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Neutrality and the politics of peace with the example of Austria*

by Professor Dr Dr h.c. mult. Hans Köchler

I Background and historical information

In the context of this presentation, 'neutrality' is understood in the sense of *international law*, i. e., concerning relations between sovereign states. It does not pertain to value judgement in moral or ideological terms. Neutrality must, therefore, be distinguished from 'neutralism', which, in the past, was often used polemically to describe a position referred to as ideological neutrality – in the sense of equally val-

uing the rival systems of capitalism and socialism. This stance was falsely attributed to the non-aligned states during the Cold War. I will show later why this attribution was not justified.

Since we deal here with neutrality in the domain of politics, I will attempt a brief operational definition of the latter. 'Politics' is the organization of the collective (communal) will with the purpose that humanity rises above the *state of nature*, i. e., that every member of the community is enabled not only to *survive*, but also – through the division of labor in society – to *live in freedom and dignity*. This would not be possible without the organization-

al form of the state – or only possible for a few individuals at the expense of everyone else. The political objective implies that not only *democracy*, but also *peace* – both internally and externally – are central concerns of the community. Ensuring peace is also the quintessence of the *rule of law* as the absence of arbitrariness: vis-à-vis the individual (within the state) as well as vis-à-vis the collective or nation (between states).

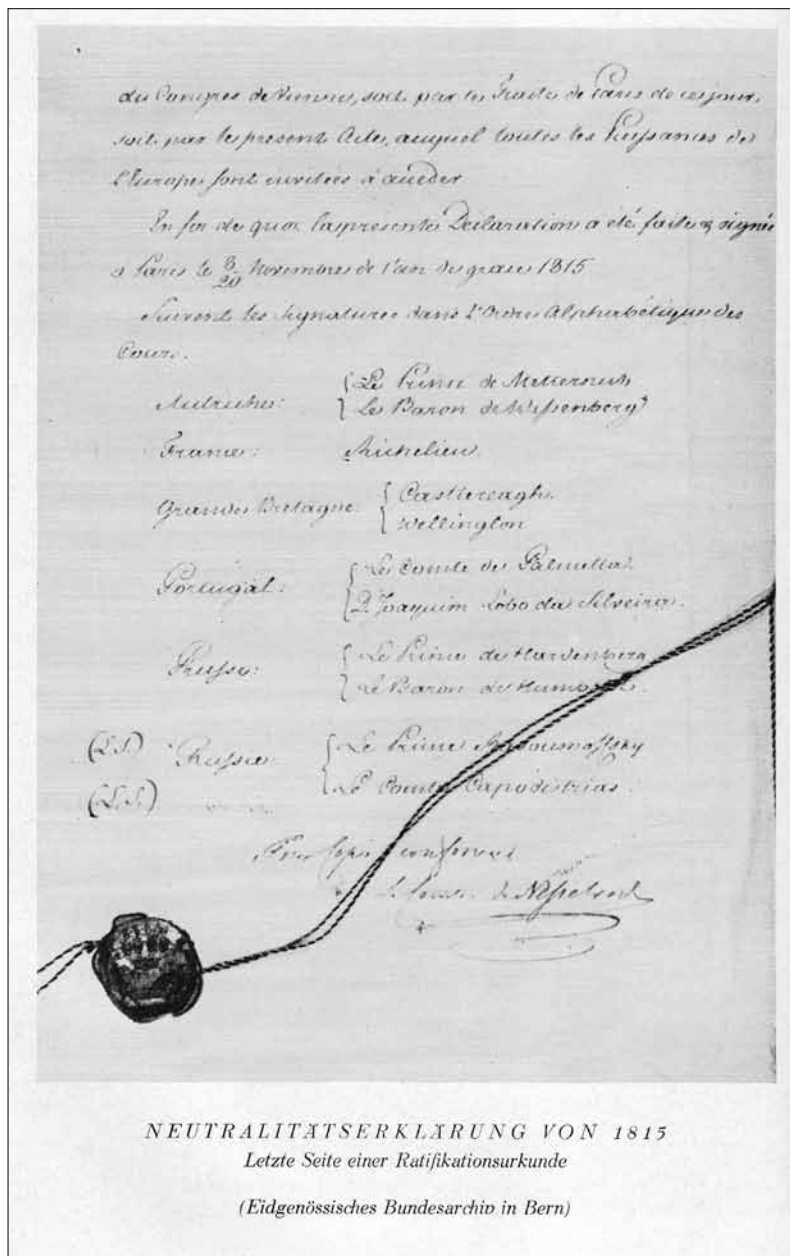
In the context of *international politics*, in concrete terms, neutrality means that, for the sake of peace and its own independence, a state keeps out of interstate disputes, i. e., does not participate in wars, does not join (military) alliances, and does not allow any other state to use its territory for war-related purposes. The latter also precludes the stationing or accommodation of foreign troops in peacetime. In this sense, neutrality – as a *principle of the state* – must be perpetual, not merely related to a particular occasion (and thus limited in time). What neutrality does not preclude, however, but in fact demands, is the ability and willingness of the neutral state to defend itself in the event of an attack. This is in line with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which enshrines the right to self-defense.

