



A brief Guide to Confidence-Building Measures 2026

History and current samples of Confidence-Building Measures
featuring Afghanistan, China, DPR Korea, France, Germany, India,
Pakistan, Palestine, Republic Korea, Russian Federation, Taipei,
Ukraine and Yemen

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Be inspired by these examples for confidence-building measures!

What does confidence need to be established and remain stable?

A border can successfully build trust. So can the absence of a border. And borders that separate relatives who have been connected for centuries can come down. With examples of confidence-building measures, this little guide aims to inspire diplomats to support such measures.

If God had to prove the purpose of creation every day, he would do so through the return of the day. It therefore makes perfect sense to describe this event as the first and oldest confidence-building measure in world history.

A confidence-building measure is at first - a gift. Maybe leading to a deal. That simple definition doesn't make it easier. The fact is, though, that not one, but all deals and agreements started with a kind first offer by one of the conflicting parties.

This guide examines the history of confidence-building measures and provides examples of proposals made to states and organizations before and during the current conflicts.

The author draws on his experience gained over the past eleven years working on a global initiative, the World Social Capital Monitor. Through this initiative, people assess their shared social assets, a prerequisite for mutual confidence, in 54 languages and across 142 countries. Several of the measures were at least discussed—and then not implemented. No government or organization is officially opposed to confidence-building measures. They just don't get started on them.

Since most politicians and diplomats have personally experienced the failure of negotiations, they react in the way of the Sultanate of Oman wrote us after having tries to mediate between Iran and the USA: "We appreciate the efforts undertaken in this regard and have taken note of the points you have raised. We wish you continued success in your work". That motivates me to present this handy collection of cases. Hopefully, when you read it, you will take the same position as the one expressed by the Sultanate!

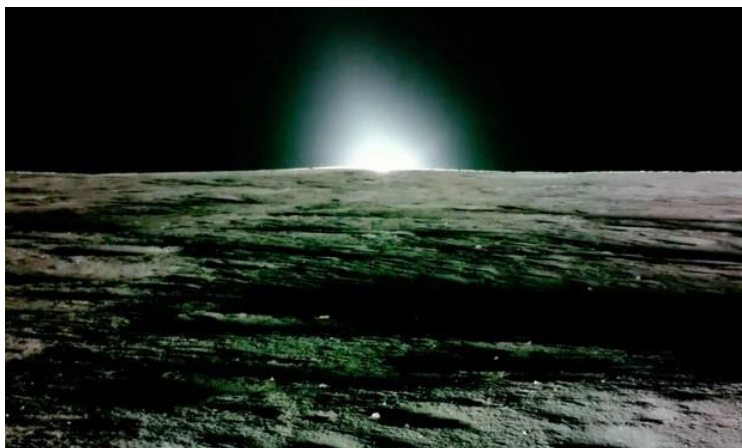
Table of Confidence-Building Measures featured in this guide

Year	Confidence-Building Measure	Page
unknown	Creation of the World and Mankind	6
1555	Augsburg Peace	10
1921	League of Nations	13
1945	United Nations	15
	NGOs and IGOs to build confidence	18
1953	Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)	20
1954	Panchsheel Treaty China and India	22
1963	German-French Youth Exchange	25
1967	Outer Space Treaty (UN)	15
1973	Convention on Endangered Species (UN)	15
1987	Reducing the Ozon Hole (UN)	15
1990	German Reunification	28
1997	Kyoto Protocol (UN)	15
2000	Millennium Goals (UN)	15
2015	Sustainable Development Goals (UN)	15
2022	Proposals to the OSCE for Russia/Ukraine	39
2023	Proposals to Yemen	58
2026	Railway across Belarus, Russia and Ukraine	46
	Mediterranean Peace Railway Initiative	48
	No border between China and Taipei	32
	Social Capital across the Durand Line	34
	Demining, an undisputed issue	61
	The Economics of Confidence	63
	Measuring mutual trust	67

The Metaphysics of Confidence-Building Measures

For centuries, researchers have sought to disprove the religious creation myth. Yet the further their space telescopes and spectroscopes ventured into the infinite vastness of the cosmos, the clearer it became: there are no other worlds.

The probability of our world's existence is so mathematically low that winning the lottery by comparison seems as likely as the sun rising every day. And what event is more predictable – and therefore more trustworthy – than the daily rising of the sun?



Lunar horizon glow, as captured by the Blue Ghost lander. Photograph: Nasa/Firefly Aerospace

If God had to prove the purpose of creation every day, he would do so through the return of the day.

It therefore makes perfect sense to describe this event as the first and oldest confidence-building measure in world history. It was on this daily certainty that the Celts, Chinese, Incas and Egyptians built a completely new resource: time. Without faith in the sunrise, time would vanish like a dream. No account could ever capture that moment. The end of time would remain silent.

Although the certainty that the sun would return each day was in fact a proof of trust as irrefutable as it was certain, there were doubts about the success of major construction and military projects, at least those that might take a long time to complete.

To gain confidence in a planned undertaking and in the future, sacrifice is therefore considered an appropriate means.

Before the Greek fleet set sail, an entire ship was sunk as a sacrifice. China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, had 8,000 soldiers out of Clay placed in his tomb so that he could continue to win wars in the future.

In the Catholic Church, the assurance of salvation was contingent upon making an offering, even if this consisted merely of confessing a minor sin, the forgiveness of which served to confirm that assurance as a service.

In the U.S. legal system, this is practiced as a "plea deal," in which the defendant, by admitting guilt, subjects himself to a kind of divine judgment by the judge. The more sincerely he pleads guilty, the more lenient the sentence will be.

The simplest form of sacrifice still practiced today as a confidence-building measure is the payment of a sum of money. As a rule, this is a protection fee. On the one hand, it protects against further trouble with the recipient; on the other hand, it is also an investment in the recipient's future willingness to cooperate.

Let's return to the introduction of this book: A confidence-building measure is a gift. The sacrifice is a form of gift. Of course, one hopes to receive something in return for the gift—at the very least, moral recognition for being an altruist.

For the recipient of the confidence-building measure, it is difficult to see what consequences the gift will have.

In the major monotheistic religions, doubts about God's trustworthiness have repeatedly arisen. He therefore contacted prophets to assure people through them that everything is actually all right. Yet the existence of evil had already cast doubt on the

ancient gods, raising questions about whether they were fulfilling their duty to spread peace, justice, and prosperity. God's revelation to a prophet can thus certainly be viewed as a theological measure to build trust. However, it is also advisable to consider a debate among theologians. In this debate, the "impulsionists" stood in opposition to the "machinists."

As the convincing Creator of the world, God needs no proof. He leaves the world, with its billions of beings, to its own devices without intervening. God as a machinist, teacher and therapist, on the other hand, attempts to influence the course of creation through his own intervention. The phrase "Inshallah," common in Islamic culture, expresses that human events are subject to God's will.

Even the primal trust bestowed by God—which is infinitely proven by the return of the day—exists in the tension between letting go and accepting, and intervening/changing.

Whether diplomat or sociologist, priest or billionaire heir—every day we must weigh whether intervention is necessary or whether our intervention only makes everything worse.

First attempts to make Peace a business case – The Peace of Augsburg 1555

History is full of accounts of kings being presented with gifts in order to win their favour or at least make them more amenable to trade. You should not visit Donald Trump without a gift. Because of this highly personal nature, there are few documents that set forth shared values and obligations to build trust. For centuries, the central question driving this diplomacy of gifts was simply this: to whom did the land and its people belong? As late as 1949, half the world belonged to colonial powers. But at the beginning of the 16th century, a new, unfamiliar question suddenly arose in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation: Which religion should one adhere to? There were only two, and atheism was not yet philosophically conceivable. For two decades, secular and ecclesiastical rulers argued over which religion their subjects should sensibly belong to. (image: Wikimedia commons)



As the conflicts grew more violent and the burgeoning global economy—particularly in the commercial hub of Augsburg, which was then akin to New York, with the Fuggers playing the role of the Rockefellers—feared a downturn, a conference was convened in Augsburg in 1555. At this conference, the Catholic Emperor Charles

V hoped to reach a mutually beneficial agreement with the wealthy Protestant estates.

The solution, which went down in history as the Peace of Augsburg, did not allow believers to choose their own religion, but it did allow their rulers to do so. *Cuius regio, eius religio*. Whose realm, his religion.

As a result, Augsburg Cathedral—which had been reformed some ten years earlier—became Catholic again and has remained so to this day. Numerous citizens and merchants moved away—to a ruler who shared “their” religion. The population movements triggered by the Augsburg Religious Peace can therefore be seen as a contributing factor to the Thirty Years’ War of 1618–1648.

The document itself, however, already echoes the statutes of the League of Nations (1920) and the United Nations (1945):

Document Courtesy of E. Reich (ed.), *Select Documents* (London 1905), 230-232.

‘15. In order to bring peace to the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nation between the Roman Imperial Majesty and the Electors, Princes and Estates, let neither his Imperial Majesty nor the Electors, Princes, etc., do any violence or harm to any estate of the empire on the account of the Augsburg Confession, but let them enjoy their religious belief, liturgy and ceremonies as well as their estates and other rights and privileges in peace; and complete religious peace shall be obtained only by Christian means of amity, or under threat of punishment of the Imperial ban.

16. Likewise the Estates espousing the Augsburg Confession shall let all the Estates and Princes who cling to the old religion live in absolute peace and in the enjoyment of all their estates, rights, and privileges.’

