At the turn of the year

Bad news around the world

Also this year, the world has been hit by many disasters and confronted with a lot of shocking news:

- *International law* and the Charter of the United Nations have continued to lose geopolitical influence. The discussions at the UN Security Council reflect the powerlessness of the United Nations in all current crises.

- There is still a brutal aggressor in Europe who has brought war back to this continent and threatens the international peace order. NATO, the EU, and the US are confronting this threat, by different means, not in full agreement, but with the same goal.

- The war in Europe and the Middle East, and ongoing fighting in Syria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Niger, Gabon and between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Republic of Artsakh, and the Taliban's renewed reign of terror in Afghanistan, occupy international politics.

- Global terror remains a constant, ever-present threat, e.g. against girls' schools in Iran, tourists in Paris and football fans in Brussels and, in a new, horrific dimension, against citizens of Israel through HAMAS.

- Natural disasters dominate the media every day: tornadoes and hurricanes in the western Atlantic and the Pacific, temperature records and heat waves in Asia but also in Europe, earthquakes in Turkey, Syria, Morocco and Nepal, floods worldwide, major forest fires in Greece, Canada, Chile, and Hawaii.

- Hundreds of millions of people worldwide are suffering: 110 million people are displaced inside or outside their country, almost 750 million people suffer from malnutrition, hunger, or lack of clean drinking water, a third of the world's population does not have access to or does not use hygienically safe sanitation facilities,

- Bad data on climate change determine national and international policy.

"Last generation"?

Based on all this and many other bad news, the magazine "*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*" has been determining the beat of the "Doomsday Clock" for 70 years against the background of the first use of an atomic bomb in Hiroshima. When it was first set, the clock was set to "*seven*

minutes to twelve." This year, after 20 adjustments in the past, it is set to "90 *seconds to midnight."*

One may dismiss this depiction of the global threat, as another interesting contribution to the theme of the "apocalypse" that has accompanied humankind for as long as it exists.

But we must take serious the very careful and elaborate surveys, facts, and assessments on which this picture is based – not only because this annual report contains the findings of currently 17 Nobel Prize winners, but also because they are the reason and the mandate for a policy that corresponds to the risk situation and our behaviour as humanity.

We must define this task correctly, because it is not a matter of doing everything now, immediately, without delay, to *"save the world"* from climate change and neglecting, even consciously and willingly ignoring, everything else that is necessary for peaceful coexistence on this earth and in our countries.

Among the approximately eight billion people on this earth, there is currently no one living who belongs to a *"last generation"*. The followers of this highly socially harmful pressure group, also know that there will be generations after them who will have to fight and will fight for the preservation of their and future generations' living conditions, worth living in their lives, which have certainly changed considerably.

It is about:

The task addressing climate change is not to save our planet from extinction, but on protecting and adapting the living conditions of this and all future generations, to climate change. We should not overestimate ourselves. The earth existed before us. It will endure us until we extinguish ourselves. We are not able to destroy it, either by sustaining and grossly neglecting climate protection, or by triggering a nuclear catastrophe.

But the constant stress to which we expose the balance of the elements on our earth, carries the real danger of changing it in such a way that we existentially threaten our living conditions on this earth – ecologically, economically, and politically. We must not allow ourselves to do that, we must not allow that to happen.

If we want to prevent this from happening, we need to make massive use of the most technologically advanced methods of our time and radically change our daily behaviour.

In doing so, we must keep an eye on global challenges, but we must try not to lose sight of the problems that concern millions of citizens every day.

Progress was possible

In gaining the necessary courage, confidence, strength, and energy, it can be helpful to keep reminding ourselves that in the course of our history, humankind has become increasingly "advanced" and has thus *"invented"* progress. The anthropological prerequisite for this was that – at first unconsciously, later consciously and confessedly – the *Enlightenment* had established itself as a gateway to rational behaviour. *Immanuel Kant* then ingeniously framed this philosophically.

