

Down to Business English

125 – German Elections

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Business News to improve your Business English.

*With your hosts **Skip Montreux and Dez Morgan.***



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Skip: Here we are Dez, recording again on a Saturday night. It's the end of the week for you isn't it?

Dez: Yeah, that's right.

Skip: Well, have you had a good one?

Dez: It's a four day weekend for us here so yeah of course it has been relaxing. You?

Skip: Not bad. I did attend a small year-end party the other night, or what is referred to over here in Japan as a bonenkai, with a few friends.

Dez: Hey, really? I haven't been to any parties this year I don't think. I was invited to one last week but couldn't make it for one reason or another. Hey, did you have a good time?

Skip: Yeah, it was okay. I was home by midnight though and was really tired. I don't seem to have the same energy I had a few years ago.

Dez: No, me neither. I don't seem to have the staying power I used to.

Skip: Well, it happens to the best of us.

Dez: Do you know who else is having trouble staying in the party?

Skip: Oh, are you talking about that friend of ours who once...

Dez: No, no, surprisingly, no, no – not him. Umm, Here, I'll give you a hint. We're talking about politics and this person is a woman. She's probably soon going to be asked to leave the party.

Skip: Oh okay, could that person be German Chancellor Angela Merkel? And are you saying that she could soon be ejected from the party she heads, the Christian Democratic Union?

Dez: That is what many experts are predicting Skip. And that is our topic for today.

Skip: OK. Let's do it. Let's get D2B ... Down to Business with the recent national elections in Germany. Why was it so bad for Angela Merkel and her party? And what does this mean for Germany and for the European Union.

Skip: So, what were the results of this recent election in Germany? When was it held exactly?

Dez: Uh, the vote took place on September 24th and Angela Merkel's CDU party received the largest number of votes.

Skip: Oh, so she did win?

Dez: But, and this is a very big but, it was the worst showing for the CDU since 1949. Their support from the electorate was down a lot. From 41% in the previous election in 2013 to a low of 33%.

Skip: Ouch. Those are Donald Trump numbers.

Dez: And we need to remember though, is that going into this election, her government was a **coalition** of two parties. And as bad as the results were for the CDU, they were even worse for Merkel's **coalition** partner, the Social Democrats, or SPD. Their share of the vote fell from 25% to just over 20%.

Skip: So if two major parties lost support then there must have been another party, or parties, that made gains.

Dez: True enough, and that party is the right wing nationalist party Alternative for Germany, or AfD for short.

Skip: We did a show about the rise of the right wing and the future of the EU back in January of this

year. At that time, our concerns about right wing parties taking power in France and the Netherlands didn't come to pass. However, it seems that they are more influential in Germany than we thought.

Dez: It looks that way. As you can imagine the AfD do not support immigration and strongly disagree with Germany's immigration policy to date.

Skip: So let me just recap. The CDU and the SPD were in government together but they lost some support in the election.

Dez: That's right.

Skip: But together they still won 53% of the vote so they can continue as a **coalition**? Is that right as well?

Dez: Ah, technically you're right. But as it happened, Martin Schultz, the leader of the SPD stated that his party would rather move into the opposition than try to form another **coalition** with Merkel.

Skip: Hmm. So where does that leave Merkel and her CDU?

Dez: Well, umm she has tried to form a government with the Green Party and the Free Democratic Party, FDP. But those talks **collapsed**, once again over immigration issues.

Skip: German politics has always been very confusing to me. I think there are too many Democratic parties or maybe just too many parties on the whole. So what happens next if Merkel cannot find any common ground with the other two parties?

Dez: She has two options really. She could either try and form a minority government with just her party, or she could call a further election. A minority government means that the ruling party is the biggest party but does not have the majority of seats in the government.

Skip: In my native country of Canada, we have had minority governments in the past. In fact Stephen Harper's government, which formed in 2008 was a minority government. I was not a huge Stephen Harper fan but I thought his Conservative party functioned quite well as a minority government.

Dez: We had a **coalition** in Britain between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrat party

from 2010 till 2015, but for the most part they're pretty rare in the UK.

Skip: In Canada as well. I think there have been two minority governments in Canada in my lifetime.

Dez: And that is quite a long time.

Skip: Very funny. You are older than I am Dez.

Dez: Hey, and better looking.

Skip: Anyway, forming a minority government is kind of risky though for Merkel though isn't it?

Dez: Well, the danger is that the other parties can join up against the minority government and stop any measures or laws being passed. And I think that is what Merkel fears will happen. Especially given that the right wing AfD party now have 13% of the vote and many of the other parties see immigration as an issue.

Skip: So how would another election help her out of this corner? Surely if a new election was called so soon, people would just vote the same way again.