We find this commitment to accept others and their rights in the 1945 UN Charter, as well as in the Panchsheel Treaty between India

and China. In diplomatic notes from the People's Republic of China, it appears in the form of “peaceful coexistence,” a concept that was met with derision by the former colonial powers.

It would be worth examining whether, for example, the Quran (circa 610 CE) and the Magna Carta (1215) were also confidence-building measures aimed at reconciling hostile tribes, in the spirit of the Peace of Augsburg.

1920: A first attempt to create global trust

When World War I ended in 1919, there was a growing belief that alliances and coalitions were not, after all, the most appropriate means of preventing wars. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was among those who advocated for the establishment of a League of Nations in the Swiss Confederation, which was already neutral at the time.



The founding members at the time included Germany, Italy, France, Japan, and China. Russia joined in 1934 but was expelled in 1939. The United States, which had supported the League's establishment in part through the Rockefeller

Foundation, decided against joining after the Senate voted against it. Germany withdrew in 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power.

Nevertheless, the League of Nations was able to mediate in several conflicts. Under the chairmanship of the philosopher Henri Bergson, the League addressed issues of intellectual property. The abolition of slavery through the oversight of its own Slavery Commission in 1920 represented a significant social and politic innovation.

The Refugee Committee, led by Fridtjoff Nansen, was the first to address the plight of displaced persons. More than two million prisoners of war were wandering through Russia alone, and they needed assistance with provisions and their return home. The Palais des Nations, built for the League of Nations, is still the seat of the United Nations in Geneva today. In 1927, the Geneva Convention succeeded in establishing global rules for the treatment of prisoners of war, some of which were even observed during World War II.

To blame the outbreak of World War II on the League of Nations' powerlessness is an oversimplification, because when the German Reich attacked France in June 1940, neither Germany, nor Russia, nor the United States were members of that first global body. The

Council of the League of Nations had four permanent members: Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. All four were in war in 1940.

The League of Nations had no effective means to counter the aggressive military policies of Germany and Japan beginning in 1939.

All League of Nations documents are now available in the United Nations Archives. Even back then, delegates complained about the high cost of living in Geneva. A London-based “World Alliance of Churches” advocated for peace through religion. A committee for the “Representation of Women in the League of Nations” was also established.

These documents, which from today’s perspective are often curious and entertaining, can be accessed here:

<https://archives.ungeneva.org/league-of-nations-secretariat>

Ultimately, the League of Nations shares the fate of most confidence-building measures: they usually take the extremely scarce resource of trust for granted. Instead, they should first work to build and foster trust.

The United Nations' surprising global successes

While in general the United Nations itself may be regarded as the World's biggest confidence-building measure, nevertheless joint and accepted measures implemented in all countries were few. Several bodies of the United Nations are still under heavy dispute, e.g. the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Human Rights Council (OHCHR), the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). We though focus on some successes of the United Nations people are normally not aware of.

1967 Outer Space Treaty

In 1967, the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West was still the dominant issue in international relations. China was still a developing country. The newly founded UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) was tasked with ensuring order in space. Surprisingly, as early as 1967, the Soviet Union and the U.S. agreed on a joint space order. China has since joined as well. The most visible example of this multilateral confidence-building measure is the International Space Station (ISS), which is operated jointly by Russians, Americans, and other interested parties.

1973 CITES – protecting 40.600 species

How did it come to be that, by 2026, 6,600 animal species and 34,000 plant species worldwide are protected, without individual countries opposing or sabotaging this effort?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) came into force in 1975 and may have been the first global agreement to be actually implemented since the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945.

Few countries in South Africa have opposed the restrictions imposed by CITES. The idea of CITES started in 1960 by the NGO

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The selected species were identified by scientists. Among the best-known species that have been saved are elephants, whales, rhinos, giraffes, and tigers.

1987 Reducing the ozone hole—the world's most significant environmental initiative

In 1985, scientists from the Californian Stanford University found a massive hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica. According to the grim forecast, the expansion of the ozone hole would increase the exposure of living organisms to UV radiation to such an extent that numerous species would become extinct. Humans would hardly be able to stay out in the sun anymore.

The researchers succeeded in convincing then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan that, to protect the ozone layer, the fluorocarbons contained in all refrigerants would have to be banned worldwide.

Despite resistance from the affected industry and, initially, from some countries that had not yet developed alternative refrigerants, the ban was adopted in 1987 and has since been implemented worldwide.

The ozone hole has shrunk significantly since then—an incredible triumph of collective human reason.

Further Global United Nations Initiatives

that were successfully launched, but not implemented:

1997 The Kyoto Protocol for Climate Protection

The Kyoto Protocol is a landmark 1997 international treaty that operationalized the UNFCCC by legally binding developed nations to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Since then, other conferences—including one in Rio de Janeiro—have been trying to establish globally binding climate measures. However, since these measures must also be financed and many countries prefer to spend their money on military, little progress has been made.

2000 The Millennium Goals

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions.

2015 The Sustainable Development Goals

Leaving Biodiversity and Peace behind

SDG preferences in the World's five major SDG reports 2019

SDG Topic	Rank	Average Rank
Health	1	3,2
Energy	2	4,0
Climate		
Water		
Education	3	4,6
Poverty	4	6,2
Food	5	7,6
Economic Growth	6	8,6
Technology	7	8,8
Inequality	8	9,2
Gender Equality	9	10,0
Hunger	10	10,6
Justice	11	10,8
Governance	12	11,6
Decent Work	13	12,2
Peace	14	12,4
Clean Energy	15	12,6
Life on Land	16	14,4
Life below Water	17	15,0
Social Inclusion	18	16,4

The 17 Goals followed the Millennium Goals that were promised to be realized by 2015.

They were adopted by 193 States. The motto

“Leaving no one

behind” has not yet

been fulfilled, as the

168 indicators in the

progress report are

mostly related to per

capita gross national

product.

It is expected that the

2030 goals will be

updated and ratified

once again by all

countries.

The distribution of the

indicators is highly

uneven. Biodiversity

and Social Inclusion, for example, receive the least attention in the five leading SDG Reports. (see chart) This distribution arises when individual actors can choose specific goals, which they naturally achieve.

Organizations to work as Confidence-Building Measures

When personal relationships and existing dependencies are insufficient to prevent conflicts between states and their escalation, a number of organisational structures have emerged which describe themselves as 'multilateral' forums. They are referred to by the abbreviations IGO (Intergovernmental Organisations) and NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations).

As a rule, they set themselves a transnational global objective that takes precedence over the conflict in question. In the 1920s, this was the treatment of prisoners of war. After the Second World War,

preventing a nuclear war was a global priority. From around 1990 onwards, the focus shifted to tackling poverty and promoting free trade.

In 2015, these issues were

superseded by the global climate

crisis, which in turn gave way to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Consequently, IGOs and NGOs have different histories and backgrounds, which often lead to competition for attention and, consequently, funding. Large, globally active organisations such as the International Red Cross (IFRC) are pitted against specialist organisations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International. Supranational organisations such as the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the South Asian Association (ASEAN) and the Economic Organization of the West African States (ECOWAS) are among dozens of attempt to activate regional synergies.

The United Nations itself, by acknowledging the need for regional structures, maintains thousands of local bureaux and regional centres such as the UNESWA for the Arab States. In many poor countries, particularly in Africa, states, NGOs and IGOs maintain more than a hundred offices providing humanitarian and development aid. As each donor country, philanthropist and the statutes of each charitable organisation have different objectives and priorities, aid is largely channelled in an uncoordinated manner into individual projects and different sectors.



The development ministries of donor countries have therefore moved towards donor conferences, where individual projects or strategies are no longer discussed. Instead, a share of the total budget is allocated. As political disputes are avoided in these rounds, the resolution of a conflict is mostly not included among the measures receiving funding. This means that the conflict zones most severely affected, such as e.g. Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine are funded solely on the basis of humanitarian need. The political aspect, on the other hand, is addressed by the governments themselves or by their think tanks, with calls for regime change being the most common outcome.

Since the infrastructure that has been funded—Gaza, for example, had an airport, a university, several colleges, and many clinics—is destroyed during the war, this often results in a dependence on emergency humanitarian aid that can last for decades.

That is why it is actually urgently necessary to include confidence-building measures aimed at ending conflicts in the funding rounds. However, since funding is consistently insufficient even for ongoing humanitarian projects—for which implementing organizations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, churches, foundations, and UN agencies have built up significant capacity—confidence-building measures effectively compete with humanitarian emergency aid.

To avoid jeopardizing their funding, aid organizations—and even the UN—do not propose political solutions. Major multilateral organizations and associations of states therefore act, at most, as passive actors in the field of confidence-building measures, for example by offering so-called “observer missions” to monitor agreements and ceasefires.

Confidence Building by a Demilitarized Zone – 73 years of “cold peace”

In all my UN publications to date, there has been only one complaint: in 2016, I had referred to “the two Koreas.” I corrected that passage and will now begin by mentioning the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea.

These two states are separated by what is arguably the world’s most famous border, running along the 38th parallel through a demilitarized zone (DMZ). Had this border—described by U.S. officers as early as 1945—been respected, millions of deaths in the Korean War could have been avoided.