Since peace between states is one of the noblest goals of the international order – it is, in Kantian terms, the "Bedingung der Möglichkeit" (condition of the possibility) for the realization of the fundamental rights of people (in political, economic as well as social terms)¹ –, the neutrality of a state under international law is, almost by definition, a matter of the *common good*. This applies domestically, regionally and globally. In this sense, neutrality is at the intersection of the *ideal* of peace and the *reality* of international politics. However, states often only become aware of this ideal-real nexus when the inter-state order suddenly falls apart at the seams. If, in a given region, the rivalry of the dominant actors (major powers) leads to the use of force and destabilization, it is in the *general interest* – that is, in the interests of peace – for individual states to opt for a policy of neutrality. This applied for example to the situation in Europe after the Napoleonic wars with respect to Switzerland as well as it did apply to the constellation following the Second World War with respect to Austria.

A brief historical review is appropriate, in fact essential, to aid understanding of the present. The Congress of Vien-

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* Presentation for readers of Zeit-Fragen in Savognin, Canton of Grisons, Switzerland, 30 July 2021. Translated from German.



Declaration of Neutrality of 1815 –
last page of a ratification document (picture Federal Archives in Bern)

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na of 1814–1815 officially established the nexus of 'ideal' and 'real' for the first time and, explicitly referring to the common good ("general interest"), declared "neutrality" as the *international status* of Switzerland. In the declaration of March 20, 1815, the powers gathered in Vienna ("les Puissances") stated "que l'interêt générale réclame en faveur du Corps Helvétique l'avantage d'une neutralité perpétuelle".² The states further declared that once Switzerland had acceded to (i. e., agreed to) this declaration, they would guarantee its perpetual neutrality within its new borders. The original text speaks of "reconnaissance et garantie de la part de toutes les Puissances de la neutralité perpétuelle de la Suisse dans ses nouvelles frontières". It seems quite remarkable that neutrality was explicitly spoken of as an *advantage* ("avantage") for the Helvetic state and it was emphasized that the *common good* required such a status, to the benefit of Switzerland.

At a meeting in Zurich on 27 May 1815, the assembly of the Swiss cantons ("Diète", or "Tag-satzung") explicitly endorsed the declaration of the Congress of Vienna. The relevant "*Act d'accession*" states, verbatim from the formulations in Vienna: "La Diète exprime la gratitude éternelle de la Nation Suisse envers les hautes Puissances qui [...] promettent solennement de reconnaître et de garantir la neutralité perpétuelle que l'interêt générale de l'Europe réclame en faveur du Corps Helvétique."³ Interestingly, the Swiss Assembly expressly notes that the *European* common good requires the status of perpetual neutrality.

In structural terms, the constellation was still quite similar over a century later – after the Second World War – with regard to Austria. It seems to me an interesting aperçu of history that an international status, which was proposed to Switzerland (de facto: linked with a promise of guarantee) in Vienna in 1815 by the great powers of the time, was explicitly determined in 1955 as the status of an independent Austria. In the context of the negotiations for the "State Treaty" with the victorious powers of the Second World War, neutral-

ity "according to the Swiss model" was introduced into the text of the so-called *Moscow Memorandum* of 15 April 1955.

