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Oral History Interview with Uta Zapf

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Summary:

Chairperson of the subcommittee for "Disarmament, Arms Control, and Nonproliferation" of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag.

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Uta Zapf

Germany

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco in person in Dreieich on 14 November 2016

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for accepting the invitation to talk to me. I want to start by asking a question to understand where you came from: How did you become interested in nuclear proliferation?

Uta Zapf:

Well we had a big discussion in Germany about what we call the NATO-Doppelbeschluss [NATO Double-Track Decision]. You know, Pershing and Cruise Missiles. This was very exciting for me because I was just beginning to act as an interested person within my party, and this really took me, it was in my heart. I was one of the acting members who fought to change this decision which was hard for the SPD because we had the chancellor then, Helmut Schmidt, who was very much a driver in the seat. I went to Bonn in, I think, 1984 to attend this big demonstration. We came there just a couple of young people with buttons of the SPD and it was hard because we were very much criticized during the demonstration. High up in the sky was one of my deputies of the SPD, Mr. Erwin Horn. He flew a small plane with an banner asking 'who is going to demonstrate in Moscow?' That was a high tension within the party. I was active at that time within the party as head of a group within the SPD Hessen South of a commission for security questions. For war and peace - so to say. I started discussing within the different levels of the party district and higher - and wrote a resolution for our party convention. This resolution was voted on, and we were one of the districts which voted against this Double-Track Decision. This was the beginning of my engagement. At that time I was also preparing information-material for my colleagues in the party. We made a big brochure and especially the women were very active, but I think that in my district, there was a broad consensus that we were against stationing of Pershing and Cruise Missiles. That was the beginning of my interest in arms control and disarmament.

Michal Onderco:

When did you become involved with the parliamentarians for nuclear disarmament?

Uta Zapf:

This was much later. Somewhere in the 90's I think. I met Alyn Ware, coordinator of PNND, he visited me in my office, I hadn't heard about them at that time. Immediately I became absolutely interested, and I think it was the following year that I became one of the co-presidents of PNND.

Michal Onderco:

How was, in Germany, your cooperation not only with people from other parties, but also with the executive, with people from different ministries?

Uta Zapf:

In 1990 when I was elected to the Bundestag I became a member of the Sub-Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. In 1998 I became the chair of this committee. For 23 years I served on that subcommittee because it was my favourite one. By that time Mr. Kinkel was Foreign Minister. He was very open because he was very interested in having the NPT prolonged unlimited and unconditionally. We had a very broad and substantive discussion with the administration, within the parliament, and with NGOs.

Michal Onderco:

So, this is very interesting, so let's take it piece by piece. Was there, when Mr. Kinkel came with the idea that Germany should accept unconditional extension, was it broadly accepted?

Uta Zapf:

Yes by that time, there was a turning point. I don't even remember what year it was. In the beginning of my time in the Bundestag, Christian Democrats were very hard on the point of nuclear armament. All of a sudden to my surprise the hardliner in the CDU, Mr. Dregger, changed his mind and in a big discussion on the issue in the Bundestag he spoke first. I had prepared to fight him and be very sharp. But he stood there and just said everything that I could agree to, I just could support him. All I could say was "I am very astonished but this is the first time that I agree fully with Mr. Dregger". He had turned completely around. He said "we must have non-proliferation, we must have arms control, we must have nuclear disarmament" and he referred to his grandchildren. So something, all of a sudden had turned him around, maybe it was a discussion in the society. I don't know because I didn't have much contact with him personally. At that time he was the head of the parliamentary group of CDU/CSU. He changed his mind and I don't know why. Maybe you must ask someone who was with him at the time, he is dead now, I don't know when he died.

Michal Onderco:

But the CDU was before against the extension of the treaty?

Uta Zapf:

I think they were against the extension of the treaty because they were pro-nuclear weapons, pro-NATO, and pro-nuclear umbrella and things like that. They didn't provide much support for arms reductions, but of course they wanted other nations not to have these weapons. That was their standpoint. They wanted to have the NPT prolonged unlimited and unconditionally. That was a very different point because that was something we had to argue with NGOs. Because some NGOs said "don't do it unconditionally".

