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A turning point for sustainability?

Impact of the war in Ukraine

André Algermißen, Gisela Elsner, Veronika Ertl, Moritz Fink, Kevin Oswald, Sabina Wölkner

- The turning point in foreign and security policy brought about by Russia's invasion of Ukraine also gives rise to revaluations in areas relating to sustainable development.
- Unilateral dependencies in the supply of raw materials and food must be remedied, while simultaneously striving for both supply security and sustainability.
- The effects of the war could mean that the implementation of the EU Green Deal may need to be made more flexible, at least as far as timeframes are concerned.
- Multilateral organisations in particular now need to be strengthened through necessary reforms, not least in the area of global health.
- The countries of the Global South have a key role to play in solving the challenges associated with sustainable development. It is therefore necessary that the increasing sense of estrangement between these countries and the industrialised countries of the West be overcome.
- The consistent pursuit of a transformation to sustainability is - in the interest of building resilience for the natural world, the economy and society - part of the solution, not part of the problem.

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The consequences of the war: trends and developments

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine is not only a flagrant violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and political independence. Russia is carrying out its invasion campaign with tremendous ferocity and brutality against the civilian population in direct violation of the Geneva Convention, the core principle of which is the protection of the civilian population not engaged in combat.

This unprecedented war in 21st century Europe ends the continent's established architecture of peace that has been in place since the end of the Cold War and has triggered a readjustment of security and foreign policy in Germany and the EU. This recalibration was initiated in Germany with the German Chancellor's speech on 27 February 2022 and is tied with the term "Zeitenwende" - literally meaning turning point. It is primarily focused on building and expanding Germany's own defence capabilities and overcoming Germany's dependence on fossil fuels from Russia. However, Russia's invasion may well also lead to a reassessment in other areas.

Whether climate protection, global health, the environment, agriculture, food, or development cooperation - while the discussions before the war were largely projected and managed through the prism of the coronavirus pandemic, this perspective is now undergoing a shift following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Even if the debate on the lessons learnt from Covid does not come to a premature end, the new premises emerging in security and foreign policy at the very least give rise to other focal points.

As Russia's belligerent activities in Ukraine are still proceeding with full force and the situation is evolving dynamically, the various thematic areas cannot yet be completely foreseen. There are, however, some trends that are emerging, which will be outlined in the following for the selected topics, after which a provisional conclusion will be drawn.

Energy supply and climate protection

The European Union has so far adopted four packages of sanctions in response to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Most notable of these is the exclusion of Russian and Belarusian banks from the international payment system SWIFT. Simultaneously, the EU prohibited all transactions with the Russian Central Bank. Against the backdrop of the atrocities committed by the Russian

army against the civilian population in Butcha and other parts of Ukraine, the EU recently adopted a further package of sanctions, which for the first time included an embargo on coal from Russia.[1] However, this still excludes supplies of oil and gas. The longer the war continues though, the greater the pressure on the EU and Germany to agree on a comprehensive energy embargo that would make it more difficult for the Kremlin to continue to finance the war. It is estimated that in 2021, Russia generated revenues of around $180 billion from the sale of oil and around $60 billion from exports of natural gas. Revenues derived from coal exports to the EU stand at only €8 billion.[2]

In the discussion about the possible socio-economic effects of imposing this kind of total energy embargo, its proponents in Germany emphasise that it would deprive Russia of the resources to continue financing the war, that the resulting economic damage would be manageable, and that it would also send an important signal of solidarity with Ukraine. Sceptics fear serious consequences and so-called cascade effects because German industry is highly dependent on Russian energy sources, which could cause a kind of "meltdown" in industry, numerous corporate bankruptcies, as well as a significant decline in GDP.

