

Gert Krell

**Laudatory speech for the Mosbach Prize of the Hans Günter Brauch Foundation  
for the life's work of Prof. Dr. Dieter Senghaas (born 1940)**

Dear Hans Günter, ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Dieter,

Honoring or paying tribute to you is both easy and difficult at the same time; both because there is so much to honor.

Just looking at the 12 points in the Mosbach Prize certificate for your life's work, I wondered how a single person could accomplish so many things in such a wide range of fields in their professional life: as a globally networked thinker and writer, as an organizer and communicator, as a promoter, as a teacher.

There is no question that you are an extraordinary scholar, a truly extraordinary scholar! My research has revealed that Dieter Senghaas has published at least 18 monographs and 13 anthologies. The stack of books you see in front of me, ladies and gentlemen, contains 10 of his books that I brought with me from home; most of them in the colorful rainbow colors of the Suhrkamp edition. You have to imagine this stack now three times as high, and probably one or two titles are still missing. An extraordinary result, not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of quality. Dieter Senghaas's writings are multidisciplinary in nature: they cover political science, sociology, psychology, history, economics, and most recently even musicology. If you read the footnotes in his texts, you will see how richly he works with material. It is incredible how much literature he integrates. Dieter's texts cover a very broad spectrum of topics: of course, basic research on peace, war, conflict, violence, aggression, civilization, and development; then many specific topics such as East-West conflict, North-South conflict, world order, the structure of the international system, European peace order, music, and peace.

In addition, Dieter Senghaas has a great talent for conceptualizing complicated issues: autism for East-West arms dynamics, autocentric development for North-South issues, civilizational hexagon for central conditions of peace, civilization against one's will for modernization processes. Finally, Dieter is a free spirit, unbiased toward any theoretical tradition or ideology and politically incorruptible. There are already a number of detailed tributes to Dieter Senghaas. Hans Günter gave me a 19-page paper by Lothar Brock, a mutual colleague and friend from the old days of peace research; if you would like to have this paper, Hans Günter will certainly send it to you. I have decided to focus my 15 minutes on what Dieter Senghaas means to me personally.

Every person needs strokes of luck for a good life, indeed for survival. In my life, the first and most important stroke of luck was that I survived the end of World War II. My parents were bombed out on September 11, 1944, during the heavy bombing of Darmstadt, but they survived. They must have conceived me soon after, because I was born on July 1, 1945, but I was seriously ill. I survived because my grandparents took intensive care of me. My mother had to stay in the hospital, and my father had retreated to the Odenwald forest for fear of being arrested by the Allies.

My second great stroke of luck is my wife, who, as befits a peace and conflict researcher, is named Irene. She is truly a peaceful person, which cannot always be said of me. I will come back to that. My third stroke of luck is my three children, and my fourth is my two intellectual fathers, Ernst-Otto Czempiel and Dieter Senghaas.

After graduating from high school, I first studied English and history in Marburg to become a teacher, but became politicized by the student movement and decided to add politics as a third subject. That's how I got to know Prof. Czempiel, who was teaching international relations in Marburg at the time, but had already co-founded the Hessian Foundation for Peace and Conflict Research (HSFK) and had been appointed to the University of Frankfurt am Main. At the end of my politics exam, he asked me: "Mr. Krell, would you like to work in peace research?" I was completely taken aback and just said: "Mr. Czempiel, I don't even know what that is." "You'll find out," was his reply. So he had more faith in me than I had in myself. That's how I ended up at the HSFK (now known as PRIF, the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt), where I worked for twenty years as a research assistant, research group leader, and, at times, as an executive board member.

Ernst-Otto Czempiel, or E.-O., as we soon got to call him, was my research group leader in the USA group and my doctoral supervisor, who looked after me well and encouraged me. Physically and thematically, however, I was closer to Dieter Senghaas. Physically, because Dieter was the only full-time research group leader in the early days of the institute. He had taken a leave of absence from his professorship in Frankfurt and literally built the institute from scratch. From morning to night, he sat in the Selmi high-rise on Eschersheimer Landstraße, instructing craftsmen, ordering furniture, allocating rooms, entertaining guests, negotiating with the ministry, and much more. In terms of content, because Dieter had already published an important paper in 1969 for our large joint research project on the arms race in the East-West conflict. His dissertation on "Deterrence and Peace: Studies on the Critique of Organized Unpeacefulness" was a fundamental examination of nuclear deterrence, which had already strayed far from the realities and genuine rivalries of the East-West conflict in terms of illusions and momentum. I quickly agreed with him on the basic approach to the topic. The motto of my own dissertation on US arms and arms control policy from 1969 to 1975 could also have been quoted by him: "We live in a world whose intellectual and moral inadequacy has entrusted the fate of the world to weapons of destruction of appalling speed, which are stockpiled under the idiotic threat of turning the earth into a desert shrouded in poisonous fumes if necessary." (This is from Thomas Mann in a 1955 essay.)

