

**Conference on ‘Family Based on Partnership as a Public Good – A Utopia?’
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Opening presentation on the topic

‘Family Based on Partnership as a Public Good – A Utopia?’

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I. Introduction

To put it simply and directly: Family is neither a private matter nor a women's matter! Instead, family is an institution that implies a way of living that concerns all of us and must therefore be a matter relevant to all of us. It exerts a determining influence on how we live now and how we will live in the future: whether we will be homeless and isolated, or letting us know where we come from and where we belong; whether we are healthy and cared for in sickness and invalidity, or abandoned or given up to anonymous officials who are chiefly interested in money; whether we are given basic trust and healthy self-esteem, if nothing else for a good education, or neglected in the development of our capabilities to the point where it is difficult to catch up later; whether as repressed, lowly and obedient subjects or as upright, free and equal citizens that treat each other as partners in a cooperative manner and, in doing so, take care of their community; whether in a society with inner cohesion and the ability to achieve as well as to exist in solidarity, or in an atomised existence where everyone keeps to himself and is vulnerable to being misled in every way. In this context I recall Hannah Arendt's famous analysis of the emergence of totalitarian rule from the atomised mass society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Without successful families, it is not possible to live well together in the state and in society. That is why family is not an afterthought, but rather a matter that concerns us all.

II. Current meaning of family

Recent surveys reveal that an overwhelming majority of people in our society also see it this way. We can make interesting historical comparisons with the old federal states: Since the eighties, the value placed on family has risen significantly among young adults. While in 1984 less than half of this age group was of the opinion that one needs family in order to be happy, more than approx. 80% since 2010 – almost twice as many respondents – believe this. (1) According to trend researchers, one of the reasons behind this development is that traditional forms of security as represented by a professional career or wealth have been increasingly called into question in the last twenty years. This leads people to take the absolutely necessary definitive measures to satisfy their fundamental need for security which, in addition to freedom, can be described as one of the basic human needs, not through money and a career, but through solid personal relationships.

Studies on the relationship between work and family show a change in people's priorities towards a greater compatibility of family and work: 93% of the respondents in a study by the Rhineland-Palatinate ministry of economics argued in favour of interesting work, and 86% for the recognition of one's own performance. After this, the third most important priority is a better balance between work and personal life (82%). In this context, the desire for a 'slow movement' is gaining more and more emphasis. (2) The German Youth Institute concluded in its latest study on family that "the solidarity community of family and its informal resources ... along with government benefits also have a strong significance in the 21st century." (3)

In the 2011 data report issued by the Federal Office of Statistics, the Social Science Research Center Berlin and the socio-economic panel of the German Institute for Economic Research, it now states that there were 8.2 million families with underage children in 2009, of which 2.4 million have an immigrant background (more than a quarter!), 72% were families with a married couple, 19% single parents and 9% cohabiting. Ten years earlier, there were still 9.3 million families in Germany (almost a million more!), 79% families with a married couple (7% more), 15% single parents (4% less), 6% cohabiting (3% less). (4) A clear transition can be observed here.

Everything considered we recognise two opposing trends: Family is desired on the one hand. Counter to the increasing desire for this way of living, there are fewer families, whereby the traditional married family is becoming rarer. Instead, there are more single parents (now nearly a fifth of families) and more people cohabiting. There are implications from this on the definition of the family and, above all, for the challenges that face us today if we consider family as an essential requirement for a successful individual and political life. I will try to provide answers to this in my presentation today, with the awkward and, at first, definitely unattractive-sounding topic 'Family Based on Partnership as a Public Good'. As you will see, the title sounds strange, but it was carefully considered. We have allowed ourselves this indulgence as a scientific 'Governance School'!

III. Historical and systematic meaning of family

It is no wonder that people, from a personal perspective, place a higher importance on family more than ever. Because family is simply the ideal place where the so-called reproduction of people and society and cultural and individual psychological, social and political socialisation all take place.

This is where key foundations are laid for mental and physical human development and also for the social and political values and attitudes of the entire society. In the history of political ideas, thinkers have reflected and expounded upon this association for over 2000 years, from Plato's 'State', important parts of which are about upbringing, Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics' and 'Politics' to Rousseau's 'Émile' and his 'social contract' in which Rousseau systematically demonstrates the association between a certain upbringing (taking Émile as an example) and the social contract for a republic. It is precisely because of this association that it is urgently necessary to bring the subject of 'family' out into the open.

