STRA-
TEGY
2025

STIFTUNG
MERCATOR

PREFACE

Dear friends and partners of Stiftung Mercator,

This strategy was approved by the executive bodies of Stiftung Mercator in September 2020. This was preceded by an intensive consultation process that was based on recommendations made by an evaluation committee.

In this brochure we will present the activities and goals to which we will be devoting ourselves over the next five years. A five-year cycle may seem short for renewing a foundation's strategy. However, if one looks back at the past five years, it is clear from the societal transformations that have taken place in Germany and Europe, not to mention on a global level, how quickly things change: growing migration to Europe, the escalation of the climate crisis, the increasing international pressure on the rule of law and democracy, a partial renunciation of multilateralism, tensions between China and the USA, and lastly the Covid pandemic.

A foundation that is expressly committed to addressing societal challenges must therefore remain versatile and adaptable, without losing sight of its own values in the process. We intend to achieve this with the aid of a strategic roadmap for the coming years. It pinpoints our destinations and offers a network of routes by which to reach them – including tried-and-tested paths as well as some we have yet to explore. We have set ourselves higher targets in our thematic fields of "Europe in the World" and "Climate Action", stepped up our commitment in the area of integration to include "Participation and Cohesion", and embraced a new challenge in the thematic field of "Digital Society". After a decade of intensive activities, we are concluding our work in the area of "Cultural Education" – work that we believe has achieved considerable success and will hopefully have a lasting impact.

We are delighted that so many partners are heading for the same destinations and look forward to meeting others as we embark on our new paths.

Markus Piduhn   Wolfgang Rohe   Michael Schwarz

OUR GUIDING VISION

INSPIRING IDEAS

Ideas set our society in motion. We inspire and develop ideas, and give them our practical support. We provide scope for new ideas that can change society for the better. In a diverse society, this works best when there is a balance between discourse and compromise, vision and practical application, individual freedom and pursuit of the common good.
We are committed to equal rights and equal opportunities, to social cohesion, respect, tolerance and openness to the world, and to the protection of nature and the environment.
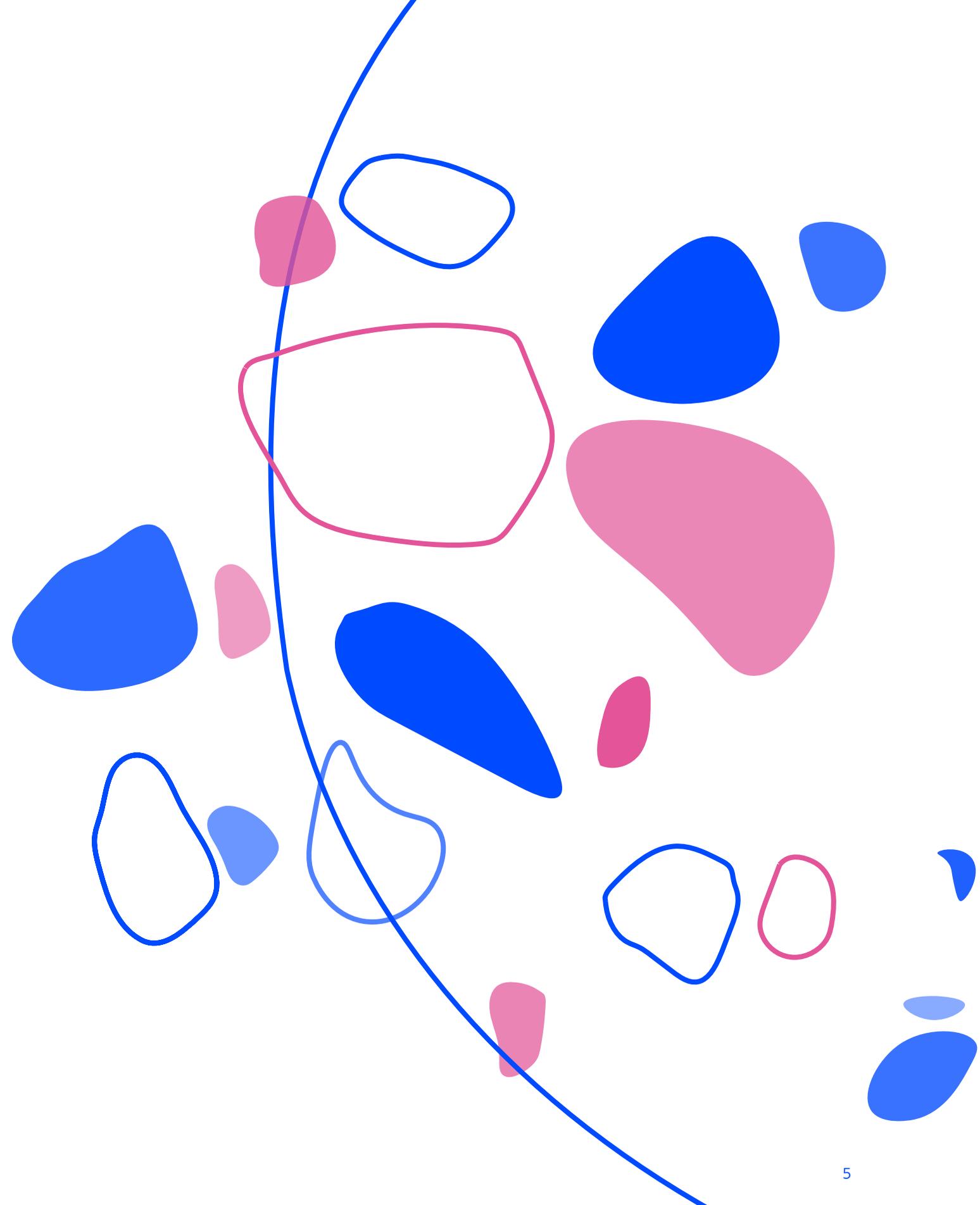
WHERE WE COME FROM

Retail entrepreneur Karl Schmidt and his family from Duisburg establishhed Stiftung Mercator at the end of the 1990s, naming it after Gerhard Mercator, a cartographer and humanist who was born in Flanders and lived for many decades in Duisburg.

WHAT WE WANT

Stiftung Mercator wants to make possible a comprehensive education and equal opportunities; to enhance the self-fulfilment of children, adolescents and young adults; to promote science and research relating to its objectives and areas of thematic focus in everyone's interests; to support mutual understanding and exchange between people of different cultures; to commit itself to a unified Europe; to improve the social prerequisites for a peaceful coexistence of people of different backgrounds, convictions and social situations; and to preserve nature and the environment.
Stiftung Mercator intends to achieve this by making possible positive examples of social progress; stimulating the imagination of all who bear a particular responsibility in politics and society; and giving impetus, either on its own or in cooperation with partners, for the shaping of the future. Its activities should always be guided by quality, professionalism and transparency and subject to public debate.

OUR THEMES AND AREAS OF ACTIVITY

DIGITAL SOCIETY

We want digital technologies in Germany and Europe to be developed and used in accordance with democratic rights and values.

1. Renewing basic normative principles

2. Defending democratic principles

3. Empowering people to take part in public discourse

CLIMATE ACTION

We want Germany to become greenhouse gas-neutral by 2050 and to help the EU as a whole to assume a global leadership role in climate action.

