

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für  
Entwicklungspolitik



Years | 1964–2014

German Development  
Institute

## Germany and global influence – challenges of global change belong on the agenda

By Dirk Messner and Jörg Faust,  
*German Development Institute /  
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*

# The Current Column

*of 12 February 2014*

## Germany and global influence – challenges of global change belong on the agenda

Bonn, 12 February 2014. Germany's Federal President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen have opened the debate on Germany's foreign policy, and this is a good thing. In an age of global interdependence, there is no longer such thing as a national or European island untouched by the concerns of the rest of the world. Germany and Europe's prosperity, democracy and security are dependent on global dynamics that Germany should try to actively influence, in cooperation with its partners. As our multi-polar world becomes increasingly interconnected, many new opportunities arise (Germany has so far been one of the winners of globalisation), but there are risks too. Without global cooperation, we risk being caught up in cross-border crises, instability and conflict.

When it comes to improving cooperation, the challenges facing us are great. These are turbulent times for the transatlantic relationship. Furthermore, Russia and the West are at odds over human rights, democracy, Syria, the Ukraine and the basic direction of international policy. China's attempts to become the leading Asian power and to develop a policy for securing global resources are viewed critically by most actors. Global cooperation processes, whether in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) or climate negotiations, are dependent on emerging economies, such as Brazil, India, South Africa and Indonesia, that are still looking to find their place in global politics. All things considered, we as a global community are experiencing "cold peace", to borrow a phrase from US foreign-policy advisor Charles Kupchan, and we find ourselves in a situation in which global cooperation is needed now more than ever.

What issues belong on Germany's international agenda? A number of key challenges were discussed at the Munich Security Conference. Security policy, the stabilisation of fragile states, and the prevention and mitigation of violence within individual states are all high on the agenda. Syria, Iraq, Libya, and possibly Egypt, have the potential to destabilise a whole region. Mali and South Sudan provide examples of setbacks in sub-Saharan Africa that can easily spill over into neighbouring states. Whenever states implode or civil war rages, the door is opened to transnational terrorism. Experience also shows that stabilisation, personal security and development progress are like Siamese twins for ordinary people. Consequently, foreign, security and development policies must be strategically intertwined and work

together over the long haul if they are to be effective in these countries.

The debate on Germany's new role in international politics has given insufficient attention to the dynamics of global change, which will radically transform the world economy and global society during this century. In this context, there are four interwoven processes whose impact and direction Germany and Europe should focus on influencing. Firstly, the world's population is set to rise from seven billion at present to some nine billion by 2050. Secondly, world food production will need to be increased by around 50 percent as a result. Agricultural land is already becoming scarce and our oceans are in a poor state. Thirdly, humankind is undergoing the most rapid process of urbanisation in its history, with the urban population expected to increase from three billion at present to around six billion during the coming decades. If urbanisation unfolds as it has in the past, resources will become even scarcer and it will be virtually impossible to prevent climate change reaching dangerous levels. Fourthly, global demand for energy will rise sharply over the next few decades. If we do not transition to renewable energies at international level, then we will not be able to make the switch to a climate-friendly global economy.

In light of these trends, scientists are pointing out that if we continue along our current growth trajectory and fail to create global concepts of well-being that take into account the finite nature of our planet, then there will be collateral damage to the world system during this century, the consequences of which are unknown. The international community can only tackle these human challenges if it works together. The current international discussion about post-2015 global development goals, which should give direction to international cooperation activities, is relevant in this context. President Gauck, Minister of Defence von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Steinmeier have started a debate that must continue. If Germany is to succeed in refocusing its foreign policy, then Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Müller, Federal Environment Minister Hendricks, Minister of Education and Research Wanka and Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Gabriel will need to pick up the baton. After all, in an age of accelerating globalisation, foreign relations are a matter for (virtually) all of the members of the Federal Cabinet.