

# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,  
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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Switzerland – EU

## “The dinosaurs got wiped out, but the hedgehogs are still around”

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich



*The Swiss army's hedgehock pavilion “Defensive Switzerland” at the Expo 1964 in Lausanne.  
(Picture wikimedia.org)*

*This metaphor expressed by the Swiss historian Oliver Zimmer in a recent radio interview<sup>1</sup> has had a profound effect on me. The hedgehog as a well-known symbol for the independent and idiosyncratic small state of Switzerland, its spines, retracted towards peaceful neighbours and used against unfriendly attacks, symbolising Switzerland able to defend itself. In contrast, to this there is the EU colossus (or any other great power) as a bulky and clumsy dinosaur, steam rolling and levelling the variety of life around it.*

*For the New Year, I wish us Swiss, as well as all other peoples of the world, that our politicians and diplomats enter into negotiations with other states and especially with major powers with a little more courage and self-confidence.*

### “It’s too high a price to pay: It’s about sovereignty”

“In our country the term sovereignty [...] is – like neutrality – used as if it was the gospel truth. But no one knows what it stands for exactly.” This statement comes from someone who served, after all, as a Swiss Federal Councillor for eleven years (1998–2009), *Pascal Couchepin*. A Federal Councillor who doesn’t know what sovereignty is? How could he represent us in our affairs? Regarding the framework agreement that his successors in the Federal Council (at least some of them) want to conclude with the EU, Couchepin says: “What do we gain, what do we lose? We lose sovereignty. But without a framework treaty we lose even more sovereignty, because our prosperity which frees people from material worries will decrease.”<sup>2</sup>

As if Switzerland’s sovereignty could be handled like an arithmetical problem! *Oliver Zimmer* brings the confusion of minds caused by economic arithmetic games to an end when he first of all states: “The EU is not an economic project, but a political one.” And furthermore: “I think dividing between sovereignty and prosperity is a false dichotomy always constructed there. Of course, this is also a political argument. If there was a dichotomy, Switzerland would be poorer than the EU. As we know, this is not the case; on the contrary, it is the other way round. The internal market is not just a market, it is about membership in a political structure. That is something quite different from a trade agreement.” The interviewer, *Iwan Lieberherr*, referred to the Swiss Nation-

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al Council’s discussion in the winter session on the three topics of wage protection, the EU Citizenship Directive and state aids, which the Federal Council wants to “settle” with Brussels, remarking hereto: “I think that you, Mr Zimmer, would talk about the bigger issue anyway, about the loss of co-determination.” Indeed, one should increasingly address the fundamental dimension of the EU, Zimmer said: “Especially the European Court of Justice, and this is recognised in expert circles, is the political spearhead of EU supranationalism. The ECJ is a political court, not a court as we think of it. [...] It behaves as a constitutional court, it constitutes the treaties, treats them like constitutions, and it also interferes in national legislation.” The Court of Arbitration is, strictly speaking, “eyewash. In fact, the European Court of Justice has the final decision-making power in this whole agreement.”

Oliver Zimmer concludes: “It’s too high a price to pay: It’s about sovereignty.”<sup>3</sup>

### Request for more national sovereignty in many European states

It is well known that not only the small state of Switzerland is struggling for its sovereignty. On 17 February 2020, *David Frost*, the British negotiator in charge of the Herculean task of Britain’s exit from EU together with *Michel Barnier* (for the EU), gave a noteworthy lecture at the Université libre of Brussels.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, he pointed out that the request for national decision making and the revival of the nation state was not only to be observed in Britain, but also in various other European states: “Brexit is the most obvious example for that, but who can deny that we see something a bit like it in different forms across the whole Continent of Europe? I don’t think it is right to dismiss this just as a reaction to austerity or economic problems or a passing phase, or something to be ‘seen off’ over time. I believe it is something deeper.” At the core is the question of regaining sovereignty. Frost says: “Sovereignty is about the ability to get your own rules right in a way that suits our own conditions.”

Frost addresses two other important aspects of national sovereignty missing in the EU – democratic co-determination of citizens and the greater flexibility of state institutions: “There are other broader advantages to running your own affairs. One obvious one is that it is much easier to get people involved in taking decisions. Another, less obvious advantage, is the ability to change those decisions. My experience of the EU is that it has extreme difficulty in reversing bad decisions it takes.”

“The EU is not an economic project, but a political one. [...] It’s too high a price to pay: It’s about sovereignty I think dividing between sovereignty and prosperity is a false dichotomy always constructed there. Of course, this is also a political argument. If there was a dichotomy, Switzerland would be poorer than the EU. As we know, this is not the case; on the contrary, it is the other way round. The internal market is not just a market, it is about membership in a political structure. That is something quite different from a trade agreement.” (*Oliver Zimmer*)

According to Frost an important reason why the majority of the British voted to leave, was that “it was always going to feel a bit unnatural to a lot of people to be governed by an organisation whose institutions seemed created by design not than by evolution, and which vested authority outside the country elsewhere.”

How would it going to feel to the Swiss population? With the framework agreement, we – even as a non-member of the EU – would be controlled by EU bodies, especially the EU Commission and the ECJ, to an extent that can’t really be assessed today. This is neither in the interest of the people in the UK, nor in Switzerland, nor elsewhere.

On 24 December, one week before the end of the transition period, the free trade agreement between Brussels and London was signed which returns sovereignty to Great Britain notably by exempting the state from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. On this the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” wrote: “The fact that the Court plays no role is also a consequence of the fact that the agreement contains no EU law and the British have less access to the EU market or to EU agencies than, for example, Switzerland.”<sup>5</sup> Translated into laymen’s terms this is a schoolmasterly warning to us freedom-loving Swiss: Don’t pride yourself upon getting out a similarly advantageous treaty for Switzerland! A counterweight was the first online commentary in the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”: “I would like to see this agreement for Switzerland. I would also like to see this agreement for Switzerland. Free trade and good cooperation, yes, but no far-reaching surrender of sovereignty, its own legislation and its tried and tested democratic processes. The advantages of the direct internal market are too marginal for that.”

### Swiss model just right for the needs of the time

But – as the inevitable objection goes – in the globalised world, global solutions are

needed for transnational problems. The question also came up in the interview with Oliver Zimmer: “Can’t we say that the world has moved closer together in recent years, and that there are problems in the world that can no longer be solved in the nation state, but which have to be tackled in supranational organisations?”

Zimmer’s answer: “That’s one of the ideas from a political science seminar, that you have to form big blocs that problems can be solved. Fact is, that the global problems that we have to solve, certainly must be solved through international cooperation. But that doesn’t mean that you have to join a federal state-like body like the EU”. He did not want to deny anyone the right to feel like a world citizen, Zimmer said. But: “I believe that most people are not radical universalists [...]. Most people need some kind of geographical relatedness and want to be politically and democratically active within a limited community. I believe that this model ultimately creates more accountability than such a wonderful ideal that sounds good but is relatively non-committal in reality.”

For Oliver Zimmer, the Swiss model is exactly right, even in today’s world: “As far as Switzerland is concerned, with federalism, direct democracy, bottom-up communal organisation, you can see that it is an incredibly modern structure, which is very much in line with the needs of the time.”<sup>6</sup>

### Framework agreement as antechamber to EU accession

The Federal Council’s statement that with the framework agreement he only wants “to put the bilateral way on a long-term, solid basis and to open the way to its further development”<sup>7</sup> is not made less false by further repetition. The Federal Council is diligently supported by parts of politics and the federal administration as well

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as by the large corporations. *Martin Jansen*, entrepreneur and professor emeritus of economics of the financial market at the University of Zurich, puts in a nutshell what drives them: “It is to be expected that politicians and the administration will consent to the framework agreement. In this way, the electorate can be effectively levered out in many areas and taxes can be further increased: the dream of many civil servants and politicians. And that suppliers of European communities or representatives of big banks and pharmaceuticals mostly consent to the agreement is not surprising because either the market access or prices or both (and thus implicitly also bonuses) are guaranteed by the state.”<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, however, more and more Swiss politicians, entrepreneurs and academics reject the framework agreement for fundamental reasons, as reported in *Current Concerns* of 28 October 2020.<sup>9</sup> Professor Oliver Zimmer states in the interview: “The framework agreement is not the continuation of the Bilateral Agreements, it is effectively the antechamber of EU membership.” Given that the agreement can factually not be terminated it can only be exited through the accession door. According to the Guillotine clause in Art. 22, para. no. 2 of the draft, with the termination of the agreement also all agreements that refer to it – i.e. the five most important of Bilateral Agreements I as well as agreements to be concluded in future – would cease to be in force within six months.

Oliver Zimmer rightly criticises the lack of an honest debate in Switzerland: In his opinion, the advocates of EU accession should finally be open about their views. Then we would have a real discussion, because the majority of the population does not want accession. “For me it would be important that this debate would be conducted openly and honestly, instead of always pretending that with the framework agreement democracy will simply continue as before. No, it is a fundamental break with what we have now.”

### Whoever wants to negotiate successfully must be sure of his own cause

For many Swiss it is a constant annoyance to see how the Federal Council repeatedly “forgets” which side of the table he and the Swiss negotiating-team are sitting on. The EU refuses to renegotiate any point in the framework agreement, one repeatedly hears from Federal Bern. Yes, it will certainly refuse it if the Federal Council gives in in advance and the mainstream media eagerly second it.

The British are apparently doing better: They are not so easily impressed by

the bangs from Brussels. That doesn’t really fit the Swiss EU turbos because the electorate might notice that it is possible to oppose and stand up to the EU bureaucracy.

And already we hear the prophets of doom saying that Great Britain is much bigger and politically more important and a far more important trading partner for the EU than Switzerland. This makes us think of the old Confederates: If they had allowed themselves to be impressed by the Habsburgs or by *Charles the Bold* just because they had much larger armies than they did, they would never have been able to defeat them and would not have been recognised throughout Europe as capable fighters. Well, fortunately, today we are not dealing with a battlefield, but with a negotiating table. We could be a bit more courageous. Unless you don’t want any changes to the framework agreement at all – although in its current form it is undoubtedly disadvantageous for our country in many respects and crushes our sovereignty.