1. Shaping climate action in a socially just manner

2. Firmly anchoring climate action as a cross-cutting challenge

3. Strengthening societal support for climate action
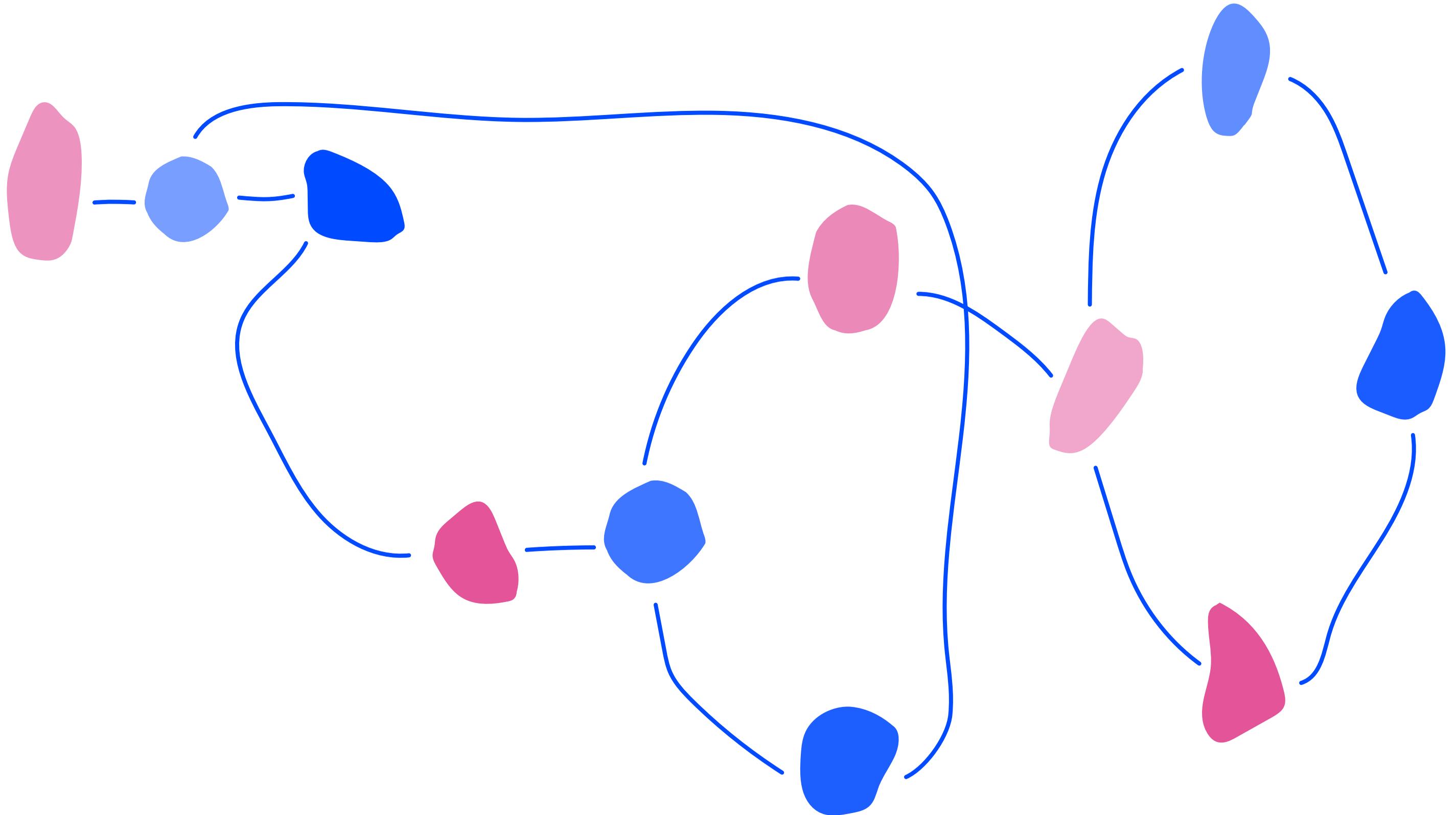
EUROPE IN THE WORLD

The continued existence of the European Union in the world depends on its degree of internal cohesion and on how it forges relationships with other countries. This is why we want to strengthen cohesion within the EU and through international understanding to contribute to the proper functioning of its relationships with key countries.

1. European cohesion

2. The rule of law in the EU

3. China and Turkey

4. International realignment

PARTICIPATION AND COHESION

We want to strengthen cohesion in our society, combat discrimination and ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to access education and participate in society.

1. Education and equal opportunities

2. Integration and social participation

3. Diversity and social cohesion

OUR OBJECTIVE: We want digital technologies in Germany and Europe to be developed and used in accordance with democratic rights and values.

AREA OF ACTIVITY 1
Renewing basic
normative principles

AREA OF ACTIVITY 2
Defending
democratic principles

AREA OF ACTIVITY 3
Empowering people
to take part
in public discourse

DIGITAL SOCIETY

OUR CONTRIBUTION: We provide impetus for renewing the basic normative principles of a digital society when it is challenged by algorithmic systems. We analyse the effects such systems have on democracies and improve the conditions for public engagement and participation, thereby strengthening democratic principles in the digital age.

BACKGROUND:

Digitization may appear old hat, a familiar megatrend that has been ongoing for at least two decades and to which everyone has become accustomed. That would constitute a dangerous misjudgement, however; after all, it is becoming ever clearer how digital technologies and the use of artificial intelligence are in the process of fundamentally transforming our society. In this sense digitization is not simply about acquiring new tools that allow us to proceed as we did before but to do so better, faster and more reliably.

The increasing use of digital technologies is changing the basic principles of our society: the way we communicate with one another, how we organize our social lives, how we engage in public debate, how we work, stay healthy or pursue science. Furthermore, digital technologies are changing the way that humans see themselves, the characteristics that define them and the rights to which they are entitled.

Digitization is challenging the basic democratic order within which we in Germany and Europe need to find political responses to these challenges. This is evident when artificial intelligence systems are used with the aim of manipulating election decisions, for example. Furthermore, digital communication in the social media is changing public political debate, which is indispensable for a democracy. Social media have led to a fragmentation of the population into individual groups and have caused polarized and extreme views to become widespread and significant patterns of communication.

This transformation will ultimately also affect democratic rights and norms such as solidarity, equality, freedom, participation, transparency and privacy. This is because it is by no means the case that all the digital technologies used around the world recognize these rights and norms. It would therefore be an oversimplification to view digitization merely as an innovative step forward that we should not miss out on. This is illustrated by two developments in the past decade: for one thing, digital media and devices are almost universally available nowadays and have become a fixture of everyday life. This has enormously compacted the relationship between humans and machines driven by algorithms.

We are hardly able any longer to separate our human habits from such habits as result from our interactions with digital applications. For another thing, data volumes and processing capacities have increased rapidly. As a result of this development, new machine-learning applications are created on a daily basis. They far exceed even complex cognitive human abilities. What is more, the performance and versatility of algorithmic systems are no longer simply a matter of programming computers. These days, machines learn themselves and are able to draw on huge quantities of data that surpass any human processing ability – especially on data that reflect human behaviour. This applies to communication and mobility, as well as to the state of health and physical function of billions of people, and also includes their consumer decisions.

It is of paramount importance that society should be involved in shaping the use and further development of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, taking advantage of their opportunities and limiting their negative effects.

DIGITAL SOCIETY
1 — RENEWING BASIC NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE S

STARTING SITUATION: The use of algorithmic systems is always geared to specific purposes. These systems are designed to decide, optimize, compare, prioritize and so forth. Without reference to norms and values it is impossible to decide which purposes are to be defined. And even in such cases where no explicit reference to values is made, algorithmic systems are never neutral; they are always value-based in two senses. Firstly, the systems adhere to the values and attitudes of their developers. Secondly, they always operate on the basis of data that reflect in their turn the moral concepts, preferences and habits of their creators in whichever context they were developed.

If digital technologies are in this sense inseparable from value attributions and value-based decisions, they entail then both an opportunity and a risk: they can strengthen values such as justice, participation, solidarity or cohesion, or indeed they can erode precisely these values. Although algorithms are used across cultural boundaries, there is no consensus about the values that they need to respect. This is why international dialogue about the following questions is urgently needed: Is it possible to agree on common values and on how they determine algorithmic systems?

This kind of dialogue cannot assume that our "European values" will automatically be recognized internationally. It would be short-sighted not to engage in such dialogue for this reason given the powerful political and economic drivers behind the spread of digital technologies, especially in China and the USA. We must represent our values in this dialogue, even if our influence may be limited. One thing is certain: digitization is forcing us to reassess the basic normative principles of our societies in Germany and Europe.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want to support the renewal of basic normative principles in a digital society. Such principles should prove themselves in international dialogue and find practical application during the development anduse of digital technologies.

OUR APPROACHES:
- Digital applications raise ethical questions. We will use these to promote international dialogue about fundamental values and concepts of humankind.

- We contribute to ensuring that fundamental values and ethical principles are translated into application-oriented approaches and practically tested.

2 — DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

STARTING SITUATION: We believe that democracy forms the political basis for any peaceful coexistence and is the prerequisite for ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to realize their potential. However, the use of digital technologies is putting pressure on democracy as a form of society and government: for example, state sovereignty can be curtailed by the power of global digital corporations; communication systems used for manipulation can undermine the true democratic principle that power constellations can be changed by elections; the use of artificial intelligence systems can make it more difficult to follow the reasoning behind decisions (regarding lending or insurance premiums, or indeed official decrees), and to correct such decisions; digital surveillance methods can hinder the free expression of opinion and restrict the diversity of opinion; digital information platforms can remove the foundation for critical journalism and a free press.

However, the application of digital technologies can also strengthen democracies, expand their problem-solving capabilities and make government administrative processes more efficient. Nothing illustrates the opportunities and risks of digital technology more clearly than the public political discourse in the social media: on the one hand it increases participation chances, while on the other it fosters the radicalization and polarization of viewpoints.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want democratic rights and principles to be preserved in a digital society. At the same time, we want greater advantage to be taken of the opportunities offered by digital applications when it comes to strengthening democracy and social cohesion.

