Speech on security by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the 12th Petersberg Talks

2016-10-08

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Ladies and gentlemen,

A great deal has changed since I last spoke to you at this forum three-and-a-half years ago – and I am not just referring to my return to the office of Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs or the long distances I have travelled since then.

The acceleration of globalisation, its counter-movements, the eruptions of violence in our southern neighbourhood and the challenging of the European security order mean that we now live in a crisis-ridden world in which security and stability can no longer be taken for granted – not even in Europe.

However, instability and the dangers posed by collapsing states are not a recent development. When I last addressed you here, we discussed international engagement in Afghanistan in depth. Many of those present have played their part in this, be it during the Bundeswehr mission or as a civilian aid worker. I am extremely grateful to you for this. At the International Afghanistan Conference in Brussels last Wednesday, we agreed on further support for the reconstruction of the country – albeit dependent on the Afghan Government meeting clear conditions.

I mention Afghanistan as an example of the crises we have been working so hard to resolve for years now. The nuclear talks with Iran also come under the category of apparently

“familiar” foreign-policy challenges. But last summer we finally achieved the breakthrough – after 12 years of tough negotiations, which more than once were almost broken off and more than once were on the brink of military escalation. And this Vienna agreement is thus not only a solution to the nuclear threat and an opportunity for security in the region – it is more generally a symbol of hope that diplomacy works. And we urgently need such achievements in these crisis-ridden times!

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We are currently experiencing a whole range of crises in greater numbers, complexity and levels of danger than I have hitherto encountered in my political career.

When I was here for the first time three-and-a-half years ago, which of you could have imagined at the time that a European country would see part of its territory being illegally annexed by another country and that the question of war and peace would return to our continent in the Ukraine conflict?

Which of you would have thought three years ago that the cancer of Islamist terrorism would spread across an entire territory between Syria and Iraq and also strike at the very heart of Europe in Paris, Nice and Brussels?

And who would have been able to imagine that a large and important

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Member State would decide to leave the Union? Wolfgang Hellmich, Hans-Joachim Schaprian, would you have expected that the word “Brexit” would become a topic of the Petersberg Talks one day?

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The question today is not, however, about who was able to predict the future, but rather what we are doing about this situation, what we are doing in a world that is out of joint. I returned from the United Nations General Assembly in New York just over a week ago. Of the many General Assemblies I have attended, it was definitely the worst. That mainly has to do with Syria, to which I will return in greater detail later on.

In New York, I said that now in particular, in times of crisis and eroding order, we must not pull up the drawbridge and retreat in fear to the nation state.

Instead, what is important, especially now, is that we persevere in the search for solutions, including across growing political and ideological rifts.

I chose the term “reflective power” to describe Germany’s role in this type of foreign policy. Originally, this term was aimed at the international readership of “Foreign Affairs” – please forgive me for using the English term, which is not easy to translate back into German.

What is meant by this term? By “reflective”, I do not mean “contemplative” and I certainly do not mean “pensive”. What I have in mind is an alert and prudent power. In a crisis-stricken world, we need countries that are prepared to take on responsibility for peace and security, including beyond their own borders. And – as we can feel – the US is ever less willing or able to play this role on its own. But a German foreign policy that takes on such responsibility must do so in awareness of our particular history, the history of a country which, following the disaster of two world wars and the betrayal of all civilised values that was Auschwitz, experienced integration in a united Europe, reintegration into the international community and not least a peaceful change of system and the end of its own division. We should now make use of this wealth of experience, as there are currently great expectations of a country of our size and economic strength in the heart of Europe – a founding member of the European Union and the second-largest financial contributor to

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. That is what I mean by “reflective” – a keen awareness of this special responsibility.

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“Reflective” also means being able to look critically at one’s own actions.

You probably know – in fact, some of you may even have been involved in the process – that we conducted a very self-critical inventory of our foreign-policy toolbox in the Federal Foreign Office during a review process in 2014 and 2015. We reviewed our own activities in order to redefine them in a world that has become more unpredictable and less secure.

