

Opening of the Academic Year 2022/23

Good governance in hard times

Inaugural address by President Cornelia Woll

Berlin, 5 September 2022. The spoken word is valid.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear members of our boards,

Dear faculty and friends,

Dear students,

After several days of orientation, welcome events and first activities, I am honoured to welcome you in a more formal setting with this address for the Opening of the Academic Year 2022 – which is also my inaugural address as the new president of the Hertie School. I have joined the university this March after several decades studying and working in the United States and France, so I share with many of you the excitement of moving to what I believe is the most fascinating place for politics in Europe: Berlin!

My scientific background as a professor of political science is in political economy. From very early on, I knew I wanted to understand how the economy is organized and governed, how wealth is created and distributed, how conflict is managed within and between firms, and how politicians interact with these economic actors to find new solutions to societal challenges. I remember speaking passionately about wage bargaining in my family, when my sister interrupted me –

unimpressed – to tell me that these are luxury problems in politics. All of them only become relevant when you have a functioning government, societal institutions and the rule of law. None mattered when states fail, wealth is taken by kleptocrats, when there is war or constant violent conflict. She is right, I thought. Peace and freedom are like oxygen: you only notice it when it is taken away.

If I chose to remain in my field, it is because I sensed that there was more to the economy than I had been able to defend. With over twenty years of work, I can now articulate why. So please allow me to use this inaugural address to answer my sister. I would like to do so not because I am stubborn and hate to lose an argument, but because I hope that my answer will explain to you what you will find at the Hertie School and what I believe are the challenges that will lie ahead of you as you engage in public life.

The politics of the economy

Let me start with French historian Fernand Braudel, who provided a three-volume world history entitled *Civilization and Capitalism*, which begins with minute details of how regular people relate to material life and make up the economy in premodern times. He then zooms in on the connection between different zones in the 15th to 18th century in a second volume entitled *The Wheels of Commerce*. His observations culminate in a third volume on *Perspectives of the World*, which analysed the capitalism that had formed by the 20th century: a rapid and financialized world-economy organized around different zones of influence. Without discussing elections or governments, Braudel's world history is deeply political, simply by showing how the economy develops as a changing equilibrium of relations between individuals, cities, countries and regions of the world.

Braudel's periodization of economic development echoes accounts of writers such as Adam Smith, who described his contemporary period as the great acceleration of trade across long and short distances. During that period we saw the massive expansion of empires – and with it – the rise of colonialism. The second period hinges on the industrialization of production and the organization of economic activity that accompanies the move from the workshop to the factory, analysed famously by Karl Marx through the lens of class struggle. Finally, over the last century, we assist an impressive acceleration of finance and more recently communication that draw the world closer together and at the same time allow us to see challenges across borders from an almost planetary perspective.

Although I am not a historian, I would like to draw on these long cycles of history to make an ambitious claim. The economy is the key for analysing conflict lines in the world, which is organized politically in constantly shifting ways as a result of deep struggles over the exploitation of resources. In the development of capitalism, incisive transformations have concerned power relationships and the political bargains to stabilize these battles. In the pursuit of gain and productivity, the economy depends on new resources. Initially considered “up for grabs”, “unclaimed” or “cheap”, then fought over and finally settled through historic arrangements, these resources created conflict lines that have marked the political history of the world. In order to develop this claim, I will focus on three items: political territory, labour and nature.

The first struggle of capitalism then becomes a struggle over the territorial expansion of empires, where control over territory was conceived of as the basis of economic growth and competitiveness, breeding with it patterns of exploitations within and between countries, including slave trade – the commodification of humans and the theft of their labour – and violent conflict raging from individual atrocities to outright war. With the end of colonialism, a trade regime linking sovereign nations represented a negotiated order that may not be void of power and inequality, but that seeks to codify the nature of territorial relations and of economic dependence.

The second struggle of capitalism centred on the factory, and in particular on work. Labour relations were identified as a central element of industrial production and working conditions turned into one of the most salient political features of modern-day politics, all the way into the structure of the party system of many countries. The defence of worker rights is a central part of the socio-democratic compromise of the post-war period, even though it took several decades to unfold in all of its details, not just within industrial countries, but also as a struggle over labour conditions and human dignity along the global supply chains. Again, we observe a development from a starting point where the livelihood and well-being of workers was disregarded or dependent on the benevolence of their respective employers to an age marked by the increasing scope and spread of a negotiated order codifying work.

