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7 How German Christian Democrats Said Farewell to Famialism

Chapter five presented a remarkable finding on German family policy. I found that power resource theory sheds quite some light on family policy until 2005. From then on, however, Christian democrats suddenly implemented policies supporting working mothers rather than the traditional family.

This chapter explores the explanatory power of the proposition on organizational change and family policy outlined in section 2.5. The proposition implies that, against a background of secularization and women’s emancipation, failure to dominate government is the catalyst triggering a coalition of equal right supporters to become dominant within a Christian democratic party. Here, I focus on the CDU in particular, since it clearly is the largest German Christian democratic party. Moreover, throughout the postwar period, the CDU has always delivered the prime minister and the family (and women’s) minister(s) when the CDU-CSU participated in government.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section analyzes family policy under the Christian-liberal coalition. The second section studies family policy between 1998 and 2005, the period when red-green coalitions were in office. The third section analyzes the grand coalition’s agenda in family policy. Finally, section four concludes.

7.1 The CDU in the Christian-Liberal Coalition: The Dominance of Famialists Declines but Remains

In line with power resource theory, the return to office of the CDU-CSU in a coalition with the FDP in 1982 meant that the traditional family would be promoted. During its period in opposition, the CDU had considered how it could continue to support the traditional family in a period of secularization and increasing female labor market participation. The number of church-attending Catholics had declined from 25 percent of the German electorate in 1953 to 15 percent in 1975. However, the share of churchgoing Protestants continued to hover around 10 percent (Wessels 2000: 147). Furthermore, female labor market participation had increased from 35 percent in 1950 to 50 percent in 1973 (Huber and Stephens 2001: 136). With the support of party
leader Kohl, the party’s general executive, Heiner Geissler, proposed a set of policy measures couched behind a discourse of parental responsibility and women’s freedom of choice (Geissler 1976, 1979; Gerlach 2001c: 264).

The Catholic Kohl was not very interested in socio-economic issues, even less so in family policy, let alone in changing the party’s rather traditional stance in this regard (Zohlnhöfer 2001: Ch. 3.1). As such, Kohl tended to give the family and women’s ministers free space as long as they did not attempt to weaken his position.

By the mid-1970s, the relation between Kohl and his party executive was still rather well. Geissler was a Catholic who belonged to the social wing of the CDU. Once he became Minister of Family Affairs in 1982, his position as minister and party executive enabled him to further develop his proposals and push through several demands. The FDP and more employer-oriented CDU politicians, for instance, were not all that enthusiastic about Geissler’s proposals, and did not favor the expansion of family benefits for lower income groups in 1983 as a compensation for welfare cuts. This expansionary measure had also been strongly favoured by the CDA. As we have seen, the CDA still had an influential position within the CDU by then (Gerlach 2001c; Zohlnhöfer 2001: ch. 4).

However, due to Geissler’s time consuming double position and dire economic straits, most of his proposals were to be implemented from 1985 on by the next CDU Minister. One notable example is the replacement of paid maternity leave for working mothers by paid maternity leave for all mothers in 1985 (Gerlach 2001c: 265). The benefit was low and flat-rate. After six months, it became income tested. It could be combined with part-time work of maximum nineteen hours per week. This benefit structure was clearly most favourable for one-breadwinner families, and secondarily for families with a second low supplementary income. Moreover, it was clearly biased against the main breadwinner taking any leave. In fact, almost 99 percent of the recipients were women (Huber and Stephens 2001: 268).

A second example of a reform that had been initiated by Geissler was the introduction of pension credits for all mothers in 1986 (Gerlach 2001c: 265). According to Geissler, both reforms provided freedom of choice for women and equal rights for the traditional wage-earner family (Bleses and Rose 1998: 255-7). Instead, SPD politicians opposed the reforms because both would lead women to stay at home (Gerlach 2004: 169). In fact, the combination of the two reforms was double-edged: people who combined the parental leave allowance with part-time work lost the
pension credits. The duration of the means-tested parental leave benefit was gradually extended to two years between 1986 and 1990. Since the flat-rate benefits were not adjusted, however, they eroded in value (Huber and Stephens 2001: 268). Moreover, job protection was not guaranteed due to strong opposition from the FDP and employer-oriented CDU politicians (Zohlnhöfer 2001: 119, 273; Aust 2003: 37).

