

# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,  
and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## Yemen: Creating conditions for a lasting peace

Opening remarks by António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General,  
to High-Level Pledging Conference for Yemen on 1 March 2021 at UN Headquarters in Geneva

cc. On 1 March 2021, representatives of various states convened by video for a "pledging conference" at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva to bring together financial resources for urgently needed aid for the people of Yemen – the country in the south of the Arabian Peninsula and opposite the Horn of Africa. The financial outcome of the conference was disappointing. Not even half of the absolutely necessary funds came together. Yemen, plagued by war since 2014, is currently the country with the biggest humanitarian disaster worldwide. Despite the fact that Yemen is the country with the largest humanitarian disaster in the world, it is usually not covered at all in our countries. The fact that the media took up the topic widely at the conference in Geneva was an exception. We document the opening speech of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and his final remarks at the end of the conference.



What future will these children have in Yemen? (Picture keystone)

### There is no lack of money

cc. According to UN Secretary-General Guterres, 3.85 billion dollars would be needed for emergency relief in Yemen to support 16 million people on the brink of disaster, to prevent "hunger and starvation from costing millions of lives". The pledging conference instead cut its donations down to \$1.7 billion.

Change of scenery: According to a report by *Bloomberg*, the currently richest person in the world, *Jeff Bezos*, became \$13 billion richer in the Corona year 2020. This was due to a jump in the price of Amazon shares on a single day in July, giving him a fortune of \$189 billion. One human being.

At the behest of the US government and NATO, Italy is to increase its military budget from the current 26 billion euros annually by 10 billion to 36 billion euros annually (i. e. by 38% or to 2% of GDP) (see p. 3). One state out of many.

A new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier for the US Navy costs around 13 billion dollars. Plus costs for 4500 crew members, aircraft and much more. Another state.

So what is really lacking?

I thank the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland for co-hosting this conference, and the representatives of governments and organisations taking part for your solidarity with the people of Yemen.

### Extent of suffering cannot be exaggerated

Today, famine is bearing down on Yemen. The race is on, if we want to prevent hunger and starvation from taking millions of lives. It is impossible to overstate the severity of the suffering in Yemen. More than 20 million Yemenis need humanitarian assistance and protection, with women and children among the hardest hit. That means two out of every three people in Yemen need food aid, healthcare or other lifesaving support from humanitarian organisations. More than 16 million people are expected to go hungry this year. Nearly 50,000 Yemenis are already starving to death in famine-like conditions. The worst hunger is in areas affected by the conflict. Four million people across Yemen have been forced from their homes. The recent Houthi offensive in Marib threatens to displace hundreds of thousands more. Last year, the conflict in Yemen killed or injured more than 2,000 civilians. It has devastated the economy and crushed public services. Barely half of Yemen's

health facilities are fully functional. The COVID-19 pandemic is one more deadly threat in a country facing such severe health challenges. For most people, life in Yemen is now unbearable.

### For children in Yemen a special kind of hell

Childhood in Yemen is a special kind of hell. Yemeni children are starving. This year, nearly half of all children under five in Yemen are set to suffer from acute malnutrition. The symptoms include wasting, depression and tiredness. 400,000 of those children face severe acute malnutrition and could die without urgent treatment. Starving children are even more vulnerable to preventable diseases like cholera, diphtheria and measles. Every ten minutes, a child dies a needless death from diseases like those ones in Yemen. And every day, Yemeni children are killed or maimed in the conflict. Sick and injured children are turned away by overwhelmed health facilities that don't have drugs or equipment to treat them. This war is swallowing a whole generation of Yemenis. It has to stop.

### No military solution in Yemen

It's been clear for years that there is no military solution in Yemen. The only path

continued on page 2

**"Yemen: Creating conditions ..."**

continued from page 1

to peace is through an immediate, nationwide ceasefire and a set of confidence-building measures, followed by an inclusive, Yemeni-led political process under United Nations auspices, and supported by the international community. The people of Yemen have articulated what they want: lifesaving support from the world; peaceful political participation; accountable governance; equal citizenship and economic justice. I urge all parties to work with my Special Envoy, *Martin Griffiths*, to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict. All our actions must be driven by this.

**Reduction of aid means death sentence for entire families**

This is the fifth time we have convened a high-level pledging event to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The bitter truth is that we will convene a sixth event next year, unless the war ends. We must create and seize every opportunity to save lives, stave off a mass famine, and forge a path to peace. The humanitarian situation in Yemen has never been worse. Yet last year, humanitarian funding fell. We received US \$1.9 billion – just half of what we needed, and half of what we received the year before. At the same time, the Yemeni currency collapsed, and remittances from Yemenis overseas dried up as the pandemic hit economies everywhere. The impact has been brutal.

Humanitarian organisations providing food, water and healthcare have reduced or even closed their programs. Families have nothing to fall back on. Two years ago, in 2018, thanks to the generosity of donors, including Yemen's neighbors, humanitarian agencies helped to prevent the famine that then threatened Yemen. Today, reducing aid is a death sentence for entire families.

**The children are paying the price for war**

With the war raging, Yemen's children are paying the price. And we know from studying the impact of conflict that those children will continue to pay a high price, long after the guns fall silent. Children who suffer from stunting in their childhood may never fulfil their physical and mental potential.

Economic damage, divisions and grievances can last decades, blighting entire regions. Communities ravaged by conflict bear emotional scars for generations.

We must end this senseless conflict now, and start dealing with its enormous consequences immediately. This is not the moment to step back from Yemen. We must equal and surpass the levels of funding we had in 2018 [and 2019]. This year, we need \$3.85 billion to support 16 million Yemenis on the brink of catastrophe. I implore all donors to fund our appeal generously to stop famine engulfing the country. Every dollar counts.

**Difference between life and death**

The funding you provide – through the *Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan*, the *Central Emergency Response Fund* or the *Country-Based Pooled Fund* – will make an enormous and concrete difference. In many cases, the difference between life and death. The United Nations family and our partners across Yemen are ready to scale up aid operations. Delivering aid in Yemen is challenging – but humanitarian workers are up to the challenge. Throughout last year, United Nations agencies and our partners helped more than 10 million people each month, working in every one of Yemen's 333 districts.

I urge all parties once again to heed the requirements of international humanitarian law to facilitate rapid, unimpeded humanitarian access. The assistance you pledge today will not only prevent the spread of famine and save lives. It will help create the conditions for lasting peace. Thank you. Shukran. •

Source: [www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2021-03-01/opening-remarks-high-level-pledging-event-for-yemen%2%A0](http://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2021-03-01/opening-remarks-high-level-pledging-event-for-yemen%2%A0)

**"The outcome of today's High-Level Pledging Event on Yemen is disappointing"**

After the pledging conference on 1 March 2021, the UN Secretary-General said: "The outcome of today's High-Level Pledging Event on Yemen is disappointing. Pledges announced total approximately \$1.7 billion. That is less than we received for the humanitarian response plan in 2020. And a billion dollars less than was pledged at the conference we held in 2019.

Millions of Yemeni children, women and men desperately need aid to live. Cutting aid is a death sentence. The best that can be said about today is that it represents a down payment. I thank those who did pledge generously, and I ask others to consider again what they

can do to help stave off the worst famine the world has seen in decades.

In the end, the only path to peace is through an immediate, nationwide ceasefire and a set of confidence-building measures, followed by an inclusive, Yemeni-led political process under United Nations auspices, and supported by the international community. There is no other solution.

The United Nations will continue to stand in solidarity with the starving people of Yemen."

Source: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-03-01/secretary-generals-statement-yemen>

**Current Concerns**

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

**Subscribe to Current Concerns – The journal of an independent cooperative**

The cooperative *Zeit-Fragen* is a politically and financially independent organisation. All of its members work on a voluntary and honorary basis. The journal does not accept commercial advertisements of any kind and receives no financial support from business organisations. The journal *Current Concerns* is financed exclusively by its subscribers. We warmly recommend our model of free and independent press coverage to other journals.

Annual subscription rate of CHF 40,-; Euro 30,-; USD 40,-; GBP 25,- for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of CHF 20,-; Euro 15,-; USD 20,-; GBP 12,50 for all other countries.

Please choose one of the following ways of payment:

- send a cheque to *Current Concerns*, P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich, or
- send us your credit card details (only *Visa*), or
- pay into one of the following accounts:

CH:	Postscheck-Konto (CHF):	87-644472-4	IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4	BIC POFICHBEXXX
CH:	Postscheck-Konto (Euro):	91-738798-6	IBAN CH83 0900 0000 9173 8798 6	BIC POFICHBEXXX
D:	Volksbank Tübingen, Kto. 67 517 005, BLZ 64190110		IBAN DE12 6419 0110 0067 5170 05	BIC GENODE31TUE
A:	Raiffeisen Landesbank, Kto. 1-05.713.599, BLZ 37000		IBAN AT55 3700 0001 0571 3599	BIC RVVGGAT2B

# Towards 2030, NATO is shaping our future

by Manlio Dinucci



Manlio Dinucci  
(Picture ma)

NATO is looking to the future. For this reason, Secretary-General *Jens Stoltenberg* summoned students and young leaders of the Alliance countries via videoconference on 4 February, proposing “new ideas for NATO 2030.” His initiative is part of the growing involvement with universities and schools, also with a competition on the theme: “What will be the greatest threats to peace and security in 2030 and how will NATO adapt to counter them?”

To carry out the theme, young people already have their textbook: “NATO 2030/United for a New Era”. The report was presented by a group of ten experts appointed by the Secretary-General. Among these experts is *Marta Dassù*, who, after being a foreign policy advisor to Former Prime Minister *D’Alema* during the NATO war in Yugoslavia, held important positions in successive governments and was appointed by Former Prime Minister *Renzi* to the *Finmeccanica* board of directors (now Leonardo), the largest Italian war industry.

What is the “new era” that the experts group envisages? After defining NATO as “the most successful alliance in history”, that “put an end to two wars” (these wars against Yugoslavia and Libya were instead triggered by NATO), the report painted the

picture of a world characterised by “authoritarian States seeking to expand their power and influence”, posing to NATO allies “a systemic challenge in all security and economy fields”.

