

Nerdland against the Narrowness of Time¹

Inaugural Speech at the Institute for Social Sciences, University of Stuttgart

by Dr. Michael Blume,

Commissioner of the State Government of Baden-Württemberg against Antisemitism

State Parliament of Baden-Württemberg

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English translation ([German original text](#))

Dear Professor Bächtiger,

Dear Department of Political Theory and Empirical Democracy Research,

Dear friends of science,

I would like to thank you for your courage in inviting a commissioner against antisemitism to give a keynote address! Isn't antisemitism, conspiracy myths, and hostile dualism, in general, "THE" counterargument against your research field of "deliberative democracy"?

My team and I deal with conspiracy believers every day, who declare every form of democracy a failure and tend towards tyrannophilia - the desire to completely submit to a supposedly saving leader. Ethnonationalists, who do not want coexistence of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Yazidi, and non-believing people, have been inundating our Baden-Württemberg, above all, with digital hate for years.

Even the escape into alcoholic drinks remains denied to us, as the Bundestag is weakening the Climate Protection Act today - while at the same time, the well-known brand Freixenet has to lay off hundreds of employees due to the water crisis in Spain.

Also, the fact that almost 30 percent of under-30 adults in Germany now say they can imagine voting for a right- or left-dualistic party strengthens the position of those who claim that democracy has come to an end without newspaper pressure and growth promises.

Today, I have brought two cups with me to underline the weight of the inquiries on our hope.

Here, you see a cup from Iraq, specifically from the holy valley of Yazidism, from Lalisch in Kurdistan-Iraq. I acquired it as the leader of the country's special contingent for particularly vulnerable women and children, with which we evacuated a total of 1,100 Yazidi women and children affected by IS violence in 2015/16.

On the one hand, this cup indeed represents a genocide, now also recognized by the Bundestag, and the collapse of a nation-state amidst media revolution, climate and water crisis, and resource curse². On the other hand, this cup also serves as a medium for a millennia-old culture. It was produced before my eyes by a family with a color printer and has since served on many occasions as a focal point for deliberative conversation.

I can hardly imagine a stronger symbol for a relaxed, calm, and friendly conversation than a cup with a warming drink, which holds each person's identity firmly without threatening the identity of others.

The second cup comes from Israel and was sent to me by Eliyah Havemann, a committed Democrat. Printed on it are the signatures of eight parties that formed the short-lived Bennett-Lapid government from June 2021 to December 2022. The coalition mainly consisted of centrist, left-wing, and right-wing Jewish parties, as well as an Arab-Islamic party. This coalition raised hopes for a new understanding of Israeli democracy, threatened from both outside and within. It ultimately

failed due to the withdrawal of two right-wing representatives, leading to new elections that brought Israel to the brink of abolishing the separation of powers and the disastrous failure of October 7, 2023.

A common theme connecting both cups is the well-researched resource curse in political and social sciences: both the so-called Islamic State/Daesh in Iraq and the deeply anti-Semitic and terrorist Hamas in Gaza and Qatar are financed through the sale of oil and gas, including to Europe.

Therefore, in the most significant speech of my life on November 9, 2023, in the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg³, I advocated for renewable "peace energies"⁴ - with every import of fossil resources, we not only poison our environment but also our togetherness. Thanks to science, I also perceive very strong connections between fossil resources, power differentials, and media biases, which are definitely worth exploring!

Because, against all fatalism, I want to say: just as the cup from Lalisch emphasizes, so does the one from Israel, especially in the face of existential threats, that democracy can be rethought for the future, deliberatively and even cross-faction.

It is true that democratic party systems worldwide are under considerable pressure from declining newspapers on the one hand and digital media bubbles on the other.

It is true that both right-wing and left-wing governments, as well as liberal ones, are failing almost everywhere in the energy transition.

It is true: 2024 is a year of fateful elections in the USA, India, the European Union, and also in South Africa. And fossil-corrupted parties like the ANC, which has been in power since 1994, unfortunately tend to resort to hostile dualism and anti-Semitism to distract from their own failures.

It is true: The deep polarization of US society has now also reached the universities, where pro-Hamas groups sometimes claim dominance on campus.

But it is also true that large majorities of all the mentioned peoples continue to reject conspiracy myths and seek and affirm deeper forms of democracy.

Even here in Stuttgart, the "March for Science" took place in 2017, where thousands gathered in the name of science.

That conspiracy entrepreneurs, sovereign citizens, "Querdenken"⁵ & Co. repeatedly push themselves into the media should not and must not obscure the fact that large majorities affirm our democratic form of government and also assess the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic as overall successful!

I believe that in Baden-Württemberg, we would be overstepping our bounds if we were to try to defeat terrorism and solve the Middle East conflict on our own. But we can indeed be "The NerdLänd"⁶ and thus the land where science and a post-fossil peace movement unfold, where dialogue and democracy find new forms! The fact that my office has now been expanded upon the request of the Jewish communities and the democratic factions of the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg to include the addition "...and for Jewish life" is also something I perceive as hope for a shared future!

I am also fascinated by the great response that the former mayor and current state councilor Barbara Bosch and her team have received with new forms of citizen participation. The citizen forum on the duration of general education high schools has influenced the entire state politics and has already led, for example, to strengthening early childhood language development. Deliberative democracy has the opportunity to shift our discourse spaces from everyday grievances to the questions that truly matter.