Dez: Well that is difficult to say but I guess the Chancellor would be hoping that voters might be more likely to vote for the majority party to **shore it up** and bring stability back.

Skip: It is possible I guess.

Dez: However a recent poll by RTL TV, Germany's largest private broadcaster, suggests the opposite result, with Merkel's CDU losing another 2% of the vote while the smaller parties, including the AfD gaining a little additional support.

Skip: As British Prime Minister Theresa May recently found out, elections don't always go the way they are predicted to, and this fall in popularity for Merkel could prove much worse. So what do you think Dez, is this situation in Germany all part of electorates around the world voting for change at any price? The US voting for Trump and the British for Brexit for example?

Dez: The German magazine Der Spiegel certainly thinks so. In a recent article they said that voters in these countries were willing to throw away decades of stability in favor of change.

Skip: I guess a lot of voters don't feel things are as stable as the Der Spiegel journalist.

Dez: We are certainly living in interesting times.

Skip: That's what we always say when we have no idea what's going on.

Dez: Ah, it sounds more professional. What I really think is that Merkel's best option is probably to try and somehow negotiate a **coalition** with the CDU's previous partner the SPD. It was a real surprise that talks broke down as immigration and environmental regulations were never seen as key areas for the SPD.

Skip: But they were chief concerns of voters in the election though?

Dez: Given the results, it seems like it. But what is more likely is that the SPD wants to distance itself from the CDU as they fear being closely aligned with them going forward. What does seem certain is whatever happens, Angela Merkel is unlikely to remain as party leader for another full 4-year term.

Skip: I see. And how is this likely to affect neighboring countries in the EU?

Dez: A weakened German will certainly give the UK's Brexit negotiators some confidence that they have been lacking as they try to negotiate a settlement with the EU. Remember that Germany, the largest and strongest economy in the EU, **is in the driving seat** in these negotiations.

Skip: Hasn't the new French President, Emmanuel Macron, been pushing for reforms for the EU?

Dez: He most certainly has. He wants the countries that share the Euro to be more closely integrated. Hey maybe even sharing a common finance minister. However that is less likely to happen now that Angela Merkel's future looks so **precarious**. I'm guessing that other policies seeking closer unification would also be less likely for the time being.

Skip: What a mess, what a mess.

Dez: And while the German politicians clean up that mess, why don't you and I get D2V...Down to Vocabulary.

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Skip: I'll get right down to vocabulary with the noun **coalition**. A **coalition** is an organization created when smaller groups agree to work together toward the same goal, even though they differ from each other on other goals.

Dez: It's very often used to talk about different political parties joining together.

Skip: And that is how it was used in our report today. Dez used **coalition** several times and in each instance he was referring to the partnership between Merkel's CDU party and Martin Schultz's SPD party. Can you give us some other examples using **coalition** Dez?

Dez: What immediately comes to mind is the multi-national '**coalition of the willing**' that George Bush 43 put together to invade Iraq in 2003. It was a group of 43 countries that supported the US's invasion and post-invasion presence.

Skip: Interesting, you know I've never noticed that before.

Dez: Noticed what?

Skip: That the **coalition of the willing** consisted of 43 members, and....

Dez: And?

Skip: And it was put together by Bush 43. You know the 43rd President of the United States. I wonder what is behind that.

Dez: Leave it be Skip. You have no more room in that brain of yours for yet another conspiracy theory.

Skip: And the magic number is thirty three. Forty three is ten more than thirty three, so if you take ten and subtract eight then, that's the number of years Bush was in power, you get...

Dez: Moving on... the next word we want to look at is the verb to **collapse**. When we say something **collapsed**, we are communicating that it very suddenly, broke down.

Skip: In the story Dez reported that the negotiations, or talks between the SDU and the Green Party, and then later the Free Democratic Party **collapsed**.

Dez: In other words, their discussions about forming a **coalition** government broke down very suddenly and there was no chance of fixing them. What's a business example of **collapse** Skip?