Let us read the general mood with which British negotiator David Frost approached further negotiations in February this year after his country left the EU: “Personally, I believe that it is good for a country and its people if they decide their own fate and it depends on their own decisions. [...] If you are responsible for your own policies, you get better results. That is the reason why we continue to approach the upcoming negotiations with great confidence. We do not allow ourselves to be deterred by hints that there will be frictions, that there will be greater obstacles. We know that, we have factored in, and we continue to look ahead – to what we can achieve in the future. That is also the reason why we are not prepared to compromise on some fundamental points of our negotiating position.”<sup>10</sup>

We have never heard such tones from the Swiss Federal Councillors and their negotiators (*Pascale Bäriswyl*, *Roberto Balzaretto*, *Livia Leu* and whatever their name is), although actually every business course teaches that a sure and confident demeanor is the key of every successful negotiation.

In the radio conversation with Oliver Zimmer, this problem was briefly and clearly classified. Question from Iwan Lieberherr: “Is Great Britain actually more self-confident in the negotiations than Switzerland, and also more successful?” Oliver Zimmer: “You’re right: in my opinion, Switzerland should have been more self-confident from the start. I think here we have the problem that large parts of the administration are in favour of the framework agreement, and large parts of the political establishment in Switzerland are also in favour of the framework agree-

ment – at least in former times. This has led to a lack of self-confidence.”

### Meeting on an equal footing – for the benefit of all

It remains to be seen, what kind of “community of peace and values” the EU is, that it does not want to allow a member state to exercise the right to terminate an international treaty? What kind of understanding of democracy is it when you try to force a non-member to become more closely involved by applying massive pressure? David Frost wishes the EU “to find a way to deal with its neighbours as friends and truly sovereign equals.” A vision worth considering for a more humane and peaceful future!

The sovereign nation state, in cooperation with other states, is better able to tackle global problems more flexibly and sustainably than a power bloc: Because cooperation on an equal basis is human nature, solutions found cooperatively are always superior those found by applying pressure and coercion. From the perspective of humanity, there is no reason, why great powers could not meet other (even smaller) nations on an equal footing. For the good of all, including their own people. •

<sup>1</sup> Lieberherr, Iwan. “Für eine selbstbewusste Schweiz.” (For a self-confident Switzerland) Interview with Oliver Zimmer; in: *Radio SRF. Tagesgespräch* of 18 December 2020. *Oliver Zimmer* is a Swiss-British historian. He has taught Modern European History at the University of Oxford since 2005. Zimmer studied history, sociology and political theory at the University of Zurich and holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

<sup>2</sup> Tribelhorn, Marc; Neuhaus, Christina. “Wenn es Krieg gibt, können Sie nicht mit direkter Demokratie und Föderalismus den Gegenangriff organisieren”. (If there is war, you cannot organise the counterattack with direct democracy and federalism.) Interview with *Pascal Couchepin*; in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 7 December 2020

<sup>3</sup> Lieberherr, Iwan. “Für eine selbstbewusste Schweiz.” (For a self-confident Switzerland) Interview with Oliver Zimmer; in: *Radio SRF. Tagesgespräch* of 18 December 2020.

<sup>4</sup> David Frost lecture: “Reflections on the revolutions in Europe”. *Academic lecture in Brussels. Gov.UK* of 17 February 2020

<sup>5</sup> Nuspliger, Niklaus; Steinvorth, Daniel. “‘Merry Brexmas’ – das Freihandelsabkommen zwischen der EU und Grossbritannien ist da.” (“Merry Brexmas” – the free trade agreement between the EU and the UK is here.” in: *NZZ online* of 24 December 2020

<sup>6</sup> Lieberherr, Iwan. “Für eine selbstbewusste Schweiz.” (For a self-confident Switzerland) Interview with Oliver Zimmer; in: *Radio SRF. Tagesgespräch* of 18 December 2020.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eda.admin.ch/dea/de/home/verhandlungen-offene-themen/verhandlungen/institutionelles-abkommen.html>

<sup>8</sup> Janssen, Martin. “Es gibt gute wirtschaftliche Gründe gegen das Rahmenabkommen.” (There are good economic reasons against the framework agreement) in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 12 July 2019

<sup>9</sup> “Switzerland-EU framework agreement: Better end the negotiations with dignity ...”

<sup>10</sup> David Frost lecture: “Reflections on the revolutions in Europe.” *Academic lecture in Brussels. Gov.UK* of 17 February 2020

# The federal state system offers scope for differentiated solutions

## Reflections on Oliver Zimmer's book "Wer hat Angst vor Tell? Unzeitgemässes zur Demokratie" (Who is afraid of Wilhelm Tell? Untimely aspects of democracy)

by Urs Graf

In his newly published book "Wer hat Angst vor Willhelm Tell? Unzeitgemässes zur Demokratie"<sup>1</sup> Professor *Oliver Zimmer* raises fundamental questions about the political development of our society. He does so by comparing observations from Great Britain and Switzerland, where he has spent half of his life to date. The historian, who grew up in the Swiss town Thalwil and has been teaching at Oxford for more than twenty years, describes his expositions as "untimely" because they are not in the mainstream of the published zeitgeist. His historical and political-philosophical explanations are therefore very interesting.

### Intellectual elites in the "golden triangle"

First, there is the tension between "liberalism" and "democracy", which already existed in the 19th century when the Swiss federal state was founded. Zimmer describes the "radical" *Jakob Stämpfli* and the "liberal" *Alfred Escher* as the antipodes of the debate at that time, with the former advocating above all participation (democracy) and the latter free enterprise. He considers both approaches to be existential for our political culture in the sense that it is precisely this ongoing tension that best balances freedom and responsibility.

Zimmer describes the mindset of today's (liberal) intellectual elites in the "golden triangle" of London-Oxford-Cambridge, where a society of higher-paid service providers in the private and public sectors has concentrated, seeing itself as cosmopolitan and having hardly any contact with the local population. It is subject to the misunderstanding that this society owes its privileged position exclusively to its own performance (meritocracy), without the help of others throughout the country who enjoy less prestige and advantages for their daily work. This can be seen above all in the sharply polarised debate about Brexit, of which only the voices of the "Remainers" can be heard in this country, i.e. those Britons who want to remain in the EU. In Switzerland, this social polarisation also exists – and certainly among parties of different colours.

### Trajectories of democracy

Zimmer points to the different understandings of the structure and function of the state (in terms of constitutional jurisdiction versus popular sovereignty) as

they have developed in the nations in the course of their social history. They determine the relationship between citizen and state. Liberals advocated the universality of human rights, the separation of powers and the constitution, but they distrusted the people (demos), whom they preferred not to grant legislative power. In Switzerland, the so-called people's rights (referendum and initiative) – at that time still without the participation of women – were gradually introduced in the course of the 19th century under the pressure of predominantly rural (conservative) democracy movements. The trajectories of democracies in continental Europe have not been the same as in Switzerland or the United Kingdom. And the perception of laws – as democratically negotiated collective treaties or as decrees from higher authorities (the political reality of the EU) – is also dependent on this.

There is a similarity between Switzerland and the UK in terms of their democratic traditions and their autonomy vis-à-vis the EU, which today certainly corresponds to the "island" metaphor.

### Judicial state instead of democracy

The tendency to juridify politics is also critically examined. Zimmer, for example, draws on the expertise of the British judge *Lord Hoffmann*, who has been pointing out this problem for decades: *The European Court of Justice* ECJ in Luxembourg and increasingly also the *European Court of Human Rights* in Strasbourg make political decisions for the further standardisation of all member states.<sup>2</sup> Courts that make law themselves undo the democratic achievement of the separation of powers. Democracy is being replaced by the "judicial state", the top-down administration – the wise tyrant?

Zimmer misses a critical debate on this topic among Swiss legal scholars as well. They should be more aware of the cultural-historical conditionality of the decisions by EU courts on which they rely. Otherwise, our Federal Constitution as the supreme source of law will soon be undermined by judges who do not even speak our language ...

The political debate is always shaped by a certain philosophical approach to history. Those who impute a lawfulness to cultural history – an unavoidable "progress", and claim scientific objectivity for this position, as *Hegel* and *Marx* did, are easily led to the elitist attitude of distin-

guishing other opinions into those to be adopted and those to be overheard.

### The need for an honest debate on the framework agreement

One can only agree with the author's wish for an honest debate on the significance of the Framework Agreement (InstA). Switzerland's accession would not be, as its supporters claim, a "continuation of the bilateral path", but a one-way street to the EU – with all the negative consequences for our Swiss "way of life" of direct democracy with the three-tier federal state structure and the voluntary cooperation of citizens in many public tasks and offices according to the militia principle.

There is, however, a section of the population and also certain sectors of the economy that – rightly or not – hope for particular advantages from such a development. They should be forthright about it and stop dismissing other fellow citizens' justified concerns about democratic participation as "populist".

### Distorted image of Switzerland

In his book, Oliver Zimmer looks at Swiss historians who represent so-called critical patriotism. They twisted the exceptionalism of Switzerland, which thanks to its political culture was able to stay out of three murderous wars between its neighbouring states, into the negative – as an isolated, backward country that only profited from developments in the world but made no contribution to them.

The same distorted image is also represented by those cultural workers who, in 1991, with the slogan "700 years are enough", unabashedly presented themselves as defilers of their own nests. Oliver Zimmer is to be thanked for helping to classify this so-called critical patriotism of the post-war generation.

### The EU – a product of American post-war policy

Personally, it seems significant to me in terms of my life history that the book deals with the ironic attack on the self-image of the Swiss, for example by *Max Frisch*. The latter emerged in 1970 as the nation's schoolmaster with his "Wilhelm Tell für die Schule" (William Tell for Schools). The man of letters wanted to break the myth of the unruly freedom fighter and was awarded the *Swiss Schiller Foundations' Great Schiller Prize* in 1974!

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# UN expert Nils Melzer asks US President Donald Trump to pardon Julian Assange



(Picture Twitter)

UN human rights expert Nils Melzer today issued an open letter to U.S. President Donald Trump, asking him to pardon Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, who has

been held in Belmarsh high security prison since his arrest by British authorities inside the Embassy of Ecuador in London in April 2019.

