urban forum

Human Security in the Post-Pandemic Digital Era

Transcript of the Online Forum

In cooperation with

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für Stadtforschung

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Transcript

Moderator: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our online forum on the topic of "Human Security in the Post-Pandemic Digital Era"! This forum is initiated and organized by Urban Forum, a non-profit association in Austria with the objective of enhancing the meaning of urban, municipal local affairs, contributing a modern administrative reform with emphasis on the values of the European Union; and SINOPRESS, an independent, non-profit and self-supportive media outlet based in Vienna dedicated to the free expression of cultural and social opinions east and west.

My name is David Kainrath. It's my honor to be the moderator for today's forum! Allow me to introduce the agenda for the upcoming discussion first:

As this year's Munich Security Conference (MSC) is approaching, the world is expecting an assembly of senior decision-makers as well as experts from around the world to discuss the various pressing issues of international security policy. The war in Ukraine is served as a trigger to rethink of human security in the post-Pandemic world, while cyber security in the digitalized world is by no means to be ignored. Again, questions like the so-called rule-based international order will be at the center of the discussions in Munich.

The MSC claims to be committed to diversity and sustainability in all forms and is willing to be measured against its very ambitious goals. With the Munich Rule "Engage and interact with each other: Don't lecture or ignore one another" as the basis of discussion principle, the conference is supposed to anticipate open questions and interactive discussions on and off the stage.

At the backdrop of this year's MSC, our online forum aims at a related/extended discussion of security issues, including international cooperation in the post-Pandemic concerning data protection, AI vs human rights, digital security, use of malware and deepfakes, globalization and localization of the economic development in the future, and more.

Our distinguished panelists include Dr. Eva Sobotka who is a human rights expert and is working for EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Today she will speak out on behalf of herself. We

have also the honor of winning Dr. Constantin Weinstabl, director of the Academy of Foreign Policies BSA, to the podium. As today's discussion involves AI issues, we have invited an IT and digital expert Mag. Michael Weilguny, Head of Sales for Evolit Consulting GmbH, to explain the future of humankind living with the rapid development of digital technology. Last but not least, we have invited Mag. Fitzthum who is an economist as well as the author of the book "China Verstehen" to participate in our discussion. Due to the time difference, Mr. Fitzthum who is living in China right now will be represented by Mr. Müller. The latter will read out the script written for the sake of this forum.

And thank you, dear Helena and Bernhard, for bringing us all together here to realize this discussion!

May I start the discussion with Dr. Weinstabl? Mr. Weinstabl, you are an international relations expert and director of the Foreign Policies Academy in Vienna. I reckon you have followed the MSC? Could you give us some of your impressions concerning this conference? What should be the priority of future international cooperation in respect of human security? Human security used to be more at center stage and previous security conferences promoted a broad definition of human security. But this year, it appears that the conference is going towards purely military security. What are your observations?

Constantin Weinstabl: Well, David, thank you again for having me. It's a pleasure being here with all these esteemed guests and discussing about the very interesting issues. I think it is common acknowledgement that military securities are back in the forefront of security policy discussions in today's world. Meanwhile, for quite some time already, interest in geopolitics is excessively highlighted in shaping the world. There has been a general vision of the world growing together and working together in the recent decades. In the last few years, however, we've seen a lot of nationalization movements.

Furthermore, we've seen a lot of populism resurfacing. There was bipolarism during the Pandemic, and thoughts on localization instead globalization. One hears this debate between the global North and the global South all the time, producing only winners or losers.

Public opinion becomes dichotomic. A more balanced position would be blamed. Diplomacy-based approach is cornered by one or even by both sides.

All these had an impact on the way how this year's Munich Security Conference was orchestrated. This year, the conference saw the return of conquest politics to the heart of Europe with the Russian invasion in Ukraine. You've seen a lot of pressure being put on Russia. They weren't even invited this year. Officially neither was Iran. That's another interesting topic. Anyway, all of a sudden, you have military security issues back in Europe. Now a lot of countries including NATO countries are delivering weapons to Ukraine to allow it to defend itself. On the other hand, you see some countries providing military equipment such as drones to Russia. What we're seeing here is, in my opinion, if it is not a complete polarization yet, it is definitely going toward that direction.