Michal Onderco:

So what did the NGOs say? What did the NGOs want?

Uta Zapf:

The NGOs said that they were afraid that if we didn't make it conditional then we wouldn't get arms reductions, and maybe they were right. I think that because they said that we needed a process in order to have pressure on the nuclear weapons states strong enough to make them reduce their arsenals.

Michal Onderco:

So the parliamentarians felt that the pressure could also be sustained otherwise? Or was it something that you didn't really consider?

Uta Zapf:

I think by that time we were very close in discussion with our government. The Europeans had a common standpoint and they had decided on unconditionally. I think it was the position of Great Britain and France. But at the time I didn't look into it too much. But the discussion at the time was to that argumentation, and although we discussed intensely with these NGOs. We felt it was better to have it unconditioned. I can't remember that any argument was so convincing that we would change our mind.

Michal Onderco:

How was your interaction with the government?

Uta Zapf:

It was very good because we, as German parliamentarians, had the advantage that we had this subcommittee and in this subcommittee we also had close discussions with the government, with ambassadors who were responsible for the issue. There is always an ambassador in the Foreign Office responsible for arms control. He is always present in the sittings of the committee. He reports, he discusses with the parliamentarians.

Michal Onderco:

Do you remember who it was at the time?

Uta Zapf:

I don't, could it be Mr. Hartman? Later on he was a very successful ambassador at the CD and then he was part of the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

until he retired. Maybe it was him. He was responsible for some time, but I couldn't say for sure. It is too long ago.

Michal Onderco:

So you had a very good cooperation with the government at time. Were you also active in contributing to the development of government policy position and papers for the conference?

Uta Zapf:

No. Not exactly. Normally you have to be a very nasty and pushy to get these papers. That's it. They prepared the papers in European circles or in New York, or at the CD. The difference I think depends very much on who is responsible. With some of them it was easy to get the prepared papers, with some of them it wasn't, and in some cases it was very difficult and almost impossible. For instance in 2010 when we talked about reducing the role of nuclear weapons in the strategic context of NATO. It was such a secret. In the context of the NPT don't remember if we could read these papers, maybe yes, maybe no

Michal Onderco:

Before the conference did you already coordinate with parliamentarians from other countries?

Uta Zapf:

No, I don't remember. I don't think so.

Michal Onderco:

So when the German government was putting together these proposals for going to the conference and advocating for indefinite extension, what were the main factors that drove the decision making? Or, also in your case, what were the main arguments you put forward?

Uta Zapf:

For me personally, it was so important that you stabilise this treaty that you make it possible that nobody breaks out who is in, and they get members in it to strengthen it. I very much agreed with all the countries who pleaded for more disarmament. I thought if other countries couldn't get weapons of their own, then the chance for disarmament would be greater. At the same time we had the discussion which culminated in 1999 about disarmament in the conventional field in Europe which was important too. Because if you don't have both at the same time then it's very difficult to persuade people to get rid of nuclear weapons and not get them of their own.

Michal Onderco:

Was there any moment, for example a discussion about the stationing of American nuclear weapons in Germany linked to the NPT?

Uta Zapf:

I don't remember, because the decision to station nuclear weapons in Germany was taken by Chancellor Kohl. We were very much against it.

Michal Onderco:

Which decision?

Uta Zapf:

To take Pershing and Cruise Missiles to Germany. In the campaign for the next elections we fought against it, but we didn't get much votes out of it. Eighty percent may have been against it, but it didn't pay for us. I think that the turnaround came when they actually didn't station these weapons in Germany.

Michal Onderco:

Yes, but there was still strategic weapons that were stationed in Germany.

Uta Zapf:

Yes, but they were removed later, there was Schöneck, here in Hessen, and some others too. Anyway we still have tactical weapons in Büchel.

Michal Onderco:

Was industry in any way involved? Because Germany of course had this large industry which was selling dual-use goods to all over the world. Historically German

industry benefitted from selling materials also linked to nuclear energy elsewhere. Was German industry involved in any way in making the future of non-proliferation, or export controls, and so on and so forth?

