Federal Foreign Office (Germany) — auswaertiges-amt.de

Speech by Foreign Minister Steinmeier at the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly

2016-09-23

Speech by Foreign Minister Steinmeier at the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2016

Ladies and gentlemen,

For far too many people, the world has become an unsafe place: the challenges confronting us seem immense and at times it seems all but hopeless to find solutions to the many conflicts around us.

However, all of us here, we as politicians, have a choice.

The choice

• between resignation or engagement – in the face of these crises

• between isolation or multilateral cooperation

• between national navel-gazing or shared responsibility for one another

We have the choice:

Do we relinquish the civilisational progress achieved by the founding generation of the United Nations after experiencing two world wars and turn back – to the 19th century? Do we return to the era of fragile, purpose-oriented power alliances and power struggles among nation-states?

Or do we move forward and work together to master the challenges of the 21st century – whether they be migration, climate change or terrorism?

In light of the dramatic meetings on Syria this week, I would like to add: We can also choose whether to put our faith in the power of diplomacy. Or whether we shrug our shoulders in resignation at the many conflicts around us – Syria, Libya, Yemen or eastern Ukraine. Do we give up and allow these conflicts to escalate even further? Or do we live up to our responsibility and continue working on solutions despite all the setbacks? We have the choice.

In Europe, too, we are faced with a choice now that the United Kingdom has made its choice and has opted to leave the European Union. Do we now fight to hold Europe together? Or do we allow this wonderful peace and social model to fall apart again or even allow populists to drive us apart? We have the choice.

In Asia, where new powers are jostling for influence, there is also a choice. Do they believe that their future will depend solely on their own strength? Or does the key to a bright future and cooperative security lie in their involvement in the international order? Our Asian partners have the choice.

The United States is also faced with a choice – in six weeks' time. Here, too, the choice is about a supposedly possible withdrawal from a crisis-ridden world which some are calling for. Or cooperation with international partners to solve the world's problems. This choice is important for all of us.

***

Withdrawal, resignation, going it alone, or shared responsibility for a better future: that is the choice confronting us in many places.

Whether we succeed in finding durable solutions to the major pressing challenges we face depends on the decision we make on this choice. Particularly now, I am talking about the Syrian crisis and the issue of refugees and migration.

However – far beyond acute crisis management – this also presents us with a choice on which direction our world takes, and in what kind of international order we will live together in future.

The objective and focus of German foreign policy are clear: we want to shape a just and peaceful world. And we want to shape it together with all partners who share this goal.

***

The United Nations is, and will remain, our central forum for this.

In the context of all the crisis meetings, it gives me hope that we here in the

UN

have made an important choice about the direction we want to take, the right choice, and that we have chosen unity, sustainability and transformation: with Agenda 2030.

The Agenda is a global pact on the world's future, the focal point, the point of convergence for our joint actions. Our policies should be based on this – on human rights, the rule of law, as

well as the fight against poverty and discrimination. We will also put global justice on the agenda when we take over the Chairmanship of the G20 next year.

Our express thanks go to

UN

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who initiated the Agenda. We would also like to thank him for his commitment to the historic Paris Climate Agreement, which the German Parliament ratified this week.

***

Ladies and gentlemen,

Where if not here at the United Nations can we demonstrate that only cooperation will take us forward towards justice and sustainability, towards peace and security. The

UN

Charter and international law provide the foundation for this. North Korea has violated central principles of international law in a blatant manner time and again. We condemn the latest nuclear test carried out by North Korea in the strongest possible terms. We cannot accept any country jeopardising security in its region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr President,

The

UN

organisations provide the tools we need for our work – both here in New York and in crisis-stricken regions.

In Libya and Yemen, we are supporting the tireless efforts of the Special Envoys to find political solutions.

In Syria it is clear that without the dedicated work of the

UN

and its experts, there would be even more suffering today and there would be even less hope of a solution.

The hope raised by the ceasefire last week has vanished again following the deadly, cynical and despicable attack on humanitarian aid workers a few days ago.

Today, the situation could not be more serious! We are again faced with the choice: will we succeed in taking the first step towards a ceasefire which finally makes humanitarian access possible so that people can receive what they need to survive. To this end, I have proposed an agreement on banning military flights over a period of several days. Assad's air force must cease its attacks. I believe that Moscow, too, has a responsibility to help bring this about. If we do not succeed, then all efforts to find a political solution will be lost in a hail of bombs. For that reason alone, we have to continue our efforts – which failed yesterday in the ISSG – to bring about a ceasefire.