To be sure, none of these conflicts are ever settled permanently. Negotiated arrangements can be contested and re-negotiated. Feminists have long pointed out that women had been left out of the

post-war compromise focusing on industrial production and neglecting the labour provided within the family. What is more, the nature of work is changing in the digitalized service economy, so that our past institutions no longer resonate with large parts of society, which is a continuous problem for trade unions, traditional labour parties, governments and international organizations. More dramatically, negotiated arrangements can be rejected entirely. The world is anxiously watching the brutal war in Ukraine because it has become clear that Russia's aggressive invasion is an imperial war in a world of sovereign nation-states. With its brutal and full-fledged invasion, Russia denies not only Ukraine's autonomy, but also its right to exist as a nation-state after 30 years of independence.

I would like to suggest that it is helpful to compare the breadth of institutions necessary to settle the past two conflicts to think about the current challenge of capitalism: the exploitation of natural resources. This conflict is as violent and possibly even more urgent than the previous two. The challenge we are currently facing, however, is to find a political arrangement for a conflict line, in which the exploited are still voiceless. Territorial conflict created struggles between populations initially perceived as "savages" that ultimately organized and negotiated political truces. Labour relations entailed the organizational representation of the weak through trade unions, parties and international organizations. The ecological struggle has gained momentum through the massive mobilization of children, students and ecological movements fighting for the right of future generations and our planet. But the complete political representation of nature will also entail taking into account living forms and innate objects that are not human. They erupt into political life through natural disasters – with floods, storms, fires and draughts taking lives and reshuffling society and the economy – but nature is unlikely to barter over a peace arrangement or comment on various "green deals".

Political representation

Like with the first two challenges, current politics will entail imagining political representation for those traditionally left out of the discussion. As a result of mass mobilizations such as Fridays for Future and the emergences of political parties for the youngest, we may be moving towards the inclusion of justice for future generations. But I would like to go one step further and draw on Bruno Latour's work on the politics of the Anthropocene – the geological age where the Earth is changed

through human activity. Bruno Latour suggests that we have to understand how humans and nature are tied together and what connects us to the Earth if we want to respond to these challenges. One way to get there is to extend political representation to what he calls “non-humans”. This debate has been opened by discussions about the rights of other live forms and natural objects. Think of animal rights, but also of the increasingly dense web of legal obligations concerning natural habitats. Just before this summer, the United Nations General Assembly declared a clean and healthy environment a human right, suggesting an avenue for constitutionalizing the common sense that humans and nature are deeply connected.

In a series of pedagogical and theatrical experiments, Bruno Latour has imagined representing nature politically to create a more balanced discussion and build political compromise. You may be familiar with the political representation of nature in non-Western cultures, for example Pachamama, the Inca goddess Mother-Earth, who is quite present in many parts of Latin America. In recent years and on the most pressing stakes, we see new political offices such as the Ambassadors for the Poles or for Marine Life, but we have yet to develop international and national settings where oil fields, fresh water sources or insects have a seat at the table.

Now you may be listing to me thinking: wow, what’s next? The “Dogs United Party” or the “Riverbed Rally”? I do not know. But looking back in time to the earlier struggles mentioned, I suspect that contemporary observers may have found it equally absurd to extend political representation to the peripheral territories in past empires, to the formerly enslaved or even just the unskilled labour force in factories. To get to a more pacified way of dealing with the current struggle over natural resources, allow me to spend a moment on the meaning of representation.

Politically and legally, representation refers to a chain of delegation where people authorize another person to speak on their behalf. It is one of the key concepts in democratic systems and comes with the challenge to ensure that governments and representative assemblies actually have the capacity to speak on behalf of society in all its diversity. Accordingly, electoral systems can be organized by relevant social groups, geographical units or other features. But the process alone is not necessarily the most relevant, the outcome also matters. In her 1967 book *The Concept of Representation* Hanna Pitkin distinguished between *descriptive representation* – where the delegates share the features of

the people they represent – and *substantive representation*, where delegates focus on the issues that are of concerns to their constituency. We encounter this tension in politics all the time until this day: Can indigenous women only be represented by another indigenous woman? – Many of us might not be that restrictive, but we would all suspect that an assembly that contains neither women nor indigenous people will do a poor job to address their concerns. This reasoning is behind the legitimate call for the greatest possible diversity in political life in *liberal* democracies – where not just majority rule matters, but also the interest of minorities. Descriptive representation is important, not least because a wealth of studies now show that it improves substantive representation. But I would like to focus on substantive representation, even without descriptive representation, because it allows to think creatively about the voice nature needs in political life. Why not assign representation for the most important aspects of our life on Earth, so as to be sure that somebody will be part of the discussion specifically to defend maritime life, air quality or biodiversity? After all, the word “Republic” comes from the Latin *res publica*, the public thing, which indicates that political life is about “making *things* public”, as Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel argued in an art exhibit centred on an “object-oriented democracy”.