A British court is set to rule on 4 January whether Assange should be extradited to the U.S. to face criminal prosecution and, if convicted, up to 175 years in prison for the publication of secret documents through the whistleblower platform WikiLeaks in 2010. This is the text of the letter from Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

“Mr. President,

Today, I respectfully request that you pardon Mr Julian Assange.

Mr. Assange has been arbitrarily deprived of his liberty for the past ten years. This is a high price to pay for the courage to publish true information about government misconduct throughout the world.

I visited Mr. Assange in Belmarsh High Security Prison in London, with two independent medical doctors, and I can attest to the fact that his health has seriously deteriorated, to the point where his life is now in danger. Critically, Mr. Assange suffers from a documented respiratory condition which renders him extremely vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic

that has recently broken out in the prison where he is being held.

I ask you to pardon Mr. Assange, because he is not, and has never been, an enemy of the American people. His organisation, WikiLeaks, fights secrecy and corruption throughout the world and, therefore, acts in the public interest both of the American people and of humanity as a whole.

I ask because Mr. Assange has never published false information. The cause for any reputational harm that may have resulted from his publications is not to be found in any misconduct on his part, but in the very misconduct which he exposed.

I ask because Mr. Assange has not hacked or stolen any of the information he published. He has obtained it from authentic documents and sources in the same way as any other serious and independent investigative journalists conduct their work. While we may personally agree or disagree with their publications, they clearly cannot be regarded as crimes.

I ask because prosecuting Mr. Assange for publishing true information about serious official misconduct, whether in America or elsewhere, would amount to “shooting the messenger” rather than correcting the problem he exposed. This would be incompatible with the core values of justice, rule of law and press freedom, as reflected in the American Constitution and international human rights instruments ratified by the United States.

I ask because you have vowed, Mr. President, to pursue an agenda of fighting government corruption and misconduct; and because allowing the prosecution of

Mr. Assange to continue would mean that, under your legacy, telling the truth about such corruption and misconduct has become a crime.

In pardoning Mr Assange, Mr. President, you would send a clear message of justice, truth and humanity to the American people and to the world.

You would rehabilitate a courageous man who has suffered injustice, persecution and humiliation for more than a decade, simply for telling the truth.

Last but not least, you would give back to Mr. Assange’s two young sons the loving father they need and look up to. You would also reassure these children, and through them all children of the world, that there is nothing wrong with telling the truth, but that it is the right thing to do; that it is honourable to fight for justice and, indeed, that these are the values America and the world stand for.

For these reasons, I respectfully appeal to you to pardon Julian Assange. Whatever our personal views and sympathies may be, I believe that, after a decade of persecution, this man’s unjust suffering must end now.

Please, use your power of pardon to right the wrongs inflicted on Julian Assange, to end his unjust ordeal and reunite him with his family!

I respectfully thank you for considering this appeal with foresight, generosity and compassion.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.” •

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26625&LangID=E> of 22 December 2020

## “The federal state system ...”

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For many secondary school students, he created a cult book. And unnoticed by most contemporaries, he supported a new myth, that of supranationalism – the core ideology of the European Union.

The EU has always been a political rather than an economic project on the European continent. This is clear from many documents since its founding.

And one should stop touting it as a “peace project”. It was pushed through step by step by Washington in the course of American post-war policy against pre-existing initiatives by European countries. Those who believed that it had been cre-

ated for the purpose of securing peace in Europe should have been disappointed at the latest since the 1990s, when the leading countries of the then EU again carried war to the Balkans fifty years after 1945.

## Outlook

The analysis is followed by an outlook: The Swiss should resist the EU’s pressure to integrate with more self-confidence, because they have good reasons to do so. Those who respect peoples only according to their trade volume cannot form a “community” anyway.

Our political culture has proven itself, and it is capable of development. Our dual vocational training system gives the en-

tire population a chance in working life. It helps to close the social gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. And the federal structure of the state offers scope for differentiated solutions that have to prove themselves in comparison among the administrative units. There is not even a copyright on this. •

<sup>1</sup> Zimmer, Oliver. *Wer hat Angst vor Tell. Unzeitgemäßes zur Demokratie*. Basel 2020. Echtzeit. ISBN 978-3-906807-21-8. New edition available on 31 January 2021

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Zimmer quotes Lord Hoffmann as saying: “This is an attempt to transform the Herderian diversity of institutions and customs, this feature of a living European culture, into a *Voltairean Unité de Doctrine*.” (Cited by Zimmer, p. 158 from *The modern Law Review*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1999)



# The Great Pretext ... for Dystopia

## For all those who do not want to have their heads twisted by a supposedly corona-induced “great reset” à la WEF

by Diana Johnstone\*



Diana Johnstone  
(Picture Wikipedia)

In their *World Economic Forum treatise “Covid-19: The Great Reset”*, economists Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret bring us the voice of would-be *Global Governance*.

By titling their recently published World Economic Forum treatise Covid-19: The Great Reset, the authors link the pandemic to their futuristic proposals in ways bound to be met with a chorus of “Aha!”s. In the current atmosphere of confusion and distrust, the glee with which economists Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret greet the pandemic as harbinger of their proposed socioeconomic upheaval suggests that if Covid-19 hadn’t come along by accident, they would have created it (had they been able).

In fact, World Economic Forum founder Schwab was already energetically hyping the “Great Reset”, using climate change as the triggering crisis, before the latest coronavirus outbreak provided him with an even more immediate pretext for touting his plans to remake the world.

The authors start right in by proclaiming that “the world as we knew it in the early months of 2020 is no more,” that radical changes will shape a “new normal.” We ourselves will be transformed. “Many of our beliefs and assumptions about what the world could or should look like will be shattered in the process.”

Throughout the book, the authors seem to gloat over the presumed effects of widespread “fear” of the virus, which is supposed to condition people to desire the radical changes they envisage. They employ technocratic psychobabble to announce that the pandemic is already transforming the human mentality to conform to the new reality they consider inevitable.

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“[The WEF] is powerful today because it is operating in an environment of State Capitalism, where the role of the State (especially in the United States, less so in Europe) has been largely reduced to responding positively to the demands of such lobbies, especially the financial sector.”

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“Our lingering and possibly lasting fear of being infected with a virus ... will thus speed the relentless march of automation...” Really?

“The pandemic may increase our anxiety about sitting in an enclosed space with complete strangers, and many people may decide that staying home to watch the latest movie or opera is the wisest option.”

“There are other first round effects that are much easier to anticipate. Cleanliness is one of them. The pandemic will certainly heighten our focus on hygiene. A new obsession with cleanliness will particularly entail the creation of new forms of packaging. We will be encouraged not to touch the products we buy. Simple pleasures like smelling a melon or squeezing a fruit will be frowned upon and may even become a thing of the past.”

This is the voice of would-be Global Governance. From on high, experts decide what the masses ought to want, and twist the alleged popular wishes to fit the profit-making schemes they are peddling. Their schemes center on digital innovation, massive automation using “artificial intelligence,” finally even “improving” human beings by endowing them artificially with some of the attributes of robots: such as problem-solving devoid of ethical distractions.

Engineer-economist Klaus Schwab, born in Ravensburg, Germany, in 1938, founded his World Economic Forum in 1971, attracting massive sponsorship from international corporations. It meets once a year in Davos, Switzerland – last time in January 2020 and next year in May, delayed because of Covid-19.

### A powerful lobby

What is it, exactly? I would describe the WEF as a combination capitalist consulting firm and gigantic lobby. The futuristic predictions are designed to guide investors into profitable areas in what Schwab calls “the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)” and then, as the areas are defined, to put pressure on governments to support

such investments by way of subsidies, tax breaks, procurements, regulations and legislation. In short, the WEF is the lobby for new technologies, digital everything, artificial intelligence, transhumanism.

It is powerful today because it is operating in an environment of State Capitalism, where the role of the State (especially in the United States, less so in Europe) has been largely reduced to responding positively to the demands of such lobbies, especially the financial sector. Immunised by campaign donations from the obscure wishes of ordinary people, most of today’s politicians practically need the guidance of lobbies such as the WEF to tell them what to do.

In the 20th century, notably in the *New Deal*, the government was under pressure from conflicting interests. The economic success of the armaments industry during World War II gave birth to a *Military-Industrial Complex* (MIC), which has become a permanent structural factor in the U.S. economy.

It is the dominant role of the MIC and its resulting lobbies that have definitively transformed the nation into State Capitalism rather than a Republic.

The proof of this transformation is the unanimity with which Congress never balks at approving grotesquely inflated military budgets. The MIC has spawned media and Think Tanks which ceaselessly indoctrinate the public in the existential need to keep pouring the nation’s wealth into weapons of war. Insofar as voters do not agree, they can find no means of political expression with elections monopolised by two pro-MIC parties.

The WEF can be seen as analogous to the MIC. It intends to engage governments and opinion manufacturers in the promotion of a “4IR” which will dominate the civilian economy and civilian life itself.

The pandemic is a temporary pretext; the need to “protect the environment” will be the more sustainable pretext. Just as the MIC is presented as absolutely necessary

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\* Diana Johnstone lives in Paris. Her latest book is “Circle in the Darkness: Memoirs of a World Watcher.” Atlanta 2020. ISBN 978-1949762136. Also published “Fools’ Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions.” 2002. ISBN 978-0745319506, “Queen of Chaos: the Misadventures of Hillary Clinton.” Frankfurt 2016 ISBN 9780989763769. She also wrote a preface and a commentary to the memoirs of her father, Paul H. Johnstone – former senior analyst in the Strategic Weapons Evaluation Group (WSEG) in the Pentagon – which was published under the title “From MAD to Madness. Inside Pentagon Nuclear Planning” in 2017. She can be reached at [diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr](mailto:diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr).

**"The Great Pretext ..."**

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to "protect our freedoms," the 4IR will be hailed as absolutely necessary to "save the environment" – and in both cases, many of the measures advocated will have the opposite effect.

So far, the techno-tyranny of Schwab's 4IR has not quite won its place in U.S. State Capitalism. But its prospects are looking good. Silicon Valley contributed heavily to the *Joe Biden* campaign, and Biden hastened to appoint its moguls to his transition team.

But the real danger of all power going to the Reset lies not with what is there, but with what is not there: any serious political opposition.

