

Current Concerns

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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Plutocracy or democracy?

What the federal popular initiative “Micro-tax on cashless monetary transactions” wants to contribute to this question

Interview with Professor Dr Marc Chesney

Current Concerns: Professor Chesney, what was the impetus for launching a popular initiative in favour of a completely new form of taxation? As a rule, popular initiatives aim to improve unsatisfactory arrangements. What shortcomings or deficiencies would you like to remedy with the micro-tax?

Marc Chesney: Our tax system is complex and archaic. In times of the digitalisation of the economy, it is counterproductive to

tax labour and consumption as heavily as we are doing now.

Moreover, a micro-tax would act like sand in the wheels of Finance Casino. The volume of electronic transactions has been huge for about 30 years now. It is equivalent to about 150 times the GDP of Switzerland. It is simply oversized for our society. The related costs (commissions or fees) are incurred by the economy and a very small minority takes advantage of this situation.

In its texts, the initiative committee points to the importance of cashless monetary transactions, which it describes as the “central nervous system of the real and the financial economy”; and it goes on from here. Up to now, it was primarily the individual who was taxed for his or her work – at least paid work. Now monetary transactions are to be taxed. What do you see as the advantages of this form of taxation?

It is too often that the digitalisation of the economy destroys jobs and human labour in general, instead of generating leisure time and higher wages, as should be the case in a well-organised society. Not everyone can become a computer scientist! To mitigate the trend towards underemployment and precariat, electronic transactions should be taxed instead of labour.

At the media conference in March last year (see the initiative committee homepage) it was said that the micro-tax would bring transparency to payment transactions and strengthen Switzerland as a sovereign country. Could you explain that a little?

Cashless monetary transactions are opaque. Not all data is available. E.g., information about intrabank transactions, i.e. within a bank, transfers between the National Bank and commercial banks, and about transactions related to derivatives or cryptocurrencies, etc., is either missing or incomplete.

Since taxpayers are liable for the risks of big banks, they should at least know

Editorial

Since 25 February 2020, the collection deadline has been running for the federal popular initiative “Micro-tax on cashless Monetary Transactions”, which is presented in more detail below – in an interview and in the box with short questions and answers on the topic of micro-tax. This initiative would deserve far more attention than it currently receives: it is, after all, a very well-conceived approach to getting under control the huge disparity between the economic performance of national economies on the one hand and the incredible amounts traded in the global financial economy in the form of mostly opaque financial products on the other. The money that is shifted in this area – for example in the form of bets on corporate defaults or the eventually bankruptcy of companies – corresponds to a multiple of the economic performance of the national economy, even in our country. The vast majority of these financial transactions are, however, obviously beyond any kind of control. This global financial casino not only endangers national economies, because in the event of the next crisis, it is of course primarily the “man and woman in the street” and taxpayer who will be asked to pay. The huge sums of money here allowing the particular interests of a few to be secured also endanger democracy, because plutocracy goes hand in hand with venality, corruption, manipulation of public opinion etc. An automatically generated tax on all credits and debits via electronic payment transactions could create transparency here. Those who really want to avoid tax evasion and tax havens and not just wage economic warfare in this sector would definitely have to espouse such a tax. Moreover, the taxation of this sort of financial transactions would always be fairer than the taxation of labour: it would be levied automatically and of course lay a heavier burden on those who operate with larger amounts.

Certainly, the financial casino will continue to massively manage the “business with fear”, as *Marc Chesney* puts it, and continue to peddle the argument that such “senior positions” as the management of a major bank should only be entrusted to the “best”, which necessitates corresponding salaries (and bonuses). In his



(Picture ma)

Marc Chesney studied mathematics at the Université de Paris, where he received Master's degrees in Applied Mathematics (1983) and in Econometrics (1984). In 1986, he obtained a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Geneva, where he received his PhD in Finance (1989, with honors). In 1994 he habilitated at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University. From 1993–2003 he was professor at the *École des hautes études commerciales de Paris* (HEC). Since 2003 he has been professor of mathematical finance at the University of Zurich, where he is also head of *Institute of Banking and Finance* and of the *Center of Competence for Sustainable Finance*. Marc Chesney takes a critical view on financial markets and big banks. His research focuses on financial crises, systemic risks generated by financial innovation and global debt, financial markets manipulations and insider trader activities as well as globalisation and financialisation of the economy in general. He is the author of several articles on the dangers associated with the size and complexity of the financial sphere. Marc Chesney is a member of *Finance Watch*.

"Editorial"

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book "The Permanent Crisis"¹ Chesney cites the example of *Joseph Cassano*, director of AIG, the North American insurance company that had made a massive bet on the survival of *Lehman Brothers*. As a result, AIG had to be rescued by the American taxpayer. It is true that Joseph Cassano resigned from his position as director; but he continued to be employed as a consultant with a monthly salary of 1 million dollars. In the film "Inside Job" it is said that this consulting contract was to ensure that AIG could "retain that intellectual knowledge"² Countless others were left with nothing thanks to this "intellectual knowledge".

We humans often seem to forget very quickly – although there are many who keep warning that this crisis is anything but solved and that, on the contrary, the 30 or so systemically relevant big banks as well as hedge funds etc. have strengthened their position even further. What the initiative could definitely achieve in this context is the urgently needed debate on these existential questions, which we will sooner or later be facing again in very concrete terms – if the plebiscite comes about. The deadline for collecting signa-

tures (somewhat postponed in the wake of the COVID-19 provisions) is 5 November 2021. By end of April, around 50 000 signatures had been received. Everyone who wants to give this urgent discussion a chance can make their small but important contribution to this in our direct democracy. (<https://micro-tax.ch/en>)

Erika Vögeli

¹ Chesney, Marc. *A Permanent Crisis: The Financial Oligarchy's Seizing of Power and the Failure of Democracy*, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2018

² Film *Inside Job*, around min. 79.50 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T21aJwkqgPk>)

"In March of 2008 AIG's financial products division lost 11 billion Dollars. Instead of being fired *Joseph Cassano*, the head of AIG FP was kept on as a consultant for a million dollars a month." (When interrogated on this subject, *Martin Sullivan*, AIG Financial Products CEO up to June 2008, said, "... and you want to make sure that the key players and the key employees within AIG FP, that we retain that intellectual knowledge.")

The **initiative committee** is composed of personalities who are primarily professionally involved in the subject of finance, taxation and/or IT against the background of their often many years of professional experience. Among them are emeritus and still working professors from economics, finance, electrical and computer technology, as well as experienced personalities in the field of asset management, business and administration. Politicians and former politicians are

also represented. However, the initiative sees itself as politically independent.

Felix Bolliger, lic. oec. HSG, owner of *Felix Bolliger AG für Vermögensverwaltung* 1987–2017; Professor em. *Beat Bürgenmeier*, Professor of the University of Geneva in economics; Professor em. *Franco Cavalli*, former National Councillor, Head of the *Institute for Oncological Research* in Bellinzona; Professor Dr *Marc Chesney*, professor of finance at the University of Zurich and author of the book "A Permanent Crisis", Palgrave MacMillan, London 2018. marchesney.com; *Hélène Gache*, politician and managing director of an SME in the field of consulting and IT; Professor Dr *Anton Gunzinger*, Professor Dr ETH, owner of *Super Computing Systems (SCS) AG*, Zurich; *Gérard Jolimay*, former managing director of a large service company and now very involved in the political and association world; *Andrea Lacroix* practised as a lawyer at the *Geneva Bar Association* for twelve years and currently holds a senior position in the administration of the canton of Geneva; *Dick Marty*, former member of the Council of States, public prosecutor of the canton of Ticino and former member of the parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe; *Guy Mettan*, journalist and politician; *Jean-Cédric Michel* is active as a lawyer internationally in Switzerland, Europe and the USA; Professor Dr *Sergio Rossi*, Ph.D., is a full professor at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) at the Department of Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics; Dr rer. pol. *Oswald Sigg*, journalist, worked for SDA and SRG (news agency and TV) and in the Federal Administration, 2005–2009 Speaker of the Federal Council and Vice-Chancellor of the Swiss Confederation; Dr iur. *Jacob Zraggen*, member of the Executive Board of *Bank Julius Baer* 1981–1993; since 1994 independent business lawyer and member of the board of directors of various SMEs.

Swiss plebiscite (federal popular initiative) "Micro-tax on cashless Monetary Transactions"

ev. The text of the initiative concerns Articles 128, 130 and 132 of the Federal Constitution.

On the basis of the current Article 128 of the Federal Constitution, the Confederation may levy a (progressive) direct federal tax of a maximum of 11.5% on the income of natural persons and a maximum of 8.5% on that of legal persons. This tax is to be replaced by the micro-tax on cashless payment transactions. Article 130 of the Federal Constitution regulates value added tax. It is to be deleted without replacement, as is Article 132 paragraph 1 of the Federal Constitution, which regulates stamp duty. Paragraph 2 on the withholding tax remains.

The Federal Constitution¹ is modified as follows:

Art. 128 (new) Micro-tax on cashless monetary transactions

- 1 The Confederation levies a micro-tax on all cashless monetary transactions by charging a single tax rate on each debit and credit. The intention is to simplify the tax code and to make finance flows transparent. The maximum rate of the micro-tax is 5 per mil.
- 2 The micro-tax replaces the value added tax VAT, the direct federal tax and the federal stamp duty.