OUR APPROACHES:
- We create spaces for trust-based dialogue between representatives of politics/government, business, science, academia and civil society. In these spaces they work together to devise ways of better protecting and strengthening democratic rights and principles in a digital society.

- We offer decision-makers in the areas of politics, business and civil society a solid analytical basis that will help them regulate, develop and use digital applications in such a way that democratic principles are upheld.

- We support the trialling and practical application of digital technologies, methods and concepts that strengthen democracy and social cohesion.

STARTING SITUATION: There is little scientific evidence available about what characterizes public discourse on digital issues in Germany and Europe, and about which attitudes on these issues predominate among the population. It was long the case that blanket statements were made about digitization. These days there is a great deal of talk about artificial intelligence, much of which focuses on the extreme situation of a rather artificial general intelligence that will prove superior to humans and could end up controlling us. The fact that so much attention is paid to this extreme scenario means that insufficient consideration is given to those areas in which AI applications have long since become an everyday part of our lives and which – in some cases problematic – consequences this could have.

For people to be able to form democratic opinions, it is necessary to have an informed public discourse, involving as widespread participation as possible, about a subject that will play a major role in shaping the future.
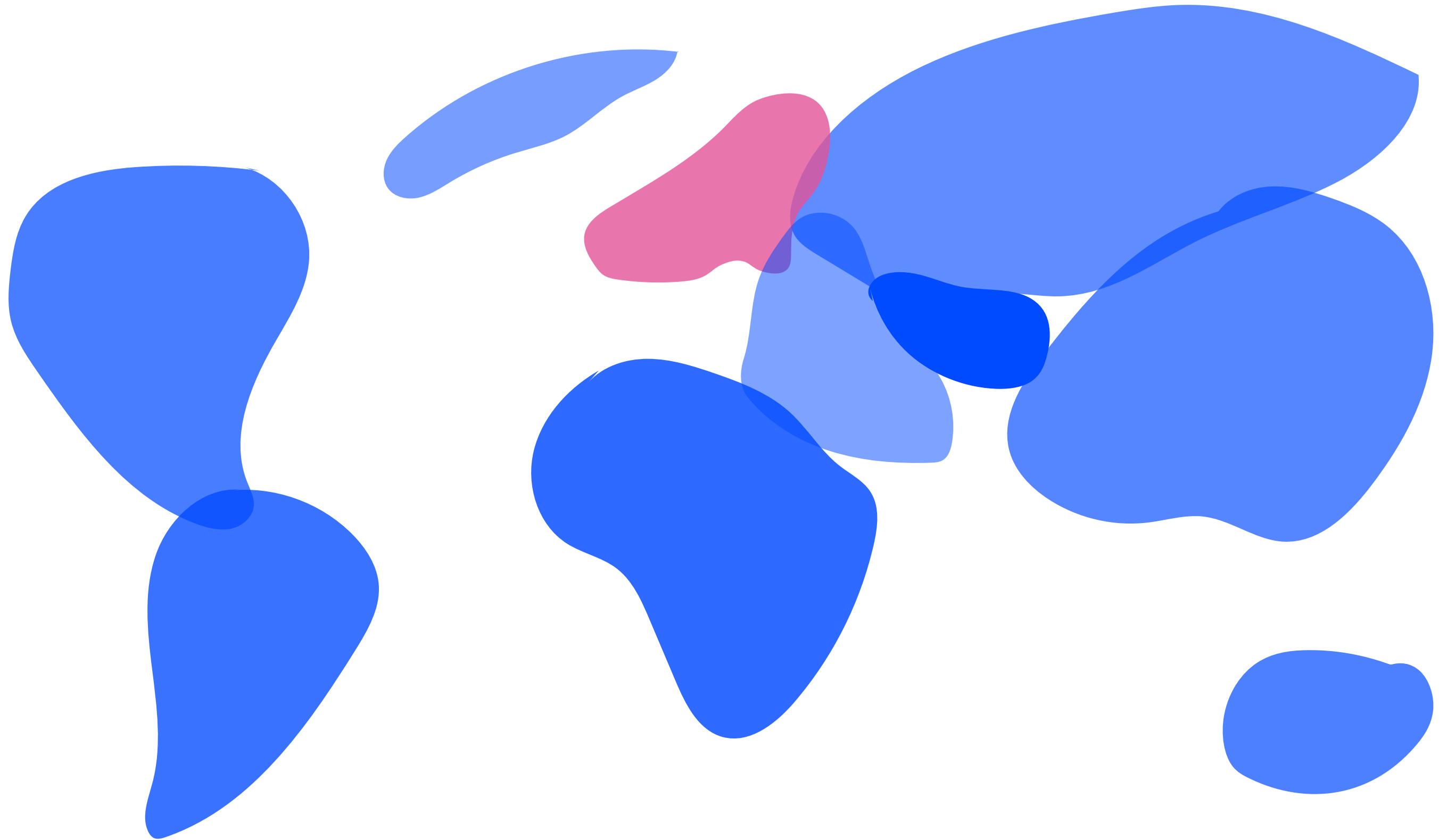
This requires on the one hand better public dissemination of knowledge about digital technology and the criteria needed to evaluate it. Publicly funded civic education has a role to play here, as have journalists and scholars, and indeed activists in the social media. On the other hand, however, what is also needed are stable civil society organizations that are willing to commit themselves continually to a plural societal dialogue and make contributions to the discourse that are oriented to the common good. There is a lack of this all over Europe due to the mere fact that the subject is still relatively new.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want a broader and better informed public discourse on the societal effects of digitization.

OUR APPROACHES:
- We help civil society in Germany and Europe to take part more effectively and with greater knowledge in discussions about the application and regulation of algorithmic systems and to raise awareness about issues in which regulation is needed.

- We encourage universities, research institutions, think tanks and others to contribute more actively to public debates on the significance and consequences of implementing algorithmic systems.

- We support fact-based media reporting about developments in digitization and their implications for society.

OUR OBJECTIVE: The continued existence of the European Union in the world depends on its degree of internal cohesion and on how it forges relationships with other countries. This is why we want to strengthen cohesion within the EU and through international understanding to contribute to the proper functioning of its relationships with key countries.

AREA OF ACTIVITY 1
European cohesion

AREA OF ACTIVITY 2
The rule of law in the EU

AREA OF ACTIVITY 3
China and Turkey

AREA OF ACTIVITY 4
International realignment

EUROPE IN THE WORLD

The foundation for the EU is its values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, non-discrimination. It wants to foster these values and peace, to provide for the wellbeing of its citizens and to ensure sustainable development on the basis of a competitive market economy. In addition, it wants to strengthen cohesion and solidarity between the member states. Although the EU has seen approval rates rise among its citizens for years, a number of governments are pursuing nationalistic interests that violate the fundamental values of the EU and its treaties. And the consequences are grave: they pose a threat to the EU's very existence and external credibility. We wish to address three questions:

1. How can we as a foundation contribute to cohesion and the rule of law in the EU?

Cohesion encompasses a variety of aspects, ranging from personal experiences and people's own commitment to others, to an individual sense of belonging and expectations of a positive future. However, interpersonal relationships and individual European experiences have declined in many EU countries over the past ten years.
Many citizens do not or no longer feel connected to the EU and do not associate their own lives with the values and positive accomplishments of the EU.

A decline in cohesion also poses a threat to democracy, as we are currently seeing both within European societies and between member states. At the same time, governments, parties and propagandists who wish to divide the EU are becoming ever stronger. Antidemocratic governments of individual member states are fundamentally questioning the EU as a union of values and a community based on the rule of law. This is weakening its credibility and authority and making it vulnerable to the subversive forces that are acting upon it both inside and out. To counter this, we want to strengthen cohesion between the citizens of the EU. We are committed to European civic education, to supporting research on the rule of law and democracy in the EU, and to strengthening and interconnecting experts in the rule of law.

2. To what extent do we first need to better understand the development of the international order?

Many experts believe that the liberal and western-dominated international order is currently experiencing its most severe crisis since the end of the Second World War – and with it the multilateral institutions. One particular role in this is played by the rise of China. New technologies such as artificial intelligence will likewise bring about major changes, as no doubt the Covid pandemic will, too. Europe must take greater responsibility for its own wellbeing and security. The key global actors in this context are not only the USA, China and Russia, but also smaller and emerging powers that are well placed to exert their influence. It is important to understand how the EU can shape its relations with these countries, and which stance these actors adopt in their turn towards a strategically autonomous Europe.

3. What contribution can we make to the relations of Germany and the EU in the spirit of international understanding?

We remain committed to our values even in this changed situation: openness to the world, respect, tolerance, and a willingness to cooperate. In upholding these values, we continue to pin our hopes on international understanding – even if changed framework conditions make this more difficult. We are defining our objectives more precisely and are aware of the risks. It is still the case that the foundation for international understanding lies in interaction between representatives of the various societies, between individuals and between as many societal groups and organizations as possible, such as NGOs, universities, foundations and think tanks.