Uta Zapf:

Not that I remember because industry didn't come to our offices to influence us. They do it on a lot of other occasions but on this occasion I don't remember and I think that they were just satisfied with what they could gain out of nuclear energy. In the case of nuclear energy it was very different.

Michal Onderco:

You said that it wasn't industry who came to your office to lobby you, so who was it in 1995?

Uta Zapf:

NGOs.

Michal Onderco:

NGOs?

Uta Zapf:

NGOs, yes.

Michal Onderco:

And were any of these NGOs diehard against the extension of the NPT?

Uta Zapf:

No, no. Those who came to my office were all pro-nuclear disarmament, even long before this decision was on the table. They were all for it, prolongation, but some of them were against unconditional.

Michal Onderco:

And when you got to New York for the conference how were you positioned within the German delegation?

Uta Zapf:

You mean my status?

Michal Onderco:

I mean your status and how did you interact with the rest of the delegation?

Uta Zapf:

The delegation was a very good delegation, we didn't quarrel. We had shades of differences but we never quarrelled. Some of them were more interested and others less, but that's always the case. But I only remember the first thing in New York which I proposed. It was my idea to meet with NGOs. It was a big circle because I think that it was for the first time that the government collaborated so closely in the conference with NGOs. Did you have your interview with Mr. Muller?

Michal Onderco:

I will have.

Uta Zapf:

He can tell you better, because he was one of the experts who was very close from the beginning giving advice to the government. He was there too. Other NGOs he would know the names. Oliver Meier?

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Uta Zapf:

He worked with me some years later. Xanthe Hall, she's from IPNNW, and she's doing a very good job and she's still there. As I said, I don't remember them by name. I don't even know who was in our delegation. I think it was Angelika Beer from the Greens at the time, now she's a Pirate or something like that. And from the CDU, I think that Mr [Friedberg Pflüger] he left parliament a long time ago, but he was the speaker of the Conservatives. We had speakers and I remember the speakers.

Michal Onderco:

And how was your interaction with the diplomats in the delegation?

Uta Zapf:

In the delegation, yes. First the ambassador who came from Germany at that time, and was the same who worked at the CD in Geneva and at the General Assembly, I think it's always one person. I think that we also had a good interaction with him and he cared for us as the leader of the government- delegation, so to say. We also had someone leading the parliamentarians but I don't remember who it was. I had a sense of importance at that time, but don't remember who the chair of the parliamentarians was. He took us to all the other delegations like the Russians, like the Americans, whoever it was, Egyptians at that time. Then this group, by that time, I remember, Mexico was very much in the lead of one of the groups, very interested in disarmament. At the Deutsche Haus in New York we met a lot of them, or in the building of the UN. So the whole day, so to say, we went from delegation to delegation and could talk to them.

Michal Onderco:

And was it about learning what these people wanted, or was it also trying to convert them towards the Germany position?

Uta Zapf:

If they were of the same opinion, of course you had a nice conversation. But we also tried to discuss with others, especially Mexico, I think, was of a different position by the time.

Michal Onderco:

Well Mexico was opposed to indefinite extension at the time.

Uta Zapf:

Oh, I don't know. We had to talk to them, but it was more like a discussion than trying to declare what is your opinion on this issue.

Michal Onderco:

In these meetings were German diplomats also present? Or were there only parliamentarians?

Uta Zapf:

Diplomats were also present, for example the Ambassador at the Deutsche Haus was also present, he also provided for dinners or something like that. The meetings were mainly with diplomatic delegations.

Michal Onderco:

Were there countries which had parliamentarians in their delegations?

Uta Zapf:

I don't know, I don't remember.

Michal Onderco:

So even at the conference you didn't coordinate with other parliamentarians from other delegations?

Uta Zapf:

No, because it seemed to us that all the Europeans were of the same opinion because they had a common decision. It's not always so, but in this case it was. I don't remember meeting people from other parliamentary delegations.

Michal Onderco:

The 1995 NPT review conference was the first one where Germany attended as reunified. Did that, in any way, change how Germany was seen within the conference or approached at the conference?

Uta Zapf:

No, not to my observation. It didn't feel any different, no.