Reversing facts, the report claimed that, while NATO amicably extended its hand to Russia, Russia responded with “aggression in the Euro-Atlantic area” and, in agreements’ violation “brought about the end of the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces”. Russia, the ten experts pointed out, is “the main threat facing NATO in this decade”.

At the same time – they argued – NATO is facing growing “security challenges posed by China”, whose economic activities and technologies may have “an impact on collective defense and military preparation in the area of Supreme Allied Commander’s responsibility in Europe” (The Supreme Commander is always a US general appointed by the President of the United States).

After raising the alarm on these and other “threats”, that would also come from the South of the World, the report of the ten experts recommended “cementing the centrality of the transatlantic link”, that is, Europe’s link with the United States in the alliance under US command.

At the same time, he recommended “strengthening the political role of NATO”, underlining that “the Allies must strengthen the North Atlantic Council”, the main political body of the Alliance that meets at Defense and Foreign Ministers level and State and Government lead-

ers. Since the North Atlantic Council takes its decisions, according to NATO rules, not by majority but always “unanimously and by mutual agreement”, it is basically in agreement with what was decided in Washington, the further strengthening of the North Atlantic Council means a further weakening of the European Parliaments, particularly the Italian Parliament, already deprived of real decision-making powers on foreign and military policy.

In this context, the report proposed to strengthen NATO forces in particular on the Eastern flank, providing them with “adequate nuclear military capabilities”, suitable for the situation created with the end of the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces (which was torn apart by the US). In other words, the ten experts asked the US to speed up the time to deploy in Europe not only the new B61-12 nuclear bombs, but also new medium-range nuclear missiles similar to the 1980s Euromissiles.

They particularly asked to “continue and revitalise nuclear sharing agreements”, which formally allowed non-nuclear countries, such as Italy, to get ready for the use of nuclear weapons under US command. Finally, the ten experts recalled that it is essential that all allies maintain their commitment, made in 2014, to increase their military spending to at least 2% of GDP by 2024, which means for Italy to increase it from 26 to 36 billion euros per year. This is the price to pay to enjoy what the report called “the benefits of being under the NATO umbrella”. •

Source: *il manifesto* of 2 February 2021

## Munich Security Conference and German Bundeswehr on a dangerous policy of confrontation towards Russia

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

In his speech to this year’s World Economic Forum in Davos on 27 January<sup>1</sup>, the Russian President Vladimir Putin warned of the dangers of a major war. This was not the first time. Unimpressed by this, important Western mass media – also in Switzerland – are continuing their anti-Russia campaign journalism – and they do this not without being backed by interested circles in politics, business and society. Probably the biggest agitator in this is NATO. It proved this once again with its almost 70-page paper “NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary-General”<sup>2</sup> of 25 No-

vember 2020, which identifies Russia as “the main threat to the Alliance in this decade”. Co-chair of the “expert group” was the former German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière.

The fact that this is an “enemy image” distorting reality becomes apparent as soon as one tries to get to the bottom of the countless massive accusations against Russia and especially against its president. This also applies to the “official” accusations made by NATO. It applies to accusations in connection with Ukraine all the way to the issue of *Nawalny* and cannot be set out again here. It is to be hoped that the assertion made more than

100 years ago by *Gustave Le Bon* in his book “The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind” that people can be made to believe any lie if it is repeated often enough and insistently enough, will perhaps today have the opposite effect on many people, that is, to raise many question marks against the obtrusively repeated “enemy image of Russia”.

### Basic strategic decisions of US governments

Let us merely recall three basic strategic decisions taken by the NATO states and above all by their leading power, the USA, over the past 30 years.

continued on page 4

### "Munich Security Conference ..."

continued from page 3

- In 1991, the war against Iraq<sup>3</sup> – even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union and only a few weeks after the *Charter of Paris* of November 1990 still pointing in a different direction – was the clearly visible prelude to the attempt to impose a "New World Order" dominated by the USA. Like the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki shortly before the end of the Second World War, the massive US use of weapons was intended to demonstrate to the whole world the power of the USA and that it does not hesitate to use its means.
- In 1999, the NATO war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia showed that the USA and its allies were no longer willing to respect international law and the *United Nations Charter*. The political leadership of Russia – at that time still with President *Boris Yeltsin* – was openly ignored.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2003, the second US war against Iraq showed that the leaderships of the USA and its allies are prepared to lie in order to justify their own strategic interests (domination of the Middle East and its raw material reserves) with the vociferous invocation of interests of mankind (engagement against the threat of weapons of mass destruction, ending dictatorships, assertion of democracy and human rights).

Much has been written and reported on these and many other points over the past 30 years – also in this newspaper – but nothing has improved. On the contrary: the NATO states continue to arm – although they still by far exceed the armament efforts of Russia (and also China); the mass media campaign propagating the enemy image is in full swing, and the opposition to the preparations for war, dedicated to the cause of peace, is today weakened rather than strengthened – apart from courageous exceptions time and again.

#### The Bundeswehr is meant to take the military lead in Europe

And, so far, almost everything indicates that the NATO states and their allies are about to intensify the confrontation course with the new US President *Joe Biden*. The German "Position Paper: Reflections on the Bundeswehr of the Future"<sup>5</sup> of 9 February 2021 and the Munich Security Conference on the afternoon of 19 February 2021<sup>6</sup>, which was conducted in online format, are currently indicative of this.

The German Bundeswehr position paper, written by German Defence Min-

ister *Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer* and the Inspector General of the Bundeswehr *Eberhard Zorn*, states under "Risks and threats", among other things: "Russia self-identifies as an antagonist to the West. With increasing obviousness, Moscow has lately stepped up its military and political threats, knowingly violating international agreements. In recent years, Russia has used military force against its neighbours and has conducted an extensive conventional and nuclear arms buildup."

While this account gives a very distorted and out-of-context account of reality, it serves as an authoritative justification for the demand for further rearmament and for a German army that is to be ready to go to war. The paper puts it this way: It needs "to be willing and able to hold their own in combat". Or also like this: "Our partners quite rightly expect us to raise our ambitions [...]" Within the NATO states, Germany is to take on a special role in future, as a "‘hub’ within the Alliance", closely alongside US forces. Germany is to take on the "role as a framework nation", "framework nation that its allies can rely on with their capabilities and structures, especially those with limited military assets." "This means that the Bundeswehr needs a broad capability spectrum so that we can our partners in all military areas". Germany has the "role as a 'first responder', which, owing to its central position, must be on the scene quicker than anyone else in the event of crisis, especially on the external borders of NATO and the EU". This applies to everywhere from the Baltic states to the Balkans, from the Mediterranean to the North and Baltic Sea". However, the Bundeswehr is "still underfunded" and "not sufficiently prepared" for all this, i. e., for "a modern, fully operational Bundeswehr". At the end of the paper, it says: "We have no time to lose now".

#### The "Big Four" in Munich

In Munich, mainly four politicians had their say online: first the new US President *Joe Biden*, then German Chancellor *Angela Merkel*, then French President *Emmanuel Macron* and finally British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson*. Now that US President *Donald Trump* was voted out of office, all four politicians were very eager to demonstrate unity and make commitments to NATO and the transatlantic "partnership". Not only niceties were exchanged. *Joe Biden* spoke about "how we're [!] going to be able to meet the threat from Russia". Because: "The Kremlin attacks our democracies and weaponises corruption to

try to undermine our system of governance." Putin seeks to "weaken Europe – the European project and our NATO Alliance". He also wanted to "undermine transatlantic unity and our resolve". *Angela Merkel* did not disagree. Instead, she said, "the transatlantic partnership has [among others] two major tasks for which we have to devise joint strategies." On the one hand, this concerns the relationship with China. The other is the relationship with Russia. It is very important "that we draw up a joint transatlantic agenda on Russia".

Ms *Merkel* will be aware that a "joint transatlantic agenda on Russia" will primarily mean that the European NATO states – apart from a few niches – will have to adapt to the ideas of the US government.

#### What's the issue? Regime-change in Russia!

Of course, things are not openly stated in public. That is left to others. For example, *Gabriel Felbermayr*, the president of the German-based *Institute for the World Economy*. In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* on 11 February 2021, he commented on the new EU sanctions against Russia that were only planned at that time (and have since been decided). He criticised them, not because he is against sanctions against Russia, but because they have had too little effect so far: "The goals we have towards Russia are very big: *we want nothing less than a regime-change in Russia* [...]. If you really want to bring Russia to its knees economically, you will need a grand coalition of countries, because Europe alone cannot get everything it needs." [Emphasis km]

It is very likely that this "project" is being worked on. So, who actually has reasons to feel threatened?

The German Russia expert *Alexander Rahr* has written a new book that will be published in March 2021. Its telling title, "Anmassung. Wie Deutschland sein Ansehen bei den Russen verspielt" (Arrogance. How Germany is squandering its reputation with the Russians). •

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Current Concerns* No. 4/5 of 2 March 2021

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_files2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_files2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf); also see the article by *Manlio Dinnucci* on page 3 in this issue of *Current Concerns*

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Current Concerns* No. 3 of 16 February 2021

<sup>4</sup> This was not an oversight but a clear signal to Russia that it no longer had any say in world political issues. As an example of US hubris, just read the remarks of *Zbigniew Brzezinski* in his book "The Grand Chessboard" (1997) in the chapter "The Black Hole".

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5029396/a83129815c00e3638302ba3630478987/20210211-dl-positionspapier-en-data.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://securityconference.org/msc-2021/>

# The Non-aligned Movement and the Role of Austria

## Multilateralism and the movement

### to ban nuclear weapons could be platforms for co-operation even today

by Professor Dr Dr h.c. mult. Hans Köchler\*



Hans Köchler  
(Picture  
hanskoechler.com)

zf. From 10 to 12 February 2021 the 5<sup>th</sup> international conference “The Rise of Asia in global history and perspective” was held on-line about the topic: “60 years after Belgrade: what non-alignment in a multipolar world and for a global future?” About 140 scientists from a broad range of academic fields (regional studies, cultural studies, ecology, economics, geography, history, humanities, linguistics, business management, political and social sciences) participated, as well as experts involved in an equally diverse scope of areas (economy, civil society, education, private business, governance, management, parliament, public relations, social and transnational movements), as well as artists and writers from various countries (Africa, North Central and South America, Australia, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Oceania, the Pacific). One of the speakers was Professor Hans Köchler.

