

# Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## J'accuse! Worse than the Dreyfus affair

UN Rapporteur Nils Melzer denounces the Assange affair as an international scandal of judicial misconduct, and breakdown of the rule of law

by Professor Dr jur et phil Alfred de Zayas\*



Alfred de Zayas  
(Picture ma)

It may appear unnecessary to repeat the truism that democracy depends on transparency and accountability, and yet, how often has the democratic order been betrayed by our leaders in the recent past? How often have the medias abandoned their watchdog function, how often have they simply accepted the role of an echo-chamber for the powerful, whether government or transnational corporations? Among the many scandals and betrayals of democracy and the rule of law we recognise the persecution of inconvenient journalists by governments and their helpers in the

media. Perhaps the most scandalous and immoral example of the multinational corruption of the rule of law is the “lawfare” conducted against *Julian Assange*, the founder of *Wikileaks*, who in the year 2010 uncovered war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the United States and its NATO allies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a world where the rule of law matters, the war crimes would have been promptly investigated, indictments would have been issued in the countries concerned. But no, the ire of the governments and the media focused on the journalist who had dared uncover these crimes. The persecution of this journalist was a coordinated assault on the rule of law by the United States, United Kingdom and Sweden, later joined by Ecuador. The instrumentalisation of the administration of justice – not for purposes of doing justice, but to destroy a human being pulled more and more people into a joint-criminal conspiracy of defamation, trumped-up charg-

es, investigations without indictment, deliberate delays and covers-up.

In April 2021 my colleague, Professor *Nils Melzer*, the UN Rapporteur on torture, published a meticulously researched and methodically unassailable documentation of this almost incredible saga. His book can well be called the “J'accuse” of our time, reminding us how our authorities have betrayed us, how four governments colluded in the corruption of the rule of law. Like *Emile Zola*, who in 1898 exposed the web of lies surrounding the scandalous judicial framing of the French Colonel *Alfred Dreyfus* in France, Nils Melzer shocks us 122 years later with proof of how countries that are ostensibly committed to the rule of law and human rights can betray the democratic ethos with the complicity of the mainstream media. Melzer writes about “concrete evidence of political persecution, gross arbitrariness on the part of the administration of justice and deliberate torture and

continued on page 2

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## Messenger of inconvenient truth

Nils Melzer: “The case of Julian Assange. Protocol of a persecution”<sup>1</sup>

by Urs Graf

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture had not been keen on getting involved with the “case *Assange*”.

On the first pages of his book the distinguished international law expert and ICRC delegate, who had decades of experience on the dark side of this world, reports on his own inner journey towards his professional commitment to this prisoner. He admits how as a person he had started this journey from mainstream prejudices<sup>2</sup> until urgent appeals of several organisations made him start his investigation, in the course of which he finally arrived at a factual documentation of what really had happened. This confession of the author and the explanation of his professional viewpoint renders the book even more valuable. The courage and outspokenness<sup>3</sup> of Professor *Melzer* provide a comforting contrast to the events in the “case *Julian Assange*”.

Because this is a protocol of state crimes and criminal state cover-ups, committed by international-law-abiding democracies rather than “failed states”. Unfortunately, the difference between the two entities seems to boil down to Melzer being subject to “soft harassment”, rather than him being prevented from doing his humanitarian job at gunpoint, or as he put it: orders obviously issued at government level resulting in bullying disrespect towards his position in the international arena. After years of non-cooperation between him and the states involved, the UN Special Rapporteur decided to blow the whistle himself and published the results of his investigation as a book.

So now the case is before us – the citizens of the world.

The book is divided into three parts: “Glance behind the curtain”, “Anatomy of

a persecution” and “Fight for the truth”. In the introduction Melzer explains, how and in which capacity he became involved with the case of Julian Assange and why he went public with this book.

### Glance behind the curtain

In a protocol of meticulous investigation of what happened in Sweden and England, we see how the admired and feared investigative journalist Julian Assange was hunted down and deprived of his human rights by state power abuse. As an internal mail communication of the US Global Intelligence consultancy firm *Stratfor*<sup>4</sup> reveals, this was all ordered and co-ordinated in the Western intelligence community. What had Julian Assange, the founder of *Wikileaks*, done? He had unmasked the ugly face of

continued on page 2

**"Messenger of inconvenient truth"**

continued from page 1

warfare, which is still the same as always even if military operations are advertised under such fancy names as "Iraqi Freedom", and he did it among other things by publishing classified documents. That way he had directed the searchlight of public interest on sinister, criminal acts of the states involved. And they retaliated by turning the searchlight around, directing it at the person Julian Assange and smearing him.

**Anatomy of a persecution**

Melzer analyses in detail how the Swedish Crown prosecution service altered the testimony of an intimidated woman into a rape lawsuit in the summer of 2010 and denied the accused any right to lawfully defend himself. Instead, details from the alleged case were leaked to the yellow press right from the start. Although Julian Assange had voluntarily cooperated with the Swedish authorities, there was no presumption of innocence for him. The State prosecutor in charge who had made this her priority case from the beginning

**"J'accuse! ..."**

continued from page 1

abuse."<sup>1</sup> This is an enormously important book because it requires us to abandon our "comfort zone" and demand transparency and accountability from our governments. Indeed, it is scandalous that none of the four governments involved in the frame-up cooperated with Professor Melzer and only answered with "political platitudes." Me too, I experienced the same lack of cooperation from powerful countries to whom I addressed notes verbales concerning violations of human rights – none of them responded satisfactorily.