There are an endless number of scientific studies on what we call 'socialisation' and which describe the conditions under which children and parents – because it is a mutual process, after all – establish the values and attitudes of their coexistence. They demonstrate the outstanding significance of successful families for a successful personal and political life. It makes a huge difference whether little children of the earth grow up in a warm, heartfelt, affectionate and also somewhat trusting and demanding environment or in an impersonal one in which no one has time for them, in which they are unable to develop basic trust in their own powers and in their fellow human beings, in which care and responsibility are unknown to them, and solidarity even less. It makes a difference whether their childlike curiosity and eagerness is nurtured or stifled. If they are to develop enough energy, empathy, imagination and intelligence later in order to assume their responsibility as citizens for the environment (in the broadest sense), for climate protection and energy efficiency, and generally speaking for the capability as citizens to conduct a democratic dispute and to terminate it by arriving at a reasonable understanding – if this is what we want, then families need a space where this can be practiced and where the psychological and emotional dispositions for this can be supported. In doing so, family is most certainly not the only so-called authority of socialisation and care. All of the others – child care facilities as well as, on the other side of the spectrum, hospice and care facilities are of essential importance. But they cannot replace the family in establishing emotional ties, attachment capabilities and sense of responsibility.

This applies not only to the socialisation of children but also to the care of the sick and those in need of care. This does not mean that everything must or should be taken care of at home. Many experiences indicate that a clever combination of care within the family and external support benefits everyone the most. But even for the socialisation of children in view of our community, it is important to experience this cross-generational relationship and to form ties. Whether people are appreciated and wanted as merely service providers or also as individuals with their own irreplaceable value, completely independently of their performance, and also as weak and invalid beings, is decided not least of all in familial experiences. The way we are made is built on the assumption that all people are equally worthy, and that we must respect their dignity. But if we are

simply *obliged*, rather than *willing* and *able* to, because we cannot associate it with any life experience, this foundation of our democracy will disintegrate and no longer be sustainable. This insight can also be linked to a very common experience: According to parents and child care centres, grandparents are the most important childcare authorities in German families. (5)

Throughout history and across various cultures until today, family life was structured very differently. It is important to remember that the contemporary, spontaneous association of family with the private, middle-class nuclear family only originated in the 19th century, that family was initially an institution not of private but of public significance. In its Greek and Roman forms, it comprised the entire household, including slaves, animals and material possessions in addition to the wife and children as the property of the father. This made the family the basic economic and legal entity of society. Even now, family law contains important economic elements that can be found in divorce and custody law.

With the economic and social differentiation of activities and roles since the 18th century at the latest – economic events occurred increasingly in separate places and institutions – the roles of the family changed: They were now supposed to predominantly satisfy the need for intimacy, personal closeness and security. (6) This applied especially to the middle class. In rural areas, among trade and industrial workers, family retained a high economic importance in terms of subsistence and universal care. Love as a foundation for family education (in contrast to economic motives) became a romantic ideal among some parts of the middle class, although marriage did in fact also retain many economic and status connotations. Nevertheless, from our modern perspective we do not wish to give up marriages and families as a place of closeness, personal intimacy and security based on personal attachment. That is a step forward that we want to keep and also need in the present.

IV. Private versus public

At this point I need to provide an explanation of my opening words. I said: Family is not a private matter. This may have ruffled a few feathers among some of you, and understandably so. It is horrifying to think of the government or the state making decisions about our family life, looking into our bedrooms so to speak, or having access to our children. Not just because of the general protection of privacy, to which we should pay close attention, but also because of the devastating experiences we have had with National Socialism and totalitarian dictatorships in Germany, which abused families in order to serve their own ideological objectives. For this reason, the constitution has rightly, and very carefully, provided for the protection of the family against this kind of abuse. And this should remain so.

At the same time, the family was also always an object of governmental legislation because it is specifically protected by the constitution. Basic principles then arose that also had an influence on the structure of the family – that is, the private sphere – and still do to this day. In the old federal states in contrast to the new ones, one principle that was held for a long time was that the man earns a livelihood and the woman takes care of the household and the children. This difference between East and West Germany with regard to these basic principles stands out to this day in the way families are structured.

