



Messages from the Berlin Peace Dialogue 2023

“Zeitenwende” for Civilian Crisis Prevention?

Annual Conference of the Advisory Board to the Federal Government for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

On 5 October 2023, the Advisory Board hosted the annual Berlin Peace Dialogue. Around 280 participants engaged in lively discussions at the Federal Foreign Office, while up to 1,500 participants joined the conference online.

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has brought about a turning point in German security policy. Does this also apply to the approaches of civilian crisis prevention and peacebuilding, the effectiveness of which is crucial for the course of crises worldwide? In the light of an increasing number of parallel global crises, the Berlin Peace Dialogue 2023 addressed the question of what the “Zeitenwende” means for the future of civilian crisis prevention in Germany and internationally.

Susanne Baumann, State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office, opened the conference and emphasised the role of civilian crisis prevention and peacebuilding in a world characterised by increasing parallel crises. To improve engagement, it is crucial to understand the contexts, to become aware of politicisation, to analyse one’s own engagement self-critically and to listen to the people affected. In this context, she referred to the German National Security Strategy with its people-centred and holistic approach as well as its integrated understanding of security. She stated that this conference marks the beginning of the revision of the Federal Government Guidelines on *Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace*.

Dr Kira Vinke and Lars Wagner, Co-Chairs of the Advisory Board, welcomed the guests. Dr Kira Vinke underlined that increasing and interacting crises of today (such as war, hunger, climate change, inequality, racism, displacement, and lingering pandemics) require greater efforts on both reaction and prevention, a more strategic foresight and a closer look at the different dimensions on human security. According to the integrated security understanding of the National Security Strategy, all three main areas of action (robustness, resilience and sustainability) must be equally achieved. Lars Wagner proposed a German-Ukrainian bilateral police project as a faster and more direct instrument to assist Ukraine in providing the necessary civilian support in addition to the ongoing large-scale military support. The National Security Strategy announced that the engagement of German police officers in international missions will be increased. Lars Wagner pointed out that due to the declining numbers of German police officers in international civilian crisis prevention missions in recent years, this can only be achieved by setting binding numbers for the future. These numbers can be achieved by defining “Planziele”, which were agreed upon in the coalition agreement and are still pending. The Advisory Board will shortly be making its first concrete recommendations in this regard.

Richard Gowan, UN-Director of the International Crisis Group, shared experience on the Zeitenwende from his perspective. He asked what we are turning away from when discussing the Zeitenwende, but also emphasised the professionalisation that has taken place in the field over the last decades. One current focus worldwide should be on the more complex patch-worked conflict management with new actors. Gowan identified trends that shape the global environment and Civilian Crisis Prevention needs to deal with.

After the first panel discussion entitled “Civilian Crisis Prevention in the Shadows of the ‘Zeitenwende’ - Implications for German Engagement & Global Perspectives”, the conference participants had the opportunity to engage in three parallel sessions on the topics “Hope in the Climate Crisis? Environmental Peacebuilding as an Instrument of Prevention & Conflict Management”, “Civilian Conflict Management & Peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Lessons Learned (Study Launch)” and “Challenging Racism and Discriminatory Power Structures in Civilian Crisis Prevention”. The conference concluded with a second panel entitled “How Wars end – Insights for Ukraine”.