Another thing if you follow the aftermath: Wang Yi is in Moscow now talking to Putin, whereas Biden went to Kiev to talk to Zelensky. While the Western countries are discussing how they can "win" the war in Ukraine by planning to deliver more weapons to Ukraine, Wang Yi, Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission from China, is proposing a Chinese peace plan. But how big the echo from the rest of the world will be, remains a question. I believe it is of tantamount importance that one tries to keep the diplomatic channels open.

In terms of public international law, there's no doubt about it that this invasion was a breach of international law. But the political situation caused by the Ukraine war is not much different from what the United States and its allies did in Iraq, or what happened in Kosovo in 1999. Sure, it'll be a really broad discussion about the validity of public international law and particularly, you know, what constitutes a humanitarian intervention. That's another thing coming to the forefront: Russia justified the invasion by saying they are trying to get rid of Nazis in Ukraine to protect the ethnic Russians in Ukraine. So, it's indeed a very complicated matter.

Moderator: You mentioned the peace proposal by the Chinese senior diplomat Wang Yi. Basically, a proposal of how the parties should start talking. In your opinion, will this proposal receive echo? Do you think this is something that will play out in the longer run?

Constantin Weinstabl: I think initially yes. Not directly at the conference, though. Well, we don't really know what it is yet. I mean the content of the proposal. As far as I understand, it will be unveiled on this Friday. In my opinion, it's a very good thing that China tries to make suggestions how to handle and to end the war, at least theoretically. Over the last decades, we've seen China gaining increasing geopolitical power. If China offers to propose something, it will be definitely welcomed. The question is, what is it going to be? The question is also what can be offered to solve the Ukraine conflict on a diplomatic level.

Moderator: Ukraine says there will be peace as soon as Russia stops occupying their territory. So we need to try to think how to dissolve this conflict on the diplomatic level. What would be acceptable has to be for both sides. May I just add to that because you have followed this year's Munich Security Conference closely. The impression which is being transported in the media is that basically all main parties who are invited there, especially the Western ones are discussing how they can win the war in Ukraine by delivering more weapons to Ukraine.
This kind of discussion is probably not going to lead to any peaceful conclusion of the conflict in Ukraine.

Constantin Weinstabl: The question, in my humble opinion, is what kind of piece you want. Do you want a peace agreement which yields territorial gains for Russia? What kind of signal would that agreement send? Providing arms to the conflicts is, I mean, certainly always a question that you'll have to think about very, very thoroughly.

Moderator: Yes! I guess we're not going to answer this question in one sitting. But obviously, talking about it is very, very interesting. Thank you so much for your insights, Dr. Weinstabl! They are very important ones.

Coming from the military and politic topics back to the topic of broader scope of security, I would like to invite Dr. Sobotka to the floor. The posed question to you, Dr. Sobotka, is how to ensure human security in the post-Pandemic digital era. There were reports about the governmental use of malware, with the consequences generating worries concerning world security. As human rights expertise, could you enlighten us on this topic?

Eva Sobotka: Thank you very much! I don't speak on behalf of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights today. But to your question "human security in the post-Pandemic digital era", also in connection with the misuse of malware and deep fakes, I think the topic is broad. So let me narrow it down a little bit. Let's go a bit back into history, not so far back but still a bit earlier than the time of the present Ukrainian situation. I would like to recall that the concept of human security was first and foremost developed by the UN Millennium Summit. The governments of Japan and Sweden took an initiative to set up a commission for human security, which defined what we understand now under the concept of human security.

Basically, the traditional concept of security has been largely shaped by the Cold War when the main concern was with the ability to counter the external threats. Today, however, the human security vision needs to consider issues such as development in the digital age, poverty eradication, social equality, as well as conflict resolution, peacebuilding, state building and so on. Humankind is also facing serious environmental challenges, global warming and millions of internally displaced persons. In the end of the day, we need to consider topics such as the air. We breathe the air of the ecosystem, the infrastructure, public health and so on.