Instead, U.S. and South Korean troops crossed the border so far that what was then “North Korea” ceased to exist. It was only with the help of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army that the highly revered leader Kim Il Sung succeeded in 1953 in recapturing and thereby founding the present-day DPRK. His name means “the sun” and if you have been invited to enjoy the most important day of the DPRK, the day of the Sun on April 15th, – I enjoyed in the Embassy of the DPRK to Switzerland in Muri, Bern – you may estimate what it means to remember the pure existence of a country that has terribly suffered under the Japanese occupation and again completely destroyed after World War II.

Germany, Japan, Italy and France have been rebuilt from 1945 on. The DPRK has been deleted from the map.

Communities experience traumatic events that become part of the collective memory and by that impact the cultural identity. Accepting this state of mind is the pre-condition for any form of reconciliation.



Image: Park Jongwoo/Alliertes Museum

The DMZ is only 238 Kilometres long. It has been disputed between 1966 and 1969, resulting in deaths of 389 DPRK, 299 South Korean and 82 American soldiers.

Since then, the DMZ stands. And so do the two states of Korea.

How India and China still do fine with the five principles

When the UN Charter has been released in 1945, India was still under British governance. India became independent in 1947. India's most important neighbour, the People's Republic of China, joined the United Nations in 1971.

Any conflict between the two most populated countries of the World, even a civil one, would generate a global impact.

It was 70 years ago, exactly on April 29th 1954, when India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and China's first premier, Zhou Enlai, signed a treaty that has been since recommended as the *Panchsheel Treaty*. It contained a few mutual and common rules that are called the *five principles of peaceful coexistence*. At the time the Charter of the United Nations that is supposed to containing the same principles had become effective for nine years yet. But within this period the American and French wars in Korea and Vietnam questioned the UN Charter.



Still agreeing on peaceful co-existence: China's Xi Jinping and India's Narendra Modi (AP photo from Hindustantimes)

So when the Chinese President Xi Jinping and his colleague Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in September 2017 on the occasion of the BRICS meeting in China's Xiamen, remembering the Panchsheel Treaty was a rare sample of successful bilateral agreements that have never been broken or put in question.

And these are the five principles:

1. *Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.*
2. *Mutual non-aggression.*
3. *Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.*
4. *Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.*
5. *Peaceful co-existence*



Understanding the paradox of rules: Lao-Tzu

While other international agreements, beside the UN Charter from 1945 e.g. the Helsinki Act from 1975 or the Minsk Protocol from 2015 failed to bringing enduring peace, the five principles appear astonishing highly topical. The Basel Institute of Commons and Economics therefore started to adopt them as a base for other

bilateral agreements on peace and reconciliation.

In a broadcast from May 1954 Nehru said: ,If these principles were recognized in the mutual relations of all countries, then indeed there would hardly be any conflict and certainly no war‘

In any case they shift the issue of peace from entirely complicated rules that cause endless violations to a couple of clear basic rules.

It was the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu (6th century B.C.) who discovered the paradox of law and rules long before Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) Categorical Imperative when he considered:

The more rules and regulations,

The more thieves and robbers.

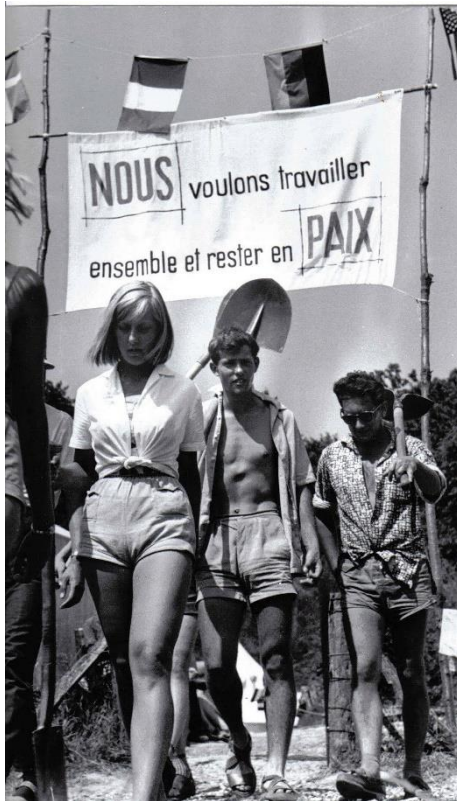
Today’s peacemakers may being inspired by such thoughts.

The Panchsheel Treaty still is an example for the oldest bilateral confidence-building measure.

How the French and the German became the best friends

“Why are you still optimistic for a solution for the Palestinians and the Israeli”? The editor asking this came from Germany’s public broadcast Deutschlandfunk. He welcomed the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. It was in September 2025, in the midst of a conflict going on for almost eighty years.

There is no contemporary conflict with a longer history of broken agreements, failed mediations and deep disappointment.



Olmert answered with a counter question by asking: “Who would have expected the Germans and the French to become best friends in 1945?”

Good question. In the year after the Elysee agreement in 1963, 2000 French-German marriages occurred. In 2019, still 946 bilateral couples said Oui/Ja. 2300 town-partnerships exist, which is around twenty per cent of all German and French towns.

Copyright photo:
DFJW/OFAJ

France is Germany’s second largest export market (2025). The joint border of 448 Kilometres is open since forty years.

So how did a conflict lasting for 2000 years ended so happy?

Was it the common roots in the Roman Empire both regions belonged to for Centuries? Was it the existence of the East and West Frankish kingdoms in the Medieval? It wasn't until the 16th century that the languages and cultures of the two regions became distinct.

Protestants persecuted in France moved to Germany. With the French Revolution of 1789, France became a political power that long prevented Germany from becoming a nation-state. From 1870 until Germany's invasion of France in 1940, three wars were fought, resulting in heavy casualties.

To this day, no one can explain how the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 could lead to a bloody war of attrition along the German-French border.

As early as 1815, Germaine de Staël had painted a positive picture of a peaceful and culturally oriented Germany—which at that time was not yet a nation-state—in her travelogue 'De l'Allemagne'. During World War I, the German-speaking writer Stefan Zweig maintained close contact with Paris and the French intellectual Romain Rolland. The writings of Ernst Jünger and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, attest to the mutual respect and friendship that existed during the German occupation of Paris beginning in 1940.

For centuries, mastery of the other's language has been regarded as a mark of the highest education and refinement.

According to UN figures, during the war and until the release of the last prisoners of war in 1948, both governments—including the Nazi regime—adhered to the Geneva Convention of War Prisoners from 1929 that included visits from the International Red Cross.

When we try to explain the remarkable success of Franco-German friendship after 1945, we find examples of economic cooperation in the reconstruction effort, such as the European Coal and Steel Community. But ultimately, Franco-German friendship is based on the fact that the shared passion for the "good life" is so deeply ingrained that there is no room for patriotic hatred. The French people's prejudices against the "Boches" have diminished from

generation to generation. Younger Britons and Germans no longer even know that the French were mocked as “frog-eaters” because of their consumption of frogs and snails.

In any case, the shared love of good food, well-preserved historic centres, sophisticated travel, and inspiring paintings, books, and films should be mentioned as confidence-building measures.

These alluring bonds of friendship have taken hold across much of Europe. Germany and France were the first pioneers to translate *jumelage* (the French word for town partnership) into geopolitical action.

According to the German-French Youth Endowment, more than 10 million young French and Germans joined 440'000 exchange programs.

I was one of them —and in 1986, married a French woman with whom I share two sons.

Inside the Inner Circle of German Reunification—A Conversation with Horst Teltschik

Political scientist Horst Teltschik became an advisor on foreign policy matters to Helmut Kohl, then Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate in 1972, who aspired to become Chancellor of Germany and chairman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Teltschik, who was also director of the Bertelsmann Foundation and, in 2007, as executive director of the Munich Security Conference, invited Vladimir Putin, is regarded as a key advisor on German reunification in 1990. The Paris Treaties are seen as a manifestation of compromises between East and West that were considered unthinkable at the time.

In 2019, Horst Teltschik published the book 'Russian Roulette', in which he warned against rejecting Russia's offer of "Europeanization" and jeopardizing the achievements of the policy of détente through NATO's eastward expansion. In an interview with the German magazine 'Der Spiegel', he claimed: "This is a damned dangerous game!"

In 2023, he signed an open letter to the German Bundestag and the Federal Chancellery, in which he urgently called for Germany to engage in negotiations with Russia.

In this interview Teltschik describes which Confidence-Building measures have led to the – at the time surprising – success of Germany's reunification.

Question: Did confidence-building measures have an impact on German reunification?

HT: Yes, absolutely. When I joined Helmut Kohl's team, he was still Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate. I was head of the foreign and security policy department at the CDU party headquarters.



Kohl had the best and youngest cabinet in Germany. Kohl wanted to become both party chairman and Federal Chancellor. He brought me to Mainz to advise him on foreign and security policy.

I advised him to maintain an international presence and get to know the key players. We then organized trips to the Warsaw Pact countries—to Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and also to Russia.

We also visited Tito.

As the prime minister of one of Germany's smallest federal states, Kohl could not expect to be received by the top leader in Moscow. So we flew there

without an appointment or an agenda.

The next day, we were suddenly granted an audience with General Secretary Yuri Andropov. He was already seriously ill and could not get up from his desk. So we approached him from behind, and he stood up briefly. A month later, he died, and we were invited to the funeral.