This fear is not unfounded. Russia is Germany's primary supplier of natural gas, crude oil, and coal. In 2019, more than half (51%) of all German natural gas imports originated from the world's largest country in terms of land area. According to the German Federal Environment Agency, Germany imports around 70% of its overall energy supply. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that Germany's economy is closely interconnected with neighbouring countries and that an import freeze would also have a negative impact on Hungary and Slovakia for example, which are even more dependent on supplies of Russian gas than Germany. Russia is by far the most significant exporter of fossil fuels - gas, oil, and coal - to the EU. According to the EU Commission's Gas Market Report, in the third quarter of 2021, Russian pipeline gas accounted for 41% of the total volume of natural gas imported into the EU.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain: in the medium term, the EU is to be made independent of fossil fuels from Russia. Besides the sanctions and other measures imposed on Moscow up to now, the Commission also unveiled its "REPowerEU" plan at the beginning of March 2022, which aims to completely free the Union from Russian energy supplies well before the year 2030.[3] This approach to the crisis could result in a prioritisation of those projects in the Fit for 55 package[4] that are intended to accelerate the expansion of renewable energies and green hydrogen in particular.

Against the threatening backdrop that Moscow could turn off the gas tap itself should the conflict escalate further, Germany is already in the process of preparing the ground as quickly as possible to substitute natural gas from Russia and close a potential supply gap for the winter of 2022/23. The German government is thus endeavouring to eliminate these dependency structures by establishing new energy partnerships and further diversifying the energy supply, for example by switching to liquefied gas imports. This is to be made possible by accelerating the expansion of renewable energy.

An energy partnership has been agreed with the Emirate of Qatar to ensure, among other things, that the first German LNG terminals in Brunsbüttel and Wilhelmshaven will be supplied once they are completed (in an estimated three to five years). Even in the short term, Qatar, the world's

largest producer of liquefied gas, is expected to step in, as is the USA, which has already agreed to supply an additional 15 billion cubic metres of gas to Europe this year.[5]

Although these precautions are indeed important for securing energy supplies in such a crisis, they will at the same time further fuel the high global demand for this much sought-after energy source. Asia is therefore already bracing itself for further increases in LNG prices and a sort of "LNG winter contest" with the Europeans from next autumn at the latest. China's LNG imports reached a total of 79 million tonnes in 2021, overtaking Japan as the largest LNG importer to date.[6]

The production and import of green hydrogen - an energy carrier that is to ensure the decarbonisation of sectors that are difficult to electrify, such as the steel or chemical industries - is also to be boosted with the help of another Gulf state, the United Arab Emirates. Green hydrogen, which is at present still considered very cost-intensive, has the potential to take on the leading role in the decarbonisation of industry on the road to Germany's climate neutrality by 2045[7] - much sooner than originally assumed due to skyrocketing natural gas prices.

Though these endeavours by the German government are predicated on the unprecedented and unjustified Russian war of aggression - which demands swift action - it remains to be seen how sustainable a large-scale expansion of energy imports from the Gulf autocracies will be. To avoid being thrown out of the frying pan and into the fire after having overcome dependence on Russian energy sources, continued efforts should be made to diversify the energy supply to distribute the risks more broadly. Simultaneously, the question arises as to what extent the rapid and legitimate need for a higher level of supply security in Germany can be reconciled with the attainment of climate protection targets. It is becoming apparent that the efforts of Germany and the EU to rapidly reduce their dependency on energy imports could also lead to sacrifices in terms of climate and environmental policy, given that the extension of the operating lives of coal-fired power stations is now being considered to guarantee a stable supply of energy. While in Germany the last remaining three nuclear power stations could now also be shut down at the end of the year, nuclear power is experiencing something of a renaissance in other parts of Europe. In Belgium, for example, the nuclear phase-out planned for 2025 is to be postponed by ten years for reasons of energy security and energy price stability.[8] In the Czech Republic, a new construction project for a reactor was recently put out to tender, planned to go into operation in 2036 and with construction costs estimated at just under €6.5 billion[9], whilst Poland is also planning to become the 15th EU state to embark on the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the near future.