After World War II, Austria regained its independence on the basis of a constitutional commitment to a non-aligned foreign policy. In the *Moscow Memorandum* of 15 April 1955, the Austrian government declared to work for the adoption of a law that would enshrine in the Constitution a provision of permanent neutrality according to the model of Switzerland. The law was to be passed after the ratification of a “State Treaty” with the four Allied Powers on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Austrian territory. Following the conclusion of the Treaty on 15 May 1955 and the completion of the ratification process on 27 July of the same year, the Austrian Parliament, on 26 October 1955, decided that Austria will permanently refrain from joining military alliances and will not allow any foreign military basis on its soil. This happened exactly on the

day after the last foreign soldier had left Austria, as was stipulated in the *State Treaty*.

As the country’s negotiators made clear at the time, Austria’s concept of neutrality was not to be understood as equidistance vis-à-vis ideological blocs, a position they polemically described as “neutrality” (and which some commentators, later, attributed to the Non-aligned Movement [NAM]). Austria always saw itself as part of the Western world. “Military neutrality,” tied to a commitment to “comprehensive national defense” (enshrined in Art. 9a of the *Federal Constitutional Law*) has become a defining element of Austrian state identity ever since the post-World War II period.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, in the era shaped by Chancellor (Prime Minister) Bruno Kreisky, Austria practiced a so-called policy of “active neutrality,” which meant, inter alia, support to causes of the then-Third World, in particular for the establishment of a *New International Economic Order*, the struggle against apartheid, and the aspirations of the *Palestine Liberation Organization* for the establishment of an independent state. This was the time of Austria’s constructive engagement with the *Non-aligned Movement*. Austria also played an active role in the debates on development policies and North-South dialogue. The Chancellor, a founding member of the North-South Commission (“*Brandt Commission*”), entertained close relations with non-aligned leaders such as *Indira Gandhi*, *Tito* or *Yasser Arafat*. To-

gether with President *José López Portillo* of Mexico, he convened the North-South Summit of October 1981 in Cancún (“International Meeting on Cooperation and Development”)<sup>1</sup> where the Prime Minister of China suggested the establishment of a “New International Economic Order.” At the European level, within the framework of the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe* (CSCE), Austria also coordinated its foreign policy with Yugoslavia, in an effort aimed at the implementation of the *Helsinki Accords* of 1975.

The Austrian Chancellor also took an active interest in, and was supportive of, conferences convened by the *International Progress Organization* on the New International Economic Order (held in Vienna in April 1979, and attended by Austria’s Minister of Finance), the Question of Palestine (held in Vienna in November 1980, and inaugurated by Austria’s Foreign Minister), and the *Principles of Non-alignment* (held in Baghdad in May 1982, with *Leo Mates*, Chief of Staff to President *Yosip Broz Tito* of Yugoslavia when NAM was founded in 1961, as General Rapporteur of the Conference). In the summer of 1983, at the initiative of Bruno Kreisky, Prime Minister *Indira Gandhi* attended an *International Dialogue Conference* at the Austrian mountain village of Alpbach.

In the context of the policy of active neutrality, Austria saw its position as neutral meeting place and facilitator of dialogue. This was evident in two of the major superpower summits of the Cold

continued on page 7

### The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

ef. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was founded during the Cold War, mainly on the initiative of the then Yugoslav President *Josip Broz Tito*, as an organisation of states that did not want to formally ally themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but wanted to remain independent or neutral.

The basic concept for the group emerged in 1955 during discussions at the *Asia-Africa Conference* in Bandung, Indonesia. Subsequently, from 5 to 12 June 1961, a preparatory meeting for the first NAM Summit Conference was held in Cairo, Egypt.

The NAM Summit takes place every three years, most recently in 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The Summit was attended by a delegation from more than 120 countries. The states of the Non-Aligned Movement represent 55 per-

cent of the world’s population and hold close to two-thirds of the seats in the UN General Assembly.

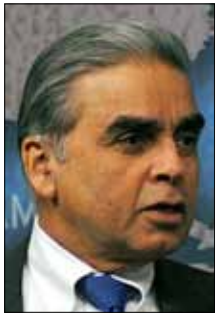
Every three years, the Non-Aligned Movement Summit takes place, most recently in 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The summit was attended by a delegation from more than 120 countries. The countries of the Non-Aligned Movement represent 55 per cent of the world population and hold nearly two-thirds of the seats in the UN General Assembly.

*Tijjani Muhammad Bande*, President in 2019 of the UN General Assembly, said on October 25, 2019: “NAM must continue to be a voice of reason and moderation, and must never fail to work, within the framework of the UN Charter, for peace, stability, human progress and justice even when it seems difficult.”

\* Presentation at the International Conference “The Rise of Asia in World Historical Perspective” with this year’s topic “60 years after Belgrade: What does non-alignment mean in a multipolar world?”, organised by Université Le Havre Normandie (France), in collaboration with Université Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne) (France), Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya (Indonesia), Kirori Mal College, University of New Delhi (India), in Le Havre, France, on 11 February 2021.

# USA and China: Friends or Foes?

by Professor Dr Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore



Kishore Mahbubani  
(Picture Wikipedia)

zf. In a keynote speech on 3 March 2021 (<https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>), the new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken promised a foreign policy for the American people – through restored “leadership in the world”.

Whether this will really be the case is doubtful.

According to Blinken, China is the “the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century” for the USA. China is “the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system – all the rules, values and relationships that make the world work the way we [the US] want it to, because it ultimately serves the interests and reflects the values of the American people”.

Therefore, the US relationship with China would be “competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be.” That, he said, requires “working with allies and partners [...] because our combined weight is much harder for China to ignore.”

Obviously, however, there are countries, especially in Asia, that do not think all that much of this kind of “partnership”. The following text by Kishore Mahbubani bears eloquent witness to this.

In the aftermath of arguably the most divisive election in US history, a new White House Administration seeks to usher in an era of change. But what does it spell for the relationship between the world’s two biggest powers — and the countries in our region?

Donald Trump will be remembered for many things. And one of the things he will be most strongly remembered for is the major geographical contest he launched against China during his Presidency. Initially, it began as a trade war, but it spread to other dimensions, and included some remarkably rude and insulting statements about China. Fanning the fire, Trump’s outgoing Vice-President Mike Pence, in a lengthy lecture on China on 24 October 2019, spelt out in great detail all the mistakes made by China. Here is an example of what he said: “All that Beijing is doing today — from the Party’s great firewall in cyberspace or to that great wall of sand in

---

“Yet, it could also face a major opportunity if the six billion people living outside US and China speak out clearly and call on the world’s leading powers and economies to cooperate and deal first with pressing global challenges we face.”

---

the South China Sea; from their distrust of Hong Kong’s autonomy, to their repression of people of faith — demonstrate that it’s the Chinese Communist Party that has been ‘de-coupling’ from the wider world for decades.” He made it clear that Trump would stand up to China.

So, what will happen to US-China relations when Joe Biden becomes President? The answer is paradoxical. On the one hand, everything will change. On the other, nothing will change. Both statements are true!

Why will everything change? For a start, the Biden Administration will stop insulting China. Even though Biden called President Xi Jinping a “thug” during the election campaign, the Chinese government will understand that this is part of the American election process. Many American Presidential candidates do not actually implement what they say in election campaigns. Just as Bill Clinton established good relations with China during his terms in office — even though he had said in his election campaign that he would not “coddle the butchers of Beijing”— Joe Biden will be courteous and civil when he meets his Chinese counterparts. Biden is a genuinely nice guy. He will not make policies through tantrums or tweets. Instead, there will be a certain predictability and stability in US-China relations. But while the tone will change significantly, the substance will not.

In short, the whole world faces both a major danger, and a major opportunity, with the Biden Administration coming into office.

## The Eternal Tussle

This, then, is the other limit of the paradox: the US-China contest will continue. This US-China contest is not driven by personalities but by structural forces. In my book, *Has China Won?*, I spelt out at least three such structural forces. Firstly, for millennia, the number one power (today, the US) always tries to thwart the number two power (today, China) and prevent it from becoming number one. American behaviour in trying to block China’s

rise as number one is normal geopolitical behaviour.

Sadly, American opposition to China’s rise is also driven by emotional forces. For centuries, the Western psyche has feared the “yellow peril”. This emotional dimension explains why President Trump called COVID-19 “Kung Flu” and “China virus”. The third structural force is a bipartisan consensus in the US that China has let the US down by not becoming a democracy. Two senior Democrat officials, Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, documented this disappointment in a *Foreign Affairs* article. They wrote, “Ever since [rapprochement began under the Nixon Administration in the 1970s], the assumption that deepening commercial, diplomatic, and cultural ties would transform China’s internal development and external behaviour has been a bedrock of US strategy.” These three structural forces are powerful forces. Hence, under Biden, the US-China contest will continue.

## Making Our Position Known

What should the rest of the world, including ASEAN, do in response to this continuing contest under Biden? Remain passive? Or speak out loudly and clearly to convey their own fears and concerns? It would be fatal to remain passive. As I document in a *Massive Open Online Course* (MOOC) on US-China relations [to be released by NUS and edx in January 2021], the whole world will be affected, indeed destabilised, if the US-China contest gains momentum. Hence, we should speak out.

But what should we in ASEAN say? We should make three points. The first point we should make is that both US and China should press the “pause button” on the contest. Why? The simple answer is that billions of people — including those in the US and China — are suffering from the massive economic recession caused by COVID-19. Global poverty is rising again. The only way to jumpstart the global economy is for the number one and number two economies to work together. Indeed, if Biden were to announce a simple

continued on page 7

**"USA and China: Friends or Foes?"**

continued from page 6

suspension of the trade war against China and withdraw all of Trump's erratic trade tariffs, the markets would react positively. The global economy would start growing again. Jobs would come back.

The second point is that the most pressing challenge we face is global warming. Fortunately, Biden, unlike Trump, agrees with this assessment. He will make Climate a priority. Yet it is also true that the US cannot stop global warming alone. Nor can China. Both have to work together. This is why I say in the conclusion of my book, "Humans would look pityingly at two tribes of apes that continued fighting over territory while the forest around them was burning. But this is how America and China will appear to future generations if they continue to focus on their

differences while the earth is facing an extended moment of great peril."