The issues of climate change, pollution, and the biodiversity loss are directly linked to the topic of the human security, when you look at the security of people in their ability to live. This morning, when preparing for this talk, I looked at the statistics which are so disturbing from the Sahel region, especially near Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger where there are loads of internally displaced persons, which lead to conflict, environmental disaster, climate change, drought, and food scarcity.

To put things in perspective: Whereas in summer 2022 we were talking about over four million internally displaced persons in that region, the statistics shows that at the end of January this year, the number has become over five million, five million eleven thousand people!

The number shows the grave situation of lacking human security there.

So how do we prevent these situations, let's say the non-traditional threats to security? My predecessor spoke at large about the traditional threats to security such as when one country attacks another country. Facing non-traditional threats to security, I would still advocate and argue that despite a great deal of pushback, human rights is really the best foundation we have in order to ensure peace.

In conclusion, what is human security? Let me quote "no peace without development, no development without peace, and neither peace nor development without human rights".

Moderator: Well, thank you for this important clarification! Some critics of the concept of human security argued that it is too vague and too broadly-based to be applied on concrete areas of policy, or on concrete security question. It doesn't prescribe a course of action in many situations. Some argue, though, that if human security is taken as a basis for political decision-making and foreign policy decisions, it can indeed produce a better outcome. The human damage in the digital era has become more prevalent. I'm talking about government spying on their citizens, or use of malware on other countries' big figures, also what you mentioned before as well, deep fakes. And may I also add the manipulation of this course: Through digital channels, it is more susceptible to manipulation than in a traditional media. Do you think human security offers some kind of guidance or recipe on how to tackle these challenges, Dr. Sobotka?

Eva Sobotka: Well, concerning human rights, there can be situations such as the COVID-19 where they need to be restricted. And this is essentially what we have seen. We have seen restrictions on freedom of movement, assembly and so on. But these kind of measures needs to be proportionate. They need to be time-limited and limited in scope as well. Every democratic government takes human rights at the heart of its action. The policies need to be taken very seriously. When we talk about deep fake --- I'm not a technological expertise. We have much better speakers this evening on that --- but I would like to start perhaps from a future perspective. The simple reality is that the deep fake production technology is improving much

faster than the deep fake detection technology. I don't say this as a human rights expert. It is something that you can read in a report from another EU agency. We don't quite know how fast this is evolving and we don't have the required tools at hand to detect the deep fakes. Of course, this is a big danger. Deep fakes lead to what has been called, I think, an information architecture collapse, where people just stop trusting any kind of sources of information. Deep fakes work on a very sinister manner with the human predisposition of what they habitually tend to believe. What we see, the audio-visual content, is supposed to be more or less true. It's very difficult to deal with a false narrative in reference to trusted sources. That is an issue.

But at the same time – here I would rather take the EU than the entire world – in the EU region, measures are being proposed in order to regulate artificial intelligence tools. Obviously, the objective is the protection of fundamental human rights and human safety. And the proposal is to follow the risk-based approach. Currently, the European Commission has proposed such a legislative package, which is being prepared to check high-risk ID applications to ensure that they are subject to adequate human oversight reliability and also the fundamental human rights. How they are used by different entities is a different matter. But at least, this proposed artificial intelligence act is a very useful development in terms of trying to put an effort to regulate these technological developments.

As a final point here, the EU has a very strong regulatory work for personal data protection. This is not only a subject of private international law, but also a subject of the EU law and fundamental rights, guaranteed under the Article 8 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. As of May 2018, when there was an entry into force of so-called General Data Protection Regulation, all companies operating in the EU, regardless of wherever they are based, are obliged to commit to and fulfill this obligation under the General Data Protection Regulation. Maybe the technology is little bit forward than any regulatory framework. But there is after all regulatory framework which is trying to establish an environment to regulate both the high-risk ID and artificial intelligence tools while offering data protection and guaranteeing fundamental rights.

Moderator: Thank you, Dr. Sobotka! It's reassuring to hear that there is a working progress, a framework being built by the European Union institutions!