Understanding is especially important when it comes to those societies that are difficult to understand.

OUR CONTRIBUTION: We promote the European civic education of young people so that they are able to understand and help shape the European Union. We are also committed to the rule of law in the EU. We want to better understand the actions of China and Turkey and their societies, and to support exchange and encounters with people from these countries. We will help to research Europe's role in the world and the future international order and help to develop ideas to shape these.

EUROPE IN THE WORLD
1 — EUROPEAN COHESION

STARTING SITUATION: Many factors are jeopardizing the sense of belonging that people in the EU have, and therefore social cohesion: many do not have sufficient knowledge about Europe and lack democratic competence. Many feel little connection to the European values. Individual governments are increasingly following unilateral national approaches. Especially young people from educationally disadvantaged families or from rural areas often find it difficult to identify with European values in their personal life situations. The extent to which well-developed structures for civic education exist differs within the EU. In many cases, little civic education takes place in or outside schools. In some places it is poorly taught, or there is simply a lack of funding. Civic education is something that can be conveyed particularly well through first-hand experience, which is why it would be ideal if formal teaching could be linked to an approach to learning that is based on researching and discovering. When young people have their own exchange experiences with other Europeans, they dismantle their prejudices and internalize European values.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
Stiftung Mercator wants to strengthen cohesion between citizens of the EU. It is committed to European civic education.

OUR APPROACHES:
● We provide young people between the ages of 13 and 28 with the knowledge and skills they need to take active part in a democratic society. In this context we focus particularly on young people from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds.

We improve their abilities to cope with different opinions, to exchange views through argumentation, and to find common solutions. We raise their awareness of European values such as solidarity, minority rights, equal opportunities and individual freedoms. We teach them about political institutions and their roles, and illustrate how their personal lives are affected by European politics.

We do this within and outside formal school education in both Germany and the EU. The young people are also to acquire these competencies through personal European encounters.

2 — THE RULE OF LAW IN THE EU

STARTING SITUATION: The EU is based on shared values; these include democracy, basic rights and the rule of law. Democracy requires independent courts, an active civil society and free media. In a constitutional state, political rule must be practised within the limits of the law and in line with the values of democracy and basic rights.

Its principles include transparent, democratic and pluralistic legislative procedures, legal certainty, effective protection of the rights of its citizens, a ban on the arbitrary exercising of power, the separation of powers, equal treatment by the law, independent and impartial courts and the proportionate use of governmental authority. A constitutional state thus has a direct influence on the life of all its citizens. Although the member states have different legal systems and traditions, the central basic principles of the rule of law are supported by citizens of all EU member states.

We are currently witnessing a decline in democratic and constitutional values in numerous EU countries: governments are curtailing the independence of courts and the rights of the opposition, limiting freedoms of communication and the press, restricting fair and open political competition and tolerating corruption within the justice system. While these trends are already very pronounced in some member states such as Poland and Hungary, they are becoming increasingly problematic in other states, too. Attacks on the rule of law in individual member states pose a threat to the legal, political and economic foundations of the entire EU.

There are many different ways in which to protect the rule of law: by protecting the plurality and freedom of the media, by engaging in debates on the rule of law in order to raise awareness of its value, and last but not least by shaping the justice systems and ensuring their independence in the battle against corruption.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We are committed to preserving the rule of law and democracy in the EU.

OUR APPROACHES:
● We promote research and analysis of the rule of law and democracy in the EU and draw up action recommendations.

● We create networks of experts in rule of law theory and practice within Europe and support better public communication on this topic.

EUROPE IN THE WORLD
3 — CHINA AND TURKEY

STARTING SITUATION CHINA:

China is an influential global power. The Chinese state recognizes international organizations and uses them to advance its interests. China is expanding its influence – also on the EU – by pursuing an active foreign, security, development and foreign trade policy. China uses its support of science and culture to ensure that European societies acquire a positive perception of the People's Republic. The consumer behaviour of the Chinese population has a considerable influence on the way in which international corporations design their products and services. Besides its different understanding of centralized decision-making structures, the Chinese state is characterized by state intervention in economic affairs, an active industrial policy and, in particular, the monitoring and active control of society and its citizens. There is consensus in many European countries that the EU should adopt a common stance towards China. On the other hand, interests vis-à-vis China differ within the EU. For example, the prospect of being connected to China's new silk road is economically attractive for some European states.

Germany and the EU have no interest in any conflict-oriented economic, political and social containment of China or of decoupling themselves from China, as the USA has done.

China is a vital partner when it comes to resolving global challenges such as climate change, shaping the international order and further developing the WTO. Partnership and competition with China must therefore coexist side by side, which requires careful consideration of the following questions: On which issues is it worthwhile and necessary to pursue dialogue? And on which issues should governments seek to bring influence to bear on China together with like-minded partners?

STARTING SITUATION TURKEY:

There is virtually no other country outside the EU with which Germany has such close economic, political and social ties as it has with Turkey. Nonetheless, relations between Germany and Turkey have deteriorated considerably in recent years. Turkey plays an important role as an EU neighbour and as a regional power in the Middle East. Many of the EU's core interests require close cooperation with Turkey. These include issues such as migration and integration, security policy and the fight against terrorism.

Nowadays, different kinds of partnership with Turkey that do not involve the country's accession to the EU are being considered – for example limited cooperation in individual areas such as economic and migration policy. Such models give virtually no consideration to constitutional or democratic questions, however. This is not enough. Any long-term partnership with Turkey requires the Germany and the EU to uphold their values, acknowledge their obvious differences, while not abandoning their efforts to bring about constructive cooperation on the basis of trust. If we were able to achieve this with a neighbour with whom we have such close ties, it would be an endorsement of the EU's ability to act in the area of foreign policy.

Political relations are influenced not only by institutions and norms, but also to a major extent by individuals. This is why personal relationships between Turks, Germans and other Europeans are especially important.

OUR APPROACHES FOR CHINA:

● We make more encounters possible between information disseminators, civil society actors and young people from Germany, China and other European countries with a view to deepening mutual understanding and strengthening cooperative relations.

● Germany and Europe need a partnership with China while at the same time competing with it. Politics, society and economic affairs require broad public discussion of this challenge. We want to foster such discussion.

● We support people in Germany in their efforts to communicate better with China and its citizens. For us, this means ensuring that Chinese language and culture is taught at German schools.

● We are committed to a joint European stance on and approach to China. To this end, we support applied research and provide safe spaces in which decision-makers can engage in exchange on a basis of trust.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS: Through international understanding, we want to help bring about functioning relations between Germany, the EU and those countries of particular importance to Europe, above all China and Turkey.

OUR APPROACHES FOR TURKEY:

● We make more encounters possible between information disseminators, civil society actors and young people from Germany, Turkey and other European countries with a view to deepening mutual understanding and strengthening cooperative relations.

● We contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which Turkey, Germany and Europe influence one another.

● We contribute to a better understanding of developments within Turkey.