The third point we should make is that the continuation of the US-China contest will not just disrupt American and Chinese lives. It will (as it already has) disrupt lives all across the world. Hence, the first thing the new Biden Administration should do is to send out "listening" envoys to the rest of the world to poll the attitudes of the rest of the world to this contest. In the process of "listening", they will discover that the rest of the world, in all likelihood, does not want to choose sides between the US and China. Indeed, they want to have good relations with both. This is true of Asia too. As Ambassador Chan Heng Chee observed recently, "The indications are that no country in Europe or Asia would like an exclusive relationship with the US or China ... All want to be able to develop relations with both powers."

In short, to close with another paradox, the whole world faces both a major danger, and a major opportunity, with the Biden Administration coming into office. It could face a major danger if the Biden Administration is driven by structural forces to accelerate the US-China geopolitical contest. Yet, it could also face a major opportunity if the six billion people living outside US and China speak out clearly and call on the world's leading powers and economies to cooperate and deal first with pressing global challenges we face, like COVID-19 and global warming. ASEAN, including Singapore, should send these clear messages to Beijing and Washington DC. •

Source: *AlumNUS*, issue 124, January–March 2021; <https://www.nus.edu.sg/alumnet/thealumnus/issue-124/perspectives/panorama/biden-and-china-friends-or-foes>

**"The Non-aligned Movement ..."**

continued from page 5

War period that were hosted in the Austrian capital, namely the meetings between President *John F. Kennedy* of the United States and Premier *Nikita Khrushchev* of the Soviet Union in June 1961, and between President *Carter* and Soviet leader *Leonid Brezhnev* in June 1979. The latter meeting concluded with the signing of the *Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty* (SALT II). Also, since 1960, Austria has provided non-combatant troops for United Nations peacekeeping and observer missions, e. g. in Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. Since the 1960s, Austria has become the host country of an increasing number of inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations, the *International Atomic Energy Agency*, the *Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization* (Preparatory Commission), the *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, or the *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE).

After the end of the Cold War, the country's focus shifted to full integration with the European Community (later, European Union). Immediately after the accession to the European Union on 1 January 1995, Austria joined NATO's "Partnership for Peace" on 10 February of the same year. As member of the European Union, the country also takes part in "EU Battlegroups" within the Union's Common Security and Defense Policy. The integration into the intergovernmental structures of the EU has been perceived by many

as incompatible with the country's status of permanent neutrality and, thus, its Constitution. Accordingly, the Parliament amended the neutrality law of 1955, inserting an article into the Constitution that allows for the active participation in military operations within the framework of Austria's EU membership.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, Austria's relationship with the Non-aligned Movement is mainly of historical importance. The actual relationship is rather formal, or ceremonial. Together with other neutral European countries and some NATO members, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, Austria is listed, by NAM, as "Guest Country" (not, "Observer Country"). In this capacity, it is invited – on an ad hoc basis – to the opening and closing ceremonies of Non-aligned Summits and Ministerial Conferences.

Austria's foreign and defense policies are oriented towards the European Union and, to a certain extent, the United States and NATO. Also, in recent years, Austria did not adopt a clear position regarding neo-liberal globalisation. This has meant a constant erosion of the country's neutrality in favor of Western-centered realpolitik. It is worthy of note, however, that the majority of Austrians, unlike the governing elite, still adhere to a more traditional understanding of neutrality in the sense of strict non-alignment. They consider a non-aligned foreign policy as indispensable for preserving the country's independence.

In spite of the obvious paradigm change in Austria's foreign policy since the Cold war era, the country's continued commit-

ment to multilateralism and its active participation in the movement against nuclear arms could open the way for constructive cooperation, albeit limited in scope, with countries of the Non-aligned Movement. •

Additional reading

*Friends with Enemies: Neutrality and Nonalignment Then and Now*. International Conference, Vienna, 2-3 March 2020. Summary by Patrick McGrath. Vienna: International Institute for Peace, 2020, <https://www.iipvienna.com>.

Hans Köchler (ed.). *The New International Economic Order: Philosophical and Socio-cultural Implications. Studies in International Relations, Vol. III*. Guildford (England): Guildford Educational Press, 1980. (Conference convened by the International Progress Organization in Vienna, Austria, 2-3 April 1979)

Hans Köchler (ed.). *The Principles of Non-alignment: The Non-aligned Countries in the Eighties – Results and Perspectives*. London / Vienna: Third World Centre, 1982.

Hans Köchler (ed.). *The New International Information and Communication Order: Basis for Cultural Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence among Nations. Studies in International Relations, Vol. X*. Vienna: Braumüller, 1985. (Conference convened by the International Progress Organization in Nicosia, Cyprus, 26-27 October 1984)

Hans Köchler. "Non-Aligned Movement," in: *Encyclopedia of Global Studies, Vol. 3*. Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC: SAGE, 2012, pp. 1248-1250.

Paul Luif. *Die Bewegung der blockfreien Staaten und Österreich. Informationen zur Weltpolitik, Vol. 3*. Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 1981.

<sup>1</sup> Because of his health condition, he was represented at the summit by Austria's Foreign Minister *Willibald Pahr*.

<sup>2</sup> Article 23j(3) of the Federal Constitutional Law, in reference to Art. 43(I) of the Treaty on European Union that provides, *inter alia*, for the deployment of "combat forces in crisis management!"

# On the history and future of Swiss sugar

## What agricultural policy do we want?

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

*Sugar is found in many foods and plays an important role in our diet. Where does it come from? Some will say: mainly from Cuba or from other South American countries where it is extracted from sugar cane. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this answer would still have been correct – but not afterwards.*

For a long time, Swiss agriculture has been heavily oriented towards dairy farming and meat. Products of arable farming such as cereals are imported to a greater extent, which has repeatedly led to difficulties. During the First World War, for example, importing grain was difficult and the country had serious supply problems that led to hunger and social problems. During the Second World War, ETH professor *Friedrich Traugott Wahlen* was faced with the not easy task of getting farmers to switch increasingly to arable farming. His message was that the population could be fed more sustainably in terms of calories with potatoes, cereals and vegetables than with milk and meat. And it worked! With the *Wahlen plan*, the lunch table was often modest, but the population did not have to suffer from hunger.

After the war, the Federal Council tried to preserve arable land and prevent farm-



*Sugar factory in Frauenfeld. (Picture Schweizer Bauer)*

ers from quickly switching back to dairy farming, which tended to produce surpluses. It did not succeed! 30 per cent of the arable land soon became “green” again. However, the Federal Council’s policy did succeed with one project: the cultivation of sugar beet.

### Success story – after initial difficulties

The conditions were favourable. There had already been experience since the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sugar beet was grown in the Bernese Seeland and processed into local sugar at the Aarberg sugar factory from 1899. However, production was modest, so that the degree of self-sufficiency after the Second World War was only about 15 per cent. It made sense to build a sugar factory in eastern Switzerland as well and to promote the cultivation of sugar beet with federal funds. After great initial difficulties and after two referendums, this policy was to become a success story.

The new sugar factory was to be built in Andelfingen. The planners in the Department of Agriculture were confident. The National Council and the Council of States received the project positively and voted in favour by a large majority. The referendum was taken, and it came to a vote – and a nasty surprise. On 14 March 1948, the people voted a clear “no” by 63.3 per cent (*Wüthrich 2020*, pp. 123–147). The reasons were mainly psychological. The whole presentation of the new sugar regime was all too reminiscent of the state-controlled wartime economy, and many wanted to get away from that. The Federal Council would have determined the area under cultivation and the price of sugar beet, organised its utilisation and much more – just as it had done with all basic foodstuffs during the war. To finance all this, the tariffs on imported sugar were to be raised, which would have increased the price for consumers. The farmers also wanted more entrepreneurial freedom again and to determine for themselves what they wanted to grow.

### Letter to the Editor

#### “One can only hope ...”

It is interesting for me how Professor *de Zayas* sums up the problems in this world in Current Concerns of 20 January 2021: “Big Brother, globalism, militarism, totalitarianism”, to name just one quote.

I still remember the day in June 1979 when we were sitting together with friends and an experienced social studies teacher pointed out the memorability of that day when the *Salt II Agreement* on disarmament was signed between the USA and the Soviet Union. This agreement gave the world more security and predictability between the opponents and was an enormous relief.

Now, forty years later, all these sagely negotiated agreements on disarmament and arms control are simply being “cancelled” by an US President *Trump* who was all the more overwhelmed with his duty the closer the new elections approached, and also in the face of the completely new and unexpected pandemic, which would have required completely new solutions. In a crazy belief in his omnipotence, he has cancelled these treaties with Russia, and he has trashed the nucle-

ar agreement with Iran, which is far away from the USA and which plays almost no role in the existence of the USA.

Anarchy in foreign policy is therefore to be expected with a constant possibility of escalation. One can only hope that the new President *Biden* learns from the mistakes of his predecessor; and above all, that Biden does not advocate a reduction of human and civil rights in his country as he did in 1995 – when he proposed an anti-terrorism law (before 9/11!) – and that he directs attention on the development of domestic civil industry and economy in the interest of the American state instead of an increase in military spending. If he relies on further militarisation, he will lead the US to fall behind the more economically successful China. These are the concerns of *Kishore Mahbubani* in his book “Has China Won?” (2020).

Unfortunately, only a few reliable film and media reports reach us in Europe from the USA, so that we can hardly get an idea of the real situation and life of the people.

*Susanne Wiesinger, Freiburg i. Br.*

continued on page 9



**"On the history and future ..."**

continued from page 8

**The people's no leads to success**

However, the sugar project was not "dead" with the people's "no" vote. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the communes, cantons, associations and private companies took matters into their own hands. They founded the *Swiss Sugar Association*, which in turn founded a joint-stock company in which the Confederation did not have a stake at all, but twenty cantonal governments, associations and companies from trade and industry as well as numerous private individuals did. (This joint-stock company was later renamed *Schweizer Zucker AG*). They prepared a new sugar bill "without the Confederation". An increase in the price of sugar was ruled out from the outset. A second sugar factory was to be built in Frauenfeld. Protective tariffs were to enable cost-covering prices and thus reliable planning for cultivation and utilisation. The federal bill was unanimously accepted in the National Council and the Council of States – which is rare. Also among the people, no one had the idea of taking the referendum.