**Can democracy be restored?**

The Great Reset has a boulevard open to it for the simple reason that there is nothing in its way. No widespread awareness of the issues, no effective popular political organisation, nothing. Schwab's dystopia is frightening simply for that reason.

The 2020 presidential election has just illustrated the almost total depoliticisation of the American people. That may sound odd considering the violent partisan emotions displayed. But it was all much ado about nothing.

There were no real issues debated, no serious political questions raised either about war or about the directions of future economic development. The vicious quarrels were about persons, not policy. Bumbling *Trump* was accused of being "*Hitler*", and Wall Street-beholden Democrat warhawks were described by Trumpists as "socialists." Lies, insults and confusion prevailed.

A revival of democracy could stem from organised, concentrated study of the issues raised by the Davos planners, in order to arouse an informed public opinion to evaluate which technical innovations are socially acceptable and which are not.

Cries of alarm from the margins will not influence the intellectual relationship of forces. What is needed is for people to get together everywhere to study the issues and develop well-reasoned opinions on goals and methods of future development.

Unless faced with informed and precise critiques, Silicon Valley and its corporate and financial allies will simply proceed in doing whatever they imagine they can do, whatever the social effects.

Serious evaluation should draw distinctions between potentially beneficial and unwelcome innovations, to prevent popular notions from being used to gain acceptance of every "technological advance," however ominous.

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"Just as the MIC [Military Industrial Complex] is presented as absolutely necessary to 'protect our freedoms,' the 4IR will be hailed as absolutely necessary to 'save the environment' – and in both cases, many of the measures advocated will have the opposite effect."

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**Redefining issues**

The political distinctions between left and right, between Republican and Democrat, have grown more impassioned just as they reveal themselves to be incoherent, distorted and irrelevant, based more on ideological bias than on facts. New and more fruitful political alignments could be built through confrontation with specific concrete issues.

We could take the proposals of the Great Reset one by one and examine them in both pragmatic and ethical terms.

1. Thanks to the pandemic, there has been a great increase in the use of teleconferences, using *Skype*, *Zoom* or other new platforms. The WEF welcomes this as a trend. Is it bad for that reason? To be fair, this innovation is positive in enabling many people to attend conferences without the expense, trouble and environmental cost of air travel. It has the negative side of preventing direct human contact. This is a simple issue, where positive points seem to prevail.
2. Should higher education go online, with professors giving courses to students via internet? This is a vastly more complicated question, which should be thoroughly discussed by educational institutions themselves and the communities they serve, weighing the pros and cons, remembering that those who provide the technology want to sell it, and care little about the value of human contact in education – not only human contact between student and professor, but often life-determining contacts between students themselves. Online courses may benefit geographically isolated students, but breaking up the educational community would be a major step toward the destruction of human community altogether.
3. Health and "well-being". Here is where the discussion should heat up considerably. According to Schwab and Mallett: "Three industries in particular will flourish (in the aggregate) in the post-pandemic era: big tech, health and wellness." For the Davos planners, the three merge.

Those who think that well-being is largely self-generated, dependent on attitudes, activity and lifestyle choices,

miss the point. "The combination of AI [artificial intelligence], the IoT [internet of things] and sensors and wearable technology will produce new insights into personal well-being. They will model how we are and feel [...] precise information on our carbon footprints, our impact on biodiversity, on the toxicity of all the ingredients we consume and the environments or spatial contexts in which we evolve will generate significant progress in terms of our awareness of collective and individual well-being."

Question: do we really want or need all this cybernetic narcissism? Can't we just enjoy life by helping a friend, stroking a cat, reading a book, listening to Bach or watching a sunset? We better make up our minds before they make over our minds.

4. Food. In order not to spoil my healthy appetite, I'll skip over this. The tech wizards would like to phase out farmers, with all their dirty soil and animals, and industrially manufacture enhanced artificial foods created in nice clean labs – out of what exactly?

**The central issue: homo faber**

5. What about human work?

"In all likelihood, the recession induced by the pandemic will trigger a sharp increase in labor-substitution, meaning that physical labor will be replaced by robots and 'intelligent' machines, which will in turn provoke lasting and structural changes in the labor market."

This replacement has already been underway for decades. Along with outsourcing and immigration, it has already weakened the collective power of labor. But clearly, the tech industries are poised to go much, much further and faster in throwing humans out of work.

The Covid-19 crisis and social distancing have "suddenly accelerated this process of innovation and technological change. Chatbots, which often use the same voice recognition technology behind *Amazon's Alexa*, and other software that can replace tasks normally performed by human employees, are being rapidly introduced. These in-

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novations provoked by necessity (i.e. sanitary measures) will soon result in hundreds of thousands, and potentially millions, of job losses.”

Cutting labor costs has long been the guiding motive of these innovations, along with the internal dynamic of technology industry to “do whatever it can do.” Then socially beneficial pretexts are devised in justification. Like this:

“As consumers may prefer automated services to face-to-face interactions for some time to come, what is currently happening with call centers will inevitably occur in other sectors as well.”

“Consumers may prefer...!” Everyone I know complains of the exasperation of trying to reach the bank or insurance company to explain an emergency, and instead to be confronted with a dead voice and a choice of irrelevant numbers to click. Perhaps I am underestimating the degree of hostility toward our fellow humans that now pervades society, but my impression is that there is a vast unexpressed public demand for *less* automated services and *more* contact with real persons who can think outside the algorithm and can actually *understand* the problem, not simply cough up pre-programmed fixes.

There is a potential movement out there. But we hear nothing of it, being persuaded by our media that the greatest problem facing people in their daily lives is to hear someone exhibit confusion over someone else’s confused gender.

In this, I maintain, consumer demand would merge with the desperate need of able-minded human beings to earn a living. The technocrats earn theirs handsomely by eliminating the means to earn a living of other people.

Here is one of their great ideas. “In cities as varied as Hangzhou, Washington DC and Tel Aviv, efforts are under way to move from pilot programs to large-scale operations capable of putting an army of delivery robots on the road and in the air.” What a great alternative to paying human deliverers a living wage!

And incidentally, a guy riding a delivery bicycle is using renewable energy. But all those robots and drones? Batteries, batteries and more batteries, made of what materials, coming

from where and manufactured how? By more robots? Where is the energy coming from to replace not only fossil fuels, but also human physical effort?

At the last Davos meeting, Israeli intellectual *Yuval Harari* issued a dire warning that:

“Whereas in the past, humans had to struggle against exploitation, in the twenty-first century the really big struggle will be against irrelevance [...] Those who fail in the struggle against irrelevance would constitute a new ‘useless class’ – not from the viewpoint of their friends and family, but useless from the viewpoint of the economic and political system. And this useless class will be separated by an ever-growing gap from the ever more powerful elite.”<sup>1</sup>

6. And the military. Our capitalist prophets of doom foresee the semi-collapse of civil aviation and the aeronautical industry as people all decide to stay home glued to their screens. But not to worry!

“This makes the defense aerospace sector an exception and a relatively safe haven.” For capital investment, that is. Instead of vacations on sunny beaches, we can look forward to space wars. It may happen sooner rather than later, because, as the *Brookings Institution* concludes in a 2018 report on “How artificial intelligence is transforming the world,” everything is going faster, including war:

“The big data analytics associated with AI will profoundly affect intelligence analysis, as massive amounts of data are sifted in near real time ... thereby providing commanders and their staffs a level of intelligence analysis and productivity heretofore unseen. Command and control will similarly be affected as human commanders delegate certain routine, and in special circumstances, key decisions to AI platforms, reducing dramatically the time associated with the decision and subsequent action.”<sup>2</sup>

So, no danger that some soft-hearted officer will hesitate to start World War III because of a sentimental attachment to humanity. When the AI platform sees an opportunity, go for it!

“In the end, warfare is a time competitive process, where the side able to decide the fastest and move most quickly to execution will generally prevail. Indeed, artificially intelligent in-

telligence systems, tied to AI-assisted command and control systems, can move decision support and decision-making to a speed vastly superior to the speeds of the traditional means of waging war. So fast will be this process especially if coupled to automatic decisions to launch artificially intelligent autonomous weapons systems capable of lethal outcomes, that a new term has been coined specifically to embrace the speed at which war will be waged: hyperwar.”<sup>3</sup>

Americans have a choice. Either continue to quarrel over trivialities or wake up, really wake up, to the reality being planned and do something about it.

The future is shaped by investment choices. Not by naughty speech, not even by elections, but by investment choices. For the people to regain power, they must reassert their command over how and for what purposes capital is invested.

And if private capital balks, it must be socialised. This is the only revolution – and it is also the only conservatism, the only way to conserve decent human life. It is what real politics is about. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/yuval-hararis-warning-davos-speech-future-predictions/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-artificial-intelligence-is-transforming-the-world/>

<sup>3</sup> loc. cit.

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“What is needed is for people to get together everywhere to study the issues and develop well-reasoned opinions on goals and methods of future development.”



# “Reconciling power politics and peace politics”?

## Does it make sense to bring up the idea of a neutral EU Europe?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

There are good reasons for focussing public attention on the “corona” issue. But it also bears the danger of ignoring other important issues. Global politics before corona continues even with Corona. And, unfortunately, it must be said that the world has not become more just and peaceful with corona – which, if it were the case, would have made, or would make, the fight against the pandemic enormously easier. In a world of multiple exchanges, it is difficult for one country or a group of countries to successfully fight a pandemic on its own. It would be much easier if all countries and peoples worked together, supporting each other. But that is not the plan of all the players. We remember how allergic the EU reacted when China and Russia supported Italy with supplies and aid workers. Italy, the first country in Europe to be hit by the pandemic and the one hit hardest at the time. Or what are we to make of the fact that *Bill Gates* recently called again for global cooperation in the upcoming vaccination programmes, but failed to mention the Russian and Chinese efforts to vaccinate?<sup>1</sup>

### Cold War instruments

With the east and south-east enlargement of NATO and the EU after 1991 and the still existing plans for the admission or connection of further European countries – for example, with the EU’s association agreements (“Eastern Partnership”) or NATO’s euphemistically sounding “Partnership for Peace” – the intention was and is also to extend centralised political management and control to the whole of Europe.