● We support analysis and concrete initiatives that help ensure that Europe will find Turkey to be a dependable partner, above all regarding issues in foreign policy, security and migration.
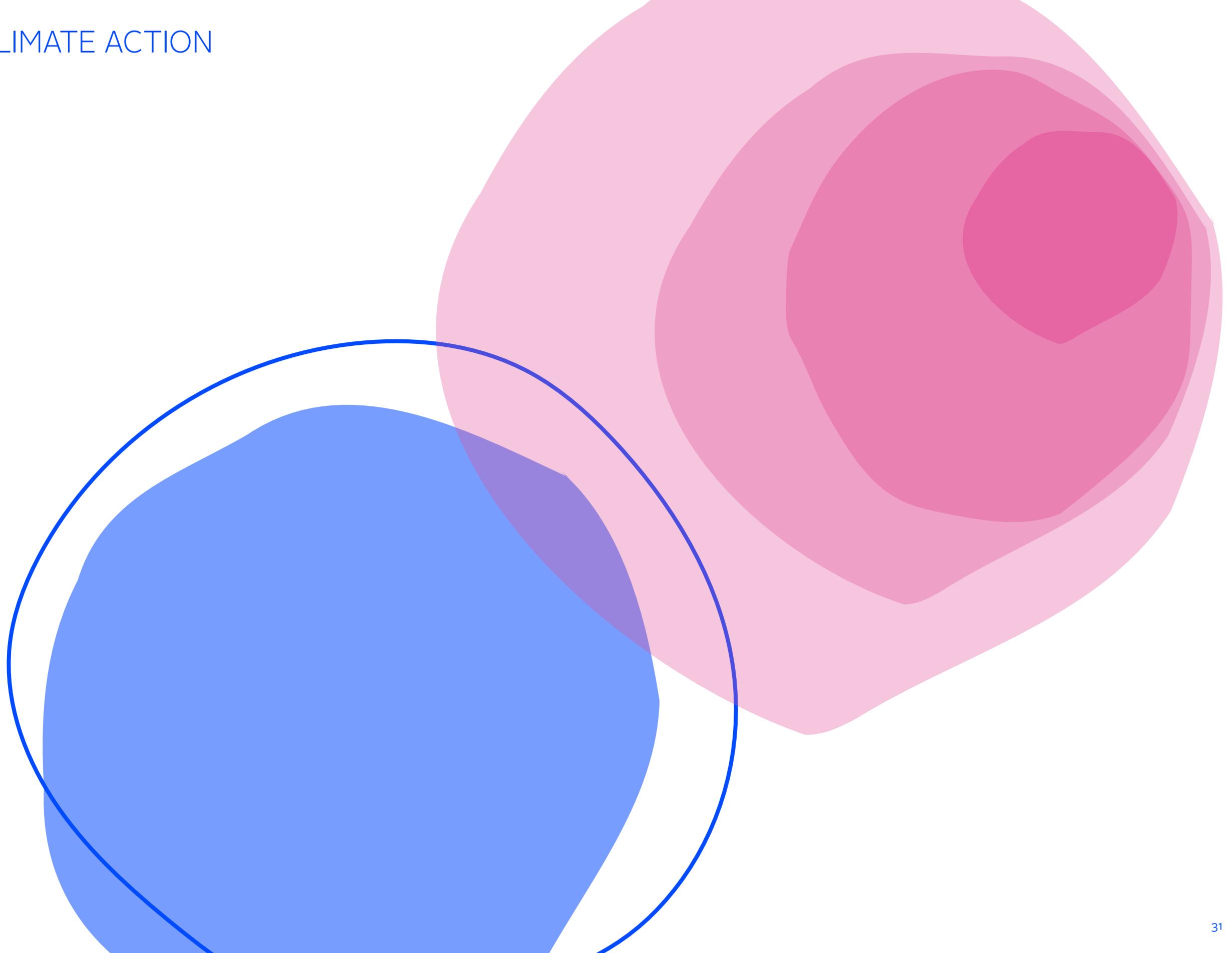
STARTING SITUATION: The order of international relations finds itself in a state of crisis. A prerequisite of any international order is that agreements are reached between states on how, despite differing interests, common objectives are to be achieved and how countries identify their commonalities and express these in institutions. An international order also always requires a group of states that establishes and then lastingly upholds it. This group of states must make the necessary resources available and use them to preserve the order. By partially withdrawing from its historically evolved role as a stabilizing power, the USA in particular has jeopardized this order in recent times, leading to renewed competition for power and the concepts of how this international order should be. This makes it more difficult for the European Union to make its voice heard and to advocate for a liberal world order.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want to understand the context in which external relations that are important for the EU are shaped: the context of a changing international order and of new multilateralism.

OUR APPROACH:
● We support people and projects that research the current and future development of the international order and of multilateralism and that develop ideas for their shaping in such cases where this is relevant to the continued existence of the EU, its values and its interests.

OUR OBJECTIVE: We want Germany to become greenhouse gas-neutral by 2050 and to help the EU as a whole to assume a global leadership role in climate action.

AREA OF ACTIVITY 1
Shaping climate action in a socially just manner

AREA OF ACTIVITY 2
Firmly anchoring climate action as a cross-cutting challenge

AREA OF ACTIVITY 3
Strengthening societal support for climate action

CLIMATE ACTION

BACKGROUND:
Climate change is one of the central challenges facing humankind in the 21st century. If we are unable to slow this process, it will massively change living conditions on the Earth and put our lives under enormous pressure. In many places, the effects of global temperature rise are already evident today – increasingly also in Central Europe.

Contrary to all the promises made by the international community of states, the political response remains inadequate: there is a considerable gap between those measures to achieve the targets of the Paris Agreement that have been announced and their actual implementation. Effective climate action is therefore needed more urgently than ever. We must reduce global emissions quickly and drastically.

Ambitious climate action requires a significant and complex shift in society that encompasses all areas of life and has no historical precedent. Accordingly, the expectations, interests and priorities of the various actors in politics, business and civil society differ.

In the activities we will be pursuing until 2025, we will concentrate on two aspects in particular. For one thing, climate change is exacerbating existing social inequalities by posing an additional burden on those groups that are disadvantaged in the first place. Climate policy also leads to instances of financial redistribution in society that many citizens perceive as unfair. What is needed here are solutions that enable climate action while at the same time reducing injustice.

For another thing, the shift offers opportunities for innovation and growth. It has the potential to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of the European economy – especially when it comes to the economic recovery following the Covid pandemic. This is also reflected in the European Commission's "European Green Deal". We want to help underpin this central guideline with an effective climate action agenda.

Together with a broad range of societal actors, we want to help Germany and the EU implement a fair and ambitious climate change mitigation policy. In this context, we believe that solid analysis, trust-based dialogue, civil society support and fact-based media reporting are the best way forward for our work.

OUR CONTRIBUTION: We contribute to climate action in Germany and the EU by fostering collaboration between science and practice. This is because they can only draw up and test viable concepts for a societal shift by working together. In order to increase the political will to change, we additionally support civil society actors in their capacity to systematically and profoundly engage in climate action. Furthermore, we strengthen fact-based media reporting with a view to contributing to an objective public discourse about climate change and climate action.

CLIMATE ACTION
1 — SHAPING CLIMATE ACTION IN A SOCIALLY JUST MANNER

STARTING SITUATION: To achieve the climate targets, emissions must be cut significantly, especially in the areas of energy, transport and industry. More consideration must be given to interactions between these sectors than has previously been the case. Reforms proposed in the past have often failed to go far enough because they ignore factors that could hamper the transition process – e.g. social and regional and cultural aspects. This is also one reason why many people regard climate policy as unfair. In turn, opponents and obstructionists take advantage of this shortcoming to mobilize forces against climate action. Furthermore, many actors in politics and business still argue that climate action is not compatible with economic growth.

By contrast, more and more companies are viewing climate action as an economic opportunity. They are designing strategies to lower emissions and are also advocating for them politically.

Public discourse is becoming increasingly entrenched along these lines. We therefore need ideas for how climate action, economic upswing and social justice can be reconciled. After all, the complexity of these conflicting views makes it difficult to reach any consensus even within political parties and groups.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS: We want a climate policy mix that combines significant cuts in emissions with economic prosperity and social justice.

OUR APPROACHES:
- We offer political decision-makers a solid analytical basis for creating regulations that will lower emissions, promote economic growth and reduce social injustice.

- We create spaces for a trust-based dialogue between interest group representatives so that they can jointly draw up concepts for effective climate action.

- We support civil society in its efforts to find answers to complex technical, economic, legal and political questions relating to climate action.

- We promote fact-based media reporting with a view to enriching public discourse and making it more objective.

2 — FIRMLY ANCHORING CLIMATE ACTION AS A CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGE

STARTING SITUATION: Climate change affects all areas of life – health, foreign and security policy, migration, and the stability of financial markets. To date, these interrelationships have been reflected only to a very limited extent in political debates. It is therefore important for political decision-makers to understand that climate action is a cross-cutting challenge. For this to be achieved, pertinent capacity has to be built with influential information disseminators.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS: We want climate action to be relevant to decisions taken in every sphere of politics.

OUR APPROACHES:
- We provide information disseminators as well as decision-makers who are not active in the area of environmental policy with an analytical basis for assessing the consequences of climate change for their political field, especially in the areas of health and finance. This will increase their awareness of the fact that climate action also plays a crucial role for them.

- We support science and civil society in their efforts to better reconcile proposed reforms in fields outside environmental policy with climate action.

- We are committed to ensuring that these interrelationships also receive more attention in the media.

