

More cooperation is still called for:

An appeal for a wise and vigorous development cooperation policy

Speech by Former Federal President Prof. Horst Köhler

on being awarded the Walter Scheel Prize 2024

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Translation

I would like to thank you for presenting me with the Walter Scheel Prize. I regard this award, which bears the name of a liberal statesman and visionary, as an honour. At the same time it is a reminder to reflect on the political legacy of Walter Scheel in the light of today.

Permit me, therefore, to begin with a quotation from Walter Scheel: “For centuries, Europe regarded itself as the Earth’s political centre. Global history was perceived as Europe’s global history. This eurocentric vision of ourselves is now outdated. [...] Africa, Asia and Latin America [...] have stepped out onto the global stage and are demanding to have their say.” Walter Scheel wrote these words in 1965, when he was in his mid-40s. And the older people here today are well aware that at that time, Walter Scheel was neither Federal President nor Foreign Minister, but the first Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation.

Today, almost 60 years later, Walter Scheel’s observation that a eurocentric vision of ourselves is outdated seems to describe a common sense to those interested in geopolitics. By now, it ought to be clear to us not only that Europe has lost its role-model status for many countries of the Global South, but also that the reputation and credibility of the West as a whole has dwindled in the past few decades. Anyone who pays close attention to political developments in Africa, Asia and Latin America these days knows that governments there increasingly want not only to have a say in geopolitical discourse, but to call the tune themselves. The goal here is no longer merely to have the chance to join in the debate and to comment on what the established big players have to say. On the contrary, many countries of the Global South are increasingly and vocally expounding their own positions. On the great stage of global politics in a world that is in the process of ordering itself anew, they are now sovereign players who act with self-confidence. In light of this, Germany’s declaration of a political “Zeitenwende” is quite late in coming.

Germany and Europe, but also the United States, are no longer viewed as the obvious partners for economic cooperation in the Global South. Fatal foreign-policy errors which led to wars, a speculative financial capitalism which generated serious turbulence on the global financial markets, and the hoarding of vaccines and selfish isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic have in the past few decades cast considerable doubt on the suitability of western states as role models and tarnished the appeal of their political and economic system.

Western offers of cooperation have long had to compete with others, particularly from China but also from Turkey and, more recently, Russia. “What will best serve the rapid and uncomplicated realisation of our (not your) goals? What will help us here and now?” Those

are the questions being posed in developing countries and emerging economies. Their governments are now not hesitating to dispense with old partners and turn towards new partners who do not preface their offers of support with patronising words of advice or make their pledges conditional on the completion of homework in the subjects of morals and good governance as defined by the West.

At this point, let me share with you an illustration: In early April, the media highlighted the harsh criticism of Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke by Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi. Masisi did not appreciate the proposal to ban the import of hunting trophies from Africa and emphasised how important the hunting of wild animals was for his country to regulate elephant overpopulation in the interests of nature protection and biodiversity conservation. He announced his plan to donate 20,000 elephants to Germany and expressed his annoyance with Germany's policies: "It is very easy to sit in Berlin and have an opinion about our affairs in Botswana. We are paying the price for preserving these animals for the world." Do we take this as a kind of April Fool's joke, or do we acknowledge and take seriously the great degree of discontent that is being articulated in this statement?

One thing is clear. The world is in the throes of radical change. Once again. Yet instead of just complaining about global disorder, the West should resolutely consider the question surrounding the credibility of the values it postulates and its share of responsibility for the crises of the present. It ought to offer reliability and stability, security and solidarity, in short, a truly fair partnership, to those who often suffer most from the current changes and upheavals.

Once again I would like to quote words by Walter Scheel from 1965 which apply seamlessly to our times: "The free world knows that [...] there are only two alternatives: to live together in an economically, socially and politically peaceful world, or to not survive." His warning of the possibility that the community of shared values could fail, "not survive", acquires a very topical dimension against the current backdrop of the emergence of new blocs, wars, increasing poverty in the world, and global warming.

In the 1960s, Walter Scheel advocated a "policy of partnership". The United Nations, in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015, speaks in a very similar way of a "global partnership". Then as now, the expression "partnership" harbours the insight that in development cooperation, givers and recipients can be found on both sides. It should not be geared to the short term but should pursue longer-term goals and – again in the words of Walter Scheel– by attempting "to reduce the poverty gap between industrialised countries and developing economies", help "eradicate potential sources of tension", thus making an important contribution to peace in the world.