As for the development of the global economy, many economists are also troubled by inflation, which is being fuelled by the rapid rise in energy prices. This could mean that even after the end of the war, a phase of low growth and high inflation could be on the horizon.[10] ECB Executive Board member Isabel Schnabel spoke of a "new age of energy inflation". The economist described how war in Ukraine illustrates once again the catastrophic consequences of the West's dependence on fossil fuels. In the case of energy inflation, a distinction should be made between "climateflation", "fossilflation", and “greenflation”, she stated. Ms Schnabel described the price-driving consequences of climate change itself as "climateflation", the rising prices of oil and gas as "fossilflation", and the costs of the green transformation as "greenflation".[11]

Environment

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the savage actions committed by the Russian army against the civilian population there are bringing untold suffering. The atrocities perpetrated

against Ukrainians, the obvious and wanton destruction of housing, civic infrastructure, and cultural assets in Ukraine, are therefore rightfully the focus of attention. Nevertheless, this should not allow us to forget that armed conflict also damages the environment in the war zone and beyond. This in turn can cause immediate harm to humans and animals but may also pose a threat to health and well-being in the medium and long term.

It is therefore not without reason that the so-called Environmental Modification Convention of 1976[12]- a convention to which Russia and Ukraine are also signatories - and indeed the Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Convention[13] prohibit forms of warfare using techniques that alter the environment and have "long-lasting or severe effects". This includes military interventions in the natural cycles of the environment. There has, however, always been a problem associated with the enforcement of such offences.

The most tangible manifestation of the explosive nature of environmental damage from war at present is the anxiety around attacks on nuclear power stations in Ukraine or over damage to the sarcophagus covering the ruins of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, where the world's most serious civilian nuclear accident to date took place in 1986. Forest fires and the excavation of trenches are said to have already released radioactivity there and Russian soldiers have reportedly been harmed by exposure to radiation.[14] But even if this worst-case scenario does not materialise, military activity and pollutants from bombs and other weapons, as well as strikes on steelworks, munitions factories and refineries, for example, will contaminate soils, pollute (ground) water and devastate forests, not to mention the immense carbon emissions from military vehicles.[15] Documenting this damage during the war is virtually impossible, which makes it difficult to ascertain the actual impact on ecosystems and to issue warnings to the local populations. As has been apparent since the onset of fighting in eastern Ukraine in 2014, armed conflicts have serious environmental consequences: the contamination of drinking water sources causes illnesses; added to this are negative repercussions for agriculture and food supplies. As the armed conflict within the country intensifies and drags on, it is feared that an ever-increasing proportion of Ukraine's nature and environment will be affected and that the danger of sickness and contamination, as well as permanent ecological damage to the soil and food, will increase for the immediate population as well as for the people in the neighbouring regions.

Agriculture and food security

The current war not only threatens the food supply of Ukrainians, both because of the environmental damage mentioned above and because seeds cannot be grown because of the war, it is also having an impact on the agricultural sector around the world. Russia and Ukraine have a major bearing on agricultural markets and supply chains are currently being disrupted: the two countries account for about one third of global wheat exports, 19 per cent maize exports and 80 per cent of sunflower oil exports.[16] The war is blocking trade routes - the Black Sea port of Odessa, for example - and devastating agricultural infrastructure. Concurrently, the economic sanctions levied against Russia will have an impact on the agricultural market. German consumers will notice the effects when shopping in the future: shortages of sunflower oil cannot be ruled out and meat prices could rise even further.[17] Alongside high electricity and energy prices, feed prices in livestock farming have also increased. Large quantities of feed maize are imported from Ukraine in particular. It seems increasingly likely that these developments will be reflected in retail meat prices. The World Food Programme warns that disruption of production and exports of wheat, soy and rapeseed from Ukraine could push food prices above their current ten-year high.[18] There is unlikely to be a supply crisis in Germany and the European Union though, due to the high level of self-sufficiency. Countries that are particularly dependent on imports from Ukraine, such as the Maghreb states, countries in the Middle East and East African states such as Eritrea,

Ethiopia, and Yemen, would inevitably be affected.[19] According to estimates by Germany's Development Minister Svenja Schulze, another 8 to 13 million people could now be driven into hunger by the war.[20]

Against this background, it is vital that the security policy dimension arising from supply shortages outside Europe is not neglected. After all, past experience has shown that rising food prices can exacerbate conflict. A major reason for the social unrest that contributed to the political dynamics and developments of the Arab Spring in 2011, can be attributed to the shortage of wheat in several countries in the region. The level of dependency remains high: Egypt sources about 80 per cent of the wheat it needs from Russia and Ukraine.[21] If the war in Ukraine causes wheat prices to rise further, this could destabilise the region and lead to further conflicts and new movements of refugees.[22] An additional concern in this context is that China possesses over half of the world's stored grain and could now use it as an instrument of power in Africa to further expand its access to the continent's raw materials and to further consolidate its political influence.[23]