Therefore, I want to thank you in three ways for your work and also encourage you. Firstly, I want to point out that your work also has strong relevance in media history. Judaism became the victim of hostile conspiracy myths because it was the first religion of literacy and education. Media shape discourse spaces, political and mythological spaces much more strongly than has been perceived thus far.

I also find myself, along with HateAid, in a legal dispute with Twitter over what we perceive as its insufficient exercise of moderation and deletion duties.

At the same time, I'm also having excellent experiences in the Fediverse on Mastodon, where volunteers achieve a very high level of dialogue and deliberation in a decentralized manner. Media are not natural forces; they can also have positive effects, and I believe your research is highly relevant for a better understanding and justice!

Just last night, young people at the Tübingen Seminary asked me how, in the face of digital polarization, the climate, water, and democracy crises, I could still have hope. I responded with the concept of "nevertheless" and said that I could no longer promise their generation eternal economic growth. But growth in relationships and meaning in life, in togetherness, I believe is possible. And I think I share this hope with you. Secondly, I'd like to share a bold but successful attempt from my own work. In the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg, I received overwhelmingly positive feedback for my classic parliamentary speech on November 9, 2023, yet I still believe that we should also explore new forms of dialogue. I see a great opportunity, for example, in podcasts and videocasts, as well as in poetry slams, preacher slams, and especially science slams emerging in our democracies.

More and more people, especially younger individuals and women, are discovering the power of their own presence and voice, literally co-determination. I believe there is still much potential here, and therefore, on Wednesday at the ESG and KHG in Fritz-Elsas-Straße here in Stuttgart, I ended a speech with a poem for the first time.⁷

With "The Fires of Hatred," I wanted to engage not only cognitively but also emotionally to encourage the process of recognizing and resolving our own entanglements in violence for those present and those reading online.

I wanted to engage not only those present but also those reading online with "The Fires of Hatred," aiming to emotionally engage them in the process of recognizing and resolving our own entanglements in violence. And I can already report from the numerous feedback received in recent days that this has reached and moved many people.

Elements of deliberative democracy can become much stronger if we also allow and explore new forms of rhetoric. A more deliberative democracy will also be a more cultural and poetic democracy. Neither politics nor science are doomed to boredom!

Thirdly and finally, I would like to point out that you celebrate your university celebration day today fittingly with the Jewish Passover as well as the ensuing Easter time. Considering the time allotted, I will limit myself to a mystery from the great Moses mythologists, which has recently been adapted into an interreligious series for Netflix: Why does the Bible report a 40-year journey of the Hebrews through the desert when a direct route through the Sinai would hardly take a month? After long deliberative discussions, the wise ones answered: because it takes so long to leave slavery behind. Freedom and democracy must be acquired, learned, and practiced over generations!

Dictatorships are not only false legal systems; they also traumatize and shape the souls of the oppressed. Indeed, political and social sciences often observe setbacks after the introduction of liberal forms of government, with a longing to return to the comfortable victim role instead of embracing one's own dialogical-monistic responsibility. Therefore, building a democracy is not limited to drafting a new constitution but requires decades of political education, conversations on equal footing, and the slow awakening of hope.

That Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker⁸ could speak of May 8 as the "Day of Liberation" precisely 40 years after the military, political, and moral defeat of National Socialism was no coincidence in this understanding. The Federal Republic needed its time. Even in the realm of literature and culture, after decades of dystopian cyberpunk, I see the flourishing of hopeful, creative, and yes, deliberative approaches of the so-called "Solarpunk". Therefore, in said poem, I also declared my stance against all fossil "fires of hatred."

I am certain: education, knowledge, deliberation, science, and ultimately inner freedom require both our perseverance and our patience. And that is why today I have brought unleavened matzo bread to thank you and symbolically include you in the Passover and Easter season.

For if, as Holocaust survivor Hans Blumenberg observed, the narrowness of time is the root of evil, then in the vastness of time lies great hope for good. Then, upon the journey through the desert of often cynical skepticism, the discovery of a new covenant could even await.

To you and your institute, I sincerely wish a wonderful festive and holiday season, the best wishes for your important work, and - if you permit - also God's blessing!

¹ This term was coined by the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resource_curse

³ <https://scilogs.spektrum.de/natur-des-glaubens/english-translation-of-my-state-parliament-speech-against-antisemitism-on-november-9th-2023/>

⁴ I found it interesting that ChatGPT knows to explain the term “peace energies” (German: “Friedensenergien” – a term used in Dr. Blume’s speech on Nov 9th 2023) in a good way and, by chance, came across this Canadian initiative: <https://peaceenergy.ca/>

⁵ Term used for a German protest movement initiated during the Covid pandemic – “lateral thinker”: <https://www.dw.com/en/meet-germanys-querdenker-covid-protest-movement/a-57049985>

⁶ A nerd is someone who is deeply passionate and knowledgeable about niche subjects, often in technology and science. The compositum “NerdLänd” wants to say: Baden-Württemberg is the federal state of the nerds as a lot of science and technology organizations are located there. The umlaut “Ä” is a reference to the local dialect.

⁷ German text: <https://scilogs.spektrum.de/natur-des-glaubens/bin-kein-optimist-mehr-aber-habe-noch-hoffnung-die-feuer-des-hasses-als-gedicht/>

⁸ This speech, delivered on May 8, 1985, was a landmark: https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/02/150202-RvW-Rede-8-Mai-1985-englisch.pdf?__blob=publicationFile