Although repeatedly concealed officially, one can assume, based on today’s knowledge, that not only the first steps of “European integration” after World War II had US foster fathers. The book published in 2000 by *Beate Neuss* “Geburtshelfer Europas? Die Rolle der Vereinigten Staaten im europäischen Integrationsprozess 1945–1958” (Europe’s midwife? The role of the United States in the European integration process) is not a “conspiracy theory”, but a post-doctoral thesis of an established professor of political science at the Chemnitz University of Technology, accepted in 1999. Just like NATO, the *Warsaw Pact* and the *Council for Mutual Economic Assistance* (CMEA), the *Coal and Steel Community*, the *European Economic Community* (EEC), the *European Atomic Energy Community* (Euratom) and the *European Community* (EC) were instruments in the

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“An EU with an ‘active’ neutrality policy, on the other hand, could put the brakes on power-political ambitions. A neutral EU-Europe would certainly not be a democratic entity. This is not even possible due to the construction of the EU. But it would be an EU Europe corresponding more to the will of the citizens in the member states – if its neutrality and the peace policy resulting from it is honest. A good concept for a neutral EU Europe could help initiating a reflection on how they want to shape their NATO membership in future, even in those member states that are also NATO members and from which opposition is to be expected for the time being. It would be worth a serious attempt. Especially considering that continuing the current path means more and more confrontation and the danger of war. And that affects all of Europe and the whole world.”

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first Cold War. And after 1991, NATO’s eastward enlargement preceded the EU’s eastward enlargement.

### Early voices for neutrality in Europe

However, there were also repeated phases in European history after the Second World War when voices in individual European states or even across states were questioning the all too close ties to the United States of America. For a country like the Federal Republic of Germany, which was particularly closely steered and controlled by the USA, these voices were highlighted in the 2001 book by *Alexander Gallus*, “Die Neutralisten. Verfechter eines vereinten Deutschland zwischen Ost und West 1945-1990” (The Neutralists. Advocates of a United Germany between East and West 1945-1990). Many will also remember the years 2002 and 2003, when the German Chancellor *Gerhard Schröder* and the French President *Jaques Chirac*, with broad approval in their countries, refused to join the US in the Iraq war (which violated international law), and sought closer cooperation with Russia instead.

This was a departure from the plans of the “single global power” as formulated by the former US security advisor *Zbigniew Brzezinski* in his 1997 book “The Grand Chessboard”. For him, the Europeans were something like US vassals and a “democratic bridgehead” for the US.

France and Germany played a central role in these ideas – along with Poland and Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> The plan was in danger of collapsing. US reactions were harsh. *Donald Rumsfeld*, then US Secretary of Defence strained to divide Europe – more precisely: EU Europe – with a distinction between “old” and “new” Europe – and to discipline France and Germany.

### While the German Ministry of Defence is back in line ...

The times of Schröder and Chirac are over. In January *Donald Trump’s* US presidency will also come to an end. France, and even more so Germany, are once again looking to close ranks with the USA, with the new US administration. German Defence Minister *Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer* has made this clear in recent weeks, in her keynote speech to soldiers at the Bundeswehr Academy on 17 November 2020 and now again in an interview with the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” on 11 December 2020, where she said unambiguously: “It is in our interest to take the most important steps with America. [...] That is why we should remain side by side in the transatlantic alliance. [...] We share common values and interests with America. [...] The main issue is the systemic rivalry with China. For us, there is no equidistance

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in this. We are and will remain allies of the United States. Germany is integrated into Europe and is clearly part of the West.” And: “Russia recognisably is a challenge”.

**... this is not the case for Germany and Europe**

It is interesting, however, how the newspaper itself presents Ms. Kramp-Karrenbauer: “As few politicians, the 58-year-old stands for a critical approach to Russia and a clear commitment to the security partnership with the USA” (emphasis by the author). One must add: The German Defence Minister does not represent the majority opinion of the German population either. *Current Concerns* has repeatedly reported this, most recently on 11 December 2020.<sup>3</sup> And broadening the view to the whole of EU Europe, shows that there are many different voices on the future global political orientation of EU Europe or the countries from which these voices come. Many people in Europe, including responsible politicians, see that being too closely tied to the USA means to be tied to a sinking ship and that the disadvantages of such close ties are getting greater and greater.

The US policy of the past decades, both at home and in foreign policy, makes it increasingly difficult to speak of “common values”. US sanctions against all those who want to trade freely and according to their own ideas with Russia, or an increasingly hostile attitude towards China do not meet with approval everywhere in Europe. More and more people in positions of responsibility know that the era of the “single global power” is over, but that it is also still very unclear what the “new” world order will look like and how it will be possible not to fall by the wayside as a vassal of the USA in the distortions that are to be feared.

**Micheline Calm-Rey is proposing a neutral EU Europe**

Such considerations match an idea currently formulated by *Micheline Calm-Rey*, former Federal Councillor and head of the *Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)*, in detail in her new book “Die Neutralität. Zwischen Mythos und Vorbild” (The Neutrality. Between Myth and Role Model) and more concise in a guest contribution for the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 16 December 2020.

Her argumentation is as follows: So far, the EU’s “Common Foreign and Security Policy” has played virtually no role in issues of global political significance.<sup>4</sup> Why is that so? A look at Switzerland’s history may help answering

this question: “Switzerland, like the EU, is home to many languages and cultures, and neutrality has allowed it to consolidate its internal cohesion and to be respected by the rest of the world for a reliable and useful foreign policy.”<sup>5</sup> Coupled with its own defence capability, neutrality in alliance policy was the means of choice for the Confederation to first secure itself externally and later to be able to develop foreign policy effects.

It should be noted here that, for example, the fronts in the First World War also influenced Switzerland and there were clear differences of opinion in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland. At the time, a military alliance decision of any kind would have torn Switzerland apart. During the Second World War, on the other hand, the vast majority of the population was united. In both wars, armed neutrality was a blessing for the country and for neighbouring countries, which Switzerland was able to assist to the best of its ability with the ICRC and many volunteers.

In her article for the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, Ms Calm-Rey writes: “Considering the mechanisms that led the young Swiss Confederation to adopt a policy of neutrality, would it not ultimately also be possible to imagine a neutral Europe? With a commitment to active neutrality, the EU [...] would set in motion a development which would allow it to reconcile power politics and peace politics. Otherwise, it can be assumed that the EU will be forced into a rather insignificant foreign and security policy in the face of continuing dissent and internal tensions.”

**Which path in foreign and security politics will the EU follow?**

With the “Treaty on European Union” (formerly: EU Treaty), the governments of the EU states that concluded the treaty in 2007 wanted to reaffirm that it is no longer the individual member states alone that conduct foreign and security policy, but also all member states together. After all, 26 of the 55 articles of the 2007 Treaty are dealing with the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy. The principle of unanimity applied (and still applies) in the *European Council* (Assembly of Heads of State and Government) and in the responsible *Council of the European Union* (Council of Ministers). In the area of the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, the government representatives alone decide (“intergovernmental”), without the EU Commission or EU Parliament. The “spokesman” for the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, the “High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy”, currently *Joseph Borell* (Spain), is also

a member of the EU Commission, even one of the Vice-Presidents, but in fact no more than an administrative head.

The “Treaty on European Union” does not prescribe an alliance with the USA or with NATO. Nevertheless, where it has become concrete, the EU’s foreign, security and defence policy has so far almost without exception been guided by US policy. One example is the EU sanctions against Russia. In general, the core of EU foreign policy to date consists of sanctions decisions. So far, there is no sign of an independent EU foreign and security policy.

Nevertheless, it has become clearer in recent years how much EU Europe is made up of very different peoples with very different cultural traditions and ties. There are also more different positions again on many foreign policy and security issues. And if the EU states really want to “reconcile power politics and peace policy”, this cannot be done today with an orientation towards the USA and NATO. In this respect, *Micheline Calm-Rey* has formulated an interesting idea.

**Not to allow to be used for power-political ambitions**

The question is justified: Is it not rather a nice but unrealistic dream that the EU is pursuing “peace policy”? But one may also add the following question: But is this not mainly due to the power politics of individual member states or the external power, the USA, which wants to put its stamp on the entire EU in its quest for more power?

Peace policy is more urgent today than ever before – also in view of a worldwide pandemic. An EU that allows itself to be harnessed in its foreign and security policy to the power ambitions of the USA or even of one or more of its power-hungry member states – which are also demanding a departure from the principle of unanimity in foreign and security policy – is a danger to peace.

An EU with an “active” neutrality policy, on the other hand, could put the brakes on power-political ambitions. A neutral EU Europe would certainly not be a democratic entity. This is not even possible due to the construction of the EU. But it would be an EU Europe corresponding more to the will of the citizens in the member states – if its neutrality and the peace policy resulting from it is honest. A good concept for a neutral EU Europe could help initiating a reflection on how they want to shape their NATO membership in future, even in those member states that are also NATO members and from which opposition is to be expected for the time being. It would be worth a serious attempt. Especially con-

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# The US plan to dominate space

by Manlio Dinucci\*, Italy



Manlio Dinucci  
(Picture ma)

Cape Canaveral (Florida), from where the Apollo mission rocket was launched by NASA in 1969, became the headquarters of the U.S. Space Force Station together with Patrick Base, also in Florida. At the inaugu-

ral ceremony on 9 December, Vice President Mike Pence announced: “Our Space Force is getting stronger every day.”

U.S. Space Force is a new branch of the U.S. Armed Forces and was established in December 2019. Its mission is to “protecting U.S. and allied interests in space, acquiring military space systems, developing space military professionals, maturing the military doctrine for space power, organising space forces to present to our Combatant Commands.”

The central task of this new Force was explicitly stated by President Trump, announcing its imminent constitution in August 2019: “To ensure American domination in space, the next war battlefield.”

\* Manlio Dinucci is geographer and geopolitical scientist. His latest books are “Laboratorio di geografia”, Zanichelli 2014; “Diario di viaggio”, Zanichelli 2017; “L’arte della guerra. Annali della strategia USA/NATO 1990–2016”, Zambon 2016; “Guerra nucleare. Il giorno prima. Da Hiroshima a oggi: chi e come ci porta alla catastrofe”, Zambon 2017; “Diario di guerra. Escalation verso la catastrofe (2016–2018)”, Asterios Editores 2018.

