

Merkel v Schulz: No knock-out blows

Last night's one-and-only live debate between Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz saw no clear winner

No game changer

Anyone who expected the live TV debate between the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and Martin Schulz, leader of the second biggest party, to be explosive would have been disappointed. Compared with debates in other countries, it looked either boring or refreshingly polite and cordial, and focused on arguments. The 90-minute debate mainly dwelt on migration, refugees, Turkey and foreign policy; followed by social justice, the diesel scandal and a brief range of other topics. Interestingly, subjects such as the future of the EU and the Eurozone, investments, education, digitalisation or structural reforms were not discussed at all.

Three weeks left to go

The biggest headline stemming from the debate will probably be a tougher stance on Turkey, supported by Schulz but also Merkel. On all other issues, Schulz tried to distance himself from Merkel, while Merkel often tried to stress the fact that Schulz' party, the SPD, was currently the junior partner in Merkel's government. In the next days, the spin doctors will try to spread their interpretations of the debate.

First polls immediately after the debate presented a solid lead for Merkel with almost 50% of the surveyed people seeing no difference between Merkel and Schulz. The polls held positive news for both candidates: Merkel has still a strong lead on Schulz but Schulz could narrow the gap somewhat. Obviously, it is too early to call the elections decided, as 40% of the electorate has still to make up its mind. In our view, last night's debate was not a game changer in the election campaign. Even though the debate had clearly less explosive potential than the WW2 bomb deactivation in Frankfurt, which led to a mass evacuation, it could at least be the kick-start for a more vivid campaign in the next three weeks. Maybe not too interesting for close followers of German politics, but probably stimulating enough for still undecided voters to deepen their interests.