I would like to turn from the question of human security in the digital world to the security in the Pandemic and post-Pandemic time now. Here is a question for Mag. Fitzthum: During the Pandemic, different measures and policies were adopted by the EU, the USA and China. How to see their pros and cons, discrepancies and common acknowledgements? You live in China, Mr. Fitzthum. As far as I know, the Chinese policy is "Save lives". There has been enough criticism on the so-called Zero Covid Policy, though, even if the epidemic infection rate and death toll remain low in China comparing with other countries. China's health expenditure, as far as we know, was as high as 7.55 trillion yuan in 2020 and 7.2 trillion yuan in 2021. China also made donations to the World Health Organization. It has provided 2 billion doses of vaccines and a large amount of anti-epidemic materials to the world. How do you see the human situation during the Pandemic in China and in the West?

Bernhard Müller (for the sake of Robert Fitzthum): Thank you. David! Ladies and gentlemen, it's an honor to answer for Robert, who is a friend of mine. Following is the answer in his own words:

I lived in southern China throughout the pandemic period and my main feeling under Zero-COVID policy was that I felt very safe from contracting the virus for 3 years. The effects of Zero-COVID policy were quite insignificant for us. I only had a gentle curfew for 14 days at the very beginning of the 2020. Back then, each family could only leave the residential complex once every 2 days for shopping and other errands - except for doctor visits. Our residential complex has a forest park inside. We could go for walks and jogging in the park unhindered. I did my rounds every day. How people were affected by Zero-COVID policy in China varied greatly. For us, we never had longer curfews later on, in contrast to Tier 1 cities (like Shanghai, Beijing or Guangzhou). The rural areas of China (with population approx. 35%) were hardly affected after the first few weeks of 2020. The ‚closure of all China' in the report of some Western media was misinformation, even if large cities like Shanghai with more than 20 million

people were cordoned off. But that's only 1-2% of the total population!

In pursuit of the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states, „ Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person," China has prioritized the right to life over individual liberty. With the emergence of the less dangerous Omicron variant, the tide finally turned and it was possible and also necessary (due to increasing dissatisfaction among affected groups of people such as small business owners and students) to ‚open' in November 2022. The omicron wave, which swept the entire country for around 6 weeks, was essentially over by mid-January 2023.

How to judge the Chinese Zero-COVID policy with facts? While the EU and the USA each owe more than 1.1 million deaths to a neoliberal, business-oriented COVID-ignored policy, there were ‚only' about 90,000 deaths from COVID in China up to mid-February 2023. According to projections, China has saved 1.6 million people from deaths! Through the Zero-COVID policy, China has also managed to increase life expectancy in the last three years, unlike the United States and various EU countries where life expectancy has fallen.

While not much is publicized in the US and EU about the huge number of people who have died from COVID there and the suffering of those affected and their families, the Western media has ‚diagnosed' that the Chinese Zero-COVID policy has had and will have a catastrophic impact on China's economy and a looming crash into recession. But what are the facts here? China is also doing better than Europe and the US on the economy. In the first COVID year of 2020, China was the only major economy with positive growth (+2.3 % nominal GDP) while the West slid into recession. Again, in nominal GDP growth in 2021, China far outperformed Europe and the United States (+8.4 % compared to Germany +2.6 and USA +5.9). And how was 2022? The same result: while China had a growth of +3%, Germany had 1.9 % and the USA 2.1%. Forecasts for 2023 will widen China's lead. Growth of 5.2-6 % is forecast. Germany is narrowly avoiding stagnation, while the USA is estimated at +1.4%.

The facts make it easy to see who coped better with COVID-19.

Moderator: Thank you very much, Bernhard, for telling us of what Mr. Fitzthum wants to say concerning the question! The answer provokes follow-up questions, though. I'll get back to you later. Now I'd like to make the transition from COVID policy in China to the world of digitalization and its possible future impact. May I invite Mag. Michael Weilguny to the floor to contribute his expertise to our discussion. Michael, in today's world, digital security is influencing the economic development. For example, quantum computing with its unfathomable frontiers in maths and science are helping solve hard problems like climate change and food security, turning driverless cars and drone taxis into reality, too. But is the so-called quantum revolution a big challenge to human security? And where do we stand?

