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Frank A. Stengel ; Christoph Weller

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Action Plan or Faction Plan? Germany's Eclectic Approach to Conflict Prevention

FRANK A. STENGEL and CHRISTOPH WELLER

Conflict prevention, more than other fields of international politics and foreign policy, is characterized by a multiplicity of state and non-state actors, giving rise to particularly complex coordination challenges. This article evaluates the extent to which the German response to these challenges, the action plan for civilian conflict prevention, has succeeded in its aim of improving coordination to increase policy coherence between different governmental agencies as well as with civil society actors. It finds that although the general approach is indeed promising, the government's lack of commitment prevents it from tapping into the action plan's full potential.

Successful conflict prevention above all depends on effective coordination. In any peace operation, a plethora of actors, national ministries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is involved. In the mid-1990s, researchers and practitioners became increasingly aware that these actors' efforts can, if incoherent, lead to unintended negative consequences (contravening the 'do no harm' rule),¹ and that in order to avoid these in conflict prevention, coordination as the main means by which to increase policy coherence between the different actors is crucially important.² Building on this perception, international organizations and national governments have undertaken reforms to facilitate and deepen coordination among the actors involved. For instance, since the 1990s the UN has emphasized so-called 'integrated missions' to improve policy coherence among UN agencies and programmes.³ Several governments, notably the UK, Sweden and Germany, have developed concepts to facilitate policy coherence through enhanced coordination, including the UK government's Conflict Prevention Pools (CPPs).⁴ Although the CPPs are considered to be a successful model of inter-ministerial coordination, some commentators argue that the German government has gained a superior model with its action plan 'Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-conflict Peace-Building' (henceforth 'action plan').⁵ Two features distinguish the German action plan from the efforts of other European governments and potentially render it a particularly innovative instrument that could serve as a model for other nations:⁶ an explicit emphasis on the *civilian* component of conflict prevention and a focus not only on inter-ministerial coordination but also on coordination with non-state actors.⁷

This article evaluates the German action plan with respect to its ability to improve policy coherence in the field of civilian conflict prevention. Broadly

understood, 'policy coherence' refers to the idea that 'various policies go together because they share a set of ideas or objectives'.⁸ The central means by which different actors achieve or improve policy coherence is coordination, that is, mutual information and consultation among the actors regarding their aims and (planned) policy measures. We limit our analysis to the coordination among domestic actors, which we believe to be a necessary prerequisite for international coordination (and consequently policy coherence) in the field.⁹ The article first identifies some structural problems of civilian conflict prevention. This is followed by a brief presentation of the action plan and the coordination measures introduced by it. Subsequently, the article examines the extent to which the action has improved institutionalized coordination (and consequently policy coherence) in the field of civilian conflict prevention, focusing on four areas: (1) early warning and early action, coordination (2) between the different ministries as well as (3) with civil society, and (4) public awareness and financial support. We argue that although the action plan in principle presents a highly innovative approach and a potential model, it falls short of achieving its goal to significantly improve the coherence of German conflict prevention policies. Persistent shortcomings in the coordination between different ministries and with societal organizations remain, mainly pertaining to the government's reluctance to fully implement the action plan (and thus tap its full potential).

Civilian Conflict Prevention: Challenges and the Need for Policy Coherence

Conflict prevention can be broadly understood as:

any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tensions and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed force, to strengthen the capabilities of parties to possible violent conflicts for resolving their disputes peacefully, and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce those tensions and disputes.¹⁰

As opposed to the analytical division into conflict prevention (prior to the outbreak of violence), conflict resolution (during an armed conflict) and peace consolidation (after the termination of combat), the understanding of 'prevention' employed here is broader, encompassing 'different entry points for intervention at the various stages of conflict cycles'.¹¹ Nevertheless, it aims to address crises and disputes as soon as possible, at best before they can turn into violent conflict. Apart from avoiding human suffering, the main advantage is that it is much more cost efficient to address possible conflicts early than to engage in peace enforcement or post-conflict peacebuilding.