In the wake of the new U.S. Space Force, NATO launched a military space program, prepared by the Pentagon and by a restricted European military summit together with the major Aerospace Industries. The importance of space is demonstrated by the fact that there are currently about 2,800 operational artificial satellites in orbit around the Earth. Over 1,400 of them are American. China is in second place with over 380 satellites, Russia comes third with just over 170. Most satellites, over 1,000, are commercial. Then come those for military, government, and civil use (the latter two types are often used also for military activities).

In addition, there are about 6,000 inactive satellites that continue to orbit the Earth, along with millions of objects and fragments of different sizes. Space is more and more crowded and more and more disputed. The giants of telecommunications, stock exchanges, large financial and commercial groups operate in space with their satellites. The number of satellites is predicted to increase five times within this decade, mainly 5G technology operated. The 5G commercial network, created by private companies, can be used for military purposes, hypersonic weapons particularly at a much lower expense. In this context, it is understandable why the United States formed its Space Force. The U.S. power played the card of military strength also in space, seeing the economic and technological margin of advantage decrease, especially with respect to China. The goal is clear: to dominate space and

maintain not only military but also economic and technological superiority.

The outcome of this strategy is equally clear. Since 2008, Russia and China have repeatedly proposed to the United Nations a new treaty (after the 1967 treaty) that prohibits weapons’ deployment in space, but the U.S. always rejected it. Russia and China are therefore preparing for a military confrontation in space having the ability. The constitution of the U.S. Space Force, therefore, triggers a new even more dangerous phase of the arms race, including nuclear weapons. From the use of space systems for espionage, military telecommunications, missile guidance, bombs, and drones, we move on to weapon systems that, placed in space, can blind the enemy’s satellites before an attack and destroy land targets, such as entire cities directly from space.

All this is covered under the hood of media silence. No voices of criticism or dissent arise from the political, scientific, academic, and cultural worlds. At the same time, financing from governments and arms industries to scientific institutes and universities for researches, which are often disguised as civilian, increases, and serves the development of military space systems. The only voices echo that of the new U.S. Space Force, which explains how space is “essential to our security and prosperity in our daily lives, even when we use our credit card at the gas pumps.”

Source: “Il piano USA di Dominio dello spazio”, in: *il manifesto* of 15 December 2020

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sidering that continuing the current path means more and more confrontation and the danger of war. And that affects all of Europe and the whole world.

<sup>1</sup> “Telemedizin und mehr: Bill Gates nennt positive Folgen der Corona-Pandemie” (Telemedicine and more: Bill Gates names positive consequences of the Corona pandemic); in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 8 December 2020 (<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/digitel/bill-gates-sieht-positive-folgen-von-corona-mehr-innovationen-17091415.html>)

<sup>2</sup> Brzezinski is a master of cover-up and whitewash. US policy, he says, is solely concerned with “an international order of democracy and cooperation” in its quest to become the “single global power”. The USA were a good hegemon. Accordingly, his chap-

ter “The Democratic Bridgehead” ends on page 58 as follows: “America’s central geostrategic goal in Europe can be summed up quite simply: it is to consolidate through a more genuine transatlantic partnership the U.S. bridgehead on the Eurasian continent so that an enlarging Europe can become a more viable springboard for projecting into Eurasia the international democratic and cooperative order.” Such formulations need interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> “Dialogue on the Volga”; in: *Current Concerns* No. 27 of 11 December 2020

<sup>4</sup> On the desolate situation of the EU’s “Common Foreign and Security Policy” (CFSP), the German “Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik” (SWP) published a comprehensive study in November 2020: “GASP. Von der Ergebnis- zur Symbolpolitik. Eine datengestützte Analyse” (CFSP. From politics of results to politics of symbols. A data-driven analysis.) ([https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A86\\_GASPOutput.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A86_GASPOutput.pdf)) This study, however, does not serve peace policy, but is oriented towards power-political ambitions probably above all of the German government.

<sup>5</sup> It is now generally accepted that Swiss neutrality has not only had a foreign and security policy dimension in its history. For example, the *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland* (<https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/016572/2010-11-09/>; article on “Neutrality” of 9 November 2010) states: “The overriding goal of neutrality can be derived from its history as the preservation of internal and external peace within the framework of relative independence and the common good. Against this background, five functions of neutrality can be identified: the integration, independence, free trade, balance and service functions. The integration function served the internal peace and cohesion of the confessionally and culturally heterogeneous Confederation. [...] For the Confederation, which was divided along confessional lines and committed to a variety of alliances, the focus of old-fashioned federal neutrality was on the integration function and the independence function. Foreign policy abstinence was an essential condition for the interplay between consolidation and deepening of integration. Neutrality created unity.”

# Pupils and students show increasingly poor performance

## Results of a teacher survey in Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft

by Michael Pedrazzi, Chairman "Starke Schule beider Basel" ("A Strong School for both Basel Cantons")

In the past two weeks [before 16 December 2020], *Starke Schule beider Basel* (SSbB) conducted a broad-based survey among teachers at the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school levels on the topic of "pupils' performance levels today compared to that of five years ago". The results are sobering: a clear majority of teachers rate the performance of pupils today as worse or significantly worse than that of the past.

506 teachers from primary and secondary schools took part in the survey in the two Basel half-cantons. This makes it a meaningful survey. Only teachers with at least five years of teaching experience were allowed to participate, so that they would be able to compare the situation today with that of the past. The teachers gave information on how they see the development of pupils' performance in the various subjects. They were able to use the following five gradations: "significantly worse", "worse", "about the same", "better" and "significantly better". The teachers could give differentiated reasons for their assessment and its causes.

The results are depressing: 63.6% of the teachers rate pupils' performance levels as worse or significantly worse compared to that of five years ago or earlier. Only 7.9% rate the performance of today's pupils as better or significantly better. 28.5% see no relevant difference in performance.

### Significant difference in the two Basel half-cantons

Of the 506 teachers, 264 teach in Basel-Land, 242 in Basel-Stadt. In both half-cantons, the respondents agree: in Baselland, 70.8% say that the current level is either worse or significantly worse. In the city canton, the same statement is made by 55.8% of the participants. Only 7.6% in Baselland and 8.2% in Basel-Stadt say that performance levels of the pupils have improved in recent years compared to the past.

The fact that Basel-Land teachers see a greater deterioration in the level of achievement than their colleagues in the city canton may also have to do with the somewhat exotic school model (orientation level and school for further education) of the past decades, which has only recently been replaced. Many experts blame this Basel school model for the last 15 years of educational malaise.

### Comparison between the different academic years

If we compare the three school levels (primary, secondary I and secondary II) of both half-cantons with each other, secondary I, i.e. the classes of the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> school year, comes off the worst: 75.6% of the respondents state that the level of performance has deteriorated or even significantly deteriorated. Only 24.4% assess the situation as either an improvement (6.0%) or stagnation (18.4%) of the performance level.

Overall, the picture is similar for all three school levels: In each case, more than half of the respondents see a deterioration, and the number of voices that can see an improvement is alarmingly low.

### Teachers see

#### clear reasons for educational decline

307 teachers expound their assessment of the performance level development in a differentiated statement. Feedback evaluation shows six main reasons for the deterioration of the education level:

- Compared to the past, schoolchildren are clearly less able to work under pressure. The ability to concentrate has also steadily declined.
- Today, more students receive less support from home, which has to be compensated for at school. This requires considerable time resources at the expense of teaching time.
- The change from five to six primary school years and the condensation of secondary school in three instead of four school years is considered as leading to a significantly greater heterogeneity in the 6<sup>th</sup> primary school year. High-achieving learners, in particular, cannot be optimally supported in the last year of primary school. In today's 6<sup>th</sup> primary school year, it is not possible to teach the same content quantitatively and qualitatively as in the former 1<sup>st</sup> secondary school year.

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## Thucydides trap – a newborn strategic concept

by Gotthard Frick, Bottmingen



Gotthard Frick  
(Picture ma)

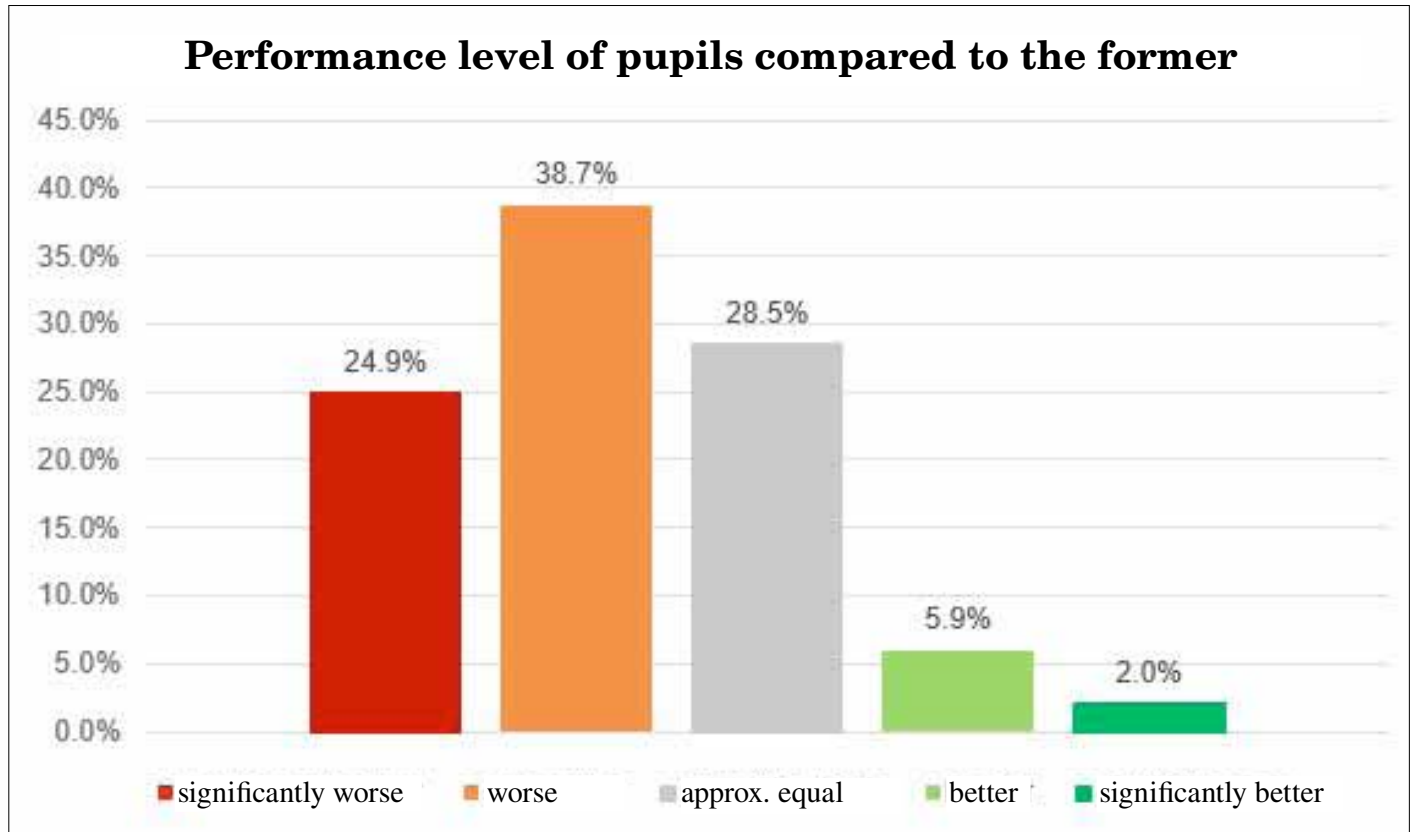
Anyone who remembers his history lessons from long ago may still know that *Thucydides*, a strategist and author, lived in ancient Greece. Athens, the then "great power", watched the emerging Sparta with increasing displeasure. The competition between the two finally erupted in the 5th century BC in the long Peloponnesian War, which led to the defeat and loss of importance of Athens (Thucydides reported in detail on this under the title "The Peloponnesian War").

