

Position paper of the SPD parliamentary group

The Horn of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for a Social Democratic Foreign and Development Policy

1. Situation and developments in the Horn of Africa¹

The African and European continents are very closely linked in historical, cultural, economic, and geo-political terms. Deepening the partnership with the Horn of Africa is therefore a declared goal of European and German foreign policy. Crucial to a successful social democratic foreign and development policy in the Horn of Africa is a coherent, holistic policy for the region that is inclusive and multi-dimensional and utilises multilateral approaches to problem-solving. Regional conflict systems, cross-border development, and crisis contexts as well as new risks must be considered and various policy areas must be integrated. Only thus can we make a meaningful contribution to peace, security, and prosperity in the region.

The region's relevance in terms of foreign and development policy

The **geo-strategic relevance** of the Greater Horn of Africa is based on its geographical location, regional conflict systems and its potentials for economic development. The Horn of Africa is located in close vicinity to the Arabian Peninsula. It is situated along one of the most important sea routes, **on whose safety world trade depends on**. As a result, competition among external players for military bases and access to or control of strategic harbours in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea is intense. Along with China, France and the USA also maintain military bases in Djibouti. More and more new players extend their activities on the Horn, including and in particular the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Russia.

In addition, the Horn of Africa represents a **complex regional conflict system**: Sudan – South Sudan, Red Sea littoral states, Ethiopia, Somalia – Kenya, the Great Lakes Region and countries bordering the Nile. The conflict and crisis dynamics in and between the countries are closely intertwined. Conflicts in one country often have a direct impact on its neighbours. The strong interdependency in the region also results in competition for resources, in particular for water, and must be given special consideration in our development work. With international peacekeeping missions, both under the aegis of the United Nations and under the responsibility of the European Union and the African Union (AU), the international community aims to support transition processes and establish functioning security authorities together with local partners. Further goals are to support state institutions in the fields of human rights and justice, to facilitate humane and regulated migration, and to contain terrorism. We support multilateral and collaborative approaches to tackle regional challenges that protect the population and to safeguard their interests.

¹ In the foreign policy context, the Horn of Africa is understood in its broader definition and includes the member states of the regional organisation IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development): Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda.

The factors of climate policy and demographic trends should also be mentioned with regard to the foreign policy relevance of the Horn of Africa. Kenya, our most important bilateral partner in the region due to its comparable stability, already plays a decisive role in German climate diplomacy. With a 90 percent ratio of renewable energy sources in electricity generation, Kenya is a positive example for other countries in the region and also takes a leading role in climate policy by hosting the African Climate Summit, among other things. The Horn of Africa is also one of the youngest regions in the world. The average age in the region is below 20 years. This goes hand in hand with excellent economic potential.

Problems and current developments

The situation in Sudan is particularly worrying at the moment. Rival factions of the ruling military have been fighting each other since April 2023. The civil war has already led to thousands of deaths and millions of displaced persons and has had an impact on neighbouring countries. Furthermore, a new genocide threatens Darfur. All international attempts at mediation have failed and there is no end in sight to the fighting.

Apart from Sudan, the Horn of Africa is generally characterised by political tensions, violent conflicts and political instability. This is illustrated in particular by armed conflicts in Somalia, South Sudan and, once again, in Ethiopia. Only a few months after the painstakingly negotiated peace agreement in Tigray, violence is escalating again in several parts of the multi-ethnic state. Conflicts are fuelled by the climate crisis and poor access to resources like water and arable land. These fragile circumstances result in humanitarian crises such as the currently worst famine in the world.

The **inadequate provision of public goods**, from security to education, health, food security and infrastructure, limited political, economic, and social participation, and a lack of protection of human rights undermine human security and social cohesion and exacerbate the risk of conflict. **Government presence is particularly weak** in Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. The inadequate provision of public goods in the region nurtures the **proliferation of jihadist networks**. Locally rooted extremist groups are increasingly connected regionally, continentally, and internationally and can easily resort to violence due to the availability of large numbers of small arms and light weapons. Violent extremism is particularly prevalent along the East African coast from Sudan to the north of Mozambique.

Wars, humanitarian crises, political instability, repression, and poverty are causes of massive migration movements in the region and beyond. The region is home to more than four million refugees and asylum seekers and more than eleven million IDPs. People from Somalia and Eritrea, who have no prospect of a future in their home countries, have accounted for the majority of African asylum seekers in Germany over the last decade.