- 3 The micro-tax revenue finances the tasks of the Confederation and compensates the cantons for cancelled contributions from the direct federal tax income.

- 4 When regulating the micro-tax, the legislator is bound to apply following rules:

- a) Swiss domestic processors of cashless monetary transactions are legally obliged to collect the micro-tax automatically. They will be remunerated adequately for this service.
- b) Systematic netting is micro-taxed on full value basis. The tax obligation is fulfilled by self-declaration.
- c) The micro-tax is levied also on cashless monetary transactions processed abroad for persons with fiscal domicile or fiscal residence in Switzerland. The tax obligation is fulfilled by self-declaration.
- d) If a foreign state introduces a micro-tax equivalent to the Swiss micro-tax, the double taxation is regulated by double taxation agreements.

- 5 Intent and purpose of the micro-tax must be respected.

Art. 130 repealed

Art. 132 heading and alinea 1

Withholding tax

- 1 repealed

Art.197 Cipher 12²

12. Transitional regulations ad Art. 128 (micro-tax on cashless monetary transactions)

- 1 Within four years of the adoption of Article 128 by the People and the cantons, the Federal Assembly shall enact the provisions necessary for its implementation and for the abolition of value added tax, direct federal tax and stamp duty.
- 2 In the first year after the implementing provisions come into force, the tax rate is 0.05 per mil. Subsequently, the tax rate will be adjusted so that VAT, direct federal tax and stamp duty can be reduced and repealed as soon as possible.
- 3 After acceptance of Article 128 by people and cantons, the Swiss National Bank publishes on a monthly basis the totality of the cashless monetary transactions, inclusive sight deposits, intrabank payments und payments processed by new technologies.

¹ SR 101

² The final cipher of the transitional regulations will be defined by the federal chancellery after the plebiscite.

Brief questions and answers on the topic of the microtax

by Professor Dr Marc Chesney

Question 1: What is the microtax?

It's about simplifying and modernizing a complex, outdated and bureaucratic tax system. How? Precisely by considering the enormous tax base which all electronic transactions would represent. It would correspond to approximately CHF 100,000 billion annually. Levying a microtax on this "macro" tax base would generate approximately 100 billion francs. This would do away with 3 taxes: the federal direct tax, the Value Added Tax, the stamp duty.

Question 2: On what and how will it be deducted?

Very simply, automatically. Every time we go to the hairdresser or to a restaurant and pay by credit card, every time we withdraw money from a cash machine, every time we buy stocks using a computer, every time we pay other bills using a smart phone, a 0.1 % microtax will be levied. Let me give you an example: If I withdraw CHF 100 from a cash machine. From that CHF 100, 0.1 %, or in this case, 10 cents, will be automatically deducted as federal micro tax.

Question 3: What taxes will it replace?

The taxes it would eliminate are: the VAT, the federal direct tax and the stamp duty. The first, the VAT, corresponds to approximately 23 billion francs. The second, the federal direct tax, to 22 billion. The third, the stamp duty, to 2 billion. That means we would need around 47 billion francs. Yet, this 0.1 % microtax applied to 100,000 billion francs this enormous tax base – would generate precisely 100 billion francs, much more than what is needed to eliminate these 3 taxes, in this case, 47 billion francs.

Question 4: What is the current volume of electronic transactions in Switzerland?

Actually, I have cited this gigantic volume of annual electronic transactions in Switzerland, around 100,000 billion francs. I say 'around' because we don't have access to all the data. For example, internal bank transactions, i.e. those conducted within one bank, transactions made in microseconds or in milliseconds, those related to cryptocurrencies, those related to derivatives, etc. So, 100,000 billion Swiss francs is a conservative figure. The tax base might actually be greater.

Question 5: Will this tax have an impact on the volume of electronic transactions?

Indeed, the introduction of such a microtax would very likely have an impact on the total volume of electronic transactions. The impact could be positive or negative, in other words, the volume could increase or decrease. Why decrease? Because one could imagine that the electronic transactions made in milliseconds or in microseconds could be offshored. Why increase? Because inversely, companies based abroad in France, Germany or Italy for example, would be very interested to come and set up business in Switzerland, given that the system would be even more transparent than before, less bureaucratic, and taxes would be lower. Please allow me to give an extreme example: Let us suppose that 80 % of electronic transactions were offshored from one day to the next. In order to eliminate the

3 taxes already mentioned – the VAT, the stamp duty and the federal direct tax – we would need CHF 50 billion ... ok, a bit less ... 47 billion francs. A 0.1 % microtax would generate only 20 % of the initial amount, in this case 20 billion francs. In order to abolish these 3 taxes, we would need to work with 0.25 % instead of 0.1%. 0.25 % would generate exactly 50 billion francs. But a tax rate of 0.25 % is still microscopic. Therefore, we still have a lot of leeway.

Question 6: What will the advantages be for Swiss people and for small and medium sized businesses?

Let us take a concrete example of a family of four: a father, mother and two children. Let us assume that this family's annual income is 100,000 francs. If both the VAT and the federal direct tax were eliminated, this family would save approximately 4,000 francs per year. Small and medium-sized businesses will benefit in terms of both money and time. In terms of time, because the introduction of the microtax will eliminate the bureaucracy associated with the VAT. In essence, for 99 % of households and businesses, the introduction of the microtax will have a positive effect.

Question 7: What will its impact be on the banks?

The financial sector is not homogenous. Our project intends to compensate financial institutions when they play the role of tax collector. Based on this, the small banks could be in favor of the project as they will be compensated for simple, automated work. The big banks, however, will probably be opposed to such an initiative given that they actively carry out electronic transactions in milliseconds and microseconds. One can well imagine that even though the rate is very low, after a few minutes or a few hours, their tax bill will be very high.

Question 8: Why introduce such a tax today?

Society is facing major challenges. I will mention four of them. 1. First of all, an outdated, complex and bureaucratic tax system dating back to the 19th century. It's time to modernize it. 2. A "finance casino" system in which the main actors are the so-called systemic banks – around 30 global banks among the 30,000 in total, as well as the important actors in what is called "shadow banking". These actors help themselves rather than the economy. 3. Digitalization. Today, it is counterproductive to tax labor while it tends to decrease. What it is really about, is taxing electronic transactions. And finally, global warming, for which solutions will need to be found quickly. Not only for us, but also for future generations. Now, it is a question of putting in place measures that meet these four challenges.

Question 9: How does it respond to the digitalization of the economy?

With regard to the digitalization of the economy, allow me to consider a few examples. When we go grocery shopping, instead of dealing with checkout assistants, we increasingly interact with self-checkout machines. Soon we will see self-driving taxis in our cities. And therefore, we will be confronted with massive un-

deremployment. Intelligent solutions will need to be found, because a democratic society cannot function with an under-employment rate of 20 %, 30 % or 40 %. The microtax is precisely one of these solutions as it taxes electronic transactions rather than labor.

Question 10: How does it respond to the climate challenge?

Regarding the climate challenge and the contribution the microtax could make, remember that a 0.1 % microtax should generate 100 billion francs. Yet, we would need 47 billion francs in order to eliminate the 3 taxes in question. What should be done with the surplus? Allocate it precisely to the energy transition.

Question 11: Does this initiative stem from a political party?

No, this initiative does not have a political affiliation. It transcends party lines. We maintain our independence and are in contact with various parties. In the end, it comes down to modernizing an outdated tax system for the benefit of the greatest number of people.

Question 12: Can Switzerland alone launch the microtax?

Yes, of course, Switzerland can launch such an initiative on its own. The first country to put in place a microtax will have a true advantage over other countries, because it will attract many companies who will also want to benefit from the advantages associated with the microtax.

Question 13: Does the microtax differ from the Tobin tax?

Yes, the microtax differs from the Tobin tax for essentially two reasons. First, it applies to all electronic transactions and therefore not only to financial transactions linked to derivatives, stocks and bonds, but to all electronic transactions made across the entire economy. Second, it does not involve adding a new tax – there are already enough of them – it is about eliminating some of them, in this case 3.

Question 14: Will this tax apply to multinational corporations?

Yes, indeed, the microtax would constitute a solution to the large-scale tax optimization carried out by multinational corporations, and, in particular, by the 4 giants: Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. Wherever their headquarters are located, once they have clients or suppliers in Switzerland, for example, the microtax would be levied on every electronic transaction.

Question 15: Are you not afraid that Swiss banks could offshore their activities?

Offshoring electronic transactions would not allow big Swiss banks to avoid taxation. Indeed, the text stipulates the responsibility of the group as a whole. Therefore, if a big Swiss bank conducts a transaction between Frankfurt and London rather than Geneva and Zurich, for example, it will be required to declare the transaction and pay the microtax. And if it does not, it will constitute an offence.

Source: <https://micro-tax.ch/en/the-initiative/current/>

"Plutocracy or democracy?"

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how large this oversized volume is and understand its inherent dangers.

In the age of digitalisation, the issue of monitoring and control is of great importance. What do you say to this? Doesn't the tax carry the danger of pushing the abolition of cash – seen by many people as a correspondingly dangerous development?