Which brings me to the arts and allows me to make a more general point about representation that goes beyond political systems. Representation is not just about delegation of authority, it is also about the symbols used to refer to something that may otherwise be forgotten or overlooked. The arts serve as the basis of imaginaries that allow us to understand the world and the parts that constitute it. Representation through symbols, images and narrative is as central to political life as formal processes of delegation. In the arts, nature and humans have not been disconnected as much as they have in our political institutions, and it is easy to find depictions of the struggle over the planet’s resources where nature has actual agency. Think for example of Frank Herbert 1960s epic novel *Dune* or blockbusters such as *Avatar* or the Disney movie *Moana* about the Polynesian islands.

Social cohesion

Maybe I have convinced you that we should consider extending representation to non-humans or maybe you are just amused by thinking of an assembly with ice bears, the rainforest or outer space taking a seat. However, some of you might be annoyed that I insist so strongly on representation of and for nature, where the representation of our human society is still incomplete in most countries.

Racial and ethnic diversity, gender and sexual orientation, ability, socio-economic inequality and other markers of diversity continue to be neglected in political discussion. The struggle for inclusion in society, political imaginaries and actual institutions now pits many communities against conservatives arguing for social cohesion based on a model of the past.

Politics is the art of collective decision-making and I am therefore convinced that we need to embrace diversity. We cannot discuss our common future and build compromise if the political arena does not reflect the changing face of society. Since I am suggesting to make this arena even more diverse by adding non-humans, let me turn to social cohesion and discuss what holds us together.

Communities are anchored in their commonalities such as place, language, religion, customs, share experience or values. Nation-states thrive as what Benedict Andersson called “imagined communities”, whose members believe they hold a deep horizontal comradeship with each other, even though most of them will never meet. It is possible to have collective decision-making with a multitude of communities represented, but it is crucial to agree on the principals of connecting them. From a philosophical perspective, Souleyman Bachir Daigne elegantly defends the need for horizontal universalism in a world of plurality. If we are to grow together around shared values, no one community can claim to be the bearer of the universal. Instead, values have to be discussed laterally among participants that recognize one another as equal. This can only happen, if communities connect, make their concerns heard and try to move beyond them together rather than retreating into isolation. The most important element in this endeavour is the translation of experience. Translation allows us to share our concerns and exchange with others in order to move towards a common horizon.

Politics in a world where the plurality of experiences is inescapable requires the constant attempt to relate and transcend individual concerns on behalf of social cohesion. Society is not possible without such a public sphere where we can speak, recognize our differences and disagree. This may sound simple, but it requires accepting to sometimes lose the untranslatable and listening to someone butcher your language as well. Souleyman Bachir Daigne therefore speaks out forcefully against those that guard the borders of experience, of who has the right to speak on behalf of who, those that allow for only situated speech. Enclosing one’s culture by saying “this belong to me” is absurd,

he argues, citing examples of identity politics and disputes over cultural appropriation. Does the translator of black poet Armanda Gorman have to share her skin colour to know how to convey her message in another language? Can I only relate to women who share my cultural background or experience of expatriation? Can the suffering of an ethnic group be discussed by somebody who is not a member and might not use their words? The intense debates we have about these questions reflect the tension between the fight for cultural and political representation and the necessity of translation. And since I have tried to defend substantive representation, I will side with Daigne and insist on translation as the basis of a plural society, which strives towards common values that are horizontally shared. In politics, every community needs to defend their interests and ideals, we need to argue and disagree, to move beyond the tribes we have grown comfortable with and grow into a functioning society. You cannot own your experience and deny others access if you want it to become part of the collective.

A University of Governance

I have now moved from the economy to politics and society and hope to have convinced you that all are connected. (I might need to check in with my sister to see where we are standing in our debate). But I also took you on this flight in time and space to give you a sense of what you will find here at the Hertie School. Created as a public policy school almost twenty years ago, the Hertie School gave itself the mission to think not just about policy solutions, but to understand governance. Unlike the hierarchical and formal study of political institutions or the technical details you need to know to solve a specific challenge, governance refers to the processes and relationships necessary to steer social systems. Governance is an approach that wants to understand the *who*, the *how* and the *what* of public affairs simultaneously – or as we called it in jargon the *polity*, the *politics* and the *policies*.

