

Current Concerns

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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Syria: Ten years of war

by Karin Leukefeld, Bonn and Damascus



Karin Leukefeld
(Picture Tilo
Gräser)

In March 2011 an uprising started in Syria with protests in several cities escalating violently in the same month. In vain, the opposition within Syria called for dialogue

with the government rather than taking up arms. In July 2011, 150 Syrian members of the opposition met in Damascus putting forward three demands to the government: no armed forces in residential areas, release of prisoners, and dialogue. At the same time, the “Free Syrian Army” was founded in Turkey and went to war in Syria, having been armed from abroad.

The events and the war that followed were fueled by “social media” from the Syrian opposition abroad, *Al Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* channels, while major Western agencies and media houses were spreading the news around the world. The media were followed by anti-government militants, then international troops moved in. Russia and Iran supported the Syrian government. Turkey and the US-led international anti-IS alliance supported the government opponents, arming and training them.

Ten years later, the war-torn country is once again in the spotlight. Politicians parade themselves with international and private aid organisations, talking about the suffering of the people, the need to help and urging donations. The Syrian opposition, mostly living abroad, keeps pointing the finger at the government in Damascus and is supported by Western countries in return.

Political approaches to a solution and offers for dialogue are stagnating. Parts of northern Syria are still occupied by Turkey and troops of the US-led “anti-IS alliance”. Local government opponents – jihadists in the northwest and Kurds in the northeast – are establishing new political and economic structures with foreign aid and money. Syria is denied access to its national resources of oil, gas, wheat, cotton and water.



Ten years of proxy war by supporting terrorist organisations and by means of sanctions that violate international law have not yet dissuaded the people in Syria from wanting to determine their own lives and build their country themselves – including this Syrian family business. (Picture Karin Leukefeld)

About 6.5 million people have left Syria. Most of them have been living as refugees in camps in neighboring countries for years. Around one million people, including large parts of the technical and medical educational elite, were able to reach Europe, especially Germany. Those who are still living in their homeland or in refugee camps in neighboring countries are reminded daily of what they have lost.

Aid organisations: politically helpless ...

Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the *Red Cross* (ICRC), referred to the difficult humanitarian situation in Syria exacerbated by a severe economic crisis and, furthermore, the Corona pandemic further isolating the country. Civilians, he said, are paying the price of a lack of political breakthrough. “We need a political solution to end the conflict,” Maurer said prior to his planned visit to Syria. “The people of Syria cannot afford to endure another year like this, let alone another ten”.

Under the heading “10 years of war in Syria”, the government-affiliated German *Welthungerhilfe* (German aid for world

hunger), founded in December 1962 by then President *Heinrich Lübke*, published a video clip on the situation of children: “A whole generation grows up in ruins,” is the title of the slow-motion footage on the organisation’s website. Not to be overlooked, the button “Your donation counts” reminding the public: 43 euros for a hygiene package, 100 euros provide 1000 people with daily bread, 200 euros help to run a “protective space” for 500 women and children.

... politically instrumentalised

A *Welthungerhilfe* staff member recently visited a refugee camp in Azaz and reported on it in numerous media. Azaz is a Syrian town located north of Aleppo, about 10 km from the Syrian-Turkish border. Azaz is controlled by Turkey and by combat units of the former “Free Syrian Army”, now calling itself the “National Syrian Army”. Native inhabitants of the village told the author (in Aleppo in January 2020) that family members stayed in Azaz to preserve their houses and fields. They were forced to sell their products in the markets in Turkey and not in Aleppo, as they had used to do.

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Azaz is considered the base of the self-proclaimed Syrian Government in Exile, which is also supported by Germany, and German *Welthungerhilfe* cooperates there with *IHSAN Relief & Development*, among others. The organisation, which is close to the Syrian opposition, considers itself a "service organisation" for externally financed aid and development and, according to its own information, it is active in areas in the northwest of Syria and in Deraa, areas that are controlled by armed government opponents.

The Syria coordinator of *Welthungerhilfe* referred to the Fifth EU Pledging Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" at the end of March to raise money to keep funding the work of aid organisations in and around Syria in order to improve the situation for the population. Furthermore, it is important that cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria be continued and, if possible, expanded. The UN Security Council is to decide on this in June.

Effects of the sanctions are not an issue

Syria rejects this and wants to distribute all aid within Syria to all regions. The country is also demanding support or at least an end to the obstructions in the process of reconstruction. But the EU and the USA reject this because they would lose influence in Syria. The business with the help pushes necessary long-term political solutions into the background. The effects of the unilateral EU and US sanctions against Syria are not an issue, although UN officials repeatedly denounce the devastating consequences.

For thousands of staff of national and international aid organisations in and around war-torn Syria, it is important that their projects are funded and their salaries too. Many seem to have forgotten that the goal of their work is not to provide makeshift care for people in unbearable shelters, but to return these people to their homes. Humanitarian aid can only be temporary, explained the staff mem-

ber of a large UN organisation, who did not want to be named. In conversation with the author in Damascus (September 2020), she said that the goal must be for people to find work, housing, health care, school and education, security and happiness again in their homeland. No one wants or should be dependent on aid packages and live in tents for the rest of his life.

No policy of détente in Syria

While the economic situation in Syria continued to deteriorate in 2020, the EU again extended its unilateral economic sanctions against the country and signalled absolutely no willingness to talk. Not with Russia or Iran, even less with Syria. Only two months after the death of Foreign Minister *Walid Mouallem* in November 2020, his successor, Foreign Minister *Feisal Mekdad*, was added to the EU sanctions list. The EU sanctions list against Syria comprises 289 persons and 70 companies and organisations. Détente looks different.

The USA, in alliance with the Kurdish-dominated self-government in the north-east of the country, is not only securing the plundering of Syria's oil, wheat, cotton and water resources, Washington extended the threat of sanctions with the "Caesar Act" far beyond Syria to all those who do business with Syria as a state, company or individual. Not affected are states which, like Germany, finance so-called "stabilisation projects" in the Turkish-controlled areas around Azaz or in Idlib, or which, like Japan, recently transferred millions of US dollars to an opposition fund "for stabilisation" in north-eastern Syria.

Cold War and geostrategic interests

With the expansion of illegal military bases on Syrian territory, Washington is signalling that it has no intention of leaving Syria and the region soon. This was underlined recently by the airstrikes by US fighter jets on Iraqi security forces on the Syrian side of the Al Bukamal border crossing, which connects Syria and Iraq. This is the only border crossing through which Syrian traders can currently trans-

port their goods to Iraq and from there on to the Gulf states: Textiles from Aleppo, citrus fruits from the coastal region or vegetables from Deraa. The more direct border crossing between Syria and Iraq, Al Tanf/Al Walid, is blocked by an illegal US military base.

The USA and the EU with their allies are building a front against Iran. Nato defence ministers decided at the end of February to increase the Nato mission in Iraq almost tenfold from 500 to 4,000 soldiers. Massive armament of the Arab Gulf states, of Jordan and Israel speaks its own language. After ten years of war in Syria, the geopolitical goals are clear. The decision, still made under the *Trump* administration, to include Israel in the US Central Command area is an accolade for Israel. For a long time, there had been thoughts of building a new Nato with the Arab Gulf monarchies under Israeli leadership.

EU marks the region as a sphere of interest

The EU and Germany make no secret of their geostrategic claim in the "southern neighbourhood", and so political and financial resources are not put into debt relief and strengthening the badly battered economies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, but into the military expansion of their own and allied forces in the region. For the population, what remains at best are (aid) projects of civil-military cooperation – a tent, a hygiene package – to secure the geostrategic goals.

A concept for dialogue and reconciliation, as attempted since 2017 by the *Astana Initiative* of Russia, Iran and Turkey, exists neither in the EU nor in the USA. With the Astana Initiative two of the opposing sides in Syria – the Syrian government and an alliance of Islamic government opponents – are in talk and are supported by the UN Special Envoy for Syria *Geir O. Pedersen* and the *International Committee of the Red Cross*. The USA and the EU are boycotting the Astana process because they have other plans for the region. The people who live there are not being asked. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Bogeyman Russia – how honestly are we being informed?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

For some time now and with increasing vehemence – by now almost daily – the reader, listener or viewer of Western or NATO-oriented media products – also in Switzerland – has been presented with an image of Russia that massively attacks the entire domestic and foreign policy of the country and only portrays it in a negative light. And when the headline of an interview with the US-American historian Anne Applebaum, published by t-online on 10 March 2021, reads: “Historian in interview: ‘Germans have no idea how dangerous Putin is’”, then this illustrates – surely unintentionally – the truth about this whole media propaganda: it was, is and remains untrustworthy. But it is very much the background music to a policy aiming at demarcation and confrontation rather than understanding and cooperation.

What does freedom of press mean?

“Freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by means of broadcasts and films” are valuable assets and basic rights. “There shall be no censorship”, states the same article of the German Basic Law. The wording of all Western constitutions is similar. The historical, political and ethical context of such formulations is less frequently spoken of – even less so the duties and responsibilities associated with such rights.

An example illustrating this: On 8 March, a major Swiss daily newspaper published a detailed article about the head of the Russia department of the internet platform *Bellingcat*. The title of the article is a quote from this person: “We are war reporters in a hybrid conflict”. And the subtitle adds ominously: “The director of the *Bellingcat* research group has exposed the Kremlin – even in Vienna he does not feel safe”. The article pays great tribute to the work of this director, and his assessments of Russia – see box – are adopted unquestioningly. The reader learns very little about *Bellingcat* itself, only that it is supposed to be an “investigative platform”.