Michal Onderco:

How did other countries perceive Germany, or the German position towards the extension of the treaty?

Uta Zapf:

I think that within NATO, there was a big consensus for the extension unconditionally and unlimited, and because of the very obedient position of the Germans, and because they had some power, of course, they had something to say within the European delegation, of course, they were very much appreciated.

Michal Onderco:

And the countries which were outside of Europe, would they look up to Germany or would they consider Germany to be just another European country, or just another NATO country?

Uta Zapf:

I think the fact that we had a lot of delegations to talk to us, or who were willing to talk to us, which is not always the case - I remember other cases where the delegations weren't interested - although we had different opinions they were very open to talk to us because they didn't receive us or perceive us as unfriendly, but as supportive in principle. That was my impression. As far as I remember.

Michal Onderco:

Was there on the spot, during negotiations during the conference, was there a lot of change to what Germany went to the conference with? Or did Germany achieve everything Germany wanted to achieve?

Uta Zapf:

I think they achieved everything they wanted. There wasn't any work plan afterwards, that came at the next conference which came afterwards in 2000. I think Germany put a lot into that conference but in this case it were the two points: unlimited and unconditional. And the unconditional was harder to achieve, but the German delegation was fine with the result in the end.

Michal Onderco:

When the delegation had private negotiations with other countries, were the parliamentarians allowed to join in? Or was it only in other settings?

Uta Zapf:

I think that there was a certain split because when the diplomats needed to change the minds of others, they wouldn't allow us in. Maybe they had some of their experts from some of the NGOs.

Michal Onderco:

So someone like Harald Muller would be in the meeting?

Uta Zapf:

Yes, because he was a permanent member of the delegation, and we were we just added for the few days we spent there.

Michal Onderco:

It's not entirely common that countries have parliamentarians and also representatives of NGOs in their delegation. So why did Germany go with such a huge delegation, with people who were not directly diplomats, to New York?

Uta Zapf:

I think that may have very well come from the openness towards people who weren't politicians but had something to say in the society. Civil society had grown by that time. I think that Germany provided support for these groups although there were sometimes frictions too of course. It is still the case with the German government. All the years I can remember, they have cooperated closely with NGOs even if they were not always of the same opinion.

Michal Onderco:

Do you think it was appreciated within the NPT setting from other countries? Or how do you think they saw the fact that the German delegation was also made up of all these non-diplomats?

Uta Zapf:

I didn't hear anything about it.

Michal Onderco:

What did you think about the negotiating at the conference? Because of course the conference started with the fact that there were countries which wanted only temporary extension, some which wanted extension based on performance, and those who wanted the indefinite extension. The indefinite extension was originally tabled by Canada. Was there any sort of coordination with, for example, the Canadians to submit that proposal?

Uta Zapf:

I don't remember, not from the parliamentarians.

Michal Onderco:

You came to New York. How was the mood within the conference? How was the mood between the parties which were there?

Uta Zapf:

It's difficult to remember for me. But I started with a very good impression because the first thing we did in the evening when we arrived, was to discuss with the NGOs. This was a very positive discussion although there may have been different opinions there. I think that what I thought was that it was the first time that parliamentarians had really been keen to meet the NGOs and listen to them before we went to the conference.

Michal Onderco:

And by NGOs, you mean German NGOs.

Uta Zapf:

Yes. Wait, there were not only Germans, Oliver Meier by that time was at Arms Control Today, IPPNW is an international organisation, and we had others there, so not only Germans.

Michal Onderco:

And the NGOs were also positive about the conference?

Uta Zapf:

I don't know if they were positive but they were definitely interested in the proceedings, and were willing or eager to get good results.

Michal Onderco:

What counted as a good result for them?

Uta Zapf:

I think it was different between those who said "unconditional and unlimited is ok" and those who said some limitations or conditions.

Michal Onderco:

So there was no discord between the Europeans and there was agreement between the German delegations and the NGOs?

Uta Zapf:

That's my memory, but I have forgotten some details.

Michal Onderco:

How did you see, for example, the fact that the conference agreed on things like pushing for the Middle East Weapon of Mass Destruction Free Zone?

Uta Zapf:

I think that was absolutely positive in our eyes.

