

Dear Readers,

“There’s nothing of value to anybody.” That is how one of the articles in the present issue of *International Reports* begins. The words are those of Donald Trump, who returned to the presidency of the United States in January. He was referring to his country’s development cooperation – in particular, to USAID, whose budget and structures he consequently slashed.

The remark illustrates a wider reality: Development cooperation is under pressure. This is true across the board, but it applies especially to the kind of development cooperation pursued in recent years by Europe in general and Germany in particular – cooperation that has largely been guided by an aid-oriented logic and that has frequently been associated with an attempt to promote broader democratic and social values in partner countries.

This approach is under strain for several – often-interrelated – reasons. Domestically, public finances have become tighter, while voices that are sceptical of development cooperation have grown louder. Some view this cooperation as inefficient or even harmful, whereas others reject it because it does not fit in with their “my-country-first” agenda. At the same time, the number of recipient countries with democratically minded governments has steadily declined over the past two decades. What is more, the governments in question now also have access to alternative donors that do not impose onerous conditions involving democracy or good governance. Among these alternative donors, we see authoritarian powers in particular – and above all, China – operating in direct global competition with Western states and using development cooperation as a tool to expand and secure their own spheres of influence, which extend from Southeast Asia and the Middle East through to sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

All of this is well known. In the present issue, we aim to contribute to the debate both on how German and European development policy can hold its own in this environment and on what lessons might be drawn from the way other countries operate in this field.

Politicians and experts often argue that we need to be more effective in communicating what development cooperation has achieved and how it benefits our own societies. This view is certainly not wrong. Compared with other states that invest less, German and European development cooperation does indeed face a marketing problem both abroad and at home. This point is underscored by Andrew Mitchell, former Minister of State at the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, who stressed in an interview for the present issue how important it is to win over an increasingly sceptical domestic audience: "Every penny of international development is spent in our national interest", he insisted – a view that is very likely much closer to the truth than the above-cited words by the current US President. Even so, it is not enough for Germany simply to claim that everything we are doing is fine and that we just need to get better at explaining it.

Reading this issue, one cannot escape the impression that many other states have been much more successful in embedding their development policy in a broader foreign and economic strategy that serves their own interests in different regional arenas – not just the usual authoritarian suspects such as China and Russia, but also the Gulf states, Turkey, and Japan. Mathias Kamp and Jan-Ole Voß examine this dynamic with regard to sub-Saharan Africa, while Denis Suarsana does so for Southeast Asia.

In the latter region, Japan plays a particularly prominent role as a development partner. Paul Linnarz analyses how Tokyo has managed to establish itself as an attractive alternative to China in the eyes of Southeast Asian governments while also deriving clear security and economic benefits from its engagement for itself. To a far greater extent than Germany, Japan succeeds in mobilizing domestic companies to carry out development projects. While German-funded construction schemes are routinely awarded to foreign firms – all too often to state-owned corporations based in geopolitical rival countries – Japanese-financed projects much more frequently fill the order books of companies based in Japan itself.

Turkey's development cooperation is examined in an article by Ellinor Zeino, with the country representing a prime example of how a state can integrate development policy into what the author terms a networked approach to foreign policy, thereby enhancing its image while simultaneously advancing its own economic and political interests across regions. Calling this policy effective while also encouraging German policymakers to take a close look at it is not the same as adopting the Turkish government's political aims, nor does it mean turning a blind eye to the difficulties Ankara is likely to face as a result of its sometimes-pronounced backing of particular political and religious groups in other countries.

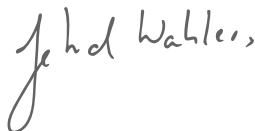
However, it is interesting to take a look at the way Turkish development cooperation views the world and the questions it seeks to answer: While this cooperation may also ask where help is needed, it primarily seeks out those countries and regions that are particularly relevant to Turkey's own interests, focusing on the best opportunities to gain influence swiftly through engagement. That is the difference between two ways of doing development cooperation: basing it purely on an aid-oriented logic, or aligning it with an underlying strategic purpose, as is recommended by Ingo Badoreck, Susanne Conrad, Magdalena Jetschgo, Fabian Wagener, Olaf Wientzek, and Nils Wörmer in the present issue. There are various options for embedding development cooperation strategically within wider foreign policy. One important step in this direction is to establish a National Security Council, as recently resolved by the current German government.

The conclusion to be drawn from all of this is not that humanitarian considerations are no longer relevant to our development policy – quite the opposite, especially from a Christian Democratic perspective – nor should it mean abandoning the promotion of democracy and fundamental human rights when we engage in such activities.

However, just as humanitarian considerations should be aligned more closely with our own interests – which range from economic concerns to the domestically important goal of reducing irregular migration – so too should we take care to remain sensitive to the historical, social, and political contexts of our partner countries when we seek to promote our values. With its broad range of actors, Germany's development cooperation is able to draw on a sound basis here. Churches and political foundations complement technical cooperation with their own tools, their deeply rooted networks, and their access to partner countries, thereby bringing precisely the kind of knowledge of local conditions and priorities that is essential for successful development policy.

Being more business-oriented, more interest-driven, more pragmatic, better coordinated at the European level, and ultimately also better communicated to the domestic public: That is the profile our development cooperation needs to match. Some of these attributes will be uncontroversial; others will be harder to swallow, particularly for the political Left. However, reality will not make allowances. All political actors who regard development policy as important – and important it is – should therefore work to ensure, as quickly as possible, that our activities in this area are more closely aligned with this profile. Failure to do so would put the very existence of development cooperation at risk.

I hope you find this report a stimulating read.

Yours, 

Dr Gerhard Wahlers is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).