

Press Release

Peace Report 2021 \ Europe can do more: Use non-military room for manoeuvre and create a coronavirus peace dividend

Berlin, 08 June 2021. “Europe can do more!” This is what the four leading German peace research institute call for in their current Peace Report, which they are presenting today at the Federal Press Conference in Berlin. The European Union must increase its ability to act within the global power structure to respond to global challenges by providing non-military solutions. Within the European Union, this means resolutely tackling nationalist tendencies, the dismantling of democracy and mismanagement. In foreign policy, measures must be taken, for example, in the conflicts in Donbas and Nagorno-Karabakh, to increase the willingness of the actors involved to compromise without sacrificing fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. In its relations with the Global South, the European Union will also have to determine new priorities: It can contribute to a fair distribution of vaccines, mitigate the socio-economic costs of the pandemic and readjust poverty- and food policies. This requires a radical rethink of military spending: The Peace Report proposes to reduce spending on arms and the military, thus freeing up urgently needed funds for the global fight against the pandemic. As tax revenues are falling due to the pandemic and national budgets are shrinking, the world needs this coronavirus peace dividend.

Key recommendations of the Peace Report 2021 to the German government and the European Union

1. Shape “strategic autonomy” by civilian means

The European Union should not stand idly by and watch the violent conflicts in Eastern Europe and the southern Caucasus. “It has the economic potential and the diplomatic clout to set the tone for peace policy—and non-military room for manoeuvre towards Russia”, the editors stress.

In its difficult relationship with Beijing, the European Union should use the potential for cooperation in select policy areas, such as economic or environmental policy. “At the same time, the People’s Republic of China must be placed under the obligation to comply with the core norms and basic principles of international order, which also include human rights,” they recommend.

“Even with global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or climate change—the strategic autonomy of Europe must always emphasise the civilian components of foreign and security policy”, concludes the Peace Report 2021.

2. Create a coronavirus peace dividend: Reduce military spending, fund pandemic response, provide humanitarian aid

“Military spending must be reduced to tackle the social-ecological renewal of the global economy and reduce social inequalities. This is how the impacts of the pandemic can be dealt with better”, is the unequivocal advice of the Peace Report.

This goes hand in hand with the recommendation to show solidarity in the fight against the pandemic in the Global South. **“The European Union should provide financial transfers, cancel debts, ensure that the private sector bears responsibility for supply chains and contribute to a fair distribution of the vaccines. Health care- and social security systems must be strengthened beyond individual measures.”**

While COVID-19 has not led to an immediate increase in violent conflicts worldwide, the pandemic is having aggravating effects on the food situation in many regions of crisis, such as in Yemen, the Horn of Africa or the western Sahel. “Humanitarian aid must be strengthened”, the editors demand.

3. Better protect democracy

Democracy is eroding worldwide. An increasing polarisation of society, the fight against terrorism and the disapproval of national COVID response measures are accelerating this trend. Civic and political rights must be protected, pandemic-related restrictions must be reversed as soon as infection rates are no longer medically relevant, and parliaments must be reinvigorated as spaces of debate. **“What is needed is the preservation of democracy within the European Union and in the framework of the multilateral cooperation of democratic countries as well as the strengthening of democratic institutions in fragile states in the Global South,” the Peace Report emphasises.**

Peace Report

The Peace Report is the joint yearbook of the German Institutes of Peace and Conflict Research, the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF/HSFK), the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF). It has been published annually since 1987. Researchers from various disciplines investigate the realities of conflicts in various countries around the world. Their analyses are the basis for the Editors’ Statement, which summarizes and assesses the results and formulates policy recommendations for peace and security policy in Germany and Europe.

It is divided into five thematic chapters: „Armed Conflicts“, „Sustainable Peace“, „Arms Dynamics“, „Institutional Peacekeeping“ and „Transnational Security Risks“. They will be revised and updated every year. The chapter „Focus“ examines a specific issue of current conflict dynamics. The German Foundation for Peace Research (DSF) has been providing support for the Peace Report since 2007.

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