Here, too, the nexus of *ideal* (peace) versus *real* (international realpolitik as power politics) cannot be overlooked. In the constellation of the Cold War – when two ideologically defined blocs suspiciously faced each other in Europe – it was essential for *Austria* to declare itself perpetually neutral in order to convince all occupying powers (especially the Soviet Union) that *none of them* could derive a strategic advantage from the simultaneous withdrawal of *all of them*. It was also in the *general interest* of preserving peace (not only in Europe, but also this time – in the 20th century – in the world as a whole) that a country geographically situated be-

dere in Vienna. On the day after all occupying troops had left the country, the Austrian Parliament enshrined neutrality in the constitution ("Bundesverfassungsgesetz vom 26.10.1955 über die Neutralität Österreichs"). This date has been celebrated as Austrian National Day ever since.

The conditionality – that the constitutionally neutral status was only decided *after* the signing of the State Treaty and the withdrawal of all foreign troops – was particularly important for Austria's self-image as a sovereign state. Constitutional law experts like to characterize the obligation entered into in the Moscow Memorandum in terms of a so-called "*Verwendungszusage*" ("pledge to implement"), which Austria had given of its own free will. In reality, however, the calculus of



Jawaharlal Nehru (center), Prime Minister of India, welcoming Austrian Foreign Minister Karl Gruber at the Bürgenstock on 20 June 1953. Nehru had invited Gruber to this meeting, at which Gruber requested Nehru's good offices for the negotiations with the Soviet Union on the State Treaty and the sovereignty of Austria.

(Picture ETH-Bibliothek Zurich, Picture Archive / Photographer: Boog)

tween the blocs should be neither a deployment area nor an ally of competing powers. The Moscow memorandum stated that the Austrian government would make a declaration in a form that commits Austria internationally to exercise perpetual neutrality as practiced by Switzerland.

In the constellation of the time, the reference to the proven Swiss model served an important confidence-building purpose vis-à-vis the world powers. The Moscow Declaration proved to be the key to the agreement of *all* Allied powers to the "State Treaty", which was solemnly signed exactly a month later at the Belve-

realpolitik – similar to that made in the case of Switzerland in 1815 – was decisive. It was clear to everyone in the country that without such a pledge (or, in plain English: declaration of commitment) there would be no state treaty with subsequent troop withdrawal – just as, in 1815, the great powers of the time made their guarantee of Switzerland's independence in the new borders – albeit dressed up in elegant diplomatic French – dependent on its acceptance of the Vienna Declaration (which proclaimed neutrality as an advantage for Switzerland).

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II The hidden and suppressed history of Austrian neutrality

In positioning 'Swiss-style' neutrality as the constitutional status of Austria in the post-World War II era of decolonization, one significant aspect in terms of history and international politics is usually overlooked, indeed, one might say, largely suppressed. I mean the role played by some of the leading founders of the Non-Aligned Movement in support of Austria on its way to full independence as a perpetually neutral state. At that time, solidarity between the states struggling for their independence was still strong. This was also the era in which the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia began to define their new-found position in terms of "non-alignment" – as equidistance or neutrality in the Cold War between the two great power blocs – and in which they created the organizational structures to articulate this policy. The decisive events were the

Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 (the "Bandung Conference") and the Belgrade Conference in 1961, which established the Non-Aligned Movement. (Two decades later, I cooperated with the Secretary-General of the Belgrade Conference, *Leo Mates*, the then head of President *Tito's* cabinet, in the organization of an international conference on "The Principles of Non-alignment".)⁴ With regard to Austria's wish to regain and secure its independence as a permanently neutral state, probably the most important politician from this group of states was the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Reference should also be made here to Indonesian President *Sukarno*, the organizer of the Bandung Conference.