No, the micro-tax does not imply the abolition of cash. Our wages have not been paid in cash for a long time. To receive cash, you first have to go to a cash machine. And as soon as, say, 100 francs are taken, 10 centimes are levied as a micro-tax, and of that perhaps 1 or 2 centimes remain as payment for the bank. Only after that, when an amount due is paid in cash, transactions are not taxed.

The text of the media conference also points to the fact that Swiss payment traffic – although vital and central for citizens, entrepreneurs and the state – is currently delegated to private companies – initially to the private SIX Payment Services Ltd, which has been owned by the French company Wordline since the end of 2018, with SIX Group Ltd receiving 27% of the shares in Worldline. The text also points out that the privatisation of the public good of cashless transactions poses the risk that the "today still largely

sovereign state of Switzerland and its financial system could be overrun". Could you explain this in a little more detail? To what extent could the micro-tax initiative help here?

The payment traffic is essential within a modern economy and should be a public good. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As a consequence of its privatisation, payment traffic is opaque and its oversizing poses dangers. The micro-tax initiative aims to shed light on this.

Specifically, on the implementation of the initiative: Who would determine the micro-tax rate, and in what form should/ could this be implemented, or who would then be responsible for it – in view of today's privatised payment traffic?

Specifically, and as planned in the initiative text, the micro-tax rate should be fixed at 0.05 permille in the first year of implementation. This means that if you pay a bill of CHF 1000, then 5 centimes will be levied as micro-tax. That is almost nothing, almost invisible. At the beginning, the goal is to precisely measure the huge volume of electronic transactions. After a year, we will know whether it is 150 times or, say, 200 times the GDP. After that, the State will have the responsibility to set the rate every year, so that first the VAT and then the direct federal tax and the stamp duty will be abolished. Another objective would be to help, without generating further debt, all those who are suffering financially in the pandemic.

At some point, the financial sector and especially the big banks should contribute to this. The recent scandals and losses of *Credit Suisse* show that the priority of big banks is unfortunately different, namely to continue to run the financial casino economy. In the medium term, the micro-tax rate should be 0.1 % and this should raise about 100 billion francs per year.

The initiative affects three federal taxes. To be sure, the taxpayer's main tax burden falls on state and municipal taxes. So why did the initiators choose the federal tax?

The micro-tax committee has set its focus exclusively on federal taxes. In order to abolish certain cantonal taxes as well, the political representatives of the cantons concerned should organise a local vote.

Could the principle also be applied to cantonal and communal taxes? Would that be financially viable or implementable in a fair way? Would this not lead to a centralised administrative apparatus in the allocation of tax revenues?

The principle could also be transferred to cantonal and communal taxes in order to abolish local taxes. Without VAT and its inherent bureaucracy, the centralist administrative apparatus should become smaller, not larger. •

Further information on this popular initiative at: <https://micro-tax.ch/en>

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Federal Referendum of 13 June 2021

Is there a need for this anti-terror law?

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 25 September 2020, Parliament approved the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol. In order to fulfil Switzerland's obligations under this Convention, Parliament simultaneously amended the Criminal Code to include new penal provisions for participation in criminal and terrorist organisations and in terrorist offences.¹

Based on terrorist attacks abroad and the fact that youths and young adults living in Switzerland had travelled to the Middle East to join armed terrorist groups, the National Council and the Council of States approved the "Federal Act on Police Measures to Combat Terrorism (PMCT)" on the same day. Various committees filed a referendum against this on constitutional grounds (Voting Booklet², p. 105).

This voting proposal will be examined here.

The most important contents of the law

The text of the draft law can be found in the voting booklet (p. 114ff.) (in German, French or Italian).

Principle: The police should already be able to intervene preventively if it can be assumed that a person poses a terrorist threat (Voting Booklet, p. 105).

- Measures can be taken against "terrorist threateners" "if it must be assumed on the basis of concrete and current indications that he or she will carry out a terrorist activity". (Art. 23e para. 1)
- "Terrorist activity" (Art. 23e para. 2): "Efforts to influence or change the order of the state, to be realised or facilitated by the commission or threat of serious criminal offences or by the propagation of fear and terror".
- The *Fedpol* (Federal Office of Police) is responsible for ordering the measures (Art. 23f para. 1), at the request of the commune, the canton or the FIS (Federal Intelligence Service) (Art. 23i).
- Enforcement and control of the measures are the responsibility of the cantons (Art. 23r).
- Measures may only be taken if they are "proportionate" [this applies to any state measure in a state under the rule of law] and if previously attempted measures in the cantons or communes are not sufficient (Art. 23f para. 1 b) (Voting Booklet, p. 108).
- Possible measures (Art. 23k-q): obligation to participate in talks, ban on contact, ban on leaving the country, obliga-

"Anyone who rumbles around with dangerous material or is on the move in criminal company, who sends around threatening mails and tweets, who travels abroad to join terrorist groups there, or who collects money for such groups, is already punishable through these preparatory acts. He does not have to undergo questionable measures by *Fedpol*, but is charged and brought before a court, with all the guarantees of fundamental rights."

tion to register, inclusion and exclusion (ban on going to or leaving certain places), house arrest, detention pending deportation (for foreigners; no detention/arrest is provided for Swiss citizens), electronic surveillance (Voting Booklet, p. 107).

Common provisions:

- Age limit: 12 years (Art. 24f)
- Maximum duration of a measure: six months (one-time extension by a maximum of six months possible) (Art. 23g para. 1)
- Legal protection: "Appeals against *Fedpol* rulings [...] may be lodged with the Federal Administrative Court." (Art. 24g para. 1) "Appeals have no suspensive effect." However, the instruction judge [investigating judge] may grant suspensive effect to an appeal "if the purpose of the measure is not thereby jeopardised" (Art. 24g para. 3).
- Penal provisions: "A custodial sentence not exceeding three years or a monetary penalty shall be imposed on anyone who contravenes measures under Articles 23l–23q." (Art. 29a)

Serious legal objections

The two referendum committees are offended by the vague definitions of "dangerous persons" and "terrorist activity", which open the door to arbitrariness. Federal Councillor *Karin Keller-Sutter*, head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, asserts that "terrorist threateners" do not mean demonstrators, "not even those who break windows" – but vague is still vague. Moreover, the planned measures could be imposed on suspicion alone and without proof against blameless citizens and against children over the age of 12 (a violation of the *European Convention on Human Rights* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*). The separation of powers would also be disregarded: The measures would be both or-

dered and carried out by police authorities (executive), but in a state under the rule of law they would have to be ordered by a court. "This law is an attack on the rule of law without bringing more security." (Voting booklet, p. 110f.)

In addition to the people who took the referendum, numerous Swiss lawyers also raise serious legal concerns against the anti-terrorism law, such as UN Special Rapporteur *Nils Melzer*, whom we got to know as an intrepid fighter for the release of whistle-blower *Julian Assange*. Together with four other UN Special Rapporteurs, he called on parliament to reject the bill: "The police should be given far-reaching powers in the fight against terror – too far-reaching, says Swiss lawyer and UN Special Rapporteur *Nils Melzer*."³

As early as September 2020, more than fifty Swiss criminal law experts wrote an open letter to parliament calling on it to reject the bill because "the present measures permit far-reaching restrictions on fundamental and human rights, the protection of which is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and international agreements (ECHR, UN Covenants I and II, etc.)."⁴ The legal experts criticised, among other things, the "extremely imprecise concept of a 'terrorist threatener'" and in particular the insufficient judicial control: "A presumption of dangerousness is established, which must be refuted before the judicial authority. This is alien to our legal system and the values on which it is based. The lack of a suspensive effect of appeal and of prior judicial review means that the person affected by police measures has to endure the professional, social and psychological consequences even if the measures prove to be unfounded."

In their open letter, the criminal lawyers conclude: "While it is clear that terrorism requires a strong response from our institutions, state action must be taken within the framework of the rule of law.

"Is there a need for ..."

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It is a strong rule of law that Switzerland needs in order to counter the terrorist threat. The bill submitted to the Federal Assembly, however, is highly problematic with regard to the Federal Constitution and international human rights agreements. Its adoption would undermine our rule of law."

**Unacceptable encroachment
by the federal government
into cantonal police sovereignty**

Completely alien to the Swiss understanding of the state is the position of power that the draft law confers to the Federal Office of Police (*Fedpol*). *Fedpol* is to have the sole power to decide on the disposition of measures against a "terrorist threatener" (Art. 23f and j), while the competent cantonal and communal authorities are to be downgraded to mere applicants (Art. 23i) and enforcement assistants (Art. 23r para. 1). Indeed, according to paragraph 2, the Federal Office is even to "assist" the competent canton: "*Fedpol* provides official and enforcement assistance." This is an absolutely unacceptable interference with the police sovereignty that has always been in the hands of the cantons.

Let us speak *Fedpol* for itself. Under the title "Police Structure – Federalist Structure", you can read on their homepage: "In Switzerland, the 26 cantons basically have police sovereignty. This is an original competence of the cantons, i.e., a competence that already existed when the Swiss Federal Constitution (FC) did not yet exist. The Federal Constitution has not changed this and thus recognises this competence. The cantons are thus responsible for ensuring public safety and order on their territory."⁵ Perhaps before drafting a law, the officials of the FDJP⁶ should first take a look at the information provided by their own federal offices.

The thick end:

The anti-terror law is superfluous

Today, the police has "only limited possibilities to take preventive action against terrorist threats. With the present federal law, the Federal Council and parliament want to close this gap" (voting booklet, p. 105).