By contrast, all family ministers, all CDU representatives, continued to expand family transfers independent of the parents’ employment situation from 1982 to 1998. An important part of the explanation is that the Constitutional Court became an increasingly influential actor in family policy during the 1990s. In fact, several rulings officially required the government to expand family transfers (Gerlach 2000). Still, the Court leaves political parties ample room for manoeuvre and not all improvements can be traced back to these rulings (Bleses 2003: 193; Gerlach 2004: 168-86). For example, the CSU finance minister ensured extra tax advantages and child benefits against the wishes of the FDP (FAZ 08.01.1995). Furthermore, party programs indicate that the CDU and the SPD (but not the FDP) continuously proposed improvements of family transfers that often went beyond the rulings and/or preceded these in time (cf. Bothfeld 2005: 289). This is remarkable since the German economic situation worsened severely since 1991 and the government had to comply with the EMU budget criteria from the mid-1990s on.

In short, I have thus far argued that reforms implemented by CDU politicians did little to support employed mothers with small children from 1982 to 1998. However, the exception to the rule is a 1992 law that entitled every child between three and six to a place in childcare. Until that time, expansions of child care had faced great difficulties due to the fact that the supply of child care officially is an issue of the federal states – though we have already seen that some improvements were made during the 1970s by the SPD-led government. Therefore, the strong commitment of most Christian democratic politicians to the traditional family seems crucial if we want to understand the development of child care in Germany. To be more precise, most CDU and CSU politicians have historically regarded the family as the only suitable institution for raising children in their first years (Aust 2003: 36).

As such, a 1979 effort by the SPD women’s minister to entitle every child between three and six to a place in childcare was bound to fail, if only because of the Bundesrat majority of the CDU-CSU at the time. At the end of the 1980s, the Catholic CDU minister of family and women’s affairs proposed a similar right. Again, the
initiative failed (ibid: 44). This time, the main reason was that the minister, a professor in gender studies, lacked the backing of most politicians within her own party. Conservative (male and female) CDU politicians warned her not to ‘glorify’ care for two year old children outside the family under the primacy of the reconciliation of work and family life (Gerlach 2001d: 423).

Moreover, the minister and some others, including party executive Geissler and the chairwoman of the women’s union, demanded that the party underwent organizational and programmatic reform, and that Kohl resigned. Please note that the CDU’s return to office in 1982 had been accompanied by a lack of programmatic renewal (Bösch 2002, 2004). Furthermore, the position of Kohl had weakened by 1989 due to subsequent electoral defeats of the CDU at the national and the federal level. Nevertheless, the sceptics unsuccessfully tried to convince Kohl and party members to renew the party’s familialistic principles during a party congress in April 1989. The aim was to promote “real” freedom of choice for working and non-working women (Gerlach 2001d: 423). Immediately afterwards, the party executive and the chairwoman of the women’s organization lost their posts while the disappointed minister retreated within a year. This particularly reduced the influence of both the employees’ association and the women’s organization.

By 1990, Kohl had suddenly become the “unity chancellor”. This helped him to regain votes as well as authority within his party. Accordingly, the CDU became a “chancellor’s party” between 1990 and 1994 as Kohl made all the large decisions himself and his authority was seldom questioned. Party committees met less and less. If they met, Kohl dominated the sessions (Poguntke 1994: 208; Bösch 2002: 53; Bösch 2004: 59). Accordingly, Kohl prevented renewal of the party’s familialistic principles personally, and it would remain off the agenda until the expel to the opposition benches in 1998 (Bösch 2002: 60).

At the same time, unification implied the political entry of people raised in East Germany. In comparison to Austria, the Netherlands and West Germany, East Germany had the lowest levels of church attendance and the highest levels of child care provision and female employment. In 1990, for instance, 55 percent of the CDU-CSU’s constituents were Catholics (Bösch 2002: 215). However, whereas 45 percent of the western Germans adhered to Catholicism, only 6 percent of the eastern Germans did so (World Value Survey). Moreover, 62 percent of all eastern German children aged three or younger went to child care facilities. In West Germany, this
figure was merely 6 percent (Hank et al 2001: 17). In addition, 82 percent of the eastern German women aged 15 to 65 were employed in 1990, while this figure was 56 percent in West Germany (sozialpolitik-aktuell.de).