Another information about *Bellingcat* can be found in the German *Nachdenkseiten*. On 2 March 2021 – i. e. before the 8 March article in the Swiss daily – under the headline “When Western quality journalism, propaganda and info war against Russia go hand in hand” it read: A media network that – at least until 2018, which is the year of the leaked information available – had set itself the goal of “regime change” in Russia. It included “the companies *Zinc Network*, *Institute for Statecraft*, *Aktis Strategy*, *DFR Lab*, the

US-Russia relations at an impasse

km. Almost word-for-word, many Western media reported on 17 March 2021 that a US intelligence report accused Russia of trying to influence the outcome of the 2020 US election campaign with a disinformation campaign in favour of *Donald Trump*. This had most likely been done with the explicit permission of President *Putin*. The report had already been presented to *Joe Biden* at the end of last year – before he took office.

Now a revised version, which is not subject to secrecy, has been made available to the public by the Director of US National Intelligence *Avril Haines*. The intelligence agencies had concluded that “Russian actors” had spread “disinformation” about *Joe Biden* during the 2020 election campaign and afterwards and had tried to undermine the legitimacy of the American electoral process with “false narratives”. Russia had tried to influence the outcome of the election with consistent messages in favour of *Donald Trump*. The Russian side had tried to “push influence narratives” to the American public. The American intelligence services had “high confidence” in this assessment.

Joe Biden has now responded publicly to the report for the first time. The Russian president, *Biden* said, will “pay a prize” [sic] for trying to undermine his 2020 presidential candidacy (in order) to help *Donald Trump* win. *Biden* said this in an interview with US broadcast-

er *ABC*. Asked what the consequences would be, he said: “You will see shortly”. *Biden* had also been asked in the interview whether he thought *Putin* “is a killer”. *Joe Biden* replied: “Uh-huh. I do”.

Various representatives of the Russian government have rejected the intelligence report as inaccurate. Neither in 2016 nor in 2020 did Russia try to influence the US elections. Once again, nothing concrete is named. *Biden*’s remarks about Russia’s president were insulting to the whole of Russia. One suspects that all this only serves to initiate a new round of sanctions against Russia. The US government again adopted sanctions on 17 March and announced further ones.

On the same day, the Russian government called its ambassador in Washington, *Anatoly Antonov*, back to Moscow for consultations. Together with *Antonov*, relations between the two countries were to be discussed, the Foreign Ministry in Moscow announced in the evening of the day. The talks are about how to correct the relations, which are at an “impasse”. “We are interested in preventing an irreversible deterioration”, they said.

The Russian president himself also commented (see box below). He spoke of the possibility that the US President’s statement was a projection and recalled the numerous crimes of US policy in history and the present.

Media Diversity Institute, *Toro Risk Solutions* and *Ecorys*. They are all companies that specialise in waging the information war against Russia and are run or funded by former high-ranking employees of the British services, the military and NATO. - or, as in the case of the ‘research network’ *Bellingcat* [!], are financed by them.”

What is *Joe Biden* to make of this?¹ At the very least, one wonders why there was no mention of it in the major Swiss daily newspaper. And one also wonders: does this non-mention really match to what the mothers and fathers of press freedom had in mind?

“Audiatur et altera pars” ...

Another foundation of good media work and probably also of freedom of press is the sentence: “audiatur et altera pars” – listen to the other side. This is particularly important for media with many readers, listeners or viewers, especially when

the “other side” is hardly heard in the published opinion of a country. In order to form an opinion, the citizen must be able to study as many points of view as possible and not – as is widely the case – to be fobbed off with a few fragments of the “other side”. Regarding Russia, it is noticeable that the official representatives of the country no longer have their say in our media. Is that because they do not take a stand? No, there are numerous statements on Russian websites – but who takes the trouble to look there?

... because for a war most people pay a terribly high price

One such official Russian website is that of the Russian embassies in every country, including Switzerland. Only a few days ago, it came to the author of these lines to look there as well. And what he found was numerous corrections to Swiss media products, which, however, were not to be

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Here's how Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted to US President Joe Biden's comments

"With regard to my US colleague's remark, we have, indeed, as he said, met in person. What would I tell him? I would say "stay healthy." I wish him good health. I am saying this without irony or tongue in cheek. This is my first point. Secondly, taking a broader approach to this matter, I would like to say that difficult, dramatic, and bloody events abound in the history of every nation and every state. But when we evaluate other people, or even other states and nations, we are always facing a mirror, we always see ourselves in the reflection, because we project our inner selves onto the other person.

You know, I remember when we were children and played in the yard, we had arguments occasionally and we used to say: whatever you call me is what you are called yourself. This is no coincidence or just a kids' saying or joke. It has a very deep psychological undercurrent. We always see ourselves in another person and think that he or she is just like us, and evaluate the other person's actions based on our own outlook on life.

With regard to the US establishment, the ruling class – not the American people who are mostly honest, decent and sincere people who want to live in peace and friendship with us, something we are aware of and appreciate, and we will rely on them in the future – their mindset was formed in rather challenging circumstances which we are all aware of. After all, the colonisation of the American continent by the Europeans went hand-in-hand with the extermination of

the local people, the genocide, as they say today, outright genocide of the Indian tribes followed by a very tough, long and difficult period of slavery, a very cruel period. All of that has been part of life in America throughout the history of the United States to this day. Otherwise, where would the Black Lives Matter movement come from? To this day, African Americans face injustice and oppression.

The ruling class of the United States tends to address domestic and foreign policy issues based on these assumptions. After all, the United States is the only country to have used nuclear weapons, mind you, against a non-nuclear state – Japan, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of WW II. There was absolutely no military need for the bombing. It was nothing but the extermination of civilians. I am bringing this up, because I know that the United States and its leaders are determined to maintain certain relations with us, but on matters that are of interest to the United States and on its terms. Even though they believe we are just like them, we are different. We have a different genetic, cultural and moral code. But we know how to uphold our interests. We will work with the United States, but in the areas that we are interested in and on terms that we believe are beneficial to us. They will have to reckon with it despite their attempts to stop our development, despite the sanctions and insults. They will have to reckon with this.

We, with our national interests in mind, will promote our relations with all countries, including the United States."

Source: <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65172>

A little later, the Russian president added:

"We should continue our relationships. And what's more, you know, I was just thinking about it. Last time the phone call was initiated by President Biden. I want to invite President Biden to continue our discussion, but on condition that we do it actually live, online. But with no delays, directly in an open, direct discussion. I think that this would be interesting for the Russian people, for the US people and for many other countries as well. I mean that we as the largest nuclear powers, have a special responsibility for strategic security on the planet.

We can discuss bilateral ties, the fight against the pandemic, the settlement of regional conflicts, and issues pertaining to regional stability there are many of them, I will not list them here. And also about other problems that humanity is facing today [...].

But let me repeat: on condition that it will be a direct, fair conversation, and live."

Source: Translated by Current Concerns from the German <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/ob-das-weisse-haus-darauf-geht-putins-vorschlag-fuer-ein-live-uebertragenes-gespraech-mit-biden-im-o-ton/> of 18 March 2021

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read in these media themselves. Corrected were articles from the "Tages-Anzeiger", the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", *Weltwoche*, *Finanz und Wirtschaft*. It is likely that the Russian embassy does not have the resources to comment daily on everything negative that can be read, heard or seen about Russia. Nevertheless, in the spirit of "audiatur et altera pars", we recommend that you look at the website of the Embassy of Russia in Bern. The internet address for the press releases is: https://switzerland.mid.ru/web/switzerland_de/pressmitteilungen.

The author of these lines hopes that this will help questioning a little more the claims in the "bogeyman Russia" and thus also the war preparations in our countries which are getting more and more obvious. Preparations for war, which – as always in history – are justified with an enemy stereotype, but actually touch on very tangible interests – as always in history about maintaining or gaining power. Most people have nothing to gain from this. They would also have to pay a terribly high price for the next war. •

¹ Unfortunately, the author did not succeed in getting a clear picture of what *Bellingcat* really is. En-

tering the term in *Google*, for example, first results in nothing but positive portrayals – *Bellingcat* itself and *Wikipedia* are at the top, followed by numerous Western-oriented media – and, only after a longer search, a few critical voices. The German *Wikipedia* page, for example, does not mention the criticism of *Bellingcat* at all. But there you can find the following interesting passage: "In December 2020, the former CIA deputy director of operations for Europe and Eurasia, *Marc Polymeropoulos*, praised *Bellingcat*'s work in an article in *Foreign Policy*: 'I don't want to be too dramatic, but we love that, instead of trying to get things clarified or worrying about classification issues, you can just refer to their work.'" Somewhat more detailed than the German-language *Wikipedia* is the English-language entry. Here one learns, for example, that *Bellingcat* is also funded by the US *National Endowment for Democracy* (NED) and the *Open Society Foundation*, among others.

Not putting Europe under US tutelage

Former high-ranking French military officials criticise “NATO 2030” scathingly

Open letter of the French “Cercle de Réflexion Interarmées” to NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg

Geopragma/cc. Should the plan “Nato 2030” be approved by the members of the alliance as it was proposed by NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg in February 2021 this would amount to an almost irreversible step towards strategic submission of Europe and France under American hegemony. The main argument which is presented in this document in several variations claims an allegedly unavoidable confrontation against two natural “enemies”, Russia and China, justifying total NATO solidarity and further concentration of all lines of command in American hands. As a reaction to this plan the “Cercle de Réflexion Interarmées” publishes this open letter.

