

After the Pact is before the future

# From the Summit of the Future to the Hamburg Sustainability Conference

Anna-Katharina Hornidge und Axel Berger

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)



In a world dominated by considerable geopolitical differences and by climate, biodiversity, debt and state crises, securing sustainable futures is a noble objective. Bringing together Heads of State and Government at the United Nations (UN) a week ago, the Summit of the Future aimed to strengthen multilateral structures, without which it would be impossible to address the global challenges together. The Pact for the Future adopted in New York outlines reform projects to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015, particularly in the field of finance, security and peace, science, innovation development and digitalisation. The Pact also explicitly focuses on young people and future generations – the first time that the UN has done so explicitly.

The Pact for the Future reflects the tense global geopolitical situation. Despite protracted and conflictual negotiations, the international community managed to

agree on this Pact, albeit in a watered-down version. Now that the Pact has been adopted, however, it needs to be put into practice: Instead of the German soccer proverb ‘after the game is before the game’, in shaping policy for sustainable futures the notion ‘after the pact is before the future’ applies.

At the halfway mark, the progress made on implementing the 2030 Agenda is sobering: a mere 17% of the SDGs are ‘on track’ to be achieved by 2030. We are lagging behind in key transformation areas, such as the restructuring of our economies and the protection of ecosystems. At the same time, voting behaviour at the level of the European Union and in some of Germany’s federal states is a reminder that economic and social systems need to be restructured in a socially responsible manner and that such measures must be communicated to the public. It is important to mobilise social and political majorities for global structural transformation in pursuit of climate stabilisation and sustainable futures.

*“It is important to mobilise social and political majorities for global structural transformation in pursuit of climate stabilisation and sustainable futures. “*

The global sustainability agenda is thus becoming more (geo)political. The G20’s programme under the Brazilian presidency is clearly geared towards implementing the 2030 Agenda, as was the Indian presidency last year. In the midst of a heated electoral campaign, the Biden–Harris Administration has published the U.S. Strategy on Global Development and outlined their programme for the future with the 2030 Agenda as a framework of reference. In contrast, Brussels is no longer quite so sure: Ursula von der Leyen’s Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024–2029 lack any mention of the 2030 Agenda, while the Mission Letters to the Commissioners do indeed include references to the SDGs. Is the shift to the right in Europe’s voting behaviour accompanied by doubts about the sustainability agenda while the large emerging powers are making active use of the 2030 Agenda at both domestic and international levels? This impression is strengthened by an increasing focus on issues connected with industrial, migration and security policy in European foreign policy.

One thing is clear: constructive debate is needed on the significance of the global sustainability agenda. And transition in the energy and transport, food and digitalisation sectors needs to be designed in a concrete, socially responsible manner. The sustainability agenda needs to be successful.

The aim of the Hamburg Sustainability Conference (HSC) is to make a contribution to moving the sustainability agenda forward. The idea is to set up an annual platform to enable influential sustainability alliances to be forged with low-, middle- and high-income countries across the globe. With the necessary resolve to take decisions and the appropriate financial budgets in politics, the private sector and civil society, the HSC can become a platform that will allow stakeholders from different sectors to learn from one another for specific sustainability transformations and that will help accelerate and scale up these processes. In a world that is increasingly marked by divisions dictated by security policy, the HSC relies on the logic of transregional cooperation. Securing sustainable development, security and the future through cooperation – a scenario in which the logic of ‘security through defence’ is not applied until the limits of cooperation are reached.

After the Pact is before the future. In Hamburg, this means initiating the steps for implementing the UN Pact for the Future. One conference will certainly not be enough to do that, but – with the necessary political stamina – the HSC can facilitate significant contributions. Particular attention should be devoted to (a) developing transformative climate-stabilising and socially responsible innovations and establishing them on a broad basis, (b) forging alliances across different regions, between policymakers, the private sector and civil society, and between local authorities, federal states and national governments and (c) using these alliances to rebuild economic and social systems across the globe. At the same time, the conference will send out an important political signal throughout Europe and far beyond: Germany remains committed to the 2030 Agenda and – as a reliable partner on the international stage that can mediate between policymakers, the private sector, civil society and the scientific community – aims to drive the restructuring of food, energy, economic and social systems at a practical level.