From January 1991 on, a former eastern German citizen, Angela Merkel, became the women’s and youth minister. Her appointment by Kohl was triggered by party internal considerations to provide some posts to former eastern Germans (Gerlach 2004: 175). According to one CDU politician and historian, the Protestant Merkel, who was a divorced woman and not a regular churchgoer, perceived herself as a young woman who, as a minister, aimed to put great effort in establishing equality of opportunity for women. This view on women policy was consistently shaped by socialist equal opportunities policy in East Germany. At the same time, she felt obliged to represent the eastern interests in re-unified Germany (Langguth 2005: 170, 322).

Merkel played an important role in establishing the right to child care for each child between three and six. According to Merkel herself, ‘the biggest success during my period as Minister of Women and Youth was to be able to push through the right to childcare...’ (Merkel in Langguth 2005: 346). Here, abortion legislation provided the opportunity to do so against the wishes of her own party’s Catholic majority in the Bundestag. In fact, Merkel and a group of female parliamentarians of all parties found a compromise that established the right to childcare as one element to support pregnant women in order to avoid abortion. The female parliamentarians also intended to entitled all children to child care, but most within the CDU and CSU considered this a bridge too far. As usual, the issue of payments was also a highly disputed element of the decision. Due to interventions by the CSU finance minister and associations of the local governments, implementation was postponed to 1996 and later on to 1999. But they were not able to prevent the law from being adopted (SZ 16.6.1992 and 17.12.1993; Aust 2002: 30-1; Aust et al 2003: 44-5).

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15 The right for employed parents to care for sick children for 10 days per year can also be traced back to the moment when Merkel was the responsible minister (Gerlach 2004: 176).
7.2 The Red-Green Coalition: How a Change in Government Implied a Stronger Orientation towards Equal Opportunities

In line with the ideal types, the formation of a government led by the SPD in 1998, with the Greens as a junior partner, meant a policy change in the direction of equal opportunities for individual family members (cf. SPD 1998: 27-30, 2002: 16-21; Greens 1998: 42-6, 2002: 15-7). However, we shall see that it was not to be taken for granted that the two SPD women’s and family ministers could easily push through these demands within their own party.

The first period of the red-green coalition witnessed declining economic conditions. Nonetheless, the government expanded family policy along three dimensions: first, raising the child allowance and child tax advantages; second, strengthening pension credits for working parents to devote six months to child rearing; and third, improving parental leave and the parental leave benefit for employed parents (Bleses and Seeleib-Kaiser 2004: 84-5).

For reasons of space, only the first and the latter will be discussed since it is necessary here to highlight the role of the EU and the Constitutional Court, respectively. To start with the improvement of parental leave for working parents, the EU had issued a parental leave directive on June 3, 1996. The directive had to be incorporated into national law by June 3, 1998. The general aim of the directive was to promote equal opportunities for men and women. This should be done by endowing both male and female workers with and individual right to parental leave for at least three months when a child is born or adopted. Here, it is crucial to stress that the overall level of protection guaranteed by pre-existing German parental leave arrangements was well above the few minimum obligatory standards set out by the directive. Nevertheless, the arrangements did not conform fully to the directive. This was because the right to take parental leave did not apply to employees whose partners were staying at home because they were not employed. Recall that almost 99 percent of these partners were women as a consequence of the male breadwinner

Historically, several wings regarding family policy can be identified within the Greens, but the equal opportunities perspective had clearly become dominant by the early 1990s (Brüssow 1996; Bothfeld 2005: ch. 8).

Within the Greens, several wings as regards family policy can historically be identified as well, though the equal opportunities perspective had clearly become dominant by the early 1990s (Brüssow 1996; Bothfeld 2005: ch. 8).
oriented family ideal underlying the arrangements of 1985. Accordingly, the directive, with its emphasis on equal opportunities, was totally at odds with the policy preferences of most politicians within the CDU and CSU. Therefore, the Christian democratic-liberal coalition refused to implement the directive.  