It is important to note that in the action plan the civilian aspect refers to the long-term goal of establishing mechanisms of peaceful management of disputes, not to the actors involved. Thus, armed forces can generally be included in civilian conflict prevention endeavours. A military intervention might, for instance, help to end the fighting. It can, however, only do so for a limited time. Moreover, in the long run, a foreign military presence has a high chance of provoking opposition by local actors and thus could turn out to be counter-productive. It is far from

safe to say that military measures are more cost efficient.¹² Military missions are only of limited value for prevention,¹³ and building a lasting peace necessitates long-term civilian measures that the military cannot be a substitute for.¹⁴

However, there are several problems that a government faces when engaging in civilian conflict prevention. The first challenge is the early-warning problem. Conflict prevention aims at an intervention as early as possible. While disputes are seen as unavoidable in any given society, it is their escalation into armed violence that conflict prevention seeks to inhibit by addressing the underlying causes.¹⁵ In reality, however, in most cases – particularly in regions not subject to regular media attention – actors do not become aware of imminent crises until the violence occurs that should have been prevented in the first place. The problem arising then is how to judge whether local mechanisms of (non-violent) conflict resolution are overextended and an external intervention is necessary. This requires the development of indicators other than the outbreak of mass violence. Furthermore, if an intervention is deemed necessary, this information has to be handed on to international actors as soon as possible to ensure that countermeasures can be taken in a timely fashion.¹⁶ A dramatic example is the 2004 resurgence of violence in Kosovo, during which (false) media reports about the drowning of three young children who allegedly had been chased into a river by Serbs led to Albanian riots. Despite alerts by representatives of early-warning systems like, for instance, the UN Development Programme's 'Early Warning System Kosovo', no steps were taken to prevent a renewed outbreak of violence, simply because the information was not transferred to the decision-makers involved.¹⁷ Thus, it is crucial that state actors systematically crosslink not only their separate early-warning systems but that they also institutionalize regular information exchange with non-state actors who often have more information on grievances giving rise to violence and can help raise awareness for the need to act.¹⁸ Only if decision-makers become aware of alerts issued by other ministries as well as NGOs and research institutes can early warning translate into effective foreign policy action.

Another closely related challenge is the problem of root cause analysis. Current conflicts within states involve a variety of state and non-state actors with a complex mixture of economic, political, identity-based and ethnic motives.¹⁹ Factors like state failure, war economies and protracted refugee situations, often connected to long-winded intrastate conflicts, render the latter even more difficult to end and prone to cross-border escalation.²⁰ Furthermore, the complex mixture of actors and motives seriously hampers identification of the problems to address and the relevant actions to achieve a lasting peace. Identification of root causes, and relevant actors, of a conflict is crucial, since addressing these issues is the only way to avoid the continued opposition of peace spoilers and a renewed outbreak of violence. This is particularly difficult for a foreign (and thus distantly located) government; it also requires close coordination with other actors such as developmental organizations, NGOs, local grassroots initiatives and so on that work to facilitate peace. NGOs are often the sole actors already on-site working to address the underlying causes of conflict, for example through mediation, network-building and grassroots peace initiatives.²¹ Particularly, local NGOs

have 'deep knowledge of regional and local issues, cultures, and relationships',²² which is indispensable for any serious conflict prevention effort.

Closely related to this is another challenge, the problem of contradictory policy goals. This refers to the fact that conflict prevention policies (and indeed cultures)²³ often clash with policies in other areas of foreign policy, which can lead to a situation in which different ministries within a government pursue contradictory policies and thus hamper each other's efforts.²⁴ This problem is aggravated when it comes to dealing with non-governmental actors.²⁵

In addressing challenges that civilian conflict prevention faces, close coordination between the different actors involved is a key issue. For any measures to be successful, a plethora of governmental and non-governmental, international, regional, national and local actors have to cooperate if only to achieve a remotely coherent strategy and to prevent the measures taken by one actor jeopardizing the success of another actor's initiatives.