Michal Onderco:

How did that come about?

Uta Zapf:

I think some of the delegations always asked for this, like the Egyptians. We talked to them, we understood that it was very important for the whole region to get rid of certain dangers. I remember that in 2010, I talked to the Egyptian delegation. That was the year they threatened to disagree with everything and to break up the conference. That was in 2010. That was when Ambassador Lavaaja was installed as facilitator. I talk to the Egyptians and they were hard as stone, they said that we need this and want this. They ran through open doors with me because I understood at that

time...it's older than that, isn't it?

Michal Onderco:

It was 1995 that the conference agree...

Uta Zapf:

Yes, but in the General Assembly it was even earlier, in the 70's.

Michal Onderco:

It is possible, but I don't know. Of course this Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone from the Egyptian perspective is directed against Israel's nuclear weapons programme, and Israel's security is a very touchy subject in Germany. Did this create any tensions?

Uta Zapf:

I don't remember. Because as far as I remember, but maybe I am wrong, this was not a key discussion, it must have been with the government but we didn't really take part in the controversial discussion about that. For me it was clear that it was a good decision.

Michal Onderco:

Was there a diversion of opinions within the German delegation on this issue? Or was there agreement?

Uta Zapf:

I can't remember that there was diversion. I can't remember. Maybe we didn't discuss it. It could be that some of the more conservatives in the CDU who were very much engaged with Israel were sceptic about that. I can't even remember and I can't even remember if we talked to the Israelis, not the delegation because they weren't part of the NPT, but to the observers.

Michal Onderco:

But maybe the diplomats did?

Uta Zapf:

I'm sure they did.

Michal Onderco:

When the conference was running towards its end and there was this decision to go towards the indefinite extension, what was the thinking about how far the German delegation was willing to go to secure that indefinite extension? Because of course there's discussion of the bargain which was made at that time that the indefinite extension was exchanged for the promises of the strengthened review process, and the Middle Eastern process and so forth. Was there something that would have been a limit for where Germany was not willing to go further?

Uta Zapf:

I didn't realise that because when we started in Germany we were so sure that we were in the right position, and even in New York itself it wasn't much of a controversy. But maybe this was because we didn't meet too many delegations who were against it. I was rather new at that time. I came into parliament in 1990 which means December which means it was about 4 years. That's a short time to look into every pocket of intrigue. I would know about other things, but later.

Michal Onderco:

But your position in the delegation changed later, over time?

Uta Zapf:

Yes sure, by that time I was a normal member, the next time I was a speaker and the time after I was chair. I made a career in that committee.

Michal Onderco:

But also within the delegation?

Uta Zapf:

Sure, when you're the chair of the committee, you automatically become the head of the delegation. Unless the chair doesn't want to come, then the speakers get the seat. I have been a head of a delegation for a long time without being the chair,

because I was the speaker of the party which had the chair.

Michal Onderco:

Ah ok.

Uta Zapf:

I don't know, it happened maybe because I was the most interested in doing the work which needed to be done and not just the sightseeing.

Michal Onderco:

Of course. When the conference ended in 1995 what were your expectations of the future of the treaty?

Uta Zapf:

Well, we were very interested to develop what followed in 2000. We had a lot of work done and a lot of papers written in the parliament, resolutions and motions, and we had a whole catalogue before the 2000 conference, a whole catalogue of things which were later in the agenda.

Michal Onderco:

You mean...?

Uta Zapf:

Such as the 13 [practical] steps.

Michal Onderco:

And at that time did you expect the treaty would welcome more members?

Uta Zapf:

We were very interested in getting more members on board, especially of course India and Pakistan, and we didn't expect North Korea to get rid of theirs by that time, and of course Israel. It was always these three. We had discussions with them. I remember at the IPU at the time I was in the delegation and I talked to the Indian delegation a lot but their argument hasn't changed until now. They still use the same argument. They don't want to be party and have obligations if it's not an obligation for everyone. The same: eye to eye. I don't know if they're really going to join the negotiations on the Nuclear convention. Because it's interesting: in December it was decided in the General Assembly that there should be negotiations on that convention. If they don't join that, they should these negotiations they should not be permitted into the NSG. I fought very much against India joining this 123 Agreement. I wrote to every country in the world, to the members of the NSG in 2008. And now I'm very much against them becoming Nuclear Suppliers Group members - absolutely, it's not possible.