However, the Federal Council conceals the fact that the gap is not that big. For on the same day that parliament passed the anti-terror law, it also criminalised a number of preparatory acts to criminal or terrorist crimes (see lead). Unlike the measures of the anti-terror law, they will be included in the Criminal Code and thus be subject to all procedural rules and fundamental rights guaranteed by the rule of law.

According to Art. 260ter SCC, anyone is punishable who

- a. participates in an organisation the purpose of which is to
 1. to commit violent crimes [...], or
 2. to commit violent crimes intended to intimidate the population or to coerce a state or an international organisation to do an action or to refrain from an action;
- or
- b. assisting such an organisation in its activities. [...]

According to Art. 260sexies, it now is also a punishable offence for anyone who

- a. recruits someone to commit or participate in the commission of such an offence;
- b. is instructed to manufacture or use weapons, explosives, radioactive materials, poisonous gases or other devices or dangerous substances, or instructs someone to do so, for the purpose of committing or participating in such an offence; or
- c. undertakes a cross-border journey with the intention of committing, participating in or being trained to commit such an offence."

Since 2003, it has also been a punishable offence to "collect or make available assets for terrorist purposes" (Art. 250quinquies), and since 1995, to "terrify the population by threatening or simulating danger to life, limb or property" (Art. 258).

In other words, anyone who rumbles around with dangerous material or is on the move in criminal company, who sends around threatening mails and tweets, who travels abroad to join terrorist groups there, or who collects money for such groups, is already punishable through these preparatory acts. He does not have to undergo questionable measures by *Fedpol*, but is charged and brought before a court, with all the guarantees of fundamental rights (right to be heard, right to a lawyer, right to take legal action, etc.). So, what is the point of a legally dubious anti-terror law that massively restricts these fundamental rights?

**Finally, an urgent question:
What do we do with young people
who are prepared to use violence?**

Federal Councillor Keller-Sutter promotes the anti-terror law with the example of a 17-year-old who announces in social media "that he will 'kill all these Muslims'". The 17-year-old uploads clips from the video of the Australian neo-Nazi who murdered 51 Muslims in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. He writes: "Someday I'd like to do the same in Switzerland." In the chat, he also gives the hint "that there is a mosque very close to him".⁷

How do we adults tackle such serious problems? Do we parents and teachers know what kind of horrific violent videos and bullying text messages are circulating among our children? Can we assess whether the individual is a potential offender or whether he might come to his senses if seriously addressed? These are challenging questions that our society must face. We are responsible for our young people, for trying to find solutions with those who are prepared to use violence and for protecting others. The measures ordered by *Fedpol* will not straighten it. •

¹ Bundesbeschluss über die Genehmigung und die Umsetzung des Übereinkommens des Europarats zur Verhütung des Terrorismus mit dem dazugehörigen Zusatzprotokoll sowie über die Verstärkung des strafrechtlichen Instrumentariums gegen Terrorismus und organisierte Kriminalität (Federal Decree on the Approval and Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol, and on the Strengthening of Criminal Law Instruments against Terrorism and Organised Crime) of 25 September 2020

² Explanations of the Federal Council on the referendum of 13 June 2021

³ Poletti, Gregor. "Experts warn against anti-terror law. Even blameless citizens could be classified as terrorist threats.", in: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 27 April 2021

⁴ <https://unser-recht.ch/2020/09/24/51-universitaere-rechtsexpertinnen-und-experten-rufen-zur-ablehnung-des-antiterrorgesetzes-auf/>

⁵ <https://www.fedpol.admin.ch/fedpol/de/home/polizei-zusammenarbeit/national.html>

⁶ Federal Department of Justice and Police

⁷ Pelda, Kurt. "Justice lets suspected terrorist escape.", in: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 19 April 2021

"While it is clear that terrorism requires a strong response from our institutions, state action must be taken within the framework of the rule of law. It is a strong rule of law that Switzerland needs in order to counter the terrorist threat. The bill submitted to the Federal Assembly, however, is highly problematic with regard to the Federal Constitution and international human rights agreements. Its adoption would undermine our rule of law." (*Open letter of legal experts*)

What to expect from Joe Biden in global politics?

A US-American view

by Stephen J. Sniegowski, Ph.D.*, Washington D. C.



Stephen J. Sniegowski
(Picture ma)

Favorable opinion of the US plummeted when *Donald Trump* took office in 2016 and remained that way during his term in office, according to the *Pew Research Center*, a nonpartisan fact tank that

conducts surveys on a wide range of issues and is generally seen to be accurate.¹ Most European countries believe that, with the election of *Joe Biden*, the United States is now in line with Europe, no longer being something of an isolationist as Europeans regarded Trump to be. Trump, however, was far from being an isolationist since he never withdrew American troops from NATO or many of the myriad of troops that the US has stationed around the world. What Trump did was to avoid wars a little better than his recent predecessors in the oval office. However, it now appears that Biden will likely expect Europeans to follow the US in its wars as it has done before, which many Europeans have stringently opposed.

“Trump derangement syndrome” ...

It should be added that Trump was attacked by the media for being too friendly toward Russia, some going so far as to say that he was actually a Russian agent and also that Russia made Trump president in 2016. According to Philip Giraldi, a former intelligence officer for the CIA, “Trump, to be sure, is the heart of the problem as he has consistently made bad, overly belligerent decisions when better and less abrasive options were available, something that should not necessarily always be blamed on his poor choice of advisers. But one also should not discount the likelihood that the dysfunction in Trump is in part comprehensible, stemming from his belief that he has numerous powerful enemies who have been out to destroy him since before he was nom-

“Still, I think he’s been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.” (President *Obama*’s Secretary of Defense *Robert Gates* about *Joe Biden*)

inated as the GOP’s [Republicans] presidential candidate. This hatred of all things Trump has been manifested in the neo-conservative ‘Nevertrump’ forces led by *Bill Kristol* and by the ‘Trump derangement syndrome’² prominent on the political left.”³

... and the Deep State

Giraldi continues, “And then there is the Deep State, which also worked with the Democratic Party and President *Barack Obama* to destroy the Trump presidency even before it began. One can define Deep State in a number of ways, ranging from a ‘soft’ version which accepts that there is an Establishment that has certain self-serving objectives that it works collectively to promote to something harder, an actual infrastructure that meets together and connives to remove individuals and sabotage policies that it objects to. The Deep State in either version includes senior government officials, business leaders and, perhaps most importantly, the managed media, which promotes a corrupted version of ‘good governance’ that in turn influences the public.”⁴

No one currently dares to be “Russia-friendly” in the USA

The claim that Trump was a Russian agent should have been refuted by his allowing the United States forces to kill hundreds of Russian mercenaries in Syria.^{5,6} And “[i]n its newly released *Nuclear Posture Review*, the Defense Department has focused much of its multibillion nuclear effort on an updated nuclear deterrence focused on Russia.”⁷

Furthermore, “the Trump administration imposed harsher sanctions on Russia than anything ever done by the Obama Administration. President Trump actually took steps against Russian interests that Obama refused to take like providing tank-killing Javelin missiles to Ukrainian armed forces as a means to deter Russian cross-border incursions with Russian armored forces that the Ukrainians were otherwise powerless to stop.”⁸

Nonetheless, this did not discredit the U.S. mainstream’s idea that Trump was, at the very least, pro-Russian, or an actual

Russian agent. For example, a book by an ex-FBI agent said Trump was a national security threat.⁹ Moreover, a former KGB agent said Russian Intelligence had cultivated Trump for decades.¹⁰ As a result, no mainstream media personality would dare to say that it might be a wise idea to be friendly with Russia rather than threatening it with war.

Biden wants to “earn back the position of leadership”

Getting back to Biden, who told America’s European allies at the Virtual Munich Security Conference on February 20 that “America is back” repudiating former President Donald Trump’s alleged nationalist/“isolationist” approach to the world. Biden said that the “past few years have strained and tested our transatlantic relationship.” He emphasised that his administration is “determined to reengage with Europe” and to “earn back our position of trust and leadership.”¹¹

Biden emphasised a hard-line approach to America’s three main enemies: China, Russia, and Iran. This threesome approach was reminiscent of *George W. Bush*’s Axis of Evil – which included Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.

China was America’s foremost enemy

Biden stated that China is America’s foremost enemy, and said the U.S. and Europe must “prepare together” for a longterm strategic competition with it. Behind the China threat is the danger from Russia. Biden opined that Russia has caused serious difficulties for America’s European democracies and sought to tear apart the NATO alliance. Finally, he said that Iran’s destabilising activities throughout the Middle East had to be effectively thwarted.¹²

Biden counts on the “hawks”

Biden relies heavily on his long-time advisers and thus has picked *Antony Blinken* as Secretary of State, *Avril Haines* as Director of National Intelligence, *Jake Sullivan* as National Security Adviser, *Samantha Power* as head of USAID and retired General *Lloyd J. Austin* as Secretary of

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* Stephen J. Sniegowski, Ph.D., earned his doctorate in American history, with a focus on American foreign policy, at the University of Maryland. His focus on the neoconservative involvement in American foreign policy antedates September 11, and his first major work on the subject, “The War on Iraq: Conceived in Israel” was published February 10, 2003, more than a month before the American attack. He is author of numerous articles on, political philosophy, World War II, communism, and the American war on Iraq. He is the author of “The Transparent Cabal: The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel” (2008).