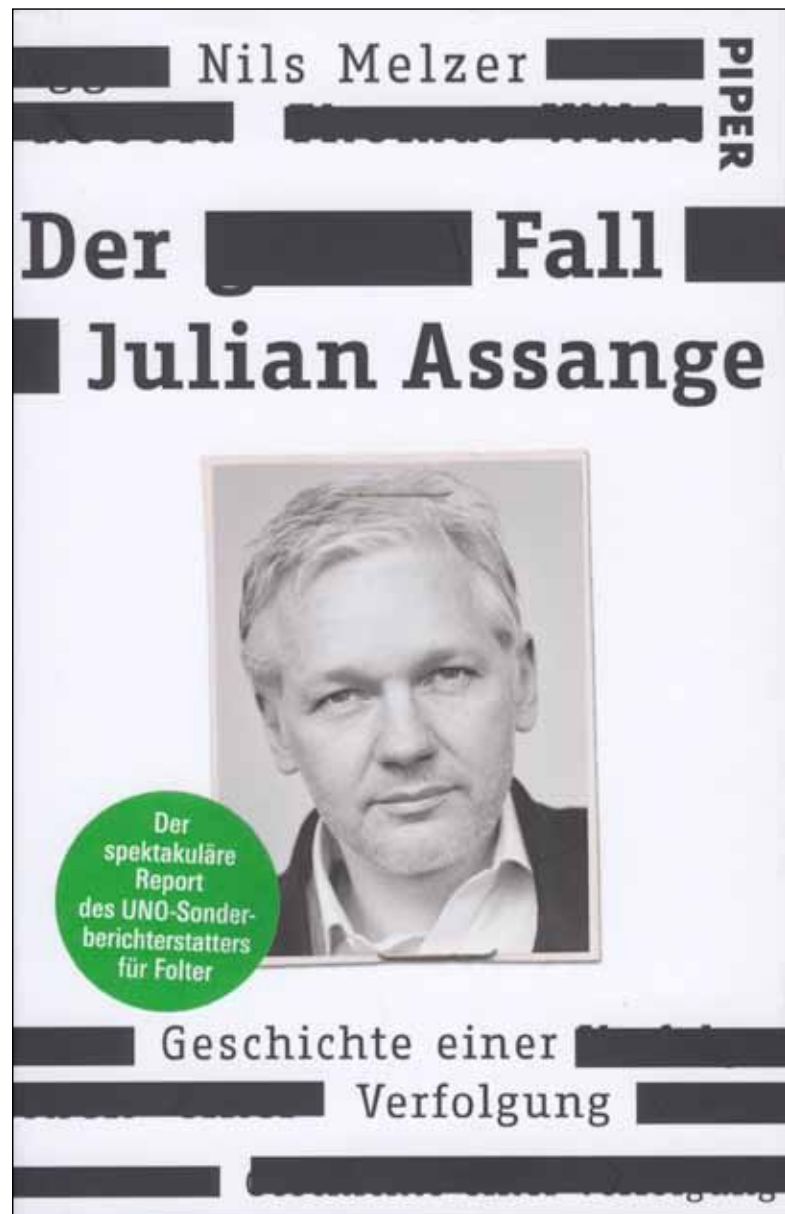
Melzer reminds us of *Hans-Christian Andersen's* fable "The King's new clothes". Indeed, everyone involved in the Assange frame-up consistently maintains the illusion of legality and repeats the same untruths, until an observer says – but the king has no clothes! That is the point. Our administration of justice has no clothes and instead of advancing justice, it colludes in the persecution of a journalist, with all the implications that this behaviour has for the survival of the democratic order. Melzer convinces us with facts – that we are living in a time of "post-truth", and that it is our responsibility to correct this situation now, lest we wake up tyranny.<sup>2</sup>

let him wait for an opportunity to testify for weeks (p. 166). When he finally applied for permission to leave the country, she approved the request but issued an international arrest warrant on the day of his flight. On the direct flight Stockholm-Berlin his baggage with important data storage devices disappeared after check-in (p. 173).

After Berlin he travelled to London. His attorney stayed in touch with the Swedish authorities. Their investigation dragged on; nobody was in a hurry. Meanwhile Assange received messages from America with blatant death threats and reports that a lawsuit for espionage was being prepared there against him.<sup>5</sup> In view of the obvious irregularities in the Swedish legal procedures he demanded a written confirmation from

Sweden that he was not going to be extradited to the USA (p. 176). The state of Sweden denied him this guarantee of "Non-Refoulement" and also refused to interrogate him in England. Instead, another international arrest warrant was issued. He turned himself in to the London police. After 9 days of solitary confinement, he was released to house detention on probation with 200.000 British pounds. He was allowed to stay at the house of a friend with an electronic ankle bracelet for the time of the Swedish-British extradition process. The British authorities circumvented international law which required them to protect this victim of prosecution by issuing what really amounts to a new law tailored for this particular case, a "Lex As-

continued on page 3



ISBN 978-3-492-07076-8

<sup>1</sup> Nils Melzer, *Der Fall Julian Assange*, Piper Verlag, Munich 2021, p. 14. See also <https://www.dw.com/en/the-case-of-julian-assange-rule-of-law-undermined/a-57260909><https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-about-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp 326-331.