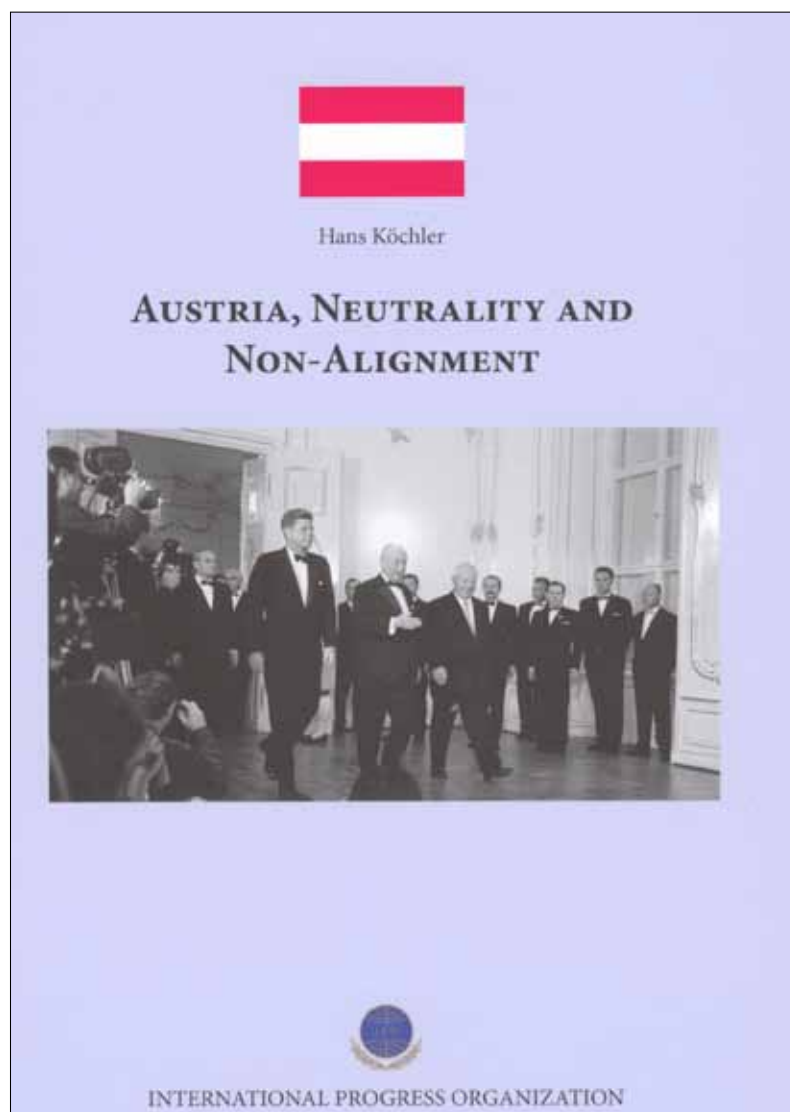
There was a structural connection between the issues defined by neutrality and non-alignment. Common criteria were undoubtedly *peaceful coexistence* based on non-interference in internal affairs and, in particular, *non-participation* in the organizational structures of the two power blocs of the time. It is important to note

that neutrality in the military sense – as practiced by Austria and Switzerland – also means that a state does not interfere in the affairs of other states and, thus, *tolerates* their specific political and ideological systems. *Tolerance*, however, does not mean *endorsement* or domestic *implementation*. Accordingly, the polemical criticism of "neutralism" leveled at the Non-Aligned Movement did not hit the mark. Moreover, the history of the interventionist policy of the West, especially after the Cold War, shows that ideological interference always brings with it the danger of armed conflict.

President Sukarno, who was a regular visitor to Vienna in the 1950s and 1960s, expressed most succinctly the meaning of peaceful coexistence. In his opening speech at the Bandung Conference on 18 April 1955, he described "peaceful coexistence" as an element of world order that a state can strengthen through a policy of neutrality or non-alignment. His carefully drafted speech, indeed a statement of principles, makes many pronouncements of today's leaders pale in comparison. It was also implicitly a formulation of what we in the *International Progress Organization* later propagated as 'dialogue between different civilizations' (1972) and what, at the UN General Assembly in New York, was suggested more than a quarter of a century later (2000) by Iranian President *Khatami* as the basis of a peaceful world order.

