

Summary of Dissertation

by Sebastian Kohlmann

Title: Frank-Walter Steinmeier. A political biography

(Original: Frank-Walter Steinmeier – a political biography)

transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld 2017

Content

I. Introduction

1. Why a biography about Steinmeier? Introduction and objectives

II. Early years

2. Childhood and youth

2.1 Brakelsiek

2.2 "Generation 74"

2.3 (Social Democratic) Politicization

3. Academic years of learning

3.1 Student

3.2 Scientist

3.3 "Citizen without shelter"

4. Interim conclusion: Guarded childhood and scientific lateral thinker

III. Politics in the background

5. The Rise to being the second man

5.1 Beginnings in Lower Saxony

5.2 Political head

5.3 Head of the State Chancellery

6. In the Federal Chancellery

6.1 Head of the Federal Chancellery

6.2 Consensus politics

6.3 Apprenticeship in external affairs

7. Metamorphosis

7.1 The Will to create at the Federal Chancellery

7.2 "Agenda 2010"

7.3 Descent of Schröder, rise of Steinmeier

8. Interim conclusion: Stepping out of the shadows

9. Politics in the spotlight

9. Metamorphosis II

9.1 Foreign Minister

9.2 "Ochsentour" backwards

9.3 Chancellor candidate

10. Politician

10.1 Chairperson of the Social Democratic Party in the Bundestag

10.2 About the best political course

10.3 Troika

11. Interim conclusion: Re-Arrival

V. Outlook and conclusion

12. Back in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

13. Influential Social Democrat, politician with content?

VI. Bibliography and sources

Conclusion

It was the turning point of a career that had so far been evolving in the background. For 15 years, Frank-Walter Steinmeier had been working as a close associate alongside Gerhard Schröder, first Prime minister of Lower Saxony, then Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. When Schröder's political career ended in 2005 Steinmeier himself stepped into spotlight; first as foreign minister, then as Chancellor candidate, afterwards as the chairperson of the biggest opposition-party in the Bundestag and once again as foreign minister – and finally, after conclusion of this study, most likely as the 12th Federal President of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Between these two poles, as an invisible political strategist in the background and a highly visible top politician in the spotlight, Steinmeier has been politically active for more than 25 years – a large part of them in the executive branch and, with the exception of the first two years, in the strategic center of his party. Due to his work in the various positions he is, so the thesis of this study, one of the most influential German social democrats of the past two decades.

This biography traces the Steinmeier's development as a politician and examines his influence on the executive branch and thus on the shaping of the country on the one hand and his influence on German social-democracy on the other. What factors enabled Steinmeier's political success? What (lasting) effects did Steinmeier achieve in his respective offices? And how great is Steinmeier's role in the repositioning of the SPD in the past two decades?

For the study, 24 interviews were conducted with present and former leading actors such as Gerhard Schröder, Franz Müntefering, Sigmar Gabriel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier himself. Statements from these interviews are included throughout the biography, partly anonymous, partly with name. All quotations are authorized. Extensive archival sources – including the files of the office of former party chairman Schröder and those of Steinmeier as vice-chairman of the party – were also taken into account. Steinmeier's publications from student days were investigated with regard to his views on party politics. Subsequent essays as well as his numerous speeches since 2005 were also included in the study. Complex topics such as the constitutional phase of Rot-Grün, the Agenda 2010 or Steinmeier's foreign policy concerning to foreign cultural policy or the question of how to deal with dictators were analyzed far beyond Steinmeier's role resulting in a monograph that uses one person's biography to narrate contemporary history.