Michal Onderco:

The NSG hasn't agreed to it, but there's very little reason why they haven't agreed to it.

Uta Zapf:

Actually they do support it, maybe they don't shout it to world, but I fought against Steinmeier and he was very much pro by that time. He was the chair of the NSG when the 123 Agreement was discussed there. I remember I was on vacation in Canada and they called me every week to fight with me. But, I know they could decide what they wanted.

Michal Onderco:

One of the things that was agreed at the time was the agreement of the strengthened review process and the future review conferences. Was this something that you, as a parliamentarian were interested in, or was the review conference something that you....?

Uta Zapf:

No, we were interested. We followed every review process when it started with the PrepComs, we were very interested. In many cases I went to Geneva or other places to talk with delegations there, or ambassadors there and PNND was very involved. I worked together with PNND and we were very interested to contribute what should be in the first row, and what would be OK. Priorities, so to say. Every time we passed

out motions in the Deutsche Bundestag.

Michal Onderco:

How did the Foreign Office see that?

Uta Zapf:

They were interested in our cooperation. I think they had a certain amount of respect for us, because those deputies sitting on the subcommittee were interested in arms control and they had their contacts into society. So they really wanted to not be too much outside of the mainstream of societal thinking.

Michal Onderco:

And did the Foreign Office also support your engagement in the parliamentarians for nuclear disarmament and these networks?

Uta Zapf:

I think they couldn't do anything against it. I never was addressed on this issue. As a parliamentarian you have certain opportunities. I can use the premises of the Deutsche Bundestag to organise hearings for myself as a parliamentarian alone. If I get the funding. You can organise this with NGOs they are very interested. I did many of these hearings where I invite experts and parliamentarians and whoever wants to join, even people from outside who want to could join. I did that also when the new strategic concept of NATO was discussed. You can use your possibilities as parliamentarian, and I never got any aggression from the Foreign Office for these activities.

Michal Onderco:

How did you see the German Foreign Office activities in that field? Would you say they were very active? Or did they try to keep more of a low profile?

Uta Zapf:

I would say that they were very active, but I have to say they never got outside the fence of NATO's decisions and the European decisions. In case of the biological convention it was different because then there was consensus within the EU and then Great Britain broke out, but with the NPT it was different. It's always difficult with France and with the UK, but obviously it was o.k. in the European context and what they decided never really hurt them. Because France would never agree to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in the context of NATO, but they said "oh we have reduced our nuclear warheads anyway, we have 300, we are at the lowest end, you can go down if you want, we don't have to". And the UK, for some time, was not very stable in this question, now they have decided to modernise Trident, I think their standpoint would be very conform with NATO.

Michal Onderco:

And in the 1990's, around the 1995 review conference, was there consensus on the future of nuclear weapons and security in Europe, from your position as a parliamentarian?

Uta Zapf:

There was no consensus.

Michal Onderco:

What were the main camps?

Uta Zapf:

There were of course the NGOs pro getting rid of NW, all the activists around Büchel, and then people like me in my party, there was quite a lot of them. Many were holding back, so to say, because there was always the discussion about the nuclear umbrella and partnership, and NATO obedience. Then in 2008 we suddenly had the Liberals taking up that subject. Before that we had other countries within Europe, like the Netherlands, where they had a strong movement to get rid of them. And Belgium. The Greeks had got rid of them without a public discussion; they just said "we've finished it". In 2008 for some reason liberals took that up, we had a coalition at that time with CDU/CSU and it was very difficult to move my people towards support. We were in government by that time.

Michal Onderco:

Of the ban...?

Uta Zapf:

Of getting rid of them. They were anxious, you know, really anxious. After that the next turn was the Liberals and the CDU in their dominant decisions, and suddenly we were very keen to support that. Now we have a big coalition again and there's no mention of that in the coalition-agreement. After all, NATO- strategy has decided that we keep them and even modernise them, and we have to do everything to modernise the commitment that is needed for the new bombs. And Steinmeier is very obedient to NATO in that case. I would fight against it but in that case, he's got rid of me.

