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## **THE LONG LINES OF NATIONALISM, AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE AND GERMANY (HOLBERG PRIZE ANNIVERSARY)**

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### **Welcome Address**

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Thank you very much for the kind introduction, dear Kjestri Flöttum, and on behalf of the whole Academy, also very personally, the warmest congratulations on the anniversary of the Holberg Prize. The list of prize winners reads like a travel guide to the most interesting researchers and topics in the field of the humanities and social sciences – ex post, because some were already on everyone’s lips when they were awarded, but surely all are today. And that is a special mark of quality, as are the highly interesting symposia on the award winners and their thematic focuses. I consider myself particularly fortunate that we have Jürgen Kocka, one of these laureates, among our members and that we have thus been able to enjoy an anniversary event of the Holberg Prize – normally, those who celebrate an anniversary receive a gift; here, the jubilarian presents a gift in the form of a celebration to those who should actually have presented them with a gift. Our gift is that we have supplemented the laureate with our academy member Michael Zürn and with Hedwig Richter. And together, we will hopefully give them all a stimulating discussion on “The long lines of nationalism, authoritarianism and democracy in Europe and Germany”, no doubt a whole bundle of topics that are currently being hotly debated not only within the historical and political sciences, but also in the feature pages of the daily newspapers and on social media.

In this respect, it is perhaps not surprising if I first introduce to you, ladies and gentlemen, Hedwig Richter, about whose book “Democracy, a German Affair” a veritable squabble has broken out among historians.

She has been Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at the Universität der Bundeswehr Munich since 2019.

Prior to her appointment, Hedwig Richter taught and researched at the universities of Bielefeld, Greifswald and Heidelberg and at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research and has held many fellowships in different countries.

Her most recently published monograph is “Aufbruch in die Moderne. Reform und Massenpolitisierung im Kaiserreich” (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021).

She received the Offermann-Hergarten Prize of the University of Cologne for her dissertation (2010) and was awarded the Prize of the Demokratiestiftung for her habilitation in 2018. In 2020, Hedwig Richter received the Anna Krüger Prize of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin for “an outstanding work in a good and comprehensible academic language”. The jury of the Anna Krüger Prize praised her style as “of masterful nonchalance and elegance, crystal clear and descriptive”. The citation went on to say: “She masters various styles, from academic to popular, but never writes dryly or pretentiously. Lightly and seemingly effortlessly, she conveys historical-political themes and does not shy away from catchy yet precise exaggeration”. Her frequent contributions on Twitter are also a testimony to this.

The second person from the panel whom I would like to introduce briefly is of course Jürgen Kocka, who was awarded the Holberg Prize in 2011. I quote here again from the citation, this time of the Holberg Prize: “Jürgen Kocka is an outstanding historian who effected a paradigm shift in German historiography by opening it up to related social sciences and establishing the importance of cross-national comparative approaches. ... Kocka is a public intellectual whose engagement with memory construction and the politics of history promotes enlightened and democratic institutions, and leads him to struggle against exclusions, privileges and inequalities. Jürgen Kocka is among the most influential historians working today”.

Currently, he is a Senior Fellow at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam and Permanent Fellow at the International College in the Humanities “Work and the Life Course in Global Historical Perspective” at the Humboldt University.

From 1988 to 2009, he was professor for The History of the Industrial World at the Free University of Berlin. From 1992 to 1996, he helped establish and directed the present Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam, from 1998 to 2009, he was director of the Berlin Centre and (since 2004) the College for Comparative European History (FU and HU). From 2001 to 2007, he was president of the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB) and from 2008 to 2011 vice-president of the BBAW. He held many other offices.

He is a member of the BBAW (1993), the Leopoldina, the Academia Europaea, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Turin Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds numerous honorary doctorates. Apart from the Holberg Prize, he has also been awarded with – inter alia – the Leibniz Prize of the DFG.

His monograph “Kampf um die Moderne. Das lange 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland”, published by Klett-Cotta in 2021, has recently been published in a licensed edition by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung).

But now we want to talk not only about the history of the long lines of nationalism, authoritarianism and democracy in Europe and Germany since the beginning of the long nineteenth century, but also about the present and the future, i. e. the emergence of far-right movements, the tilting of entire societies and legal systems. And this is where Michael Zürn comes in, whom I would like to introduce to you as the last of the tercet sitting on the podium. Again, I quote from a citation, namely the one for the Berlin Science Prize for the year 2021:

“Professor Michael Zürn is one of the most, if not the most, distinguished German political scientists. It is impossible to imagine Berlin’s research landscape without him, and by founding, supporting and further developing various institutions, he has made himself a very important promoter and supporter of Berlin as a location for science and teaching. With his theory of global governance, he has further developed the analysis of international relations. He researches politicisation processes and legitimations of international organisations and their interaction with national politics, especially with regard to questions of democratic governance.

With his latest book, Prof. Michael Zürn contributes to one of the most important political debates of our time: The future of democracies. Together with Achim Schäfer, he examines the ‘democratic regression’ that is also taking place in the heart of the European Union. The focus is on a problem of democracy that has received too little attention: the shrinking space for democratic decision-making at the level of the nation state. The authors’ look not only at states like Poland and Hungary, where authoritarian governments are dismantling democracy step by step, but also at the interior of consolidated democracies like Germany, Austria and France. Their warning: Among other things, strengthening the executive in

times of crisis can weaken democratic processes and citizens' sense of not being properly represented. Populist-autocratic politicians are ready to exploit this situation to their advantage.”

As a historian and theologian who deals primarily with antiquity, allow me to make two final remarks on the topic of our discussion, which will follow shortly and will be opened by brief statements from the panellists. The long lines of nationalism, authoritarianism and democracy: The discussion on Hedwig Richter's book has very clearly presented us once again with the question of whether democracy and authoritarianism are really accurately described when they are radically conceived as a dualistic opposition. Erwin Planck, Max Planck's son, prepared the so-called Prussian Strike in the Reich Chancellery for Chancellor von Papen – i. e. the illegal dismissal of the Prussian state government in 1932. It was not until 1934, after the assassination of former Reich Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher in the course of the so-called Röhm Putsch, that Planck realised that the dismantling of the constitutional state was irreversible and began his path into the German resistance, which ended with his conviction by the People's Court and execution in 1945. How do we deal with the fact that many of the resistance fighters were committed to the rule of law and followed through authoritarian state models? Is this a step on the way to democracy? Or precisely not? And, is there a specific German history of the connection between thoughts on the rule of law and democratisation that is something other than a special path (“Sonderweg”), as one might ask with Jürgen Kocka?

Finally, a second observation: As a young girl in Swabia, my wife was still physically chastised, beaten. As a young man in Berlin, of course, I have not been beaten for a long time. Today, of course, this is also forbidden in Swabia. Doesn't a history of the body, as Hedwig Richter demands, have to complement the answers to our questions in the history of structures, politics and ideas? I am looking forward to our discussion!