

Interview with the Jordanian newspaper Al Ghad on the occasion of Federal President Steinmeier's official visit to Jordan from 27 to 29 January 2018

- 1. How would you evaluate your visit to Jordan, and how do you see Jordan as a stable and stabilising element in a burning region?*

By coming to Jordan, I am visiting a country that has long been a reliable partner and friend to Germany. Our relations have never been so close. Germany and Jordan are working together in the fields of science, cultural preservation and security, to name but a few. And Germany is grateful to Jordan that it enabled German soldiers involved in the Counter Daesh mission to be deployed quickly. Tomorrow I am going to visit the German soldiers in Al Azraq.

Turning to development cooperation, Germany is currently supporting Jordan with more than a billion euros. The German Jordanian University is an absolutely outstanding example of our cooperation. It is moving forward in many disciplines and, alongside Jordanians, also offers refugees an opportunity to study. I am delighted to be able to meet a group of archaeology and MBA students today.

As a neighbour of Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Jordan is one of the few and thus particularly valuable anchors of regional stability. Your country plays a central role in the region. It is a responsible role it performs with remarkable circumspection and one for which I have great respect.

- 2. How do you evaluate the American administration's move of recognising Jerusalem as a capital for Israel?*

There are good reasons to doubt that the unilateral recognition of Jerusalem will make a contribution to a more peaceful Middle East. I hope nevertheless that no one will see this as justifying hatred and violence towards Israel, whether in my own country or elsewhere. Germany's position here is not unfamiliar. Part of it is that the status of the holy sites need to be preserved and that the final status of Jerusalem is to be negotiated as part of a two-state solution.

3. *There are concerns in the Arab and Islamic World about the rise of the far right wing in Europe. Some see Germany as the last fortress to preserve democratic values in Europe. Do you see any new threats to democracy and democratic values?*

Democracy doesn't just happen. It has to be fought for and won time and again. This is something I keep telling my fellow Germans. All over the world, also in Europe, democracies are facing major challenges. These include the emergence of new movements and parties who propagate pulling up the drawbridge and retreating. Their success is in the past rooted in the enormous changes triggered by globalisation and the widening gap between the worlds we live in: between urban and rural, rich and poor, old and young.

At the same time, digitisation and social media are dramatically transforming political discourse. In many political debates, voices are becoming louder and shriller yet more and more of us are at a loss for words. Sections of our society are moving further away from one another, are inhabiting differing realities, also because they are often hearing different news or reading different newspapers. This makes it increasingly difficult to provide what we in pluralist societies need for peaceful coexistence: the balancing of interests. That applies both within and between countries. The people here in the region are also experiencing at first hand how essential this balancing is.

4. *Some experts in the Arab World and the West think that security is being given priority over spreading democracy in a region blighted by internal wars and chaos. Do you agree with this characterisation?*

My country has learnt the defining historical lesson that democracy and stability are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, only a free society can be stable in the long term; a society that is shaped by its citizens and gives them scope to develop their ideas, their individual talents and wishes. This is a realisation that only took root in Germany as we experienced our very painful history. But there is certainly not only one way to shape a free society.

Of course, security is important. It is a basic human need and guaranteeing it is one of the most important tasks for every country. But achieving security by restricting basic freedoms is in the

long term the wrong way to go about it. The crises in your region do not make it easier to guarantee a free and safe society. But that should not mean losing sight of this goal.

5. The refugees' issue became one of the prominent international files. Germany, unlike other European countries, adapted an open human approach to receiving refugees. But, there is a sense of retreat and rising internal opposition to this role. How do you read this?

Before going any further, I would like here to voice my respect for the generosity and readiness to help demonstrated by your country and the people in Jordan. You have taken in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in recent years. That really is impressive. Germany will continue to help Jordan in its efforts to provide decent conditions for these refugees.

As for Germany, the debate on displacement and migration has stirred many hearts in recent years. A lot of people in our country have rolled up their sleeves and helped make sure refugees are received well. Others in turn are worried about the large number of people who have sought refuge in Germany. This in part heated debate is not over yet. From my point of view, it is key that we fulfil our obligations. Those suffering political persecution have the right to asylum and protection under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Refugees from civil war can also receive protection. Endeavours to improve one's economic situation may in individual cases always be legitimate but do not justify the same right to settle in Germany.

Above all to ensure we can do justice to political refugees also in the future, we need once more to be serious about this differentiation. We must never shrug our shoulders upon seeing the plight of others. But not every hardship brings with it the right to settle in Germany or Europe. We need to do more for these people to ease their suffering and promote peace and economic development.

6. Germany witnessed several terror incidents recently, which rose concerns about the presence of terrorist and fundamentalist cells in the country. How do you deal with this challenge and with the scenario of veteran Jihadi fighters returning home?

Above all the attack on Breitscheidplatz in Berlin just before Christmas in 2016 hit my country hard. We have to do all that is possible in a democratic state based on the rule of law to prevent further terrorist attacks. We have improved cooperation and data exchange between the police authorities of our Länder and within the EU and have amended legal regulations in accordance. In so doing, we want to be better prepared for the return of German IS fighters. The battle against extremism, fanaticism and violence is one of the biggest challenges for our country and for the international community.