As a University of Governance, we are deeply concerned with plurality, the organization of relationships and social cohesion in our teaching, research and outreach. We were founded on the belief that public administration needs to be agile – capable of adapting and learning from multiple perspectives – and that public affairs is not just a matter of the public sector, but also in the hands of the private sector and civil society. Moreover, it is the intersection of these institutions and normative claims about their role and nature, which has shaped our work at the Hertie School ever since. Unlike other capital cities, Berlin did not have an institution with such a mission at the turn of

the 21st century, which was striking given its central place in the upheavals of the 20th century and the importance of Germany in the challenges of the present. But we never sought to focus on Germany alone, simply to start here to understand Europe and the world. These missions are summarized in our three guiding principles: to be interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and international.

This perspective materializes in the way we address the big questions that I have just gotten you a flavour of. But something important was missing in my birds' eye account: the real people, who trigger these processes and shape the public sphere. These people have their own viewpoints, experiences, and imaginaries. What they bring into the discussion, whether they will cynically manoeuvre to win a political game or be guided by the desire to improve the world matters for the course of history. Today in this room, we have assembled some of the people that will shape, lead, and transform their institutions in the future: you, dear students! You have made the decision to apply to a program here at the Hertie School in order to use your talent and passion for shaping politics in the areas that matter most to you. You will be part of those who will have to address how we work together towards the common good.

Our ambition is to train you to work in and on politics from this broad perspective. In order to be the actor you envision to be once you have completed your program, you have to understand politics, society, the economy, historical context, and the functioning of law. The interdisciplinarity design of our curriculum seeks to not just provide you with answers, but to give you the tools to ask the right questions, to doubt productively, to consider various viewpoints, and to think deeply and beyond the mere policy issue at hand.

Our curriculum, however, is only one side of the coin of what learning at the Hertie School entails. The other side is your diversity, your personal, regional, academic and professional stories. We want you to learn from one another as much as you will learn from us. We know you will share moments we will never hear about, exchange, collaborate and argue, both in class, on projects, and also after work. An intellectual discussion about decarbonization might create conflict between those of you that have experienced wildfires, droughts or whose towns are endangered by rising sea levels and those who have family members whose jobs are dependent on coals mining or the fossil fuel industry. You might start fights over night trains or airplane travel, a theoretical choice that rings

differently when your trip is necessary because a member of your family is suffering from poor health. Such clashes are not always comfortable, and they do not have to be. They are an integral part of the process of finding your position and fighting to have it be part of a bigger compromise. In fact, I remember the lessons I learned in university best in situations where I was outright furious. Wherever your life will take you after you have completed the program, you will most certainly work in unfamiliar environments where the negotiation of compromise is crucial. Our ambition is to not only provide you with the necessary toolkit for forging the best, most well-informed, and scientifically-grounded compromise, but also foster the mindset necessary to do so. My piece of advice to you: Make compromise a virtue and base it in mutual respect! It seems that this is something which has been lost over the last years in the political world. If we want to shape the common good, however, the goal of politics cannot be to win, it is to move forward together to tackle the most urgent challenges of our time.

A final aspect of the Hertie approach is to ground our expertise in the sciences, in particular the social sciences. The scientific method establishes facts by sharing the observer's assumptions and allowing for rigorous scepticism, testing and experimentation communicated in an open and transparent debate. We are now living in the post-truth era, where claims about what is real or not can be based on all sorts of authoritative arguments and sometimes on nothing more than somebody waking up with a wild idea and finding an effective image to circulate it on social media. Donald Trump's wrong claims about injecting bleach in response to a Covid infection is just one of the most infamous examples thereof. To me, this is one of the truly most dangerous developments of our times, where sometimes lives are willingly sacrificed just so that somebody can win an argument.

To be sure, the sciences cannot simply provide the right answers all of the time. The interpretation of data and conclusions differ from person to person, from question to question and from field to field. They only provide partial indications on the right way forward. In fact, scientific inquiry is a method of how to reduce uncertainty rather than an infallible decision-making tool. But it is a shared and open framework guided by rules and standards, a process of mutual respect and the possibility to determine for yourself the conclusions others have reached. To learn about scientific perspectives and methods will allow you to think for yourself, to not be misguided by charlatans or gurus. This is why the social sciences are so central for us here at the Hertie School and beyond. We want you to

dig deep into the questions you have by making all social sciences accessible to you. We want to show you the necessary guard rails for how to make claims of true and false. Science gives us a community of inquiry and cooperation, which can move us forward even in dark times.