Graham T. Allison, Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at Harvard Kennedy School, wrote in his book "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?" (2017) coined the term "Thucydides Trap" and means developments such as those that affected Athens and Sparta at the time and for example the USA and China today.

This means that a dominant great power feels competitive, ousted, and then seriously threatened by a newcomer, which may lead to a war. (The new Chinese defense law, which is about to come into force, supported by massive armament, does not bode well in this regard.)

In an interview with Professor Allison in the leading daily of the CPC, the

"Global Times", on 13 December of last year, one can read that even *Xi Jinping*, the President of China, has already mentioned several times the tensions and the danger of war with the USA and spoke about the "Thucydides Trap". Because of this, the Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister *Wang Yi* demanded a few days ago that China and the USA must start negotiations at all levels and seek lasting solutions in order to coexist peacefully ("Global Times": Compete and Coexist). "Thucydides trap" is likely to have found its place as a new term in the dictionary of strategy. In the May 2019 edition of the *Allgemeine Schweizerische Militärzeitschrift*, the author demanded for the same reason: "The world needs a new Peace of Westphalia." •



*The results are depressing: The performance level of the pupils is rated as worse or significantly worse by the teachers compared to five years ago or earlier with 63.6 %. Only 7.9 % rate the performance of today's pupils as better or significantly better. 28.5% see no relevant difference in performance. (Graphic: starke-schule-beider-basel.ch)*

#### "Pupils and students show ..."

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- Due to numerous projects and project weeks, camps, sports days, school trips, "Future Days", internal school training, etc., fewer and fewer days remain to teach subject lessons according to the timetable. The effective teaching time is significantly less than it has been even only a few years ago.
- In the teaching of foreign languages (French, English), multilingualism with the corresponding teaching aids "Mille feuilles", "Clin d'oeil", "New World" is given as the main reason. Many foreign language teachers blame these teaching materials and their underlying ideology for the decline in education. The lack of grammar in and the unstructured setup of these teaching materials are mentioned several times.
- The new curriculum with its descriptions of competencies is considered useless or unhelpful. Many teachers blame the numerous reforms of recent years for the decline in education.

#### Some examples of feedback

"With many reforms, starting with the de-cluttering of the curricula, but above all with the individualisation of teaching and the softening of learning goals al-

ready in primary school (former learning goals for grade 1 are now only compulsory to be achieved after grade 3), teachers have been persuaded to transfer the responsibility for learning progress to their students."

"Matura students and undergraduates (I also teach

a module at university) sometimes have big problems with spelling, in structuring trains of thought, cannot research carefully [...]."

"The linguistic level in the mother tongue has declined very much."

"For years we have been increasingly copying the Anglo-Saxon school system with the shift of emphasis to testing, controlling (output) instead of focussing on the special competence of teachers."

"Combining the subjects of history and geography [in Basel-Stadt] means that the children no longer have any basics. Material that was actually a prerequisite is not covered at all or only very little."

"Digitalisation is another step backwards, as the cognitive component is insufficiently promoted by the keyboard. [...] Mobile phones (WhatsApp) and laptops are highly distracting and concentration drops rapidly."

"Basic language skills (sentence structure, spelling, answering questions in such a way that even someone who has not read the question will understand the answer)

are no longer present when pupils enter secondary schools. The HarmoS reform has brought a massive deterioration: far too much inaccuracy and approximation is accepted at primary level. Today's seventh graders are roughly at the level of earlier sixth graders. The approach of not insisting on correctness and of extensively creating neural highways for wrongness instead is questionable."

"Repetition is undesirable from an educational policy point of view because it is expensive. The numerous resulting consequences lead teachers to continually lower their standards."

"The change from 5/4 to 6/3 is tantamount to a cutback in education for the following reasons: 1. Primary teachers are not trained for the sixth school year, i.e. they lack the teaching material for this year and the corresponding subject knowledge. 2. The school children's achievement gap is already large in the fourth and fifth year at primary level. In the sixth year, this heterogeneity can no longer be compensated for, even with the most efficient internal differentiation".

*Although a clear majority of the written feedback dwells on deterioration, there are also a few positive comments.*

"I have been teaching for 30 years. The level of English has improved enor-

continued on page 14



**"Pupils and students show ..."**

continued from page 13

mously, in contrast to French. There are many reasons for this. Perhaps the most important is the students' self-motivation: English is cool, English is 'easy', English is a must. A teenager's world is English, the music, the films and series on *Netflix*, the online video games. The latter are also played, written and spoken internationally, ie in English. Another reason is that the two years at primary school are an advantage; students come with a very good listening comprehension and can express themselves orally. The next reason is that English teaching materials are better than all the others. 'Ready for English' was top, 'New World' is ok."

"A broader knowledge of ICT through good ICT infrastructure for every pupil. More proficiency in mental arithmetic due to more efficient exercise programmes. Higher quality teaching materials than before."

"The English language is very much to the fore. Many pupils come into contact with this language on a daily basis. They also increasingly watch series on *Netflix* (or 'stream' them elsewhere) in English, which also leads to their level of English improving. Nevertheless, there are individual pupils who have a very poor level. I would like to add that level differences are getting bigger also in English."

"Students bring more basic knowledge about individual subjects. In the past, it was mostly individual students who already knew something in advance and could contribute, now it's several students and more in-depth information."

**Conclusion**

It is remarkable and noteworthy that one of the main reasons mentioned for the presumed reduction in performance is the reduced ability to absorb and concentrate, as well as the non-existent ability to link trains of thought and to think in a networked manner. So this is a damning verdict by the teachers for the competency-based curriculum that has been introduced, which should have particularly promoted precisely these abilities.

It is obvious that with 3536 descriptions of competencies in the curriculum, the actual content of subject matter in class has been reduced, and thus various interdisciplinary skills have also suffered. Pupils today have more difficulty following simple trains of thought in a structured way than was the case in the past.

As the most blatant reason for the deterioration, the SSbB recognises the subtly introduced change management with regard to the methodology and didactics of teaching. Without necessity, calm, concentrated teaching, in which pupils gain a basic understanding of the subject, was

discredited and portrayed as frowned upon, reactionary and outdated. Group work and self-organised learning, on the other hand, are declared the measure of all things. Lessons detached from direction and guidance, in which pupils try to discover things for themselves at an immense expense of teaching time, and where they can hardly concentrate due to the noise, are mainly just kept busy and often achieve wrong results, have fatal consequences for learning success.

Besides, teachers have to teach increasingly more subjects, especially at lower secondary level. This problem has been in existence since the University of Teacher Education (PH) largely took over the professional training of prospective lower secondary teachers from the university. Valuable study time is squandered on content that is far removed from practice and is ultimately missing in the students' subject training.

It is important to more strongly promote knowledge content and its connections in the individual subjects so that a further deterioration in the performance and educational level of the students can be offset. Students deserve to receive a good quality school education and thus be optimally prepared for further educational opportunities.

Source: [www.starke-schule-beider-basel.ch/Home.aspx](http://www.starke-schule-beider-basel.ch/Home.aspx) dated 16 December 2020

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# Addressing world hunger with agroecology

by Luca Beti

*Zero Hunger by 2030 – was the goal set by the international community in 2015. But with the current methods of food production, this goal remains unattainable. A fundamental shift towards agroecology is needed.*

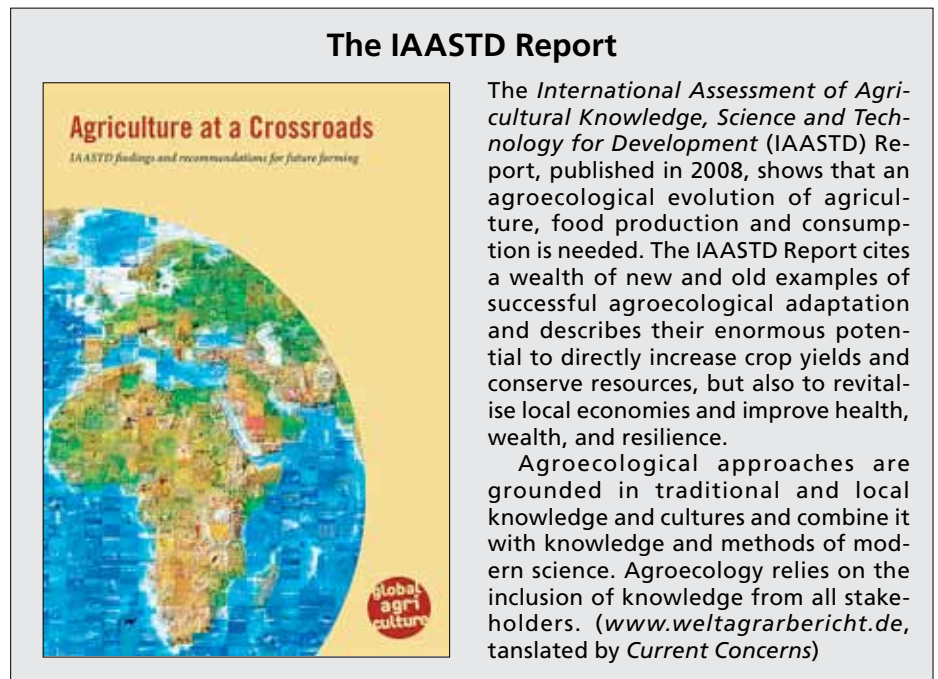
“A system change is needed in agricultural production! All experts agree on this. The disagreement starts when you try to agree upon a possible way of achieving this,” says *Urs Niggli*, former director of the *Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)*. After all, the goal has been fixed and takes the second position in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: an end to global hunger, food security, improvement of the food situation and the advancement of sustainable agriculture. Still ten years short of the set date, but “Zero Hunger” seems further away than ever.