As an organisation, the Cercle de Réflexion Interarmées (CRI) is independent from both government agencies and military hierarchy. It brings together former generals and high-ranking officers retired from service in all three branches of the armed forces (army, navy and air-force) as well as several civilians. Their goal is to putting the Army back in the spotlight heart of the nation from which it is the emanation and to mobilise energies in order to be better heard by political decision makers and the public opinion.

It is high time, the signees of the letter point out, to open out eyes and resist machinations which are not in our national interests but would render all efforts towards European strategic autonomy futile. In this article we present a translation of the letter.

Orientation of NATO towards a Russian and Chinese “threat”

On Thursday, 18 February 2021, the study “Nato 2030” which you had commissioned was made public. It outlines the strategic goals of NATO over the next ten years. From the outset it appears that NATO’s entire orientation is based on the paradigm of a dual threat, one from Russia, presented as being active today, and the other from China, a potential threat to come. Two major ideas emerge from this study.

The first is the enlistment of Europeans against China’s global domination, in exchange for American protection of Europe against the Russian threat.

The second is the circumvention of the consensus rule [in NATO’s line of command]¹, in several ways: operations in coalitions of the willing; implementation of decisions that no longer require

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consensus; and above all the delegation of authority to SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe, always an American general) on the grounds of efficiency and speeding up decision making.

Studying this “Nato 2030” project clearly reveals a document of tranquil bad faith, of quiet disinformation and of instrumentalisation of this ‘Russian threat,’ a ‘threat’ patiently created and then maintained, so as to ‘bring to heel’ the European allies behind the United States, in the perspective of an forthcoming battle with China for world hegemony.

History lesson about NATO: worse than just threats

Therefore, Mr. Secretary General, it is crucial to remember certain historical facts to shed some light on reasons and reality of this Russian threat prior to any consideration of the future according to the “Nato 2030” project. Indeed, history does not start in 2014 and jumping in a single sentence from invoking the “constructive partnership” allegedly launched by NATO in the early 1990ies directly to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (right at the beginning of the chapter entitled “Russia”) as if nothing had happened between the “kind Russia of the day” and the evil “Russian Bear” of today is a sign of blatant historical malevolence regarding the European-American-Russian relations.

NATO’s eastward enlargement

In reality it had been NATO who enlarged their territory up to the Russian borders since the 1990ies, certainly according to the wish of the joining countries but contrary to the assurances given in the Moscow treaty of 1991² – a movement which brought NATO armies ever closer to Russia year by year, making NATO the beneficiary of the crumbling Soviet Union.

War of aggression against Serbia

It had also been NATO which, without any UN mandate, bombed Serbia for 78 days³, with more than 58,000 air sorties, staging an extensive intelligence operation of manipulation and incitement of hate among important members of the treaty organisation (by the alleged Serbian “Potkova” plan and the Racak affair) thereby promoting the creation of an independent Kosovo, forcing a sovereign state to accept the secession of one of its provinces in violation of international law which was justified with the people’s right of self-determination, thus humiliating Russia through its Serbian ally. Could the same principle be applied to Crimea in parallel, which is inhabited by more than 90% Russians and which joined Russia without a single shot being fired?

“Conquest of the East” and rejection of the “European Security Pact”

Again, it was NATO which pursued its dynamic “conquest of the East” and rejected the Russian offer for a renewed “European security pact” in 2008 which was meant to trade the settlement of several unresolved conflicts in Eastern Europe (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) in exchange for certain neutrality of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova towards NATO, in other words the immediate Russian “hinterland”.

Coup d’etat in Ukraine

And with the same spirit of conquest, perceived as a real strangulation by Russia, the violent protests of the “Euro-Maidan” were promoted in 2013, a textbook coup d’état which ousted the legitimate elected Ukrainian president because he was considered too pro-Russian to continue the policies of tying Ukraine with NATO. We

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know what happened next, with the secessions of Crimea and Donbas.

Missiles against Russia

After NATO had included Russia in their *Theatre missile defence system*⁴ in the early 2000s which was meant to protect "the United States and its allies, including Russia" from a fired missile attack by «rogue states», mainly Iran and North Korea [sic], this system was transformed into a global ballistic missile defense architecture in Europe (BMDE) at the Lisbon NATO summit of 2010, now no longer a theatre system but a real protective shield, turned against Russia and not protecting it. Again, it was NATO who assured Russia that this anti-ballistic missile system built right at Russian doorsteps was purely defensive in nature, but they neglected to specify that in reality these ABM missile launchers (MK41) could just as well be used to fire Tomahawk offensive missiles against Russian territory (nuclear or conventional missiles with ranges greater than 2000km, depending on the version). This clearly violated the INF treaty, in force at the time of their deployment; it went far beyond the controversy whether Russian 9M729 missiles had a firing range of 520 or only 480km!

Russia responded

As a result, the potential threat thus created to Russia's second-strike-capability, the basis of its nuclear deterrent, challenged the American-Russian power balance and pushed Russia to suspend all cooperation within the NRC (*NATO-Russia Council*) at the end of 2013, thus even before the 2014 Crimea affair, an action then used by NATO to justify – a posteriori – the BMDE protection of Europe in the face of the new 'Russian threat'.

Twenty years of painting the Russian threat in-order to separate Russia from Europe

So yes, Mr. Secretary General, at the end of these twenty years of sustained efforts on the part of NATO to recreate the 'Russian enemy,' which is indispensable for the survival of an organisation that is theoretically purely defensive, yes, Russia has finally stiffened, and sought in the East the cooperation that the West refused it. The effort to drive a wedge between Russia and Europe, patiently carried out over the years by your predecessors and by yourself under the constant authority of the United States, is today well under way, since Russia, at last, once again 'the Russian threat,' justifies the most provocative exercises, such as *Defender 2020*, postponed to 2021, increasingly close to its

borders, as well as the most insane new mini-nuclear employment concepts on the theatre European under the authority of the American ally, which alone holds the key.

One thousand billion dollars of NATO spending on armament against 70 billion in Russia

But no, Mr. Secretary General, today, and despite all your efforts, Russia with its military budget of 70 billion Euros (barely double that of France), does not constitute a threat to NATO with its 1 trillion Euros, 250 billion Euros of which is for all the European countries in the Alliance! But that is not your concern, because what is being aimed at through this new NATO 2030 concept is a much larger project: to involve the Atlantic Alliance in the struggle for world hegemony that is taking place between China and the United States.

Terrorism – the real threat

The actual threat is that of terrorism. The study does devote a section to this, but without ever abandoning the word 'ter-

exists, is meant to be transformed into an offensive alliance against an enemy that does not exist for Europe (even if we are not fooled by China's territorial ambitions, the impact of its economic power and the totalitarian character of its regime). But this plan goes even further towards an organisation with a global political mission that stands above any other international organisation.

... above any other international organisation

According to this report:

- NATO should introduce "mechanisms of consultation" with their allies prior to meetings of other international organisations (UN, G20, etc.), in other words "come and take instructions the day before" on how to impose them in the plenum on the next day!
- NATO intend to "bolster the political dimension of NATO" as it had "adapted its military structures and posture". "NATO should consider increasing the delegated authorities of the Secretary General to make meaningful decisions on personnel and certain budgetary

"Therefore, Mr. Secretary General, it is crucial to remember certain historical facts to shed some light on reasons and reality of this Russian threat prior to any consideration of the future according to the 'Nato 2030' project."

rorism,' nor characterising its sources, its motives, its ideological and political foundations. In other words: this narrative alleges that the only threat was a mode of action, because that is the essence of "terrorism". This way a disturbing reality is shielded away from, which is radical islamism and its messianism, which is by no means less dangerous than communism used to be. The problem is, that this very mechanism is maintained by the tremendous chaos resulting from the post-cold war US campaigns and that terrorism is even supported ideologically by *Erdogan's* Turkey, a member of NATO, as well as by Saudi Arabia, a staunch ally of the United States.

NATO: Transformation into an organisation with a global political mission

Predictably, from the first lines it gets very clear that this document is up to no good for the strategic independence of Europe because it aims quite bluntly to bring the European allies who had entertained just the faintest ambition of something like European autonomy back in line with US hegemonial interests. But that's not all, because NATO, initially a defensive alliance against an enemy which no longer

matters, as well as encouraging him/her to make the fullest use of his/her existing authorities."

- "NATO should create a more structured mechanism to support the establishment of coalitions inside existing Alliance structures and should examine ways to time-limit decision making in crisis". The aim would be for the Allies to be able to place new operations under the NATO banner even if not all were willing to participate in a possible mission.
- Or in other words: "To deal with the growing frequency of single-country blockages involving external bilateral disputes, it should consider raising the threshold for such blockages to the Ministerial level".
- "NATO should deepen consultation and cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners – Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea."
- „NATO should begin internal discussions about a possible future partnership with India.“

A threat to peace in Europe

Mr. Secretary General, since this organisation, after it had lost its external enemy,

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did not stop searching for a new political justification to maintain their military equipment but kept making-up its new Russian enemy, that today NATO tends to become a danger for Europe.

For, not content with having denied Europe the opportunity of a truly sustainable peace desired by all, including Russia, NATO, driven by the sole concern for its survival, and its justification by expansion, has only provoked a vast rearmament on both sides of Russia's borders, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, endangering peace in this Europe, which it now considers only as its future battlefield.

