

## **Background information**

Many countries around the world are facing similar challenges with the attendant opportunities to shape new developments: demographic change, globalization, sustainable energy supply, the digitalization of the world as we experience it, innovation and growth, successful cooperation between peoples – every country will find its own solutions to challenges like these, solutions grounded in the country's own history and culture, its level of development and how its economy and society are organized. But we are also dependent upon one another. One country's solutions can affect many others far beyond its own borders. We can thus learn much from each other in a dialogue on our questions and answers.

The Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Angela Merkel, intends the

### **International German Forum**

to be a new format for the discussion of questions facing societies in the future. These questions are important for many countries around the world and our answers will set our course towards the future. Approaches to shaping societal, political and economic projects that are transformative, modernizing or innovative will be discussed with decision makers and experts from the fields of politics, economics, science and society.

The goal is to learn from each other by getting to know one another and listening to what we have to say. This will build a network for global learning, which will support the mutual exchange of innovative ideas and approaches to shaping the future. The idea for the International German Forum arose from the Federal Chancellor's "Dialogue on Germany's future" conducted between spring 2011 and summer 2012 in which she asked citizens and experts to suggest answers to the question "how do we want to live in five to ten years".

For the First International German Forum around 80 high-level experts in the fields of civil society, science, business, politics and administration from around the world have been invited to take part. The first part of the conference is dedicated to discussions among the experts themselves. In the second part of the conference,

around a dozen high-level opinion makers from around the world will hold a discussion with the Chancellor, with the other experts asking questions and making comments. Building on the current national and international debate, the focus will be on the future.

The topic of the First International German Forum is:

**“What matters to people – wellbeing and progress”.**

For several years now, national and international debates on people’s wellbeing, quality of life and contentment have been intensifying. Many countries approach these issues with the help of government reports, commissions of experts or dialogue with the public.

Discussions include topics like how people, scientists, economists or politicians in specific cultural contexts define quality of life, wellbeing and progress, what role material prosperity plays and what significance these goals have for the people and for decision-makers in business, society and politics.

The participation of the people in the dialogue process to determine what quality of life means to them aims at achieving an understanding of what a desirable future looks like, a pluralistic understanding that takes the whole of society into account. Reports on the quality of life in one region or one country tell us something about the situation there, about what action must be taken and what the government should aim to accomplish. New indicators and systems of indicators will also be developed, because these present opportunities in the areas of politics and its perception. They formulate and communicate political goals, express an understanding of society or make it possible to demonstrate good governance.

In Germany, wellbeing and progress has long been under discussion, not only in the fields of science and the economy, but also in society, politics and the media. The German Government led by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel has been discussing this topic for a long time:

- Together with Nicolas Sarkozy, then President of France, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel launched a joint initiative in the fall of 2009 that saw both countries’ councils of experts present a joint report on improved measurement of wellbeing and progress.

- With the “Dialogue on Germany’s Future”, the Federal Chancellor held a wide-ranging dialogue with the people and with experts on topics of importance to the future that included quality of life, wellbeing and progress.
- The German Government has had a national sustainability strategy for many years that includes detailed reporting on progress.
- The German Government regularly publishes reports focusing on various topics such as poverty and wealth, education and its sustainability strategy.
- The Federal Statistical Office and academic institutions have a large amount of data on subjective and objective factors affecting quality of life and standard of living.

In the current parliamentary term, the German Bundestag has also a study commission on the topic of growth, prosperity and quality of life, which will present its findings soon.

The focus of this global discussion shifts depending on the given cultural and historical background and the level of development. For countries with a lower level of development, value-oriented economic development and the appreciation and use of their own culture often take precedence. Countries with a higher level of development pay more attention to subjective happiness and social cohesion in addition to maintaining prosperity.

Progress thrives on learning. And learning thrives on dialogue. In addition to the experts, around 40 representatives from German organizations active abroad and representatives from the national and international media have been invited as observers in order to ensure that the dialogue will continue both at home and abroad.

In order to strengthen this dialogue, preparation and follow-up events related to the topic are planned for future events in the International German Forum series. These will be open to both governmental and non-governmental organizations.