Michael Weilguny: Thank you for having me, David! It might sound scary that one day quantum computing will be everywhere, being used in the artificial intelligence algorithm like Chat GPT. It works much faster and much better, though, making calculations one can never do with normal computers. Quantum computing will require human beings to change everything to do with password security. It will for sure have a real impact in future. But quantum computing can help tremendously in positive ways, for climate change and medical development, food security, driverless cars and drone taxis, etc. More concerning is the phenomenon of digital surveillance done through malware by some governments. Education, in this respect, is the most important and a long-term way to recognize the fraud, in my opinion. Technical fraud generates technical solution about it. It's just a question about the solutions. In the quantum computing area, some help from China wouldn't be bad, either.

At the moment, the algorithm done by the traditional computers can transmit data and help research development, safely if not hacked. Quantum computing based on the quantum mechanics with qubit, however, can recognize the sign of the transferred data being hacked. The quantum computer does it without "computing". Quantum computers already exist on the market and are used at the moment in insurances and finance, for example. As more and more quantum computing come into being, more and more changes will happen in the technologies. It could be a big "scary" thing one day. But as I said before, quantum compu-

ting can help the human world in positive ways tremendously.

Moderator: Thank you for this input, Michael! I gather from your comments that you're not much concerned about the threats of quantum computing and AI developments to human security, but quite positive about the possibilities and the merits of these technologies delivered to the human world.

May I take the opportunity to go back to the question of government spying using malware? Dr. Sobotka offered us points from her perspectives. Maybe you can talk a bit more about it from the technical perspective? What challenges do you see connected to this relatively new phenomenon of digital surveillance done through malware use by some governments?

Michael Weilguny: The manipulation is really a problem to the mankind at the moment. And it is very dangerous. If you analyze the Brexit, you can see a lot of manipulation model versus hacking there. In fact, almost everybody showed the attitude against Brexit, yet so many voted for the Brexit. The result came mostly from the populists with lies supported by software solutions. Cambridge Analytica was accused of amassing the data of millions of Facebook users without their consent and using it in political campaigns.

Moderator: You mentioned education before, but not regulation. Do you think it should go hand-in-hand, that regulation and laws need to be adapted for the digital era to deal with these new threats and challenges?

Michael Weilguny: Well, you can deal with the problem with all sorts of regulations like for the securities. But I still think one of the easiest and the most important things to do is education. Education is a long-term solution, and a better way. It might sound naive that I'm optimistic in this sense.

Moderator: You have kind of dodged my question here, but thank you very much, anyways!

My next question goes back to Mr. Fitzthum. After loosening the so-called Zero Covid Policy, the international logistics are pacing up in goods transportation into and from Europe, which has already had positive effect in Europe with trade growth rate. Europe is talking about

localization of some products like medicine. But much more industry is interdependent on globalization, for instance, car industry and tourism. Mobility of skilled workers and experts are also of key importance. Unfortunately, today's world is becoming more and more geopolitical and polarized. Bernhard, how did Mr. Fitzthum interpret China's future role in the international economy?

Bernhard Müller (for the sake of Robert Fitzthum): Thank you for this interesting question! On behalf of Robert, I'd read out his answer to this question:

Firstly, there is worldwide uncertainty as to whether the EU states and the USA will get back on their feet economically in the next 2-3 years with their potent customers remaining there. Secondly, the breadth and effects of the ‚decoupling' operated by the US government are not foreseeable. China has been accused in Europe of having made Europe ‚dependent' through its large and efficient manufacturing base, as if it was Beijing's decision that so many large corporations went to China to invest in low-cost manufacturing facilities and, increasingly, also research centers in China. As a matter of fact, the decisions were made by those Western companies who operate for profit or to conquer the Chinese market.

It is understandable that Europe would like to localize the market, for instance, in the field of pharmaceuticals. Well, let's do it. It's anyway not up to China to decide. However, this area is particularly not easy to localize. Incidentally, many of the drugs come from India, not from China. And India obtains many of the raw materials and precursors in its drug production from China. I wish Europe the best of luck for this decoupling, which involves destroying large elaborate supply lines.