Foreign, defence and security policy must not therefore be detached from development cooperation policy. That should, incidentally, also apply to the budgets which the budget-planners here and elsewhere make available for the relevant ministries. It is to be welcomed that, in the face of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the German Government, by making available a 100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr and pledging to comply with the NATO two-percent target, has expressed a clear commitment: Germany has a need and is

willing to increase its defence capabilities. Yet scaling down engagement in the form of (more efficient) development cooperation in exchange would be the wrong response. Germany must continue to fulfil the goal set by the industrialised countries themselves to provide 0.7 percent of gross national income to fund development cooperation. Overall, that means that Germany's future viability now has to prove itself in the power of policy makers to set priorities.

Development policy is a policy of interdependence. It must ask what the impact of national policy is on the globe and also closely analyse the relationship between events elsewhere in the world and our future in this country.

My advice is to give the large continent on Europe's doorstep – Africa – greater political attention and priority, not least in our own interests. This continent now has 1.4 billion inhabitants, and this figure is predicted to increase to around two and a half billion by 2050. Half of Africa's current population is below the age of 19 (median age in 2022: 18.7 years). Africa's youth population can serve as a major source of progress and economic growth not only in Africa but also for its rapidly aging neighbouring continent Europe (current median age in the EU: 44.5 years). Yet it could also mutate into a development policy timebomb with as yet unimagined migration flows if the quality of life in Africa does not improve in the long term.

The most recent Index of African Governance published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which traces development in 54 African states, shows that although more than half of Africa's population lives in countries in which governance improved between 2012 and 2021, during this same period more than 30 countries regressed in their development in the categories of security and the rule of law, participation, rights and inclusion. Between 2019 and 2021, the governance score actually stagnated, and it can be assumed that the overall picture has become even more dismal. For at present, coups, wars and high internal migration are affecting the political situation in a number of African countries. Moreover, the continent is threatening to become a secondary theatre of war for the new geopolitical tensions. This is demonstrated not least by the growing presence of Russia's Africa Corps, which is continuing the work of the notorious mercenary Wagner Group and providing Moscow with the wherewithal to destabilise democratically elected governments. And we should not forget that Africa is already one of the regions most affected by global warming, although it contributes very little to what causes it – CO2 emissions. My view is that "business as usual" is no longer enough when it comes to German and European Africa policy.

What is to be done? I think it could be very helpful if initially, the EU and the AU were to jointly charge a high-level panel of competent and independent figures, composed of an equal number of representatives from each side, with providing an answer to this question. The United Nations also adopted this approach when drafting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a member of a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda that was formed for this purpose, I have experienced how exchange and dialogue between the parties can broaden and sharpen the focus on common interests. It would be good if, one year after this year's European elections, the EU and the AU could

have access to a report by a high level panel like this on the readjustment of the European-African partnership.

I would also like to see this report cultivate a better understanding of the concept “helping people to help themselves”. For example, by also raising the issue of the structural change needed in Europe, which would give self-help in Africa a better chance of success, for instance, in developing its own processing industry and food economy.

However, a new partnership between Europe and Africa cannot solely be based on the criterion of what is directly beneficial. I myself take a certain pleasure in numbers and statistics. At the same time, however, I am aware that our world, and particularly the true, the beautiful and the good in it, cannot be measured by numbers alone. We feel a sense of wonder, we experience emotions and breathe life wherever we encounter art. And often enough it is art which builds bridges between peoples and nations. Walter Scheel knew that. He was a great friend and supporter of the visual arts. At his behest and insistence, I took over from him as Honorary President of the Deutscher Künstlerbund (Association of German Artists) 15 years ago. I have never regretted this decision. For some time now, the Deutscher Künstlerbund has also been giving artists from Africa and Latin America the chance to exhibit their works in this country and thereby offer new perspectives for our society. Art is a fount of creativity. And that is something we all need when it comes to shaping the pending new great transformation.

“Working together, not in opposition to one another.” This was the motto that Walter Scheel adopted for his inaugural speech as Federal President. He gave this speech 50 years ago, on 1 July 1974, to the German Bundestag in Bonn, and used it to call for a social partnership in a diverse society with a responsibility to promote freedom and solidarity.

I would like us to rediscover this motto – “Working together, not in opposition to one another”. Not only for ourselves and the people who live in our country, but also and particularly in the context of our contribution to a genuine partnership with Africa. That would very much be in keeping with the spirit of the man who gave his name to this prize, and I would like to conclude with 50-year-old words of his, which are nonetheless by no means outdated:

“Although we think trade policy on a global scale, our politics risks being complacent and provincial. If we give importance only to what happens in our vicinity, we will soon no longer be important for anyone. [...] We need to sharpen our focus and our conscience for what is going on in the world [...]. In my view, a healthy sense of what is in our own interests ought to prevent us from attempting to be an island of the privileged amid a sea of poverty. Solidarity does not stop at national borders.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this is something we can still learn from Walter Scheel today: More cooperation is called for, in Germany and in the world.