

Angela Merkel is taking a break. After one of the toughest months of her chancellorship, Mrs **Merkel** chose to unwind - by watching a five-hour performance of the Wagnerian opera Tristan and Isolde. The **German** chancellor's summer holiday routine rarely alters. She is an avid opera fan, so it is usually a trip to the Bayreuth Wagner festival followed by a stay in **South Tyrol**. What is different this year is the political storm from which she has emerged in **Berlin** and the speculation still rife in **Germany** about her future. It has been a bruising few months. Largely due to the drama of the Greek debt crisis, whose twists and turns could have come straight from one of the operas Mrs **Merkel** so enjoys. Image caption Image caption She has been chancellor for 10 years and must choose whether to lead her conservatives into the next general election in 2017. Because, despite those rebellious **conservatives**, she is unlikely to be pushed out. There are few obvious **challengers**. Her Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, was once widely tipped as a successor, but she is struggling with the poisoned chalice that is her portfolio. The leader of her coalition partners, Sigmar Gabriel, is a popular figure. Even so - one of his **social democrats** said recently - there was little point in putting up a candidate from the party trailing in the polls. "It's difficult to win against **Merkel**," said Torsten Albigh. Others speculate about her finance minister. Mrs **Merkel** is said to have a complicated relationship with Mr Schaeuble - she helped to thwart his chance of becoming chancellor a decade ago. His hawkish policy on Greece went down well domestically. Arguably, it suited Mrs **Merkel** to have him play bad cop during negotiations, but the finance minister made it very clear he wields real power, threatening publicly to resign rather than act against his principles. There is, however, no evidence Mr Schaeuble - who is in his 70s - is planning a coup. Public popularity And he would be fighting a chancellor whose approval ratings have remained consistently high. Image caption Dr Peter Matuschek, who runs a German polling organisation, said the **Greek crisis** had not damaged her significantly. If anything, Germans were rather proud of her. "She is seen as a crisis manager," he said. Her focus on compromise is admired in **Germany**, where the political system values **consensus**. Even so, at times it can get her into trouble; she was recently accused of turning a blind eye to human rights abuses by the **Egyptian** government in order to foster bilateral trade. But Germany also admires her ability to broker a deal. That reputation (think late-night talks over **Ukraine** or the recent **G7** commitment to phase out **greenhouse gas emissions**) plus **Germany's** economic might has made her one of the world's most powerful politicians. And one of its busiest - the **Greek crisis**, after all, is not yet fully resolved. There is also **Ukraine**, and the possibility of the **UK** leaving the **EU**. **Angela Merkel**

1954: born **Hamburg**

1978: earns physics doctorate

1990: joins **Christian Democratic Union (CDU)**

1994: becomes minister for environment

2000: becomes **CDU** leader

2005: becomes **chancellor**

2009: re-elected **chancellor**

2013: re-elected **chancellor** for a third term, winning one of the most decisive victories in **German** history, and coming within five seats of the first absolute majority since 1957

Immigration issue And then there is what is likely to be the next major challenge of her chancellorship. Already, in her absence, **German** politicians are squabbling over how to deal with rising immigration. As **Europe's** refugee crisis continues, up to 450,000 people are expected to claim **asylum** in **Germany** this year - more than in any other **European** country. Image caption There are complaints about dwindling resources, and attacks on homes for asylum seekers. Mrs **Merkel** must soothe domestic fears but seek to achieve a sustainable **European** solution too. During a break in that production of Tristan and Isolde, a chair suddenly collapsed under Mrs **Merkel**. A subsequent cartoon, entitled Merkel's stuhl (stool), depicted a plush-looking chair - balancing on a single leg. It begs the question - can the German **chancellor** regain the political support she will need to get through what promises to be a stormy autumn?

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