

FriEnt Sea change for German peace policy

Setting navigation marks for steering through troubled water

Points for discussion based on a FriEnt dialogue series

Since March 2022, FriEnt hosted a series of expert discussions about the “Zeitenwende” (sea change) in German peace policy, bringing together representatives from politics, academia, and civil society – including peacebuilding activists from the Global South. This paper presents key observations and conclusions from these discussions and draws on current policy debates in the run-up to the first National Security Strategy for Germany.

The watershed moment of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is reshaping international cooperation and initiated a paradigm shift in German foreign policy. How will this affect crisis prevention and peacebuilding? Since the founding of the Federal Republic, Germany has anchored its political priorities in the promotion of peace, democratic governance, and human security – including a deliberate stance as a civil power with a focus on non-military measures and the primacy of politics. Now that the international peace and security system is rapidly eroding, policy actors are confronted with a new reality and changing expectations for German foreign and security policy, while the peacebuilding community is increasingly side-lined in current debates. The upcoming National Security Strategy – the first in German history – marks a decisive moment for future policy making. Members of the peacebuilding community are concerned, that the new strategy will initiate a policy shift towards a more state-centred and militarized understanding of security.

Since its creation 20 years ago, FriEnt, the working group on peace and development, has played an important role for German crisis prevention and peace policy – as a sounding board for dialogue between civil society and state actors and as a facilitator for mutual learning and exchange – in Germany and with global partners and networks. Since March 2022, FriEnt hosted a series of expert discussions about the “Zeitenwende” (sea change) in German peace policy, bringing together representatives from politics, academia, and civil society. The series concluded with an open dialogue with peacebuilding activists from conflict affected countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe – including Afghanistan, Somalia, the Sahel region, Iraq, and the Philippines among others. This paper presents key observations and conclusions from these discussions and draws on current policy debates in the run-up to the first National Security Strategy for Germany.

A key concern of this outline is to pave the way for a broader and inclusive discourse about the guiding principles for promoting peace and human security, especially in cooperation with partner countries. Fighting inequality and injustice – within and between states and societies – has always been at the very heart of development cooperation and peacebuilding. In times of a raging climate crisis, a global pandemic, ongoing warfare, and a spike in world hunger and poverty, it has become clearer than ever, that the threats for peace and security are globalized and interconnected.

Based on a comprehensive understanding of security with fundamental rights and freedoms for all members of society, FriEnt aims to broaden perspectives for a multidimensional approach on pressing issues for peace and security and their implications in different parts of the world:

- What are key requirements for a future German peace policy – understood as a triad of development cooperation, foreign and security policy – in response to the changing conditions and (global) demands for peace and human security?
- How to address conflicting interests and dilemmas as part of political considerations – especially with southern partners – in light of prevailing disputes about double standards?
- How does this affect cooperation and partnerships – including partner countries in the Global South – and how to make sure that all relevant actors are taken into account – beyond states and governments?

A main conclusion from the FriEnt series points out the importance of a differentiated view and the willingness to challenge one's own perspective. This includes looking beneath the surface regarding categories like 'the Global South' – used for a broad variety of states with different interests and affiliations – and state policies as such, since state-society relations and the role of civil society for sustainable peace and human security are often overlooked. Further observations refer to the understanding of security. Our discussions underlined that there is no sense in hierarchizing policy goals for different dimensions of development, peace, and security in a world where crises are steadily becoming more intertwined.

Based on these considerations, we identified three fields of discussion that could be helpful in bringing different lines of argumentation together and provide impetus for the political discourse:

Balancing values and interests: While global challenges and risks for peace and security need broad cooperation beyond political discrepancies, systemic antagonisms and barriers for global governance prevail. Considering competing offers by countries like China, new dynamics of cooperation and conflict emerge, while political leaders from the Global South demand a greater say in matters of global governance and security. The current international peace and security architecture reflects an outdated reality and seems ill-suited for present-day challenges due to power imbalances and political paralysis. At the same time, core values like the protection of human rights and the rule of law are increasingly being challenged. Consequently, Western policy makers are facing new negotiation processes on conflicting policy goals, values, and interests, with varying dynamics for different policy fields and constellations of actors.

Human security vs. state security: In view of a resurgence of political debates about state security, defence, and military alliances, members of the peacebuilding community are concerned that the upcoming National Security Strategy might initiate a policy shift towards a more state-centred and militarized understanding of security. On the other hand, the new German government has committed to a feminist foreign and development policy, which aims to promote rights, representation and resources of women and marginalised groups. While this approach would be in line with previous government guidelines for crisis prevention and peacebuilding, the new strategy aims to set up new parameters for future policies to acknowledge the paradigm shift in German foreign and security policy. How the strategy will translate into practical cooperation in and with partner countries will determine which understanding of security will permeate throughout German peace policy.

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New messages and narratives for political discourse: The paradigm shift (“Zeitenwende”) in German foreign and security policy also marks a significant turning point for the political discourse. Even if key principles and priorities for German peace policy are to remain untouched, the profound changes for international cooperation need to be discussed and conveyed – especially, to address conflicting policy goals and dilemmas – as part of an open dialogue at national and global level. This concerns different policy levels and stakeholders, including parliament, civil society, local actors in partner countries, and international partners. Meanwhile, the peacebuilding community is also called upon to reflect about their messages and if there is any need for adjustments to get in touch with the present political dynamic.

“Where should we stay the course? Where is room for manoeuvre? And where are we sailing into uncharted waters?”

In all fields of discussion, the current discourse indicates the need for dialogue and exchange about the political coordinates for navigation: Where should we stay the course? Where is room for manoeuvre? And where are we sailing into uncharted waters?