I advised Kohl to attend, since the new General Secretary would surely be introduced at the funeral. And so we immediately met Leonid Brezhnev. He, too, died soon after, and at the next funeral we met his successor, Konstantin Chernenko. After Chernenko, a General Secretary suddenly emerged who did not deliver statements prepared with the Politburo, but with whom one could speak directly and spontaneously: Mikhail Gorbachev.

Question: So trust was built through personal contacts. Who, then, came up with the idea for German reunification?

HT: I was already acquainted with the Soviet ambassador to Germany, Yuli Kvizinskij. The Soviets had made no further comment on the fall of the Berlin Wall, and an interview with Helmut Kohl in *'Newsweek'*, in which a comparison of Gorbachev to Reich Propaganda Minister Goebbels had been interpreted, had greatly angered the Russian side. Further meetings were therefore out of the question. In January 1990, Kvizinskij—who had since become Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union—contacted me directly, saying he needed to speak with me urgently. I asked him what Russia needed. He replied with one word: “Meat.”

We then organized aid shipments that also included other essential goods, such as soap, worth about two billion marks. Shortly thereafter, we were invited to Moscow by Gorbachev.

Question: If I understand you correctly, trust with the Soviet Union was thus built through empathy and a willingness to help, without expecting or demanding anything in return?

HT: Yes. I was supposed to take the minutes at the meeting, but I didn't know shorthand. The two interpreters took their own shorthand notes. After about ten minutes, Gorbachev said, “It is

entirely up to the two German states to decide how they wish to proceed.”

Kohl initially had doubts about this momentous statement and asked Gorbachev to repeat it.

Afterward, I compared my minutes with the translators’ shorthand notes, and yes, that statement was definitive.

No border as a confidence-building measure – the case of China and Taipei

When I met the Senior Representative of Taipei in a Grand Hotel in Bern for Lunch to present our estimate of the opportunity cost for the military both of Taipei and the People's Republic, I lived in a perspective that turned out to be biased by the German reunification.

In 2022 when I published my study in the UNDESA, the Military costs of Taiwan were at \$ 18 billion per year. So I estimated the double costs, \$ 36 billion for China to reach a total of \$ 54 billion per year – much higher than the military expenditures of the two German States before 1989.



Image: Chat GPT and Nicolas Dill

When I presented my study on the opportunity cost of the alleged conflict between China and Taipei to Diplomats of the UN Mission of China in Geneva, they smiled and said “Your estimate is far too high”.

So what did I have to learn?

First: From 1991 on, Taipei has been the biggest single investor in China's industry. Even 2024, the major trade partner of Taipei has been – the People's Republic of China.

In March 2026, forty per cent of the heavily growing exports of Taipei went to China Mainland and Hong Kong.

In fact, the relations between Taipei and the People's Republic are much deeper.

After a peak of 430.000 Taiwanese employees working in Mainland China in 2012, still 231.000 were counted in 2024. The prioritisation of economic growth in both countries pushes political differences in the backyard.

When talking to Diplomats from Beijing and Taipei, they would hesitate to admit any urgent conflict proceeding. They express the existence of "different perspectives", but not with a clear claim in consequence.

To underpin this status quo, officially no border separates Taipei from the Mainland. The border appears highly virtual though. No "border violations" are reclaimed. No barriers stand in the way.

Unlike the supposedly existing maritime "EU external border," neither side is taking any measures to "protect" their country against goods or migrants. This is remarkable and demonstrates how confidence-building measures can function tacitly, entirely without formal agreements or arrangements.

The debate over the form of government in Taipei and Beijing, which dominates Western media, does not determine day-to-day relations. They speak one language. They share a common goal: prosperity. And the fact that war does not lead to prosperity is, in much of Asia, a bitter lesson learned from Japanese rule.

The "systemic question"—already invoked in Western circles during the Korean and Vietnam Wars in the context of the Domino Theory—did not even lead to destabilization when Hong Kong returned to the People's Republic.

The opportunity costs of the military on both sides can and should nevertheless be reduced, as this would increase prosperity.

The Long Farewell to a Pointless Border – Afghanistan and Pakistan

In 1893, following the British defeat during the occupation of Afghanistan, the then British Foreign Secretary, Mortimer Durand, conceived the idea of separating the British sphere of influence—which still existed at the time—from the Afghan Empire by establishing a border. The 2,640-kilometer-long border (no one knows the exact length) has since been named the Durand Line in his honour, a name it retains to this day.

The following text has been published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and has led to a session in the German Parliament in 2018 to present confidence-building measures to end the war over the governance of Afghanistan. At the time Heiko Maas from the Social Democrats SPD was Minister of Foreign Affairs. The people in Afghanistan and Pakistan share the same social values and perceptions—this surprising result questions the interpretation of the violent conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan to being driven by ethnic, political and religious dissensions. (Image: Chat GPT and Nicolas Dill)



Once the reason or reasons behind a conflict is understood, there should then follow an understanding of the rational conflict between divergent interests, that can then in turn hopefully be resolved through legal agreements.

Following this idea, Germany hosted one of the most advanced attempts ever to achieve peace in Afghanistan. In line with the Afghan tradition of the *Loya Dschirga*, or Council of Elders, the Bonn process invited leaders and representatives of tribes of the 34 Afghan provinces to Bonn on 27 November 2001, just two months after the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

In October 2001, British and U.S forces invaded in Afghanistan to support a regime change. After a further 16 years and the subsequent involvement of many other nations' armed forces, including Germany, lasting peace and reconciliation is still not established in Afghanistan.

The concepts of governance and rule of law portray conflicts as being a simply question of compliance with rules and regulations. Paradoxically, this perspective brings up an entire obstacle for peace: According to the UN Charta of 1945, war is only permitted in the cases of either self-defence or of a unanimous decision of the UN Security Council. Neither fit the wars "on terror" in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Helsinki Act of 1975, which helped to end the Cold War, contained the principles of sovereignty, judicial equality and territorial integrity.

In foreign aid, the legal and security perspective—represented in Afghanistan by ISAF—competes with the development perspective, which identifies poverty as a major cause for internal violent conflicts.

As a result, the Federal Republic of Germany is addressing the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan—both countries are blaming each other for enduring clashes across the border—on the level of three governmental agencies: The Ministry for Development addresses

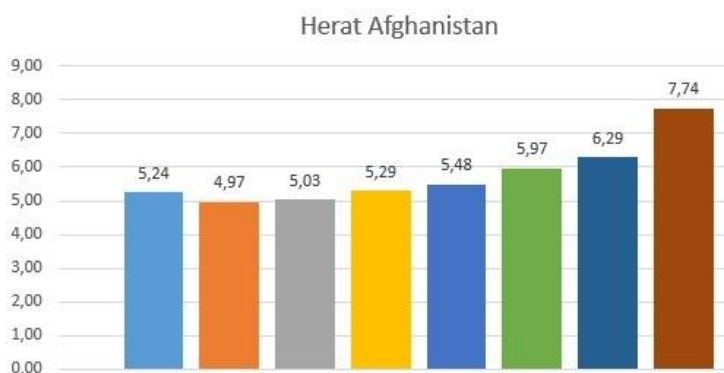
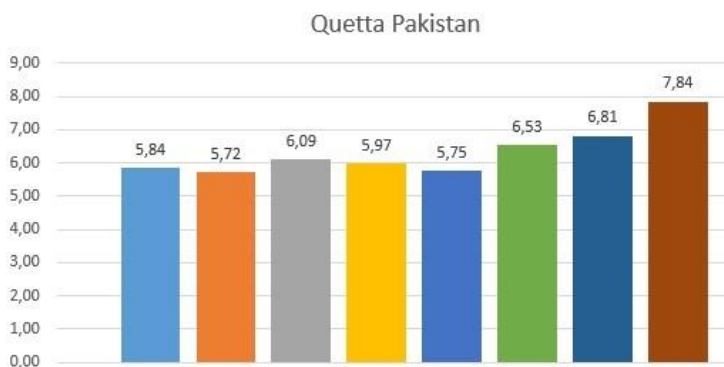
issues such as nutrition, health and education. The Foreign Office tries to enhance governance, civil society and legal institutions. The Defence Ministry tries to improve the security—including to allow the US government to launch drone attacks in Pakistan from German Air bases.

Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) on which in 2014 all 193 United Nations members agreed, Peace (SDG 16) has been sidelined by major donors and organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank and the EU. There is no discussion about this. It may be suspected that addressing SDG 16 first will evoke controversial positions for the major areas of conflict. On the other hand, SDG 16 is a good occasion to review the current perspective on peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As shown by the recent results from the UN SDG Partnership project, the World Social Capital Monitor, the Social Capital shared in both countries resemble each other closely.

In the Pakistani town of Quetta, a Pashto town with leading Quran Schools, the social goods show the same pattern as in Herat (see images). Hospitality (brown) is the major social asset in these two regions entirely differing by language, tribe and religion. Trust (orange) is low in both towns.

Legend (columns from left to right): Social Climate, Trust, Acceptance of austerity measures, Acceptance of taxes, Acceptance to invest in cooperatives and SME, Helpfulness, Friendliness, Hospitality.



When groups share the same values and perceptions, this is called bridging Social Capital. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, contributor to the issue within the World Bank in 1998, called Social Capital a tacit knowledge. So why not addressing frozen conflicts by identifying bridging aspects between the conflicting parties? The towns of Quetta and Herat could become sister towns, such as many German and French towns did after World War II. Enduring peace cannot be brought about by legal commitments alone. If yes, the UN Charta would have been respected as well by the United States and Russia. If yes, the Helsinki Act from 1975 would still be valid in Europe.

