

GOETHE MEDAL 2019

LAUDATORY SPEECH FOR ENKHBAT ROOZON

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- Check against delivery -

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My dear friend Enkhbat,

... I know this won't be a proper laudatory speech. I adhere to the insight that "Too much incense sullies the saints."

The two of us met for the first time in Zurich in the summer of 2013. The meeting was arranged by Anita Fahrni, who has been supporting schools in Mongolia for years. Our first encounter made me feel like I was meeting an old acquaintance. We discussed "enlightenment, education and democracy." From my language, unworthy of the stage, ladies and gentlemen, you may recognise my Helvetian origin. It shapes my understanding of democracy. Please note that my understanding of democracy is free of pathos.

Google informs me that Mongolia is a "threshold state." The makers of the information provide a few acronyms and numbers. The reason for the threshold is the numbers. I am informed that I live on this side and Enkhbat on the other side of the threshold. If one reads further, it becomes clear why Enkhbat intercedes for "enlightenment, education and democracy." The online information - written on this side of the threshold - lacks precisely these concepts.

The thinking of the Enlightenment delegitimises statist, seigniorial social orders, exposes dogmatic obscurantism and promotes equality before the law. Enlightenment is not an epoch among others. It never ends; it is incessant scepticism about fake news, alternative facts and assertions of power. This founds Monsudar publishing house as a contribution to enlightenment and education. Enkhbat and his team organise the one-week Enlightenment Days twice a year. They are a contribution against the growing nostalgia for traditional conventions and practices. Nostalgia is selectively longed for, but never selectively acquirable. Nostalgia means not only pretty dresses and folk festivals, but also legal inequality and clan rule. Experience: We were sitting over our morning coffee. On the radio, some minister was giving an interview. Enkhbat was annoyed: "It's all manipulation!" He picked up the phone and demanded an interview at the station - today. I didn't understand a word, but I knew that I wouldn't want to be the person on the other end of that phone. Enkhbat was on the radio during prime time. I didn't understand a word, but I knew that I wouldn't want to be the minister who was being hauled over the coals. It must have sounded similar to when Enkhbat and his team won a lawsuit against the Ministry of

Education, which claimed to have the power to have full definatory power over educational materials. Curricula and teaching materials are not a monopoly of old-boys' networks in a democracy. Preventing this is enlightenment.

Education is a challenge, bulky, unpleasant; it is an initiation into a culture with its history – certainly not folklore. Education in primary school is never needs oriented and certainly not individualised. It is not the bugbear of small-minded educability, but a lifelong confrontation with one's own inabilities and the social context. It is not consumed in the comfort zone. Education, especially public education, is not a privilege but an indispensable condition of a democracy. Education cannot be illustrated on websites by acronyms like BiP, BsP, CPI, Dax, NASDAQ, SCI, and so on. It cannot be hampered by thresholds. Education is certainly not private, especially elementary education never is. Education pushes for public or political engagement, especially when new feudal lords and kleptocrats are settling in. In 2017, I was invited to Mongolia for three weeks partly by public offices for five school visits with lectures. The program felt chill. The school visits were planned – take note – only in private schools. Experience: I explained to Enkhbat and his colleague Ariuna that I would never do that. I'm not going to fly 15 hours with two stopovers to find out what I can find out at home on YouTube. Ariuna organised another program: visits to six public schools, about 20 lectures, teacher seminars and public discussions. It included a short excursion with consulting for a school in the Dornod Aimag region, each journey there and back 800 km in three days. Enkhbat's rationale: The whole country needs education, not just the city. Everyone has to understand what's going on in society and politics and get involved.

Concepts of democracy are contingent and historically conditioned. The historical core of democratic orders is increasingly being ignored and replaced by "participation" or "a voice," which is an impermissible diminution and aestheticisation. It's not enough to summon the formula "all power to the people." The constituent of democratic constitutions is substantial mistrust of power holders and political sleaze. This mistrust is constitutionally formalised in the separation of powers. We all, on this and the other side of the threshold, know who has the power, who can abuse it. Those drunk with power launch attacks on the separation of powers. People with state power must be constantly monitored. They are accountable to the public. The public is not simply transparency; it is a requirement for the public. From the eighteenth century onward at the latest, public means an uncompromising obligation to accountability and discourse of all exercises of state power. For this, independent, free school – public – education is needed. Monsudar publishing house – an educational publishing house – dedicates its activity exactly to this commitment. This includes the *Mongol Citizens* project to strengthen democratic, civic and ethical awareness among pupils, students and teachers. This includes the textbook *civic education*. A prerequisite for this is the promotion of reading – that too is a publishing program. Monsudar knows no thresholds.

Dear Enkhbat, now a word of praise: I sometimes wish Enkhbat and his team were on this side of the threshold. Your work is principled – enlightenment, democracy and education – and yet pragmatic. You deserve this honour without reservations; your work is worthy of it.