Michal Onderco:

If you were opposed to maintaining NATO nuclear deterrent in Europe, wouldn't that mean extending the NPT in 1995 meant giving a blessing to the maintenance of that nuclear equipment.

Uta Zapf:

No, they promised in good faith, to fulfil their obligation of article VI to get rid of them, and not keep to keep them. It's an obligation.

Michal Onderco:

But already in 1995 there were countries which criticised the fact that nuclear weapon states are not doing enough to fulfil Article IV.

Uta Zapf:

Well, they have never done enough to fulfil it.

Michal Onderco:

So wasn't that a good enough reason to reconsider the extension of the treaty in 1995?

Uta Zapf:

In 1995, I don't think I spent one thought on not prolonging it because, as I said - if we don't have this treaty and all those who joined it, with their obligation to stick to it, if it would break apart, then we would have 25 nations acquiring nuclear weapons, like Kennedy once said. So I thought it was absolutely necessary to not get more nuclear weapon states.

Michal Onderco:

And you didn't reconsider that thought later?

Uta Zapf:

No. I still think it is right.

Michal Onderco:

Were there other parliamentarians who had second thoughts later whether or not this was a smart move?

Uta Zapf:

I don't remember, I don't think so. Sometimes you get declarations by some backbenchers that every nation should be able to acquire nuclear weapons because they have to protect themselves. I think that that's such a stupid idea.

Michal Onderco:

But there are some countries nowadays who threaten that they may withdraw from the NPT because nuclear weapon states are not doing enough to get rid of the nuclear weapons.

Uta Zapf:

What I realise is that countries like South Korea and Japan who are threatened by nuclear weapons of North Korea, who have sort of second thoughts. Japanese Prime Minister Mr Abe says yes and then no; and opposition politicians in South Korea said we have to get them, and then the Prime Minister says no we don't. I think there are some countries who don't voice it in that form, but if they think that it is appropriate for them, like Saudi Arabia, and some countries which have the technology to do it, will be tempted to decide to acquire them. Maybe South Africa would go back to them if they thought it was useful for them, but you never can be sure unless you have a good strengthened organisation like IAEA and good inspections to make sure they

don't break through. After the good example of the Iran deal I hoped there would be progress. I don't know what Mr. Trump is going to do, but we are always really in danger that this treaty breaks apart. Still, I think that this treaty is a blessing, as long as there is enough pressure to stick to the obligation. That is why it is so important that the nuclear weapons states really do something to reduce their weapons.

Michal Onderco:

But the question is whether the treaty provides enough tools for that, to keep pressure on the nuclear weapon states...

Uta Zapf:

There are no sanctions, but changing the treaty would be absolute impossible.

Michal Onderco:

Of course.

Uta Zapf:

Because of the different interests that are there and in the end you have to be in absolute agreement with those who participate.

Michal Onderco:

One of the most recent development in the NPT is the rise of the Humanitarian Initiative. Looking back in 1995, would you have predicted that something like this would have emerged?

Uta Zapf:

Well, it's not so new, because before 1995 we had this discussion on Nuclear Winter, with scientific analysis, with impact on climate change, lack of light and all the consequences. With the fallout and so on. This was forgotten for some time, it was taken up by the humanitarian pledge which I think is a very good thing to do. In August, I was in Astana and they supported this idea Kazakhstan is a very good example of promoting disarmament. Just a few weeks ago I was in St. Petersburg, in Russia, and they had this discussion on the humanitarian pledge. Of course, it was the International Red Cross in Moscow, they were those who organised the conference. But most of the discussion was on all of the other categories and not the nuclear ones. There was one panel on the nuclear issue and the Russia representative who gave the opinion said: "we need it to keep our sovereignty". So interestingly there was a discussion on the humanitarian pledge and humanitarian aspect of using weapons of mass destruction, but nuclear weapons were a little set apart. The Russian said that they needed it to keep their sovereignty. Still, the discussion is there.