Following the German Chancellor's proclamation of a "Zeitenwende" or turning point in security policy, the war in Ukraine has also led to a debate on a paradigm shift in agricultural policy. The yields must be increased to secure the food supply. Planned provisions of the *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)* from 2023 onwards, for example the dedication of four per cent of arable land for climate and environmental protection, could be up for debate as a result. A postponement of the revised CAP is also under discussion. Also unclear is whether the European Green Deal in its original form is feasible. Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans emphasised that there were no plans to water down the targets of the Green Deal.[24] However, should the crisis on the agricultural markets continue to deteriorate, it may well be that the European Commission will not be able to avoid a readjustment.

In particular, the timeline set out in the Farm-to-Fork Strategy to increase organic farming to at least 25 per cent by 2030 will be virtually unachievable. Simultaneously, the date for the reduction of the use of fertilisers and plant protection products could also be delayed.

Health

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, an act that violates international law, has also had a massive impact on health care. This is true both for the country's population and for international efforts to improve cooperation on pandemic prevention in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis.

Until the invasion, the public discourse in Germany in particular, but also in neighbouring European countries, was dominated by the handling of the coronavirus, which is still prevalent worldwide. Proposals on how, for example, early detection of pathogens or stronger cross-border cooperation between countries (exchange of data) can be successful should be examined in the political arena. At the end of February, a negotiating body convened for the first time at national government level in the World Health Organisation (WHO), tasked with negotiating an international instrument to strengthen pandemic prevention and response. A parallel review of the international health regulations is to be carried out and proposals for sustainable financing of the WHO are to be made.[25] It seemed an appropriate moment for this - true to the motto "never let a pandemic go to waste" - to present the first results at the World Health Assembly in May 2022. Significant importance is attached to this assembly, since the WHO's future capacity to act depends decisively on a solid and sustainable financial basis and, above all, planning security - and it is precisely for this that the will and readiness of the individual member states is needed to support the WHO more strongly from this point on. The question of whether this will succeed

though is an open one, as health policy priorities, triggered by the Russian invasion, are currently and justifiably focused on humanitarian support for Ukraine.[26]

As the discussion on the new direction in defence and security policy could take centre stage in Germany in the coming months, there is also a risk that the much hoped-for "Corona dividends" will not be secured, not least due to the overarching sense of Corona fatigue and the subsequent war in Ukraine. This could mean that the momentum for learning lessons from the pandemic for a more resilience-oriented and therefore more sustainable approach to health policy might be lost or not fully exploited.

Indications of this can be found in the draft federal budget recently presented by Germany's ruling three-party coalition government, in which a redistribution of government spending to the detriment of the international health sectors already appears to be in the pipeline. Traditionally, states tend to save on their contributions to multilateral organisations, such as those not covered by mandatory contributions when the costs of domestic projects and priorities are higher. Yet concrete ambitions pursued by the WHO, such as efforts to strengthen the international health architecture through new legal instruments or to fundamentally improve funding through new financing mechanisms, could be inadvertently undermined in this way.

It is therefore to be hoped that the important structural reforms undertaken at WHO level will not be pushed into the background because of the current shifts but will continue to be pursued in a target-oriented manner. In this context, Germany should make effective use of its presidency of the G7 to reflect on the lessons to be drawn from the experience of the coronavirus pandemic and continue to invest in the development of a more resilient global health architecture. This includes improved health provisions in war zones.

The relevance and fragility of medical care is tragically illustrated in clear detail in the Ukrainian war zone: Russian attacks are increasingly also being levelled at civilian targets. Consequently, medical health facilities in particular are the focus of Russian aggression and destruction.[27] The Russian air strike on a maternity hospital in the besieged city of Mariupol is another tragic example of this. The largest insulin storage facility in the country is also reported to have been destroyed by the Russian military. It is absolutely clear that health workers as well as hospitals and other health facilities must never be the target of attacks and that they must be able to continue to meet the health needs of the population.[28] The protection of civilians is an obligation of international humanitarian law.