**"Messenger of inconvenient truth"**

continued from page 2

**Psychological Torture**

The term "torture" in the sense of the UN convention against torture refers to – in a nutshell – the deliberate infliction of great bodily or psychological pain and harm, in order to achieve a certain goal. Moreover, torture is always directed against defenceless people whom the perpetrator has total control of.

Psychological torture is characterised by the concerted combination of four elements: intimidation, isolation, arbitrariness and humiliation.

sange" (p. 189). His native Australia also let its citizen Assange down and denied him a guarantee not to extradite him to the USA where he could have faced torture, a trial before a secret court<sup>6</sup> a life sentence of solitary confinement or even the death sentence.

**Escaping to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London**

After Great Britain had agreed on his extradition to Sweden Julian Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy. During the era of their president *Correa* Ecuador bravely stood up to the big brother in the North of their continent and granted asylum to the persecuted Julian Assange. They even had to fight off Great Britain who had warned they might ignore international law yet again and storm the embassy building (p. 194). The British authorities then downgraded their threat to a seven-year long siege by the police, during that time Assange would have faced immediate extradition had he set one foot outside the building. Despite this, the British minister of foreign affairs informed the UN Special Rapporteur that Julian Assange had been free to leave the Ecuadorian embassy at any time (p. 246).

After the change of administrations in the USA (*Trump*) and in Ecuador (*Moreno*) this asylum turned into a trap. The Moreno government followed a neoliberal course and wanted to "normalise" their relations with the USA. "Assange's stay in the Ecuadorian embassy becomes an obstacle on the way to the reconciliation they were hoping for." (p. 206)\*. In the autumn of 2018, the US Congress told President Moreno how he was to proceed towards this reconciliation.<sup>7</sup> At this time at the International Monetary Fund a decision about a loan was due which was desperately needed by Ecuador, and the USA had the vetoing power. Therefore, Ecuador changed the personnel at their London embassy and created a pretext to expel Julian Assange.<sup>8</sup>

During all that time the whistle blower was constantly smeared by the mainstream media. In order to discredit him, a campaign was launched alleging his predatory behaviour in the embassy despite the fact that the 24/7 audio-visual surveillance in the building never had picked-up anything like that, let alone that his deteriorating health would not have allowed "predatory behaviour" anyway. The ceaseless hunt for Julian Assange in this combined effort of state authorities and media outlets fulfils all criteria of psychological torture.

**Psychological torture**

Part of psychological torture is social death, a defamation campaign to discredit a person. This aim was achieved by the "strong suspicion" of rape, which all potential victims had publicly denied before the Swedish Crown prosecution service had illegally published the accusation and maintained it for 10 years without ever going to court. This defamatory assault on Julian Assange prevented distinguished human rights organisations from getting active on his behalf. "... the rapist stain never left him and continues to this day to distort the public view so that his case is not acknowledged as what it obviously is: politically motivated persecution." (p. 121) The abusive delay of his trial by the Swedish authorities also meant that the women, who kept denying that they were ever raped, had no protection against smear articles alleging that they were "liars" and "honeytraps". "They were recklessly instrumentalised for a political persecution and forced against their will into the humiliating roles of doubtful rape victims." (p. 124) It has to be added: The Swedish indictment was dropped in 2017 despite everything.

From a viewpoint of international law both torture and abuse are absolutely and universally forbidden and cannot be justified under any circumstances. Moreover, any suspicion of torture is required to be subject to criminal investigation and legal prosecution worldwide due to its special nature of cold-blooded instrumentalisation of pain and suffering.

In the morning of 11 April 2019 Ecuador illegally cancelled both citizenship and asylum status of the politically persecuted Assange and invited the British police to arrest him in their embassy building. He disappeared in Her Majesty's Belmarsh prison. What happened immediately afterwards was what Assange had already suspected when he was still in Stockholm and what had made him the mainstream media laughing stock as a "paranoiac" for years: The US Department of Justice unsealed their indictment and officially requested his extradition from Great Britain.

The personal belongings of the detainee, including documents and computers, were directly handed over to the Americans in a blatant breach of good legal practice, "answering to a request of the US department of justice for prosecutorial collaboration" (p. 224).

In the chapter "a glance across the Atlantic" Melzer comments on the situation of the US American justice system. His predecessor as UN Special Rapporteur on torture, *Juan Mendez*, had already given up on this issue. His interventions had been simply ignored. This resonates with reports by *Solzhenitsyn* and *Bukovsky* from Soviet times. In addition to the, from a European perspective, somewhat archaic proceedings, cases involving national security allow for "special administrative measures" to be undertaken by the US Department of Justice – these may result in conditions of custody fulfilling all criteria of torture as in the case of whistle blowers *Chelsea Manning*. Whistle blowers, even though they acted without violence and helped to uncover criminal acts, may be regarded as threats to US national security. One should bear that in mind when speculating about a fair and dignified trial of Julian Assange in the USA.