Michal Onderco:

The interesting thing is of course, that in Germany there was never this discussion, certainly not after the reunification, that Germany wouldn't need nuclear weapons for any sort of protection.

Uta Zapf:

We had it before joining the NPT. It was a big discussion, yes. No, there were no such official considerations. There was one essay by Gen. Klaus Nauman, he was the former inspector of the Bundeswehr, and some other authors and they wrote a paper in the late 90's or early 2000's about the necessity why Europe should provide their own nuclear weapons. But this was very quickly removed from the table. But now Klaus Nauman is one of the fathers for nuclear disarmament.

Michal Onderco:

It's an interesting twist.

Uta Zapf:

He's in the European Leadership Network. I worked with them when I was in parliament.

Michal Onderco:

Is there something I should have asked about the conference that I didn't ask?

Uta Zapf:

I don't think so. The only thing I can remember which is a personal impression that

Mr. Kinkel was absolutely the first Foreign Minister to be friendly and open, and explain everything to the delegation. When we were on the plane going to New York, he called us to his compartment and he made a drawing of his vision. I would have liked to keep it. It was like "here's a connection and there's a connection, and there's a country". Wonderful. But it was, you know, a sign of "OK, I give you part of my opinion". The next thing, and this never happened afterwards and not before, he invited us to his own press conference with the international press. We could take part in it. It didn't happen before, and never after, so that was a good atmosphere.

Michal Onderco:

So was your participation in 1995 different to the participation in years after?

Uta Zapf:

Yes, I wasn't there every time when a Foreign Minister was present. The last time I was in New York as part of a delegation was during the negotiations of the Arms Trade Treaty, we were very useful to our ambassador to support him in what he wanted to achieve. We talked to critical delegations. For example, India was very critical at that time. I think that the ambassador was even grateful that we tried to convince other delegations. But in the first row this was very interesting too. It was the parliamentarians which drove the government to join. In other cases parliament really drove government to join conventions, for instance in case of the Ottawa and Oslo convention. They didn't want to join at first but were driven by parliament, NGOs and civil society. Right now they don't want to join in negotiations for a nuclear convention.

Michal Onderco:

But is the parliament also pushing for them to join in the Nuclear Weapon Ban convention?

Uta Zapf:

Yes, that's the convention I mean.

Michal Onderco:

Is the parliament pushing now?

Uta Zapf:

No, I did.

Michal Onderco:

You did?

Uta Zapf:

I did, in 2010; parliament passed a resolution which I formulated. It was the first time that we had a very broad consensus in the Bundestag, on the resolution. The convention was one small point in it and all parties agreed, that government should support the negotiations for that convention. But it's dead now, they didn't ... I guess they took part in the Open Ended Working Group, but not as a main actor. In the General Assembly in December they didn't vote for it. There's only one NATO country which voted for it, the Netherlands, even Norway didn't vote for it. I looked it up because I'm very interested and I wanted to discuss it in St Petersburg and it was only shortly before. No, it was in October. I fought with the ambassadors responsible for arms control for a long time because when I heard about that convention by IPNNW and others, I invited people to the subcommittee for expert hearings and the government was always against it. They said we need in the framework of the NP a step by step analysis, adding the CTBT, FMCT and other steps. I changed my mind during a longer place of discussions with NGO's. I think about 2008 I changed my mind. During that time, I tried to convince the parliament and the government. Right now I don't think that the parliament is doing a lot on arms control, they are working on other issues. Things change.

Michal Onderco:

So is the executive now more in the driving seat on disarmament?

Uta Zapf:

I guess so, yes.

Michal Onderco:

And is it now more out of sync with the parliament?

Uta Zapf:

No, now, there's a big coalition, which means that the critical voices from the Social Democrats are dead, and the possible critical voices from the CDU don't come out. There are few people within the Greens and always the Left, who make it a point of opposition. As far as I remember we could get to a consensus on these issues across the aisle, so to say. But I don't see that right now. There's not much activity, I think, because I think that the government in itself is not interested. But these are the circumstances: after Crimea and conflict in other parts of the world like Syria, with growing tensions with Russia, how can you support nuclear disarmament now? The changes are worrying.

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for your time.