In addition to the coordination problems addressed above, civilian conflict prevention faces the problem of policy mediation. One crucial prerequisite of any policy is the question of public awareness. All actors – in particular, governmental actors – involved in any policy issue depend on legitimacy. Only if the populace deems policy measures legitimate can the necessary financial and personnel resources be mobilized. In the field of conflict prevention this is particularly complicated, for the public usually becomes aware of the need for civilian conflict prevention only through media reports on the very armed conflicts that are supposed to be prevented in the first place. Success in civilian conflict prevention is only indicated by the absence of anything measurable, namely, the outbreak of violence. Thus, it is particularly difficult to judge if the intervention was necessary in the first place, that is, if an outbreak of violence would have taken place without it.²⁶ Due to the 'invisibility' of its successes, civilian conflict prevention depends on an active communication and lobbying strategy that raises awareness in the populace and to justify the need for steady and increased funding.²⁷

Addressing the Challenges: The German Action Plan

After the 1998 Bundestag elections, the newly formed coalition government of the Social Democratic (SPD) and the Green Parties took up elements from an extensive debate in the academic discipline of peace research,²⁸ as well as in public forums, and in 2000 adopted the 'Comprehensive Concept of the Federal Government on Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-conflict Peace-Building' (henceforth 'comprehensive concept').²⁹ This stated the national principles of, and possibilities for, civilian conflict prevention, building on an 'extended security concept that embraces political, economic, ecological and social stability', in turn based on the 'respect for human rights, social justice, the rule of law, participatory decision-making, the protection of natural resources, development opportunities in all regions of the world and the use of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms'.³⁰ Needless to say, such a broad approach does not translate easily into a coherent policy or coordinated measures. From an initiative of individual Green Party MPs, the action plan

was developed to concretize the principles of the comprehensive concept.³¹ It was compiled under the auspices of the Foreign Office, in close cooperation with experts from different ministries, academic advisers and members of civil society organizations, and it incorporated insights from a report taking stock of civil society approaches in conflict management.³²

Overall, the topics addressed in the action plan included not only the ‘classical’ areas of foreign policy, but also policy areas that lie within the responsibilities of other ministries, for example, development policy, environmental issues and defence. As the action plan points out, ‘[t]he aim of introducing crisis prevention as a cross-sectoral task is to develop methods, instruments and procedures to ensure that due attention is accorded to crisis prevention in all stages and sectors of government activity’.³³ It aspires to be the ‘binding frame of reference’ for the different ministries’ crisis prevention policies.³⁴ To facilitate policy coherence in the activities of the different state and non-state actors involved, however, the plan is not confined to a list of priorities for crisis prevention, but also introduces a number of institutional innovations.

Within each ministry, some heads of units or departments have been appointed as crisis prevention commissioners or representatives.³⁵ To improve and systematize coordination, the Federal Foreign Office has been assigned the overall task of coordinating the different ministerial activities in the field of civilian conflict prevention. This is reflected in the position of a Commissioner for Civilian Crisis Prevention in the Foreign Office with the rank of ambassador, which was established through the action plan. Most importantly, the action plan created a new coordination committee, the Interministerial Steering Group (ISG), comprising the different ministries’ commissioners/representatives and chaired by the Foreign Office’s Commissioner for Civilian Crisis Prevention. It has the overall task of implementing and monitoring the action plan. The members of the ISG meet on a regular basis to discuss certain issues and overall to keep each other informed.

To strengthen the integration of non-state actors into the policy process, the Federal Government created an Advisory Board for Civilian Crisis Prevention ‘which will provide specialized back-up support for the work of the Interministerial Steering Group’.³⁶ It comprises 19 representatives of civil society groups and umbrella organizations as well as individuals with expert knowledge in the field of conflict prevention who meet twice a year. These include representatives from research institutes, NGO umbrella organizations, and business companies (such as Siemens, BASF, Deutsche Bank), as well as one of each church and political foundation. Furthermore, the federal government was committed to submit a report to the German Bundestag every two years, sketching progress in the implementation of the action plan. In May 2006 and July 2008, respectively, the first and second interim reports were issued.³⁷

A Blueprint for a Coherent Foreign Policy?