In his speech, Sukarno explicitly referred to the *diversity* of religions, ideologies, and economic as well as political and constitutional systems in the global community of nations. Already then – half a century before the slogan was in vogue – he formulated the principle of "*unity in diversity*" while emphasizing the interdependence (i.e., the need for one another) of all states and peoples. On this basis, he formulated the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, which embodies the principle of *reciprocity* that is essential to all dialogue. Sukarno appealed to the representatives of the states gathered in Bandung and to the international public to take to heart the maxim of "live and let live," which also means refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of other states. He characterized the states gathered in Bandung in terms of a "body of enlightened, tolerant opinion, which seeks to impress on the world that all men and all countries have their place under the sun."⁵

There is an interesting temporal coincidence. Sukarno delivered the speech in Bandung, with the plea for an enlightened and tolerant attitude toward all peoples and states, exactly three days after the Moscow Memorandum was signed, estab-



Hans Köchler. Austria, Neutrality and Non-Alignment, Vienna 2021, ISBN 978-3-900704-28-5

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lishing Austria's commitment to perpetual neutrality, on 15 April 1955. The Indonesian head of state paid his first state visit to Austria in the following year (September 1956). It was followed by several more visits – including a second, weeklong state visit in 1963.

The doctrine of equal coexistence was later adopted by the founding assembly of non-aligned states in Belgrade in September 1961. The leaders gathered there spoke of a transition "to a new order based on cooperation between nations, founded on freedom, equality and social justice for the promotion of prosperity."⁶

The closeness of Austria's efforts to achieve neutrality to the concerns of the Asian and African political leaders gathered in Bandung who would later form the Non-Aligned Movement was even more evident in the support that Indian Prime Minister Nehru gave Austria at the most difficult time before the conclusion of the State Treaty – in the delicate negotiations with the Soviet Union.⁷ Switzerland comes into play again here, this time as a neutral meeting place. On 20 June 1953, Nehru received the Austrian Foreign Minister *Karl Gruber* on the Bürgenstock, high above Lake Lucerne. He had met Gruber a few days earlier on the sidelines of the coronation of *Elizabeth II* in London and invited him to visit him in Switzerland. During the meeting, which went down in history as the Bürgenstock Initiative, Gruber asked Nehru to mediate in Moscow. Despite the usual diplomatic denials immediately after the meeting became known, Nehru kept his promise. The Indian ambassador in Moscow was instructed to bring into play – as a confidence-building step – a voluntary neutrality commitment by Austria, and to present this as an Indian idea (in order to allow Austria a face-saving withdrawal, if necessary). Even though Soviet Foreign Minister *Molotov* reacted skeptically at first, two years later, the proposal was part of the Moscow Memorandum, which paved the way for the State Treaty. *Bruno Kreisky's* famous statement is to be understood against the background of these historical facts: "Nehru's name will forever be associated with the history of our neutrality." (Kreisky later served as Foreign Minister and Federal Chancellor of Austria.)

The "neutral non-aligned community of thought", as it could casually be called, was also evident in the fact that Nehru was the first politician to pay a state visit to the newly re-established Austria – barely a month after the signing of the State Treaty. It was rumored at the time that Nehru also particularly felt attached to the Austrian cause because the Habsburg Empire

– unlike the British Empire, for example – had never maintained colonial territories.

Historically, it is also of interest that Austrian neutrality was sealed six years before the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement (in Belgrade in September 1961) – but practically at the same time as the Bandung Conference. These were the years when Austria took neutrality seriously and performed its role as a new member of the United Nations on the basis of strictly staying out of international disputes. The policy was also reflected in the instructions issued by Foreign Minister *Leopold Figl* to the Austrian delegation in New York. For the 12th session of the UN General Assembly (1957–1958), he instructed the diplomatic representatives to abstain from voting on all decisions on 'measures' but, at the same time, to support all initiatives toward decolonization (the term Figl used was "anti-colonialism") and to always affirm the principle of the self-determination of peoples.

III Development of the neutrality doctrine and the constraints of *realpolitik*

This was also the time of constructive cooperation with the countries that were considered to belong to the 'Third World' and which – like Austria – wanted to stay out of the quarrels of the First and Second Worlds. One of the main concerns of Austrian policy was to secure neutrality as an integral element of a sustainable *policy of peace*. In a statement to Parliament in Vienna on 25 March 1971, Foreign Minister *Rudolf Kirchschläger* summarized the essence of the policy of perpetual neutrality. He stressed the need for independence on all sides, adding that this must be accompanied by the establishment of constructive and friendly relations with as many states as possible. His quite realistic assessment was that "a small country situated between rival ideological blocs can best develop in an atmosphere of détente and cooperation." In this sense, he propagated a policy of so-called "active neutrality".

