than the next placed party. Mrs Merkel may stay as Chancellor, but has a lot of work to do to get the votes in Parliament to support her

Then let us consider seats lost. The Conservatives in the UK lost 13 seats, taking them down from 330 to 317. The CDU/CSU lost 65 seats, taking them down to 246. The CDU alone lost 55 seats.

As a result of the German system Mrs Merkel with her CSU allies control just 34.7% of the seats in the newly expanded 709 seat German Parliament. Mrs May and the Conservative party control 49.4% of the seats in the UK Parliament. Mrs Merkel's own CDU only has 26.8% of the seats.

Mrs May and the Conservatives in coalition with the DUP have a majority of 14. Mrs Merkel needs to sure up her relationship with the CSU, and persuade the Greens and the Free Democrats to enter an arrangement with her in order to construct a coalition.

It is commonly assumed that the May-Merkel exchanges will be very influential over the outcome of talks about the UK's future relationship with the EU. Doubtless Germany, as the largest country and economy in the EU and the largest paymaster of the EU, will continue to be more influential than its overall percentage of EU Council and Parliament votes. However, it is also likely to be the case that Mrs Merkel will find it much more difficult to offer decisive leadership given the need to make more demanding and more frequent compromises over the German position to keep a coalition going, assuming she is able to form one. In contrast Mrs May's DUP partners are likely to be solid on Brexit, as they were a pro Brexit party in the last election.