This sequence of events is a prime example of the functioning of federalism and the principle of subsidiarity, which belongs in a civics textbook: the state or the federal government should only take on tasks that the citizens and the lower-political levels cannot do themselves.

The 1948 no-referendum had led to a solution that was generally accepted. The voters in Frauenfeld approved the construction of the new sugar factory and were also prepared to contribute financially. The cultivation of sugar beet proved its worth. Beet is an important crop for crop rotation and helps to maintain arable farming in Switzerland. In 1974 and 1985, there were two more federal referendums: The two sugar factories were to be expanded with the help of the Confederation and the area under sugar beet was to be increased. In 1974 the people voted yes, but in 1985 they voted no to a project that was too large.

Just a few years ago, 6,000 farmers in Switzerland grew sugar beet, which was processed in the two sugar factories in Aarberg and Frauenfeld into about 250,000 tons of sugar, which corresponded to a self-sufficiency rate of almost 100 per cent. 85 per cent went to the food industry and 15 per cent to the shops. In autumn, you can meet many tractors with trailers, heavily loaded with sugar beet, on the access roads to Aarberg and Frauenfeld. A "soft smell" also tells the population that sugar processing is in full swing. No one is bothered by this because the factory simply belongs to the region. – Swiss

sugar was and is an entrepreneurial success project in which the people set a decisive course not only in the initial phase.

**Decline of Swiss sugar production as a result of the Bilateral Agreements I**

EFTA's free trade agreement with the then EC of 1972 still excluded agriculture. For a long time, Switzerland was still able to shape its agricultural policy independently with the direct participation of the people.

This changed with the increasing political rapprochement with the EU. Within the framework of the Bilateral Agreements I of 1999, the EU concluded an agricultural agreement with Switzerland for certain areas. This included sugar as a basic agricultural product. The agreement contained a strangely absurd clause. The EU is allowed to protect itself with protective tariffs against cheap imports from Switzerland. Switzerland, on the other hand, is barred from doing so. This is reminiscent of the "unequal colonial treaties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with China", commented *Samuel Krähenbühl*, editor at *Schweizer Bauer* (20 February 2016). One can only conjecture how such a provision got into the great treaty. In 2005, an agreement was reached on sugar, which is industrially processed into luxury foodstuffs and foodstuffs. Switzerland undertook to align the price with the EU level. In fact, the EU price in euros has applied since then. Reason: The domestic industrial enterprises, such as the "Schoggi-fabriken" (chocolate factories), are to have the same length of spit as their competitors in the EU. In this way, the Swiss sugar industry was to be integrated into the EU internal market as far as possible.

In the following years, prices began to fall. In 2007, the farmer received Fr. 98 per tonne for his sugar beet. In 2014 - seven years later – Fr. 48 was still paid. In 2017, the sugar market in the EU was completely liberalised (i.e. the quota system was abandoned), and prices continued to fall. In 2019, Fr. 44.– was still paid. The farmers' loss of income was compensated somewhat. The federal government increased direct payments from 1,800 to 2,100 francs per hectare, but this was far from compensating for the lower yield. About a third of the beet growers gave up. *Guido Stäger*, CEO of *Schweizer Zucker AG*, commented in 2018: "The degree of self-sufficiency with Swiss sugar is falling towards 60 per cent, more than 100 000 tonnes of EU sugar will have to be imported" (*Schweizer Bauer* of 25 August 2018, 2 December 2020, 15 January 2021).

**Other secondary effects and consequences of the EU internal market**

The two sugar factories in Frauenfeld and in Aarberg are no longer working

to capacity today (which makes sugar more expensive to produce). The *Schweizer Bauer* of 25 August 2018 reports that 132,000 tonnes of sugar beets had to be imported in 2017, according to the customs administration. It is annoying that "northern German beets are currently also being processed in the Frauenfeld sugar factory". – These unnecessary transports of heavy beets through half of Europe not only contradict the Confederation's climate strategy, but also all common sense, since these beets could be planted as before in the region where crops and knowledge are already available.

In addition, the production of sugar today is not sustainable enough due to the pressure of costs. *Josef Meyer*, President of the Swiss Sugar Beet Growers, made the following comments: "We have to cut costs where we can so that sugar beet farming works out in the end" (*Schweizer Bauer*, 25.8.2018). The result is that the vast majority works according to organic standards, but not according to IP guidelines.

Only 250 beet farmers in western and eastern Switzerland – less than 10 per cent – do this. In the "Integrated Production IP", farmers abstain from using insecticides and fungicides. The use of herbicides is restricted. Each farm must plant 10 acres of flowering strips (flower meadow) to comply with the biodiversity programme. The farms are inspected annually according to IP-Suisse. Although the two sugar factories process organic beet, 90 per cent of it is imported (*Schweizer Bauer* of 25 August 2018, 28 November 2020).

The fact that the sugar industry is largely integrated into the EU's internal market thus has serious consequences. Today, one gets the impression that many things are going wrong. It is possible that the degree of self-sufficiency will be reduced again to 15 per cent (where it already was once after the Second World War) and the Frauenfeld sugar factory built at that time will be closed again. However, a study concludes that the production with only one sugar factory is not profitable.

The problems cannot simply be remedied with a little more or less direct payments, which are connected with administrative effort and tied to conditions that farmers often perceive as pressure. The fundamental question is whether Switzerland should once again determine its agricultural policy more itself. Adequate border protection, which helps to ensure that prices cover costs, is indispensable. – Do we really want to dismantle the reconstruction work of the post-war generations and import sugar from abroad?

continued on page 10

**"On the history and future ..."**

continued from page 9

**Alarm**

At the policy level, there have been several reactions that clearly point to the unsatisfactory situation. Here are two examples: Already in 2015, National Councillor and Farmers' Association President *Jacques Bourgeois* (FDP) submitted the motion "Stop the ruinous price dumping of sugar! Protection of the domestic sugar industry" is submitted. He demands that the tariff rates should be set in such a way that "a minimum price is ensured for sugar".

In autumn 2020, the Fribourg CVP councillor *Pierre André Grandgirard* and 52 co-signatories launched the initiative "Swiss sugar must not disappear!" It was supported by the Fribourg Parliament. The content: The beet disease *Viröse* is currently rampant in some areas of Europe, leading to major harvest losses. Until now, farmers have fought this disease with the product *Gaücho*. Probably in view of the upcoming vote on the pesticide ban initiative, the Federal Council today banned the emergency use of this product. However, more than ten EU countries have allowed its use with restrictions (*Schweizer Bauer* of 21 November 2020). National Councillor and farmer *Andreas Aebi* said: "If we are banned from using these products, we will no longer want to import food produced with these products. I am prepared to allow less sugar into Switzerland. That would be consistent, everything else is a lie" (quoted in *Schweizer Bauer* of 13 January 2020).

**What kind of agriculture do we want?**

The Swiss agricultural policy AP 22+ reinforces the already existing tendency to promote "nature-based" agriculture (whatever one understands by this) at the expense of production agriculture – with the effect that less is produced and more is imported and the degree of self-sufficiency decreases. This is why the *Swiss Farmers' Union* has clearly taken position against it. The two initiatives (Drinking Water Initiative and Pesticide Ban Initiative) that will be voted on in June are supporting further this trend. However, from the point of view of most farmers, they overshoot the target by far. What do we really want? A "close-to-nature" agriculture and more imports of food produced with methods banned in Switzerland, as the example from the sugar industry shows?

**Halt**

The Council of States recently confirmed the financial framework for farmers for four years, but suspended agricultural policy 22 + and ordered a "halt". Parlia-

ment has already decided on the necessary measures to reduce the use of plant protection products with so-called "reduction paths". The IP cultivation of sugar beet is to be promoted. Further measures are not necessary. The Council of States instructed the Federal Council to draw up a report with an overview and strategy so that future agricultural policy can be discussed anew. The Council of States' concern is certainly correct – especially after 25 years of experience with direct payments.

The committee of the National Council has also been critical about AP22+ in recent days: "The income of the agricultural sector would decline, valuable cultivated land would be lost, imports would increase, and the administrative burden for farmers would rise. All in all, there is too little evidence for a coherent strategy" (from the media release of 2 February 2021). The National Council will decide on 16 March whether it will follow the Council of States (see also *Current Concerns* Questions No. 4/5 of 2 March 2021, pp. 7–8).

Nationally and internationally, the political environment has changed since the turn of the millennium. The Doha Round in the WTO, which aimed to liberalise agriculture globally, was discontinued in 2011 after ten years without results. In the same year, the National Council and the Council of States instructed the Federal Council to "immediately stop" the ongoing negotiations with the EU on a free trade agreement in the agricultural and food sector. In 2008, the UN Agricultural Report (*World Agricultural Report*) had set new accents worldwide.

**Retrospect and outlook**

Agricultural policy in Switzerland was and is not easy. Its issues have always strongly sensitised the entire population, so that numerous referendums have taken place in recent decades (far more than on other economic issues). On 12 March 1995, for example, there were three federal referendums on agriculture in a single day (cf. *Wüthrich* 2020, pp. 123-147).

In the 1960s, the initial situation was still different from today. A panel of experts had advised the Federal Council on questions of European integration as follows: The cost level of agriculture was about 30 percent and in individual cases up to 70 per cent higher than in the surrounding EEC countries: "All the crops we can grow can be produced in one or more regions of the six countries under much more favourable conditions than here [...]. Our agricultural production could not be maintained in the event of a complete dismantling of import protection [...]" (cf. *dodis.ch* 34185, pp. 6–9)

In EFTA's 1972 free trade agreement with the then EC (which was approved by 72 percent of the electorate), Switzerland retained its sovereignty and excluded the agricultural sector from free trade. As a result, it was able to shape its policy largely independently with the involvement of the electorate until the turn of the millennium. Thus, the production of sugar became a pearl in agricultural policy.