**Struggle for the truth**

The states involved responded to the interventions of the UN Special Rapporteur with "reality denial", or as *Christian Morgenstern* might have put it: That which must not, cannot be.<sup>9</sup> Their responses to the United Nations representative, whom they had helped to elect into his position, varied according to national language culture from wordy attack mode or wordy vacuous mode to "stiff upper lip" negation. Meanwhile Her British Majesty's government tried to challenge the neutral position of the Rapporteur and the German government, who had not even been asked to comment, expressed their "concerns regarding the respectability of his mandate". (p. 256) Both however kept silent about the suspected human rights violations in the case Julian Assange, while – double standard par-excellence – sharply criticising and even sanctioning other governments for other cases with sparse evidence. Considering the blatant and deliberate misconduct of the involved officials one cannot help but assume that this concerted action is meant to discourage Julian Assange and potential epigones from ever again making injustices public.

**Anglo-American show trial**

The British-American extradition trial degenerated into a show trial against

continued on page 4



### "Messenger of inconvenient truth"

continued from page 3

Julian Assange at the end of 2020 and at the same time into a undignified example of "...British obedience towards the American indictment." Step by step even the most bizarre arguments of the USA were accepted without questioning. At the same time district court judge *Baraitser* dismissed legal counter-arguments as well as exonerating affidavits of the defendant side en-bloc and without any detailed consideration. (p. 318)

On 4 January 2021 the judge declined extradition of Julian Assange not for legal but for medical reasons. The sentence alleges that the harsh conditions in a US high security prison might drive Assange suicidal, considering his unstable psyche. (p. 319)

Melzer suspects that "this sentence is a brilliantly set-up trap rather than a sign of the rule of law, humanism or justice for that matter." (p. 320). Because the judge has now set a legal precedent which might well scare other journalists, publishers and activists globally into thinking again, should they have considered to follow the example of Julian Assange, since in her sentence she has extended the US espionage act's area of application to that of the British Official secrets act.<sup>10</sup>

### Afterword

Nils Melzer could have chosen the easy way out of this. He is aware that his stance and the publication of this book do carry a risk for him personally. (p. 115) He has now turned into a whistle blower himself and has challenged those in power, who act under the cover of state secrets, by exposing their corruption – made possible by us citizens putting up with injustice instead of paying attention.

Melzer refers to *Hannah Arendt*<sup>11</sup>, the philosopher who had emigrated from Germany and later coined the phrase "the banality of evil" after she had attended the Eichmann trial (1961 in Jerusalem), in her book she had already then posed the question how everything could possibly have happened the way it had. Melzer is concerned that unless some serious changes occur the amount of public "denial, self-deception and whitewashing" as evidenced by the case of Julian Assange will jeopardise our entire future because we as humanity might not be able to face the challenges ahead.<sup>12</sup>

### Systemic failure

The book shows with disturbing clarity that Western democracy has been hijacked by a powerful cabal. The people are no longer in control of democratic processes in crucial state institutions. Melzer analyses

dryly: "Even though we might be tempted to resort to moralising: The reason for the systemic failure of the global community of states – be it in the case of Julian Assange or other cases – is not moral in nature but rather rooted in neurobiology and sociopsychology. [...] As I have argued in my report to the UN General assembly in October 2020, even complicated political decision processes are steered by mainly subconscious emotions primarily aiming to secure one's own existence and to avoid potentially dangerous conflicts. Inconvenient truths and moral ambiguities are suppressed, denied and whitewashed by self-deception of various kinds. The result of this process of self-deception is always a moral-free space where inhumanity and injustice may run havoc without being recognised as such." (p. 261)

### Life at war

Considering that we have been living in a state of war not in far-away parts of the earth but right here in Europe since the 1990s, wars waged by European democracies, that means that we have already put-up with lies and injustice for decades. Propagandistic manipulation, violence and might-makes-right are openly practiced. This is the socio-psychological climate we have slowly got used to. This climate frames our reasoning and demolishes the freedom of the press. Non-transparent "narratives", pushed by powerful media outlets, replace free public discourse. The difference can only be noted by comparing the current state of affairs with similar incidents decades ago. While in the early 1970s "New York Times" and "The Washington Post" were still able to defend themselves and thereby protect the freedom of the press<sup>13</sup> before the US Supreme Court after they had published the "Pentagon Papers" about the Vietnam war, which were leaked by *Daniel Ellsberg* and showed how the American public had been deceived by their own government, today Julian Assange is openly and cynically denied all his rights by state authorities.

### Honesty is the best policy

At the end the author makes a plea for self-reflection, only by paying attention and honest awareness of our own inclination to self-deception we can act in a politically mature way and tackle the problems of our time. "In order to make darkness disappear all we need to do is let our own light shine wherever we are and in our own way. That requires courage to be honest with ourselves and the world." (p. 331)

Now that we know what is going on in our time it has become a question of mental hygiene to fight back.