Changes to family law in the old federal states were spurred by the goals of equal treatment for men and women, the legal status of illegitimate children with those born in marriage and the legal regulation of same sex unions. The former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court Christine Hohmann-Dennhardt speaks in this context of a “mutual influence of mentality, law and reality”. (7) Family in the Federal Republic of Germany was never strictly private in this respect. Expectations of the state to establish new regulations to protect privacy emphasise the public side of the family. Until today, it remains a legitimate object of discussion and consideration as to how much influence the legislator should or should be permitted to have on the internal structure of the family. Family has therefore always been both a private and a public matter. Since highly emotional and ideological positions play an important role here, it depends highly on the reasoning behind the legal or general social changes that are being targeted.

This also applies to our topic, since it contains several normative options that target changes and therefore must be clearly set forth and justified. Within the context of the various family structures, this applies to the internal form of the partnership of families in our conference topic as well as to the claim that the family based on partnership is a public good. Now we come to the option of partnership.

V. Rationale, definition and freedom to choose the ‘family based on partnership’

An ongoing trend in the historical development of family structures can be seen in the slow dissolution of male domination over the family in favour of partnership between man and woman, which stretched out over centuries and has not yet been finalised in reality as experienced by families. (I recall a typical scene on the ski slopes where the wife and kids want to finally break for lunch and get out from the bitter cold and biting wind, while the father imposes his strategy to keep going.) But the principle of partnership has asserted itself, at least at our latitudes. According to the verdict of the Federal Constitutional Court, marriage is, as a traditional foundation for family, again in the words of the former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court Christine Hohmann-Dennhardt, a “long-term relationship between a man and a woman, founded by their own free choice in cooperation with the state, in which the man and the woman can freely decide in equal partnership on the configuration of their cohabitation. Roles can be assigned in any way.” (8) Same-sex unions are not included under the term ‘marriage’. But between man and woman – in which the power divide was historically the most trenchant – the principle of partnership applies, according to our constitution.

In this sense, our option for a family based on partnership is covered by our constitution, and therefore not a deliberate choice. One difference from former practices in Germany and also from certain party political positions is that the terms of partnership, family and free choice ‘concerning their cohabitation’ can be interpreted in different ways.

This initially concerns cohabiting partnerships, the numbers of which have greatly increased and continue to do so, to the extent that there is less and less resistance to accepting them as a basis for families. It is different for same-sex unions. For example, while heterosexual and same-sex partners are permitted to adopt children in the United States and it is also permitted by a European adoption convention, it is by no means the case in Germany and Switzerland. Nevertheless, 6,600 children are being raised in so-called rainbow families – that is, by lesbian or homosexual partners. The Federal Constitutional Court also recently supported the right for homosexuals, the same as for heterosexuals, to adopt the children of their cohabiting partner. It is presumably a matter of time until German law adopts the European convention and regulations such as those in the United States.

This is why we do not limit our understanding of family to traditional families based on marriage and single-parent families, but also include long-term partnerships, both heterosexual and homosexual, as a foundation. We therefore define family as communities of people established on a long-term basis that are connected to each other across generations and care for each other reliably. As I have mentioned, these people do not necessarily need to be maritally or physically involved with each other.

Apart from this, the so-called ‘free choice’ that determines how marriages and, by extension, families structure their lives, merits discussion. Experience in this area has shown that the degree of

so-called freedom of choice depends on the extent to which decisions are influenced by economic/material or cultural realities, and that this freedom can in fact only be exercised to a limited degree. This applies especially to the assimilation of the traditionally different roles among men and women, specifically to the question of what stands in the way of a free division of professional and domestic duties based on partnership. More and more young adults desire an 'egalitarian' division of roles, but it is still controversial at the social and party political level. I freely admit that it underlies our normative notion of a 'family based on partnership as a public good'. It is not forced on us, but is rather a truly free choice with many advantages. Conversely, the demand for 'freedom of choice', which is sometimes invoked as a reason against new division of roles between men and women, may not be used as a pretext to indirectly concretise the traditional division of roles or to come up with obstacles to reforms.

