

Zeitenwende**“Morals have to be affordable!”**

Stephan Klingebiel

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)



Bonn, 14 November 2022. Politics is full of contradictions and conflicting objectives. The list of autocratic regimes that have welcomed high-ranking representatives of the German government in recent months – in what is an unprecedented time of crisis – has met with no little criticism. Many of these trips are aimed at increasing Germany’s energy security, not least via agreements designed to give it access to additional sources of fossil fuels.

Needless to say, close relations with autocracies and agreements to supply more fossil fuels are not part of a deliberate policy. Quite the reverse, in fact, as the German government has set itself the target of phasing out fossil fuels and pursuing a value-based international policy. “We shall base our foreign, security and development policy on values” is what it says in the coalition agreement. Such an ambition makes conflicts between varying objectives all the starker, not least in light of the arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia that were signed off in October.



Highlighting contradictions in the policies of the actors involved is generally not especially difficult, and this has consistently been the case with previous governments in Germany. However, it is even more true now that Russia's policy of aggression has necessitated far-reaching changes at the drop of a hat. At the same time, a federal government that focuses on a basis of values – of all things – faces a particularly challenging time.

„The assumption that values can find a place in "fair weather" times but do not hold in times of crisis fails to recognise the role of trust, credibility and transparency in international relations.“

Development policy is underpinned by values to a greater extent than other policy fields, with humanism, Christian values, issues of international justice and other values playing a relatively prominent role. Furthermore, values and interests are not mutually exclusive, especially since neither concept is founded on notions that can be clearly delineated.

At times of fundamental upheaval, development policy has to change. With this in mind, the question of the relationship between values and interests is particularly important. Despite its theoretical nature, the question also serves as a compass for making practical decisions – making it hugely significant. After years of worrying about supply chains, will development policy have to focus more on strategic aspects of Germany's energy and raw material supply alongside production conditions in developing countries? What is cooperation with autocratic regimes supposed to look like in light of this?

The following points should be taken into account in order to take a stance:

Firstly, value-based politics is directly relevant to credibility on the international stage: the assumption that values might have a place when the going is good but a short shelf-life in times of crisis ignores the role that trust, credibility and transparency play in international relations. The debates at the UN over Russia's policy of aggression have underlined how double standards (such as regarding military intervention in Iraq in 2003) and the lack of reform to global governance structures are directly affecting (Germany's) security interests. Development policy has the potential to be

a key policy field in cooperation with the Global South in this regard.

Secondly, many of the debates currently raging are too simplistic because they just revolve around a single topic: global challenges – from inequality and climate change through to the legitimacy of political power – are all difficult enough as it is and can rarely be measured in any meaningful way by dichotomous pairings (autocracies versus democracies, "North" versus "South", etc.). For the sake of development policy, it is important to be able to handle this complexity. Simply looking at the "neediness" of a particular country (irrespective of the relevance of governance to existing problems, for instance) would be one example of such an oversimplification, as would picking governance as the sole criterion when choosing cooperation relationships. Conflicting objectives are becoming especially apparent with regard to China, where a large number of issues – connected with the economy, security, human rights and other matters – are all coming together.

Thirdly, situations involving conflicting objectives do exist and should be discussed in a transparent way: in development policy and other policy fields, whether and how contradictions are addressed makes a difference. It is the process by which interests are weighed up and priorities are set that makes politics what it is.

In an ideal scenario, politics will be based on long-term objectives and strategies to match. Multiple crises require policies to be formulated as strategies in times of far-reaching uncertainty, even if this is extremely difficult in the face of rapidly changing underlying conditions. This is evident in the groundwork being laid for Germany's first-ever national security strategy and, similarly, the China strategy announced by the federal government. Besides the need for a longer-term focus, attention should also be paid to specific mechanisms for resolving conflicting objectives by "negotiating" within and, especially between, policy fields. Better interface management would represent a major step towards tackling conflicting objectives in German policymaking. The forthcoming strategy documents should be measured in terms of whether they can help bring about an improved policy coherence of this kind.