Several countries have recently undergone significant political upheaval and transition processes, which constitute the backdrop for a significant change in the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in the wider region. In Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and also Ethiopia, these political transition periods offer **potential for democratic social change**. However, hopes for more political and social openness have often been undermined by political elites who misuse and sometimes block transition in order to consolidate autocratic power. This is also due to the fact that peace and transition processes are still primarily negotiated among elites or armed groups. The involvement of wider society in the organisation of new political orders, in particular women and marginalised groups, is insufficient. As a result, it

is difficult to develop new sustainable social contracts. Thus, all too often, power-political interests of elites come at the expense of human security. In addition, inadequate rules for and lacking experience with peaceful transitions of political power encourage political violence. The involvement of young people in the peace processes in the region is insufficient given the very young population structure. In addition, it has hardly been possible to adequately address crimes committed against the civilian population by means of "transitional justice" in the establishment of stable government structures.

These challenges weaken the region's capability to respond adequately to **global megatrends such as climate change, demographic change and urbanisation**. Considering its contribution to the climate crisis, the Horn of Africa is disproportionately affected by its effects on human security. Increasingly extreme weather conditions jeopardise the livelihoods of millions of people, increase risks of conflict and aggravate humanitarian crises. Exceptionally prolonged droughts or floods exacerbate the already precarious food security situation and distribution struggles that contribute to displacement and flight. The impact of Russia's war of aggression on global food supply as well as the decreasing availability of donor funds aggravate the situation. In Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia alone, more than 23 million people are suffering from severe hunger. The socio-economic situation and the lack of public services undermine society's ability to prepare for the consequences of the climate crisis.

2. Together for the challenges of our times

In terms of a social democratic foreign and development policy, we consider the countries in the Horn of Africa and the people living there as partners at eye level together with whom we want to meet the challenges of our times: from the climate crisis and its numerous effects, especially on women and marginalised groups, to migration, terrorism, disinformation and food insecurity, to public health and dealing with colonial heritage. We have an interest in finding common solutions to common problems. To this end, we need to make attractive offers.

As social democrats we are guided by the conviction that value-based action that makes credible and effective offers requires a **seamless foreign policy** that pursues an interagency approach. It is important that the structural causes of conflicts, displacement and violence be addressed by utilising the nexus approach: foreign, development, economic, climate, and security policy with and vis-a-vis the Horn of Africa must be harmonised and coherently implemented and coordinated. It is therefore also crucial that Germany not only cooperate with state actors, but also offer various forms of cooperation at several levels, both with and without the government, in order to strengthen reform-oriented players, protect human security, and promote democratic civil society engagement. In addition to bilateral cooperation, political foundations, church organisations, associations, and initiatives as well as other non-state actors should therefore be more closely involved in development cooperation. We see the German **multi-level approach, which does not rely solely on cooperation with governments**, as a clear comparative advantage over other players active in the region. That is why we want to strengthen and expand partnerships in a targeted manner:

Our social-democratic ambition is to foster collective security and engage civil society players as well as to support tendencies towards democratic change. We are also committed to setting up inclusive government structures. To overcome the numerous regional challenges, we need partners in government and regional organisations in addition to civil society.

We want to support partners in creating stable structures that counter violent conflict, for example by expanding the rule of law and supporting mediation processes. This must explicitly include the prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence, which is deliberately used as a weapon and instrument of power by warring parties in countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. We welcome and support cross-border cooperation in the Nile Basin and within the framework of the Lake Victoria Basin Commission to prevent resource conflicts and advocate an intensified multilateral dialogue for a just distribution of resources and the technical implementation of the results within the framework of development cooperation.

Germany's foreign policy offers with regard to the Horn of Africa must include the area of **foreign cultural and educational policy** (AKBP) within the framework of the available budget funds. This will make it possible to offer the population of the Horn of Africa a broad range of opportunities for dialogue and discussion, which will contribute to an open exchange of ideas and help to find joint solutions to common challenges. We are also concerned with countering the growing challenges posed by disinformation campaigns through increased communicative efforts in order to explain the actions taken by Germany and its partners to the population in a transparent and understandable way.

3. Courses of action for German and European foreign and development policy

Social democratic feminist foreign policy always aims at preventing crises and conflicts while including women and marginalised groups like LGBTQI* people. We also want to find collective responses to existing crises, **strengthen democratic structures in the long run, create good jobs and social security systems**. This is in line with the adopted national security strategy. In doing so, we have to consider existing power structures while seeking to stand up for the values of our "leave no one behind" approach. This also applies to the Horn of Africa. In the context of increasing involvement of external autocratic actors pursuing geostrategic and economic interests, German foreign and development policy must identify courses of action that focus on human security while making attractive offers to governments and non-state actors in the region.