Half a decade after the adoption of the action plan by the Federal Cabinet, it has now become possible to evaluate the progress achieved in the coordination of

Germany's conflict prevention policy. In the first section, we briefly outlined the core problems of civilian conflict prevention policies. From this analysis we develop four core criteria to evaluate the plan: (1) early warning and early action; (2) inter-ministerial coordination; (3) coordination with civil society actors; and (4) public awareness and financial support. The first and fourth criteria more or less directly refer to the corresponding problems identified in the first section. The second and third criteria (coordination between different ministries and state agencies as well as with civil society) have been chosen here because the challenge of policy coherence could only be met with better coordination mechanisms. Achieving early warning and action, a thorough root cause analysis and balancing contradictory policy goals all depend on coordination among the different actors involved.

Early Warning and Early Action

As noted argued above, a systematic analysis of conflict potential in the country or region concerned is a crucial precondition for any effective conflict prevention. However, there is still much confusion over the use of conflict types and indicators among the different actors involved in German conflict prevention policy, raising doubts as to the 'effectiveness or existence of an overall analytical framework'.³⁸ Although different departments (the Federal Foreign Office, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development [Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung – BMZ], Federal Ministry of Defence and the intelligence services) produce early-warning analyses, there is no systematic attempt to cross-link information and different assessments.³⁹ This situation is not due to a general unavailability of established early-warning instruments. The BMZ for instance has relied on a fairly successful early-warning instrument for years, which could relatively easily have been applied on an inter-ministerial level.⁴⁰ With respect to early warning, the only progress mentioned in the 2006 interim report is the creation of a working group within the Ministry of Defence focusing on crisis developments relevant to defence policy,⁴¹ and the second report concentrates on international cooperation in this regard. If different governmental actors cannot even bring together their various assessments in early warning, coherent action with civil society organizations – not to speak of international actors – will be virtually impossible. The only positive example for inter-ministerial cooperation as well as that with civil society in the field of early warning is provided by the country-specific discussion groups, which are anchored in the action plan and subordinated to the steering group, working to develop strategies for specific regions in close coordination with civil society. A pilot project on Nigeria, however, received a negative evaluation due to a lack of conceptual clarity, insufficient personnel resources as well as a lack of incentives for the ministries to achieve policy coherence.⁴²

Inter-ministerial Coordination

Enhanced inter-ministerial coordination looms large in the action plan, and although the first interim report emphasizes the 'considerable progress' of the

first two years, in particular with respect to 'greater coherence and coordination',⁴³ it also points to infrastructural deficits that have become evident and calls for the strengthening of the national infrastructure to be made a priority task for the 2006–8 period. In their 2005 coalition agreement, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) and the SPD committed themselves to implement the action plan and, more specifically, to strengthen the steering group.⁴⁴ Although the latter's establishment presents an important step towards a further integrated approach to conflict prevention, after almost six years significant shortcomings prevail. The central weakness of the ISG is that its role remains limited to horizontal coordination and information. The steering group cannot take the initiative without an assignment by a ministry's leadership. A real improvement in terms of policy coherence, however, would require the ISG to become a supervisory body, closely linked to the state secretary level and equipped with an independent pool of financial and personnel resources to develop initiatives on its own as well as prevention concepts for crisis regions, to systematically evaluate conflict prevention policies.⁴⁵ Despite the first interim report's emphasis on the necessity to strengthen the steering group, this is not implemented in practice. Instead, the second report merely reifies the ISG's character as a non-hierarchical body to facilitate horizontal coordination and information-sharing.⁴⁶ Arguably, the ISG is further weakened by the fact that the tasks of the commissioner for civilian crisis prevention in the Foreign Office have now been assigned to the commissioner for global issues. Although the latter is higher in rank and has more resources at their disposal, conflict prevention will only be one of several issues (such as poverty reduction, human rights and international terrorism) they have to deal with. Whether this will prove to be a positive change or lead to the marginalization of conflict prevention remains to be seen. Despite the remaining deficits, the 2008 report asserts that civilian conflict prevention 'is now accepted as being an inter-ministerial, inter-departmental and cross-sectoral task' and that the structures that have been created with the action plan have 'proved themselves'.⁴⁷