Our strategic ambition

As we are reaching our twentieth anniversary next academic year, the Hertie School can proudly look back proudly on its achievements. We have grown into a community of over eight hundred students and over two thousand alumni hailing from over 110 countries. With a faculty of 37 permanent professors and over 350 staff members, we are now offering four graduate programs, executive education and a doctoral program. Resolutely international, we are a founding partner of the European university CIVICA created in 2019, which allows us to build a strategic alliance with other institutions dedicated to using the social sciences to further civic engagement and the common good from Madrid to Bucarest, with partners such as Sciences Po in Paris, the London School of Economics, the European University Institute, Bocconi University, Central European University, Romania's National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, and the Stockholm School of Economics. To make our strengths more visible and provide a beacon of light onto the most wicked problems of the world, the Hertie School has founded six centres of competence in recent years: the Jacques Delors Centre on European integration, the Centre for International Security, the Centre for Fundamental Rights, the Centre for Digital Governance, the Centre for Sustainability and a Data Science Lab.

This is a sound basis to look into the future, but the intensity of current conflicts and threats remind us not to remain static. We have to invest in science and support the dialog with practice so that we can stay relevant without losing sight of the big questions. What does this require?

First, we have to continue on the path of making the Hertie School a global university in the heart of Europe. The Hertie School is in the middle of Berlin, one of the most fascinating places for politics in Europe. We want to bring the world's best researchers and practitioners into discussions that are relevant not just for the German government and this country's destiny, but also for Europe and the world, and particularly for the dividing line that is deepening between liberal and autocratic states. Our strategic alliances with 40 partner universities in 21 different countries ensure that we will have

a deep comparative knowledge among our faculty and students to inform public affairs. Simultaneously, our proximity to core German governance institutions enables us to deepen our relationships here at home. This will be even more true once we have moved into our new campus in 2025, which will be just a stone's throw away from the seat of the Bundestag, the Bundeskanzleramt and several Federal ministries.

Second, and relatedly, we must redefine and sharpen what it means to put science at the service of society. Besides the scientific rigor I have mentioned earlier, our mission is to reach out to all of society and escape the ivory tower. We want to make our research and training count, not just in the long run, but also for very specific problems that require urgent action. My wish is that the Hertie School will continue to be known as a place where you will move to action and get your hands dirty. We will work with our practice partners, our alumni network, our faculty and you, dear students, to spell out how the scientific insights you have gained can be applied to tackle very real issues in the present. This can take the form of a professional year, but also with new formats that we will be starting to develop, such as policy labs in which you can engage in working groups together with our researchers, faculty, and outside experts. In the coming years, the Hertie School will completely redefine its own method for connecting scientific excellence with real world challenges, ensuring autonomy and relevance simultaneously.

Both of these goals, scientific excellence and relevance, are worth little if they only concern the privileged few. If we succeed as a closed club that does not reflect the diversity of our societies, then we have failed our mission to reform politics for the better. This is why my third strategic ambition is to make the Hertie School even more accessible. Diversity is our biggest asset. We have to remove barriers to entry for the talents coming from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds, racial or ethnic groups, from visible minorities, marginalized groups or from regions of the world where international education is still a major challenge. This requires reviewing our recruitment strategies, our communication, our financial aid and the entire student life cycle, as well as the content of our research and of our curriculum. We are one Hertie community, and our community cannot be complete when people are denied their rightful place at the table. If we stick together, if we trust one another, and if we lift each other up, then we will be the most exciting, most successful, and most welcoming university of governance in Germany and Europe.

Let me conclude by telling you that we will support you on your path and help you make the best out of your drive, your interests, your passion. Your task, dear students, is to learn how to argue, to struggle and to strike deals around solutions that you firmly believe will help the common good. You will work hard, you will have to handle the pressure of discomfort and uncertainty, and you might also be overwhelmed at times. But we are confident that you will leave a footprint in the world. In fact, moving to action is often the best way forward once you have carefully weighted your options. In all that, you are never alone here at the Hertie School.

John F. Kennedy famously called Americans to civic action by saying “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” We have an equivalent in Germany, which is less heavy on patriotism and also rhymes, so let me leave you with it. It is a quote from Erich Kästner, one of Germany’s most influential children’s’ book authors, whose impact was so important that his books were part of the book burnings instigated by Joseph Goebbels in 1933 in Berlin’s Opera Square, just a few minutes away from where we are today. In 1949, he invented a route to disarmament by having animals take the lead in his book *The Animals’ Conference*. Animal making politics, what a fitting reference to end this talk! Erich Kästner reflected on our civic responsibilities by simply stating: “Es gibt nichts Gutes außer man tut es!” – „Nothing good happens unless you do it”.

In this spirit, we are eager to help you understand today and shape tomorrow. With great pride and joy, dear students, I welcome you to the Hertie School!