Bridging social goods such as trust, solidarity, helpfulness and hospitality are the source of any peace and reconciliation.

Seeking out and identifying the rational argument behind can have the effect of fanning the flames of that conflict. Bridging social goods such as trust, solidarity, helpfulness and hospitality are the source of any peace and reconciliation. So, considering them within the SDG 16 process can be a new attempt to overcome two biases currently present in addressing conflicts:

1. Attributing conflicts to a lack of governance and rule of law gives undue importance to regime change;
2. Attributing conflicts to poverty and missing education gives undue importance to economic interventions from abroad, e.g. in foreign investment, agriculture and schooling.

Nevertheless, the countries fomenting wars by delivering weapons and starting interventions since decades are mostly affluent countries with advanced legal institutions. It's the rich that bring war to the poor. Understanding their motivations didn't help the United Nations to prevent them from violating the sovereignty of others. In the end, it is like couples' therapy: instead of repeating all the reasons for the separation the mediator focusses on the common issues of children and family budgets. So why should outdated and inefficient ways to interpreting conflicts by religion, poverty and ethnicity continue to be the knowledge base of foreign funding and interventions?

New types of peaceful attempts to overcoming frozen conflicts such as considering culture and social capital, offering open participation in surveys and democratic processes, and allowing conflicting parties to make their points are crucial for SDG 16.

To appreciate the social capital of conflicting parties in frozen conflicts such as in Palestine, North Korea, Ukraine and Russia, Eritrea, Syria, Iraq, West Africa, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan will meet the motto of the SDG which is "leave no one behind". Instead of providing unilateral standards we may enhance what we expect in our culture as well: to have our own values and social goods considered and respected.

The OSCE – confidence-building measures as a program

In the early 1970s the wounds of World War II began to heal. The idea came up, to create a cutting edge between the East and the West. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) started in Helsinki 1973.

It was clear that NATO, founded in 1949, was unable to promote understanding and reconciliation among the nations involved in World War II. The OSCE, which was subsequently established in Vienna, included both the Soviet Union and the United States. To this day, the Russian Federation remains a member of the OSCE. When the conflicts in Ukraine escalated in 2014, the OSCE would actually have been the appropriate forum for confidence-building measures to prevent further escalation.

Neutral OSCE observers, including those from Switzerland, therefore sought to implement confidence-building measures.

The Basel Institute contributed several proposals and even entered into contracts with neutral partners in the Donbas.

The proposals were based on the results of the Social Capital Assessment of Donbass in both languages that we collected in an anonymous digital survey:

<https://trustyourplace.com/?lang=ru>

<https://trustyourplace.com/?lang=ukr>

The suggestions were presented in 2014 yet to the General Secretary of the OSCE, Mr. Lamberto Zannier.

And this is his answer:



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretary General

Vienna, 16 February 2015

Dear Dr. Dill,

Hereby I would like to confirm the receipt of your letter of 19 January 2015. While I appreciate your interest in the OSCE, the OSCE Secretariat can unfortunately not take advantage of your offer to inform the participating states of your assessment and to present a proposal to resolve the current conflict on Ukraine and Russia based on considering the Social Capital of all countries involved. Your field of analysis and thematic approach is outside the agreed activities of the OSCE.

Should you wish to pursue this matter further, you may explore appropriate procedures for such a project with any of OSCE participating States, including Switzerland.

Yours sincerely,

Lamberto Zannier

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We nevertheless continued to keep up the contact with the population in the area of conflict. By the help of the Swiss Special OSCE Observer for Donbass, we could negotiate an agreement with the Donbass Development Centre (DCC) in late 2016. The agreement has been signed in September 2016 and is worth to be presented here.

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN BASEL INSTITUTE OF COMMONS AND ECONOMICS AND
DONBASS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

This Memorandum of Understanding (hereinafter - “MOU”) is entered into by **the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics**, Gerbergasse 30 CH 4001 Basel, Switzerland, represented by the Dr. Alexander Dill, Director (hereinafter - “The Basel Institute”) and non-profit organization **Charity Foundation “Donbass Development Centre”**, 34B, Radchenka Street, Druzhkivka, Donetska Oblast, Ukraine, 84200, represented by Skyba Anastasiya, Chairman of the Board) (hereinafter “the DDC”), The Basel Institute and the DDC are hereinafter jointly referred to as the “Parties”

WHEREAS, the DDC is a charitable organization whose mission is to support promotion of the legitimate interests of the beneficiaries, particularly affected in armed conflict and accidents, refugees and persons who are in difficult circumstances,

WHEREAS, the Parties share similar missions and wish to cooperate in the areas of mutual concern to enhancing the Social Capital in Donbass

NOW, THEREFORE, the Parties agree to cooperate in a spirit of trust, solidarity and understanding as follows:

1) The purpose of this MOU is to provide a framework of cooperation and facilitate collaboration between the Parties, on a non-exclusive basis, in areas of common interest. The overall purpose of collaboration of the Parties is rapid response to the issues caused by the armed conflict that adversely affected citizens' rights and freedoms, civil society development, as well as social and economic life in the region and Ukraine in general.

Once the agreement has been signed, Basel Institute tried again to involve the OSCE and OSCE Member States – including the Swiss Federation – to support the measures that directly addressed the 'armed conflict' - six years before the escalation that will since then be called 'military operation' and 'war of Russia against Ukraine', depending on the perspective.

And this is what the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE, Marcel Peisko, answered in May 2017:

“Unfortunately, we do not see a methodological role for your tools within the operational modalities we currently employ.”

According to the OSCE, the Minsk Agreement has been the roadmap to proceed. In Paragraph 12 of the Minsk agreement it says:

“Elections will be held in compliance with the relevant standards of the OSCE with the monitoring by the OSCE ODIHR.”

While neither the OSCE nor the Trilateral Contact Group since then started any activity to conduct elections under the surveillance of the OSCE, Basel Institute of Commons and Economics continued to suggest free elections for the Donbass and delivered a proposal for trust-building measures to the General Secretary of the OSCE, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid on January 24th 2022:

To the OSCE
Secretary General
Ms. Helga Maria Schmid

Proposal for two confidence-building measures in the conflict over Russia and Ukraine

Basel, January 24th 2022

The escalation in the relationship between the NATO countries and Russia will be further fuelled on Monday, 24.01.2022 by a declaration of the European Union that we already know about. In this statement, Russia alone is held responsible for the escalation and threatened with further economic sanctions. In order to stop the escalation, our Institute is making the following proposals for confidence-building measures, which we submit to the OSCE in Vienna.

The background to this is our ongoing survey with language choices of Russian and Ukrainian, in which members of the parties to the conflict also participate anonymously:

<https://trustyourplace.com/?lang=ukr>
<https://trustyourplace.com/?lang=ru>

The two suggestions were to end all sanctions against Russia and to conduct elections in the Donbass under the hospices of the OSCE where people could decide whether they like to be independent, Russian or Ukrainian.

The following day, the OSCE answered the last time.

Dear Dr. Dill,

We acknowledge receipt of your email.

With best regards,

Vojko Crep | Senior Secretary
Assistant to the Secretary General



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe

[@osce](https://www.osce.org) | [@osce.ru](https://www.osce.org) | [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/osce) | [linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/osce) | [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/osce)

On January 31st 2022,

Basel Institute picked up the contact with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for the preparation of the visit of Germany's chancellor Olaf Scholz to Putin that was planned for February 15th 2022. The

proposal was though submitted to both the Foreign Section of the SPD and the chancellery, where Alexander Jung was in charge for the Ukraine. Both confirmed the receipt and indicated to include the suggestion in the preparation of the visit.

There was very few public information on what happened at the visit. Germany's major public news, Tagesschau, reported the talks to have lasted four hours. And this was the official result:

“Chancellor Scholz demonstrated diplomatic tact and backbone in Moscow. And he showed President Putin just how united the West is on the Ukraine issue.”

Credit: <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/scholz-putin-moskau-101.html>

Nine days later, the Russian Federation started the war.

In March 2022 yet, several attempts to mediate in the conflict over Ukraine were launched by e.g. the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and by the President of Türkiye. Negotiations in Istanbul failed in April 2022.

In September 2023, Horst Teltschik, Member of Board of the Basel Institute, launched a proposal for a peace agreement, together with former NATO General Harald Kujat and the Professors Hajo Funke and Peter Brandt.

The suggestion has been delivered to the German Parliament and as well to Chancellor Olaf Scholz,

It was based on the following estimate:

“No one can win this war. It has been clear for some time now that neither Russia nor Ukraine can win this war, because neither side will achieve the political goals for which they are fighting it. Even with Western support in the form of weapons and ammunition supplies, as well as training for Ukrainian soldiers, Ukraine cannot defeat Russia militarily.”

Credit: <https://www.lippische-gesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/12/Kujat-u.a..pdf>

Now, in June 2026, this assessment—which is clearly not shared by either the warring parties or their supporters—has still not been refuted.



In June 2024, Swiss Federal President Amherd made an attempt to organize a Summit on Peace in Ukraine in neutral

Switzerland. In the end, 88 delegations signed a communiqué. However, Russia was not invited to the conference.

When asked why organizations such as the OSCE, the EU, and NATO were unable to end the conflict through confidence-building measures, Horst Teltschik replied: “Civil servants alone cannot implement proposals. Political leadership is needed.”

