

Wolfgang Schäuble's Long Career (October 25, 2017)

Abstract

One of the most prominent members of the CDU who never served as chancellor was Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU). He made his mark in many political roles, in particular as federal finance minister from 2009-2017. His political career continued in fall 2017 as president of the German Bundestag, an office he held until 2021.

Source

Wolfgang Schäuble – the man who always fights his way back

In spite of the party funding scandal, in spite of the attempted assassination: Wolfgang Schäuble always fought his way back. As Federal Interior Minister he made a name for himself as a hardliner, later in the Ministry of Finance as a defender of the “black zero” [balanced budget]. For that, Schäuble was acclaimed by some and despised by others. He is polarizing. But his authority is wanted in the new Bundestag. He is relaxed about his new job, saying that every member of parliament is committed to the rule of law. No worries, then.

The election of seventy-five year old Wolfgang Schäuble as President of the Bundestag is the culmination of a political career that should have ended twenty years ago. The atmosphere was heated in the Bundestag on December 2, 1999 – the leader of the CDU at the speaker's podium at the height of the party funding scandal. For weeks, rumors have been circulating that Schäuble had had contacts to the arms dealer Karlheinz Schreiber.

The donations affair spoiled his candidacy for the chancellorship

Schäuble denies it publicly. But later he has to admit that he accepted money from Schreiber. The state prosecutor investigates and quickly closes the case. Still, the donations affair will ruin his political career for the time being. It must have been tough times for a man who was in politics all his life. “I have always been fascinated with politics and with an engagement in and for politics.”

Schäuble was elected to the Bundestag already in 1972 – the youngest member of parliament at the time. From then on, politics determined his life. His family saw him frequently on television, rarely at home. And if so, then always with files, recounts his wife Ingeborg. “I resigned myself a long time ago. My husband is interested most in politics, that is his great passion, by now I also have a greater understanding for it.”

Detail-obsessed workaholic

His family's understanding was needed: Schäuble was considered a detail-obsessed workaholic. His rise within the CDU was slow but steady. Fellow party members describe him as a loyal man and discrete political manager. Rather by chance, he is appointed Minister of the Interior in 1989 and becomes one of the architects of German reunification. Twenty-five years later he will say that it was the most moving moment in his political life.

But for Schäuble, the *Wende* and unification are forever linked with a major personal blow. On October 12, 1990, a mentally ill man guns Schäuble down during a campaign event. One eye witness remembers: “He lifted his head, looked at me and said that he couldn't feel his feet.”

Defender of the black zero

Schäuble himself talks little about that experience. He does not want to be a victim, but a doer. He would have liked to have become federal president, but Chancellor Merkel prevented it. Yet in 2005, she brings him back into the top echelons: Schäuble becomes Federal Minister of the Interior and makes a name for himself as a hardliner. Afterwards, too, he does not mince words, which some find humiliating. As Minister of Finance he becomes Merkel's manager of the euro crisis, tirelessly calling on Greece to save money. And yet he remains a fervent supporter of Europe. "Everyone sweeps in front of their door and the neighborhood is clean. We Europeans have a lot of sweeping to do."

Schäuble's authority is needed

Again and again, he urges reforms. And he guards the budget with Baden discipline. The black zero is also his doing. Schäuble is esteemed across parties, in part because of the authority of age. He will need it in a parliament that will have right-wing members for the first time. It is Schäuble's job to conduct the sessions neutrally. He is relaxed about it, saying: every member of parliament is bound by the rule of law. The rule of law applies to all. No worries, then. Just the way he has always done politics.

Source: Martin Mair, "Wolfgang Schäuble – der Zurückkämpfer," MDR Aktuell Online, October 24, 2017,
<https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/politik/inland/schaeuble-wird-bundestagspraesident-100.html>.

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