### Why one should read this book

As early as January 2020 Professor Melzer had outlined almost everything one needs to know about the case Julian Assange in his interview with Daniel Ryser of "Republik"<sup>14</sup> In the meantime SARS-CoV-2 has taken over and dominates all public debates. Behind this smokescreen all wars, murderous sanctions, destabilisation programmes and regime changes against countries resisting global market radicalism continue, pursued by the same governments who keep us busy and distracted with their "Corona crisis management" – and so does the prolonged murder of whistle blower Julian Assange who made all this public.

The book opens our eyes for the details and the magnitude of criminality involved. Puzzle pieces from which a picture emerges that should wake us up – unless we want to lose our humanity. In the case of Julian Assange, it is still possible and necessary to make justice prevail. •

<sup>1</sup> Melzer, Nils with Kobold, Oliver. *Der Fall Julian Assange. Geschichte einer Verfolgung.* (The case of Julian Assange. Protocol of a persecution) Piper, München 2021, ISBN 978-3-492-07076-8

<sup>2</sup> see "... trapped in my own prejudices" (p. 28)

<sup>3</sup> "Suddenly I realised the political dimension of this case and that I owed it to my personal and professional integrity to take a closer look and make up my own mind." (p. 53)

<sup>4</sup> "Pile on. Move him from country to country to face various charges for the next 25 years. But, seize everything he and his family own, to include every person linked to Wiki." (p. 174)

<sup>5</sup> death threats from America (p. 225ff)

<sup>6</sup> secret national security trial (p. 228ff)

<sup>7</sup> "In order to make progress in these crucial questions we need to solve a significant challenge first which had been created by your predecessor *Rafael Correa* – the status of Julian Assange." (p. 221ff)

<sup>8</sup> "While all points suggest the extradition to be unavoidable, at a closer look they turn out to be rather unconvincing if not absurd." (p. 222)

<sup>9</sup> "And he comes to the conclusion: His mishap was an illusion, for, he reasons pointedly, that which must not, cannot be."

<sup>10</sup> "This way the legal foundation has been laid to prosecute anybody worldwide who dares to pull dirty government secrets into open daylight in the future." (p. 321)

<sup>11</sup> "And it is the prosaic plots which eventually grow into the great tragedies of mankind, starting with political appeasement of the powerful, the denial of passive complicity up to bureaucratic perpetrators of horrific crimes – in other words the 'Banality of Evil' as *Hannah Arendt* had coined it." (p. 260)

<sup>12</sup> "Self-reflection, honesty and responsibility are no longer mere questions of personal morals, faith or life-style, but requirements for the survival of our species" (p. 326ff.)

<sup>13</sup> 6 May 2021: "Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government. And paramount among the responsibilities of a free press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell." (<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/403/713.html>)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-spricht-ueber-wikileaks-gruender-julian-assange>

\* Translation of all quotes by *Current Concerns*

## If lessons were learned ...

### On the recent escalation of violence in the Middle East

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

According to official figures, the renewed escalation of the conflict in the Middle East has claimed the lives of 12 Israeli and 243 Palestinian deaths, including more than 60 children and young people. This is reason enough to talk again about the factual novel "Apeirogon", published in 2020 and written by the Irish writer Colum McCann – as twice before in this newspaper (*Current Concerns* No 18 of 31 August 2020 and No. 22 of 16 October 2020). The novel has two "heroes" who actually exist: the Jewish Israeli Rami Elhanan and the Arab Palestinian Bassam Aramin. Both have lost a child to acts of violence by the "other side". Both have joined the Jewish-Arab peace movement, in which both work together.

#### Apeirogon

In the middle of the novel, after the first 500 and before the last 500 chapters, both of them speak at length themselves.

"My name is Rami Elhanan. I am the father of *Smadar*. [Smadar was killed in a Palestinian suicide bombing]. I am a sixty-seven-year-old graphic designer, an Israeli, a Jew, a seventh-generation Jerusalemite. [...] It may sound strange, but in Israel we don't really know what the Occupation actually is. We sit in our coffee shops, and we have a good time and we don't have to deal with it. We have no idea what it's like to walk through a checkpoint every day. Or to have our family land taken away. Or to wake up with a gun in our faces. We have two sets of laws, two sets of roads, two sets of values. To most Israelis this seems impossible, some sort of weird distortion of reality, but it is not. Because we just don't know. Our lives are good. The cappuccino is tasty. The beach is open. The airport is right there. We have no access to what it's like for people in the West Bank or Gaza. Nobody talks about it. You're not allowed into Bethlehem unless you're a soldier. We drive on our Israeli-only roads. We bypass the Arab villages. We build roads above them and below them, but only to make them faceless. Maybe we saw the West Bank once, when we were on military service, or maybe we watch a TV show every now and then, our hearts bleed for thirty minutes, but we don't really, truly, know what's going on. Not until the worst happens. And then the world is turned inside out.