"NATO 2030" defies basic logic

And now, through this document which defies basic logic by claiming that the end does not have to justify the means but rather the other way round – although even the ancient Romans stated "Cedant arma togae" (let arms yield to the toga, the garment of the senators) – you would like to justify the military tools of this alliance in the future by transforming it into an inescapable political instrument for the management of large-scale international coalitions for the benefit of a true global governance, even going so far as to override the decisions of the UN and crushing national sovereignties! So no, this is

"Mr. Secretary General, since this organisation, after it had lost its external enemy, did not stop searching for a new political justification to maintain their military equipment but kept making-up its new Russian enemy, that today NATO tends to become a danger for Europe."

not to happen, Mr. Secretary General! We must stop this runaway train before it is too late! As for France, in line with the principles enunciated more than half a century ago by General *de Gaulle*, it cannot, without serious failure, lend itself to this adventurous agreement of American tutelage over Europe".

For the „Cercle de Réflexion Interarmées“ Air-Brigade General Grégoire Diamantidis*

* Grégoire Diamantidis is 75 years old, was a fighter pilot, an Air Force general, and former mayor of Lédignan in southern France. Following his military career he served as a diplomat in the OSCE, participating in the disarmament of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, as well as the former Yugoslavia.

¹ Until now, all decisions in Nato's highest political decision-making body, the Nato Council, have had to be taken unanimously. The Nato Council has its seat in Brussels and is composed of the permanent representatives (ambassadors) of the Nato member states. (Editor's note)

² Treaty of Moscow: or "treaty two plus four", signed on September 12, 1990, in Moscow, between the representatives of the two Germanies and those of the four allied powers of the Second World War, is the "treaty bearing final settlement concerning the Germany" which paved the way for German reunification and established the international status of united Germany".

³ *Operation Allied Force*. This operation, decided by NATO, after the failure of negotiations between the Kosovar separatists and Serbia under the aegis of the OSCE (Rambouillet Conference 6 February-19 March 1999), was launched without a UN mandate. , on March 24 on the basis of a vast campaign in the Western media, concerning a plan of ethnic cleansing (Potkova plan) carried out on a large scale in Kosovo by Serbia. Plan which later turned out to have been fabricated from scratch by the Bulgarian and German secret services.

⁴ *Theatre missile defense* (TMD), also called *theatre ballistic missile defense* (TBMD), deployment of nuclear and conventional missiles for the purpose of maintaining security in a specific region, or theatre, officially a missile defence system to intercept enemy missiles. (Editor's note)

Source: <https://geopragma.fr/lettre-ouverte-a-monsieur-stoltenberg-secretaire-general-de-lotan/> of 12 March 2021

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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The 2020 Foreign Policy Report of the Federal Council

Much worth reading and some inconsistencies

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 3 February 2021, the Federal Council submitted its 2020 Foreign Policy Report¹ to Parliament. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N) succinctly asks its Council to “take note of the report”, which the National Council did on 9 March (after a short debate). The Council of States will deal with it in the summer session.

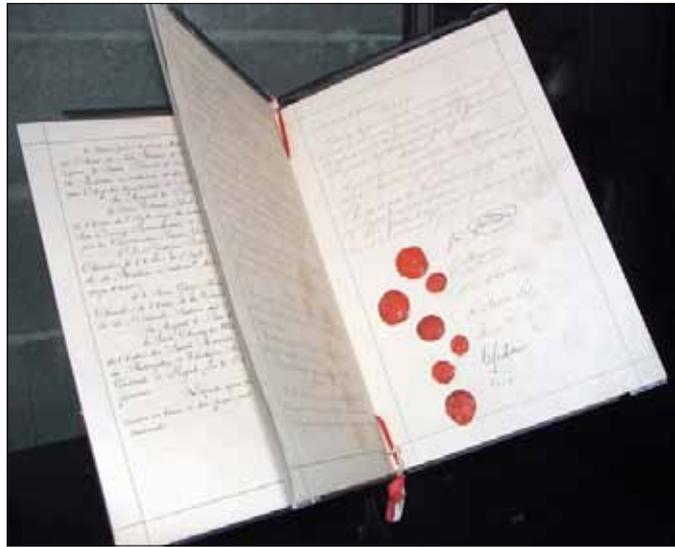
It is worth taking a look at the report to find out about the Confederation’s foreign policy activities in a bundled form, so to speak. Some of the most important areas will be taken up and commented on here. We will leave the topic of relations with the EU to one side for the moment. It contains nothing that would be new to the reader of *Current Concerns*; the issue will occupy us again on another occasion.

There are so many opportunities for the neutral and economically strong small state to contribute to a more peaceful world and to alleviate the plight of people in other countries, but also to cultivate and use exchange and cooperation with neighbouring states and the community of states. The Federal Council’s report shows that the federal administration and diplomats are indeed doing a lot. On the other hand, they should not want too much, but rather reflect on the strengths of the sovereign small state and sometimes be a little more modest. “Don’t make the fence too wide!”, Brother Klaus admonished the old Confederates – it seems to me that foreign policy makers in Bern should remember this wise advice from time to time.

According to Article 148 paragraph 3 of the Parliament Act, the Federal Council reports to Parliament on Switzerland’s foreign policy activities. The National Council and the Council of States only take note of this, so it is a mere formality. Of course, this does not mean that the Federal Council can do whatever it wants in foreign policy. To a large extent, the executive has to implement the decisions of parliament, but it can also take action itself or suggest future decisions. The sovereign has the final say on important international treaties.

Corona crisis: Only nation states can guarantee security of supply

“The year 2020 was under the spell of the pandemic.” This is the opening sentence of the report. Corona has, of course, shaped Switzerland’s foreign policy activities in many ways. The Federal Council cannot



The First Geneva Convention of 1864 “for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field” (Original: “Convention pour l’amélioration du sort des Militaires blessés dans les armées en campagne”). (Picture Wikipedia)

avoid admitting that the glaring weaknesses of globalisation were already apparent at the beginning of the pandemic: “The risks of global added value and supply chains that the COVID-19 crisis brought to light reinforce the trend towards more regionalisation and localisation.” (Report, p. 6) And further: “The pandemic brought security of supply to the highest attention. Already in February, the temporary shutdown of plants in China affected the added value chains of industry and trade, as many companies could neither fall back on stocks nor on alternative suppliers” (Report, p. 25, my emphasis, mw). The rest is well known and does not need to be reproduced here in detail: Due to the shortage of medical supplies and the health risks to the population, Switzerland, like many other states, took the necessary measures in its traffic with other states and at home (Report, p. 25f.).

The Federal Council’s claim that “the importance of the well-functioning internal market, in particular for ensuring Europe’s security of supply, has become clearly visible” at the EU level is rather daring. Every newspaper reader has noticed that the EU bureaucracy colossus, as in most crisis situations, also functioned extremely poorly in this one. In any case, the health and economic policy challenges could only be tackled effectively by the individual member states – in cooperation with other states, of course – and most EU member states had to introduce massive restrictions on the free movement of persons to protect their populations. Contradicting itself, the Federal Council then

also states: “There were predominantly national responses to the global economic crisis.” (Report, p. 26) National Councillor *Gerhard Pfister*, president *Die Mitte*, has come to the same conclusion in a recent interview: “Corona will lead to a re-assessment of globalisation. The trend towards renationalisation is unmistakable. The value of social security and supply sovereignty has become evident again.”²

Humanitarian aid in times of pandemic

The Foreign Policy Report 2020 describes the extraordinary challenges for humanitarian aid in countries whose populations were already weakened by wars and hardship before Corona: “Humanitarian engagement in 2020 was also dominated by COVID-19: according to the UN, 10.3 billion US dollars are needed to meet the humanitarian needs caused by the pandemic in the poorest countries. This is the largest appeal for donations in the history of the UN. Switzerland has provided additional funding for the international fight against COVID-19 and the humanitarian consequences.” (Report, p. 23) Specifically, Switzerland has reorganised several hundred ongoing humanitarian projects. For example, in Burkina Faso and Chad, various health facilities were equipped with materials to produce disinfection solutions. In 2020, Parliament approved around CHF 600 million in additional aid for these and similar SDC (*Swiss Agency for Develop-*

"The 2020 Foreign Policy Report ..."

continued from page 8

ment and Cooperation) projects. A number of countries (including Syria, Sudan and Kyrgyzstan, but also Italy and Greece) were supported with COVID-19 protection materials. In Geneva, Switzerland is involved in providing vaccines and tests for developing countries (Report, p. 16).

Switzerland has long been committed to improving access to clean water and basic sanitation, and is stepping up its efforts in the 2020 pandemic year, including in 200 schools in Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Nepal. In the words of the Federal Council: "The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important reliable access to water is: handwashing is the most effective and cheapest public health tool to prevent the transmission of diseases, be it corona, diarrhoeal diseases, cholera or typhoid. Yet 40 per cent of the world's population, or about 3 billion people, still have no way to wash their hands at home." (Report, p. 32/33) It is our responsibility to do our utmost to remedy this situation.

Disaster and development aid

The explosion in the port of Beirut with its terrible consequences occurred in the reporting year 2020. Swiss Disaster Relief specialises in providing rapid assistance in such situations. Within 40 hours, 38 experts from the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps were on the scene. Among other

things, they made two hospitals functional again, where numerous children, mothers and newborns could be provided with care, and repaired 19 school buildings (Report, p. 23).