With ever stronger political ties to the EU, the situation has become much more difficult. The Federal Council justified its goal of largely integrating the sugar industry into the domestic market by saying that sugar-processing companies like *Lindt&Sprüngli* should have equally long spears as their competitors in the EU.

Well – the Swiss export industry has never had equally long spears. *Lindt&Sprüngli* and also *Läderach* have become big, even though they had to pay a little more for domestic raw materials such as sugar and milk than their competitors abroad. This has not harmed them – on the contrary, it is part of their success story. Even the textile industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to buy its raw materials (cotton, silk) from far away and accept higher procurement costs. The embroiderers in St. Gallen, for example, or the fabric printers in Glarus found their way by making a special effort and by ensuring excellent quality. They have thus created true works of art and more than made up for the competitive disadvantages in terms of cost. The same can be said of the watchmakers in Geneva and the Jura, of the entire industry and also of the service sector. The disadvantages in the area of procurement and higher wages are only one thing. In addition, there have often been other disadvantages in the area of currencies. Since the Second World War, the US dollar has lost 80 per cent of its value against the Swiss franc, the British pound more than 90 per cent, and the euro has lost about a third of its value since 1998. Did therefore the export economy and with it the entire economy go down? No – on the contrary – it has become stronger, as all statistics show.

It is not the export economy that is at risk today, but agriculture. Let us beware of imposing too much on from home and abroad, because sufficient self-supply is in the interest of us all. •

**Sources:**

Numerous issues of the magazine *Der Schweizer Bauer* (The Swiss Farmer) from 2015 to 2021.

Wüthrich, Werner. *Wirtschaft und direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz – Geschichte der freiheitlich-demokratischen Wirtschaftsverfassung der Schweiz*. (Economy and Direct Democracy in Switzerland - History of the Liberal-Democratic Economic Constitution of Switzerland), Zurich 2020

*dodis.ch*; Collection of Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland

# In the jungle of the internet

## Education in times of digitalisation

by Dr. Eliane Perret, psychologist and remedial teacher

Who doesn't know them, the slightly tilted heads at bus stops, the people standing together in small groups, staring at a flat, rectangular "thing" in their hands or swiping around on it? Or the gentleman in the suit who appears to be having a relaxed conversation with himself, laughing and pausing, until you discover that he is talking into his rectangular "thing", equipped with headphones. When out walking, you see babies in their prams trying in vain to get eye contact with their mothers because those are fixated on their "thing": the smartphone. What came onto the market as a clunky device – mainly used for making phone calls – is now a portable little computer, including a shopping centre, that accompanies people everywhere, to work and during leisure time, in the day and often also at night. And the same applies to children! They get involved with these devices at an increasingly younger age, and more and more experts are concerned about the associated development.

### Count us out – we're not taking any of this any longer

In October 2017, "The Guardian" published a report about employees who left their technology companies in Silicon Valley. They no longer wanted to spend their energy and vigour working for an internet catering to the demands of the advertising industry and vying for the capture of human attention. *Justin Rosenberg* was one of these. As a *Facebook* engineer, he had developed the "Like" button. Thumbs up and thumbs down – like it, don't like it! Now he and other colleagues were concerned that this technology could distract people's attention and concentration and even get them addicted. Some of them went even further in their deliberations. They noted that the ability to hold conversations and live in relationships was being altered and feared an increasing erosion of democratic systems.

### Children as a target group of the market

They knew what they were talking about, having spent years meticulously developing technical ways to make users of websites and especially of so-called social media accessible to advertising. Now these technicians and engineers had had enough of servicing such marketing ideas.

They all belonged to a generation still able to remember "a life before". Many



First analogue, then digital. (Picture Caro)

of them only used their own products when absolutely necessary. They sent their children to elite schools in Silicon Valley where *iphones*, *ipads* and *laptops* were not allowed. They knew the mechanisms inherent in the devices and were aware of the subtle psychological tricks used to entice users – who "just quickly" wanted to check their messages – to stay typing and swiping on *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Tinder* or *Twitter* for much, much longer than planned. How could children resist this temptation that adults had already succumbed to? *Snap Chat*, *Tik Tok*, *WhatsApp* and whatever else that children use today were created especially for them. Their increasing purchasing power has made them an important target group for the media industry.

### Feeding illusions – creating dependency

Man is a social being. We want to be connected and in relationship with other humans, and be of importance to them. Whether and how we succeed, essentially determines our feeling to be valuable. This basic human need is exploited for the functioning of social media and computer games. Thus, there is a multitude of well thought-out technical mechanisms that animate users to stay longer on those websites and on the net in general. The personal data of users that can be obtained in this way is the "crude oil" of IT corporations that is sold to advertisers. For example, users are granted a certain amount of creative freedom, which feeds their illusion of being able to move

continued on page 12

# Who dares to oppose progress?

by Nicole Duprat, France

Like a *Hydra*\* with a thousand heads and many tentacles, the ultra-connected smartphone invades the space and time of its users by constantly attracting their attention and changing their daily behaviour.

Permanent loss of concentration and incessant stress, dependencies, destroyed family life, speech disorders, physical isolation, addictions, depression, anxiety, eye fatigue, migraines, insomnia, hearing loss, narcissism, pornography, bullying, threats to personal safety (in the car, on the motorbike, on foot) – these are the harmful impairments (some of them irreversible) and various distortions that are currently being observed.

Who would dare to oppose progress? Of course, there are some who oppose it, and they are not few! An article in the magazine *Le Point* (20 September 2014) teaches us better! It is – what a surprise – entitled: “The children of *Steve Jobs* deprived of IPAD.” *Apple’s* founder always kept his children away from new technologies, its author reveals. In Silicon Valley, those in charge of tablets, iPhones or video games hardly let their children touch a smartphone; they are encouraged to read books made of paper. We also learn with astonishment that many executives and employees of *Google*, *Yahoo*, *Apple* and *eBay*, in order to counter the manipulation and misinformation, send their children to Waldorf-, Steiner-, Montessori-schools, whose pedagogy is particularly hostile to technology! And for good reason, the management of these schools does not allow any tablet or smartphone, as these represent a certain danger and a serious

obstacle to the development of creativity, concentration and social behaviour of the pupils.

After all, who would know better than Steve Jobs whether the use of smartphones and tablets is harmful to children? Since many are highly addicted or even enslaved by this “modernity”, this important information should be passed on to many young people and adults.

One must be able to decide between screen and paper. Numerous studies (University of Pittsburgh, University of Virginia on the site *adozen.fr*, OECD in an article in “*Le Monde*” of 25 September 2015) all come to the same conclusion: namely that the performance of students who use smartphones show a 30% drop in intellectual performance compared to those who do not use them. Let’s not forget that the function of the written word is to fix it in memory. Writing by hand on a blank sheet of paper is an act that activates, develops and strengthens the memory in our brain, whereas typing on a keyboard does not make the neurons work in the same way. When we write, we are guided by our thoughts, and writing follows the rhythm of our thoughts.

While billions are spent on equipping schools, digital technology seems more likely to fail than to succeed ... Taking notes in a course on a keyboard rather than on a piece of paper seems to be an absurdity for a few! For many today, on the other hand, the claim to take notes on a piece of paper instead of on a keyboard is an absurdity.

Furthermore, the British newspaper “*The Guardian*” of 25 February 2018 noted that because of smartphones and

tablets schoolchildren no longer know how to hold a pen properly. According to paediatricians interviewed by the newspaper, children have insufficient muscle development for writing because of the time they spend in front of screens. “It is easier to give a child an *iPad* than to encourage him to spend time playing construction games, doing activities like cutting and inserting something, sewing cloths, drawing. So, they don’t develop the basic skills needed to grip and hold a pen,” says paediatrician Sally Payne, senior occupational therapist at the Heart of England NHS Trust.

In an interesting pedagogical approach *Eliane Perret’s* article in *Current Concerns* No. 24 of 10 November 2020 invites young people and adults to resist this modern grip!

Man is the master of the machine, not the machine must dominate man. We must never lose sight of the priority of the human being over the technological dimension. In the consumer frenzy of a society geared towards high-tech, digital sobriety is an advantage to be acquired!

Regulation and the right to switch off must be used to counteract the perverse effects of digital technology. Living with the tools of our time does not mean getting lost in the hecticness and torment of progress. •

\* Hydra: The *Hydra of Lerna* was a sea monster with multiple heads that regenerated twice when cut off and emitted a dangerous poison even when asleep. The hero of Greek mythology, *Hercules*, killed it by cutting off its main head with the help of a golden snake (this is the second of Hercules’ twelve labours).

## “In the jungle of the internet”

continued from page 11

independently and self-determined on the net. This includes the Like button, with which visitors to websites like Facebook can make their opinion known, in the belief that they are helping to shape the content of the net. The success of the Like button convinced other IT companies, and the idea was immediately adopted by Twitter, Instagram and other apps and websites. With other website operators, you can download their products (for example, PC games) for free; in return, they generate huge profits through integrated shops where (unnecessary) accessories can be purchased. With photo and video portals like Snap Chat or Instagram, you can change photos with filters or easy-to-use programmes and waste a lot of time on the net this way. In ad-

dition, *Snap Chat* has a built-in function – the Snapstreak – which counts the consecutive days on which one has exchanged a photo or video with a friend; after a 24 hour lack of communication, you have to start again from scratch. The social pressure created in this way pushes users to stay active. Computer games also exploit the desire to take part, to be there, so in multiplayer games like *Fortnite*, interruptions are associated with adverse consequences. *Netflix* and *YouTube* lead the user from one series to the next in an automated way; this arouses curiosity and makes it difficult to drop out. Games like *CandyCrush*, which is primarily aimed at an increasingly growing female “gaming community”, entice users to stay in the game by bestowing prompt successes on them. A complex reward system does not allow for any predictions of subsequent

achievements, and so reinforces the desire for success all the more.

Conclusion: These platforms exploit the healthy human need for relationships and social interaction. The fear of missing out tempts people to stay on them longer, and moods seduce people into quick, thoughtless actions and pointless online shopping.