Instead, the SPD’s policy preferences went hand in hand with the directives’ general thrust and recommendations. Following the adoption of the directive in 1996, the SPD issued a parliamentary motion in which they argued that the need to comply with the directive should be used to transform the existing parental leave scheme into a more gender-neutral one. However, the motion was voted down by the government. Only after the red-green coalition came to power, was compliance with the directive accomplished by a reform of parental leave. This reform was based on the 1996 motion. Thus, it not only extended the right to parental leave to one-income couples, as required by the directive, but went far beyond the minimum requirements of the directive, reflecting some of its non-binding provisions (Falkner et al 2002: 5-14; Falkner et al 2005: 140-51). For instance, the reform enabled both parents to take parental leave simultaneously. Moreover, it introduced a right to work part-time during parental leave, at least if one was employed in a company with fifteen employees or more.

The latter also is an example of the difficulties for the minister, the SPD women’s union and women within the main trade union (DGB) to push through their demands within the SPD. With the support of the Greens, their aim was to introduce the right to work part-time in companies with five or more employees. However, key actors within the SPD, like chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the economics minister and other rather business-oriented politicians, were able to limit this right to companies with at least fifteen workers (Bothfeld 2005: 185-6, 216-7, 253-4, 292-5).

To turn to the increases in child allowances and child tax benefits, it is impossible to neglect the role of the Constitutional Court. Most notably, a November 1998 ruling provided more detailed requirements than ever before by obliging the government to provide tax advantages of at least € 4,000 per year per child by January 1st 2000. Accordingly, the SPD minister implemented several increases in tax advantages and child allowances within the required time frame. However, the SPD

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18 For the same reason, the government also did not implement the 1989 EU directive that entitled pregnant workers to several rights. Eventually, the red-green coalition transposed the directive in 2002 (Falkner et al 2005: 74-82).
refused to bluntly increase tax advantages independent of the family’s income situation. This was because the party, in line with its social democratic tradition, did not accept tax advantages which would primarily benefit higher income groups (Gerlach 2004: 187-8). Moreover, the demand to raise tax advantages to DM 6,000 had already been part of the SPD’s party platform since 1985 (Bothfeld 2005: 198). Finally, the SPD Minister continued to increase allowances in 2001 with the support of the CDU and the CSU in the Bundesrat (FAZ 08.05.01). This is not to deny the crucial role of the Constitutional Court, but to nuance it by also pointing at the role and involvement of political parties.

During its second term, which lasted from October 2002 to February 2005, the economy was in a recession and Germany continuously failed to comply with the EMU budget criteria. However, expansion again went in the direction of equal opportunities. Most notably, the new SPD women’s and family minister, Renate Schmidt, set aside federal subsidies amounting to € 1.5 billion annually (from 2005) for the federal states to expand all-day child care facilities for children under the age of three. The aim was to provide places for 20 percent of this age group. Well below the existing level in the new states, this nonetheless implied a large increase for West Germany. Furthermore, another € 4 billion was set aside for helping states and municipalities to convert traditional half-day to full-day schools between 2003 and 2007. Starting from a very low level of 5 percent of schools also teaching in the afternoon, the number of full-day schools rose by 64 percent between May 2003 and June 2004 (Clasen 2005: 163).

If one bears in mind the low levels of childcare provision in West Germany and the 1998 SPD party program arguing in favor of an expansion of childcare, one may perhaps ask why child care was not expanded sooner (SPD 1998: 28). Moreover, surveys indicated that such reforms would be very much welcomed by the electorate (Clasen 2005: 164). According to Renate Schmidt, however, expanding child care was rather difficult due to a combination of the Constitutional Court’s ruling on the expansion of child transfers and tight fiscal conditions.