A comprehensive understanding of security is one of the main concepts that emerged from this review process. When foreign-policy crises are no longer the exception, but rather the new norm, then we have to improve how we take the entire crisis cycle into account and develop early warning systems. We want a security concept that encompasses preventive and interministerial conflict management and includes instruments such as mediation, strategic planning, stabilisation and post-conflict peacebuilding. And where necessary and appropriate, this also includes military means. I already mentioned our long-term engagement in Afghanistan. In Mali, we are working with France to ensure lasting peace. In Iraq, we are support the Peshmerga by providing equipment and training for the fight against Islamist terrorists. And in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL in Syria and Iraq, we are using our Tornadoes and will also provide AWACS in the near future if the German Bundestag agrees.

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I know that a few students from the University of Cologne are here with us today. You are very welcome! So that what I have just described in rather abstract terms does not sound like a political science class – I'm sure you get enough of that! – allow me to describe this approach using the conflict that is currently preoccupying us, that is, Syria.

Syria magnifies a crisis-ridden and profoundly unsettled region. And Aleppo, epitomises it. The images and news from eastern Aleppo plumb the depths of cruelty. Although our efforts failed last week, we need to find ways to bring the dying and killing to an end. This insanity cannot and must not go on forever.

It is unbearable that the ceasefire, which was painstakingly negotiated between the Americans and Russians over a period of weeks, is not being implemented or even tested and is in fact being deliberately torpedoed by the Assad regime and its supporters and by radical Islamist groups.

Despite this setback, we must not allow ourselves to fall into a state of paralysis or depression or to simply do nothing.

People in eastern Aleppo are starving; aid convoys are hardly able to get through; and since last week, even the water supply has been bombed. The humanitarian disaster is worsening from day to day. This is why I spoke with US Secretary of State Kerry, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, about how we can provide a minimum of humanitarian aid to the suffering population under the current conditions of ongoing violence. I discussed this issue with my Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov yesterday – as you can imagine, it was not an easy conversation!

As long as there is no ceasefire, the way forward can only be achieved via temporary security guarantees by the parties to the conflict so that humanitarian aid convoys and aid workers are not attacked and killed once again. Protected access routes to eastern Aleppo must be created for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in order to at least help the people suffering from hunger and thirst in short intervals. I am aware that this is difficult under the current conditions. But precisely because the efforts to bring about a lasting ceasefire have not proved successful so far, we must not stop our humanitarian endeavours.

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If one sees the crisis phenomenon as a whole, one cannot simply doggedly focus on seeking a comprehensive political settlement in a conflict situation as complex as that in Syria – although one must do this too! – but must also, wherever possible, help people and provide support in small ways. We need to identify the small steps that can be taken in Syria and to stop focusing on the great wall we can never break through with a single blow. Ultimately, it is not only a political question, but also a matter of our moral credibility that we make progress here.

It is our duty to alleviate human suffering. Germany is now the third-largest donor of humanitarian aid worldwide. To date, we have provided around 2.5 billion euros to Syria and its neighbouring countries. Germany also managed to get aid supplies to 110,000 people in Deir ez-Zor via air drops.

However, we also want to underpin political processes by providing practical stabilisation support. In places where violent clashes have abated, decent living conditions must first be restored so that people do not despair anew and resort to new conflicts. One example is our reconstruction work in Iraqi cities such as Ramadi and Tikrit, where we created the prerequisites for 90 percent of the people to return to their homes after the liberation by repairing water and electricity supply lines and rebuilding schools and clinics.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I have spoken about Syria, and that is why I would like to ask you to allow me to say a few words about Russia at this point. I have already spoken about Russia's responsibility in the war in Syria. Russia also has a responsibility to implement the Minsk agreements as promised and to exert its influence on the separatists in Ukraine. Hardly any conflict that affects us can be solved without or indeed against Russia. Russia is not only Europe's largest and most influential neighbour – it is also a player on the international stage that we can neither do without or ignore. In his own inimitable style, Egon Bahr once said: "America is indispensable. Russia is immovable."

Through its actions in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea, Russia has openly challenged Europe's peaceful order.

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reacted to this in the last two years with a strategic adaptation that enhances collective defence and the Alliance's responsiveness.

I cannot give a talk today on the status of the Ukraine conflict and the implementation of the Minsk agreements – nor do I want to do so. I also do not intend to speak about the intensive debates in

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about how to deal with Russia. I would simply like to say that following the annexation of Crimea, during the course of the conflict, and most recently in Warsaw, we have taken prudent decisions based on the understanding that we must of course protect ourselves, and we must protect those in eastern Europe and in the Baltic who fear Moscow's threats and potential actions. And Germany does not only stand to these decisions, but is in fact also

playing the largest role in Europe to ensure their implementation. These endeavours, along with the simultaneous strengthening of our defence capability, will continue to challenge us in the coming years.

