

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development
Institute

Social cohesion and fragile statehood

The goals of the coalition agreement reach beyond Germany's borders

By Jörn Grävingholt,
*German Development Institute /
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*

The Current Column

of 19 March 2018

The goals of the coalition agreement reach beyond Germany's borders

Bonn, 19 March 2018. The new German government has committed itself in its coalition agreement to strengthen social cohesion in Germany. The urgency of this task is self-evident. Election results and the nature of current political discourse provide evidence of increasing tears in the social fabric, yet the problem exists far beyond Germany. It explains, for example, the rise of populist politicians with confrontational and isolationist agendas, such as Chavez, Trump, Putin and Orban.

For many societies, the consequences of internal fragmentation are even more dramatic. In a recently published joint study, the United Nations and the World Bank warn that more countries have had to confront violent conflict since 2016 than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Germany's connection to this trend has been clear for all to see since 2015. Without the implosion of the old order in the Middle East and North Africa, the humanitarian disaster that would finally reach Europe would never have come about. So, what should we do? The report by the UN and the World Bank makes it clear that anyone wishing to achieve sustainable peace will have to overcome marginalisation, open up equal opportunities for political participation on the part of disadvantaged groups and find new ways of overcoming poverty and creating wealth. More growth alone will not bring about peace, and more jobs are not guaranteed to prevent further social division. Still, of all institutions, it is the World Bank which argues that there could possibly also be a need for redistribution in order to counteract the deepening social rifts.

The German Government has also provided a great deal of investment since 2015 under the banner of 'reducing the causes of displacement'. It has spent several billion euros each year on providing humanitarian aid for refugees in countries of initial reception and on stabilising crisis countries and their neighbours through economic and infrastructural measures in order to hopefully limit the number of people making their way to Europe. There is no question that many of these endeavours are helpful and, from a humanitarian point of view, necessary. Other measures have attracted criticism, as, for example, human rights organisations saw more isolation taking place than sustainable aid work. Above all, however, there has been a failure to finally invest as much in actually preventing crises and creating a sustainable peace order as in managing crises. The joint UN and World Bank study showed once again

that prevention costs far less than just dealing with the economic damage caused by violent conflict and humanitarian disasters, let alone the human consequences.

Those who wish to work to mitigate the causes of displacement must examine the reasons why people feel compelled to leave their homes in large numbers against their will. In most cases, there is a state behind it that has more or less given up on large parts of its population. Research by the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), which is available online as of this week under the title 'Constellations of State Fragility', shows where and to what extent states around the world have been neglecting their core duties to their populations since the mid-2000s and thus creating risks to social cohesion. Based on this data, it can be seen among other things that states that repress their population rather than seeking legitimation from it can sooner or later turn into ticking time bombs. The Middle East and North Africa in particular stand out in this regard. The region had the largest collection of states with legitimation deficits prior to 2011. The tragic consequences are well known.

As such, contributing to greater social cohesion and, by extension, to the prevention of violent conflict abroad is as much an imperative of reason as it is one of humanity. The last grand coalition committed itself with notable clarity to this endeavour in a policy document on peacebuilding published in summer 2017. "Our lives have become so interwoven that the effects of state fragility, of crises and bloodshed, can be felt even in Germany," wrote the German Chancellor in her foreword. It is now necessary to move from focusing on crisis management to pursuing a policy that seeks to overcome political and economic exclusion around the world, and especially in fragile states.

Incidentally, such a policy does not stop at the traditional boundaries of foreign, security and development policy, but also addresses trade, finance and the environment, along with other policy areas. The United Nations 2030 Agenda shows the way forward in this endeavour. The new German Government has more reasons than ever to take seriously the commitments that it made together with the international community in 2015. This will ultimately serve to promote social cohesion in Germany as well.