Such obstacles include half-day child care programmes at day-care centres, kindergartens and schools, which are all arrangements that put women at a disadvantage due to the higher income of men (e.g. parental leave, income splitting and child allowance), and an overall professional environment that still lacks an appreciation for active fatherhood and full-time working mothers. In addition, there are significant cultural barriers. The Achter Familienbericht (report on families) addresses in part these structural obstacles to true freedom of choice:

“The primary goal of a sustainable family policy must be to organise the relevant social structures that limit the freedom of choice in terms of lifestyle. Freedom of choice is currently limited above all by the lack of quality day-care facilities, while the existing child care and educational facilities are not sufficiently family-oriented.” (9)

Even so, the consensus can be maintained that freedom of choice only exists if structural conditions are not biased towards the traditional division of roles. What are now the main idea and direction of impact of our project ‘Family Based on Partnership as a Public Good’ that go beyond the many widespread initiatives meant to facilitate what we call the compatibility of family and career?

VI. Private and political meaning of the principle of partnership for family and democracy

For both parents, for mothers and fathers who have freely chosen to carry on a professional activity, it is to gain more time for the family: for daily routines, child-rearing, caring for the sick and the elderly, shared leisure time, maintaining the partner relationship, further education and time for oneself. This also includes being able to link family with civic commitment. This cannot be done without imposing a time limit, slowing down and adapting professional careers to the life cycles of both the fathers and the mothers during family time; unlike child-rearing, the care of elderly or sick family members extends over the course of life for an indefinite time. At the same time, there is an opportunity to slow down the working lifetime adapted to the life stages not only in terms of time, but also to subsequently intensify or extend it as one chooses so that the problems of old-age security can be better solved. Therefore, it is overall a matter of reorganising the relationship between work and family in order to be able to better implement the principle of partnership in the private and the political/democratic sense according to what many young people want and to entrench it more deeply into our society.

The *meaning and the positive effects of ‘partnership’* as a formal principle for families are varied. At first glance, they obviously stand *for a real equality between men and women* that is relevant to both employment and family activity: whether it is about opportunities to develop one’s own talents and capabilities and put them to use, the independence to earn one’s own living, the possibility of establishing one’s own life structure and circle of friends, or equal pay for equal work, which has been demanded for years to no avail, as well as security in sickness and in old age. Here are just a few key points: Women still earn approximately 25% less than men, even for the same work. Their old age security is on average half that of men – the difference in Eastern Germany is much less, because women have worked there full-time for longer. And old-age poverty is a particular threat to women.

I distinctly remember something that my first housekeeper said. She was from Southern Europe,

had moved into our house with her husband and family and was working for the first time with social security. She had signed the rental contract for the apartment. After a few months she said to me: Since I have been working here and have the apartment in my name, my husband does not beat me anymore. This was over thirty years ago, but not entirely irrelevant to our time.

A division of work and family duties, freely agreed upon in a partnership in which both fathers and mothers do both, also has *significant advantages for the development of the children*. It already represents a tangible advantage if the different roles demanded of the parents (a very common example: to sometimes be stricter and sometimes more lenient, to accept any and all differences in attitudes) do not have to be fulfilled by only one person all of the time. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that children need to have a deep relationship with their father, not only with their mother.

A greater advantage lies in the *acquisition of social skills by the fathers*, which occurs out of the necessity of having to care for little beings, to see things from their perspective, to sense that there is no point in forcing the issue, but rather that one must accommodate them. Furthermore, this provides them an opportunity to overcome one-sided priorities in their way of living that often come back to haunt them, especially after their career is over. It is well known that women deal much better than men with setbacks or the departure from professional life. The value of diversification that many men know well from financial investments is also proven in this case.

But exactly the opposite is true for women. Their single-minded fixation on raising children often puts a significant burden on the children because they sense that their mother derives her self-esteem from the success of the children, and that she falls into life crises when things do not work out or when the children leave home. The balance between nurturing and caring for children and enabling them to develop independently is easier to achieve when neither parent is fixated on a particular role and thus offer their children the opportunity to learn diversification, how to deal with different attitudes and decisions and behaviours based on partnership.

Such a partnership also gives a better chance to the relationship of the couple itself: Their common world in child-rearing expands, and at the same time, both are able to develop further in separate areas and, in doing so, remain interesting to one another. More time is needed for this too. When our lives are taken over by work, which often happens at present under intensely competitive circumstances, it is difficult to make the time that we need for each other in order to maintain and further develop a vibrant relationship.