The steering group stands in stark contrast to the UK's conflict prevention pools, which are jointly administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development. Nevertheless, the possibility of establishing a jointly administered prevention pool along the lines of the CPPs was rejected after evaluation due to 'considerable differences between the organization of the executive power, the provisions of budgetary law, and political and financial conditions' in the two countries.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the promised integration of Germany's peace and security policies is not even carried through in the central government documents. For instance, the action plan and the 'White Paper 2006 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr' have been developed largely detached from each other.⁴⁹ Instead of integrating the two documents, the action plan is only dealt with as an 'example' of inter-ministerial security policy in the White Paper,⁵⁰ and the comprehensive concept is only seen as one of the 'components' of German security policy.⁵¹ The small weight attributed to the action plan in the

White Paper indeed indicates how far away the German government still is from establishing civilian conflict prevention as a cross-sectoral task and ensuring 'that due attention is accorded to crisis prevention in all stages and sectors of government activity', as the action plan heralds.⁵²

In particular civil–military cooperation proves difficult because of the Ministry of Defence's departmental interests. As the defence White Paper reveals, the Ministry of Defence is increasingly aiming to establish itself as a conflict prevention actor.⁵³ But to date the development of the necessary general concepts of civil–military cooperation remains fragmentary and mainly takes place at the tactical level.⁵⁴ One well-known example is the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan. These teams, which comprise members of the armed forces as well as representatives of the Foreign Office and the BMZ, work to strengthen the central government's influence in the local provinces, to foster civil reconstruction, information-gathering and the provision of security. However, thus far, military and development policy goals have not been successfully combined. A lack of resource-pooling as well as the tendency to perceive other ministries or agencies as competitors rather than as partners have proven to be significant obstacles to effective cooperation.⁵⁵ For the Bundeswehr, development policy still is seen mainly as a tool to increase acceptance among the local populace of the military presence, whereas development cooperation actors point to the importance of sustainability and participation.⁵⁶

In this regard, conceptual coherence as well as institutional coordination mechanisms has to be improved. The 2004 joint Utstein study found Germany lacking in this regard,⁵⁷ and other critics also point to the fact that different German ministries still draw on diverging conceptions of the core problems at hand.⁵⁸ However, only when the central actors involved can agree on the concepts, goals and principles of civilian conflict prevention can departmental turf wars be avoided.⁵⁹ In this respect, the steering group could prove to be an important forum for discussion. Overall, however, the German commitment to enhanced interagency cooperation has not gone far in comparison with other governments'.⁶⁰

Coordination with Civil Society Actors

But not only inter-ministerial coordination is still lacking. Another crucial aspect is coordination with civil society. Increased coordination in this regard is desirable for several reasons. First, all conflict prevention actors could benefit from a shared assessment of a situation. State and non-state actors have different sources of information and assessment standards. NGOs are often embedded in the 'target society', as they have often been working among local people prior to government activities. Thus, their assessments are more likely to reflect the actual local conditions, and their cooperation is crucial to identify potential local partners. Furthermore, area studies experts and peace researchers can significantly contribute to early warning and the development of appropriate strategies. Private business can also play a role, for instance, by lobbying for peace processes. Thus, regular exchange is crucial for coherent approaches to conflict prevention.⁶¹

According to the action plan, coordination with civil society is supposed to take place mainly via the advisory board. Taking into account the heterogeneity of this body and its infrequent meetings, however, the exact form in which advice is supposed to take place remains unclear. Thus, some observers have argued that the advisory board merely fulfils an 'alibi function'.⁶² The second interim report also pleads for closer cooperation between the steering group and the board.⁶³ The action plan only rather vaguely announces that individual ministries will, 'where appropriate, hold regular consultations of a general nature or on specific topics or countries' to facilitate coordination with non-state actors.⁶⁴ Most of the concrete initiatives taken to facilitate exchange with civil society remain those of individual ministries instead of the overall government. The most notable example is the Working Group on Development and Peace (FriEnt), which, on the basis of close relations between the BMZ and civil society actors, was developed prior to the action plan. FriEnt comprises seven state and non-state organizations in development cooperation and serves as a platform for information-sharing, contributes to the networking of the actors and provides consulting services through research and analysis, though focusing on only a limited number of countries.

