

## A Tribute to Margrit Vetter

June 17, 2022

It is perhaps not a coincidence that we celebrate the retirement and departure of Margrit from WTI at the same time as the success of the Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Geneva, concluded early this morning in difficult times of war. Over many years, Margrit was committed to contribute creating a community of young people –many of them now in high positions and influencing trade talks – who believe in the value of the multilateral trading system as a factor of stability, prosperity and peace. How many of our WTI alumni had their first encounter with Berne and the WTI talking to Margrit? How many obtained her assistance, her advice? She enjoyed the world coming to Berne, and of all of us at the WTI, she probably kept the largest network, staying in touch with former students ever grateful to her.

Numerous and often hidden from the front-desk were the tasks assigned to her in the early years of the new century: As a director of administration, Margrit was responsible for all the logistics, for all the finance and personnel matters at the Institute. Next to her, there was just a director of studies and myself, Gaby Hofer and Fred Rüfli on IT.

The MILE programme was comprehensive and run on a weekly basis with many visiting professors who had to be looked after, from travel to lodging. Moreover, at the time, Margrit was the one prolific with the new word programme. Many of the researchers, including myself, obtained her assistance in properly formatting papers and student papers. Conferences had to be organized, again involving travel and catering arrangements. She was the secretary of the board of the WTI Foundation who, at the outset, took all the important decisions on funding, programmes and strategy. Later on, with the large NCCR project, new positions and functions were created and specialisation reached the administration.

None of her many and multiple assignments could be successfully met without a high level of efficiency. Margrit was a fast worker, and intensive. She did not like to be disturbed, and would look up at you from her screen slightly annoyed. She was not a charmer, and would not get lost in small talk, getting to the point. You always were able to sense her mood. She was always honest, in joy and anger. She always came in a constructive and hands-on mood to get the job done properly, efficiently, and reliably. A few things she could not stand in people: arrogance and haughtiness, sometimes displayed by incoming students who still had to learn to wash their own socks, or sometimes displayed by academics who failed to recognise her central role in the Institute. Or in dealing with the University showing little understanding for an Institute which had to earn its income every day, far from the level of subsidies otherwise available to institutes.

In doing her work, and much more, Margrit was at the centre of the WTI. Located close to the entry where she was in control of incoming and outgoing persons. However, much more: she was at the heart of the Institute. For all the reasons I said, but much more because she was committed to WTI and its development. It was not just a job at the Hallerstrasse. She was part of the project of building a centre of excellence in teaching and research in international trade regulation. She was part of building a large network and a community whose effects, today, may have been felt in Geneva and beyond just these days.

In all these years, she was a true companion at the WTI. For this, I am most grateful to Margrit.

Thank you so much!

Thomas Cottier