Furthermore, it was not easy for the minister to convince key persons within her own party to support such a policy change. Especially the crucial support from chancellor Schröder was lacking (interview with Renate Schmidt). For instance, in

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19 See, for instance, the 1975 reform of child tax advantages as described in section four.
line with the demands from business associations, Schröder blocked a proposal by the women’s and family minister to oblige companies to improve the opportunities for women to reconcile work and family life in September 2001 (FAZ 11.09.01). A few months later, however, he attended a party congress on equal opportunities and listened carefully to a speech by Renate Schmidt, by then the chairwoman of a SPD commission on family affairs (FAZ 24.11.01; interview with Renate Schmidt). After the congress, he admitted to Schmidt that he had recognized some problems too late (interview with Renate Schmidt). To quote Schröder, ‘I must admit that I needed some time to assess the societal relevance of family policy correctly… It became clear to me – especially during conversations with Renate Schmidt – that parents need more as simply only higher child allowances, they need a better child care infrastructure so that mothers, but also fathers, can reconcile work and family life. Because never before has there been a generation of so highly qualified women… For companies, which will have difficulties in finding qualified personnel within a few years, these women are also the qualified workforce of the future’ (Schröder 2006: 439-40).

Hence, it was a rather economic line of reasoning rather than the feminist perspective of the 1970s and of some of the current female SPD politicians, which convinced Schröder. Accordingly, Schröder echoed earlier statements of the women’s and family minister to expand childcare in his government declaration of April 2002. Please note that a similar line of economic reasoning has also led business associations to become increasingly in favor of an expansion of childcare since the early 2000s (interviews with business representatives). Hence, also the more business-oriented politicians within the SPD, like Schröder, had a strong backing within society.

An OECD study and the EES served as “selective amplifiers” for family minister Schmidt. The OECD study linked the lack of childcare in Germany to low educational achievements among fifteen year olds (OECD 2004). It became a standard reference of the family ministry (Clasen 2005: 165; Gerlach 2006a: 15). Finally, the European Commission blamed the German government for not sticking to the EES principle. In its recommendations to the government, the Commission criticized the weak development of German childcare since it prevented a better reconciliation of work and family life (Aust et al 2003: 46).

Though Schmidt noted that the OECD and EES had indeed played a facilitating role, she posed that the main problem was resistance by the Länder,
especially those governed by the CDU and CSU (interview with Renate Schmidt). By then, the clear preference of most Christian democrats still was to increase the incentives for mothers to stay at home and care for their young children. For instance, the key family policy proposal of the 2002 CDU-CSU election program was a new form of family transfers of €600 per month, independent of labor market participation. This was to be provided during a child’s first three years (Aust 2002: 35; FAZ 19.04.02).

7.3 Family Politics since 2005: The Usual Party of Government is Back with an Unusual Agenda

We have thus far seen that family policy has been an ideologically highly polarized domain with the Christian democrats and the social democrats adhering to two rather different normative views on the role of the family. However, we can witness a remarkable process of convergence of Christian democrats towards the SPD’s family model once they had returned to office in 2005. If we want to understand how this happened, it is first necessary to return to the sudden expel to the opposition benches in 1998.

In line with my proposition on organizational change, government exclusion triggered the replacement of the CDU’s dominant coalition of famialists by equal right supporters in a context of secularization and women’s emancipation. The number of church-attending Catholics had declined from 15 percent of the German electorate in 1975 to seven percent in 1998. Accordingly, this group accounted for merely 13 percent of the votes for the CDU-CSU in 1998 and 12 percent in 2005. Furthermore, the total number of Protestants going to church had declined from 10 percent in 1975 to 2 percent by 2005. As such, not even the most loyal voters could prevent the electoral decline of the CDUCSU (Wessels 2000: 1468; Kornelius and Roth 2007: 54). Increased women’s emancipation likely increased, or at least did not contain, strains on the traditional family ideal. Between 1990 and 2000, western German female labor market participation rates increased from 56 percent to 62 percent (sozialpolitikaktuell.de). Moreover, the claim that both husband and wife should contribute to income was supported by 55 percent of the West Germans in 1990 and 65 percent in 1999 (World Value Surveys).
As the CDU was mainly centered on Kohl’s leadership, the loss of office in 1998 and his sudden retirement resulted in a power shift. This was amplified by the fact many politicians of Kohl’s generation stepped down as well and that Angela Merkel became the new party executive. Nevertheless, Kohl’s closest ally, the Protestant Wolfgang Schäuble, succeeded him (Bösch 2004: 75-77; Langguth 2001: 7, 211). For Schäuble it was clear that ‘the CDU has to use the opposition phase to raise and discuss those questions which cannot be pushed aside anymore’ (Schäuble 2000: 302).

