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The president of the ISHR recommends the new book of Rudolf Decker about Africa

(Bonn, 11.09.2017) *Here you find a review, in which the president of the International Council of the International Society of Human Rights (ISHR), Thomas Schirrmacher, recommends the new book of Rudolf Decker about Africa as pioneering.*

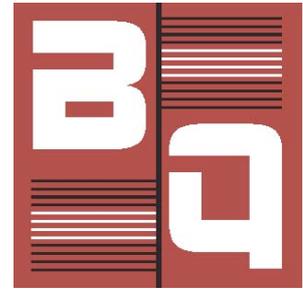
Just to make it clear from the outset, I am not an impartial reviewer. It is not only the case that I sincerely love Africa and its people. I have a lot to thank Rudolf Decker for, for what has generally been his strength, how he has been able to motivate many people while standing in the background and put them to work and not put himself in the middle of things. And whoever becomes Rudolf Decker's friend cannot help but also become a friend of Africa!

Decades ago, Decker learned his love for Africa from Dr. Douglas Coe, who recently died at the age of 88 and who encouraged Decker to make his first of more than one hundred trips to Africa. As Coe had done in the case of many peace negotiations – for instance in the case of 'Camp David' between Israel and Egypt – pulling strings behind the scene, Decker has brought parties in dispute to the table and has been a blessing because he has not only met the pleasant and showcase heads of state of Africa. Rather, he has also sought dialog with others.

Decker has often initiated partnerships, and that is what he has now suggested could mean great success for two continents. The goal of his book is plain and simple: "The African Union has to become an indispensable partner of every collaborative development" for the European community of states (163). Indeed, in practically every respect both continents could hardly be more different (115). Decker also does not hesitate to express criticism towards Africa, above all towards a number of dictators, for instance under the heading of "Human Rights – a Drama" (57). However, that speaks more for than against a close partnership between the neighboring continents. And it should not be allowed to let the amiable and hopeful voices of Africa be overshadowed in any way.

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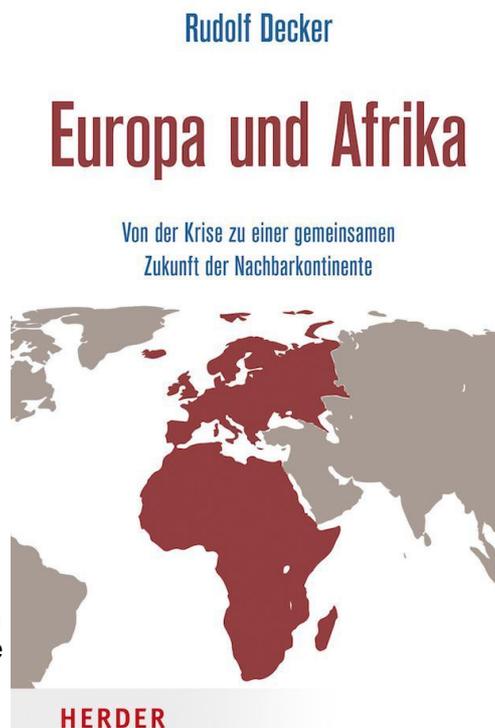
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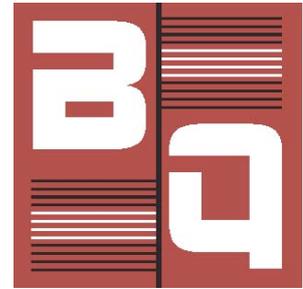
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One notices that the book emerged over a long period of time and that every statement has been carefully considered. That does not mean, however, that the language and content are boring. One example should suffice. Decker has written: “If one had to pay for ‘advertising immigration,’ the lion’s share would fall to television.” This is due to the fact that it is received in the most remote African village, and it praises the European way of life (43).

The recommendations are also not typical. Let us choose as an example China’s role in Africa. China, according to Decker, is developing Africa, and this indicates a “turning point” for Africa (85). 15 years of Chinese activity in Africa have left behind significantly more lasting traces than one-half a century of Western developmental aid (86-87). At the same time, he is well aware that in the process China does not require adherence to human rights standards by the respective presidents. Correctly, Decker recommends acknowledging what reality is. What that means is that Africa, China, and Europe have to sit down together, for the good of Africa. Russia also belongs here at the table, as Decker is firmly convinced of the opinion that Europe should not miss the boat when it comes to autocrats in Africa and autocrats who are involved in Africa. Rather, this indicates that active dialog and engagement have to find their proper importance.

At the same time, it is not a matter of daydreaming. Rather, it has to do with concretely tackling issues. On a number of pages, Decker describes joint projects which are “recommended to be imitated” as well as “failed” attempts (208-212).

There is also another reality which Decker sees as important to acknowledge, and that is that Africa is a very religious continent. He poses the question to Europe: Who should be in a position to deliver “central values” if not religions and worldviews (184)?

It is a book that not only belongs in the hand of every lover of Africa. It belongs in the hands of every European decision-maker in the world of politics and business.

Bibliographical information:

- Rudolf Decker. Europa und Afrika: Von der Krise zu einer gemeinsamen Zukunft der Nachbarkontinente. Herder: Freiburg, 2017. 240 pp. HB. € 19,99 (D), € 20,90 (A), Sfr 26,90. ISBN 978-3-451-37779-2.

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