Fixed coordinates – these cliffs cannot be circumnavigated

- **Democracy is not conditional for cooperation – but values trump interests:** Global challenges for peace and human security, like the climate crisis, require radical cooperation beyond a democratic-autocratic yield line. However, core values like human rights and the rule of law, are non-negotiable and an integral part of all policies, irrespective of national interests. Consequently, they can't be taken out of the equation for any 'non-political' issues.
- **Credibility, leadership, and responsibility:** A leading role in peace and security policy needs comprehensive reliability. While military means play a relevant part, crisis prevention and peacebuilding are essential for Germany's international role and reputation. In view of recent developments towards protectionist and nationalist policies in other European countries, Germany's engagement in peacebuilding is even more significant and an important safeguard for global security. Consequently, the civil dimension is a building block for responsible leadership and must remain a primary concern for all policies.
- **Emancipatory approach and systemic change:** A feminist foreign and development policy requires enabling structures for all members of society, a redistribution of power and joint efforts to fight inequalities – at national and international level – with global and local partners as active stakeholders in their own right.

Room for manoeuvre – these shallows require flexible navigation

- **Conflicting interests and political dilemmas:** There is no catch-all solution in dealing with competing priorities in national and international policies. Conflicting values and interests must be addressed frankly and may result in a double-track approach of cooperation and conflict in different fields of engagement. Political actors need to sound out possibilities for reliable collaboration on issues of mutual interest and find entry points for supporting human rights and democratic participation.
- **National Security Strategy – actors, structures, and dynamics:** The emerging strategy has to meet multiple requirements: take up relevant policy documents like the government guidelines for crisis prevention and peacebuilding; connect to multilateral agreements and security frameworks; address emerging demands for reforming global (security) governance and decision making; reconcile different prospects and dimensions of peace and (human) security; and convey political goals and priorities to a national and international audience. In response

to these challenges, it seems recommendable to focus on common interests for a rule-based order. The strategy should provide convincing narratives that hold up against competing claims and political gaslighting by authoritarian regimes and/or anti-democratic forces.

Unknown territory – uncharted waters without navigation marks

- **Where to draw the line?** While taking a stance for the protection of human rights and supporting civil society it is important to avoid patronizing policies that disregard national initiatives for peace and democracy. What does this imply for practical policies? What conditions and criteria can apply to navigate conflicting needs for cooperation and confrontation? Especially in light of increasing systemic rivalries, anti-Western narratives, and prevailing allegations of double-standards, policy makers should also be conscious of historic legacies and ensure that their agenda is not perceived as selfish and myopic. However, translating this into concrete policies and inclusive cooperation is highly challenging and requires transparent communication.
- **Agency and ownership:** In a similar vein, the political commitment to ensure equal participation in global decision making on matters of peace and security and to initiate systemic change for equal access and political agency for all stakeholders – at all levels of governance – seems easier said than done. Policy makers would do well to recognize state and non-state actors from the Global South as political agents in their own right and to find ways for open dialogue and cooperation at an equal footing. This should also include a revision of instruments and approaches in foreign and development policy.
- **It's complicated:** The current global developments and the political discourse call for strong advocacy and a clear stance in promoting the merits of crisis prevention and peacebuilding. However, the achievements of civil conflict transformation and development cooperation for peace and security seem less visible or easy to explain than diplomatic, economic, and military instruments – especially regarding local potentials and dynamics for peacebuilding. “It’s complex and complicated” is not a satisfactory response in facing the current challenges for the peacebuilding community. Local and international peacebuilders need to come up with an adequate strategy for political communication with clear messages and convincing narratives.

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Considerations for future policies

In summary, the findings from the dialogue series allow for conclusions on how to address pressing issues for peace and security. As described above, these observations refer to three core questions for future German policies:

- **On responding to changing conditions and (global) demands for peace and human security:** The implications of the “Zeitenwende” call for a coherent policy approach at various levels of intervention and in response to different challenges for cooperation and governance. In view of limitations of the current international peace and security system – due to power imbalances, political paralysis, and lack of representation of policy actors from the Global South – *exploring alternative ways for inclusive governance and decision making* is indispensable. To achieve this, German and Western policy makers are called upon to *include non-European perspectives* as an integral part of political opinion-forming and to *strengthen multisectoral approaches* for a peacebuilding strategy across policy fields.

- **On cooperation and partnerships beyond states and governments:** In a similar vein, peacebuilding efforts depend on *the vital role of civil society organisations* for promoting human security and good governance – as a safeguard against exclusion and to increase political accountability. Consequently, *a people centred approach and multi-stakeholder engagement* are considered as reinforcing elements for strengthening community resilience – also against extremist tendencies – and local security. Against this background, *a strong focus on human security* is both highly recommended and most suitable for complex crises and fragile situations.
- **On addressing conflicting values and interests and avoiding double standards:** In view of competing influences of democratic and autocratic states, rights-based and inclusive policies will only prevail if policy makers stay true to their words and walk the talk. This applies both to content and delivery. Analysts criticise contradictions and inconsistencies between different policy fields and call for *a coherent approach* in balancing values and interests as a core requirement for *credibility and accountability*. Consequently, a consistent commitment to core values like human rights and the rule of law is also a key ingredient for convincing political messages. Western policy makers *need to make attractive offers* to political actors from the Global South – based on their needs and priorities and in accordance with common interests and global challenges for peace and security. This should also reinforce messages of solidarity and partnerships and strengthen political commitments for global justice, the protection of human rights, and sustainable development – which is after all the very core of the global agenda for peace and human security.

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