## And what is the point of all this?

A few years ago, the father of a student – he worked in an internet company – told me that we were clueless about how meticulously our activities on the net were recorded and evaluated. I was sceptical and hoped this assertion was exaggerated. He predicted that in a few years we would be amazed at how the unsolicited advertis-

continued on page 13

**"In the jungle of the internet"**

continued from page 12

ing offers would seemingly coincidentally precisely meet our interests. And how about today? The above-mentioned former employees of high-tech corporations also tell us this. For example, Facebook, considered by many to be a nice social network, has now replaced its Like button with the option of expressing six basic emotions. This is meant to capture the user's mood and assess their buying behaviour in order to stock them up with appropriate offers. What works best will be tested through large-scale trials in which users serve as guinea pigs without first being asked.

It would be going too far here to explain other technical possibilities of influencing people (for example by means of cookies, the pull-to-refresh function or even signal colours). In summary, they all serve to create a differentiated profile of the user, which is used for personalised advertising and individualised information offers. This increases the likelihood of this person's spending time on the net and, if possible, making purchases. Children are also a customer segment that is targeted very specifically.

**A lot to lose**

But it is not just about business, although that runs into the billions. That would be too short-sighted. The personalised content delivered to users undermines their intellectual sovereignty and narrows their view of the world's complexity. They receive selected information. The net becomes an echo chamber that confirms one's own point of view and conveys the feeling of being in the best-informed and "right-thinking" society.

The often-heard argument that one has nothing to hide therefore comes to nothing. It is all about control, power and manipulability. And we have a lot to lose: personal rights, the right to privacy, the right to our own image as well as unrestricted access to independent information as the supporting pillars of the free forming of opinions in a democratic society.

**Self-determined and interested in the world**

While we adults have the opportunity to make use of the internet as a multifaceted working tool even while being aware of the risks, this is hardly possible for children. We therefore have a duty to give them the necessary protection. What does that mean? The goal of all educational efforts is surely to educate our next generation to become mature citizens who actively and responsibly help shape life together. That is easy to say, but it involves fundamental considerations that are worthwhile to comprehend. We wish

our children and young people to shape their lives in a self-determined way and to be responsible in their actions and feelings, thoughts and motives. That means they should have a healthy self-confidence combined with self-responsibility. We wish them a broad interest that goes beyond their own concerns to include those of their fellow human beings and even of the world. This means being active in life and broadening their own horizons to become capable of judging for themselves. This requires a corresponding educational background that strengthens the ability to judge and leads to an effective security in the encounter with the world. A successful educational process will create the necessary conditions for such a development.

**Pampering – the path to a lack of courage**

Today we often meet children and young people who lack the courage and confidence to tackle their tasks in life. Here we must look at the currently very widespread pampering style of upbringing (often paired with neglectful or authoritarian tendencies). Too many difficulties are conveyed out of the children's way, and they are given too little guidance how to persevere in the pursuit of a goal. There is always someone who speaks for the child, sees dangers and tries to prevent them. Such children do not learn, or learn too little, to build on their strengths and to cope with more demanding situations without constant support. To be sure, they do not lack ambition, but this is often linked to the idea of achieving brilliant results without much effort. If something does not work out immediately, their disappointment is excessive and often coupled with hypersensitivity, resentment, displeasure or temper tantrums. Against this background, the path to becoming a mature citizen of the world is blocked. These children and adolescents are curtailed in their aptitude to relate and hindered in their possibilities and abilities to shape life in a self-determined and courageous way. They hardly ever experience satisfaction through their own efforts. Their lack of courage leads them to avoid demands.

**Bogus solutions on the net**

Such children and adolescents run a great risk of not being able to resist the temptations of the internet, of the social media and computer games discussed at the outset – a convenient way of avoiding life's tasks and a supposed loss of prestige. Prestige is sought in the circle of the equally discouraged. They speak the same language, have the same interests and values. Activities on the internet become a means of escape that temporarily alleviates one's own insecurity. But it remains

a pseudo-solution because it does not encourage the young person to tackle his or her life's tasks, to become more relational and cooperative – in short, to become a player. On the contrary, it can lead to dependency, because the gap to the demands of life becomes wider and wider. As parents and educators, we have a duty to give our children and young people the protection they need.

**A sense of significance**

For earlier generations, coping with everyday life occupied an important place. The whole family was involved in various ways. Since then, many achievements have been developed to make life easier. Just think of all the utensils in the kitchen, our possibilities to move from one place to another, and so on. But children and young people need the opportunity to be active themselves and to experience the feeling of being noticed by the people around them, of having an impact and meaning for others. A corresponding lack of experience can lead to boredom and ultimately to addictive behaviour.

**Engaging in conversation with each other**

Children strive for independence and autonomy in many areas and want to test and

continued on page 14

**Current Concerns**

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

*Publisher:* Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

*Editor:* Erika Vögel, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

*Address:* Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

*Phone:* +41 (0)44 350 65 50

*Fax:* +41 (0)44 350 65 51

*E-Mail:* CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

*Subscription details:*

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, , Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

*Account:* Postscheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

The editors reserve the right to shorten letters to the editor. Letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *Current Concerns*.

© 2021. All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

### "In the jungle of the internet"

continued from page 13

assert their own ideas. At the same time, they seek and need the discussion with their parents, to learn their point of view in order to find their own way. And they also need this kind of support in learning how to deal constructively with the media. This does not mean that parents have to surf around on all platforms and waste their time with PC games, but a certain knowledge of the mainstream offers is certainly helpful to get into a conversation with children and young people. As a parent, you can show them how you yourself use digital devices as working tools in your everyday life and assign them an appropriate place in your daily life. This orientation gives the adolescents the necessary protection so that they do not lose themselves in the digital no man's land, and it also reduces the danger of power struggles between parents and children.

### Got it all wrong?

It is not easy for parents today to introduce their children to digital media. After all, it's not about remaining in the digital stone age. Parents often feel under considerable pressure to make the various devices accessible to their children ("because everyone else has it too...").

The sensible path to the digital device leads step by step from analogue to digital media, from picture books to smartphones, according to a child's psychosocial stage of development. Basically, the guidelines "analogue before digital" and "producing be-

fore consuming" are helpful. But what if, as a parent, you realise that there is a considerable gap between such a plan and the reality? When the inevitable conflicts have worn you down? Perhaps then your gaze must first linger on where you managed – for example, to postpone the purchase of a smartphone for a year? And from this success you may gain the confidence that you didn't do everything wrong!

### Finding their place in the world

Children are not born technology freaks, they are raised to it. Today the temptation is great for them to shift their social life into the digital world at an early age. Therefore, they need to develop their social interests – with our help. In this way, they often discover impressive ways to be active and creative, as the following example shows: In *Maria's* school, money had been collected as part of a project for children at risk of going blind. Their fate had obviously touched the girl, and Maria had an idea. She set up a small table on the pavement in front of her house and sold toys, books and homemade roasted almonds to passers-by. She was very proud to be able to do something for other children in this way. •

The following books and websites gave me important impulses when writing:

Alter, Adam. *Unwiderstehlich. Der Aufstieg suchterzeugender Technologien und das Geschäft mit unserer Abhängigkeit.* (Irresistible. The rise of addictive technologies and the trade with our addiction.) Berlin-Verlag. 2020. ISBN 978-3-8270-1294-4

Bleckmann, Paula. *Medienmündig.* (Media Maturity.) Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. 2012. ISBN 978-3-608-94626-0

Buermann, Uwe. *Aufrecht durch die Medien. Chancen und Gefahren des Informationszeitalters und die neuen Aufgaben der Pädagogik.* (Upright through the media. Chances and dangers of the information age and the new tasks of pedagogy). Flensburg: Flensburger Hefte Verlag. 2007. ISBN 978-3-935679-38-1

"Dopamin (Dopamine)": Miniserien on the addictive mechanisms of Tinder, Facebook and Co. <https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/RC-017841/dopamin>. Available from 10 September 2020 to 3 September 2023.

Feibel, Thomas. *Jetzt pack doch mal das Handy weg.* (Will you just put away that mobile phone.) Berlin: Ullstein. 2017. ISBN 978-3-548-37719-3

Lewis, Paul. "Our minds can be hijacked: the tech insiders who fear a smartphone dystopia". In: *The Guardian*, 5 July 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/.../2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia>

Perret, Eliane. "Das Smartphone – ein Geschenk oder ein gemeinsames Projekt? (The smartphone – a gift or a shared project?)" in: *Current Concerns* no. 24 of 10 November 2020

Planet Wissen. "Soziale Medien – Wie sicher sind unsere Daten? (Social media – How secure is our data?)" [www.planet-wissen.de](http://www.planet-wissen.de), accessed 26 February 2019, available until 26 February 2024.

"Soziale Netzwerke: Die wichtigsten Social-Media-Plattformen im Überblick (Social networks: An overview of the most important social media platforms)". [www.ionos.de](http://www.ionos.de)

Spyri, Johanna. *Keiner zu klein, ein Helfer zu sein. Geschichten für Kinder und solche, die Kinder lieb haben.* (There's no one too small to be a helper. Stories for children and those who love children.) Zurich: Ernst Waldmann Verlag

Wunsch, Albert. *Droge Verwöhnung. Eine Erziehung zu mehr Eigenverantwortlichkeit.* (Pampering as a drug. An education towards more personal responsibility. Munich: Kösel-Verlag. 2013

Weiss, Jennifer. "Die wichtigsten sozialen Medien. Ein Überblick (The most important social media. An overview)". [www.blog.mediakraft.de](http://www.blog.mediakraft.de), accessed 22 February 2021

Various short films for children on the topic of social media at [www.logo.de](http://www.logo.de), accessed 22 February 2021

Letter to  the Editor

## Human sympathy is anything but a racist assault

In the age of our world-historically unique prosperity, thanks to active and good people, we finally learn the correctness and the only eternal and basic truths, which should determine our lives from now on. These truths may not be questioned and so far, we did not want to take note of them because of our male arrogance and white hubris. High time, I was finally enlightened to realise that it is extreme racism to stand next to a foreign person and ask her where she is from. Here, I expose why this caused me such deep, incurable mental injuries.

