

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



Years | 1964–2014

German Development
Institute

Germany's global ambition must have a European dimension

By Mark Furness and Svea Koch,
*German Development Institute /
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*

The Current Column

of 12 February 2014

Germany's global ambition must have a European dimension

Bonn, 12 February 2014. The new German government's desire to increase its global presence should be welcomed. German-born former US Secretary of State Kissinger once said that Germany was too big for Europe and too small for the world. Both Europe and the world need more from Germany, and Germany will have to work through the EU if it is to realise its new global ambitions.

The broad sweep of Germany's aspiration was announced at the recent Munich Security Conference, where President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen all made speeches arguing that the time for German reluctance in world politics is past. Von der Leyen said that 'indifference is not an option' any more. Steinmeier said that as Europe's strongest nation, Germany should contribute more to joint European action.

100 years after the First World War, Germany's leaders are right that their country needs a more active foreign policy. But what does this mean? As it builds its capabilities, Germany should focus on supporting crisis prevention, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, using civilian and non-combat military resources in the first instance. Second, Germany should use Europe as a vehicle for its global ambitions, and in so doing strengthen the EU as an international actor.

A global peacebuilding strategy

Germany's global ambition needs clear goals and a strategy for achieving them. The German government's best option is to contribute more to international peacebuilding and conflict resolution. With the exception of Kosovo, Germany hasn't had a prominent political role in any recent peacebuilding engagement. As most conflicts require a robust but non-combat international response, Germany should increase its capabilities for engaging in non-combat military and civilian interventions. This would help protect the world's most vulnerable people, and assist global and local efforts to build lasting peace.

Peacebuilding engagements are complex, long-term exercises requiring political commitment and the deployment of many tools. Germany does some of this very well - funding emergency relief agencies, training police, building infrastructure, and providing technical assistance in critical sectors like health-care and sanitation. But the German government needs a political strategy to focus and align the diplomatic resources of the Chancellery and foreign ministry, its defence and civilian response assets, its

humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and its civil society, in a 'whole of government' approach.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to stop crises from turning violent. While Germany's focus should be on civilian and non-combat military peacebuilding support, the German military also needs to be ready to react when things get bad. Partly, this means Germany must increase cooperation with European partners - especially the UK and France - under the NATO umbrella for the rare cases where the international community takes a *legitimate* decision to intervene militarily. European defence cooperation is a mess and more commitment from Germany might just help fix it, even if a European army is unlikely.

Germany needs Europe, and the EU needs an active German foreign policy

The German government also needs to look at the avenues through which it may have the most influence. Germany could do more through the UN, where a more active peacebuilding policy might help to restore its reputation in the Security Council. But the biggest potential lever for Germany is the EU, through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Germany is economically and politically the strongest EU member and it should invest more in strengthening the EU's diplomacy, especially on Syria and Ukraine. It could even push for a German EU High Representative if Martin Schulz does not become Commission President.

Germany should commit to strengthening the CSDP by committing resources to its missions. There is no reason to wait: German troops, hardware and development cooperation would be welcome in the Central African Republic. Germany could also push for a strong EU contribution to an international response to the tragedy in South Sudan. It should also look to contribute more political, financial and technical resources to the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis response. In so doing Germany would help define the EU's global role, capabilities and limits.

Hopefully, the ambitious Munich speeches will not turn out to be the empty platitudes that politicians often express at the beginning of their term. 100 years after the start of the Great War, it is worth remembering that seemingly minor conflicts can escalate into global disasters. A committed German contribution to a global Europe focused on peacebuilding, conflict resolution and development could be a major force for good in the world.