In this context there are also new opportunities for men and women to arrive at a more relaxed understanding of roles and self-image. This depends not least on the understanding of roles as promoted or rejected by society. Decades of feminist conflict have put the emphasis on the discrimination towards women and on the loss, both individual and societal, that both they and society have suffered due to their repression and devaluation. And rightly so.

Despite the enduring inequalities, actual discrimination and, particularly in the familial context, the dual burden of many women, they are nevertheless clearly gaining ground in terms of their role and their position in society – and this is true everywhere in the world. The real psychological problem lies today in men. At first glance, it appears as if there are only losses in store for them: They have forfeited their dominant position by law and, increasingly, in reality. In many areas of society, however, they are expected to display a ‘superiority’ that they can in no way achieve without the superior status they used to enjoy. And so they often end up in a psychologically dead-end situation. An indicator for this is the problems faced by young men from disadvantaged social strata in terms of roles; they end up developing extremist attitudes, not least because of these problems. It is a problem well known in sociology and will continue to exist as long as men – or in fact all of us – think in categories of superiority or inferiority, in categories of hierarchy rather than equality.

The basic principle of ‘partnership’ offers an outstanding – dare I say – the only promising way out of this dilemma. **Instead of hierarchy, equality comes into diversity, with the opportunity for mutually exhilarating**

challenge as well completion. No one is forced to play a traditional role any longer that is totally inappropriate in our current situation. Men and women can effortlessly, without status clichés, be sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, sometimes well rested, sometimes not, carry out different activities – e.g. men can take on care-giving or childcare jobs, women can also take on managerial positions – without attracting disapproval. We can understand much better the difficulties and inner rewards inherent in each other’s activities, which no longer need to be separated as inferior or superior according to gender.

Of course each one of us must decide for her or himself whether a partnership is the right thing and how it should be organised. But the partnership requires an underlying material independence in the gender relation. This is why the division of domestic and professional duties based on partnership plays an essential role. Material power may of course remain in the background within a particularly happy relationship. And the essence of a good personal relationship, in both love and in friendship, clearly does not lie in money. But since we are human in the end, a major imbalance in power harbours the risk that dependencies will be exploited, the risk of repression, and – if it is still at a subtle level – the risk of undermining the equality of the partnership. This applies not only within the family but also in public and political life.

The transition here from the private to the public side of families clearly brings back the close association between family, society and politics. The notion that democracy is the contemporary political form of a free coexistence is commonly accepted throughout the world, just as the specific political/institutional structure it should adopt is contentiously debated throughout the world. As a rule, a distinction is made between the structural and institutional form of democracy and its culture, i.e. the values and attitudes of the citizens. **If democracy is founded upon the same values of all people and legitimised through them**, i.e. on the equal freedom of all citizens to make their own life decisions and to participate responsibly in decisions on common issues, **then partnership is its determining cultural foundation. Because partnership means equal freedom, equality in diversity, with the goal and the best opportunity for solidarity and cooperation in which conflict and consensus can be managed.** Starting from the private sphere, it carries on in the economy within the so-called social partnership and in international and global politics as a partnership between nations and continents, notably in development cooperation.

I have presented my extensive, if not exhaustive, arguments in favour of structuring families based on partnership, in order to illustrate the systematic association between the private and the public/political spheres. However, I would like to address two objections. First of all: It is generally accepted that we live in a time of increasing diversity in our society and increasing diversification in terms of lifestyle. This diversity includes the fact that 33% of all births originate in an exclusively German background. In some of our major cities, this figure is 50% and, in some cases, a greater percentage of children starting school come from a so-called immigrant background.

We end up in a trap if we set a so-called German mainstream society, which would in itself be homogeneous, against an immigrant minority that is also considered homogeneous. If we therefore ask, for example, whether the normative option for the partnership also applies to immigrants, it cannot come as a surprise that in this case there are differences within the social strata and the age cohorts, just as there are for people of German origin. In the words of Ursula Boos-Nünning, a specialist in immigrant families: "The gender roles as inter-familial division of duties and the balancing of professional and domestic roles are very similar among young people, whether they are native Germans or have an immigrant background. In all groups, the current generation of parents more often have an egalitarian model than their parents do. In both groups the egalitarian model loses significance at the expense of the woman when the first child is born." (10) Among the Turkish Muslim girls, the female Italians and the ethnic female immigrants there are no remarkable differences in this regard. The respective social parameters are what influence the understanding of roles beyond cultural origin. (11) And equality is also better achieved in immigrant families when both partners are working. (12)