Policy Prerequisites: Public Awareness and Financial Support

Taking into account the structural invisibility of civilian conflict prevention, actively raising public awareness is a crucial precondition for ensuring steady funding. In this regard, the federal government's efforts seem rather disappointing. When the action plan was issued, the government missed the opportunity to actively lobby for the utility of civilian conflict prevention. The lack of public awareness can be neatly illustrated by the parliamentary debate on the first interim report. Scheduled for 15 December 2006 (the last session before Christmas), only one state secretary and fewer than 30 MPs stayed for the debate. If the presence of parliamentarians in plenary debates is any indicator of the importance of a particular policy issue, civilian conflict prevention has to be regarded as a mere niche component of German foreign policy.⁶⁵ In the light of the limited awareness the first interim report won in the Bundestag, it is unsurprising that it received almost no media attention. This is all the more troubling because a public debate could give civilian conflict prevention the public legitimacy it needs to ensure constant and increased financial and personnel resources.⁶⁶

Thus, in the 2006 report, the federal government identifies the absence of a 'prevention lobby' as a central problem and commits itself to 'redouble its efforts to raise the profile of Germany's contribution to crisis prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building to a broad interested public by maintaining contact with selected media representatives and keeping them strategically informed, and by holding informative events'.⁶⁷ Whereas enhanced communication was identified as a priority task by the first report, in the 2008 report the communication strategy called for by the advisory board was merely mentioned as 'one approach',⁶⁸ and with their quite extensive wordage the reports themselves hardly seemed fit to raise awareness.⁶⁹ No short version of either

report was produced which would make it much easier for the media or interested public to pick up the issue. Moreover, both were published solely on the Foreign Office's website; nor was their publication accompanied by a marketing campaign. By contrast, the active promotion and broad attention given to the Defence White Paper clearly shows that the federal government is indeed able to raise public attention for those policy issues it deems important. Thus far, however, it has missed the chance to do so with respect to civilian conflict prevention, and the fact that the second interim report has been handled along the lines of the first does not raise hopes that the government is willing to push for enhanced public awareness.⁷⁰ Furthermore, an initial idea to create a special representative of the federal government for civilian conflict prevention, which might raise public awareness,⁷¹ has been dropped.

One central obstacle, following from the lack of public awareness, remains the problematic financial status of civilian conflict prevention. Already when the action plan was adopted in 2004, the government lacked the will to dedicate additional budgetary resources to civilian conflict prevention, proclaiming instead that it would be 'working to ensure permanent funding for crisis prevention.'⁷² Nor did the 2006 report link its plea for improved coordination with the intention to increase financial resources.

At first glance, this changed subsequently in 2008 when financial resources committed to tasks that in principle could be subsumed under the heading of conflict prevention were increased significantly. The Foreign Office's budgetary item for conflict prevention and resolution was extended from €12 to €60 million, including €25 million for a newly created crisis fund to allow for quick financial contributions to, for instance, UN peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, the BMZ's budget was extended by 14 per cent (to €640 million) in 2008. In the years 2005 to 2007, one-third, or roughly €1.7 billion of development aid was spent in conflict regions, and €700 million related to conflict prevention.⁷³ Although the government's equation of development aid with conflict prevention neglects the complex nexus between poverty reduction and conflict prevention, these budget increases are in principle laudable. There are, however, no efforts for true resource pooling to produce financial incentives for coordinated inter-ministerial action in the field of conflict prevention. Almost six years after the inception of the action plan, German conflict prevention policy remains a field of inter-ministerial competition rather than coordinated and coherent.