However – and I would like to say a few words about this – that is only one side of the coin. Since the Harmel Report was published in 1967,

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has pursued a dual strategy of deterrence and détente vis-à-vis Russia, a dual strategy of deterrence and dialogue. This strategy was successful, as it helped overcome the divide of the Cold War.

It has one problem, though. Deterrence is always real and visible to everyone. That is why the invitation to engage in dialogue must also be given a concrete form.

I believe we must provide this. The relaunch of the

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-Russia Council is an important step. In addition, we are lobbying in the Alliance for

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– with participation by Finland and Sweden – to hold talks with Russia on concrete steps to bring about greater security in the Baltic Sea region.

This is also why I suggested that we discuss conventional arms control and disarmament in Europe once again. I am aware that the topics involved are sensitive and demand a great deal of all sides.

Success is not guaranteed. However, I believe it would be irresponsible not to even try just because there are no guarantees. In the group of friends I set up, we have succeeded in drawing up the first key points and principles. Fifteen countries from western and eastern Europe have already joined this group. I hope that we will conduct a broad and structured dialogue on this basis on a new start of arms control in Europe. German foreign policy is playing its part in this not only with the aim of restoring lost trust, but also to remind people that military strength alone does not mean lasting peace; that we should return to a concept which has virtually disappeared, namely the collective security that increasingly shaped European security architecture from the second half of the 1970s; and that we should learn from this concept for the security policy of the 21

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century.

Ladies and gentlemen,

That is what we need to do. But at the same time, we need to know that German foreign policy is inconceivable without Europe.

This has often been raised in recent times. Some people criticise Germany's role in Europe as being too dominant. Others call on us to display more leadership in Europe. In my view, the particular challenge facing German foreign policy is not the issue of whether Germany is the key power in Europe, but rather whether it is able to work with its closest partners to create and uphold a political centre from which a common and strong Europe can act.

It is clear that if Europe wants to remain capable of taking action in this turbulent world, it must speak with one voice. I described this recently as follows, using an image from "The Man without Qualities" by Robert Musil: together, the countries of Europe can be a magnet. On their own, they are merely scattered iron filings.

The decision by the people of the UK to leave the European Union is a setback for us. The long-term effects for the UK and Europe cannot yet be entirely foreseen.

I make no secret of the fact that I did not want the vote and the circumstances under which it came about. But we accept it and we have to deal with it. It is now up to the UK to notify the

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of its wish to leave the Union and to explain how it envisages future relations. I am not only worried because the

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will lose a foreign-policy heavyweight when the UK leaves the Union. I am also worried because the Brexit campaign very deliberately played on people's fears. We need to counteract this policy of fear.

That is why we need to ensure that the

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shows the public that it is capable of taking action. If the

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wants to regain legitimacy, it must find concrete answers to people's concerns. This goes for questions of internal and external security, for how we deal with migration and refugees, and above all, for issues such as youth unemployment, social justice and economic growth.

We need to talk now about how we can make progress in these key areas. That is why my French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, and I have made suggestions on these topics. And we said that not all

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Member States need to follow all of these proposals. Those who want to work together should do so without others trying to stop them. This does not make someone a better or a worse European. We called this a “more flexible Union”.

It includes more effective crisis management by the

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In addition, we need to enhance our civilian crisis management – the

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unique characteristic is its integrated approach that combines military and civilian means of response. And we need permanent civilian and military planning and leadership capacity in order to integrate these elements.

Those who see this as duplicating or weakening

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are being short-sighted. Our American friends are rightfully calling for a greater distribution of the burden and for Europe to take on more responsibility. I firmly believe that it is in the interests of all – the

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and the US – that we finally create the foundations for this in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in a time when the certainties that guided us for decades are eroding. None of us can predict what Europe and the world will look like in a year’s time.

We need to strengthen multilateral cooperation, particularly in view of the current challenges and the new actors and players involved. This is why I announced in New York two weeks ago that we would run again for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2019-2020 term. We must not refuse to accept our responsibility for a rules-based order in the future. We must take on this responsibility. And we are doing so.

Thank you for listening.

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