CLIMATE ACTION
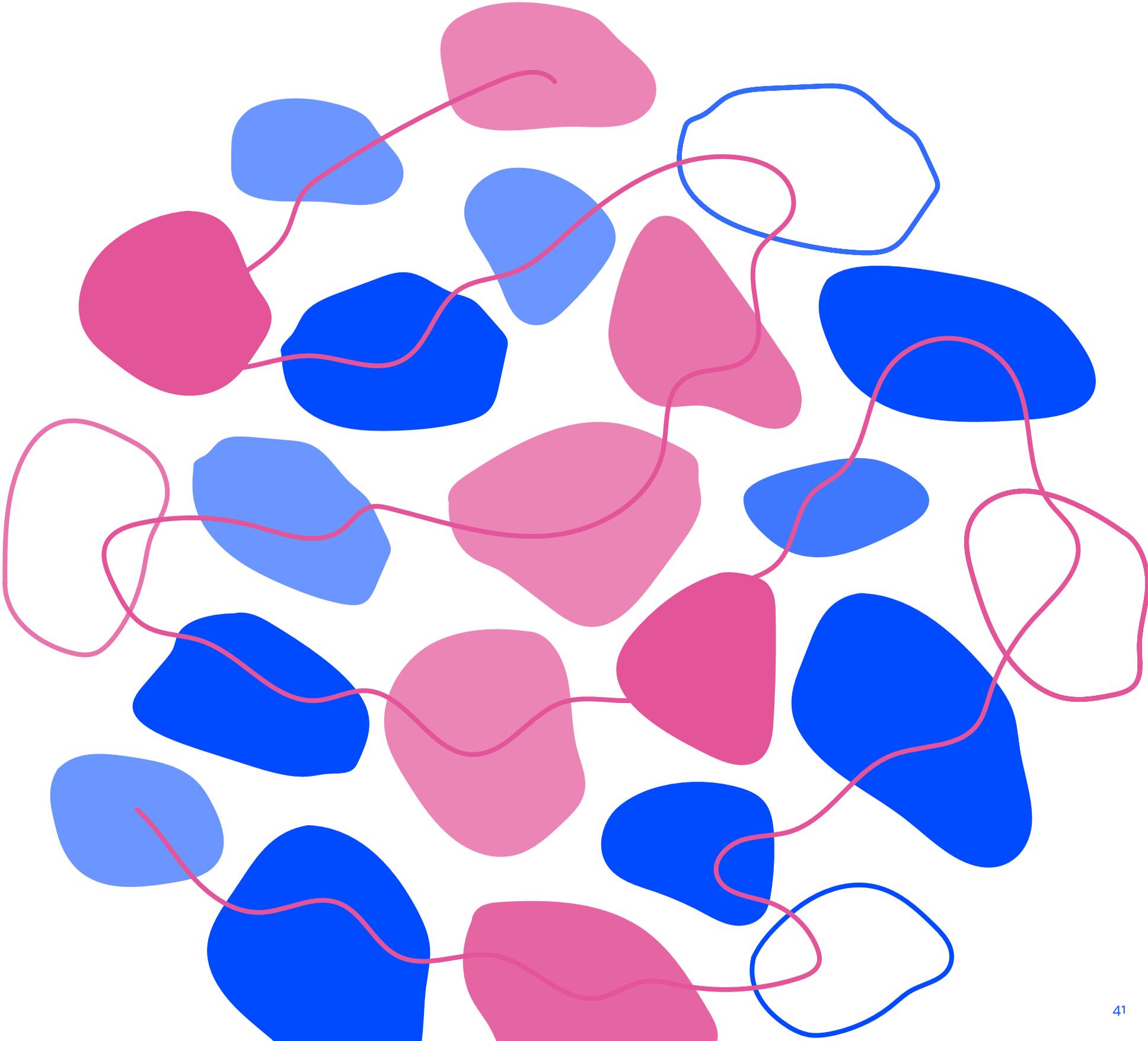## 3 — STRENGTHENING SOCIETAL SUPPORT FOR CLIMATE ACTION

STARTING SITUATION: Climate action is a response not to an environmental problem but to a societal problem. Humankind has brought about this situation itself and is destroying the vital resources it needs for life. Nonetheless, the public perception of climate action continues to be closely associated with environmental protection and ecologically oriented groups – despite it being an issue that concerns us all directly. For a long time, the political will to take ambitious action was therefore limited. This can change if many different societal actors commit themselves to climate action.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS: We want as many people as possible, including those not active in the area of environmental policy, to commit themselves to effective climate action.

OUR APPROACHES:

- We support civil society actors outside the realm of environmental protection by helping them understand how climate action is relevant to them.

- We create spaces in which civil society actors can engage in exchange, network and forge new cooperative ventures and alliances.

- We help civil society actors to increase the visibility of their activities to support climate action.

- We create spaces for experimentation in which people can experience the transition to a greenhouse gas-neutral society at the local level.

- We raise awareness of good examples of effective societal participation and put them into practice.

OUR OBJECTIVE: We want to strengthen cohesion in our society, combat discrimination and ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to access education and participate in society.

AREA OF ACTIVITY 1
Education
and equal opportunities

AREA OF ACTIVITY 2
Integration
and social participation

AREA OF ACTIVITY 3
Diversity and
social cohesion

OUR CONTRIBUTION: We contribute to improving the education on offer such that nobody will be disadvantaged on account of their background. In Germany's federal states and municipalities we help to develop policy approaches that will make social participation possible at the local level, facilitate participation in the employment market and raise society's acceptance of diversity.
We promote societal cohesion by encouraging encounters between different groups and strengthening civil society actors.

BACKGROUND: There has always been social inequality in terms of incomes, wealth, education and social participation, which we define as the ability to participate in community life. This inequality is due to factors such as social and ethnic background or religious affiliation. While such differences declined for many years in Germany, they have increased again in the past two decades. Income distribution data show that the poverty rate has risen continuously since 1991 and that the group known as the "long-term poor" is also growing. Poverty is closely associated with a lower educational level: children from families of low socioeconomic status or from families with poor educational qualifications likewise tend to achieve lower educational qualifications. In other words, from birth they have poorer chances of participating in society. Easier access to education and better vocational qualifications will reduce this social inequality.

Previous attempts to achieve this have had too little effect, however. Cooperation between the different educational institutions themselves and with child and youth welfare services must therefore be improved, and their remit must be extended to take parents and families into consideration. Furthermore, political decision-makers must to a greater extent allocate staff and funding to those areas with the greatest needs.

People of migrant origin often have a lower socioeconomic status and experience discrimination. This is not only a problem for those affected. Where entire groups are disadvantaged and discriminated against, this serves to divide society even more. Consequently, problems build up in certain neighbourhoods, and conflicts arise. These need to be countered at the local level. For this to be achieved, two things are needed: first, the will of everyone concerned to change something. And second, local decision-makers must create structures to bring about long-term social integration and must promote the benefits of living together in a diverse society.

Besides social integration, integration into the employment market is also a challenge. It is evident time and again that it is not only newly arrived migrants but also second-, third- or fourth-generation migrants living in Germany who have fewer opportunities to access the employment market and be promoted to higher positions – despite in some cases having the same educational qualifications as Germans who are not of migrant origin.

This growing social inequality poses a threat to social cohesion. Such cohesion encompasses various aspects, including personal experiences, a person's own commitment to others, an individual sense of belonging, and expectations of a positive future. Cohesion is a key expression of an intact community that is based on solidarity – and thus of a functioning democratic society.

Studies show that broad swathes of the population must accept diversity if social cohesion is to be preserved. Exchange and dialogue between different groups allow each of the groups to gain deeper insights into the respective realities of the other's lives. As a result, people are able to dismantle their prejudices and mutual trust is strengthened. The engagement of civil society actors can play a central role in this.

It is also necessary in structural terms to achieve greater acceptance of or a different approach to diversity and to reduce disadvantage and discrimination. This applies especially to people who work in a sector of particular relevance to social participation and social cohesion – such as health or education, or the justice system and law enforcement. Participation and cohesion are only possible long-term if everyone is comfortable with diversity and people are no longer discriminated against, for example on account of their ethnic, cultural or social origins.

We work closely together with politicians, government, business and civil society to bring about changes in society. The foundation for this is a network of such actors that is based on trust.

PARTICIPATION AND COHESION
1 — EDUCATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

STARTING SITUATION: The educational success of young people in Germany depends on their socioeconomic background. This is partly due to the fact that the support parents are able to give their children varies. Another problem is that teachers do not always assess the potential of their pupils correctly, as is evident for example when they transition from primary to secondary school. To counter this, all actors in educational practice and administration have a role to play: staff at day care centres, nurseries, general and vocational schools, and youth welfare services must all work together at the local level to support children according to their specific needs. This local approach is closely linked to the municipal development of neighbourhoods, which as a rule is aimed at upgrading socially challenged neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, it is a question of resources and the way they are deployed to meet specific requirements. For instance, educational institutions in socially challenged neighbourhoods often need far more teachers and social workers; these staff also require better in-service training. The key in this context is to ensure that the allocation of funds goes hand in hand with quality development and quality assurance.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We contribute to improving the education on offer to young people who are disadvantaged on account of their ethnic, cultural or social background

OUR APPROACHES:

- We support actors in educational practice and administration so that they can work together, across institutions, to improve educational qualifications in socially challenged neighbourhoods.

- We provide decision-makers in politics and government with well-founded strategies and instruments with which to allocate resources within the education system according to needs, thereby reflecting the different circumstances at the local level.