International Cooperation (IC) 2017-2020: In these four years, numerous other aid projects were carried out for people in emergency situations and for reconstruction after disasters in developing countries, which are part of "normal" development aid and are not listed individually here (Report, p. 28f.). For neutral and economically well-off countries like Switzerland, there will continue to be plenty to do. With this in mind, in autumn 2020 Parliament approved the IC strategy for the next four years and the associated framework credits of CHF 11.25 billion (Report, p. 30).

Neutrality I: "Switzerland's foreign policy remains independent and committed to dialogue with all states". Really?

In view of the tense situation in the world, especially among the major powers, the Federal Council states that it is closely following the changes in world politics and is sticking to its course: "Through independent positions, good offices and skilful diplomacy, Switzerland contributes to stabilising the international order". (Report, p. 9/10) Yes, that is how neutral Switzerland should position itself in the world of states.

However, the Federal Council and its administrative team do not always stick to their own words, but often explicitly hang

their flag to the wind from Brussels or from even further west. In the 2020 reporting year, for example, Switzerland joined the EU sanctions against Belarus "after the disputed presidential elections in August and the subsequent massive use of force by the security forces against demonstrators" (Report, p. 46). It also condemned, one-to-one with NATO's narrative, "the poisoning of Alexei Nawalny with a chemical agent of the Novichok group" and called on Russia to "clarify the facts" (Report, p. 10). Switzerland has also taken over the sanctions against Venezuela and Nicaragua from the EU, on the grounds of the "continuing impairment of human rights, democracy and the rule of law". (Report, p. 51)

Actually, Swiss diplomats should draw the Federal Council's attention to the fact that a number of governments in EU/NATO states also blatantly violate human rights, democracy and the rule of law (often also international law), most of all through their wars, but also through sanctions that are contrary to international and human rights law and often primarily affect the helpless civilian population. In the last issue of Current Concerns, Professor *Alena Douhan*, UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral sanctions, reported on this in an impressive and depressing manner.³ Consequently, at least half the world of states should be subject to sanctions – it would be better for neutral Switzerland not to do so at all.

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National Council debate on the Foreign Policy Report 2020

mw. On 9 March, the National Council adopted the motion of its Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC-N) and took note of the report of the Federal Council.¹ The spokespersons of the parliamentary groups had the opportunity to address their criticisms – from the most diverse political "corners" – for example on EU policy or on migration policy. *Claudia Friedl* (social democrats, St. Gallen) as spokeswoman for the Commission welcomed the statement of the Federal Council for "the unbroken support of Switzerland for the multilateral organisations. Common rules of the game allow even small states to participate on eye level and forge alliances."

Candidacy for the UN Security Council: Lack of criticism in the National Council

Unfortunately, the majority of the Commission and most of the spokespersons of the parliamentary groups understand "participation on eye level" first and foremost as Switzerland's candidacy for the *UN Security Council 2023/24*: "Switzerland's candidacy for the Security Council 2023 is also part of Switzerland's international visibility. Participation will be a great challenge for Switzerland, but also a unique platform." (*Claudia Friedl*). Admittedly, Switzerland's good offices and in particular its involvement in 17 peace processes were positively acknowl-

edged in several votes, for example by the Green Group (*Christine Badertscher*, Bern): "We are impressed by the manifold achievements of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and thank it for this important work, whether in development cooperation, peacebuilding or in the provision of good offices. Switzerland's good reputation has a lot to do with the commitment of the FDFA". But no one raised their voice to point out the indispensable linkage of the urgently needed activities with Switzerland's neutrality status.

Increasing humanitarian aid during the Covid crisis

The COVID-19 crisis was discussed by the Commission and by all parliamentary group spokespersons as having a formative influence on Swiss foreign and development policy of the year 2020. It was positively noted that Switzerland "reprioritised ongoing cooperation programmes, responded to humanitarian aid appeals from international organisations and contributed to multilateral initiatives such as the development of and access to diagnostic tests and vaccines." (*Brigitte Crottaz*, Social Democrats, Vaud). (What is puzzling, however, is the extent to which Switzerland could help other countries to get vaccines when

it is not able to collect enough for its own population). In any case, the Commission called on the Federal Council to intensify its commitment to cope with the COVID-19 crisis and for the equitable distribution of vaccines in the poorer regions of the world.

Federal Councillor Cassis for the first time eyes a failure of the framework agreement with Brussels

The final point was made by FDFA head *Ignazio Cassis*, among other things with a remarkable statement on the controversial framework agreement with Brussels: "The consolidation of the bilateral path with the EU remains difficult [...]. Whether we can go the last mile with the institutional framework agreement remains to be seen. If this is not the case, the European question will remain central. An independent foreign policy does not mean that we could turn away from Europe". We can live very well without a framework agreement, but Switzerland remains in the middle of Europe – surrounded by friends (most of the time). No one wants to "turn away" from the EU, Mr. Federal Councillor, we want to work together, but on an equal footing.

¹ 21.009 Foreign Policy 2020. Report of the Federal Council. National Council debate of 9 March 2021

"The 2020 Foreign Policy Report ..."

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Neutrality II: participating in the community of states – without a seat on the UN Security Council

Switzerland has always been very active in UN organisations and contributed much more financially than a membership fee long before it became a full member. For the UN city of Geneva, for example, taxpayers dig deep into their pockets, something most Swiss people take for granted. In 2020 alone, Switzerland was elected to the *UNESCO Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* for the next four years. *Daniel Fink* was re-elected as Swiss expert of the *UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture*, and *Stéphane Rey* was appointed by the UN Secretary General as a member of the advisory committee of the *Peacebuilding Fund* (Report, p. 53). At the UN General Assembly, Switzerland, together with five other states, initiated the first UN resolution to address the COVID-19 crisis, which was adopted unanimously (Report, p. 52).

After a clear rejection in 1986, the Swiss sovereign agreed to join the UN as a full member just in 2002. The main argument of the opponents of accession (the author was one of them) was the incompatibility with neutrality, especially after the Federal Councillor at that time and head of the FDFA, *Joseph Deiss*, had untruthfully claimed that a seat on the Security Council would not violate neutrality.

Now, unfortunately, the time has come. The Federal Council has announced (with the approval of the parliamentary majority) Switzerland's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council for the years 2023/24 (*Current Concerns* has reported on this⁴). According to the Federal Council, Switzerland wants to "share responsibility for peace and security" (Report, p. 10). Not like this! Neutral Switzerland has enough constructive possibilities to work for a more peaceful world. It has no place in the circle of power of the great powers.

Good services and peacebuilding

"The demand for Switzerland's contributions to peace and security remains high. This applies in particular to the good services". This is surprisingly and happily recorded in the 2020 Foreign Policy Report (Report, p. 18).

As part of its protecting power mandates for mutual relations between the United States and the Republic of Iran, Switzerland contributed, for example, to the release from prison of a US citizen in Iran and an Iranian in the United States in December 2019 and June 2020 (during *Donald Trump's* presidency). "In the field of mediation, Switzerland prepared and accompanied seventeen peace processes in the reporting year, for example

in Libya, in Cameroon and in Ukraine". In Libya, Switzerland, together with the Netherlands and under the aegis of the UN, leads the working group on the promotion of international humanitarian law; in Cameroon, at the request of the conflicting parties, Switzerland held talks as a facilitator between these parties in order to find solutions for sustainable peace (Report, p. 18).

The fact that these attempts do not always succeed is unfortunately part of everyday life in countries bothered by war, bloody power struggles and the economic interests of third parties. This is confirmed by the long-standing Swiss ambassador Dr. *Paul Widmer* in his recommendable book "Swiss Foreign Policy". "The good services of a small state fail more often in international conflicts than they succeed – even if in memory the few successes make the proportions appear different".⁵ Nevertheless, their offer always opens up new paths and hopes. A seat for Switzerland on the UN Security Council would largely undermine this trust-based assistance.

Other important areas of Switzerland's peacebuilding activities include the search for missing persons – in cooperation with the ICRC – or assistance in mine clearance, as well as participation in election monitoring (Report, p. 20).

On the other hand, the so-called "military peacebuilding" by members of the Swiss Army under the command of the EU and NATO (for example in the Balkans) and even more the integration into NATO via the so-called "Partnership for Peace" (Report, p. 20f.) belong in a cat-

egory in which neutral Switzerland has no place. Leading it out of such entanglements must remain the long-term goal of every peace-loving Swiss elector.

Promotion of the international humanitarian law by the ICRC

The ICRC is the most important partner of the Confederation in the humanitarian area. Around one third of the humanitarian aid budget is deployed for the ICRC. The main task of the ICRC is to monitor and promote compliance with international humanitarian law. The focus of its operations – especially during the pandemic – is the support of health facilities and hygiene measures, mental health and the protection of arrested persons. In April 2020, the Federal Council granted the ICRC an additional loan of CHF 200 million to alleviate the intensified effects of the pandemic in war zones (Report, p. 56). •

¹ 21.009 The 2020 Foreign Policy Report of the Federal Council from 3 February 2021. *Bundesblatt BBl 2021 230* (cited as "Report")

² Neuhaus, Christa and Tribelhorn, Marc. «Die Wirtschaftsordnung dieses Landes muss sich verändern» ("The economic order of this country must change"). Interview with National Councillor Gerhard Pfister, President Die Mitte. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 3 March 2021

³ An appalling majority of unilateral sanctions violate international law. Interview with Professor Dr. Alena Douhan. *Current Concerns* of 2 March 2021

⁴ Wüthrich, Marianne. "Big question mark on Federal Council foreign policy programme. What has neutral Switzerland got to do on the UN Security Council?" in *Current Concerns* of 22 July 2020.