Europe and the USA accusingly whine about the possibility of being blackmailed by products such as ‚rare earth'. So far, however, China has never used its monopoly in various areas to the detriment of the West since Chinese companies want to do business. On the contrary, the United States and Europe are exploiting China's dependence particularly on the latest technology and impeding China's development by refusing to supply microchips and other products.

And the stronger this sanction pressure from the USA, the clearer it becomes that in order to achieve technological independence, China must develop its own leading-edge technology even more intensively, broadly and quickly – especially in the fields of semiconductors, AI, software, aircraft engines, etc. The result will be that companies such as Qualcomm, Intel, Samsung or ASML in Europe will not only lose the Chinese market in the future, but also be exposed to strong Chinese competition and greater price pressure on the world market.

Facing the West's attempts at decoupling China, the previous strong export orientation of China towards the USA and the EU could become a major problem for it. Since last year, there has been a stronger focus on exports to Asia, especially the ASEAN countries and the countries of the Global South in general. The stronger Asia orientation is reflected in the signing of the RCEP trade agreement and the negotiations of a free trade agreement with Japan and South Korea. The administration is in talks to join the Trump-scorned CPTPP transpacific trade deal, the centerpiece of Obama's ‚pivot to Asia'. China is also successfully orienting itself towards affluent parts of the Arab world. The expansion of the BRICS group to BRICS+ is expected to provide additional impetus for the Chinese export economy. The worldwide Belt & Road Initiative is an important channel for new export markets.

Concerning tourism, except for Greece and Hungary, Europe is showing little interest in attracting Chinese tourists since the opening in China, especially since the beginning of the year 2023. The creation of a negative mood towards China by politicians and the media, special entry restrictions for Chinese and negative voices from the population are not paving good grounds for getting wealthy tourists from China. In January 2023, during the Spring Festival holiday week, Chinese outbound tourism largely focused on Asia, with Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia particularly enjoying the arrival of the Chinese guests.

To conclude, the economic growth in China will be strategically generated more internally. And the export orientation will be weakened. Increasing the standard of living with a boost in demand is given top priority by the Chinese government for the future.

Moderator: Thank you again very much for this very thoughtful and thorough answer!

As we still have a couple of spare minutes, I would like to invite Dr. Sobotka and Dr.Weinstabl for a short analysis about the international cooperation in this ever polarizing world after the Pandemic – if we look at this year's Munich Security Conference – the possible future policy on digital security and human rights, as well as the economic development.

May I start with you, Dr. Sobotka?

Eva Sobotka: Certainly! Thank you very much! If I may take a couple of minutes before answering the question that you raised, I just want to say that I was listening very attentively to the previous speaker talking about the education about artificial intelligence and also the negative side of AI. I just didn't want one point to be missed. Of course, education is an essential element. You cannot invest more in education. It always pays out somehow in the future. But at the same time, what is needed? It affects fundamental rights, I mean, the use of the technologies and data protection. There are oversight structures within the international world. Different monitoring mechanisms are in place for the human rights, like the UPR system by the UN.

The monitoring mechanisms are currently done with regard to the artificial intelligence, too. As I mentioned before, the EU is trying to conclude the Artificial Intelligence Act that is coming up, which involves also expert bodies such as equality bodies, and national human rights institutions which are mandated to protect and promote fundamental and human rights at the State level. It includes businesses because corporations have AI concerns with deep fakes news, just as much as for individuals. So, it is the oversight structures that I do not want to leave unmentioned. The Council of Europe has also an initiative to conclude a convention on the artificial intelligence. But it's at its very start. The underlying point is that the regulatory framework is two steps behind the technological development. But I don't think this is necessarily bad. I think the law always follows the reality. If the reality follows the law, that would be absurd. I wouldn't like to live in such a world, at least speaking for myself.

