



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

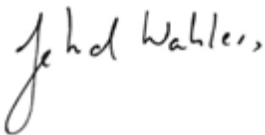
For some decades now, there has been a noticeable increase in nationalism in Asia. Nationalism, understood as an exaggerated perception of the importance of one's own nation, which produces a feeling of superiority over other nations, is generating tensions and conflicts in the entire region. There is a military build-up taking place in the South China Sea and territorial disputes are on the increase.

The impact of nationalism is apparent in almost all Asian countries. The terms of nationalism and patriotism are frequently used as synonyms in this context. Nationalism is by no means only seen in a negative light. It comes as no surprise that the former colonies in particular have a different historic link to this phenomenon than the former colonial states. Whenever they considered the significance of their nation, it was very rarely with the aim of occupying other countries; on the contrary, it often was with the aim of liberating their country from oppression by another power.

There are not only historic explanations for the great significance of nationalism. Another reason is the widespread notion that a strong military is a prerequisite to securing social peace and stability. Political decision-makers rely on support from the armed forces, which for their part appeal to the patriotism and nationalism of the population and frequently cooperate with nationalist political parties and groupings. When a television programme reports on a deployment of the national military, this is often accompanied by patriotic music, soldiers are celebrated as heroes, rousing appeals are made to the population's patriotism. No commercial media outlet would dare to appeal to the readers' and viewers' reason in the conflict about the South China Sea. While many contributions advocate peaceful conflict resolution, they always have the "nationally desirable" outcome in mind.

The most serious tensions in the region arise from the rivalry between Japan and the People's Republic of China. Surveys indicate that the opinions the Chinese and the Japanese have of each other are as poor as they had last been in war times – despite the fact that China's economic upsurge has resulted in more intensive economic and trading relations with its neighbour. Peter Hefele, David Merkle and Janina Sturm state in this issue that it is becoming apparent in East Asia "that globalisation and economic interdependency between nations are no guarantee of increased trust and peaceful relations." In spite of a globalised economy and an increase in cultural influences from abroad, the importance of nationalism has not diminished in Korea either. However, in their article from Seoul, Norbert Eschborn and Janine Läßle point to the phenomena of increasing migration and worldwide media networking. In their opinion, these two developments may well have a moderating effect on nationalism, albeit not in the immediate future.

In Europe, nationalism served as justification for the devastating wars of the 20th century. Konrad Adenauer called it the "blight of Europe". Subsequently, though, the European unification project has demonstrated how tensions can be reduced and how nationalism can be restrained. However, half a century of economic, political and finally institutional interrelations has not meant that nations have lost their significance. Even in a united Europe there will always be a German, an Italian and a Czech identity, for instance. A similar development is conceivable and desirable for Asia. Greater regional cooperation can help to reduce tensions, boost prosperity and increase the possibilities for citizen participation. That would be to the benefit of all Asian nations.



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