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Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for Foreign and Security Studies, SWP)

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Contribution to GCM General Debate, Item 8, 11 December 2018

Mr President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

as researchers and foreign policy advisors to German Parliament and Government, my colleagues and I are really concerned about the sharp polarization of the GCM debate we have experienced during the past weeks, not just in Germany. We expect that this will make it even more difficult to find common ground on migration policy, and that it will also make the implementation of the Compact more complicated.

We therefore think the GCM follow-up should be used also as an opportunity to ask how this polarization came about and what governments can do against it.

Actually, the dispute over the GCM has intensified from day to day in recent weeks. Often, the debate was based on insufficient information, and partly on fake news. Now, the internet is full of hate speech, and supporters of the Compact are being defamed.

I think, nobody who was involved in the drafting of the Compact has expected such a debate. The governments have negotiated as usual, and the results have been published. The process was transparent. In this respect, governments cannot be blamed.

Nevertheless, what was lacking in many countries was an active promotion of the Compact. I think the GCM debate is a good illustration that the conditions for diplomacy have changed and are further changing: Diplomacy nowadays takes place less and less in closed and confidential rooms, but in public. Now the public is everywhere – and public interest can be created quickly and effectively via social media. And this technical and social development cannot be reversed, and neither can it be ignored.

But then, with regard to the Compact, what can governments and other stakeholders do against the polarization?

In our view, they must avoid being on the defensive. They should proactively create more scope for debate. They should create more opportunities to bring critics and supporters of the GCM and the international migration cooperation to the table and create a space to exchange arguments. This debate should primarily take place in Parliaments, but also on the local level, and always in cooperation with civil society.

Similar debates could be organized at the regional and international level. The GCM provides various forms in which these debates can be organized, as also the GFMD. All these forums should be designed in such a way that advocates **and** opponents can be heard.

So, this would be the easier part of a better communication and implementation strategy of the GCM.

Far more difficult would it be to address the targeted misinformation and disinformation campaigns we've experienced during the past weeks.

Recently, there were reports that a substantial number of the recent critical tweets on the GCM in Germany were based on social bots, i.e. computer programs that operate in social networks and pretend to be real people. We can't really verify these reports, but we do know, that there is also a variety of manually managed instruments, like so called "sockpuppets" – fake online identities used for the purpose of deception, as well as so called "fake-influencers". We think governments, UN agencies and civil society must become far more active to identify such manipulative methods.

Nevertheless, governments interested in implementing the Compact will also have to improve their working methods and develop convincing communication strategies and counter-narratives.

So, our appeal to those governments who have an interest to promote the GCM and to foster a sustainable and effective international migration cooperation:

Strengthen your commitment to the Global Compact, make use of its opportunities to promote a substantive policy dialogue – and take the challenges of political campaigning seriously!