⁵ Widmer, Paul. *Schweizer Aussenpolitik. Von Charles Pictet de Rochemont bis Edouard Brunner* (Swiss Foreign policy. From Charles Pictet de Rochemont to Edouard Brunner). Second updated edition 2014.

Suspension of agricultural policy 2022 plus National Council joins the Council of States

mw. On 16 March, the National Council – albeit by a narrow margin of 100 votes to 95 with one abstention – joined the Council of States in suspending the Federal Council's proposed agricultural policy for the years 2022 to 2025 "until the Federal Council has submitted a report in fulfilment of the postulate 'Future orientation of agricultural policy' (20.3931). According to the text of the postulate, this report should be available by 2022 at the latest". (see *Current Concerns* of 2 March and 16 March 2021)

Fortunately, the National Council also approved the federal direct payments for farms (around CHF 13.5 billion for the next four years) by a large majority – 144 votes to 14 with 38 abstentions. (20.022 Agricultural policy from 2022, National Council debate of 16 March 2021)

In addition, the National Council adopted the postulate "Future orientation of agricultural policy. Supplementing the mandate to the Federal Council" of its

Economic Affairs and Taxation Committees of the National Council (EATC), with the following welcome objectives:

"Promotion and support of direct sales and short distribution channels.

Measures against food waste, e.g. action against excessive standardisation of fruit and vegetables or other measures that could be included in the law."

With the first demand, the National Council supports the local and sustainable production of domestic farms, in line with the recommendations of the *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD)* The demanded measures against food waste are of great urgency in a world where millions and millions of people are starving. Every individual is called upon to support them as a citizen or as an entrepreneur in food production or trade. (21.3015 Postulate, National Council debate of 16 March 2021). •

“Doctors maxed out – cost pressure instead of patient welfare”

ZDF report brings up the painful subject of the German health system

by Winfried Pogorzelski

In the series “ZDF-Zoom”, on 28 January 2021, the “Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen” broadcast a film with the title “Ärzte am Limit – Kostendruck statt Patientenwohl. Krankenhausärzte in Deutschland schlagen Alarm (Doctors maxed out – cost pressure instead of patient welfare. Hospital physicians in Germany sound the alarm” on the subject of health care provided to the population of Germany by hospitals. It was about the consequences of the fact that German hospitals have been increasingly transformed into commercial enterprises in recent years, where the primary aim is to operate profitably and avoid financial losses. By now, the patients’ well-being is apparently no longer the top priority, and this scandalous development also comes hard to doctors, nurses and not least the training and further education of specialists. Quite a few of those affected are therefore thinking of giving up their profession or going abroad. However, in this report it remains in the dark how things could come to this.

The physician as a manager: Profit instead of patient welfare

If a profit is to be made from people’s illness, then savings have to be made on materials and staff, to the detriment of the sick, but also to the chagrin of the doctors. There is, for example, the doctor *Friederike Schlingloff*. She worked in heart surgery at a hospital for eight years and suffered more and more from constant cost and time pressure, which meant that she could not do justice to the patients. Finally, she gave up this kind of work, became an emergency doctor and can now do more for her patients than before in the hospital, namely the best without any ifs and buts.

She also works as a training assistant in a community practice and is for the first time experiencing how beneficial it is to treat a patient according to the motto: “It will take as long as it takes.” Hospitals, on the other hand, usually work at their limit due to chronic staff shortages, resulting in many facilities being unable to admit far too few if any emergency patients. More avoidable serious illnesses and deaths are the result.

The financial pressure results from the introduction of case-based flat rates, the so-called *Diagnosis Related Groups*, which were introduced in 2003. 12,000 medical services are listed, together with the amount of money they bring. For example, the insertion of a pacemaker brings



Striking nurses at the Charité hospital in Berlin. (Picture linkezeitung.de)

a gain of 16,000 euros, an operation on the spine 10,000 euros. The amount of the latter procedure increased by a whopping 71 % between 2007 and 2015. Careful discussion of alternative and cheaper treatments before an operation – by rights a matter of course – usually falls flat, because they are not on the list and bring in nothing.

Risks and side effects

On average, only 7.6 minutes are left for a patient consultation; every minute counts. Doctors who do not record their times accurately pay a fine. The principle stemming from the productive economy and used here is called “process control”. 60-hour weeks and 24-hour shifts are not uncommon. A comparison with aviation illustrates what is at stake here: what traveller would board an aircraft whose pilot has, for example, been on duty for thirty hours without interruption?

The future of the health system is also affected, as the training of young doctors suffers under these conditions. According to a survey by the *Marburger Bund* – the federal association of salaried and civil servant doctors – 70 % of future specialists no longer receive structured further training because there is simply no time for it. As a result, younger specialists are often unable to perform more complex procedures.

Tübingen University and Children’s Hospital – an example

The University Children’s Hospital – Department of Paediatrics in Tübingen treats 12,000 patients a year. As elsewhere, maintenance here costs much more than it yields. In the past, there were no financial discussions because there were no financial constraints, says the health director, but now not a day goes by without debates about money. The so-called commercial director of the clinic repeatedly criticises the hospital for using too much money and earning too little – an accusation that was never heard before. The situation has come to such a heat that the threat of closure is constantly hanging over the hospital like a sword of Damocles. However, the doctors may under no circumstances be forced to practice “unethical medicine”.

The director of the university hospital, Prof. Dr. *Michael Bamberg*, reports that the Covid 19 pandemic hit the hospital like a tsunami. Half the necessary operations had to be postponed; 250 patients had to be treated for covid-19, 36 of them had to be artificially ventilated at the same time. 86 patients with severe cases were treated for four long months. The deficit was in the two- to three-digit million range. Hospitals were stuck with the costs because the subsidies from the

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“Doctors maxed out ...”

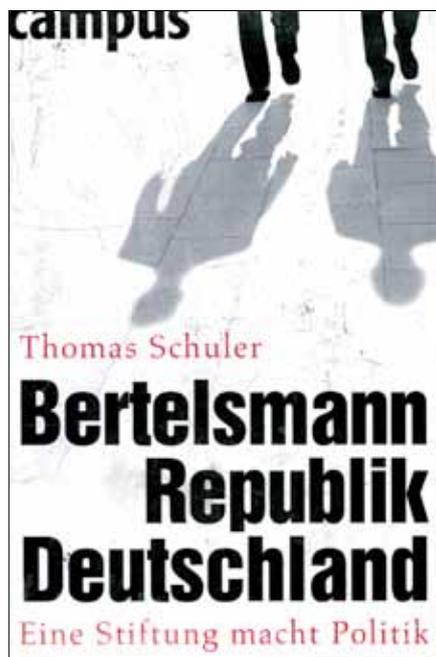
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state government were a drop in the ocean. One is tempted to say the Covid 19 virus and its mutants also have their good side, they teach us how existentially important a functioning health system is for our society.

Doctors are constantly in conflict, have a guilty conscience because they cannot meet all the demands made on them. In this context, the medical ethicist Professor Dr *Giovanni Maio* (University of Freiburg i. Br.) speaks of a “moral dissonance”, to which the constant role conflict leads, of conflict situations that should not arise. Burnout and feelings of being drained are the consequences for the individual, the migration of staff and the resulting shortage of doctors and nurses the logical consequence for the health system – a veritable vicious circle, especially since the training of new nurses is expensive, takes many years and the profession is becoming less and less attractive.

How important are public health and the health system truly to us?

There are 1925 clinics in Germany; they have now become veritable health factories and cost around 110 billion euros per year. Their operation is trimmed to efficiency instead of focussed on the patients’ health and well-being. Giovanni Maio speaks of an “economic tribunal” set up against clinics: Everything done there is evaluated according to whether it brings in revenue. The motto is: operate as much as possible, make full use of every minute in the operating theatres. “You can make a lot of money in this way. The doctors don’t even actually want to take a decision in that direction, but they are forced to [...]



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because they are threatened that their department will be closed,” says Giovanni Maio.

There is no way around a fundamental discussion about how much our health system matters to our society. Professor *Peter Rosenberger* is the Tübingen University Hospital Medical Director; he is calling for a rethink. The pandemic has made clear the relevance of hospitals, he says. “What I would like to see: a really sustainable change in the world of work, less shaped by monetary factors, less shaped by process controls and financial backgrounds [...]. Perhaps the conclusion to be drawn from the pandemic is that society should discuss the question: How important is the health system to us? Perhaps it is not just about a cost factor, but perhaps it is a very strong pillar of society that no-one has to be afraid of dying from an illness.”

How it could come to this and the increase of resistance

The report only hints at the background of and true reasons for this fatal development of the health system, so here are a few additions: The tendency in our western societies to privatise areas of the public service in order to capitalise on it in the truest sense of the word has a long history. It already began after the German reunification in the times of the government of *Helmut Kohl* (CDU) and his health minister *Horst Seehofer* (CSU); under the Red-Green government of *Gerhard Schröder* (SPD) and *Joschka Fischer* (The Greens); the DRG (Diagnosis Related Groups) system’s flat rate per case was made compulsory in 2004. If the costs are exceeded because a treatment takes longer due to complications or delays, the additional costs are not covered by the health insurance; hospitals are the sufferers; they are left to bear costs.