In family policy, Schäuble and Merkel were much more oriented towards working women than most within the CDU. As such, they understood one another well, and Merkel was able to set up and chair a new commission on family affairs in response to the 1998 defeat (SZ 09.10.99; Langguth 2005: 191, 197, 317). Whereas some CDU politicians pleaded for a clearer emphasis upon familialistic values in order to regain votes, Merkel argued exactly in the opposite direction (Schäuble 2000: 45). According to Merkel, family policy had to adjust flexibly to the current situation of families. Hence, new policies were required to allow for a reconciliation of work and family life (Merkel in FAZ 18.08.99).

On December 13th, the commission’s presented her findings at a special party conference on family affairs. At the time, the media concentrated on the biggest crisis in the CDU’s history, the so-called spending affair. For years, the party had spent too much on its vast party staff and illegal charities were uncovered. As such, it went largely unnoticed by then that the commission was able to push through some key changes. Instead of focusing on a married man and woman with children, the CDU now defined a family as ‘any situation whereby parents are responsible for children and children are responsible for parents’ (CDU 1999: 8). Furthermore, the commission departed from the traditional family ideal by stating that both parents usually want to be employed by now and that this requires policies enabling them to do so (CDU 1999: 3). According to the commission, ‘the key issue for the reconciliation of work and family life is a satisfying child care system’ (CDU 1999: 13).

By January 2000, Schäuble felt that he was not able to deal with the spending crisis due to his long history within the party. Accordingly, he retreated as party chairman (Schäuble 2000: 266). A party in uncertainty as well as a lack of experienced competitors somewhat surprisingly enabled Angela Merkel to become party leader in April 2000. She only had a small group of loyalists, the so-called “girls
camp”. This consisted of four women and included both the chairwoman and the vice-chairwoman of the youth union. Merkel’s candidacy was supported by the youth union and the women’s organization, though she did not have a background in the women’s organization (Bösch 2002: 147-155; Langguth 2001: 223-240). After she had become party leader, the CDU headquarters suddenly included a high number of women compared to most of its European sister parties (Bösch 2002: 259).

Nonetheless, Merkel had great difficulty in keeping the different wings and regions together as she lacked the authority of being chancellor and did not have a single portfolio to divide. Moreover, it was not the party headquarters that took charge of the CDU but the prime ministers of the different states (Bösch 2004: 73). This was exemplified by a high number of conflicts between Merkel and the rather conservative Roland Koch, the Prime Minister of Hessen (Trampusch 2005: 4). In addition, the CDU seemed in opposition with itself with Merkel as party leader and Friedrich Merz as fraction leader. Merz could build upon great sympathy within the fraction. The latter had a more conservative composition than the CDU headquarters and considered Merkel too progressive as regards family issues.

Both Merz and the CSU party leader made it repeatedly clear that the majorities in their parties were in favour of providing a family allowance of at least €1000 per month during three years, independent of the parents’ labor market situation (FAZ 05.07.2000 and 18.01.2001). Accordingly, this became the key family policy proposal of the CDU-CSU in their 2002 election program. On the other hand, the new definition of the family as established by the CDU commission on family affairs entered the election program. Moreover, for the first time in the history of the CDU-CSU, a concrete proposal was made to expand child care in its party program. To quote the program, ‘we will ensure that the tax system will take into account child care costs between €1000 and €5000 already from 2003 on’ (CDU-CSU 2002: 37).

After the 2002 electoral defeat and subsequent government exclusion, Merkel managed to strengthen her internal position by taking up the position of Merz. Moreover, she had put a large effort in a rejuvenation of the Bundestag fraction. The result was an exceptional rejuvenation of the fraction with approximately one third being new. In the field of CDU talents, Ursula von der Leyen probably was Merkels most important discovery. Von der Leyen has seven children and had been working as a physician between 1987 and 2004. Afterwards, she became the minister of social affairs, women, family and health in Lower Saxony. As will be shown below, Von der
Leyen - like Merkel - supports equal opportunities for women rather than the CDU’s traditional family ideal. When Merkel wanted to use the dire situation of the CDU to promote further programmatic renewal within the party, Von der Leyen seemed the perfect person to do so in family policy. Accordingly, Merkel appointed Ursula von der Leyen as chairwoman of the CDU commission Parents, Child and Employment in April 2005. Especially the CSU and some conservative CDU prime ministers of federal states did not really appreciate this decision (FAZ 04.05.2005). In response to her appointment, Von der Leyen replied that she would do her best to ‘achieve a change in orientations and to improve child care in order to facilitate the combination of work and family in Germany’ (FAZ 22.01.2005).

