

ANGELA MERKEL, REELECTED CDU PARTY LEADER



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At a party congress in the western German city of Düsseldorf, conservative opposition leader Angela Merkel has been reelected chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), allowing her to maintain her bid to challenge Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at elections in 2006 and become the country's first woman head of government.

Merkel, 50, was confirmed in her post with 88.41 percent at the Christian Democratic Union congress in Düsseldorf.

The two-day congress gave Merkel a chance to focus on the hot-button issues preoccupying voters: the stagnant economy and what she calls the "failed" vision of a multicultural society.

Mrs Merkel identified patriotism and conservative values as the core of her party's agenda ahead of national elections in 2006, echoing unease across Europe at efforts to accommodate the cultural differences of immigrant minorities. "We [in the CDU] are against seeing foreigners as our enemies", she said. Foreigners must adopt "certain values and standards", such as learning German and ensuring women from ethnic minorities enjoy full legal rights, she added.

Regarding Turkey, she said: "A Europe with Turkey as a fully fledged member won't be a Europe that is fully integrated," she warned. "The degree of European integration achieved over 50 years must not be thrown away just like that."

Several EPP members head by EPP President, Wilfried Martens, and EPP Secretary General, Antonio Lopez-Isturiz, participated in the XVIII Congress of Germany's largest conservative party. All of them congratulated Merkel personally for her reelection.