The intellectual challenge in my socialization as a peace and conflict researcher was, in addition to Dieter's dissertation on nuclear deterrence in the East-West conflict, which he characterized as "autistic," his richly documented book on armament and militarism, in which the military-industrial complex in the US played a major role, and another text on the negotiations on strategic arms control, now known as SALT I, which he sharply criticized because in the end they only symbolically intervened in the arms race, which on both sides had become more of a race with itself. After intensive research, I came to my own conclusions, which agreed with Dieter's research in some respects, but also differed in others. I will return to the concept of autism later.

The next topic I must mention is the "civilizational hexagon," one of the most important and internationally renowned peace models of all. I quote it repeatedly in my own works. It concerns the interaction of six prerequisites for the peacefulness of societies: the state's monopoly on the use of force, which is constrained by the rule of law and controlled by democracy; social justice, which ensures acceptance; the practice of nonviolent conflict

resolution; and emotional control, both of which ensure peaceful behavior by individuals and groups. Dieter Senghaas has also addressed the issue of emotional control in great detail in his book “Zum irdischen Frieden” (On Earthly Peace), referring to Freud's drive theory and asking how we come to behave reasonably in the first place; this is probably his most significant work on peace ever. It is no coincidence that the first edition was published in 2004, the 200th anniversary of the death of Immanuel Kant, whose work “Zum ewigen Frieden” (Perpetual Peace) is known to be one of the most important older foundations.

I myself have never experienced Dieter as aggressive. Now, I am generally considered a civilized person, but my wife, who knows me best, sees things differently. I am not aggressive toward other people, especially not toward my wife or children. But I lose my temper very quickly and fall into a state of panic when I feel like I am losing control, even over trivial matters, for example, when I can't cope with the seemingly insignificant challenges of modern communication technology or when I can't find my glasses even after searching for a long time. In international relations, we talk about “ontological security.” Most people need the stable feeling that they have a secure place in their environment, that life cannot slip away from them. They also usually need a minimum of continuity in their existence. We know that an important cause of fascism was the feeling many people had of losing their footing or being declassified. Fascism compensated for this void with new, highly questionable meanings or promises of salvation and with dishonest and mostly malicious opportunities for self-aggrandizement. Fortunately, this is not the case for me, but you can imagine that there are parallels here to the crisis of our democracy and the success of the AfD.

However, based on my own work on the subject, both in the IB and on myself, I suggest combining the concept of affect control with that of affect transformation. Controlling emotions can also mean suppressing them. Transformation can only succeed if one deals with the underlying causes. We now know that trauma becomes embedded in the body and brain, and that it can even be “inherited.” For example, people who have experienced a lot of violence in their childhood often have difficulty dealing with criticism. They sometimes even interpret friendly gestures as hidden aggression. This also applies to collectives! However, and this does not make the issue any easier, such experiences are often misused as excuses for one's own aggression.

My third topic is the problem of development. Dieter Senghaas has once again received worldwide acclaim for his extensive research on this subject. I have recently been looking into post-colonialism, a popular topic among today's students in our subjects. According to the dogmatic version of this still relatively young theoretical tradition, “the West” is to blame for all the misery in “the South.” Despite all the justified criticism of colonialism and today's North-South relations, this is not tenable. <sup>[1]</sup> Europe itself was underdeveloped or even undeveloped for centuries, lagging behind other contemporary cultures. The rise of England presented Europe itself with the challenge of catching up in terms of development. Even in Europe, there were, and indeed still are, marginalized regions. I listened with great interest to Dr. Rahman's lecture on clothing and growth in Bangladesh, from which I learned that it was not so much international investment as the ideas of the working people themselves, especially women in the clothing industry, that drove the country forward. Dieter uses the term “autocentric development” to describe this. Countries that want to develop must promote their own “productive forces.” To this end, he repeatedly refers to the German entrepreneur and economist Friedrich List, who argued this point as early as the first half of the 19th century. Productive forces explicitly include self-determination and co-determination, education, and good governance, including government initiatives to promote the economy. It

was Dieter who first inspired me to read List himself in the original, who is at least as important as Marx.