The second objection concerns single-parent families. How can partnership be practiced in these families? As already stated, almost a fifth of all families in Germany are single-parent families. Obviously, one person cannot become two, which is the minimum required for a partnership. And this idea cannot solve all of the problems that families currently have. Nevertheless, single parents can also benefit from positive, family-oriented measures through work regulations, governmental assistance and childcare support that result from the basic principle of partnership and contribute directly to the improvement of the situation of single parents. And on this note I will return to my considerations in the final part of this presentation during which I will outline some proposed solutions. But first the core challenges faced by families based on partnership need to be examined. They pertain to institutional and cultural obstacles within the context of a professional environment that threatens to take over people's personal lives and in many cases has become more precarious.

VII. Families based on partnership – opportunities and obstacles

The key challenge of the possibility of living as a family based on partnership lies in organising flexible and, if necessary, fewer working hours for women and men so that they both share the domestic duties, respond to the inevitable unpredictable events, and at the same time can make ends meet financially and are not obliged to limit their career opportunities. This requires significant institutional, cultural and mental changes that include a slower career development, the ability to accommodate employee requests for mobility and flexibility, a change in working procedures under certain circumstances (e.g. in the case of assembly line work), and a cultural transition with regard to how work and family are prioritised. At the same time, it requires flexible support provided by childcare and educational facilities and nursing care services for sick and invalid family members. Cooperation between the workplace, the municipalities and various infrastructure services is necessary to achieve this.

In this regard, we actually live in the best of times: Everywhere we hear talk of the ‘compatibility of family and work’, of the necessary ‘work-life balance’, of the new fathers who beam at us – or give us tortured looks – from the cover of every other weekly magazine, of the female quota on executive and advisory boards, of the demographic transition and the foreseeable lack of skilled employees that will encourage more women to enter the workforce. There are an increasing number of regulations for flexible work hours, time accounts, telecommuting, and very progressive human resource managers who do not even insist that employees be reachable around the clock, that simply being at the workplace is not necessarily a sign of managerial ability nor a requirement (one can sit at the computer late into the evening playing games).

There are now many companies that have also established part-time work for management positions. According to many analyses, some of them conducted by the Federal Employment Agency, it is profitable to apply professional and human resource policies that are adapted to the different life phases, some of which even include substantial advance payment for reduced working hours. Appreciative employees demonstrate stronger motivation, identification with the company and loyalty, even in more difficult times. There is a decrease in staff fluctuations in companies, employers do not need to invest as much in hiring and training new staff members or reintegration, and the quality of the work increases, as does the staff’s willingness to innovate. The good reputation that comes with this is also not to be underestimated.

In addition to the financial advantages, there are also economic ones: Being able to live in a family based on partnership provides the best chance of achieving higher birth rates, thereby dealing successfully with the so-called demographic challenge (compare with the statistical findings in Scandinavia and France). It saves healthcare costs, because a well-balanced lifestyle minimises

unhealthy stress (psychosomatic illnesses arise in many cases from unhealthy stress and the feeling of being overextended), it improves educational opportunities because children can grow up in greater security, confidence and tranquillity, it facilitates the integration of the underprivileged and their participation in social, cultural and political life, because it addresses their situation in life, it overcomes the many areas of discrimination against women with regard to income, careers and pension, and it increases the opportunities for fighting against poverty, especially in retirement age, but also for single mothers, by enabling them also to reduce their work while maintaining an income.

In theory, the ideal conditions exist for families based on partnership to be achieved. But in reality, they do not. There are still many obstacles standing in the way.

Based on the argument that the global competition it has been required by a globalised economy, working conditions have grown significantly more precarious over the last decades due to high unemployment, the increase in temporary jobs, seasonal and contract work, and not only in Germany. Low-paying service sectors are particularly affected by precarious working conditions, but they also concern qualified and highly skilled employees. This means that starting a family represents an increasing risk, if not an impossibility.

Many men and women fear that if they work less they will appear less interested, and that this will get in the way of the development of their career. Many men are concerned that if they clearly wish to devote themselves to domestic duties, it will have an impact on their image as a real man.

