

Edmund Stoiber on His Running for Chancellor in 2002 (Retrospective account, 2013)

Abstract

Edmund Stoiber, then minister president of Bavaria, reminisces about his selection as chancellor candidate for the CDU/CSU in 2002, the campaign, and his relationship to Gerhard Schröder. When the votes were tallied, the SPD-Green coalition gained sufficient votes to stay in power. Stoiber was only the second CSU member to run for chancellor.

Source

When Edmund Stoiber Wanted to Become Chancellor

In 2002, the Union [CDU/CSU] wanted to replace Gerhard Schröder (SPD) as chancellor, though not with the chairwoman of the CDU as the candidate for the chancellorship. Then came the flood, as Edmund Stoiber recalls.

I would actually prefer it if others wrote about the 2002 campaign. When I do it myself, I feel it is somewhat insincere. But all right, then, I let them talk me into it. Anyway, it was a long time ago that I wanted to be chancellor. Eleven years. I have to think in order to remember everything. It's not like I'm constantly preoccupied with it. I could make a public appearance somewhere almost every day, especially the Young Union often invites me. And the young people are interested in how I assess politics, what I think about Europe. Rarely does anyone ask about back then.

That surely has to do with the fact that I did not quit after my candidacy for the chancellorship. I was Minister President of Bavaria until 2007 and have been politically active on a voluntary basis to this day. I'm happy to support my successor during his election campaign. I am not talking about the candidate for chancellor, Peer Steinbrück, but Bavarian Minister President Horst Seehofer.

The party funding scandal

At the time I felt a little like Seehofer in 2008. He, too, was assigned a role in a very difficult situation. In 2001 and 2002, the CDU was still suffering from the party funding scandal. Kohl had resigned, so had Schäuble, after that Angela Merkel had taken over the leadership of the party. The CDU was denied the moral right to criticize the federal government.

The CSU, however, was not affected by this affair. It was minister presidents like Erwin Teufel, Bernhard Vogel, and Roland Koch who advised me to stand as a candidate. Some were remembering that I became minister president in 1993, when the CSU stood at 38 % following the Amigo affair. A year later I won the absolute majority. Now we were far behind on a national level. Far behind. Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer were masters of the word, masters of staging.

There were many, also in my circles, who did not believe we could do it. They prophesied that we would not get more than 30 per cent and thus damage the CSU. That is why the risk of a candidacy for the chancellorship was too great for the CSU. Sometimes I hear that I wanted to become a candidate for the chancellorship in order to return the CSU to its rightful place after Franz Josef Strauß. That was not the issue. Nor was that motivation sufficient. A CSU candidate needed a basis in the CDU. I had that. And you have to believe yourself capable of it. "I believe I can do it" was my first statement in the state

parliamentary group in 1993. It was true also in 2002.

Breakfast with Angela Merkel

Of course Angela Merkel would have liked to run. She wanted to campaign with a new style. In the end, the CDU leadership believed their chances were better with me. When Merkel and I met for breakfast at my home in Wolfratshausen, we were already agreed that she would not run. Still, she wanted to speak with me in person prior to the meeting of the CDU's federal executive committee in Magdeburg on January 12. She had called two days earlier. My schedule was full, New Year's receptions had been scheduled with thousands of people. She suggested we might meet at the airport or in the state chancellery. But it was important to me that we could talk in peace and outside of the public view.

That is why I suggested breakfast, and she came over on Friday at eight in the morning. Angela Merkel also made it clear to me that as leader of the party she would not become a minister in my cabinet. I could understand that. On Saturday before the Bundestag elections we met once more at the Oktoberfest in Munich, and after that for a last time in the state chancellery.

She said that in the event of my victory or defeat, she would pursue the position as leader of the parliamentary group. I promised her my support. Of course that weighed on my friendship with Friedrich Merz, her predecessor. Politically I had no other choice. Today, Merz and I have a very good relationship. Except that as a member of the board of BVB Dortmund he often disagrees with me as a member of the board of Bayern Munich.

Germany, a basket case

I described Germany as a basket case and applied to be a kind of bankruptcy trustee. Germany was considered the sick man of Europe. Today I say: while I did not win the election, my candidacy made a difference. After his victory, Gerhard Schröder developed and implemented the Agenda 2010.

These were reforms that had dominated the campaign. Labor market and social reforms were the major issues. An awareness about them emerged during the debates. At the beginning of this year, Schröder sent me a handwritten letter inviting me, as the only representative of the CDU/CSU, to a discussion on ten years of Agenda 2010. I was happy to attend.

At first things went well with our issues. My shadow cabinet carried weight, people listened to the likes of Schäuble, Merz, Späth, and Seehofer. Then came the clashes over the Iraq war and the floods on the Elbe. Today I think I should have gone there immediately. But things looked different at the time. Saxony's Minister President Georg Milbradt did not urge me to come to Saxony immediately. After all, I had no role outside of Bavaria, I was "only" a candidate for chancellor. One week before the elections we were then behind the SPD/Green Party coalition in the polls for the first time. What a sour mood that caused within the CDU/CSU parliamentary group! If the election had taken place two weeks later, our starting position would have been better again. But that's how it was.

Morale-boosting slogans

When I boarded the flight back to Munich in Berlin on the evening of the election, it was clear that it would be very close. In Munich, I was informed by CSU General Secretary Thomas Goppel that we didn't make it. Of course I was disappointed. But at the party in the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung I was received like a victor. After all, we had improved by 3.4 percent compared to 1998. Since 1983 things had been going downhill steadily for the CDU/CSU. Only once was there an outlier on the upside: in 2002. Some talk about a Stoiber spike. I hope that we will now see the Merkel spike. My statement on the evening of the election, "One thing is clear: we won the election," referred to this gain. I wanted to make clear: We're back. On my way to the debate between the two candidates, I passed Schröder. He looked a little

downcast sitting in his chair and said: “Now you can show what you can do.” Unfortunately I was not able to. I had one hope: Red-Green would not last a full four years. And that’s what happened. It ended prematurely in 2005, and after seven years the CDU returned to the chancellery with Angela Merkel.

Gerhard Schröder

Today I have a very good relationship with Gerhard Schröder. We have known each other since a TV debate in 1979. He was Jusos [youth organization of the Social Democrats] chairman and I was general secretary of the CSU. It was quite a clash. Twenty years later we met for the first debate between candidates for chancellor on television. I suggested it to him. Some asked whether I had lost my mind. The media chancellor! When I arrived at the studio in Berlin-Adlershof on the evening of the debate, I did feel a little uneasy. The hundreds of journalists, the huge response! I thought to myself: If you make a serious mistake now, you will disappoint a lot of people who are relying on you. The responsibility was enormous. But I was well prepared. My team and I had gone over possible questions. They bombarded me and I responded spontaneously. After the first debate, I was seen to have an advantage. After the second, Schröder did.

All in all, the campaign in 2002 was more exciting than the one today. After all, the results were much closer. Almost five years later, in April of 2007, I congratulated Schröder on his birthday and invited him to my home for a casual lunch. It was a lovely meeting. We talked mostly about our plans and the family. We now leave the big political debates to others – usually.

Source: Edmund Stoiber, “Als Edmund Stoiber Kanzler werden wollte,” *Die Welt*, 26 August 2013.

Available online:

<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article119372007/Als-Edmund-Stoiber-Kanzler-werden-wollte.html>

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Edmund Stoiber on His Running for Chancellor in 2002 (Retrospective account, 2013), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/ghdi:document-5351>> [September 10, 2024].