“What to expect from Joe Biden ...”

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Defense. All of the appointees are regarded as “hawks” and have a personal history working with Biden when he was in Congress and as Vice President.

Secretary of State Blinken has served with Biden for almost two decades. Blinken was Deputy Secretary of State from 2015 to 2017 and Deputy National Security Advisor from 2013 to 2015 under President Barack Obama and Vice-President Biden. Blinken has held senior foreign policy positions in two administrations over three decades.

Secretary of State Blinken – a war advocate

Blinken has been a hard-liner, supporting the war on Iraq in 2003; advocating U.S. intervention in Libya’s 2011 civil war, even though Biden opposed it; and calling for a far greater U.S. military presence in Syria’s civil war and opposing a withdrawal of U.S. troops from that ravaged country.¹³

In 2014, Blinken advocated isolating Russia after the Crimean Peninsula joined the Russian Federation in February–March 2014. Blinken explained his goal thus: “One way President *Putin* and Russia define power is by the geopolitical influence that Russia is able to obtain. And undermining Russia politically in the international community and isolating it politically diminishes that power.”¹⁴

Not ready to accept a multipolar world

Biden seems to assume that NATO members would willingly follow the goals of the U.S. leadership. This is highly unlikely. Biden and his coterie do not appear ready to accept a multipolar world, believing that the U.S. is still the leader of the globe. Of course, the U.S. has tried to drag Europeans into unnecessary wars for the last twenty years and has not always been successful. For example, the only countries contributing troops to invade Iraq in 2003 besides the U.S. were the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland. European powerhouses Germany and France did not provide any aid and there was even considerable opposition to the war in Britain, America’s most important ally.¹⁵

Only “transatlantic solidarity” again?

An article in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, the organ of the establishment *Council on Foreign Relations* (CFR), begins by referring to a roseate future: “Relations between Europe and the United States are poised for a dramatic rebound now that Joe Biden has taken office. Goodbye Donald Trump’s America First and the damage it has done to the nation’s interests and international standing. Welcome back a brand of US statecraft based on re-

spect for and teamwork with democratic allies. Biden’s electoral victory and the course correction he has already begun are poised to repair America’s reputation abroad and reinstate transatlantic solidarity.”^{16,17}

What do people in Europe think?

But the author of this article, *Charles A. Kupchan*, acknowledged that many people in Europe think like Trumpian Americans, as he writes: “Despite Biden’s defeat of Trump, populism, nativism, and illiberalism remain alive and well on both sides of the Atlantic. The sacking of the US Congress on January 6 made that amply clear. Europe faces its own warning signs, including Brexit, Italy’s ongoing political instability, and the strength of illiberal governments in Hungary and Poland. That *Angela Merkel* will soon step down adds to the uncertainty.”¹⁸

How many “enemies” at once?

Nevertheless, the Biden administration has so far stuck to the policy of declaring China and Russia to be the enemy, and it is not certain that there will actually be any détente on the Iran issue either. In the USA itself, all this is not uncontroversial. The political position that finds the most approval is that China is a competitor for world power and therefore also an enemy. Controversy surrounds the question of whether it makes sense to tangle with China and Russia at the same time. Not to mention the question of what significance it would have if there were no improvement in relations with Iran.

Parallel to these political questions, there is an intensive discussion in the USA regarding the areas of armament in which new money should be invested in the future. This also involves the question of rearmament in space.

One thing is for certain: the signals are not pointing to détente.

Robert Gates about Joe Biden

About Joe Biden, President Obama’s Secretary of Defense *Robert Gates* stated in his memoir: “He’s a man of integrity, incapable of hiding what he really thinks, and one of those rare people you know you could turn to for help in a personal crisis. Still, I think he’s been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.”

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canda-51012853>

² Trump derangement syndrome (TDS) is a pejorative term for criticism or negative reactions to former US President Donald Trump that are perceived as irrational and bear little relation to Trump’s actual policy positions or actions of his administration. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_derangement_syndrome [Editor’s note]

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The courting of the Eastern Europeans for the attention of the White House

by Gerd Brenner, Colonel i. G.



Here the weapons have spoken. An orthodox church, destroyed in 2015, next to the Donetsk airport in Donbass. Destruction is the principle of war. This cannot be the final word of humanity. (Picture Wikimedia/Mstyslas Chernov)

In the second half of last month, the diplomatic punitive measures between Russia and some NATO states literally overlapped and led to an actual exchange of blows. The whole thing is taking place against the background of a military build-up in the Black Sea region, which will continue into June with the implementation of the NATO exercise "Defender Europe 2021". Added to this were heightened tensions on the frontline in eastern Ukraine. This raises the question of what this is all about and how far it can escalate.

It started in mid-April when US President Joe Biden announced that the US would expel ten Russian diplomats for alleged hacking. In December last year, it had become known that a massive hacker attack on US ministries, agencies and companies had taken place which remained undetected for months; embarrassing for the US intelligence services. The attackers had gained access to the networks via the maintenance software of the company SolarWinds, which is used in many plac-

es. The US security authorities suspect that Russia was behind the attack.¹ Poland then expelled three more Russian diplomats out of "solidarity"; at least that was the official explanation. If Russian hackers did indeed interfere in the US election campaign, then the expulsion of diplomats would be a legitimate reaction of the US government. However, the US government has so far failed to provide conclusive evidence. Perhaps we will never see such evidence, because there is none. But nowadays it is enough to spread unproven allegations.

When Russian diplomats are declared undesirables and asked to leave the country, Russia respectively expels the same number of diplomats from the other side. Experience shows, however, that the Russian government thinks very carefully about whom it expels. We know this from the wave of expulsions following the *Skripal* affair before the 2018 World Cup.² At the time, Russia was careful not to expel any diplomats who were needed for cooperation around the World Cup. That Russia now expelled five rather than three Polish

diplomats in return is unusual.³ Whether the diplomats in question actually abused their position to conduct intelligence is irrelevant on both sides. Every diplomat owes reports to his capital. What is decisive is how far the person concerned goes in his information gathering.

It is probably no coincidence that the Czech Republic almost simultaneously declared 18 Russian diplomats undesirable because of an alleged sabotage operation by the Russian military intelligence service GRU at the Vlachovice ammunition depot in 2014. Then a Czech army ammunition depot had exploded, killing two people. A large number of unexploded ordnances in the area remained, which had to be cleared in an elaborate operation. *Bellingcat* and other "investigative journalists" want to have identified the same employees of the Russian intelligence service GRU as the authors of the explosions in Vlachovice, who are also said to be responsible for the alleged attack on Sergei Skripal. It all seems almost grotesque.

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"The courting of the Eastern Europeans ..."
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An ammunition depot as a theme park

According to press reports from 2014, chaotic conditions prevailed at the Vlachovice camp: Car races, hunts and mushroom searches apparently took place among bullets, mines and grenades. Now it looks more as if the Czech Republic wants to blame Russia for its own sloppiness. We know enough of similar blame games from the Ukraine. Russian diplomats are usually in a post for three to four years. If an employee of the Russian embassy in Prague really did engage in such an act of sabotage, then he or she is hardly still working in the Czech Republic. The Czech justification seems lazy.

During the explosion in Vlachovice, anti-personnel mines of the Czech army are also said to have exploded or been hurled into the surrounding area.⁴ The Czech Republic became party to the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention* (Ottawa Treaty) in 1997 and should not have procured any such mines thereafter. The mines in question were thus a good 20 years old. However, they probably dated back to the times of the Cold War, so they were at least 30 years old. The OSCE's experience shows that decades-old explosives tend to decompose spontaneously and thus explode, especially if they are stored improperly. The OSCE has run extensive programmes for this reason. In this respect, too, the Czech justification seems somewhat thin. The fact that Russia then expelled 20 and not 18 Czech diplomats is also telling.⁵

Deployment on all sides

Finally, the question arises whether there is a connection with the events in the Donbass, where the Ukrainian army began systematically shooting at drones of the SMM observer mission in the days following the meeting of the OSCE Trilateral Contact Group on 14 April. Despite this obstruction, the OSCE observer mission observed a large number of heavy weapons at the railway stations near the front line in Donbass during those very days. However, it was not able to clarify whether these were reinforcements for the benefit of the Ukrainian government troops or troop transports as part of the replacement of troops at the front. In Donetsk and Luhansk, it is assumed as a precautionary measure that the former was the case. It is also possible that the Ukrainian army interfered with the GPS reception of the drones to such an extent that some of them could not take off at all and that one of them crashed.⁶ This is unusual, as GPS interference had previously been rather limited and distributed on both sides of the front. The Ukraine apparently tried to blind the OSCE observers.