According to the latest UN report on food security and the world food situation, around 690 million people suffered from hunger in 2019. That is 60 million more than in 2015, when the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda. After years of declining numbers, an increase in the number of hungry people was registered since 2014, a trend now exacerbated by the COVID-19-induced global recession.

## An involved situation

The crisis exposes how vulnerable and inadequate current food production systems are. The earth would be able to feed ten billion people – that is how many will populate the planet in 2050. According to a recent report by the *Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)*, this will require a fundamental shift towards agroecology and other innovative methods.

“Some say you have to rely on extensive agriculture, such as organic production,” Niggli explains. “Others say you have to focus on new technologies and invest in increased efficiency.” One thing is



## The IAASTD Report

The *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD)* Report, published in 2008, shows that an agroecological evolution of agriculture, food production and consumption is needed. The IAASTD Report cites a wealth of new and old examples of successful agroecological adaptation and describes their enormous potential to directly increase crop yields and conserve resources, but also to revitalise local economies and improve health, wealth, and resilience.

Agroecological approaches are grounded in traditional and local knowledge and cultures and combine it with knowledge and methods of modern science. Agroecology relies on the inclusion of knowledge from all stakeholders. ([www.weltagrabericht.de](http://www.weltagrabericht.de), translated by *Current Concerns*)

certain: conventional agriculture, together with forest management and other forms of land use, has had a negative impact on the environment. It causes 23 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, leads to less biodiversity, promotes soil erosion as well as the loss of humus and is responsible for a large part of water pollution.

It's difficult: agriculture is suffering from the consequences of climate change, for which it itself is partly responsible. “The solution is agroecology,” says *Hans Humi*, professor emeritus at the Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment at the University of Bern. “With this kind of agriculture, you combine different aspects: not only organic production, but also the social, political and economic realities in the lives of the farmers.”

## Balanced nutrition is favoured

Agroecology combines science, practice and social movement. One of its key prin-

ciples is diversification by cultivating diverse species on the same land, thereby restoring natural ecosystems. The method strengthens the resilience and climatic adaptability of ecosystems, their resistance to diseases and their absorption of nutrients. It also favours a balanced nutrition, as farmers decide for themselves what they want to cultivate.

“In addition to strengthening plants against parasites and drought, organic farming also promotes food security and a healthy nutrition,” emphasises *Tina Goethe*, an expert on the right to food from the non-governmental organisation *Bread for all*. “In Honduras, for example, by those who cultivated maize, beans, fruits and vegetables and had domestic animals the corona crisis was survived without major problems. This was not the case for those who only cultivated coffee.”

## Turn towards food security

What Goethe recalls is also proven by a recent study conducted by the NGO *Bio-vision* and the FAO: agroecology is an effective tool to combat the consequences of climate change, strengthen the resilience of humans, animals and plants, increase biodiversity and promote knowledge and exchange between farmers and researchers.

Agroecology is not the same as organic farming. “For many years I have been involved with this form of cultivation, and I also know its limitations,” says Urs Niggli. “Agroecology, on the other hand, is the ideal way to combine new technologies,

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## Funding agricultural research

As many as 85 per cent of the *Gates* investments in agricultural research for agricultural development projects end up in industrial food production in sub-Saharan Africa.

This is the conclusion of a study by the NGO *Bio-vision*, the expert group *IPES-Food* and the *Institute for Development Studies* IDS. However, *Bio-vision* President *Hans R. Herren* emphasises, “Industrial access has failed across the board in Africa.” The agroecology system does not propagate universal rec-

ipes, but calls for the development of local solutions, the study emphasises. It also analysed agricultural research projects supported by the SDC: 51 per cent of the projects included elements of organic farming, while 41 per cent promoted dignified labour and gender equality. Only 13 per cent of the initiatives supported by Switzerland focused on industrial agriculture.

Source: “Money flows” study; [www.agroecology-pool.org](http://www.agroecology-pool.org) (*Moneyflowsreport*)  
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# Agriculture is “systemically relevant”

by Josef Kunz, former National Councillor, Grosswangen



Josef Kunz  
(Picture ma)

The headlines in the media constantly cast agriculture in a negative light. For example, Switzerland is drowning in slurry, livestock numbers are far too high and produce too much ammonia, agriculture pollutes the water, meat production

pollutes the environment and the farmers' subsidies cost too much. These are just a few examples.

For clarity, the following facts:

**Too much slurry:** The use of artificial fertilisers has decreased massively. Spreading slurry must be precisely documented and done in a targeted manner. The nutrient balance, withdrawal and application must correspond to the yields.

**Livestock numbers too high:** The number of cattle and pigs has decreased in recent years.

With almost 50% of self-sufficiency it would be negligent to further reduce livestock numbers. By livestock farming Switzerland's grasslands are maintained. Do those who demonise meat want to consume grass soup in the future? Farmers refine grass into milk, cheese and meat, and thus also provide thousands of processing jobs.

**Water pollution:** Farmers have never used illegal sprays. These have always been approved by the federal agencies. Thus, the farmer uses sprays in good conscience, believing that residues are not a problem. Additionally, hormones and medicines from humans are just as big a problem. Clearly, residues must be reduced in all sectors of industry, health and agriculture, but to hold agriculture unilaterally responsible for these residues is untenable.

**Subsidies:** With the introduction of direct payments, farmers saw their milk and grain prices halved. Thus, agriculture lost income of approximately two billion francs in these sectors alone. Do you know, dear readers, that without direct payments 50% of farmers' families would no longer have an income? *Avenir Suisse* would have to question whether these price reductions reached the consumer or led to margin improvements by the intermediary trade. Cheese did not become significantly cheaper for consumers; despite the halving of the milk price, cheese imports have increased to over fifty thousand tonnes within fifteen years. Where is the climate and environmental protection? Payments are also linked to animal welfare and environmental services.

**Conclusion:** Farmers do not produce for themselves, but to provide our population with excellent food. Productive agri-

culture is the cheapest form of landscape maintenance and provides thousands of jobs in processing. The *Agrarplattform* (agricultural platform) calculated that if the state had to take over landscape maintenance, this would cost twelve billion without any production. If Europe were hit by a drought (signs are there), famine would also break out in our country. That is why our farming families deserve appreciation. They do their utmost to preserve the environment and to pass on intact land and agriculture to the next generation which is also in the interest of the rest of the population. The media has a great responsibility not to constantly cover agriculture with negative headlines, but for once with positive ones! Here are some suggestions:

- The farmer is drowning in bureaucracy.
- Without farmers, there is no intact landscape.
- Without food, there is no economy.
- The degree of self-sufficiency must not be allowed to fall any further, otherwise dependence on foreign countries threatens to increase.
- Due to the price reductions, the farmer is dependent upon subsidies.

I thank all consumers who support our agricultural and local products, I advise the media to take my food for thought seriously, the farming families deserve it and are grateful for it!

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “Addressing world hunger ...”

continued from page 15

organic farming methods and the experience of farmers – that's a key element in development cooperation.” The transition to the new system is undoubtedly happening through farming nuclear families.

According to international studies, 500 million small farmers could double their production with it. Already, they could feed an estimated 70 per cent of the population of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. “Monocultures have reached the peak of their productivity, so we now need to focus on smallholders to increase the amount of food available,” Hurni stresses.

Paradoxically, 75 per cent of people suffering from hunger live in rural areas and from agriculture. And here, too, the answer lies in agroecology, a multifunctional approach that promotes democratic processes conducive to food sovereignty.

What is meant is control over the production, soil, water and genetic resources of local communities. “It is for example important for farmers to create cooperatives to sell their products on the local market without middlemen – thus fighting against poverty,” Tina Goethe highlights. “Compared to organic production methods, agroecology confronts human rights issues and questions of income and a dignified life in a more direct way.”

### Time presses

Instead of a further increase in productivity, Urs Niggli prefers to talk about curbing consumption: “We could easily live with a 20 to 30 per cent reduction in agricultural production. But this would only be possible if we changed our eating habits, for example by reducing our meat consumption. At present, however, there is a trend toward more meat. Especially the middle classes in developing countries see meat as a synonym for prosperity.”

This is not to condemn meat consumption in general, he said, but more emphasis should be placed on ruminants such as cows and sheep that eat grass. Cereals, on the other hand, should not be used to feed poultry and pigs, and certainly not to increase milk production from cows.

Eradicating hunger requires a sustainable nutrition and cutting food waste in half. “In addition, we need to stop producing biofuels from crops intended for food and feed production,” Hans Hurni stresses. “Let's use what little land we have to grow food.”

What is needed now are supportive policy interventions at the international, national and local levels, and a shift toward a food system that serves human health, the environment and social well-being. “Today, we still have choices,” says Urs Niggli. “But the more global warming increases, the fewer options we will have.”

Source: <https://www.eine-welt.ch>, Issue 4/2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)