My favorite text on this subject is Dieter's comparison of the development paths of Denmark and Uruguay, which had similar profiles in the first half of the 19th century: both were characterized by agriculture and the export of natural products. In Denmark, there was an early agricultural reform with generous land distribution and many independent farmers. Agricultural production and livestock farming were cleverly networked to save resources, and early industrialization took place in close proximity to agriculture. There were early attempts at democratization and, above all, early universal education. In comparison, Uruguay fared worse in all of these areas. Above all, however, export revenues there went to the consumption of wealthy cattle ranchers.

My fourth topic is Dieter's book "Civilization Against Will." The inspiration for this work was Samuel Huntington's book "The Clash of Civilizations," which caused a sensation in 1996. Huntington claimed that most conflicts and wars arose from contradictions and rivalries between the major cultural "blocs," primarily the Chinese, Islamic, and Western blocs. Dieter argued, on the contrary, that the major cultures were and are much more in conflict with themselves than with each other. According to Senghaas, the decisive dynamics of modernity and thus the opportunities and risks for peace arise from the politicization and pluralization of all cultures through their spatial, intellectual, and communicative mobilization. This gives rise to entirely new group formations and also contradictions between new collectives. Without the civilizing of these conflicts, modernization that is acceptable to all parties involved is at risk. I was particularly fascinated by Dieter's analyses of the specific opportunities and obstacles to modernization in the religious traditions of the major cultural areas, which are still in the midst of the necessary civilizing process against their will.

In Confucianism, China's dominant theological tradition, there were already critical approaches to good governance in very early reflections, which the current Chinese leadership, however, rejects. Whether it can continue its economic success without fundamental reforms remains an interesting question. Buddhism is probably the most peaceful religion of all, but it is largely apolitical. Hinduism is extremely pluralistic in its diverse pantheon of gods, but it is stubbornly linked to the hierarchical and conflict-ridden caste system. Islam also has competing variants, often with very violent conflicts. Dieter sees a central obstacle to Islam's capacity for peace in the theology of literal revelation, which places any deviation under suspicion of unbelief, which in extreme cases must then be persecuted with fire and sword. Perhaps there is a paradoxical solution here: precisely because it is so repressive, radical Islam ultimately undermines its own basis. "Civilization Against Its Will" was also a fascinating read for me, again combined with respectful amazement at the incredible wealth of material that Dieter has processed in this book.

As far as the subject of music and peace is concerned, I must admit that I have not read any of Dieter Senghaas' three books on the subject. Perhaps this is because I have played a lot of music myself in various forms throughout my life. Without music, I might not have survived at all. I still sing in a choir. We are currently rehearsing an oratorio by Handel, which is of course about war, namely between Persians, Greeks, and Jews, albeit in ancient times. Neuroscience has now also proven that music calms, heals illnesses, and creates community. There is a wonderful book on this subject by the violinist, sociologist, and biological and medical psychologist Stefan Kölsch entitled "Good Vibrations: The Healing Power of Music," now in its fourth edition from 2024.

I would like to conclude with two questions or concerns for Dieter. The first relates to the concept of autism. I should mention that six months ago, I was contacted by a young British scientist who is doing her doctorate on the subject of “autism” in political science at Aston University in Birmingham. The project, which is supported and supervised by her university, aims to find out how some of the 180 users they have found worldwide came across this term and how and why they use it. After many emails back and forth, Elena, the young researcher, conducted a one-hour interview with me. Among other things, I told her that I had adopted the category of autism from Dieter Senghaas and had also used it occasionally in essays after my dissertation, most recently in a book about the Middle East conflict of 2023. She then asked me if I knew any autistic people. I know two, although not personally. One of them, Pia, is severely physically disabled; among other things, she cannot speak. But she writes wonderful poems; my wife has three volumes of her poetry. Pia graduated from an inclusive school in Leverkusen (I myself grew up in Leverkusen many, many years ago) with a grade point average of 1.0.[\[ii\]](#) The other is Jason, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of four. There is a movie about Jason that I highly recommend: “Wochenendrebellen” (Weekend Rebels). Jason's main problem is that you can't touch him; then he freaks out. Because he also has antisocial tendencies, his teachers eventually ask his parents to take him out of school. Father and son want to improve Jason's social skills and travel every weekend for months to a soccer game in the first, second, or regional league. Please remember: the boy must not be touched! In the end, everything turns out well. Jason comes out to his classmates and is allowed to participate in a science research project on the side.