At the same time, NATO conducted a large naval manoeuvre in the Black Sea. As a countermeasure against the massive Western naval presence, the Russian Ministry of Defense ordered additional warships off the Crimea. The Caspian Flotilla also moved *Buyan-class* corvettes equipped with 3M-54 *Kalibr* guided missiles to the Black Sea, among other vessels. These weapons can be used over long distances against both sea targets and land targets. The West would be well advised to take these small ships seriously. Russia has now demonstrated that it can rapidly relocate these ships on its canals and rivers. The political message is clear: Russia is quite capable of defending itself in a pinch. At the height of tensions, the U.S. refrained from sending two more warships to the Black Sea.⁷

A few days earlier, information had been circulated about Russian troop movements on the border with Ukraine and in Crimea.⁸ Indeed, the Russian army moved airborne troops from the west of the country, from the Moscow area and from the Urals to Southern Russia and Crimea. Russia proved that it is not only NATO that can move large troop formations quickly, and showed that it will not be intimidated. The resulting clamour on the part of Ukraine is familiar from previous years. Russian snap-exercises in the past have always passed without the panicked threat scenarios of eastern NATO member states becoming reality.⁹ The Ukrainians should be reminded that it was their U.S. allies who weakened the instruments of verification in recent years, for example the *Treaty on Open Skies*, and who abused the Vienna Document. Now the Russians will make a return to the negotiating table pay with concessions.

And it is against this backdrop that the struggle for power in Belarus is taking place. The arrest of two potential coup plotters in Russia prevented a planned coup against Belarusian President *Lukashenko*, Russia's President *Putin* recently announced.¹⁰ The assassination of *Lukashenko* and his family was also planned as part of this coup. Of course, such information cannot be independently verified. What is clear, however, is that the West has positioned a pretender to the throne in Vilnius in the person of *Svetlana Tikhanovskaya* and will continue to finance her there for a long time to come. *Tikhanovskaya*'s political inexperience is to the West's advantage, because Brussels and Washington are looking for a compliant, popular figure whom they can manipulate at will. In the past, *Lukashenko* believed he could do business with the West and Russia at the same time. The EU already thwarted a similar attempt in 2013 in the case of Ukraine, and it has become even more unrealistic with the EU's anti-Russian sanctions.

Assessment

How are these events to be assessed? If there is a connection between them, one plausible interpretation is that Ukraine's Eastern European friends were trying to inflame tensions in order to mobilise the USA, which so far has not offered the support that was hoped for.

It is not impossible that Ukraine is frustrated by what it sees as insufficient help from the Biden administration. For the time being, however, the latter is at best available for verbal and "logistical" help in the form of arms deliveries. Despite grandiose declarations, no US government has yet gone to war against Russia to return Crimea to Ukraine. The Biden administration will be no exception. Ukraine lacks international support and is de facto isolated. Its efforts to drag Europe into a war for the sake of Crimea and the Donbass have so far been fruitless.

The big agitators against Russia are located in Canada with the Ukrainian diaspora there, in Poland and in the Baltic States. The diplomats in these countries are particularly strident and outdo each other in their declarations of loyalty to Brussels and Washington. In Warsaw, Vilnius and Riga, there are enough people with an insatiable desire to pander to every US administration. In the US, on the other hand, there is a strong segment in politics that is tired of the eternal interventions across the world. These people elected *Trump* and will hopefully stop the US from further interventions in violation of international law in the years to come.

For years, the USA has been following a zigzag course in foreign policy. This has been the case for a long time, at least since the beginning of *Trump*'s presidency. The White House, the State Department and Congress each take their own line. At the same time, the Americans are trying to arrange a summit meeting between *Joe Biden* and *Vladimir Putin* in Vienna, which is to take place next June. Whether this summit meeting will actually take place is still completely open at the moment. The US is no longer a reliable partner in international politics, and the EU vastly overestimates its influence in the world. Why would *Putin* want to see *Biden* or *von der Leyen*?

Germany has so far remained steadfast on the issue of *Nord Stream 2*. If the Americans want to sell their gas to Germany, they should offer it at more favourable conditions than Russia. Germany wants to be supplied from different sources. That is legitimate. As long as *Alexei Navalny* remains alive in the Russian penitentiary, Germany will probably stick to *Nord Stream 2*.

Under pressure from the nationalist right, Ukrainian President *Volodymyr Ze-*

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Europe is a war-game ground for the US / NATO strategy

by Manlio Dinucci



Manlio Dinucci
(Picture ma)

In 2020, peoples' land mobility in the European Union was paralysed by lockdowns, mainly following the tourism blockade. The same happened in air mobility: according to a study by the European Parliament (March

2021), it suffered a net loss of 56 billion Euros and 191,000 direct jobs, plus over a million in related industries. In 2021, the recovery is promising to be very problematic. Only one sector has greatly increased its mobility against the ongoing-trend: the military sector.

At the moment, about 28,000 soldiers are passing from one country to another in Europe with tanks and airplanes: they are engaged in *Defender-Europe 21*, the US Army (not NATO) great exercise in Europe involving 25 European Allies and Partners. Italy participates in it not only with its armed forces but as a host country. At the same time, the NATO *Steadfast Defender* exercise is about to begin, mobilising over 9,000 US and European soldiers, including Italian soldiers. It constitutes the first large-scale test of the two new NATO commands: The *Joint Force Command*, with its headquarters in Norfolk (USA), and the *Joint Support Command* with its headquarters in Ulm (Germany).

The "mission" of the Norfolk Command is "to protect the Atlantic routes between North America and Europe", which according to NATO would be threatened by Russian submarines; the "mission" of the Ulm Command is "to ensure troops mobility across the European borders to allow a rapid strengthening of the Alliance on the Eastern front", which would be threatened by Russian forces according to NATO.

For this second "mission" the European Union plays an important role, as the US Army requested the establishment of "a military Schengen Area". The Action Plan on military mobility, presented by the European Commission in 2018, envisaged modifying "infrastructures (bridges, railways, and roads) that are not suitable for the weight or size of heavy military vehicles". For example, if a bridge cannot carry the weight of a 70-ton tank column, it must be strengthened or rebuilt. After having earmarked an initial allocation of around 2 billion euros for this purpose, public money subtracted from social expenses, the EU Ministers of Defense (*Lorenzo Guerini* for Italy) decided on May 8 to involve the United States, Canada, and Norway on the EU military mobility plan. NATO Secretary-General *Stoltenberg*, who was present at the meeting, stressed that "Non-EU Allies play an essential role in protecting and defending Europe". In this way, NATO (21 over 27 EU countries are NATO members), after having instructed the EU to carry out and

pay for the restructuring of European infrastructures for military purposes, actually takes over the management of the "Military Schengen Area".

In the European region transformed in a parade ground, the infrastructure adaptation to the US / NATO forces mobility is tested in war trials, which include "the deployment of land and naval forces from North America to the Black Sea region". They serve – quoting *Stoltenberg's* words – to "demonstrate that NATO has the ability and the will to protect all allies from any threat". The kind of "threat" was also declared by the G7 Foreign Ministers (United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan), who met on 5 May in London. The seven Ministers (*Luigi Di Maio* for Italy), overturning the facts accused Russia of "irresponsible and destabilising behaviour, illegal annexation of Crimea, massing military forces on the Ukraine border, use of chemical weapons to poison opponents, malicious activities to undermine the democratic system of other countries, threaten the rules-based international order". The fact that the G7 formulated these accusations with the same words used by the Pentagon and repeated by NATO, confirms the existence of the same matrix in the strategy of tension that pushes Europe into an increasingly dangerous situation. •

Source: *il manifesto* of 11 May 2021

(Translation *Jeannie Toschi Marazzani Visconti*, CNGNN, Italy)

"The courting of the Eastern Europeans ..." continued from page 10

lensky has manoeuvred himself into a difficult situation: Elected to bring about an end to the war in the Donbass and to relax relations with Russia, he went along with the sabre-rattling. Now his only choice is between a military disaster and a serious loss of prestige. That is why *Zelensky* is also trying to persuade *Vladimir Putin* to hold a summit meeting, in the hope that the latter will offer him a solution that will spare him a loss of face. *Putin* will make such a meeting pay with political concessions. In particular, he will maintain the old demand that the Ukrainian government first solve its problems in eastern Ukraine in direct negotiations with the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Before that, there is no reason for a new summit. The extreme nationalists in Ukraine will not allow *Zelensky* to hold direct talks with the breakaway republics in Donetsk and Luhansk.¹¹ Thus,

Zelensky remains under pressure for the time being.

Russia remained restrained in all this turbulence, but held out against it. Cries of imminent war and of a Russian threat to Europe can be taken calmly: NATO defence ministers feel the need to demonstrate that they are needed. •

¹ see, among others, <https://www.n-tv.de/politik/USA-weisen-zehn-russische-Diplomaten-aus-article22492653.html>

² see, among others, <https://www.waz.de/politik/kommt-der-wm-boycott-so-straft-die-welt-russland-ab-id213856129.html>; <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/sergej-skipal-islands-politiker-boycottieren-fussball-wm-in-russland-a-1200007.html>

³ see, among others, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/russland-ausweisung-diplomaten-1.5267520>

⁴ See, among others, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article230471697/Tschechien-weist-wegen-Explosion-18-russische-Botschaftsmitarbeiter-aus.html?cid=onsite.onsitesearch>. On the conditions in the Vlachovice ammunition camp see <https://www.welt.de/vermishtes/weltgeschehen/article135319344/Das-wohl-unsicherste-Munitionslager-Tschechiens.html>

⁵ See, among others, https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/ausland/krisen/id_89868976/vergeltungssaktion-russland-weist-tschechische-diplomaten-aus.html

⁶ cf. https://www.osce.org/files/2021-04-17%20Daily%20Report_.pdf?itok=80371; <https://www.osce.org/files/2021-04-16%20Daily%20Report.pdf?itok=98877>; <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/483149> and other Daily Reports of the SMM

⁷ [https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/russland-schickt-15-kriegsschiffe-into-schwarze-meer-17298421.html](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/kriegsschiffe-der-usa-fahren-doch-nicht-into-schwarze-meer-17294349.html)

⁸ See, among others, <https://www.dw.com/de/russische-truppen-an-der-grenze-zur-ukraine-machtdemonstration-oder-bevorstehende-invasion/a-57112211>

⁹ One such case had been the "ZAPAD-17" exercise in Belarus.