- Skip: The global economy almost **collapsed** in 2008 after the **collapse** of Lehman Brothers.
- Dez: How come when I use the 2008 financial crisis as an example you always say it's too old for our listeners to clearly remember, but it's perfectly okay for you to use it?
- Skip: Oh, okay, you are right. There is no excuse for that. How about this – Hyundai workers in South Korea have walked off the job at two factories because talks between the union and the company **collapsed**.
- Dez: Really, they couldn't agree on salary?
- Skip: Actually no. The dispute was over how many workers would be used to make one of their SUVs. Apparently the company started using one of the factories to make an SUV instead of the Hyundai Accent subcompact. Now this SUV manufacturing is more automated than the Accent model thus requires fewer workers.
- Dez: I see. No wonder the union isn't happy. What's our next word?
- Skip: Now let's look at the phrasal verb **to shore up**. When you **shore something up** you are giving it support because it is in a weakened state. In the story, Dez reported that Merkel may call another election in hopes that voters would **shore up** her CDU party.
- Dez: In other words, even if they didn't vote for her in this last election, after seeing how unstable the political situation is now, they might help strengthen the CDU's position in a second election.
- Skip: Just a few days ago in Australia, the government turned on the largest lithium battery ever built courtesy of Elon Musk's company Tesla.
- Dez: What does that have to do with '**shore up**'?
- Skip: Well, Australia had ordered the battery to **shore up** their weak power grid system. Australia suffered many, many power outages last year so they contracted Tesla to build and install this lithium battery in time for Australia's next summer, which as you know starts in December down under.
- Dez: Ah, interesting. Those kind of headlines will not be popular over here in the oil-producing Middle East.
- Skip: I suppose not. Apparently, Musk promised that they could get the job done in 100 days or else Australia wouldn't have to pay for it.
- Dez: And did they?
- Skip: They did, with just a few days to spare.
- Dez: Hey, good for them. Moving on though, I'd now like to look at the common pattern **to prove much worse**. In the story Skip commented that if Merkel decides to have another election, the results could prove much worse than she thinks. What Skip meant was that the results could be much worse than she predicted.
- Skip: Of course I could have just said that, '*the results could be worse*', but by using the verb '**prove**' my remark sounded a little more professional.
- Dez: You can use the verb prove with any adjective to talk about predictions.
- Skip: For example?
- Dez: For example, the heat in Abu Dhabi proves to be too hot for some foreign teachers, and they go back to their home countries after just one or maybe two years of teaching here.
- Skip: Okay, well how about a business example?
- Dez: Sure. As you know the US, Canada, and Mexico are currently renegotiating NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement?
- Skip: Yes, I am well aware of that. From what I understand things are not going very smoothly.
- Dez: Hey, that's right. It's proving very difficult for Canada to get any mention of climate change in the new agreement. Something Justin Trudeau strongly believes in but Donald Trump thinks is a hoax.
- Skip: Renewing NAFTA just might prove to be impossible with the current political landscape in North America.
- Dez: Well don't despair. At least the talks haven't **collapsed** yet.
- Skip: Key word is 'yet'. But before we go down a Trump rabbit hole, let's go on to our next word.
- Dez: 'kay, and which word is that?
- Skip: Next up is the idiom, **to be in the driving seat**. When you are **in the driving seat**, you are controlling the car. So idiomatically, the person or thing that **is in the driving seat** has the most control or most power. In the story, Dez remarked that because Germany is the largest economy in the EU, they **are in the driving seat** in the EU – UK Brexit negotiations. To put that another way, Germany has the most power in those talks.
- Dez: You could say that Amazon **is certainly in the driving seat** when it comes to retail logistics.

They have a lot of power in the home delivery market place and it's almost impossible for rival companies to compete.

Skip: That is a great business example. Hey Dez, who **is in the driving seat** in your home?

Dez: No question about that. I can confidently tell you that Roxy **is in the driving seat**. She is 100% in charge.

Skip: I have a similar situation, but I'd rather not talk about it.

Dez: In that case, let me go onto our final word of today, the adjective **precarious**. A situation or relationship can be described as **precarious** if it's not well balanced and could fall over or break easily.

Skip: In more literal terms if I balanced a cup on the edge of a table we would say that I need to be careful as I have left it in a **precarious** spot.

Dez: Yes, make sure you don't knock it over. In the story I said that Angela Merkel's position politically was **precarious** as she could easily lose her job.

Skip: And I understand that the situation in the Middle East is pretty **precarious** right now.

Dez: Hey, sure is and that is a story we will be discussing very soon.

Skip: That is a good idea. Do you know what else is **precarious**?

Dez: No, tell me.

Skip: Huh, my work-life balance. I seem to do nothing but work and if I'm not careful I could just suddenly break down.

Dez: Or **collapse**. Skip, I've known you for over 10 years. You've always had a busy schedule. If you slowed down, I doubt you'd know what to do with yourself.

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Skip: Thank's Dez. It was good speaking with you today.

Dez: Hey, you too Skip. Please take care of yourself. Maybe take a day off soon?

Skip: I will consider that as soon as I get this episode posted.

Dez: Just before we go, everyone, if you have found today's episode of Down to Business English useful in your self-studies, please consider becoming a member.

Skip: Yes. Your membership will help us bring you even more content to improve your range of professional vocabulary and listening comprehension skills.

Dez: Just visit our website at downtobusinessenglish.com, click on the **Membership Link** at the top of the page for all the details.

Skip: We would very much appreciate the support.

Dez: Yes indeed.

Skip: Thanks for listening everyone. See you next time.

Dez: Bye bye.

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