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## 2012, people to watch: Angela Merkel

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Angela Merkel faces a difficult 2012. Her ambitious strategy for strengthening the Eurozone and keeping the EU as a stable framework will need major efforts of a smart leadership. The EU summits in October and December 2011 have agreed on far reaching objectives, however full of political and legal obstacles and challenges for the German chancellor both in the Eurozone like in Germany itself.

Angela Merkel has already an established record for a guiding role in shaping European polity and making EU policy. She managed to get the Lisbon treaty through after the failed referendum on the constitutional treaty. She was one of the strongest proponents of the EU's climate policy. In the financial crisis after Lehman Brothers and the sovereign debt crises she was however accused of reacting too slowly and too timidly. Strong pro-European voices in the EU like in Germany claim that she did not have the European conviction and charisma of Helmut Kohl. Her personal background is seen as a major difference to some of her predecessors. But be aware though, the chancellor is still difficult to read: her low key and low profile speeches should not lead to some kind of underestimating her strength and engagement - especially in view of her ability to adapt to new constellations and to keep her power. Given her engagement and risks she has taken also in view of her electorate I claim that we should not draw a comparison with Kohl which would be both unfair and not helpful.

In 2012 her will and strength to mobilize a strong German engagement against an ever increasing opposition in Germany and in the EU itself will be tested. The major challenge will be the conclusion of the intergovernmental treaty on the Stability Union and its ratification also in Germany itself. The economic outlook for 2012 does not promise a helpful support. Elections especially in France will put some of the major assumptions for a successful EU policy in question. All Europeans should be aware that a major pre-condition for her success will be a strong support from her allies in the EU - not only from France but also from other players. Her domestic support is shaky as her coalition partner, the Liberal party, is undergoing a major crisis of survival. Also the German Constitutional Court will put constraints on an ambitious integration policy and the public opinion might even more move to a deep EU skepticism and pessimism.

Though she claims that there is no alternative to her policies she might face a constellation with fundamental blockages in which she might need to pursue a strategy of downsizing the Euro and perhaps even restructure the EU in a reasonable way. A reliable look into 2012 is difficult to make. We might witness mayor unintended consequences of the decisions taken in 2011.

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