¹⁰ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/65418>

¹¹ *Mercouris*, Alexander. "Despite Russia's Rebuff Desperate *Zelensky* Says Is 'Arranging' Summit With *Putin*", in: *The Duran* of 27 April 2021; <https://theduran.com/despite-russias-rebuff-desperate-zelensky-says-is-arranging-summit-with-putin/>

Who benefits when “impudence wins”?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Luisa Neubauer is considered the “German face” of “Fridays for Future”. She was born in 1996, has been a member of *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* since 2016 and is currently being courted by the “mainstream”. On 9 May 2021, she could appear on “Anne Will” on German television as a counterpart to the CDU candidate for chancellor, *Armin Laschet*. Afterwards the “Frankfurter Rundschau” titled: “Luisa Neubauer is taking Laschet to task”. On the same day, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* headlined: “Luisa Neubauer from Fridays for Future is a stroke of luck for the climate protection movement with her oratory talent.” And as a footnote it reads: “Luisa Neubauer will be a guest at ‘NZZ Unplugged’ at *Kaufleuten* Zurich on 6 June on the topic ‘Climate reality – are politics failing?’ In a personal conversation with *Peer Teuwsen*, Head of Culture of the *NZZ am Sonntag*, she talks about *the most pressing questions of our time.*” [emphasis km] And, finally: The German *Wikipedia* entry on her person now runs to 13 pages with 56 footnotes – as of 10 May 2021.

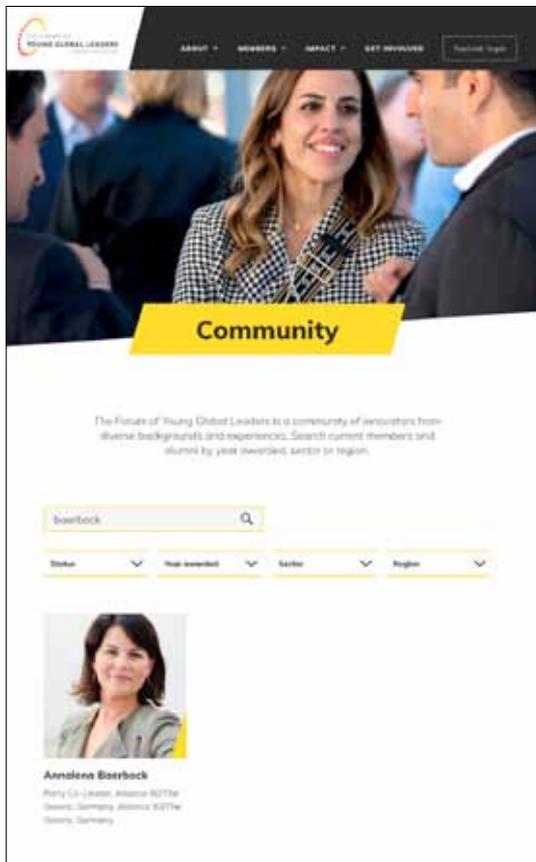
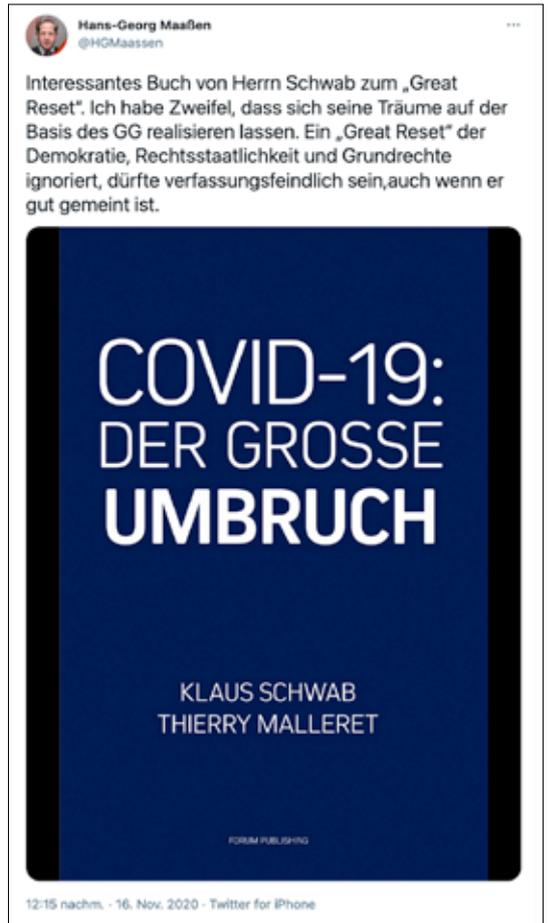
On “Anne Will”, Ms Neubauer distinguished herself above all by one thing: polemical, unsustainable and above all sharp

attacks on *Armin Laschet*. This is probably exactly why she was invited by Ms *Will*, who obviously has little sympathy for the CDU’s candidate for chancellor and knows very well what “cheeky brats” can achieve, even if they are already over 20. “Impudence wins!”, one could indeed get this impression; for it was obvious that all the participants in the talk show made an effort for the young lady, aligning themselves with her the more the sharper her attacks became.

One might dismiss all this as an anecdote from a media world gone mad. However, all this is somehow symptomatic of a disintegration of what should characterise a political culture oriented towards the common good and a culture of discussion: namely, a common search for realisable solutions to concrete problems, approaching the other opinion and the other person with respect. Have people already got used to the idea that in all areas of life – from family to world politics – it should always be a question of victory or defeat? That presenting oneself as “good” should always be at the expense of others? And that almost any means should be allowed as long as they lead to a success?

Getting used to that would not do any country any good. The public and private complaints about increasing polarisation have increased sharply in recent years. There are also people who are actually doing something about it. But Germany is now permanently in state of election campaign. Ms Neubauer’s appearance on “Anne Will” gave a foretaste of what the country can expect in the coming weeks and months. The German Greens have posed the question of power. They are seeking power by any means necessary. – Until someone shouts “Hold on!” decisively enough.

PS: One of Luisa Neubauer’s unproven claims in her war of words with *Armin Laschet* was that *Hans-Georg Maaßen*, CDU candidate for the Bundestag in a Thuringian constituency and President of the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* until 2018, was spreading “anti-Semitic and racist content”. Ms Neubauer did not provide any evidence for her ve-



Screenshot clip of the internet page <https://www.younggloballeaders.org/community?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=baerbock>

hement claim. In the days that followed, however, numerous mainstream media jumped to her rescue with constructions, some of them crude.

The fact is that Hans-Georg Maaßen had tweeted on 16 November 2020: “Interesting book by Mr *Schwab* on the ‘Great Reset’. I have doubts that his dreams can be realised based on the GG [Basic Law]. A ‘Great Reset’ that ignores democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights is likely to be anti-constitutional, even if it is well-intentioned.” Add to this the fact that Maaßen had judged Germany’s climate policy by saying that Germany had “already tried twice to save the world – and it went wrong each time”. All this will not have pleased Ms Neubauer and her party.

By the way, Ms Neubauer has already been a guest of Klaus Schwab in Davos. And until recently her party’s candidate for chancellor was listed as a member of the WEF’s “Forum of Young Global Leaders”.

In Germany, one hears more often now that the country needs a breath of fresh air and that it would therefore be good if Ms *Baerbock* became chancellor. Surely it would be good to also think about whence the air is blowing and, above all, whither it wants to blow.

“If I had only written this one book ...”

