

Wolfgang Müller [\(00:10\)](#)

Hello, this is Wolfgang Müller from SBS Radio. I'm speaking with Dr Oliver Hartwich. He's a think tank director in New Zealand in Wellington. Last week was the Leadership Forum here in Sydney between New Zealand and Australia. Any interesting diplomatic things to talk about there?

Oliver Hartwich [\(00:32\)](#)

Yes, there are indeed those to talk about. One is that there is a thaw in Australian-New Zealand relations. The relationship hasn't been particularly good between Scott Morrison and Jacinda Ardern. The two come from completely different, different camps. But the relationship has improved considerably after the change of government in Australia. The new Australian prime minister gets along much better with Ardern than his predecessor. But there is also something else to report, namely that it will soon be easier for New Zealanders to gain a foothold in Australia and stay there in the long term. That is, there should be possibly soon even the possibility that Kiwis can vote in Australia. They should be allowed to serve in the Australian army and they should also be given the prospect of being able to obtain an Australian passport in the long term. So in that respect, there is something happening in the relationship. Apart from that, the so-called 501 cases of criminals, i.e. only a few citizens who have committed crimes in Australia, but who may not have any relations with New Zealand at all, will soon no longer be able to be deported so easily.

Oliver Hartwich [\(01:45\)](#)

Something is happening.

Wolfgang Müller [\(01:46\)](#)

This is also a step in the right direction, I would like to say, because it is after all two brother peoples living very close to each other.

Oliver Hartwich [\(01:53\)](#)

Yes, this is a step in the right direction. But of course, it is also a step that is not entirely altruistic from an Australian perspective. I mean, we have the situation in all countries of the world at the moment that there is a shortage of skilled workers. Well, and the New Zealanders, they are traditionally very interested in Australia, not least because wages and salaries are significantly higher in Australia. I believe that a few days ago a survey that reportedly 20% of New Zealanders are toying with the idea of emigrating, and Australians are thinking that's a wonderful reservoir to draw from to fill your own skills shortage. To that extent this perk for New Zealanders in Australia has to be seen in the context of the skills shortage, then it makes sense.

Wolfgang Müller [\(02:37\)](#)

As so often in life, the good and the useful are very closely related.

Oliver Hartwich [\(02:42\)](#)

That's definitely the case, and I think you just have to analyse it in terms of realpolitik. The Australians have certain interests, they want to have access to New Zealand labour. And the New Zealanders have an interest. They don't want any more criminals to be deported from Australia to New Zealand in the near future. In that respect, it's a practical step forward.

Wolfgang Müller [\(03:01\)](#)

But there are also fears that bring the two governments together. These are also fears that are shared by the French, for example, and also by the Americans. And they are directed at developments in the South Pacific. The Chinese are spreading out there, and that's what people are worried about.

Oliver Hartwich [\(03:19\)](#)

That's right. And, of course, that was one of the topics of discussion in the bilateral consultations. I mean, both prime ministers attended the NATO summit in Madrid in the week before the summit in Sydney. There, the defining issue was, of course, Ukraine, but also the threat that was perceived from China. Australia and New Zealand now both approach NATO at the same time.

Wolfgang Müller [\(03:51\)](#)

At the weekend, our Foreign Minister Penny Wong met with the Chinese Foreign Minister. And we got the impression that the Chinese are very actively trying to play down these concerns.

Oliver Hartwich [\(04:04\)](#)

Of course. But this is of course also a balancing act for the Australian government, which is trying on the one hand to accept the Chinese challenge and to meet it accordingly, but on the other hand not to let the thread of communication with Beijing break. It has to be said that they are trying to do both. In my opinion, she is doing her job very well by simply traveling a lot, visiting a lot of countries in the region. The New Zealanders could certainly learn a thing or two from that. Our own Foreign Minister Mahuta is very restrained in her travel diplomacy. It was significant that in the first month of her term in office, Penny Wong visited more countries than Mahuta the last two years as foreign minister.

Wolfgang Müller [\(04:48\)](#)

What do the Chinese actually want in the South Pacific? One has the impression that they are looking for new vacation spots for their many vacationers.

Oliver Hartwich [\(04:57\)](#)

That would be nice, if that were the case. But I don't think the Chinese are concerned about resorts. It's about strategic influence in the region, it's about military influence. We can also expect Chinese military bases to be opened soon in our neighbourhood and, as I said, in the backyard of Australia and New Zealand. In that respect, however, we should be very concerned, especially since there are really no legitimate security interests for China in this part of the world.

Wolfgang Müller [\(05:25\)](#)

Yes, the South Pacific has attracted many, many adventurers. Even the German Empire was present here at one time. They seem to come and they seem to go, so you should take it so seriously.

Oliver Hartwich [\(05:39\)](#)

It is true, of course, that the German Empire was present in the region. That was long ago at the height of imperialism, the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I don't think you actually want to go back to those times in the 21st century. Actually, we had thought that we had overcome that and that we could behave differently with each other and deal with each other differently in what is, after all, a globalised world. So these are really relapses into other times. The fact that the world has been divided into zones of influence is in principle already a kind of new Cold War that is being started there.

Wolfgang Müller [\(06:12\)](#)

But these countries in the South Pacific, these small islands, also complain that they have always been overlooked by Australia and New Zealand, that they have been left to the left, and that the Chinese look after them with an open heart.

Oliver Hartwich [\(06:29\)](#)

Of course, and that's exactly what happens when you leave a vacuum. That's right. The Australians didn't take care of it enough. The New Zealanders had taken care of it, actually, until the 2020 election. After all, we had a coalition with New Zealand First before that. That was when the foreign minister was still Winston Peters. And Winston Peters, his favourite project was the so-called Pacific Reset. That means that New Zealand, under its foreign minister, tried to actively establish new ties with neighbouring countries and island states. And that has now come to an end again, now that we have this Labour majority government and a new foreign minister. Suddenly there is not much left of the Pacific Reset that we had talked about before.

Wolfgang Müller [\(07:13\)](#)

Do you think both governments in Wellington and in Canberra will now get up on their hind legs in the future and take more care of those island groups there in the South Pacific.

Oliver Hartwich [\(07:24\)](#)

They will have to do that, because if they don't, then, as I said, the vacuum will be filled elsewhere. And that's where China stands ready.