These approaches are a continuation of our activities in the sphere of education, though we now have a new focus, namely on socially challenged neighbourhoods. Over the past ten years we have concentrated on key issues such as language education and quality development in all-day schools. These have now been included on the education policy agenda and to some extent have already been incorporated into teacher training programmes.

2 — INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

STARTING SITUATION: Integrating migrants poses a particular challenge for municipalities in Germany. This is because it is municipalities that take the migrants and are supposed to help them integrate and participate in society. A central role in this is played especially by socially challenged neighbourhoods, as they take large numbers of migrants.

To overcome these challenges, all actors must work together in a coordinated manner – from the immigration offices and job centres to the social welfare departments and educational institutions. They need to improve their management of the integration process at the points of overlap so as to better foster integration and participation. This applies to everyone at the local level, including migrants and those who have been living there for generations.

To achieve integration and successful participation, it is essential that migrants have good access to the employment market and the opportunity to advance professionally. The integration of highly skilled workers and professionals into the employment market has already been researched, and good regulations are in place to promote this. By contrast, too little is known about the situation facing those with low formal qualifications, and there is little regulation of their integration into the employment market. In many cases people do jobs for which they are overqualified and work in precarious circumstances, which often afford them only limited opportunities to take part in society.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want to make social participation possible and promote the development of viable political approaches at the state and municipal levels.

OUR APPROACHES:

- We support decision-makers in politics, administration and integration practice in their efforts to improve structures across institutions and to trial courses of action that will ensure social integration in the long term. In this context we focus particularly on structurally weak regions.

- We provide decision-makers in politics, administration and business with an analytical basis for strategies and the instruments they need to facilitate access to the employment market for those with low formal qualifications, thereby helping them to advance professionally and improve their chances for participation.

PARTICIPATION AND COHESION
3 — DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

STARTING SITUATION: Acceptance of diversity is vital if social cohesion is to be achieved in a plural society. Social diversity has increased in recent decades. Although people from different groups encounter one another in everyday life, for example on the street or at school, they often have scant knowledge of what life is really like for the other groups because they engage with them to only a very limited extent. Studies show that personal encounters and engagement with others are the key to dismantling prejudices and strengthening social relationships.

It is equally important for people to engage with diversity and reduce discrimination in those sectors that are particularly sensitive when it comes to social cohesion. Enabling equal participation, alongside greater acceptance of diversity, is another central aspect for fostering cohesion.

OUR APPROACHES:

- By facilitating exchanges and encounters between different groups, we give them the chance to gain reciprocal insights into the realities of their respective lives. This increases mutual understanding, dismantles prejudices and strengthens a sense of social solidarity.

- We raise awareness among representatives of key sectors of society of the need to reflect upon and embrace diversity, and we support decision-makers in their efforts to identify and reduce structural discrimination within their institutions. We make it clear that engaging with diversity, discrimination and racism is urgently needed if we are to achieve cohesion in society.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ACTIONS:
We want to increase acceptance of diversity and contribute to greater social cohesion.

WHAT LINKS OUR THEMES

In the future, we will continue to play a part in shaping important societal changes. We need to create a number of conditions to allow us to do this even more successfully: we must focus our attention on specific themes, and our action must be guided by strategic and legal considerations. Furthermore, as a foundation we must be capable of learning, we must describe the impact of our activities in a plausible manner, and we must measure such impact wherever possible.

Our activities are linked by three leitmotifs: changes in social cohesion, the future of democracy and the renewal of multilateralism. Society in Germany has become far more heterogeneous in many respects: for example in terms of life circumstances, origins, moral concepts, educational levels, media access and use, incomes and income sources, opportunities for participation, and internationality. This heterogeneity can be seen as an inevitable distinguishing factor of modern societies. However, it can also be lamented as a loss of unity and as a threat to cohesion.

The current changes in social cohesion are the first leitmotif that we examine from the viewpoint of all our themes: we look at our globalized society in our theme "Europe in the World"; we look at the issue of a sustainable society in our "Climate Action" theme; we look at a society shaped by participation and migration in our theme of "Participation and Cohesion", and we look at the digital society in our theme "Digital Society".

Besides the changes in social cohesion, the future of democracy will be the second leitmotif linking our activities over the coming five years. This is because the past decade has shown something that had previously been only clear in theory: the values and practice of our liberal democratic basic order can by no means be taken for granted; rather they must be defended and further consolidated. We have a special obligation to stand up for democracy. After all, if we are to contribute to resolving societal challenges in the first place, we need a community with stable, democratically legitimate institutions and processes.

As with social cohesion, we will also explore the future of democracy in all the different respects that are relevant to our themes. These include the potential renouncement of constitutional principles in Europe, the growing competition to democracy in the form of authoritarian states, the tackling of climate change by democratic processes, the ability of democratic governments to act as their societies become increasingly heterogenous, and the pressure on democratic principles and processes to change as a result of digitization and the use of algorithmic systems.

A third overarching leitmotif is multilateralism. The international relations between states are in crisis – and with them often the institutions that are supposed to make multilateral relations possible. In many places, national interests are pursued so doggedly that tried and tested multilateral structures are damaged. Without functioning multilateralism, however, there will be no solutions in our four thematic fields: this applies to international agreements to protect the climate, to the responsible use of algorithmic systems, and to dealing with global migration, which challenges the cohesion of host societies.

THE CONTRIBUTION MADE BY AND THE LIMITS TO THE FOUNDATION'S ACTIVITIES IN A DEMOCRACY

WHAT SUCCESS MEANS TO US AND HOW WE LEARN

Using funds that originally stemmed from private assets, we devote ourselves solely to activities that serve the interests of society and contribute on an altruistic basis to the common good. To do this in the most effective and efficient manner possible, we select societal issues that we are able to address with our resources and our expertise.

For us to be able to change things, we need a "theory of change". This involves deriving individual areas of activity from a theme and its objective, defining the objective of the action in a particular area of activity, and then identifying appropriate approaches to meet this objective. Our "theory of change" also takes the respective contexts into account as an area of impact.

Theme

Area of activity

Approach

Project

The future of democracy, being an overarching leitmotif, concerns not only the themes of the foundation. It also concerns the foundation itself, and its role as a civil society actor in a democratic community. The sphere of action for foundations in a democratic and constitutional state is dictated firstly by tax laws, and by the provisions for non-profit purposes enshrined in the fiscal code. The state has granted tax privileges to foundations so that they can pursue non-profit objectives. We are very much aware of this.

This rules out any partisanship in day-to-day politics and even the indirect pursuit of profits. For us as a foundation, however, it is not enough simply to adhere to tax regulations. Repeatedly, German presidents have asserted that foundations have an important role to play in social transition processes. Democracies all over the world are in a state of flux and facing challenges from populists. Elected political representatives alone can neither come up with nor implement solutions to the imminent major societal challenges. Only when a society organizes itself to a considerable extent and pursues its own activities above and beyond the realms of state, market and private life will it truly thrive and be capable of overcoming its many challenges.

We meet these expectations by helping to resolve societal challenges. We have therefore geared our themes and areas of activity to a number of central change processes that are important for our society. We respect the primacy of democratically legitimate institutions of the state in all political decisions.

We are not political decision-makers. Nonetheless, through our activities we can raise the quality of public political discussions and therefore of decisions. We achieve this by expanding the spectrum of possible solutions to major societal challenges, and by more precisely assessing the risks, costs or opportunities of the individual options. This is why we do not measure our success against the achievement of a political goal, but against our inspiring and productive contribution to the political process. An important role in this contribution is played by the provision of knowledge and scientifically founded assessments for social debates and for the democratic decision-making processes in all of our themes, and by the practical trialling of new approaches.

In this context, we recognize the fundamentally different roles of science and politics: that which is scientifically correct will not automatically be implemented politically; nor is that which is politically implemented automatically scientifically correct. We respect the democratically enshrined right of politicians to take the final decisions, and we respect the freedom of science to conduct research in alternative scenarios with a view to permanently expanding knowledge.

The impact and success of our action can be described and evaluated along these lines. Naturally, a foundation's impact can only be assessed to a limited extent given the complexity of the interrelationships in social and political processes. Nonetheless, we use qualitative and quantitative methods to measure the impact of our action as best we can.

We are also aware that things can change, at times quickly, within our themes. This is why we need constantly to adjust and recalibrate our areas of activity within the themes and our respective approaches. In doing so, we strive to achieve a balance between a willingness to change and reliability. We do not shy away from the criticism of the expert and general public, and ensure the visibility and transparency of our work. We review the impact of our work not only to make ourselves accountable, but rather to engage in a continuous discussion of what we do and how we do it so that we can learn from our mistakes and evolve. This requires not only data-based processes and analyses, but also places of learning within the foundation.