Key Take-Aways

- Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s proclamation of a “Zeitenwende” is also reflected in civilian crisis prevention and peacebuilding. The world is evolving from a Western-dominated to a multi-polar order. As a result, **civilian crisis prevention and peacebuilding is becoming more complex** with an increasing number of actors who need to coordinate themselves with each other on different levels in the face of increasing parallel crises. Civil society, which is not to be understood as one homogeneous group, is also becoming increasingly important as an actor and has yet to be represented accordingly.
- **Truthfulness and trust** at the internal as well as external level are essential for the establishment of sustainable and long-lasting peace. Without trust, there can be no peace between conflict parties; likewise, the trust of a state’s population in its institutions is essential for the future survival of a country. To (re-)build this trust, honest communication is necessary. Likewise, external actors need to honestly assess what engagement could be, is and has been peace beneficial and which of the instruments in the toolbox are or could be useful for this purpose.
- The German government has long contributed to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding efforts in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood including the South Caucasus. However, its engagement often seems to be fruitless, and it becomes clear that frozen conflicts without transformation are only an illusion of stability. To this end, Germany should step up its engagement as a proactive and reliable partner in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood based on a **new comprehensive and conflict-specific roadmap for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding** in the region, based on thorough conflict analysis and strategic foresight. Development cooperation, peacebuilding and transformation approaches should be interlinked. **Better coordination** between the actors involved and between the different instruments as well as **clearly defined (financial) resources** would be beneficial. A clear strategy should also be developed at EU level. In addition, German mediation approaches could include **fixed joint objectives (“mutually beneficial”)** and should involve local actors and civil society organisations. Internal components, such as historical development, but also trust-building should be considered. The Advisory Board has recently published a [study on the Civilian Conflict Management and Peacebuilding in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood](#).
- **Conflicts are often rooted in structures of inequality**, with injustices and power positions dating back to colonial times also playing a role. In order to address discrepancies between the information and involvement of the international community and the actual situation of civil society of affected countries, civilian crisis prevention needs to ask to **whom the processes are accountable**. Similarly, the coverage of wars and the use of media in general, the production of knowledge as

well as positions of power and current approaches of impartiality and universality need to be **critically questioned**. It is necessary to **focus on local needs and perspectives**. Actors in the field of civilian conflict prevention and peacebuilding must begin to self-critically reflect on their actions and thereby also admit mistakes.

- **Climate change has a multiplier effect on existing conflict causes**, for example resource scarcity and inequality. The increasing insecurity of conditions due to climate change and environmental degradation is overwhelming the social, political and economic systems of vulnerable states such as Somalia. This could be addressed through environmental peacebuilding. Conflict-sensitive bottom-up approaches that focus on strengthening and empowering local infrastructures for peace are key to identifying and breaking cycles of violence that are amplified by the climate and environmental crises. This also requires the involvement of civil society and marginalised groups. Sustainable development and lasting adaptation to climate change should be seen as a functional unity in this new form of peacebuilding.
- Published in June 2023 as an umbrella document for all other strategies of this government and ministries, the **German National Security Strategy** and its implications are being discussed in Germany. The comprehensive understanding of security, the integrated security concept and the primacy of crisis prevention are positively emphasised. However, this strategy also has shortcomings and many concrete questions have not yet been conclusively addressed. The National Security Strategy will have a significant influence on the revision of the Guidelines on *Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace*, in which the Advisory Board will act as an advisory capacity based on its mandate. The Advisory Board has published a [Position Statement](#) on the Strategy.
- There are **no universal standards for peace agreements in interstate conflicts**; they depend on the conflict and the particularities of each case. Even in the context of strong imbalances and injustices, as in the case of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the responsibility for such peace agreements lies with the parties to the conflict. However, in the case of unwillingness for a final peace agreement by at least one of the parties for a certain period, there are also "**intermediate steps**" which take place at different levels and in parallel processes and can thus contribute to peace.
- For future engagement in conflict areas, **hard power and military spending** will remain a central component in view of the divided international security order. A certain focus on hard security is also evident in media coverage. However, a balance must be found as **civilian crisis prevention is essential for sustainable and long-lasting peace** – especially in times of the "Zeitenwende". This need must be shared and communicated transparently with each population, so that hard security and civilian crisis prevention do not impede each other. Rather, consideration must be given on how both can support each other coherently and positively.
- In a world with multiple crises, **interlinking across different levels, thematic priorities and between actors** (states, ministries, civil society, etc.) seems necessary. The **honest representation** of actors (also from the Global South) in the different thematic priorities at different levels is equally relevant. Clear demarcations make it difficult in many cases to achieve a positive outcome.



About the Advisory Board

By bringing together expertise from both civil society and academia, the Advisory Board supports the Federal Government in the areas of crisis prevention and peacebuilding. It is appointed for four years and comprises 20 experts from academia, foundations, military, police and civil society organisations. Its mandate is laid down in the Federal Government's Guidelines on [Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace](#) adopted in 2017. The Advisory Board fosters constant exchange between the Federal Government and civil society. It publishes positions on overarching strategic questions and develops contributions on pertinent issues. More information can be found on the Advisory Board's website: <https://beirat-zivile-krisenpraevention.org/>

Disclaimer

As results from the discussion at the conference, the above statements do not necessarily reflect the position of the Advisory Board and its members.