Ensuring the provision of medical care is becoming increasingly problematic in the country at a time when the Ukrainian health system was already facing an immense challenge due to the coronavirus pandemic. In mid-February - shortly before the Russian invasion - daily coronavirus infections reached a new peak.[29] The immediate care of (Covid) patients[30] can consequently no longer be guaranteed in Ukraine, as the limited existing medical resources available are currently required for the treatment of acute injuries as a result of the war. The supply of oxygen is also approaching a "very dangerous level", as the supply chains within the country have largely collapsed. More generally, critical clinical services are greatly affected by electricity, energy, and staffing shortages, which significantly increase the level of risk and danger to patients.[31]

Development cooperation and humanitarian aid

The complication of humanitarian aid work is already apparent - not to mention in Ukraine, where it is taking place under the most difficult conditions due to the ongoing war and Russian aggression. Due to soaring prices of wheat, energy and other commodities, the running costs of

delivering aid are rising dramatically. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), which received approximately 50 per cent of its supplies of wheat from Ukraine before the war, estimates that the rise in the cost of its programmes as a result of higher food and energy prices will be around $29 million per month.[32] Even before the outbreak of the war, rations for people facing food insecurity had to be cut in the war-stricken country of Yemen, due to higher prices and a lack of funding. Current estimates indicate that this situation will worsen significantly in the coming months.

The impact of the war in Ukraine also creates massive additional demand for humanitarian aid and, in the future, for reconstruction and making up for lost development gains. Many donors - including Germany - have announced additional funds to support Ukraine. The European Commissioner for Crisis Management stressed that the additional €90 million in EU humanitarian aid was not diverted from other crisis responses, but was instead additional, new money.[33] Despite this, there are mounting concerns about competition between the Ukraine case and other recipients of humanitarian aid and development cooperation funds. Oxfam has indicated that some donor countries have already announced severe cuts in their development funds, in the case of Burkina Faso up to 70 per cent, according to reports.[34]

This trend is up against an international system, especially in the field of humanitarian aid, which is already massively underfunded. As recently as March 2022, a conference on aid to Yemen pledged only $1.3 billion instead of the desperately needed $4.27 billion.[35]

The effects of the war also pose the risk of further cuts in longer-term development budgets, which are already dwindling in many countries due to the growing need to support their own economies and populations. Several factors contribute to this. Firstly, in donor countries, higher spending on military support will mean that funds will have to be reduced elsewhere in the budget. The German government's current draft budget shows that these savings also hit development cooperation. However, it is precisely against the current backdrop of numerous crises worldwide that partnerships and instruments for conflict prevention, stabilisation, and the strengthening of structures in partner countries must not be neglected. Secondly, the national budgets of donor countries, which are already under strain due to the pandemic, will be further squeezed by rising energy prices and the economic impact of the current crisis. As a result, the leeway and will to spend large sums on international cooperation could diminish. And thirdly, under OECD rules, countries can count the costs of housing refugees from Ukraine - estimated to be around $30 billion per annum - towards their development expenditure. This allows them to meet corresponding targets, such as the 0.7 per cent target, even though the funds for supporting partner countries are in fact decreasing.

In this context, the direct and indirect economic impacts on developing countries must not be underestimated. The price increases brought about by the war pose major challenges for many developing countries when it comes to providing for their citizens and pursuing their economic development. Preliminary estimates suggest that the price hikes will push an additional 40 million people into extreme poverty.[36] As is so often the case, the impact will hit the poorer and more import-dependent countries hardest, as well as the most vulnerable sectors of the population in these countries, who will have to rely on support from abroad.

Finally, the crisis poses a further risk with respect to the debt levels of many developing countries, which have already been soaring since the pandemic. Higher prices for many goods will hit countries that are dependent on imports. Even before the war, 20 African countries were already

heavily in debt.[37] Furthermore, rising world market prices and the expected tightening of financial markets will further push up the cost of credit, especially for emerging and developing countries.

It is highly likely that the present efforts of the international community to manage debt - including within the framework of the G20 - are not adequate to meet these challenges and will have to be expanded accordingly.