So it is not a failure of processes within an organization—the OSCE did, after all, review and reject our proposals—but rather a lack of leadership with the will to end a conflict.

To date, most organizations and states have attempted to address the Ukraine conflict. And even the People’s Republic of China, viewed by many as the only promising mediator, had a compelling argument, as a government advisor explained at a conference in Tehran when asked why China was not intervening:

“In our experience, applying pressure does not yield lasting results.”

The role of traffic for confidence-building measures –

The Kaliningrad-Kyiv-Minsk-Moskva-Railway

From May 8th 1945 on, around 200 million citizens of the former Soviet Union enjoyed the end of genocide, ethnical cleansing, slavery and starvation.

It is estimated that 27 million Russian citizens lost their lives during World War II, making this costly victory the “Great Patriotic War.”

The relative safety from war and persecution that lasted at least until 2014 led millions of young Russians to move to cities far from their home regions to study and work, whether those cities were Tbilisi, Riga, Kyiv, Minsk, Moscow, or St. Petersburg.

Until 2014, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine were connected not only by a shared language and culture, but also by families visiting their relatives across borders. Until 2014, there were daily direct flights from the airport in Donetsk to destinations such as Munich.

Few people know that even after the conflict over Ukraine escalated, two trains still run daily from Kaliningrad to Moscow. The trip takes 19 hours and three minutes. Tickets start at around 132 euros (one-way) and can be booked at Russiantrain.com.



Поезда Калининград — Москва: расписание, цены и ж/д билеты

Расписание поездов Калининград — Москва со всеми изменениями от РЖД, 2026 год. Стоимость билетов, покупка ж/д билетов онлайн. Время в пути на поезде от 19 ч 3 мин. Купить билет на поезд онлайн, чтобы не стоять в очереди у кассы.

The route passes through Lithuania, a NATO and EU member state, into Belarus, which borders Russia directly. According to the Belarusian UN Mission in Geneva, following the outbreak of war on February 24, 2022, the Ukrainians seized approximately 400 cars and locomotives belonging to the Belarusian railway.



Image: Chat GPT and Nicolas Dill

The proposal made by the Basel Institute in 2023 to the three countries—Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine—would have made it possible to travel from Kyiv to Russia via Minsk—and thus avoid passing through a war zone.

The Mediterranean Peace Railway Initiative

As a direct neighbour of the conflict-ridden states in the Middle East, the European Union has repeatedly sought to find common ground. Following the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in November 1995 and the Barcelona Declaration of 1998, an unusual research commission was awarded to the Italian Istituto Affari Internazionali: Mohamed Kadry Said was tasked with compiling an inventory of confidence-building measures in the Near and Middle East. This was published in 1999 under the title “Confidence Building Measures: A Practical Approach.”

<https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai9952.pdf>

Much like in relations between nuclear powers, arms control was long viewed as a confidence-building measure. To this end, a Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) was established, with Russia and the United States serving as sponsors. Confidence-building measures in the Middle East were actively promoted not only by the European Union, but also by U.S. Presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama. The King of Jordan, Egyptian presidents, and even Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin took part in meetings aimed at ending the conflict over Palestinian rights that had been ongoing since 1947.

In 1994, Rabin, along with his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

As of 2026, the time this short guide was written, all attempts by anyone to build trust in the Middle East in any form had failed. In 2025, the Swiss Confederation’s MENA representative, Wolfgang Amadeus Brühlhart, was working to initiate new talks in Geneva.

During these talks, new approaches to confidence-building measures were presented, including a proposed railway line that would connect Egypt on the coast to Syria via Gaza, Israel, and Lebanon. Its name: the Mediterranean Peace Railway.



Image: Chat GPT/Nicolas Dill

The United Nations had just issued a call for projects for the Decade of Sustainable Transport 2026–2035. Approximately 100 projects were accepted and published, and the Peace Railroad is one of them. In the following, I am transcribing a report that gives a few details.

The Mediterranean Peace Railway: An economic solution to a political conflict

By Roland Bardy, Basel Institute of Commons and Economics

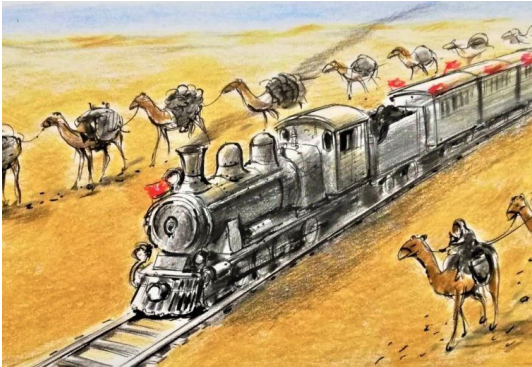
After the many decades in which hundreds of legal and diplomatic efforts have tried to end destruction and bring peace to the Middle East, a common understanding seems to be rising that more is needed than initiatives by UN Secretaries General and US Presidents or by transnational institutions.

The new understanding is about involving the people who are concerned, and about giving them the chance to take part in reconstruction. Any reconstruction effort, especially in the Gaza strip will involve a cost that surpasses millions of billions of USD.

There also is the fact that, as per a statement by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), „the enormous resources spent on military arsenals and waging regional wars have succeeded in crowding out investments for sustainable development support“ (*Unlocking the Public Opportunity Cost to Financing Sustainable Development*: Hameed Opeleyeru, OIC Permanent Observer to the UN, Presentation on 29 October 2024). But there also is the fact that for reconstruction to get into motion, transportation and mobility are needed – workers, building materials and other goods have to be carried to all the locations where they are required. And mobility brings much more: It brings people together – in the end, it furnishes collective action. Why not start with building a railway line? A line that connects all the locations and regions affected by and engaged in reconstruction would be a socio-economic development corridor, it would be a peace development corridor.

The OIC’s reference to sustainable development emphasizes that all reconstruction efforts are connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and that these are all interlinked: poverty and hunger cannot be eradicated without good health and wellbeing and access to water and sanitation, infrastructure cannot be built without peace and strong institutions. While there certainly is a predominance in serving the basic needs in the first place, other economic undertakings would also have an effect on satisfying that demand. When Germany was rebuilt after World War II and everyone was prioritizing provision of food, clothing and housing, it was Ludwig Erhard, who, in his role as Minister of Economic Affairs, favored the development of car manufacturing. This would not only create jobs and income but also generate demand for many other goods and services. Similarly, in rebuilding the Gaza, a transport solution for the Palestine that connects the region to all neighboring countries might not be viewed as a priority. But building this “Peace Railway” would have a multitude of economic, social and ecological consequences. First and foremost, it would unite the communities in common interest and common efforts.

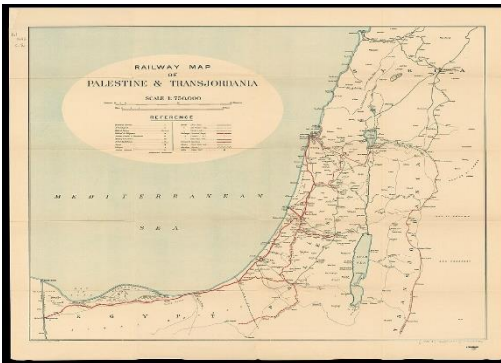
With achieving stable and peaceful relations, SDG 16 would be automatically attained. The objective of launching a project structure by end 2026 is demanding. But there have been a large number of positive reactions from state representatives and from



industry, with the most prominent being Siemens Mobility. The challenges will be enormous. Like in Erhard's post-war Germany, there will have to be

outside contribution from many sources and institutions. One other comparison may be alluded to. This is to the project that can be seen as a forerunner in the region. It was in 1922, when a "Railway Map of Palestine & Transjordan" was released as per the image shown here. We use this image because the tracks of the new line would run along the same route in the South.

In 1922, the challenge was not borders and conflicts but delivering



the water for steam locomotives. The water issue motivated the route to be moved to the backlands where water was easier available.

Today we would need electricity -

the rain will be electrified.

This is not utopic in a region rich in solar power. We would need finance, we would need infrastructures, both of “bricks and mortar” and of manpower, from high-end engineering to skilled and unskilled workers. For skill building, new educational facilities will “pop up” – a great accomplishment for the area. There are many examples where a technical project spurred the establishment of colleges and technical schools.

It is not just the railway tracks; there will also be a need for buildings of all kinds. Which particular locations would benefit from the project will depend on the specific layout of the route. There are various possibilities, but any of them would to connect to existing projects like the 2000 km track on which Siemens is working in Egypt, and to routes that the company plans to build between Jordan, Syria and Turkey (all, in order to guarantee success, will be “build and maintain” projects).

The ecological and economic impact of the project is self-evident. For the social impact, we might go back to a definition for “transport” that was taught in business schools before the concept of logistics came up: Transport is about eliminating distances. That includes social distances - mobility links to the ideas of admission to any facility for all, of liberty, and minimization of risk. This concerns one of the foremost SDGs, namely, equity and social inclusion: The project will accelerate the access to employment, to education, healthcare and social activities. Allowing all population in the region to use public transport is the “horizontal view” of the topic; the vertical approach reaches even further: Public transport serves the social groups that need it the most: low-income households, young people and older people.