While the world is working flat out here in New York for a ceasefire, Assad is continuing to bomb Aleppo to bits. That shows once more that the Assad regime cannot and must not be allowed to determine Syria's future. Nor, however, can we allow the conflict to be used by close or faraway powers to redraw the political and ethnic map of the Middle East. Syria's external borders must remain and we should not allow new internal borders to be defined. The parties in the country and in the region can, and indeed should, declare their legitimate interests. However, a fair balance of these interests must be found. Insisting on one of the many absolute truths will not bring peace any closer. There will be no winners in this war!

In the face of all this suffering, we have an obligation to alleviate the plight of people there. Germany is one of the biggest donors of humanitarian aid today. To date, we have made available around 2.5 billion dollars for Syria and its neighbours.

We are particularly active in helping to stabilise the areas liberated from IS. In Tikrit, we have joined forces with

UN

organisations to rebuild schools and wells so that 90% of those who fled could return. In Ramadi, we are concentrating on mine clearance. And in the case of Mosul, we are now preparing to help local forces start rebuilding the city, which will hopefully be liberated soon.

At the same time, we are promoting access to education and the labour market in Syria's neighbouring countries, which have done such great work – in Turkey, in Jordan, in Lebanon – so that people there see that they can have a future in their own region.

In Germany, where we took in and gave shelter to more than a million people last year, we have begun training refugees so that they have the skills needed to rebuild their cities. The objective is to ensure that the belief in a future at home does not remain a mere hope but can become reality.

***

Our response to refugee movements and migration is a joint and global task for the future. It is clear that this challenge will become even bigger if conflicts, hardship and poverty continue.

We therefore have to tackle the causes together. What is more, we have to improve the architecture for the international efforts to deal with refugee movements and migration. As co-chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development along with Morocco, we want to play our part in the coming two years. With the Berlin Roundtable, we are focusing on improving the structures of humanitarian assistance.

Important decisions were made on more joint action at the two migration summits held this week. Our thanks go to

UN

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President Barack Obama.

***

In Europe, too, we have to revitalise both engagement and cooperation. New rifts have emerged on our continent – following Russia's annexation of Crimea in violation of international law and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The security situation has changed.

We have to react to that – first of all, by strengthening our own readiness to defend ourselves. But, at the same time, we also have to be engaged: together with France, Russia and Ukraine, we are working tirelessly in the Normandy format on a political solution to the Ukraine conflict. And finally, progress has been made thanks to the Trilateral Contact Group's framework resolution on disengagement of forces. A ceasefire is not all that is needed for the Minsk agreements to be implemented. But we will not make any headway politically if the weapons are not silenced.

However, this is about more:

We have to be aware that genuine and lasting security in Europe can only take the form of cooperative security.

That is why I have proposed that greater attention be paid once more to arms control in Europe. This is not meant as a substitute for obligations which have not been met. Rather, I am thinking here of the new challenges and new technologies and threats, many of which are not even mentioned in existing documents. Our goal is more security for everyone.

As we want to step up the dialogue between East and West, especially in these difficult times, we have taken on the Chairmanship of the

OSCE

this year – the only organisation in which East and West continue to work together on a regular basis. We need the

UN

and regional institutions such as the

AU

and the

OSCE

to ensure that diverging interests and differences of opinion do not turn into lasting alienation, thus preparing the ground for ever more new conflicts.

***

Our own history reminds us Germans that we have to do everything we can to overcome the rifts in Europe.

When Willy Brandt spoke in this Hall in 1973, after the flags of the two parts of Germany had been hoisted in front of this building, he said:

“In a world in which we are all increasingly dependent on each other, a policy for peace must not stop on our own doorstep.”

This is all the more true today in our interconnected world than it was back then. And it is all the more true for a large and prosperous country which our partners – rightly – expect to play a role commensurate to our size and capabilities.

It is for this reason that Germany is applying for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2019/20 term. Peace, justice, innovation and partnership – these are our goals. They are the leitmotif of our candidature and we will be guided by them.

Despite crises and conflicts, I still firmly believe that the future lies in our hands. We will make the world a better place if we assume responsibility together – not against but with one another and, above all, if we work for those who follow us as the next generation.

We have the choice. But we have to decide!

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/160923-bm-un-283700