However, as has so often been the case in international politics, a U-turn occurred in Austria's neutrality policy. With the shock of the disintegration of the old bipolar order at the beginning of the 1990s, nations oriented themselves – over-zealously and suddenly – with the newly emerging unipolar constellation, which they prematurely believed would be "perpetual". In order to adapt to this new order, Austria gave up its perpetual neutrality – de facto and probably also de jure. Austria joined the EU and "adapted" the country's constitution in such a way that participation in military operations within the framework of the European Union became possible. (No in-depth conceptual analysis is needed to see that this is incompatible with

the concept of *military* neutrality). In this way, Austria became, as it were, a 'party' in all international political conflicts in which the EU, driven by the global interests of its largest member states, plays a role – all the way to the Hindu Kush (if I may allude to a recent dictum in German politics) and to the Sahel region of Africa.

Despite the erosion of the principle of neutrality – actually its negation in the course of Austria's growing integration into the power politics of Europe and the Atlantic region –, the concept gained new relevance in international affairs at the beginning of the 21st century – not only for Austria, but also for countries on today's geopolitical fault lines. We are witnessing the emergence of a new multi-polar constellation that is beginning to replace the hegemony of the United States. In this scenario – unlike in 1945 – tensions are emerging between powerful actors in a growing number of regions, e.g., between Russia and the EU/US or NATO alliance, China and the US, or China and India. In this constellation, it is particularly prudent for small and medium-sized states to stay out of the conflicts and rivalries of the major powers. This is (1) in a country's *self-interest*, properly understood (so that it is not targeted – and then abandoned, as the sad fate of many US allies has proven); it is also (2) in the overriding interest of stabilizing zones of tension, where it can be

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Thucydides dilemma

"Anyone who remembers his history lessons from long ago may still know that *Thucydides*, a strategist and author, lived in ancient Greece. Athens, the then 'great power', watched the emerging Sparta with increasing displeasure. The competition between the two finally erupted in the 5th century BC in the long Peloponnesian War, which led to the defeat and loss of importance of Athens (Thucydides reported in detail on this under the title 'The Peloponnesian War').

Graham T. Allison, Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at *Harvard Kennedy School*, wrote in his book 'Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?' (2017) coined the term 'Thucydides Trap', referring to developments such as those that affected Athens and Sparta at the time, and the USA and China for example today.

That is, a dominant great power feels rivalled, displaced, then seriously threatened by an ascendant, which may lead to war."

Frick, Gotthard. Thucydides trap – a newborn strategic concept. In: Current Concerns No 30 of 5 January 2021

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argued that the greater the "alliance-free space" (geographically and legally), the greater the chances of consolidation and peace. This could also give new relevance to the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is obvious that such an approach is diametrically opposed to NATO's new doctrine of "non-Article 5 crisis response operations", which effectively turns the entire world into a theater of operations. However, what the world needs most urgently in the current constellation (that begins to resemble the former Cold War scenario – in Europe, but also in East and Southeast Asia), are not constantly expanding military alliances such as NATO, but "zones of peace" formed by states that follow a policy of neutrality not in an ideological sense, but in the strict meaning of international law, i. e., of "military neutrality" – similar to the idea of peaceful coexistence succinctly formulated by Sukarno in Bandung more than six decades ago. This, however, would require a renewed focus on the global 'need for one another' – in Sukarno's words: "to develop a true consciousness of the interdependence of men and nations for the well-being and survival on earth."

Great power politics, still enabled and encouraged by the voting procedure of the UN Security Council,⁸ will hinder the realization of this vision, at least for the time being. The 'realignment' of the nuclear superpowers – the US, China, and Russia – envisaged by the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, US National Security Advisor under President Carter, will probably remain a wishful dream.