Meanwhile, the hospital business has become a highly lucrative business from which private clinics, nursing homes, the pharmaceutical industry and shareholders profit. The system works according to the principles of competition and profit. Those who cannot hold their own on the free market are out of luck and are cast off. The most important private player in this system is the *Bertelsmann Foundation* (360 employees, annual budget 60 million euros), behind which stands the *Bertelsmann Group*, the largest media corporation in Europe, which is very well networked with many private hospital groups such as *Rhön-Klinikum AG* or *Sana-Kliniken*. The foundation claims to want to improve the health system. In blatant contradiction to this, it permanently advocates a reduction in the number of hospitals according to the motto “less state, more competition”, arguing that this is the only

way the remaining facilities can be run economically. Also, the current government under Chancellor *Angela Merkel* and Health Minister *Jens Spahn* are continuing down this fatal path.

And resistance is rising, first and foremost among those are primarily affected, apart from the patients, namely the doctors. In the *Ärzteblatt*, the members’ journal of the German medical associations, critical articles on the privatisation of the health system are appearing time and again. Or in the form of an initiative called “Gemeingut in BürgerInnenhand” (Public Property in the Citizens’ Hands), which campaigns for preserving public goods and services and preventing the privatisation of further areas, because otherwise common goods would become commodities, and this would lead to the dismantling of democratic control and local self-government. The work and activities of the Bertelsmann Foundation are repeatedly analysed critically by non-fiction authors.

The hope remains that the current biggest crisis since the Second World War could give the impetus for a turnaround, so that in future the population will once again be able to rely on a well-functioning health system, and people working in the medical and nursing professions will find humane working conditions and regain a joy in their work.

The worrying developments in the health system will bother and preoccupy us for some time to come, and besides, they are also ongoing in Switzerland, as a recent two-part documentary on Swiss television shows.

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On 4 and 11 March 2021, Swiss television SRF 1 broadcast a documentary by *Michael Zollinger* and *Pasquale Ferrara*, on the current development of the hospital system in Switzerland: “Wettkampf der Spitäler – Weniger Spitäler = bessere Qualität? (Competition between hospitals – Fewer hospitals = better quality?)” (1), “Wettkampf der Spitäler – Mehr Qualität für Patienten oder teures Aufrüsten? (Competition between hospitals – More quality for patients or expensive upgrading)” (2), <https://www.srf.ch/play/tv>

A living bond between the generations

A cooperation between a senior citizens' home and a secondary school

by Heike Hupe, Cologne

Looking back, I have very fond memories of a project with my secondary modern school students in a retirement home. For almost four years, I visited a senior citizens' home once a month with some of my students in a permanent working group in the afternoon after school. We spent the afternoon telling stories, doing handicrafts, singing, celebrating and talking, among other things, about the experiences of the elderly during the war.

I think I have achieved my goal of getting the students excited about social engagement. However, far beyond my imagination, the project has provided us all with enriching experiences, broadened our horizons, sparked strengths and ideas within us and deepened our relationships with each other. It made me even more aware of the original task of my beautiful profession. For example, the task of the teacher

to introduce the children and young people to the world of adults, to teach them the importance of the older generation and the natural respect for it.

Both sides, the seniors and the young, were so surprised, moved and happy at each meeting, as I had not suspected. My exhaustion from the morning also disappeared and I always went home exhilarated and invigorated afterwards.

Many senior citizens in our society live in senior citizens' homes and no longer have anyone close to them who visits them, takes an interest in their life experiences, listens to them and accompanies them in their often difficult last stage of life. Due to the nursing shortage, nurses can hardly meet the needs of the elderly. Thus, many seniors become lonely, increasing depression and pain. They live isolated from the following generations, no longer experience the liveliness of young people and know little of their problems. So they also have no opportunity to pass on their experience, their advice and the serenity of old age.

The young people, for example my students at the secondary school, often lack self-confidence, good relationships and support as well. They have little confidence in learning at school. In addition, the influence of the media and possibly drug abuse make it difficult for them to engage in meaningful activities and make positive human bonds.

At the weekly meetings, I could observe how the old people felt addressed by the young ones and how they were pleased. The enthusiasm of the students, their increasing confidence in themselves due to the joy of the senior citizens and the helping activities in dealing with the often weakened people were also obvious.

In the young people's reports on their experiences with the project, it becomes clear how they were able to grow and how comfortable they felt.

Emotional significance of the project for the students

A few weeks before the end of their school years, the young people reported on their years of engagement at the senior citizens' home in an interview for the *Citizens' radio* of the local radio station.

They told about our activities, their observations and sensations and reflected on the importance of the project for them personally. They especially underlined the nice and cosy atmosphere in the residential group and the appreciation of the resident assistant, who had taken the students very much to her heart. I was very touched by their reasons for staying so long and amazed when they expressed their feelings so clearly and distinctly. I will give a few examples:

- "We had many nice moments. I enjoyed being able to laugh with the seniors and had funny moments."
- "During the meetings, I felt joy and excitement. Because, when I looked closer at the seniors, I noticed how excited they were when they saw us. A little smile came out on many of them."

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Being helpful with senior bowling. (Picture Heike Hupe)

"A living bond between ..."

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- "In the beginning we were insecure and didn't know exactly how to act. But we got older and got more and more experience and confidence."
- "I felt a sense of being trusted. The seniors and staff at the citizens' home trusted us with the things we did with the elderly."
- "The staff there, especially our contact person, respected us. They accepted us as we are, no matter what colour skin or nationality you have. It felt good."
- "We had fun and enjoyed seeing and making the seniors happy."
- "There I was surrounded by something positive and calm, which made myself calmer and more composed."
- "We will take our experiences with us into life and pass them on to friends, relatives, our children."

Our activities

In the following I would like to explain some of our activities in more detail. Each meeting started with a group coffee. The students sat among the seniors and talked about school and private experiences. Some seniors were then able to pick up the thread of conversation, others listened and followed along. The resident assistant and I were always there to help keep the conversation going.

One focus was the seasonal handicrafts. I provided the materials and under my guidance the students did the crafts with one senior each. Depending on their ability, the seniors could work along or just select material by colour or arrangement and otherwise watch. But even this watching and the little conversations along the way filled them with joy. The finished products were always well received and then decorated the common room.

The play afternoons were also very popular, where we played *Mensch-ärger-dich-nicht* (Man, Don't Get Angry), *bingo*, *senior citizens' bowling* or guessing games. The mood among both the residents and the young people was cheerful and very lively.

We were in charge of the programme for parties and celebrations in the residential group. The students recited poems, read cheerful short stories, one student played the keyboard and thus had the wonderful experience of being able to present his skills in front of the community. Or my ex-colleague accompanied us with his guitar so that we could sing songs together.

Our group was invited to special events. For example, to the carnival session or to the summer party on a Saturday afternoon. Every time, students from our group came, even on a Saturday, and we celebrated together with the seniors and contributed to a cheerful mood.

A special conversation

In 9th grade, we dealt with the topic of National Socialism in history lessons. I took the opportunity to give the young people an understanding of this time with its human suffering through personal conversations with contemporary witnesses. Three senior citizens were willing to talk to us. With great empathy and thoughtfulness, the young people thought of questions, and we discussed and debated the subjects of this afternoon.

The students were insecure at the beginning and approached the topic cautiously. The senior citizens talked about their childhood during the war, about many hardships and fears and also losses. One of the senior citizens was very moved, but with my help, we were able to include her into the conversation again and again. For the young people it was a challenging and moving afternoon, from which they went home thoughtfully and with great appreciation for the old ladies.

A contribution to important life decisions

During the eight years of cooperation with the senior citizens' home, many students decided to do a *voluntary social year* or an apprenticeship there.

One boy, for example, got to know the senior citizens' home in the 9th school year and regularly went to a senior citizens' residential group once a week.

In his last year of school, 10th grade, he did everything he could to be able to continue his visits. He saw his vocation in this occupational field, did an apprenticeship as a geriatric care assistant in another home for the elderly, then returned to our cooperative house to do another apprenticeship as a geriatric nurse. Since he felt very strengthened by the activity and the human experiences, he gave a speech of thanks at the end of his school days, which he probably would not have been able to do before. In this way, our project was able to help some young people taking a meaningful life decision and thereby giving a valuable contribution to the common good.

One of the students in my group of five also decided to start an apprenticeship there as a geriatric nurse.

In my current volunteer work, I sometimes meet former students of our school who are successfully completing their training or are already working there. Every time it is a warm encounter.

Looking back

Looking back, I can say that the cooperation work with the senior citizens' home was a very fulfilling and inspiring activity. On one hand, because I was successful in giving some of the students concrete job prospects. On the other hand, because I was able to experience so much commitment, enthusiasm, responsibility, perseverance and joy among the students.

Especially because of the continuity with the permanent working group over four years, I was able to address the students in such a way that my joy, enthusiasm and appreciation for our joint activities sparked off. The young people thus showed openness for interpersonal experiences and commitment. They were able to overcome reservations and cultivate respectful, empathetic contact. They could feel their importance, matured in their personality and experienced reliable relationships. They were able to anchor their values. The young people developed great respect for the life achievements of the older generation, and the "dialogue of the generations" was thus promoted and experienced.



Playing bingo together. (Picture Heike Hupe)

In the beginning there was a bet

The beginnings of winter sports

by Heini Hofmann

Winter sports are taken for granted today – from skiing and ski jumping or ice skating and ice hockey to bobsleigh and skeleton to curling and skijoring. But the beginnings sound like a fairy tale!