Public transport both consumes resources but also produces huge value for society. The Peace Railway, at least at its beginning, will not produce revenues from passengers; even the fees collected from freighters will not cover the costs. The difference will have to

be met from subsidies of many sources. In all, we do not just deal with a railway project here. As said, it is a development project for the region.

The Peace Railway project associates with another project in which the Basel Institute is involved, which is the Middle East-North Africa Digital Common Ground Map, a civil society platform for cultural exchange, social cohesion and social capital that the Institute suggested with a civil society partner which is MENA 2050.



The reach of this initiative would extend beyond the region to be covered by the railway project, but it complements it: What is needed to make up the Peace Railway, besides the physical infrastructure, is trust on all levels and between all levels.

Trust throughout the region and all MENA must be rebuilt - in many parts of the area it remains fragile and perceptions are still shaped by conflict narratives. But people, everywhere, do not want to live in conflicts. They are longing to end this.

Quite a few civil society networks in the region strive to provide solutions, even though they often operate in parallel. The Digital Common Ground Map would bring them together, both with hard-core digital infrastructure and with elements of “soft infrastructure”: These are civic legitimacy, cultural cohesion, and networks across borders. Within the borders, specific cultural

content, rooted in history, geography and tradition comprises what is called local or national social capital. But across the borders they have common ground beyond their ethnic and political economies: They share ideals and objectives, knowledge and practices. This should eventually bridge most of the differences. A common effort like that of building the railway will tie people together.



Image: Chat GPT and Nicolas Dill

In the field of social capital, the Basel Institute has a long-standing experience which it brings into this network project. The Institute has worked on re-defining and monitoring social capital since it started in 2009. The idea was to make the concept operational – i.e., applying it in a way that it powers factual results. Operationalization of the social capital concept has long been driven down by the approach of the World Bank approach which was restricted to a networking perception. The bank has named five key aspects (World Bank [1998]. *The Initiative on Defining, Monitoring and Measuring Social Capital. Social Capital Initiative*. Working Paper No. 1. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, p. 9): “groups and networks – trust and solidarity – collective action and cooperation – social cohesion and inclusion – information and communication”. As there are no direct numerical indications in official statistics that would reflect these aspects, the Bank resorted to proxy statistics, i.e. numerical measurements that

are available elsewhere. E.g., it connects its index to the number of civic associations. However, not only will this context differ from one district to the other within a country it also differs within a district. But it is these differences that may have aroused conflicts over time. The World Bank's index cannot determine how the roots of these conflicts might be eliminated and how positive outcomes may be generated¹. In the end, the World Bank has given up its index. In the bank's new strategy for reducing poverty, it explicitly emphasizes outcomes. For a development project to be launched in a conflictive region this is essential. Now, the Basel Institute's notion of social capital is an outcome perception, and, as mentioned above, the railway project will produce social outcomes. Restoration of trust and willingness to cooperate would rank in the first place, and then improvement of job opportunities, the raising the competitive advantage of (small) businesses, advancement of educational performance, of individual and public health and government effectiveness.

The most visible outcomes of the railway project will be the physical ones. Which "physical" impact from the project can be quantified at this initial stage?² The first estimation would have to be on passenger figures and cargo volumes. There is no record or history in the area to be covered by the railway on which to base this tentative information: People do not really travel; trade is literally inexistent. But some indications for cost and for first demand (and its further

¹ The Basel Institute's method to measure social capital can be performed from on a local base up by open access in 54 languages: <https://trustyourplace.com/> First results from all the countries connected by the Mediterranean Peace Railway are still available.

² As mentioned in the project's listing on the UN website, the first stage will be to create a Board and to release the business plan in October of 2026. Until then, all quantitative data are preliminary estimates. Once business plan is completed, the initiative will reach out to prospective stakeholders.

expansion) can be drawn from comparisons with other development projects. E. g., there is a Siemens project for an Egyptian railway line that is under construction presently (Kiselev, I., et al. [2024]. *BRICS TRANSPORT*. Saint Petersburg State University of Transport Review No. 1, 3/4).

This facility would have a length of 2000 kilometers, and its voluminal dimensions can be compared to the Mediterranean Corridor venture. Similarly, there is a project under way in Syria (*Shafaq News*: Syria moves to revive rail links with Iraq, Turkiye. *Damascus*, 2025-12-30) The stage of development in this region is at a different level than the one in the Palestine, but the numbers of passengers and of cargo tonnage may be assumed to reach an initial level that matches the one in post-war Syria, where the number of passengers carried (million passenger-km) was reported at 1857 in 2014, according to the World Bank, and exports per capita were USD 45.1 in 2024, and imports were USD 157. This might be an indication for an estimated volume for the Peace Railway.

From volume to cost, which mainly is the expenses for building the tracks and the utilities. At a stage where even the planning of the route has not yet begun, estimates for the construction resources needed to build the railway line are highly speculative. But any design of the track structure above ground consists of rails, sleepers and ballast. In a flat environment, one kilometer of the line requires about 20 to 40 workers³, 30.000 to 60.000 tons of sand, sand-gravel and dolomite, about 1.600 to 1.800 sleepers and 120 to 130 t of metallic tracks (Langdon, D., ed., [2021] *Spon's Civil Engineering and Highway Works Price Book*. New York; Taylor and Francis). All this can be provided by or be easily brought into the MENA region. From the prices that prevail there, a good guess for the cost of the construction material can be estimated to be 1.4 m USD per for one kilometer. In Syria, where the Mediterranean Peace line would reach a connection

³ We take it that manpower can be made available in the region; resources for training must be brought in, in part, from outside.

point, recent estimates point to a cost of about 5.5 bn to repair the country's railway lines, of which there are about 2800 kilometers. A very tentative conclusion from that figure would lead to labor cost and overhead of 1.6 bn USD for the Syrian undertaking. With all due caution, the figures may serve as an indication to the cost for building the physical rail structure of the Mediterranean project. Add to this an estimated 2 bn USD for railway utilities and buildings (based on an early estimate of around 53 bn USD by the United Nations for rebuilding all Gaza) and about 1 bn USD for electrifying 2000 kilometers plus the leasing cost of about 500 m USD for engines and cars, an approximation for the total expense would give a magnitude of 8 – 10 bn USD. The return on this investment would be that re-establishing the ability to move people and cargo in the area will raise societal and economic development.

The big question is about feasibility. Now, according to a recent statement by Siemens Mobility, not only is the project feasible, but it is a necessity, and it should be started now. Also, apart from being among the contractors, Siemens would be in a position to make contacts with investors, key suppliers, governments, and transnational institutions. This is most promising – for the project, and for the people.

Digital connectivity as a confidence-building measure – progress in Yemen

Unfortunately, it is true that so-called “social” media promote radical and hateful posts and comments. As part of the UN SDG partnerships, an app was therefore developed that allows citizens to anonymously rate their local social capital—such as helpfulness, friendliness, and hospitality. An Arabic version was created in cooperation with UNESCWA in Beirut, which oversees the 20 Arab states:

<https://trustyourplace.com/?lang=arabic>

Several months into the war in Ukraine—in the summer of 2022—the Basel Institute asked itself: Could the escalation of the war in Ukraine be an opportunity to end the war in and around Yemen? This would, of course, involve addressing the supporters of the warring parties directly. These were the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

We succeeded in securing meetings with the ambassadors of all three countries at the United Nations. During these meetings, we did not present peace treaties or agreements; instead, we began with a discussion about the assessment of the war in Ukraine. “Don’t you also believe that the war between Russia and Ukraine is completely senseless?” we asked the ambassadors.

They agreed immediately. The next question followed right away: “So what makes the war in Yemen more justifiable?”

The answer—which could be seen as proof of the existence of Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative in diplomacy—was: nothing.

Shortly thereafter, a prisoner exchange took place and hostilities ceased. A delegation from the Saudi government flew to Tehran. The Basel Institute had discovered “common sense” as a solution.

Now the Social Capital Assessment of both parts of Yemen could begin, for which an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Aden.

المحترم السيد الدكتور الكسندر ديل

مدير معهد بازل للعلوم والاقتصاد

(ESCWA السادة / لجنة الأمم المتحدة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لغرب آسيا)
المحترمون

السادة / لجنة الأمم المتحدة للتنمية المستدامة

المحترمون

تحية طيبة

الموافقة على طلب انضمام الجمهورية اليمنية إلى مشروع مرصد رأس المال الاجتماعي
العربي

تهديكم وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية والعمل أطيب تحياتها وتتمنى لكم دوام التوفيق والنجاح في مهامكم واعمالكم.

وبناء على اجتماع معالي الوزير مع السيد الكسندر ديل واجتماع منسقي الوزارة مع شركاء مشروع مرصد الرأس مال الاجتماعي العربي، تتشرف الوزارة بالموافقة على طلبكم بانضمام الجمهورية اليمنية الى عضوية مرصد رأس المال الاجتماعي العربي الذي يتم تنفيذه من قبل معهد بازل للعلوم والاقتصاد بالشراكة مع لجنة الأمم المتحدة (ولجنة الأمم المتحدة للتنمية ESCWA الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لغرب آسيا) المستدامة.

وستقوم الوزارة بعمل كافة الإجراءات اللازمة لانجاح هذا المشروع وفقاً للأنظمة المتبعة، وتعد الوزارة انضمام اليمن الى هذا الكيان الهام فرصة لتعزيز الشراكة والتنسيق بين الجمهورية اليمنية وكافة الأعضاء في هذا الكيان بما يعود بالنفع والفائدة لحكومات وشعوب الدول الأعضاء.

