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STEVEN SCHMERZ

## Advocacy as Dialogue

**During the five years Steven Schmerz, MPP Class of 2012, spent studying and working in Israel, the country was involved in two wars. In that time he put a lot of thought into resolving conflicting interests—so much that he has made advocacy his vocation—and avocation.** As a board member of a small, Berlin-based NGO that fosters dialogue for Middle East peace, Schmerz wants to get people to the table to talk. NAFFO, the Middle East Peace Forum, aims to bring together people with different viewpoints in the hopes of finding common ground.

“This is about an understanding between two peoples – that it’s in both [sides’] interests to come to a resolution,” says Schmerz. At the same time, NAFFO advocates for a strong bond between Germany and Israel based on a shared set of values. “We are trying to shed light on the complexity of the process and provide German policymakers with perspectives not typically on the agenda,” says Schmerz.

In “real life”, Schmerz is a public affairs manager for the German specialty chemicals company, Evonik Industries. It is his job to monitor policy-related events and advise on issues relevant to Evonik’s business, such as the implications of Germany’s shift to renewable energy. To do that, he must cooperate with a broad range of actors—from



experts who make products and understand procedures, to those in policymaking and ministries. For Schmerz, governance means fostering dialogue between a wide variety of stakeholders, sometimes with conflicting interests.

Juggling various issues and individual perspectives while bearing in mind a particular time and context requires analytical, communications and people skills, as well as a good mix of sensitivity and assertiveness, says Schmerz.

“What I learned at the Hertie School is that there are methods for going about this,” he says. Rather than fighting competing interests, Schmerz says it’s important to come to the table with ideas. Successful negotiating is not a win or lose match, it means finding areas of agreement where everyone benefits whether in energy policy or the conflict in the Middle East.

*Steven Schmerz studied government, diplomacy and strategy in Israel before attending the Hertie School. He gained experience in advocacy working for the Berlin-based public affairs firm APCO Worldwide during his MPP studies.*