It is no longer possible to find out exactly how it all began. But there is an equally amusing and plausible legend circulating about the alleged birth of winter sports in Switzerland. The promoters of this novelty were English tourists.

Farewell party with consequences

It was 1864 and the summer season in the remote high valley of the Upper Engadine was drawing to a close; most of the guests had already left. Only a group of Englishmen were still sitting in the cosy Engadin parlour of the *Kulm Hotel* in St. Moritz on a gloomy late autumn evening, celebrating the last day of their holiday together with the bearded hotelier *Johannes Badrutt*. One word led to another, and the whisky bottle became increasingly dry.

Such humid, happy and wistful farewell parties were held again and again at the end of summer holidays that often lasted weeks and months. But this farewell drink was to be a very special one, with enormous repercussions right up to the present



*The Lake Run toboggan run from the Kulm Hotel down to the frozen lake.
(Picture «Gesundheitsmythos St. Moritz» (Health myth St. Moritz))*

day, a great moment for St. Moritz, a milestone in the history of the Engadine and the entire Alpine world! This short end to summer holidays that had become routine became the long beginning of a new, dynamic winter tourism.

“Well,” Johannes Badrutt interrupted the merry round of British gentlemen, “you are now returning to the foggy grey, drizzly English winter routine.” Then he stroked his beard and said mischievously, “Are you aware that here in winter, during the sunny hours, one can stroll without a hat and coat, even without a smock, and this, in contrast to England, without the danger of catching bronchial catarrh or even pneumonia? On the contrary, fresh Alpine air, powder snow and pure winter sun are a blessing for mind and body!”

Bet that – even back then!

Hotelier Badrutt paused for a moment, as if he were concocting something. With a brief flash in his eyes, he continued, “Why don't you put it to the test and see for yourselves? You'll be my guests in winter; I bet you won't regret it!” And he added: “If I don't keep my promise, I'll pay your travel expenses; oth-

erwise you'll be free guests in my house.” The English were very fond of betting, and they did not hesitate; the die was cast.

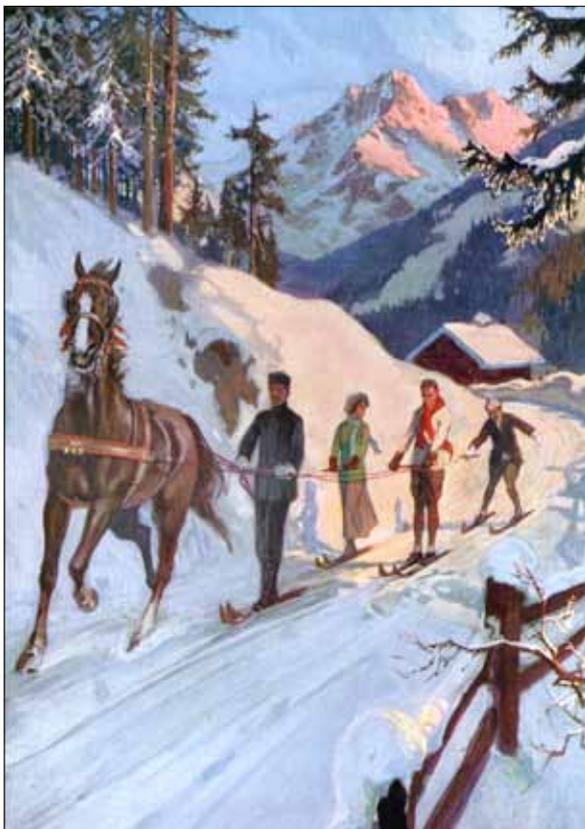
Shortly before Christmas, the four gentlemen, accompanied by members of their families, travelled back to St. Moritz, because the British don't give up on betting. But they secretly enjoyed the anticipation and *schadenfreude* of tricking the good Badrutt. In Chur, they hired a horse-drawn sleigh and crossed the snow-covered Jüli-er Pass in glistening sunlight. But instead of thick coats, they would have been better off taking sunglasses; for they reached St. Moritz sweating and almost snow-blind...

This was not how they had imagined the mountain winter, but cold and foggy and dark grey. But now the sun was shining brighter than in summer, and the snow shone like a glittering carpet. Badrutt, who received the stunned guests in shirt sleeves, had clearly won the bet! He kept his promise and granted the four gentlemen hospitality until Easter. His concession was to pay off: These Englishmen came every winter from then on, accompanied by dozens of relatives and acquaintances.

The birth of winter sports

November 1864 was the actual birth of winter tourism. Year after year, more and more Britons came to the sunny Engadine winter, and it was not long before the size of the winter season far outstripped that of the summer season. The famous bet, intended as a little joke between friends,

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Skijoring.

(Picture «Gesundheitsmythos St. Moritz»)

"In the beginning ..."
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had triggered an avalanche that transformed and dynamised tourism and made Johannes Badrutt the competition king for life.

But those who receive guests have to show themselves from their best side, in other words: beautify the place. St. Moritz needed an instrument for this, so a commission was formed whose first task was to renovate the cemetery near the *Leaning Tower*, where the gravestones were toppling over due to the mountain pressure. Ten years later, this became the "St. Moritzer Curverein", later the "Verkehrsverein" and finally the "Kur- und Verkehrsverein".

A complaints book was kept in its information office, where dissatisfied guests could express themselves and to which the association tried to react continuously – according to the proven principle "The guest is king". So the beginnings of the St. Moritz winter spa business were marked by Badrutt's wager and the beautification attempts of a cemetery commission... Did anyone dare to dream of the grandiose dimensions that this Engadine winter spa business would one day experience?

Sport-loving Englishmen

These first British winter tourists did not come as passive spa guests and whisky drinkers, but as enthusiastic sports fans, and they brought the know-how in some disciplines with them. Sledging and ice skating were the first winter sports to become popular. Every winter, several toboggan runs were provided, for example on the edge of the Badstrasse from the village to the baths or from the Kulm Hotel across the meadows down to the frozen

lake. Twenty ice rinks were available for ice-skating fun, where fantastic ice festivals were also celebrated. Ice hockey was on the rise, replacing its predecessor, bandy, which was played with a stick bent at the bottom.

And another ice sport caused a furore: curling, which found its way from Scotland to St. Moritz in 1880. Yes, even tennis was played in winter, on shovelled courts surrounded by walls of snow. The daredevil bobsleigh pilots and skeleton riders were particularly admired. 1885 was the opening of the *Cresta Run*. Because bobsledding had to be banned on the road from St. Moritz to Celerina for safety reasons, bobsleigh runs were built, the first of which in 1903. However, the world's first bobsleigh run had already been built in St. Moritz in the winter of 1895/96, and the *St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club* was founded a year later.

Skiing in all its facets

However, the winter discipline with the greatest potential was skiing. Beginners gained their first experience on the long boards on gently sloping meadows. Those who climbed up to Salastrains or even Corviglia to plunge into the downhill were sure to be admired. The real gladiators, however, were the ski jumpers. The Julierschanze was built for them in 1906. Ski races and ski jumping were organised by the *Alpina Ski Club*, founded in 1903, and in 1929 the St. Moritz Ski School was founded – nota bene the first in Switzerland.

Since the English were horse-lovers and horses were the main means of transport at the time, equestrian sports, which were suitable for all-year-round use, also began to boom. Skijoring was popular in winter, with the first race taking place in 1906. Here, too, safety reasons forced

From winter to summer sports

hh. The English did not only initiate winter sports. They also gave the impetus for the development of tourism in the Alps in general. Animated by the works of painters and poets such as William Turner and Lord Byron, they flocked to the Alps. One of the first female Alpine Superiors was the English alpinist, writer and photographer Elisabeth Maine, a regular guest at the Kulm Hotel in St. Moritz from 1884. On 31 January 1898, together with an Engadine mountain guide, she completed the daring first winter ascent of Piz Morteratsch (3754 m).

people to leave the roads for the frozen lake. The founding of a riding club was not long in coming, and flat, trotting and hurdle races followed as early as 1907. The sport of polo had been introduced earlier by English cavalry officers, as the polo field had already been prepared in St. Moritz Bad in 1898.

More guests – more wishes

The journey to the Upper Engadine was still adventurous in those days. From 1850 onwards, six postal services ran weekly from Chur over the Julier Pass to Samedan in an eleven-hour bumpy journey. All goods were also transported by oat engines. No wonder there were often up to 400 (!) horses in St. Moritz.

But the more spa guests, the more activities and the greater the demands. The tasks in the up-and-coming health resort grew. The streets had to be extended and paved. And because the spa guests could not be expected to carry a lantern on their way out in the evening, electric street lighting was introduced. Incidentally, the very first electric arc lamps in Switzerland were lit in the dining room of the Engadin Kulm Hotel at Christmas 1878; the proactive Badrutt had discovered them at the World Exhibition in Paris - and immediately set up a small hydroelectric power station.

But mundane problems such as waste disposal and sewage regimes were also waiting to be solved; it was no longer acceptable to discharge sewage into the lake without an upstream septic tank. And because there was a desire for a convenient connection from the village to the baths, it was decided to build a tramway: in 1896, the "Tramway électrique" went into operation. In short, what began with a simple bet by the hotelier and competition king Johannes Badrutt caused the then sleepy mountain village of St. Moritz to rise like a phoenix from the ashes and become one of the world's most famous glamour tourist destinations.



Telemark turn. (Picture «Gesundheitsmythos St. Moritz»)