تجدد الوزارة الشكر والتقدير لتعاونكم الدائم، ولكافة الشركاء في هذا المرصد، متمنين للجميع والتوفيق والنجاح.

الدكتور محمد سعيد الزعو

وزير الشؤون الاجتماعية والعمل

الجمهورية اليمنية

The government in Aden immediately began the survey.
To our surprise, results from Taiz and Sanaa—that is, from the
neighbouring regions—began trickling in after just an hour.
This inspired us to create the following image:



Image: Chat GPT and Nicolas Dill

Demining, an undisputed issue

Achim Wennmann is a Professor of Practice and Nagulendran Chair in Peace Mediation at the Geneva Graduate Institute.

In this interview he describes his perspective on confidence-building measures.



How long are you in the peace-making industry?

AW: I am in my 25th year now. I have written a PhD on the financing of conflict with a focus on how a better understanding of conflict financing is contributing to de-escalation dynamics between the conflicting parties. Then I directed for ten years the Geneva

Peacebuilding Platform. I advise non-governmental and governmental actors in their de-escalation and peace-making strategies.

Question: What confidence-building measure is the most successful you have seen in these 25 years?

AW: An enduring topic has been the collaboration of war parties on land-mines in a post-conflict settings. De-mining is such a significant confidence building measure that it works everywhere from Ukraine to Myanmar. In Geneva this has been institutionalized with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. In parallel technical expertise has been build up that can be used worldwide.

Question: In the current two major conflicts over Gaza and Ukraine Mines do not play a major role. So what are the confidence-building measures there?

AW: There have been prisoner exchanges facilitated by several governments. Qatar enabled help for displaced children in the Ukraine. We can call this 'Humanitarian Diplomacy'. They represent a certain level of confidence between the parties upon other issues can be negotiated. There were also measures in South-East Ukraine to avoid the explosion of chemical and biological weapons to prevent water pollution.

Question: When mines are taken in place, the military conflict is still there. What about confidence-building measures to avoid the escalation of a conflict?

AW: They come more under a conflict prevention umbrella such as e.g. city partnerships and exchange between people, cultural events, cultural diplomacy. The core applicability of confidence-building measures is when the parties have realized their military strategy is no longer sustainable in the long run but they are institutional and ideological not still in the position to make peace. This is where confidence-building measures are particular useful and this is why third parties for identifying space for confidence-building measures are so important. The appetite for confidence-building measures is uneven distributed among the conflicting parties. There are always hawks who want to continue fighting and others who want to apply a political strategy. Even their might be appetite for CBMs in one part of the group it might not be representative for an entire group or political party. The pathway to peace means compromises with those who are the most important hawks.

Question: Who are the actors to create the space for confidence-building measures?

Societal actors can bring up the issue and say "We want confidence-building measures" to get to a deal. That's an important part of expanding the space for peace-making. Where is the demand side for confidence-building measures? It might be that it is really at a societal level with respect to people-to-people partnerships. In many countries, the decision for war is a decision by elites while most part of the population really doesn't want to fight a war.

The Economics of Confidence

Since 1995, all international organizations have relied on gross domestic product per capita as the most important indicator for evaluating countries. However, when it comes to assessing trust within and between countries, the interest rate plays a central role. The lower a country's interest rate, the greater the trust in its stability, its government, its currency, and its economy.

If a government succeeds in fostering, sustaining, and justifying this trust, its citizens benefit in many ways, including lower interest rates on their homes and investments, increased asset allocation from foreign investors, and, as a result, more stable government revenue.

Seen in this light, high trust would have to be a one-of-a-kind business case with a maximum ROI (return on investment). Governments would be scrambling to adopt this business model.

Measures to foster trust would thus be comparable to major investments in IT, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence.

The opposite is true: many countries are not investing in trust, but in mistrust.

As with personal and business loans, the interest rate reflects the lender's confidence in the borrower's ability to repay:

Interest rates June 2026 worldwide

Country	Interest Rate
Switzerland	0.00
Japan	0.75
Singapore	1.00
European Union	2.15
Canada	2.25
South Korea	2.50
China	3.00
Great Britain	3.75
USA	3.75
Saudi Arabia	4.25
Australia	4.35
India	5.25
Brazil	14.5
Russia	14.5
Türkiye	37.0

The following table from 2021 shows which countries invested in trust and which invested in mistrust

Governmental investment in military research as a percentage of their annual R&D investments 2021:

Fig. 1 The wildest military researcher The smartest government research budgets

Israel	65 (see study)	Belgium	0,09 OECD
Iran	65 estimate	Austria	0,13 OECD
North Korea	65 estimate	Switzerland	0,17 OECD
United States	46 OECD	Mexico	0,23 OECD
Russian Federation	46 estimate	Denmark	0,33 OECD
Ukraine	46 estimate	Portugal	0,40 OECD
China	46 estimate	Italy	0,55 OECD
Turkey	21 OECD	Colombia	0,92 OECD
South Korea	15 OECD	Czech Republic	1,01 OECD
United Kingdom	14 OECD	Spain	1,11 OECD
Taiwan	9 OECD	Netherlands	1,34 OECD
France	6 OECD	Greece	1,48 OECD
Germany	4 OECD	Canada	1,97 OECD

Government Budget Allocation (GBARD) for Military Research as a percentage of GBARD. Sources:

OECD: <https://www.nationmaster.com/nmx/ranking/defence-budget-on-rd>

Israel: <https://www.neaman.org.il/Files/STE4.pdf>

It is striking that five of the six countries with the highest investment in military research in 2021—that is, in mistrust—were at war in 2026.

So is it worth investing in confidence-building measures?

None of the ten countries with the lowest spending on military research is involved in even a single military conflict—not even a territorial dispute.

When, shortly after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, even leading business newspapers such as the German ‘Handelsblatt’ identified the goals as an “investment case,” it quickly became clear that ending military conflicts offered the greatest economic benefit.

Making the UN Goals an investment case

Investors do take the UN Sustainability Goals into consideration. But, the investments often benefit the transnational co-operations more than the **companies and people** that the SDGs are made for. New **financing models** are therefore urgently needed.

Sustainable business models could create a market capitalization of \$12 trillion and create 380 million new jobs by 2030 – that is what the Business and Sustainable Development Commission (BSDC) has forecasted. This two-year multi-stakeholder initiative has studied how relevant the 2015 UN Sustainability Goals are for the respective activities of companies and investors.

TOPTHEMA
11.5.2018 | Nr. 5



Source: https://commons.ch/wp-content/uploads/Making_the_UN_Goals_an_Investment-Case.pdf

However, investors and experts soon realized that neither private nor government budgets could support confidence-building measures.

According to a study recent published by Professor Achim Wennmann from the Geneva Graduate Institute, the total budget for Institutes focussed on Peace and Mediation was around 300 Million Dollar in 2024. They are allocated by few countries such as Colombia, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Remarkable domestic resources to avoid conflicts were as well noted in Oman and Qatar.

Source:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/579fc2ad725e253a86230610/t/6a0b4d7c5fb843682588623b/1779125629851/6_WhereAreThePeacemakers_Wennmann%28summer2026%29.pdf

Measuring mutual trust

“How is trust among the people?” – this question is a part of ten indicators in the World Social Capital Monitor. It is available in 54 languages. The answers can be given on a scale between 10 (high) and 1 (low). Here some results from <https://trustyourplace.com> :

Australia	8,0
Bangladesh	5,0
Bosnia Herzegovina	5,0
Brazil	4,6
Cameroon	3,8
Canada	6,0
DR Congo	3,5
Egypt	4,8
France	4,7
Germany	7,1
India	5,4
Indonesia	6,7
Iraq	5,5
Kenya	5,0
Lebanon	4,9
Liberia	5,0
Montenegro	3,5

Nigeria	5,2
Palestine	6,2
Phillippines	4,0
Romania	4,6
South Africa	4,8
Türkiye	5,1
Uganda	4,5
Ukraine	5,9
United States	4,1
Yemen	3,6
Zambia	5,3
Zimbabwe	6,5

Due to open access and anonymity, no representativeness of the results is reclaimed. However, the open access feature allows to repeat the survey any time which may give indications of what has changed within a time-span. Participants are invited to verify the results for themselves. It's very simple: all they have to do is recruit 10 respondents and then request the results from us. Note: to recruit 10 respondents, you'll need to approach about 100 people. Here is a brief look at results for the perception of trust.

With trust being indispensable for confidence-building measures, it takes no wonder that there is a wide spread between the high and the low. Again, the method allows for repetition and from there one might see how a specific measure of confidence-building has worked. More information on the methodology can be found on:

[https://commons.ch/wp-content/uploads/Understanding the Methodology of the World Social Capital Monitor.pdf](https://commons.ch/wp-content/uploads/Understanding_the_Methodology_of_the_World_Social_Capital_Monitor.pdf)



By Frits Ahlefeldt

Basel Institute of Commons and Economics

The Basel Institute of Commons and Economics has been founded in 2010 to assess non-material goods and their impact on politics and economy.

Since then, 50+ studies have been published. In 2016, Basel Institute applied for several Stakeholder Partnerships in the United Nations.

Recent contributions to the UN Community can be browsed here:

<https://commons.ch/un-consultations/>

Among the clients are the Canton of Basel, Switzerland, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Foreign Ministry of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.