It requires a special approach to agree on established working processes with flexible part-time: for example, assembly line work and shift work, which is now being implemented in IT departments, marketing and the service sector. Often the most basic considerations are disregarded – for example, not to schedule mandatory meetings after 4 p.m. The expectation of being able to extend the length of the working lifetime by adapting work to the lives of individuals is refuted by experience, which shows that the time and performance pressures have increased significantly in the past few years and have led to mental and physical burnout. 84% of works councils have confirmed that staff is constantly under time and performance pressures.

Another obstacle to establishing flexible working hours within the scope of partnership is the income gap between men and women. The gender differences may appear logical, since the woman is usually the one to reduce working hours, rather than the man. This is why in Germany it is often the case that men have a full-time job and women, after a break, pursue a part-time job, with fatal consequences in terms of pensions and the threat of old-age poverty for women.

The current tax regulations still stand in the way of a family based on partnership: for example, the tax benefits for single parents and the splitting tariff for married couples, whereby 42% of the married couples receiving the benefit have no children.

In the end, establishing flexible working hours poses significant problems among income earners. If women and men in families based on partnership are to gain more time for the family, both partners must reduce their working hours. When young people are well paid, they increasingly prefer to have more time rather than greater financial advantages. And if women increase their working time from half days to full days, their income also increases. But in low-income groups in which both partners work full time, financial compensation is needed if gainful employment is to be reduced. How can this be achieved?

We have now arrived at the last station in our train of thought, which is the question of whether and why the family based on partnership represents a 'public good'.

VIII. Why is the family based on partnership a public good?

It may sound strange at first to refer to the family as a 'good'. Because the economic definition of public goods refers to a 'product' – a

street, a dike, clean air – that is manufactured or produced and is either necessary to the public, but is not sufficiently profitable as a good on the market, or lies in the public interest (education, health), although it can also be traded as a good (paid university education, private stays at health spas). A ‘public good’ is also something that cannot exclude anyone from its benefits – for example, clean air. But the family is not a product that can be manufactured, that can be offered to others or used by them, but rather an institution whose concrete examples are founded by people, but not as something that can be offered to others.

However, the definition of public goods has expanded – particularly in the context of globalisation, and also of developments within the municipalities. Having experienced increasing deregulation and privatisation, the responsibilities of the state as previously defined at the national level are again called in to question, now in terms of the overall conditions required by societies in order to prosper: from external security, a clean environment, water and energy supply, public services and climate protection to the stability of the financial market and the constitutional state. This now also places institutions in the domain of ‘public goods’ that cannot be traded as a product on the market, yet are considered essential for a successful life. How we decide what should be privately and what should be publically produced and provided no longer arises from an axiomatically determinable economic definition, but rather from society’s political understanding of how it wants to live. Arguments to this end need to be presented and exchanged.

Since public goods such as climate protection have arisen from the economic insight that economic production can trigger so-called external effects (e.g. damage to the environment) beyond the economic horizon, which then have consequences on the general public and therefore should in future be included in the economic calculation more and more as negative external effects, it makes sense for these considerations on ‘external effects’ to be further developed in a positive way. This means that, for example, if education, healthcare or a functioning constitutional state are also publicly managed (such as in the case of vaccinations or food regulations), they should trigger positive external effects on society (overall increase in productivity, reduction in economic costs, peace under the law). This is also precisely what applies to the institution of the ‘family based on partnership’. I have exposed the reasons for this, and will summarise them now:

If we enable 'families based on partnership' and make them liveable, it will serve to stabilise families and also provide a clever and realistic answer to the demographic issue of the declining birth rate. This will support child-rearing, education and healthcare. We promote equality between men and women and address poverty in old age. We develop a modern understanding of roles for both partners and stabilise partner relationships. We provide the best opportunities for the urgently needed practice and consolidation of responsibility and solidarity and, consequently, for the cohesion in our society. In doing so, we lay the foundation for a forward-looking democratic culture of community as an entity for handling conflict and engaging in cooperation, which we urgently need not only within the borders of our own country if we want to survive the global challenges of the next decades. It seems to me that these external effects are sufficiently positive in order to justify the 'family based on partnership' as public good.

