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

Speech by Minister of State for Europe Michael Roth at the Stabilization Leaders Forum

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-- Translation of advance text --

Excellencies,

Dear guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are facing challenging times. Crisis seems to be the new normal wherever we look:

In Ukraine, serious violations of international law have brought back a military conflict to the European continent. Violent actions continue to take place almost every day, and the fragile calm could break down any time.

In North Africa and the Middle East, the high hopes of the Arab Spring have not been fulfilled. To the contrary, authoritarian regimes have been restored in a number of countries. Others have descended into violent und bloody conflicts like in Syria where we witness one of the most horrific humanitarian crisis in history.

All over the world, terrorist organizations have committed barbaric attacks. Most of the countries represented here have been hit in one way or another.

And here in Europe, more than a million refugees have arrived in the past year, seeking shelter from war and terror.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the sheer number of current conflicts around the world – Sahel, Horn of Africa, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen to name only a few – could make us lose hope. Because too often it seems that our collective efforts at solving these crises remain unsuccessful. And yet, we cannot turn a blind eye to them, we cannot wish them away.

We should not pretend we can hide behind borders or fences. Whether it is the violent escalation of ethnic or religious conflicts, the destabilization or even collapse of states, climate change or natural disasters: Each and every crisis concerns us directly because their

repercussions – refugee or migratory movements, terrorist threats, organized crime or piracy – have a direct impact on all of our countries.

As a whole, these issues represent an enormous challenge to the international order. No, we cannot shy away. To the contrary: We need to face them jointly and actively. And we need to improve and sharpen the instruments we have at hand in our toolbox.

Thus, I am delighted to welcome you to this year's Stabilization Leaders Forum. Thank you very much for coming to Berlin to discuss our stabilization engagement in these difficult times. Thank you for your readiness to discuss how we can take more responsibility and how we can achieve this together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not want to pre-empt your debates at this forum. But let me say a few words about our German approach to stabilization: Why do we host this forum? What is our understanding of foreign policy and the use of diplomacy? How do we adapt to the changing circumstances?

Since 1990, Germany's role in the world has changed. In the early 1990s it seemed that Germany had left the world's spotlight that had been on us for centuries – with Berlin as that Cold War's front city. Germans felt quite comfortable in a united Europe, surrounded by friends living together in freedom and peace. We certainly did not actively seek a more prominent role in world affairs.

But already in the 1990s, the wars in the Balkans showed us: Even in our direct neighbourhood, in Europe, there were regions that were neither united nor free nor at peace. Our European and transatlantic partners – and most of all the people of the Balkans itself – expected Germany to engage in maintaining international peace and security. After almost half a century, German military forces were deployed "out of area" for the first time. In 1999 Germany took part in the military operations that stopped ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

Shortly after

NATO

's intervention there, 9/11 turned the world order upside down. Germany stood together with its American friends and engaged in a state-building exercise that proved to be even more ambitious than re-establishing peace in the Balkans. Since 2002, Germany has devoted enormous resources to stabilizing Afghanistan, both in terms of a significant military deployment and with a civilian portfolio to help establish rule of law and foster economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the last few years we have started to look more conceptually into our foreign policy toolbox. It entails much more than the mere use of military force on the one hand and mediation and diplomatic efforts on the other hand. If we want to be effective, we need to follow an integrated approach. Our toolbox also contains elements to reform the security sector, to promote the rule of law and good governance or development assistance.

And it spans all phases of a conflict: from crisis prevention, to stabilization and peace-building. All these tools need to be sharpened and maintained on a daily basis. They need to be adapted to local circumstances, in accordance with scientific research and practical experience.

In the Federal Foreign Office the urgent need to further develop our diplomatic toolbox led to the formation of the new Directorate-General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Assistance led by Rüdiger König who has invited you to Berlin and who will chair your meetings over the next two days.

Foreign Minister Frank Steinmeier has coined the term “reflective power” to describe the essence of German foreign policy today. “Reflective powe” means that prior to any use of our tools, but in particular when considering the use of military force, we need to carefully consider all possible consequences of our actions.

Having learned the lessons from Germany’s past, it also means that we intend to remain a power that emphasizes civilian over military means whenever and wherever possible. In the Balkans and in Afghanistan, we have seen that solutions to a conflict can only be political. Military action may sometimes be necessary: to open up the space for a political process, and to provide a safe environment to sustain it.

This is what stabilization is all about: employing all our instruments in order to sustain political processes, to support conflict resolution and to establish an inclusive political order. This is where we have intensified our international efforts and intend to shoulder more responsibility. In the past three years, Germany has joined its friends and partners in solving conflicts, be it in Ukraine, in Mali, in Libya, in Iraq or in Syria. Success is sometimes elusive. But the heart-breaking images from Aleppo should not make us despair but rather make us redouble our efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The limitations to our actions are more easily to overcome if we can rely on friends and partners. We need partners on the ground and we need partners when we develop strategies and instruments.

We need continuous reflection and exchange about the instruments we use, about possible ways to prevent crises and about opportunities of cooperation or division of labour according

to our strengths. We are convinced: We will only succeed if we act jointly.

I am glad that you came to Berlin to exchange views and to consolidate our partnership in stabilization. I know that some of you have travelled a great distance to be here today. This forum brings together countries with a similar vision. It is an important forum for developing a meaningful, responsible and co-operative policy in crises.

I wish you good “reflections”, new insights and useful conclusions for the next two days. I am sure that all of you will take home substantial food for thought. And I am looking forward to seeing this forum and our common efforts in stabilization evolve.

A very warm welcome again!

Overview "Newsroom"

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