Developments point in the direction of a global showdown in which the much-invoked 'international rule of law' may become irrelevant. The 'Thucydides dilemma' – involving the US and China – appears to be quite real. Thus, it will be all the more important to secure and expand 'neutral spaces' (in the geostrategic, but also in the literal, location-based sense) so that the 'powers' – 'les Puissances' as they were apostrophized by the Congress of Vienna – have an *incentive* and find *space* to negotiate their differences.

I would like to conclude with what is almost a platitude: The fewer the states that join the alliances of these powers, the better will it be for peace. The greater the number of states that commit themselves to genuine neutrality in the sense of non-alignment, the more precarious will be a

conduct of power politics that regards war as *ultima ratio*. •

¹ For clarification, it is important to note that a *necessary* condition (*conditio sine qua non*) is not a *sufficient* condition.

² "Déclaration des Puissances sur les affaires de la Confédération Helvétique, du 20 Mars 1815", quoted from the official records of the Congress of Vienna: *Actes du Congrès de Vienne*. Brussels: Weissenbruch, 1819.

³ "Acte d'accession (*en date de Zurich le 27 Mai 1815*) de la Confédération Suisse à la Déclaration des Puissances réunies au Congrès de Vienne, *en date du 20 Mars 1815*," op. cit.

⁴ Hans Köchler (Ed.), *The Principles of Non-alignment: The Non-aligned Countries in the Eighties – Results and Perspectives*. London/Vienna: Third World Centre, 1982.

⁵ Original text of the speech: "Address given by Sukarno (Bandung, 18 April 1955)," in: *Asia-Africa speak from Bandung*. Jakarta: Indonesia – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955, pp. 19–29.

⁶ 1st Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belgrade, 6 September 1961: Final Document – Section on Nuclear Disarmament and Related Issues, quoted according to: *Non-Aligned and Developing Countries: Basic Documents*. New Delhi: Indian Society of International Law, 1970, p. 6.

⁷ For the details, also see Hans Köchler, *Austria, Neutrality and Non-alignment. Studies in International Relations*, Vol. 36. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2021, Chapter I.

⁸ See also: Hans Köchler, *The Voting Procedure in the United Nations Security Council*. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1991.

"The Swiss Lectures – World Order and the Rule of Law"

The book "The Swiss Lectures – World Order and the Rule of Law" is the extended edition of the German book "Schweizer Vorträge – Texte zu Völkerrecht und Weltordnung" (2019). The English book is a collection of all articles by Hans Köchler published in the Swiss journal *Current Concerns*, from 2011 to 2021. The articles summarise lectures given in Switzerland to readers of *Zeit-Fragen*, the German edition of *Current Concerns*. The book also contains further analyses and interviews on pressing issues of our times.

Hans Köchler's approach combines basic legal-philosophical analyses with an assessment of current developments in law and world affairs. In one of his texts he writes:

"In philosophical – or more specifically, hermeneutical – terms, we can only understand ourselves if we are able to relate to other identities. This is true for the individual person as it is for a collective of individuals. [...] Realizing that knowledge of other cultures is indispensable for knowing oneself will also help to create a new and solid basis for what is called peaceful co-existence, namely a harmonious living together of communities – cultures and civilizations as well as states" (pp. 24).

"May this English edition encourage readers to further deepen their appreciation for the dialogue between cultures and people, to advance the awareness of the benefits of diversity and exchange rather than violent power politics, and to acknowledge the 'resulting need to

reach an understanding beyond ideological boundaries' (pp. 70f below)." (Preface of the Editors, p. 10)

The Author



Hans Köchler (*1948) is emeritus professor of philosophy. From 1990 until 2008 he served as Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Innsbruck (Austria). Köchler's research interests

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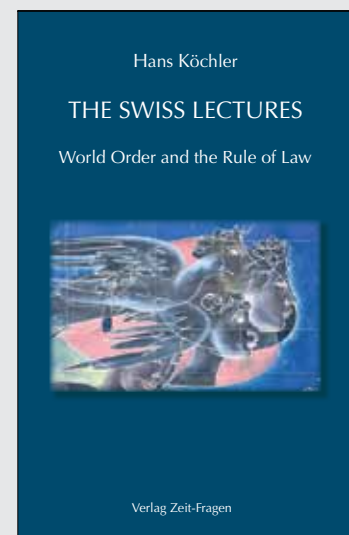
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