Germany is highly trusted in the Horn of Africa. It is the second largest bilateral donor in the region and also known for its reliability. The fact that Germany does not primarily appear as a power-driven player also increases our credibility on the ground. In this respect, the Federal Government is particularly well positioned to work in partnership with state and non-state actors on politically sensitive issues and processes such as security sector reforms, national dialogue, or mediation in armed conflicts, as well as domestic autocratic tendencies and causes of flight.

However, Germany is not tapping its full potential in this respect. Germany should make more "good offices" available and act more actively as a unifying player. In addition, when travelling to the region, government representatives should have offers for partners that provide incentives to steer political dynamics into the desired direction. A more courageous German policy coordinated with international partners is desirable and appropriate. The fact that the Federal Foreign Office has now appointed a special envoy for the Horn of Africa based in Nairobi is the right approach. However, his powers and budget should be expanded.

In addition to the development and strengthening of reliable state structures, economic prospects for the young population and support for resilient civil society structures are essential to stabilise the region. In this regard, further cooperation in the area of social security systems is extremely important.

Protecting human security through crisis prevention

Civil crisis prevention, stabilisation, and post-conflict rehabilitation are the main guidelines for the foreign policy of the SPD parliamentary group. It is better to invest in stabilisation at an early stage and in a targeted manner. Crisis prevention is more effective and cheaper than crisis management. The primary goal of a social democratic foreign and development policy is therefore to invest in crisis prevention. First and foremost, this means to secure the livelihoods of the population and to promote the inclusivity of government institutions and political processes.

Women are the key to sustainable development, and women are most affected by crises and conflicts. Therefore, it is crucial to lay the focus of international cooperation on women's and girls' rights in particular. Topics like access to education, the right to own land, improving opportunities in the formal economy and a consequent fight against female genital mutilation have to be pursued.

In our understanding, considering the close connection between the climate crisis and peace and security, a social democratic foreign policy in the Horn of Africa is also a climate-oriented foreign policy. The aim is to prevent climate-induced humanitarian crises in the long term and reduce the risks of conflict. Together with local partners and/or governments, German governmental and non-governmental development cooperation can raise awareness of the effects of the climate crisis, develop courses of action and provide affected populations with advice, expertise, and material support to help them deal with consequences and strengthen their resilience. Particularly in view of recurring food crises, climate-adapted agricultural systems are a basic prerequisite for successful long-term crisis prevention as they preserve the livelihoods of the mainly rural population in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, climate security as a common interest also offers an entry point for political dialogue with national and regional institutions as well as neighbouring countries in the region.

Forward-looking, gender-sensitive humanitarian aid and transitional aid are of particular importance in the region in order to prevent humanitarian crises and their devastating effects and to strengthen the resilience of the population **through targeted action**. Measures for climate change adaptation, risk reduction, early warning, and the development of social security systems help prevent humanitarian crises. Germany, the EU, and multilateral donors should support the **crisis and conflict early warning and response systems** of the African Union and the regional organisation IGAD in collecting and exchanging information in the region.

Collective response to crises and conflict

We believe in international and multilateral cooperation. Acute humanitarian crises and violent conflicts require foreign policy action coordinated with influential and like-minded players. This means that we want to further develop capacities of African multilateral players like the African Union or the regional organisations IGAD and the East-African Community (EAC) together with our partners such as the EU or the UN, so that they can better respond to crises and conflicts in the future. Our priority in this context is collective action within a multilateral framework.

Concerted action within the framework of the EU and the United Nations should be used to promote continental and regional multilateral efforts to resolve crises and conflicts. There is no alternative to **supporting mediation initiatives** of regional organisations in political and armed conflicts. The German government should continue to position itself as a reliable partner for regional mediation initiatives, support the efforts of the EU Special Envoys for the Horn of Africa, and act in coordination with like-minded bilateral and multilateral partners to effectively support mediation processes and secure fragile political transition processes. It is essential that Germany and the EU seek to identify **common interests** in crisis and conflict resolution, also in coordination with adverse actors, and coordinate foreign policy action wherever possible.

Establishing new formats and forums for exchange, coordination and cooperation between the region, its neighbours, and other influential external actors can help to create new channels of communication, build trust, and strengthen the coherence of foreign policy action vis-à-vis the region. Regional initiatives such as the "Horn of Africa Initiative" provide a good basis for German support.

German engagement should aim to restore the long-term security of the population. Mitigating humanitarian emergencies in the long term requires the **maintenance and (re)construction of essential infrastructure** such as access to drinking water and health care. As an important humanitarian donor in the Horn, Germany has a role model function and can contribute to a **more effective and forward-looking coordination of humanitarian aid** in order to ensure reliability in the flow of funds, especially in times when global crises divert and diminish donor resources. But we must also contribute to medium and long-term solutions: the G7 development ministers have already pointed the way in the fight against world hunger and for an improvement in food supply under German leadership by initiating the **Global Alliance for Food Security**. In the Horn of Africa, sustainable agriculture can lead to an increase in food production.