In addition to the effects on developing countries and assistance within the framework of development cooperation and humanitarian aid, it is also worth taking a look at the effects on multilateral cooperation and relations with partner countries.

Many observers in the global South criticise - while showing great solidarity with the Ukrainian population - the perceived double standard on the compassion and willingness to help and provide refuge in Europe relative to other crises. These disparities in dealing with different crises and refugee populations are seen as an indication of a credibility problem in Europe's dealings with its partner countries around the world. The negative effects this has on partnerships and trust in Europe as a partner for the countries of the global South should not be underestimated.

This is particularly concerning against the backdrop of the growing influence of countries such as China, and indeed Russia, in many developing countries, as they often deliberately exploit the unreliable and self-interested West narrative. It seems regrettably unsurprising, then, that when the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution condemning Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, numerous African states, among others, abstained. This is a disastrous signal for partnerships with Europe and for multilateral cooperation.

Conclusion

1. Germany's efforts to tackle its dependence on Russian sources of energy because of the war reveal that in the well-justified search for new suppliers to replace them, the issue can only be partially solved through partnerships with the autocracies in the Gulf. The endeavour to diversify to achieve a secure and resilient energy supply must therefore be sustained in order to spread the risks as broadly as possible.

2. This also means that the mistakes of the past of once again entering one-sided relationships of dependency, such as in the case of Russia with regard to gas, oil, and coal, have to be avoided. With regard to the critical raw materials needed for sustainability, such as rare earths, this also means increasing the security of supply through the diversification of supply chains and the improved use of secondary raw materials within the framework of the circular economy. Although China is one of the most important exporters, it is not the only exporter of such raw materials, which are in increasing demand for the advancement of climate-friendly technologies.

3. Alongside a secure energy supply, it is also important to continue to set the course for more climate protection and ensure a sustainable basis for supply. In the current crisis, this means that, in addition to an accelerated expansion of renewable energies, all options for decarbonisation must remain on the table in order not to lose sight of Germany's climate goals for 2030 and the ultimate goal of climate neutrality in 2045. Moreover, the current uncertainties and the transformation costs caused by the war must be adequately cushioned.

4. Equally, it is hoped that Germany will continue to pursue structural reforms at WHO level in a target-oriented manner, despite the shift in spending priorities that is emerging. With regard to health, Germany should therefore use its presidency of the G7 to review the experiences of the coronavirus pandemic in order to make its contribution to a more resilient global health structure with the WHO as the key player. On this basis, a financially-sound WHO will also pave the way for improved care in war and crisis zones now and in the near future.

5. The war in Ukraine has also led to a debate on a paradigm shift in agricultural policy. Given that it can be assumed that the European Commission will not be able to avoid a readjustment if the crisis on the agricultural markets worsens further, it could be possible to handle regulations and time frames more flexibly. This is not to say that the European Green Deal should be suspended, but a flexible and pragmatic approach to selected targets would be useful to better manage the current crisis.

6. The situation in development cooperation shows that it would be premature to believe that the prevailing "Zeitenwende" narrative within Germany and the EU applies to all states worldwide. The aforementioned UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine serves as evidence for this. There were 35 abstentions in the vote, including from the two nuclear powers, China and India, as well as from developing and emerging countries, many of them in Africa. This may serve as an indication that the result is not solely due to (systemic) political differences but can also be seen as an expression of an alienation between industrialised Western countries and countries of the Global South, the causes of which are important to reveal and to investigate.

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The authors

All authors belong to the Department 2030 Agenda in the Division Analysis and Consulting of KAS:

André Algermißen – Policy Advisor Climate, Agriculture and Environment

Gisela Elsner - Policy Advisor Global Sustainability Policy

Veronika Ertl - Policy Advisor Development Policy

Moritz Fink - Policy Advisor Global Health

Kevin Oswald - Policy Advisor Energy and Resources

Sabina Wölkner - Policy Advisor Head of Department 2030

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

Sabina Wölkner
Head of Department 2030 Agenda
sabina.woelkner@kas.de

Phone +49 30 / 26 996-3522

Coordination of the publication series:
Gisela Elsner
Global Sustainability Policy Advisor
gisela.elsner@kas.de

Phone +49 30 / 26 996-3759