
Achim Steiner to Chair Council of Agora Verkehrswende

Press Release

Positioning sustainable transport as a key strategy amidst profound economic and geopolitical change

25 February 2026. Achim Steiner, for many years Germany's highest-ranking diplomat at the United Nations and now a new senior fellow at the Oxford Martin School, has been appointed Council chair at the non-profit think tank Agora Verkehrswende. Steiner held this same position a decade ago, during the institute's founding phase. The Council, Agora Verkehrswende's advisory body, brings together notable individuals from the domains of politics, business, academia and society to assess trends and develop strategies for climate-neutral transport. Under Steiner's leadership, the Council will add new members and put more emphasis on the importance of international cooperation.

Steiner sees the appointment as an opportunity to develop field-specific solutions to humankind's most pressing problems: "The future of mobility is being shaped anew around the world – from the rapid development of electric vehicles to the profound shifts in geopolitics and economic policy caused by climate change. This transformation requires fundamental strategic decisions from all of us, including the automotive industry. Agora Verkehrswende is a valuable forum that brings together stakeholders from Germany and abroad and jointly develops viable pathways for competitive, sustainable, and safe mobility in the future. As Council chair, I look forward to shaping this dialogue."

Agora Verkehrswende regards the collaboration with Achim Steiner as an element of the think tank's repositioning in response to new geopolitical realities, says Christian Hochfeld, Director of Agora Verkehrswende: "As we began our work ten years ago, few could imagine how much international conflicts would shape societal debates in Germany today. In light of the tectonic shift in global affairs over the past half-decade the transition to climate-neutral transport has become even more important. Climate action is not a burden. It is part of the solution not only for climate change but also in the areas of economic competition, energy security, the sustainable supply of critical raw materials, and the preservation of democratic participation. Achim Steiner, with his extensive international experience, will provide important guidance to the Council – and to our institute. He will also help to drive the mobility transition at the national and international levels. We are honoured that he has supported our work from the beginning and will once again chair the Council."

In addition to chairing the Council of Agora Verkehrswende, Steiner is a senior fellow at Oxford University's Oxford Martin School, a position he assumed this past January. There, he primarily studies security policy in a world shaped by systemic risk, including in the domains of climate change, human health and digital technology. He has also chaired the Hamburg Sustainability Conference since October 2025 and has been a member of the German Council for Sustainable Development since January. From 2017 to 2025 he served as Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and led the UN Development Programme (UNDP). From 2006 to 2016, he was head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

As Council chair Steiner is succeeding Johann-Dietrich Wörner, who also served as the president of Germany's National Academy of Science and Engineering (acatech) and as Director General of the European Space Agency.

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Christian Hochfeld reflects with gratitude on Wörner's time as Council chair: "Jan Wörner led the Council's discussions with enormous acumen during his three-year leadership. He was key to improving understanding across various interests and focusing the organisation's attention on effective long-term strategies. We will continue to follow him in his belief that climate action is a whole-of-society challenge that requires hearing everyone's needs and understanding oneself as a force for change."

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