

Rules vs. ‚Deals‘

## Policy for a rules-based multipolar world

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Bonn, 25 February 2025: Germany has voted. The formation of a coalition between the CDU/CSU and SPD is possible and thus the chance of a relatively stable government. However, this ray of hope should not obscure the fact that a good 20 per cent of voters cast their vote for a party that is under observation by the German domestic intelligence service due to its far-right orientation, is questioning the European integration and positions itself pro-Russian.

The challenges for the new government could hardly be more substantial. Ever since US Vice President Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference and the direct negotiations between the USA and Russia, it has been clear that the rules-based international order as the foundation of a multipolar world is under serious threat. Anti-democratic forces are working systematically and in a transnationally organised manner to destabilise it. The alternative, however, an

international order based on bilateral 'deals' and the power of the strongest, amounts to the division of the world into spheres of influence – including a possible increase in destructive competition and spiralling escalation.

Over the next four years, the new German government, as a driving force in Europe, must throw its full weight behind securing the rules-based order. This includes substantial investment in Germany's and Europe's security and defence as well as a comprehensive partnership with Ukraine. At the same time, and complimentary to the 'security through defence'-strategy, 'security through cooperation' is thoroughly needed. This requires targeted investment in sustainable development, democratisation and conflict prevention is needed to facilitate trusting, strategic and peace-building alliances with like-minded countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

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We see **five guiding principles** to protect the rules-based, rather than 'deal'-based, order:

**1. Reduce structural determinants and 'root causes' of social and political polarisation.** Germany's ability to cooperate depends on wide societal support. There is a need for a targeted promotion of political and economic participation and the power of marginalised groups to shape society. Investments in social cohesion should be supported by protection against anti-democratic, polarising external influence.

**2. Strengthen multilateralism.** The ongoing reforms of the World Bank show that multilateralism continues to be possible. The gaps created in the UN through the withdrawal of the USA must be filled quickly. Otherwise China will step in. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a key frame of reference for shaping the future, especially at a time when the rules-based order, including the Human Rights Charter, is being openly questioned. Germany and Europe should be highly committed to them and to an ambitious follow-up agenda.

**3. Reduce (unbalanced) dependencies on global centres of power.** This applies first to military dependence on the USA. Europe and Germany must

emancipate themselves to the extent that they can defend themselves against, for example, Russia without the USA, including a nuclear deterrent. At the same time, the primacy of military defence must be avoided. Furthermore, it is important to reduce one-sided dependencies in other areas of immediate strategic relevance. In addition to energy, these include in particular questions around critical raw materials and digitalisation.

**4. Expand strategic, trusted partnerships in a targeted manner.** Not 'despite everything', but: now more than ever. Where multilateral cooperation is not possible, Germany should work in minilateral alliances with like-minded (democratic) middle and regional powers. Further, it is in our national interest to continue to actively contribute to G7 and G20. Lastly, and in order to secure global common goods, Germany must seek thematically specific cooperation with the heavyweights of the multipolar world, especially China and India, in addition to the USA.

**5. Specifically stabilise and strengthen Europe's neighbouring regions.** Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, but also in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the consequences of climate change, poverty, lack of income opportunities and lack of access to healthcare, in some cases exacerbated by external forces, are destabilising societies, economies and political systems. The dismantling of USAID, as latest development, will further substantially affect healthcare systems and refugee camps in Sub-Sahara Africa. Europe and Germany are well advised to intervene here with humanitarian aid in the short term and to ensure structurally transformative sustainable development in the medium to long term.

Discussions about departmental responsibilities on the level of Federal Ministries of Germany are popular before elections and in coalition negotiations. And yet, they obscure the real challenge: Germany's external policy-fields need to be much better interlinked and coordinated. Germany, Europe and the world need a united Federal Government as an advocate for a rules-based international order. Together with all the smaller and medium-sized countries in the world, we, our peace and prosperity, directly depend on these rules and compliance with them. In order to defend them, an emancipated Germany must diversify its partnerships, reduce dependencies and seek new alliances.