But now I go to your question concerning the future of globalization. I would sort of agree

with the comments made before that we live in a bizarre stage of geopolitics. We do experience polarization. We do experience some flashbacks from the Cold War period in a way. But at the same time, I would say there's a triple crisis now: financial crisis, energy crisis, and food crisis. These three elements together are already affecting millions of people, which goes back to the essence of the topic for today: human security. If you look at the food prices, they have skyrocketed by 40 % compared to the previous two years, globally. It makes a world of difference whether 15 % or 50 % of the national budget is spent on food purchases. There is competition and higher prices in the energy market in the EU, due to the dependency on Russian gas that Europe has developed after World War II and especially after 1989. Recently, we have also a crisis of the availability of antibiotics and other essential medicines in some EU member States. This is another dependency: the biggest pharmaceutical industry in the world has been sending production to India. We have now learned that somehow this works until there is a serious crisis when the market does not provide enough medicine anymore. The war in Ukraine shows the dependency has become a weapon.

When it comes to China and its future economic role in the world, I've been listening very carefully to what Mr. Fitzthum said. China's achievements in the past 40 years are unprecedented. It is an extraordinary success story from the point of view of getting people out of poverty and developing the country, which is now at the forefront of economic growth. Being already a very powerful country, China is very confident in its own political model, and is willing to promote it to the world. There is a problem, though, about how to govern in order to better satisfy the interests of its population, I think.

Back to Europe, after World War II, Europe still made 20 % of the world population, I think. Now the statistics stands that Europe makes only less than 10 % of the world population. This is another perspective we need to take into consideration when talking about future. I would argue that today, the European Union should engage itself with the rest of the world and acknowledge the history of imperialism and colonialism in the past. Successful engagement with the rest of the world will require acknowledgement of the past.

Moderator: Yes! Thank you very much, Dr. Sobotka! What would you say, Dr. Weinstabl?

Constantin Weinstabl: I particularly like two points made by Dr. Sobotka. The first one is this dependency. There's no doubt that the system we got used to over the last 50 to 70 years is basically gone. I mean, you had a lot of international organizations created after World War II in order to make sure that something like World War II will never ever happen again, like the establishment of the United Nations during the Cold War, or the setup of the European Union and NATO. These institutions need to ask themselves the question of their actual tasks now. Over the last 20 or even 30 years, there has been huge discussions about the usability of such organizations. It is a question continuously lingering in international relations, where countries will have to ask themselves if they would rather side with those who are in favor of the political system or say, of the energy market.

The other point that I would like to reiterate is that with the ascension of China and to some extent India and some other countries, the international relations have been experiencing a shift of power center. The world is interdependent. Yet the Europeans traditionally have a value orientation of Europeanization. As a matter of fact, both Europe and the United States adopt this mindset. Over the years, the traditional Western model has emphasized democracy, freedom, capitalism, neoliberalism, etc. But the world has now other models, such as State capitalism. New forces with new alliances have emerged. The West should not think about the world in a bipolar sense but embrace the future with a diversified way of thinking. Looking back at history, Europe was also diversified in the 19th century. Europe needs to reflect on the consequences of colonialism, not to mention that many former colonies have now become a dominant force in the global economy. Right now, Europe and the United States might feel a sense of insecurity, since the originally ironclad hierarchy has been leveled or challenged.

Moderator: Thank you, Dr. Weinstabl! Hmm, how should I put it? These two last answers don't make us overly optimistic about the future, I guess. We see multiple crises coming up, which are not very positive for human security. And we probably see the system of international relations awaiting huge change on a global scale in the next couple of years, too. I guess

we all need time to crunch on what has been discussed tonight. But first, allow me to kindly ask Mr. Müller, one of the organizers for this event, for a closing statement. Bernhard, the floor is yours!

Bernhard Müller: Thank you, dear David!

Ladies and gentlemen, it was a very interesting forum for a very important topic! I will try to offer some remarks as a small summary. I think this year's Munich Security Conference took place in an environment of prevailing global insecurity and strong political tensions. In this context, propaganda reminiscent of the Cold War is not spared on different levels and from different sides. International cooperation would be particularly important now to ensure the safety of people, data protection and cyber security.