Through thousands of years of experience and the use of intelligence, we have managed to change conditions in such a way, that our living conditions have become better and better:

We have managed the cold with fire and clothing around the world, overcome hunger with hunting and agriculture, reduced distances with the invention of the wheel, discovered the value of cooperation in the creation of necessary goods, removed billions of sick people from death through the study of the human body and the healing powers of nature, and only recently defeated a pandemic in a very short time.

In most areas of the world, the power of the family has been supplemented by societies and states, and the rights of the individual and his duties in the community, have been cast into constitutions and laws.

In Europe, a single market without customs, and an area of freedom, security, and justice without internal borders, have been created.

In Germany, we have continuously increased the level of education of citizens, made the protection of citizens in old age, illness, disability, accidents, unemployment, and hardship, the task of the state and society, permanently increased incomes, and pensions in recent years, shortened monthly working hours and working lives, and curbed crime.

Excessive demand

These advances were not and are no guarantee that we will always be able to guarantee their implementation in everyday life. Where excessive demands occur, this may or may not indicate wrong policies. Allowing progress often comes up against personal and personnel, financial and ideological limits:

- Advances in *medicine* are pushing the healthcare system to the limits of its capacity. In Germany for instance, there is a lack of money and staff to continue to operate many small hospitals close to the community. There are not enough rural doctors who make modern medical knowledge accessible to the rural population. Life-saving medicines, especially in the field of paediatric medicine, are often not available.

- The growing infrastructure in the *transport sector* is pushing the capacity of operators to its limits. Regular maintenance, the replacement of worn and obsolete material with new equipment, especially in rail transport and public transport, the rapid and constant maintenance of roads, motorways, and bridges, fail due to a lack of financial resources and a lack of personnel.

- The rapid implementation of technical progress in the field of renewable *energy* is failing due to personnel limitations and a lack of (national) production capacities.

- The permanent flood of *information* of all kinds, especially through digital media, has triggered a permanent challenge for recording, evaluating, and processing of these data. The abundance, density, and the complexity of the sometimes-contradictory news. does not make us more confident in assessing the problems of this world, rather the opposite.

We know much more than the generations before us. But has that made us wiser, more relaxed, more satisfied? Doubts are warranted. The persuasive power of "facts" is dwindling, the fear of "fake news" is growing.

- When it comes to maintaining the *infrastructure* in many cities, cleanliness, hygiene, and care are increasingly being forgotten.

- The framework conditions for good *service* are deteriorating under the pressure of costs and under the pretext of digitalisation. This applies to the private sector as well as to the public sector:

  o The *times* when authorities or public service providers, e.g. citizens' offices or Deutsche Post, are *personally available* to customers are constantly being reduced. The information about this often only available via the internet. Many service providers can no longer be reached by phone at all.
  o Until a contact is made, dozens of agonizing minutes often pass in the *queues* of call centres and with the search for the actual responsible body, whose competence is often dubious and can only be conveyed to a limited extent due to language deficits.
  o It must be admitted that *digitalisation* in the service sector is important and almost essential for survival in some regions of the world where personal communication is hardly possible, e.g. in the Arctic ore are sparsely populated regions. But in areas of an advanced infrastructure, and this is something that is neglected in the discussion in our country, it has above all advantages for public and private service providers themselves, as the time-consuming personal contact with citizens or customers, which some find annoying, is no longer necessary. "No Reply"-E-mails are not helpful, but frustrating. For citizens or customers, digitalization often leads to complicated, time-consuming procedures that often overwhelm technical skills or equipment, especially for older, sick, or disabled people.

- Against the backdrop of Hamas' terror and Israel's military response, *demonstrations* on Europe's streets, often associated with *crimes* committed by right-wing extremists and Islamists, have increased.