Conclusion

With the action plan, the German federal government took significant steps to address the complex coordination challenges in the field of civilian conflict prevention. In particular the focus on the civilian aspects of conflict prevention and the coordination with civil society actors renders the action plan a potential model for other countries in tackling the field's coordination challenges. Newly created institutions like the steering group and the advisory board have significant potential to improve policy coherence.

This article has focused on four key prerequisites of an effective conflict prevention policy (early warning, inter-ministerial coordination, coordination with civil society actors, and public awareness and financial resources) to assess the extent to which the action plan has indeed facilitated foreign policy coherence. Despite the generally laudable initiative of the action plan, however, the federal government 'still fails to meet its own claim in terms of practical and conceptual implementation'.⁷⁴ This is particularly obvious in the field of early warning, where not even the governmental actors have systematically interlinked their mechanisms, let alone with those of non-state and international actors. Also, more generally, inter-ministerial coordination remains insufficient. Despite repeated contrary assertions, the steering group has not been strengthened, let alone provided with any steering capacity, and it still suffers from a significant lack of personnel and financial resources which significantly limits its ability to facilitate coordination. As the ISG is not endowed with steering rights, it remains little more than a talking shop. Nor does the advisory board in its current form provide a sufficient forum for regular exchange with civil society actors, mainly because of its infrequent meetings and lack of resources. Although more overall resources have been devoted to conflict-prevention-related tasks during the past few years, resource-pooling is still lacking. Furthermore, the federal government remains reluctant to actively lobby for public awareness for civilian conflict prevention. Without widespread public understanding of the benefits of civilian conflict prevention, it is doubtful whether funding can be ensured in the long run.

A consequence of the general lack of efficient coordination (in particular in the field of early warning) is that Germany's conflict prevention policies still remain largely reactive in nature. The absence of forceful implementation of the bureaucratic reforms thus continues to undermine the credibility of the offices involved.⁷⁵ Overall, it not only remains unclear whether the federal government will be able to meet the complex coordination challenges in this field of foreign policy but also whether civilian conflict prevention can establish itself as a constant feature of German foreign policy. A continued commitment to civilian conflict prevention is put in doubt even more by its dependence on the will of the coalition in power, with elections taking place every four years.⁷⁶ While it is too early to provide a substantial assessment of the policy priorities of the new coalition government established in 2009 between CDU, CSU and the Free Democratic Party, the fact that the action plan is not once mentioned in the coalition agreement might indicate a further shift away from civilian conflict prevention.⁷⁷ Indeed, while the new coalition remains committed to an extended (or 'networked') security concept that includes civilian means, the coalition agreement mainly emphasizes the role of the Bundeswehr as 'an essential instrument of German peace policy'.⁷⁸ The changing nature of contemporary foreign-policy-making and the complex challenges of today's armed conflicts, however, demand new instruments precisely like those introduced by the action plan. As long as the federal government does not truly commit itself to the implementation of the action plan, much time and resources will continue to be wasted at home before actors can even start to address the problems abroad.

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69. The first report comprises not only a description of the activities undertaken since 2004 but also identifies future priorities. The second interim report simply lists the measures undertaken during the period under review: future policy priorities play only a minor role. This not only provides an obstacle to an assessment of the activities undertaken after 2008 but also raises doubts about the government's long-term commitment to civilian conflict prevention.
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72. Federal Government (see n.5 above), p.91.
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76. The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.
77. In general, the term 'civilian conflict prevention' can be found only once in the coalition agreement, referring to the role of the German Federal Police in the field of conflict prevention; see CDU, CSU and FDP, *Wachstum. Bildung. Zusammenhalt. Der Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und FDP* [Growth. Education. Cohesion. The Coalition Agreement between CDU, CSU and FDP], Berlin: CDU, 2009, p.98 (at: www.cdu.de/doc/pdfc/091026-koalitionsvertrag-cducsu-fdp.pdf).
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