We are living in a period of epoch change. But many people do not want to admit it. The era of digitalization at the States' level and thus of the world following has long begun. In my opinion, the motto „Engage and interact with each other: don't lecture or ignore each other" is very well chosen and absolutely true. But the question is how this could be implemented worldwide. During the Pandemic, not only have different States used different measures and methods to combat COVID-19, but also huge rifts have emerged in the societies of different countries. This is all the more reason why we need multilateralism. The major problems of the world, such as fighting hunger and poverty, creating comprehensive social and health care, coping with climate change and combating terrorism and other security risks, can only be tackled through cooperation between the major players. Human security is more than just preventing threats to life. Human security in the post-Pandemic digital era can only exist if this term is interpreted comprehensively.

Thank you all very much for joining us at this online forum, ladies and gentlemen! We'd hope to see you soon again! Have a good evening and goodbye!

20th February 2023

Weckruf Corona
Gesellschaftliche Diagnosen für unser Leben nach der Pandemie

Die COVID-19-Pandemie war und ist nicht nur eine Gefahr für die Gesundheit der Menschen, sie hat sich auch als Bedrohung für unsere europäische Gesellschaft erwiesen. Die Coronapandemie hat beinahe keinen Bereich unseres täglichen Lebens unberührt gelassen – in Österreich genauso wenig wie in der gesamten Europäischen Union. COVID-19 hat darüber hinaus auch Systemschwächen offengelegt, die nicht erst durch diese Pandemie entstanden sind. Dieser Sammelband ist im Geiste des Vorsorgedenkens entstanden und will einen Beitrag dazu leisten, dass wir diese vorausschauende Haltung wieder ins Rampenlicht

stellen. Nicht nur, um unsere Gesundheitssysteme zu stärken und besser auf die nächste Pandemie vorbereitet zu sein, sondern auch, um eine neue Sichtweise darauf zu entwickeln, was uns in unserer Gesellschaft wirklich etwas wert ist und worauf wir besonders achten müssen.
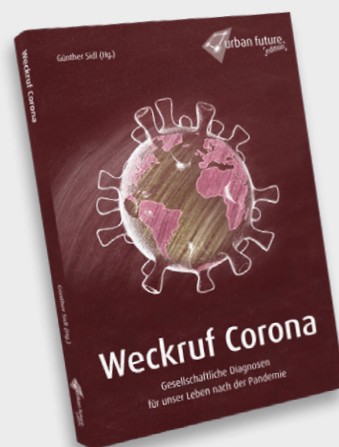
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Auswirkungen der Covid-19-Pandemie
Erkenntnisse der Jahre 2020 und 2021 für ein nachhaltiges Finanzierungsmodell der Kommunen und deren gesamtstaatliche Rollenentwicklung

Die gegenständliche Studie befasst sich mit den Auswirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie auf Österreichs Gemeinden in den Jahren 2020 und 2021. Die 2.093 Kommunen mussten zahlreiche Aufgaben zur Bewältigung der Pandemie übernehmen und hatten zeitgleich mit erheblichen Einnahmen- ausfällen zu kämpfen, welche die Sicherstellung der Leistungen für die Bürger*innen gefährdeten. Die Untersuchung erfolgt aufbauend auf der bestehenden Gemeindestruktur und deren finanzieller Ausgestaltung. Die bestehende Literatur bestätigt hierzu strukturelle Defizite.

Das Ziel dieser Publikation ist es somit, die Auswirkungen der Pandemie im Kontext der Gemein- definanzierung in Österreich und de-

ren Aufgabenentwicklung zu analysieren. Damit sollen Er- kenntnisse für ein nachhaltiges Finanzierungsmodell der Kommunen und deren gesamtstaatliche Rollenentwicklung abgeleitet werden. Hierzu wird folgende Forschungsfrage gestellt: Welche Aus- wirkungen hatte die CO-VID-19-Pandemie in den Jahren 2020 und 2021 auf Österreichs Gemeinden und welche Rahmenbedingungen müssen aus ihrer Sicht vorherrschen, um die Gemeindefinan- zierung und die sich stetig weiterentwickelnden Leistungen für die Bürger*innen nachhaltig ab- zusichern?

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