#### "Violence is weak. Hatred is weak"

Truth is, you can't have a humane occupation. It just doesn't exist. It can't. It's about control. Maybe we have to wait until the prize of peace is so high that people

begin to understand this. Maybe it won't end until the prize outweighs the benefits. Economic prize lack of jobs. No sleep at night. Shame. Maybe even death. The price I paid. This is not a call for violence. Violence is weak. Hatred is weak. But today we have one side, the Palestinians, who are completely thrown to the side of the road. They don't have any power. What they do is out of incredible anger and frustration and humiliation. Their land is taken. They want it back."

#### "The occupation is wearing us down"

"My name is Bassam Aramin, I am the father of *Abir*. [Abir was fatally wounded in the head by a rubber bullet fired by the Israel Police]. I'm a Palestinian, a Muslim, an Arab. I am forty-eight years old. I've lived in many places – a cave near Hebron, seven years in prison, then an apartment in Anata, and these days in a house with a garden in Jericho near the Dead Sea. [...] When I was a kid, I thought it was a punishment from God to be a Palestinian, a Muslim, an Arab.

I carried it around, a big heavy weight around my neck. When you're a kid you always ask why, but adults forget to ask why anymore. You just accept it. They smashed up our homes. Accepted. They herded us through checkpoints. Accepted. [...] You see, the Occupation exists in every aspect of our lives, an exhaustion and a bitterness that nobody outside it really understands. It deprives you of tomorrow. It stops you from going to the market, to the hospital, to the beach, to the sea. You can't walk, you can't drive, you can't pick an olive from your own tree which is on the other side of the barbed wire. You can't even look up in the sky. They have their planes up there. They own the air above and the ground below. You need a permit to sow your land.

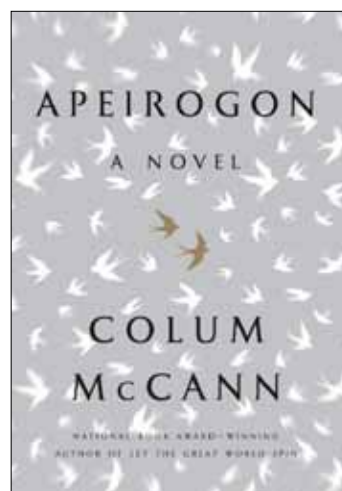
Your door is kicked in, your house is taken over, they put their feet on your chairs. Your seven-year-old is picked up and interrogated. You can't imagine it. Seven years old. Be a father for a minute and think of your seven-year-old being picked up in front of your eyes. Blindfolded. Zip ties put on his wrists. Taken to military court in Ofer. Most Israelis don't even know this happens. It's not that they're blind. They just don't know no idea what is being done in their name. They're not allowed to see. Their newspapers, their televisions, they don't tell them these things. They can't travel in the West Bank. They have no idea how we are living. But it happens every day. Every single day. We will never accept it. Even after one thousand years we'll never accept it. [...] The Occupation knocks us down and we get up. We are steadfast. We won't give in. Even if they hang me with my own veins. You see, ending the Occupation is our only real hope for everyone's security, Israeli, Palestinian, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Druze, Bedouin, it doesn't matter. The occupation corrupts us all from the inside out. But how do we go about ending it? I knew back then – and even more so now – that we have to do things differently. [...] We had to learn to use the force of our humanity. To be violently nonviolent. To bow our heads to the things that we need to tell one another. That is not soft, that's not weak, on the contrary, it's human."

#### "Portaitissa to Donetsk"

A multi-award-winning documentary from 2018 about a monastery very close to the embattled and now completely destroyed Donetsk airport – "Portaitissa to Donetsk" – also comes to mind. The abbess of the monastery, which was largely destroyed during the fighting around the airport at the end of 2014/beginning of 2015, says in the film: "At that time, something could probably still be changed. We could have reconciled. Understood each other. Apparently, no one wanted that."

#### Not enough, but worth the effort

And finally, another quote from the novel "Apeirogon". Bassam Aramin, as the novel tells us in one of the last chapters, had the opportunity to speak at a conference of the *American Israel Public Affairs Committee* AIPAC. He is always unsettled during his talk and has doubts about whether it makes any sense at all in speaking here, at the Israel Lobby. He perceives unrest and unwillingness in his audience. But in the midst of the portrayal, it reads: "To shift just one mind. It was never enough, but it was worth it anyway." •



ISBN 9780593134511

## The Palestinian people too have the right to self-determination

Statement delivered on behalf of the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM)  
at the Special Session of the Human Rights Council on Palestine on Thursday, 27 May 2021

Distinguished Chairperson,  
Delegates

IHRAAM is committed to the implementation of article 1 of the International Cov-

enant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates the right of self-determination of all peoples, including the Palestinian people.

Since 1947 the United Nations has a special responsibility to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, entailing full respect of international law and pertinent UN pronouncements, including Security Council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which held that international human rights treaties had been breached by Israel and formulated solutions that hitherto have not been implemented.

There can be no just solution for the peoples of Israel and Palestine unless international law is enforced. This Council must insist on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Palestine, Professor Michael Lynk.

IHRAAM further endorses the recent report of Human Rights Watch and calls upon Israel to stop its policies of land-grabbing and eviction of Palestinians from their homes, which are contrary to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Red Cross Convention and contrary to articles 7 and 8 of the Statute of Rome.

