



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Along its southern and eastern periphery, in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe, the European Union is confronted with violent conflicts, which also have implications for the future of Germany and Europe. The situation is reflected not least in the current refugee crisis, which is putting the EU member states severely to the test and which some already describe as a “crisis of solidarity”. The war in Ukraine represents one further situation where solidarity is required. In this context, the European partners are called upon to support the government in Kiev in implementing its political and economic reforms – even against Russia’s interests.

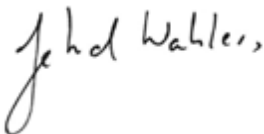
The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung maintains offices in many countries that are currently gripped by war and violence. While the conditions under which we carry out our work have deteriorated in many places not only due to conflicts and civil war but also due to the increasingly authoritarian conduct of many governments, our local staff and partners continue in their endeavours to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. At the same time, we are making efforts in Germany and Europe to provide advice on conflict prevention and issues of security policy to decision-makers in the political dialogue.

In their articles in the current issue, the authors take a close look at the current political situation in Russia, the countries of the Eastern Partnership, and the situation of Christians and the instrumentalisation of religion in the Middle East. Leaving aside concrete security challenges facing the European Union in these regions, the EU has committed itself through its Community Treaties to follow a normative course in shaping its foreign relations. In his article, Professor Jörg Dosch examines the role the EU can play as a “soft power” in Asia with its value-focused policies and the extent to which it can influence the discourse on the topics of democracy, human rights and good governance there.

Claudia Crawford, head of the KAS office in Moscow, reports about the deterioration in the mood among the Russian population with respect to the West one year on from the annexation of Crimea, a change in which the media play a significant role. Critics of the Russian President are denounced as traitors and are in danger of their lives, as illustrated by the murder of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov this February. The West is called upon to make alternative sources of information available to the Russian people and to facilitate an exchange at civil society level. Stephan Malerius who heads up an EU project for supporting civil society in the countries of the European Partnership implemented by the foundation, explains the incompatibility between the integrative policies of the European Union and the Russian thinking in spheres of influence.

The war in Syria is characterised by intensifying violence and stagnation in the political resolution process. Vast swathes of the country have been devastated and no longer provide a basis for people's livelihoods. More than 13 million Syrians and Iraqis have either been displaced internally or are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The situation of Christians and other religious minorities in Syria and Iraq is particularly precarious, as Otmar Oehring, head of the KAS office in Amman, reports. In his article, which is partly based on eye-witness accounts by clerics in the two countries, he describes the conditions under which many Christians had to leave their traditional settlement areas and the extent of their desperation. He fears that the situation of the Christians has in fact not yet reached its nadir. In his article, Martin Pabst investigates the confessionalisation of conflicts in the Arab world, asking the question as to whether the disputes in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq are, in fact, based on ethnic, religious or even tribal motives – or whether these are actually used as a cover by the actors in the region intent on enforcing their own claims to power.



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