By late May 2005, however, chancellor Schröder suddenly called for early elections and the commission was unable to complete the process of programmatic renewal. With early elections looming in November 2005, the 2005 party program of the CDU-CSU was completed within six weeks. Touchy subjects, like how one should raise children, were avoided as much as possible (FAZ 14.08.2005, 22.01.06). Nevertheless, the 2005 party program of the CDU-CSU pointed at the need to change traditional family orientations and the need and the will to improve child care, but no concrete proposals were made in this regard (CDU-CSU 2005: 24-5). Furthermore, against the demands of the CDA and the women’s union, the commission was able to leave out the proposal to expand family allowances which had still stood at the forefront of the 2002 program (FAZ 14.08.2005).

On November 22nd, the CDU and CSU formed a government with the SPD. The then Chancellor Angela Merkel appointed Ursula von der Leyen as family and women’s minister. So far, the two most notable reforms of the grand coalition were to expand childcare and to introduce a new parental leave benefit (cf. Gerlach 2007).

To start with the former, it is worth noting that the coalition agreement points at an expansion in the direction of equal opportunities, just like under the red-green governments. This applies, for instance, to the will to expand child care (CDU, CSU and SPD 2005: 112-5). This is to large extent due to the extensive support of the SPD’s emphasis upon equal opportunities by Von der Leyen, the Christian democratic negotiator in family policy (SZ 18.01.2006; Gerlach 2007: fn. 1; see also SPD 2005: 42-6). By early January 2006, Von der Leyen proposed to entitle families with two working parents (or one working lonely parent) of children younger than seven to a
tax reimbursement, up to a maximum of €4,000 per year, if their expenses for child care exceed €1,000 per year.

The proposal was part of the “law to promote economic growth and employment fiscally” and received fierce criticisms, especially from the CSU and several CDU politicians. As to the SPD, left-wingers noted that the reform would benefit higher income groups rather than lower income groups if the expenses on child care had to exceed €1,000 (SZ 18.01.2006; FAZ 25.01.2006). Nevertheless, a majority within the executive committee agreed with the proposal and the SPD would eventually support it (Gerlach 2007: 7). Most within the CSU, however, were concerned about the neglect of the traditional family and demanded that the proposal would also support families with one working parent (SZ 18.01.2006; FAZ 25.01.2006).

Von der Leyen’s response was that ‘both men and women will participate in the labor market. The only issue is whether they will raise children’ (in FAZ 22.01.2006). In addition, some high-ranking CDU politicians were not willing to accept the minister’s plans as it implied a quite sudden move away from the party’s traditional family ideal by a minister from their own party with the support of a chancellor from their own party (SZ 18.01.2006). Accordingly, three politicians with rather traditional views on the role of the family criticized Von der Leyen for the supposed glorification of the working mother during a meeting of the party’s executive committee in Mainz. The deputy prime minister of Brandenburg argued that he would not like his children to be raised by the state. Two other politicians joining the critique on Von der Leyen were the leader of the CDU Bundestag fraction, and the prime minister of North Rhein Westphalia (FAZ 22.01.2006).

In the end, Merkel gave in to the critique from the CSU and several CDU politicians. Accordingly, the original proposal was revised in such a manner that it not only entitles families where all parents work, but also those where one of the two parents is employed (FAZ 25.01.2006). This became law on January 31, 2006.

In June 2006, the existing parental leave arrangement was replaced by a new scheme. The new law entitles a working parent to 67 percent of his or her income when caring for a child in the first year after birth. The maximum payment is €1,800 per month. The reform also introduces two so-called “daddy months” with the same replacement rate to enable the other working parent to care for a child during the subsequent two months.
Inspired by Swedish policy, the former SPD family minister Renate Schmidt had already developed a similar proposal in 2004. The only difference was that it entitled one parent for ten months and would entitle the other parent for two months. At the time, the proposal was received rather skeptically within the SPD Bundestag fraction due to its beneficial effect for higher income groups. However, several studies show that especially well-educated working women with high incomes postpone the decision to have children, if they have children at all. Therefore, chancellor Schröder backed the proposal. Due to sudden early elections, however, the implementation was postponed to 2006 (interview with Renate Schmidt).