To this end, we will set up "communities of practice" – groups of people who work on similar activities and wish to learn from one another. In this context we are keen to involve key project partners, alongside the foundation's own staff, as well as our partner organizations and alumni. They will discuss our methods and approaches across all our themes.

Individual communities of practice can be expanded – or indeed disbanded if they turn out not to be conducive to our learning process.

Communities of Practice:

Science and analysis
Support of think tanks
and science

Encounters and empowerment
Support of individuals
and civil society

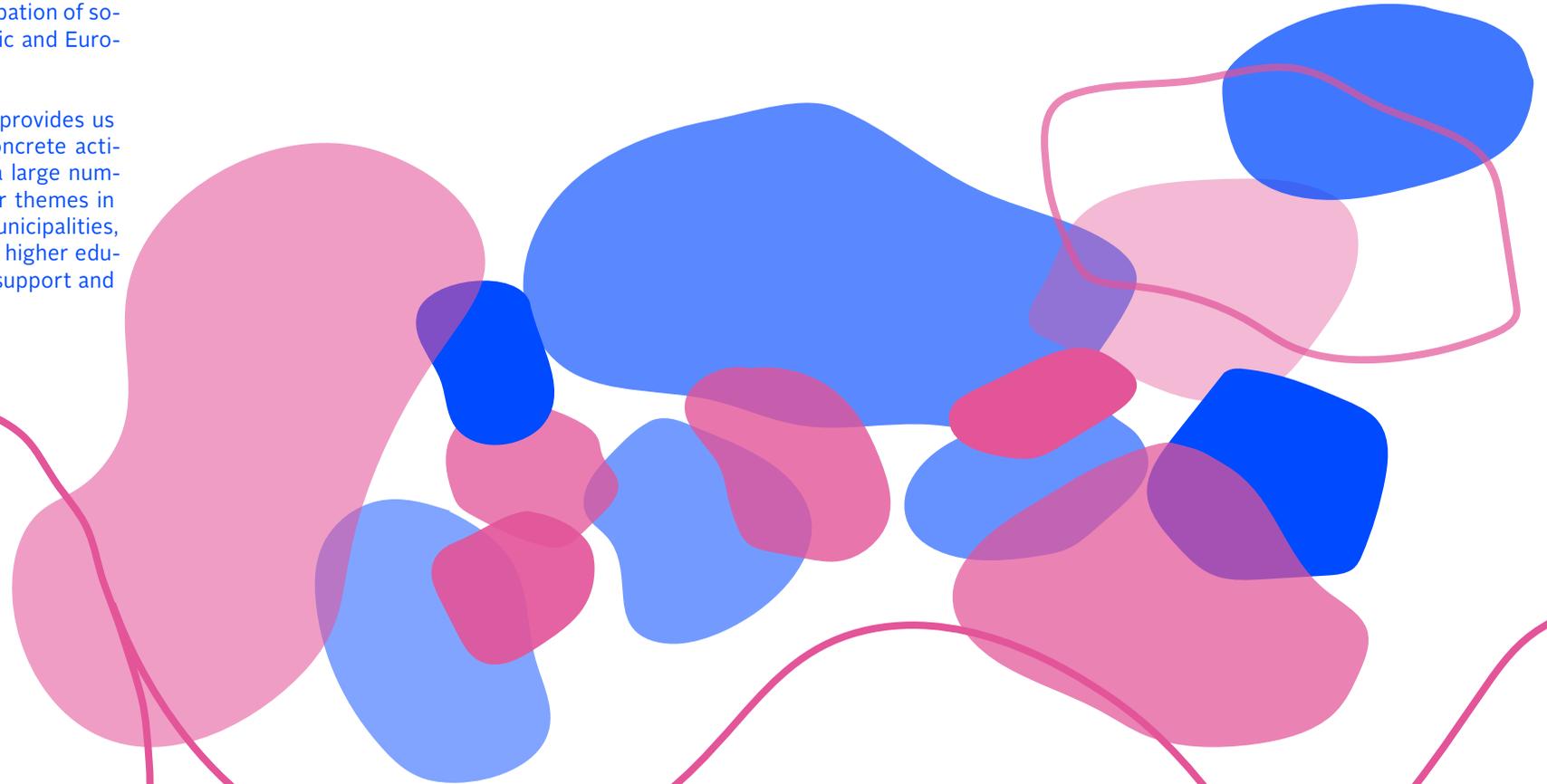**Community building**
with partners, alumni
and staff

Education
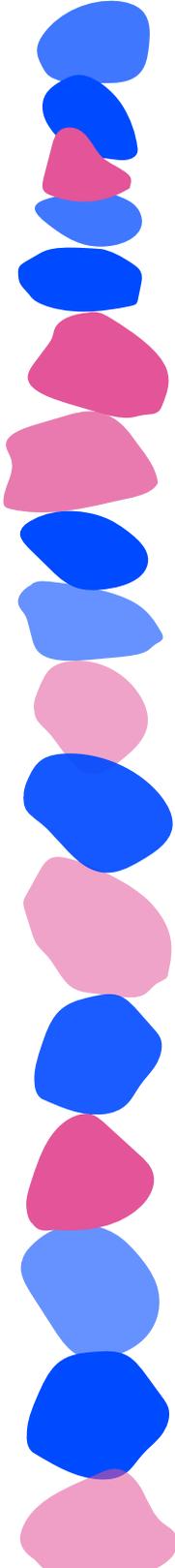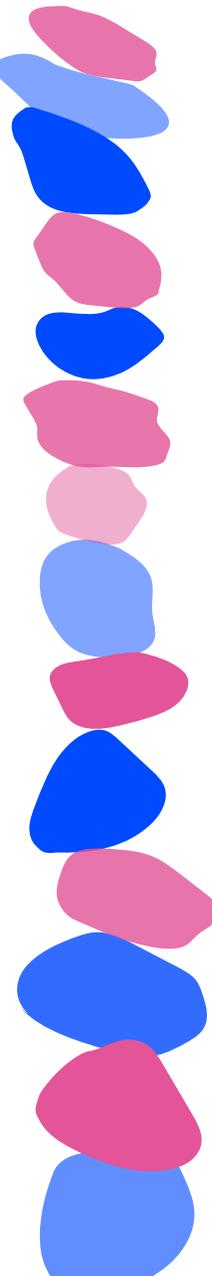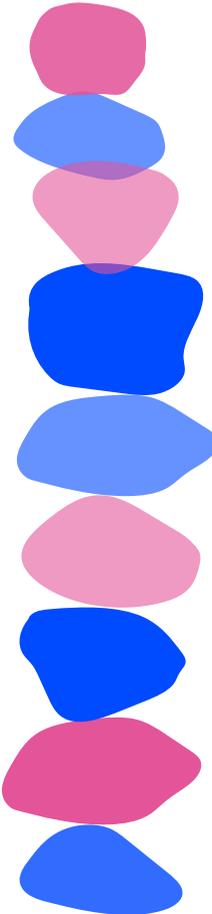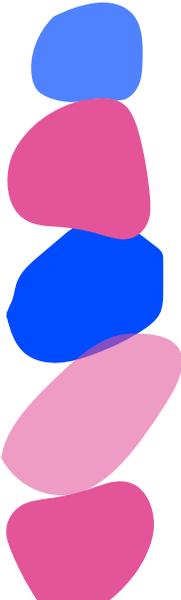Cooperation with
educational institutions

We feel a strong sense of loyalty to the Ruhr region, the home of the founding family and the foundation's headquarters. We have expressed this in two different ways over the past decade: for one thing, we have dedicated ourselves to making the Ruhr region a cooperative and high-performance hub for education and science. And for another we have selected the Ruhr region for the privileged application of our strategic focal themes. This second aspect of our commitment is something we plan to continue and to intensify in the coming years.

The societal challenges on which we intend to focus during our next strategic phase include many that are particularly acute in the Ruhr region: the energy and transport transition that is necessary to protect the climate; the improvement of access to education and educational success in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; the consequences for social cohesion of digitization and the use of algorithmic systems; the participation of socioeconomically disadvantaged young people in a democratic and European society.

For all of these themes, and many others, the Ruhr region provides us with an excellent real-life laboratory in which to pursue concrete activities in specific areas and neighbourhoods. Furthermore, a large number of expert cooperation partners can be found for all our themes in the Ruhr region, and therefore in our immediate vicinity: municipalities, educational and research institutions, universities and other higher education institutions, civil society organizations, associations, support and intermediary organizations.

We are grateful to the
founding family for the trust
they continue to show in us
and thank all those who
make our work possible
and effective. We thank our
Advisory Board, our partners
and our colleagues in Essen,
Berlin, Beijing and Istanbul!