About the task and responsibility of authors of books for children and young people

by Eliane Perret

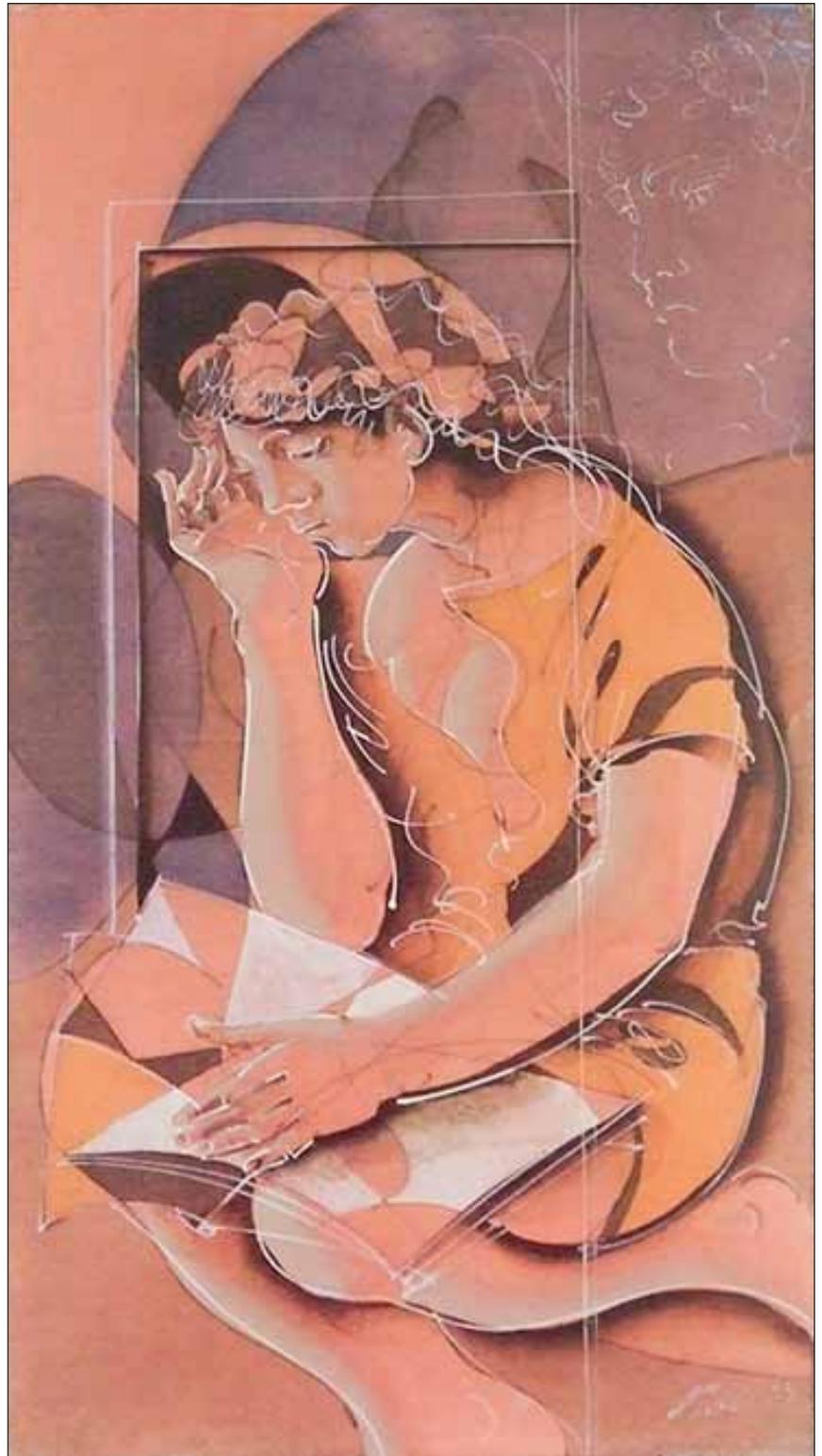
Many parents would like their children to enjoy reading, because it is not only an important skill to succeed in school, but a cultural technique that connects us with our fellow human beings and the world. It requires an emotional activity on the part of the reader to engage with a story, to grasp it mentally and to enter into an inner dialogue with the protagonists of a book. A mental and emotional task which is simply without a parallel! Especially in the last few months, when many families spent more time at home due to the pandemic, some parents realised that reading would be a good alternative to screen media. They realised how many hours their children and young people spent gaming and chatting, and many rightly feared a dependency associated with this. But what reading material could be used to create an attractive counterbalance here?

Walking through the bookshops and also libraries could often leave one perplexed, annoyed or even stunned, as *Nicole Duprat's* contribution from France [page 14] shows. Perhaps it helps to take up basic thoughts, but also one's own memories of reading.

Getting to know people in their world

When I unwrapped a book from the wrapping paper at Christmas of my first year at school, I had great joy and I immediately set about reading the “Colourful Stories”, as the book was called, in the following days. Since then, books have been my faithful companions and have broadened my view of the world. At first it was fairy tales, but soon I began to long for “real” stories, by which I meant those that had a connection to reality. These could be animal stories, but also books that describe the everyday life and adventures of children and their families. Through “Hansi and Ume” by *Elsa Muschg*, I learned a lot about the life and culture in Japan and was fascinated by room walls made of paper, on which you were not allowed to write or drill a hole. When I devoured “Heidi” by *Johanna Spyri*, I experienced how a bitter old man became a warm-hearted grandfather and how the relationship between his granddaughter and him held enriching tasks for both of them. I immersed myself in the life story of “Anneli” from the Tösstal, which was written by *Olga Meyer* based on her mother's biography and became a classic children's book. It gave me my first insight into the industrial history of the Zurich Oberland. The ideas of the “Red Zora” by *Kurt Held* accompanied me on our play afternoons in the forest. When my

continued on page 14



Good books can give us insight into the experiences, the emotional world and the thinking of other people, into other times and circumstances, broaden our view of the world – time and again, visual artists have also depicted the importance and fascination of reading. Here the picture of a reading girl by Hans Erni. (Picture ma)

“If I had only written ...”

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aunt gave me “Sadako will leben” (The Day of the Bomb) by *Karl Bruckner*, I not only feverishly wondered whether the girl would be healthy after folding a thousand cranes, but I also learned a lot about the devastating consequences of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. I could list many more books that I spent hours with and that made me laugh and cry. Even today, it is still my concern to track down books that would give children and young people the same experience as me. I would heartily wish it for them! And there are still those authors who join Olga Meyer and can say of themselves: “I wrote out of an inner compulsion, because I could not do otherwise. [...] I wrote out of joy, with the sole intention of grasping the child’s heart, creating from its world and helping it to move forward on the path of goodness”.¹

Confusing and ideologising

Unfortunately, when you walk through the children’s and young adults’ book sec-

tions, you also find a lot of other things. Politically charged and often ideologised topics such as climate change, Corona and euthanasia find their way into picture books.

“Children’s hearts are easily influenced,” wrote Olga Meyer. And who gives the right to abuse this fact for selfish purposes? Next to them are thick tomes in which little boys rule a magical world. They are disseminated – medially staged – find a wide readership and are imitated in endless variations. Here too: What is the point of confusing the next generation with unreal, constructed and often confused fantasies, apart from financial interests?

And this in a developmental phase in which they naturally like to turn to the “real” problems and discuss them? It is to be hoped that the target group of children and young people will “sense whether a book is ‘made’ or whether it is inwardly true, whether it is real. They feel the warmth that comes to them, the love with which the characters are realised,” as Olga Meyer wrote.²

Committed to an ethic

Writing a book for children or young people is a demanding task. It requires the authors to assume their human and civic responsibility. Ideologies and subtle manipulation mechanisms have no place there. Every writer must honestly ask himself whether he is committed to ethics, as Olga Meyer reflected after meeting one of her readers:

“And if I had only been able to create this one work in my life, what it has given to this girl, would have been proof enough for me that books intervene in the lives of young people in a guiding way – for good or for bad – that they have to fulfil a task and that the author must be aware of this. I would like to say that he must take part in the healthy mental development of the young person, that he must love him.”³

¹ Meyer, Olga. *Olga Meyer erzählt aus ihrem Leben.* (Olga Meyer talks about her life). Zurich 1968, p. 259

² op. cit. p. 260

³ op. cit. p. 275

When ideology dominates instead of respect for the child’s emotional world Why certain topics do not belong in children’s book

by Nicole Duprat, France

At the 2019 Geneva Book Fair, the children’s book “Paulette” was presented as part of a talk entitled “Why is euthanasia taboo in children’s books?”. No discussion was possible afterwards.

Under this rather aggressive title, the authors tell a seemingly “innocent” story with successful illustrations that enable the child to identify with the characters. A chicken suffering from a serious illness wishes to end its suffering. It therefore decides to take the end of its life into its own hands by resorting to euthanasia as a last resort: euthanasia under the watchful eye of a family of chickens on the farm, which is intended to “touch us” and prepare the child for the farewell of a loved one.

The protagonists in the children’s book try to convince us of the rightness of their approach (euthanasia is legal in Belgium), but we can ask ourselves what the real taboo is. Is it euthanasia or the refusal to love life to the end, or to accept the fact

that there is even a joy in dying for someone who has lived his life well?

Besides, in reality, it is more than outlandish when doctors extinguish a person’s life by a lethal means in front of the child and his family. It is not necessary to put the child and his family through a practice marked by morbidity. The fact that the climate of such a situation causes fear is concealed in the book.

How callous it is to take the child as an adult in miniature and to condition it to behaviour for which it has neither the psychological maturity nor the elements of understanding of life and death! To force upon the child the meaning of euthanasia as the final solution to existence is neither respect for the child’s world nor psychological empathy for its personal sensitivity!

How dishonest it is to extol euthanasia without mentioning the compassionate accompaniment at the end of life, which should be done in peace! Illness is not

a scandal, and old age is not decay. The child can understand illness and suffering if it comes into contact with disabled children or has itself experienced a less serious illness.

How inhuman it is to manipulate the child’s feeling and thinking in order to impress upon him the “image” of a self-determined death, instead of speaking to him of the tenderness, the bond of love, which his loved one so desperately needs for his natural going! Loving life to the end, despite the evils of the ageing body and the gradual onset of physical decay, is the best example we can give our children by accompanying our loved ones in their final farewell.

Love is stronger than death. The memory of a loved one is a flower that does not fade.

“You are no longer where you were, but you are everywhere where I am.” (Victor Hugo)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)