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Source: <https://dezayasalfred.wordpress.com/2021/05/27/special-session-of-the-human-rights-council-on-palestine-thursday-27-may-2021/>

### Outcome of the Special Session of the Human Rights Council on 27 May 2021

The Human Rights Council this afternoon adopted a resolution on ensuring respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, in which it established an international commission of inquiry to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions.

The resolution was adopted at the end of a one-day special session of the Human Rights Council on the "grave human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

In the resolution (A/HRC/S-30/L.1), adopted by a vote of 24 in favour, 9 against and 14 abstentions, the Council decides to urgently establish an ongoing independent, international commission of inquiry, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, to investigate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem,

and in Israel all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.

The Council also calls upon all relevant parties to cooperate fully with the commission of inquiry and to facilitate its access. It urges all States to refrain from transferring arms when they assess, in accordance with applicable national procedures and international obligations and standards, that there is a clear risk that such arms might be used in the commission or facilitation of serious violations or abuses of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. [...]

Source: <https://www.un Geneva.org/fr/news-media/meeting-summary/2021/05/human-rights-council-establishes-international-commission> (excerpt)

## If you want to find a solution, you have to be prepared to sit down at the table

Statement by Dr Bruno Kreisky\* in 1988 on the basic problems of the conflict between Palestinians and Israel



Bruno Kreisky,  
(Picture oel.orf.at)

A terrible blood-bath is taking place in the Middle East, every day. I always saw it coming and I am very sad that it has come. Perhaps some of you remember the time when I dealt with these things, as the only head of government in Europe, and warned that this was coming. There was also talk in the pubs and the regulars' tables: "What is Kreisky constantly doing with the Palestinians?" Of course, because I am of the opinion that they have a right to exist, a right to their lives, and that their land must not be taken away from them, and that above all the Israelis must not do that, they must find a solution as to how two states can coexist. I have fought for this for decades. [...]

Recently, someone said in a large American magazine: "If the Israeli politicians, the Israeli government are not able to solve these problems, then they should not demand that the young Israeli soldiers solve them for them." You need a new policy. And again, dear comrades, you see where a wrong policy leads.

I know the Arabs well, and I know the Palestinians well, and I have been in contact with them, only last Sunday, in London. I was on the phone with Arafat. I know that now, if you only want to, you can find a solution. You just have to be willing to sit down at the table. And the present Israeli government is not ready to do that. And the world's conscience has to speak up when it wakes up so late, as is the case at the moment. But now it has awakened, and one should not underestimate it. Even a small state that behaves like a crusader state will have to pay for it. And the sooner the people of Israel real-

ise how urgent it is to sit down and [stop] this daily murder. They may throw stones, what else do they have but stones, why shouldn't they throw stones, I say frankly, when they have been made servants for years.

The more prudent must be those who have the weapons. Now is the time, and it can often happen that on an issue you go all the way to the top in the opposites, and suddenly the moment comes when people become reasonable. We have experienced it, you will experience it, I am telling you today, many have experienced it. And so I have only hinted at the problem here, for which I have fought all my life, in the last part of my life in particular: For justice and peace among humans. Because weapons only bring renewed misfortune, again and again and again.

\* Bruno Kreisky, Austrian chancellor (SPÖ) from 1970–1983, refers here to the First Palestinian Inti-

continued on page 8

## With each other instead of against German-Russian dialogue at this year's "Potsdam Encounters"

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

On 18 May 2021, the German-Russian "Potsdam Encounters" took place for the 25<sup>th</sup> time. The theme of this year's conference was: "Turning Times – Prospects for European Cooperation between Pandemic and New Location". Matthias Platzeck, Chairman of the Board of the German-Russian Forum, explained the significance and objectives of the conference: "Especially in the current difficult situation, closer cooperation between Germany and Russia as well as the EU and the EEU [Eurasian Economic Union] must be possible and encouraged. It is important to define concrete approaches for joint action and to implement targeted steps. We are working on this within the framework of the 'Potsdam Encounters'".

In 1999, the then Federal President Roman Herzog initiated the "Potsdam Encounters" with the aim of finding a deeper understanding for each other and new forms of togetherness through the discussion of current issues. Since then, high-ranking representatives from politics, business, culture and other public figures from Russia and Germany have gathered regularly each year for this conference, which usually lasts two days. The organisers are the *German-Russian Forum* in cooperation with the *Russian Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy*. Since 2019, the event has been under the patronage of Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, who this year gave an address that was unifying for peoples.

The conference morning was devoted to political issues, while the afternoon agenda included questions of economic cooperation.

Further speakers and panellists listed in the programme at the conference, moderated by Alexander Rahr, were Konstantin Kossachev, Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Dr Thomas Kunze, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Office Abroad and Country Representative for the Russian Federation, Wolfgang Ischinger, former Ambassador to the Russian Federation and Chairman of the Munich Security Conference (replacing Dr Johann Wadepuhl, Member of the German Parliament, who arrived late), Professor Dr Alexander Dynkin, President of the Primakov Institute for World Economy and International Relations at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr Pavel Savalnyj, Chairman of the Russian-

German Parliamentary Group and Chairman of the Energy Committee of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. In the afternoon, which was dedicated to German-Russian economic relations, the keynote speaker was Peter Altmaier, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy.