It stands to reason that in order to overcome the above-mentioned obstacles, e.g. that the costs for the time the men and women need to spend on domestic duties should not only be considered a personal matter. This applies to the infrastructure support for child care, education and hospice care, but also to the reduction of working hours that should in any case be recompensed through public means. There need to be general legal regulations for this (e.g. with regard to taxes, income splitting). Other regulations should be specifically negotiated among businesses, employees, municipalities and public social organisations, that is, in a pre-governmental context. This therefore also applies to single parents and needs to be actualised. It can no longer happen in individual cases. In my reflections today I have proposed to place the institution of the family based on partnership overall in this very social and political context.

IX. On the practical implementation of the 'family based on partnership'

When we speak of the public good, we do not refer only to the state. According to the basic philosophy of the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA School of Governance, it is rather our intent to bring together all of the various experiences and information gathered from society, in cooperation with politics, the business sector and organised civil society, with science and media in order to develop common solutions that are well thought out and to try them out into practice. With this in mind we are working together with companies such as Deutsche Post and Deutsche Telekom, and also with the Deutschen Städte- und

Gemeindebund (German Association of Towns and Municipalities) as well as with proactive father groups, and unions, to further develop the concept and the many individual ideas that have already been proposed for the respective specific requirements and to come up with precise actions for the necessary legal regulations. We offer this cooperation to all companies and municipalities that are willing to give their commitment.

As already mentioned, there are already a large number of individual proposals that will not be presented now. We will instead be offering an information and exchange platform on these on our premises tomorrow. We will address this at the conference tomorrow in the entry panel, the workshops and the summary, and work through them again. They need to be precisely defined and adapted to the respective situation for the professional environment, municipalities and families.

Above all, this includes role models, if possible from leadership and if possible also masculine, who understand the scope of this innovation and support it. For this we give special thanks to all of the male participants at our conference and also Professor Gerald Hüther for his talk at the end of our conference on the need for new fathers in Germany, which he will also present elsewhere.

In the future, our objective is to combine the many approaches that are already available with the two principles 'partnership' and 'public good' and to promote them in order to bring them out into the open within the public consciousness of family policy and, together with science and media, highlight their importance for politics, economy and civil society, in support of our life together under democracy beyond national borders. Let's get to work!

- (1) Statistical figures from Datenreport 2011, a social report for the Federal Republic of Germany, published by the Federal Office of Statistics, WZB, DIW, the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, Bonn 2011, p.46
- (2) Rhineland-Palatinate: Ministry for Economics and Work and the Ministry for Traffic, Energy and Regional Planning. Strategy for the Future. A Guideline for Business in Connecting with Acquiring Employees. October 2011, authors: Prof Dr Jutta Rump, Silke Eilers, Gaby Wilms, p.15ff.
- (3) Deutsches Jugendinstitut, Thema 2010/6: Stark und stabil – Familie als Solidargemeinschaft (Theme 2010/6: Strong and Stable – Family as a Solidarity Group, p.9

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- (4) Datenreport 2011, a social report for the Federal Republic of Germany, published by the Federal Office of Statistics, WZB, DIW, the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, Bonn 2011, p.32
- (5) German Youth Institute: Deutsches Jugendinstitut, Thema 2010/6: Stark und stabil – Familie als Solidargemeinschaft (Theme 2010/6: Strong and Stable – Family as a Solidarity Group), p.6
- (6) cf. Elke Völmicke, Gerd Brudermüller (editor): ‘F amilie – ein öffentliches Gut?’ (‘Family – a Public Good?’) Würzburg, 2010, introduction, p.9
- (7) in: Elke Völmicke, Gerd Brudermüller (editor.): ‘F amilie – ein öffentliches Gut?’ (‘Family – a Public Good?’) Würzburg, 2010, S. 53
- (8) ibid. p.53ff.
- (9) Prof Dr Norbert Schneider (Zeit für Familie Ausgewählte Themen des 8. Familienberichts Monitor Familienforschung Ausgabe 26) (Time for Family Selected Themes from the 8th Family Report Monitor Family Research Issue 26)
- (10) Ursula Boss-Nünning, Migrationsfamilien als Partner von Erziehung und Bildung. WISO Diskurs, Dec. 2011, editor Friedrich-Ebertstiftung, p.5
- (11) ibid. p.21
- (12) ibid. p.22