During the coalition negotiations between the SPD and the CDU, Von der Leyen backed the SPD proposal. However, the introduction of the “daddy months” was criticized by most within the CSU (not by some female politicians and the women’s union) and by some CDU politicians. Especially the CSU was not willing to accept the proclaimed cut of two months for those families where only one of the two parents takes up parental leave to raise children. Furthermore, the Christian democratic prime minister of Thüringen, posed that he was not willing to let the state determine whether he his or his wife would raise children (FAZ 21.04.06). In addition, the CDU prime minister of North Rhein Westphalia, who had also been highly critical about the child care tax advantage, argued that the Constitution would forbid the state to oblige fathers to care for children. This triggered the SPD party executive to claim that the prime minister was a “dinosaur” who had been sleeping during his own party’s learning process on family policy. In her turn, Minister Von der Leyen replied to the opposition by conservative fellow partisans by stating that she wanted to enable young men and women to reconcile their work and family lives under the current socio-economic conditions. ‘Though some may remember the fifties nostalgically, they will never come back’ (FAZ 02.12.2005). A few months later, chancellor Merkel herself attempted to convince the skeptics and to bring them on board (FAZ 20.04.2006).

Afterwards, the CSU and the CDU skeptics gave up their resistance against the “daddy months”. However, they could claim a partial victory by avoiding the two month cut for those families where only one of the parents takes up parental leave. Therefore, the new parental leave benefit would be paid for twelve months to one parent, instead of the ten months as originally proposed by Schmidt and Von der
Leyen. The two months for the other parent would now become a bonus (FAZ 26.04.2006). This became law on June 23, 2006.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain a quite remarkable process of convergence of Christian democrats towards the SPD’s family model once they had returned to office in 2005. Until that time, power resource theory did a good job in explaining the development of German policy. Afterwards, we have seen that, against a background of secularization and women’s emancipation, government exclusion from 1998 to 2005 triggered a profound change of Christian democratic politicians. Once the CDU returned to office, dominant groups within this party were much more oriented towards working mothers than their predecessors and opted for expanding family policies for employed mothers.

It clearly became easier for chancellor Merkel to change family policy in the direction of equal opportunities with the likeminded Von der Leyen as family and women’s minister. To quote a CDU insider, ‘programmatic renewal is for the greatest part bound to persons. Without Angela Merkel and Ursula Von der Leyen, we would never have had such a strong reorientation within our party’ (interview). As such, German Christian democracy remains relevant in family policy, but means a rather different thing over time.

Nevertheless, internal opposition by Christian democratic politicians with familialistic orientations remains. A notable example concerns a recent debate on costless child care for children under the age of three. In January 2006, Von der Leyen announced that she would like to put great effort in making this possible (FAZ 22.03.2006). A few months later, both the leader of the SPD Bundestag fraction and chancellor Merkel publically supported her proposal (SZ 20.03.2006). Again, the proposal met fierce criticisms from within Christian democratic ranks. For instance, some CDU politicians blamed Von der Leyen for moving the CDU-CSU away from the traditional family ideal and the party’s constituents (FAZ 14.02.2007; http://www.n-tv.de/766641.html). According to a recent survey, however, 65 percent of the electorate supports an expansion of child care (FAZ 22.04.2007).

At a childcare summit in April 2007, the government then committed itself to reaching the EU’s 2003 Barcelona targets by providing 750,000 additional childcare
places by 2013, and annually earmarked € 4 billion euro to reach this goal. This is expected to cover about one-third of the costs. In September 2007, the government decided that – in the long run – parents should have a “statutory right” to a childcare place. Yet, mainly the more conservative CSU insisted not to “discriminate” against women who opt for minding their children at home. Accordingly, in a political compromise, the cabinet also introduced additional transfers by 2013 as an alternative to a child care place. These transfers might, however, stimulate low-income families to opt for receiving cash payments rather than participating in the labor market (Weishaupt 2008: 285-6).