Parallel to my exchange with Elena, I read two recent books on autism and finally came to the conclusion that the term should no longer be used in political science. Today's medical profile of autism is so diverse that the term is no longer suitable for diagnosing highly idiosyncratic delusions and a dramatically disturbed relationship with reality. I understand that neurodiverse people (that is the official term) feel discriminated against when we still use the term autism today for what could be medically described as “malignant narcissism” in some cases. What's more, we don't need the term. Everything we used to call autistic can be covered by other terms: necropolitics, chosen trauma, negative utopia, narcissistic politics, defense mechanisms. There is a new, stunningly good book by José Brunner on this subject entitled *Brutale Nachbarn: Wie Emotionen den Nahost-Konflikt antreiben* (Brutal Neighbors: How Emotions Drive the Middle East Conflict) (Berlin 2025). [\[iii\]](#)

My second concern relates to a central imperative for peace, which Dieter repeatedly discusses with his usual high level of competence: *si vis pacem, para pacem* – if you want peace, prepare for peace. This is a correction of the old Roman saying *si vis pacem, para bellum* – if you want peace, prepare for war. Dieter is right, of course, that you have to do something for peace if you really want it. He certainly has a lot to say on this subject. But in connection with Russia's war against Ukraine, I asked him about a year ago: Can there also be asymmetrical autism? (At the time, I still used that term.) Yes, of course, he replied. But then the question arises as to whether it is enough to behave peacefully yourself when the other side is waging war for no real reason: out of blindness, a desire for destruction, a lust for power, or delusional fantasies of threat. Finland, which has a lot of experience with Russia, has opted for a middle way. There are no problems with conscription there. When Russia sent a rusty tanker through the Baltic Sea, which dropped its anchor onto the seabed and destroyed underwater cables vital to Finland, a Finnish military helicopter dropped soldiers onto the ship, who took possession of the tanker and brought it to Helsinki, where it had to remain for a long time. The crew was not convicted, but Russia has not taken any further action of this kind to date. I have never been a radical pacifist, but I have always distrusted nuclear deterrence. Shortly after my laudatory speech, I came across an article by the philosopher

Olaf Müller, who proposes a hybrid system combining powerful, ultra-defensive air defense with a highly professional, well-organized, and well-trained civilian defense.<sup>[iv]</sup> He also provides good historical and statistical arguments in support of this. His latest book is called “Atomkrieg” (Atomic War) and is set in 2025. I will get hold of a copy. I would be very interested to hear what you, dear Dieter, think of my thoughts on autism and *si vis pacem, para pacem et defensionem*.

Congratulations on your Mosbach Prize and best regards,

Gert

Wangerooze, October 18, 2025<sup>[v]</sup>

<sup>[i]</sup> On the controversies surrounding this topic, see the compelling article by Kamel Daoud, *On our right to be the center of the world: If we do not want to play the intended roles as whining colonized peoples, the West will withdraw its love from us. On Boualem Sansal's Peace Prize speech in 2011*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, October 16, 2015, p. 13. Here are two excerpts: “*The postcolonial discourse that was necessary in the past is now being appropriated by decolonialism. Role-playing and the invention of a discourse that relieves the children of independence of their responsibility.*” (...) “*And what if I were to speak? If I were to speak about the sexual misery in my homeland? About Islamism, which is ravaging our ‘Arab’ countries just as much as colonization?*” Daoud is an Algerian writer who speaks and writes openly about the many crimes committed during the Algerian civil war. He lives in France because he would immediately be imprisoned in his homeland.

<sup>[ii]</sup> See the article by Claudia Keller, *I have to feel myself: Am I still here? Autism is always different . For Pia Kollbach, that means straight A's in high school and writing. But she can't make herself a sandwich or wash herself on her own. Now she wants to move into her own apartment*, in: Chrismon 11/2022, pp. 38-46. Here is a poem by Pia Kollbach from 2024:

"The stars tell how things will continue. Cruel wars, who will prevail?

Saving the climate would be wonderful and great! A shift to the right worldwide, a brown swamp spreading.

Growing poverty, more humanity would be good. Live and let live – instead of hating.

The future is open – we can only hope. What we need is simple – confidence.

We already know that God's son has been sent to us."

<sup>[iii]</sup> See the exciting discussion with José Brunner and Muriel Asseburg in a Sternstunde on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=i61WXQ\\_TIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i61WXQ_TIE).

<sup>[iv]</sup> See Olaf L. Müller, *Können wir uns nur mit Waffen verteidigen?* (Can we only defend ourselves with weapons?), in: Die ZEIT, October 16, 2025, p. 51.

<sup>[v]</sup> I omitted some things from my lecture in Mosbach on October 9, 2025.