From 1960 to 2004 I was on the road professionally in very many countries on all continents. Everywhere and on every occasion, for example in Lagos or in Tanzania, in the centre of Nairobi, in a lift in Johannesburg, in a bus in Shanghai, in Calcutta, in a train to New Delhi, in Bombay, in a hotel bar high up in Kathmandu and in a temple in Lhasa, on Sugarloaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro, in Buenos Aires, on Grenada and Jamaica, in a port in the Azores, on a US base on the Panama Canal, in Syd-

ney and Wellington, in Hawaii, yes, even in Fiji: Everywhere and again I was asked where I was from – usually followed by a positive comment when I mentioned Switzerland. In the subway in Beijing, the Chinese bench neighbour who approached me even exclaimed loudly: "Ah, the Swiss, the most peaceful and defensible people in the world." In places where I was particularly conspicuous because of my white skin or the shapes of my eyes, nose, lips, body or clothes, which were different from those of the locals, for example in Africa, India, China, Saudi Arabia, etc., I was approached more often than average. I always felt that this was a pleasant expression of the primal human need for contact with other people and interest in other cultures, and I was happy to respond. Often this resulted in interesting and informative conversations, in which I learned a lot about the country I was visiting. Now and then even friendships evolved that lasted for a while until the worldwide distances between us put an end to them.

Thanks to the politically correct activists, who today have the monopoly to form opinions and determine what is politically correct, I have understood that it is evil racism to ask a foreign-looking person the question about his origin, who is therefore in the same position as I was for decades in all countries: being a non-native. Unfortunately, this means that all the people all over the world – the Africans, the Indians, the Germans and the English, the Chinese, the Russians, the Indians in South America and all the others – who asked me the question about my origin probably feigned friendliness and surely only feigned interest – they were nothing else than sneaky racists.

All my sunny memories of so many seemingly nice people all over the world now became incurable, deep psychological traumata, because the politically correct showed me in their articles that I had been a naive victim of racists all my life.

Gotthard Frick, Bottmingen

# Corona in Egypt: The small miracle of Itmiah

by Karim El-Gawhary

*In Egypt, the schools are closed. A twelve-year-old teaches maths, English and religion in her home village.*

Two water buffaloes are peacefully chewing their cud. Somewhat bored, they look at the village school opposite Itmiah, a small town in Egypt's Nile Delta, a two-hour drive from Cairo. Not much is going on: the school that is located next to a field on the edge of the village, has been closed since the beginning of the year because of the Corona pandemic, like all schools in the country. Instead of the usual shouting of the children during breaks: silence in the three-storey building. Only the fluttering of the Egyptian flag in the wind can be heard.

While in Germany parents complain about the hardships of online home-schooling during Corona and the consequences for families and children, in other parts of the world the pandemic means a total cessation of classes. According to estimates by the Egyptian Ministry of Communications, 52 per cent of the population has no internet connection. In the village of Itmiah, hardly any children know the luxury of having their own computer. For them, as for most of the other 19 million pupils in the Nile country's public school system, the closure of their school means the complete cancellation of lessons.

If it weren't for *Reem El-Khoury*. She is something of a heroine in Egyptian everyday education – a very young heroine. Reem herself is just twelve years old. Every morning she sets up her blackboard on the rough outer brick wall of her modest house. Then she spreads a large mat on the village street which serves as a classroom for the next few hours. Everything is ready for the first lesson of the day for the children from the neighbourhood. Today, a good dozen children gather, sit down on the mat and spread schoolbooks and notebooks on the floor. Like Reem, almost all of them with a face mask.

Reem in jeans, in her cream-coloured blouse, with long wide sleeves and her wine-red headscarf already looks like a real Egyptian teacher. She teaches Arabic, mathematics, English and religion to children up to the age of nine. What originally started as a game has evolved into a substitute for the lessons lost in Corona times. "When Corona started, the children played all day long in the street of the village. I thought it would be better to teach them. We started with our textbooks and notebooks. Then someone in the village donated the blackboard to me", she says.

Reem describes her day: Every morning now, she gives lessons in front of her



*The twelve-year-old Reem El-Khoury teaches her classmates in her home village in Egypt. (Picture Karim El-Gawhary)*

house. After that she studies her own material at home in order to stay update to date when school opens again. In the evening she prepares the next lesson for the other children. She has a natural authority, and all the children listen attentively and want to impress her with their answers. "Reem said, come, let's play something new. We brought notebooks and pens and started writing," says eight-year-old *Muhammad*, who sits on the front part of the mat and eagerly takes notes.

Reem conducts the lessons based on what she knows from her own village school. She writes a word in Arabic and English slowly on the blackboard and checks her textbook again to make sure everything is correct. Then she points to the board and calls out "kitab", the Arabic

word for book, "yaani" (which means) and "book". From a dozen little mouths this is repeated passionately and loudly, "Kitab yaani book", followed by an "Assad yaani lion". "Assad means lion". But Reem's real passion is mathematics. She says that she definitely wants to be a maths teacher when she grows up.

Proud of the village's achievement, some of the mothers also watch the lessons. Reem's teacher from the village school is also present. "Reem is always very attentive and smart in school. Then Corona came. At first, I thought they were just playing, but then I saw that my daughter pays better attention in Reem's lessons than when I teach her at home," says *Shaima Adallah*. No one can say when the real

continued on page 16

**“Corona in Egypt ...”**

continued from page 15

school will reopen: “We are waiting for a decision from the school authorities,” she explains.

Reem, meanwhile, has called break and in that second, she transforms from teacher to child again as she romps through the village alleys playing tag with her pupils. After half an hour, break is over. Enthusi-

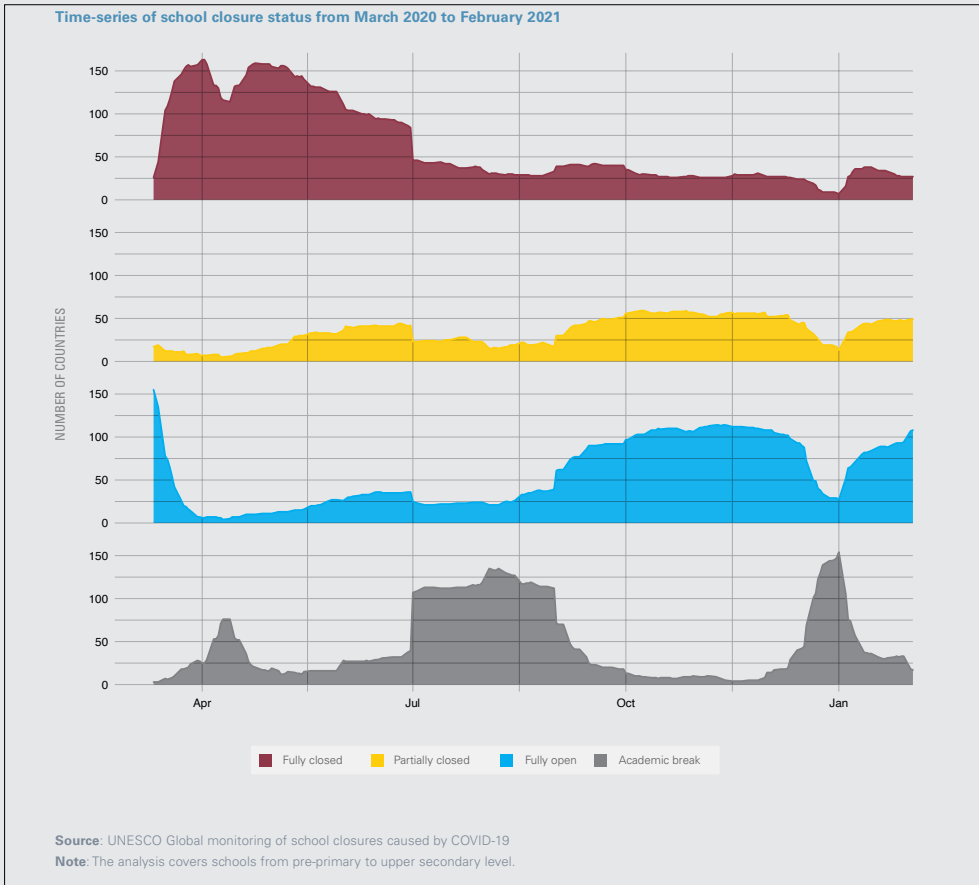
astically, her pupils run back to the teaching mat, jumping and tumbling over their books and booklets to take their seats on the mat in the village alley again. There are probably few places in this world where pupils return to class so enthusiastically after a break.

Once again it is quiet and only the braying of a donkey a few alleys away can be heard, who obviously refuses to pull his

cart any further through the village. The children are waiting for their young teacher Reem to continue her lessons. With her modest means, Reem is celebrating a tiny educational victory every day on the Egyptian Corona front in her village in the Nile Delta.

Source: With friendly permission by the author. First published by *Rheinische Post* of 6 February 2021 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

**UNICEF: “School closures have devastating consequences for children’s learning and wellbeing”**



Source: UNESCO Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19  
 Note: The analysis covers schools from pre-primary to upper secondary level.

cc. On 2 March 2021 the United Nations Children’s Fund (*UNICEF*) published a study on the extent and consequences of school closures as a result of the Corona pandemic, particularly in the world’s poorer countries. The press release of 2 March 2021 stated: “Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns, according to new data released today by *UNICEF*. Furthermore, around 214 million children globally – or 1 in 7 – have missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning.” It continues: “Two-thirds of those countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean, affecting nearly 98 million

schoolchildren. Of the 14 countries, Panama has kept schools closed for the most days, followed by El Salvador, Bangladesh, and Bolivia.” “School closures have devastating consequences for children’s learning and wellbeing. The most vulnerable children and those unable to access remote learning are at an increased risk of never returning to the classroom, and even being forced into child marriage or child labour. According to latest data by *UNESCO*, more than 888 million children worldwide continue to face disruptions to their education due to full and partial school closures. The majority of schoolchildren worldwide rely on their schools as a place where they can inter-

act with their peers, seek support, access health and immunization services and a nutritious meal. The longer schools remain closed, the longer children are cut off from these critical elements of childhood.” The figures given by *UNICEF* do not reflect the full extent of the school closures. There are no figures for East, South, West, Central Africa, Europe and Central Asia. *UNICEF* calls attention to the need for governments to prioritise the reopening of schools.

Source: *COVID-19: Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost a full year, says UNICEF*