- The *Economic Situation* in the EU Member States has deteriorated. There are many reasons for this:

  o High energy prices following the far-reaching ban on Russian gas and oil, a high inflation rate until the middle of the year, and rising interest rates, have negatively affected the EU as a business location.
  o The Covid pandemic and the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, have made the limits of globalization clear for the first time: supply chains are threatened and interrupted, production outsourced abroad is stagnating and has led to shortages, especially in the field of medical products and electronic components, in the energy sector and in the automotive industry, but at times also in the segments of steel, wood and paper. This also highlights the importance of drastically

reducing our high dependence of imports e.g. of rare minerals or medicines from problematic or unreliable single trading partners.

- o Chinas growing pressure to gain access to critical infrastructure facilities, such as the port of Hamburg, and to get control of companies there, euphemistically disguised as the "New Silk Road", threatens the strategic autonomy of the EU and its Member States.

- o The weaker growth of the economy in China, the sanctions against Russia, and the US subsidy offensive in favour of its own economy, have slowed down our exports.

- o Rising interest rates and the uncertainty about the conditions for investors and customers in the field of green energy, especially heating, have led the construction industry into an exceedingly inconvenient situation.

What do we want?

Anyone who has followed the political discussion and the response in the media this year will notice that there is no "*common sense"* in many countries as to how and with what priority these problems should be eliminated.

Opinions differ widely, not only in governments, parliaments and within the parties. The answers in our society depend on age, origin, education, and the extent to which individual problems are affected. Therefore, there can only be one *personal* answer:

I want us to

- promote further European integration, taking care not to overburden the European Union's absorption capacity and therefore to end the negotiations on Turkey´s accession and to interrupt it with Serbia;

- call for severe sanctions, up to and including loss of voting rights, against Member States that continue to grossly violate European Union law;

- be honest about the issue of asylum and migration and tell our citizens in the EU the truth: that it is not possible to completely stop the abuse of the right of asylum and illegal migration by means of a democracy based on the rule of law;

- draw the right conclusions from the obvious *weaknesses of globalisation* and recreate more capacity for essential goods, especially medicines, but also technologically important goods, such as semiconductors;

- protect and preserve the "strategic autonomy" of *Germany and the EU* through appropriate measures against aggressive competitors, e.g. the PRC.

- conclude more bilateral and multilateral *agreements*;

- pursue the *energy transition* on a realistic basis and include nuclear energy and artificial fuels.

And I want

- many citizens in the EU to follow Poland's example and return to a majority as soon as possible to parties that pursue policies that preserve, protect, and strengthen the area of freedom, security, and justice that the EU has created, and
- Israel's security not to be misunderstood as a carte blanche for the entire policy of that country, especially for the actions of the military in the Gaza Strip, the settlement policy, and the judicial reform.

Progress remains possible and mandatory.

In an enlightened, science- and technology-savvy society, which is dependent on permanent growth and change, it is unthinkable to counter the big challenges of progress by refusing to accept progress. This has been impressively demonstrated by *Steven Pinker,* the modern, internet-based successor to *Immanuel Kant*.

That is why we must include the following questions in the implementation of progress in our daily lives:

- Where is there a risk of being overwhelmed, not only in the material but also in the personal and human sphere?
- Where do we need to create and promote readiness for progress and overcome resistance?
- What financial, administrative, and human resources and capacities, are required for this, when and for how long?
- Who already has it and to what extent?
- When and by whom can the missing resources and capacities be provided?

In doing so, we should be guided by the practice that has been used for decades by legislators in Germany and in many EU Member States, of attaching to each draft legislation, a detailed assessment of the consequences of these new or amended laws in the various areas concerned. This assessment must be publicly available and made available to all those affected.

The most ingenious invention, the most impressive new scientific knowledge, becomes a nuisance and stirs up hostility to technology and science, when its practical implementation, its intrusion into our normal daily routine, becomes a permanent nuisance, when the opinion spreads that it would be better without it, because it only creates unrest and ties up strength and forces in other important and proven areas.

An enlightened society must constantly reassure itself of itself ,and give responsible progress the space it needs, so that it can help secure our livelihoods in peace, security, and prosperity in the future.