Political, economic and cultural marginalisation and exclusion are important causes and amplifiers of **armed extremist threats** and require comprehensive solutions beyond military responses. Political dialogue on a local and national level and the provision of public goods must be in the focus of foreign and development policy efforts, in order to effectively address causes of violent extremism in the long term. For us, this may also include sensitizing governments in the region to **offer talks** to solution-oriented **armed groups** with political objectives that have been classified as terrorists by governments in the region.

Multilateral peacekeeping operations are among the most important instruments of collective action of the international community in response to conflicts and to pave the way for long-term peace keeping. The UN mission in South Sudan and the EU-funded African Union mission in Somalia play key roles in protecting human security and paving the way to a peaceful future. In light of regional experiences and global developments, Germany should work towards an **adapted and realistic design of mandates for international peace missions**, defining a clear end state for the missions which would then also allow for a reduction in European financial support.

Strengthening democratic structures and economic prospects long-term

For us, peace, democracy, and security go hand in hand. Securing them requires comprehensive long-term investments, which call for coordinated approaches in diplomacy, politics, and development cooperation. Ceasefires and peace treaties represent the starting point of usually difficult paths to long-

term peace and sustainable social contracts. The successful implementation of a treaty requires resources, **international attention**, and accountability of all partners as well as the inclusion of civil society. German foreign policy within the EU should **continuously support the implementation of peace and transition agreements** in the Horn of Africa and, together with partners, counter violations of treaties by parties involved with foreign policy consequences.

Particularly where armed conflicts prevail and governments and government structures are not subject to democratic accountability, development cooperation **can be used in a targeted manner, combining governmental and non-governmental instruments**. This can mean working with local authorities at local level to improve the provision of services and the political, economic, and social participation of the population, or supporting non-state reform-oriented civil society actors.

Political transitions in the aftermath of conflict and severe human rights violations should be accompanied by transitional justice processes initiated at an early stage in the interests of reconciliation and overcoming the past. The **documentation and verification of human rights violations and war crimes** are a prerequisite for this. EU countries can play a critical support role here in collecting and sharing information. Development cooperation can serve for counselling and foster overcoming the past and reconciliation through technical cooperation with human rights commissions and NGOs.

Long-time stabilisation and thus crisis and conflict prevention often require comprehensive **security sector reforms**. Two aspects require particular attention in cooperation in this area, especially the **democratic embedding of the security sector**: firstly, security sector reforms are a political and highly sensitive endeavour that requires close cooperation and common political lines. The political will of governmental cooperation partners is indispensable. A purely technical-military approach may undermine democratic development in the cooperating countries and cause new risks of conflict. Also, security sector reforms should aim at **an inclusive organisation of the security sector** and thus the creation of human security. Non-traditional players in the security sector such as **civil society, women, marginalised groups, and human rights and humanitarian organisations** should be included. The exchange between these groups and security forces must be encouraged.

In order to promote long-term social stability, it is important to encourage governments in the region to **enhance social inclusion** by allowing for more **social, political, economic, and cultural participation**. The institutionalisation of social negotiation processes for shaping policy and prospects for generating income under fair conditions can prevent the alienation and radicalisation of marginalised population groups. It is essential to involve and strengthen civil society players, especially women and youth, and to recognise the plurality of voices of these groups in shaping policy and transition processes. This currently applies in particular to the threatened National Dialogue in Ethiopia. Germany and the international community must remain committed to stabilising the largest country in the Horn of Africa. Confidence-building dialogues with a regional perspective that are inclusive and comprehensive and bring together governments, key conflict players and civil society must be supported.

Economic prospects for the young population in the Horn of Africa are a key prerequisite for long-term stability and peace in the region. Development cooperation can contribute to a dynamic and job-creating private sector in the Horn of Africa by improving access to funds, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, and by supporting economic policy conditions and the investment climate. There is particularly great potential in agriculture and the respective value chains. This requires adequate vocational training systems that prepare people for employment in ecologically relevant sectors of the

future. One focus should be on employment opportunities for women and jobs with higher environmental and social standards. A dynamic private economy can also broaden the basis for state income in the mid-term and encourage the assumption of state supply tasks. In the Horn of Africa, it is still important to establish better regional networks and to encourage regional trade. Development cooperation can support financing infrastructure projects with high sustainability standards both through bilateral relationships and in conjunction with the EU and other international partners such as the World Bank. For example, as part of the "EU Global Gateway" initiative.