In view of the tense situation in German-Russian relations, the event offered one of the rare opportunities for an open and equitable exchange. Most of the kick-off speeches and contributions to the discussion were based on the notion of peace, reconciliation, mutual understanding, the interest in good partnership relations, the will to continue the long-standing cooperation and were generally forward-looking.

Matthias Platzeck greeted all participants with warm words and paid tribute to the Russian guests who had spared no effort to attend the conference in Berlin in person.

### Reflecting again on what unites us

"Relations between the West and Russia, between the European Union and also between Germany and Russia are [...] in the worst crisis since 1990, since the end of the Cold War. We have long since entered a new era of confrontation and arms race", Matthias Platzeck said in his welcoming speech. He referred to the war of extermination against the Soviet Union unleashed by the Germans which will be celebrated for the 80<sup>th</sup> time on 22 June. He recalled the victims on the Soviet side: 12 million soldiers and 15 million civilians. "I harbour a hope, admittedly a very faint one, that this historic date will make us reflect again. [...] And that we reflect much more again on what unites us, what can bring us closer together again, and not only on what divides us today."

### Creating trust through reconciling remembrance

He recalled the Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, which had shown "that deep rifts can also be overcome in relations between East and West". Today, too, he said, "a reconciliatory commemoration of the victims of German crimes can again create more trust". He emphasised the great potential and the great interest that also exists today in economic and societal cooperation between Germany and Russia. "The ideas of Ostpolitik – reconciliation, responsibility and understanding – live on today, especially among the citizens. Germans and Russians are working together in a spirit of trust in more than a hundred town twinning programmes, in

youth exchanges and in school and university cooperation. They exchange ideas in countless joint projects – from new mobility to social participation to museum cooperation."

### Russia not interested in confrontation

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov began his address by regretting that the pandemic has so far not led to the unification of the international community, noting, "The anti-Russia sentiments of some German media outlets have risen to a fever pitch".

This is eroding mutual confidence and the very foundations of our relationship", he said.

He again stressed that Russia was not interested in confrontation and called for "developing a positive Russian-German agenda on a wide range of issues".

He said it was "It is notable that German business leaders invariably reaffirm their commitment to carry on mutually beneficial cooperation with their Russian partners".

He continued: "Moscow continues to regard Berlin as an important international player and remains open to dialogue, but a dialogue that is honest and mutually respectful. We know that in Germany, too, there are many of those interested in promoting relations based on the principles of equality and regard for each other's interests [...] I hope that common sense will prevail and that the forces that put national interests above ideological schemes and bloc discipline in the spirit of the Cold War will gain the upper hand".

### Building bridges in a difficult time

In order to be able to overcome the economic problems caused by the pandemic, it is necessary to bundle the potentials; he referred to the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin to form the "Great Eurasian Partnership", which was open to all countries in Asia and Europe without exception".

He praised the Potsdam meetings as part of the positive connecting initiatives in the Russian-German society-to-society dialogue, which today had a special role to play: "After all, they have been originally created as 'all-weather' arrangements independent of the changeable political situation".

Sergey Lavrov and Matthias Platzeck are just two examples from a series of contributions to this year's "Potsdam Encounters" that seek to build bridges in a very difficult time. •



# Caviar and war in the Caucasus

## Corruption and greed for power do not let the region come to rest

by Gerd Brenner, Oberst i G

*It is not yet certain whether all the casualties of the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia last October have really been recovered and all the prisoners exchanged, but Azerbaijani ruler Ilham Aliyev is already making new demands. Now it is no longer a matter just of Nagorno-Karabakh, but about Armenia's very existence.*

In the war in Nagorno-Karabakh from 27 September to 10 November last year, probably more than 3,600 Armenians<sup>1</sup> lost their lives. On the other side, one must add almost 2,900 Azerbaijanis<sup>2</sup> as well as up to 500 Syrian mercenaries recruited by Turkey in Syria for the war against Nagorno-Karabakh. Most of them were probably Islamic extremists.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of the war, the Republic of Arzakh, as the internationally unrecognised republic in Nagorno-Karabakh calls itself, lost practically the southern half of its original territory. In the secessionist war from 1992 to 1994, Armenian and Karabakh fighters had occupied not only the heartland of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also surrounding areas indisputably belonging to Azerbaijan. These areas were important because they served as a land link between Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian motherland. In last autumn's war, however, Azerbaijan did not content itself with reconquering its original territories, but also occupied parts of Hadrut province, which had already been part of Nagorno-Karabakh in Soviet times. This was a clear signal of contempt for the mainly Western states of the OSCE Minsk Group, which had laid down the modalities for resolving this territorial conflict in the so-called Madrid Principles.<sup>4</sup> With Turkey behind him, *Aliyev* believes he can allow himself such behaviour.

As a result of the war, Nagorno-Karabakh is now surrounded by Azerbaijani ter-

ritory on all sides. The only remaining land bridge to the Armenian motherland is the so-called Lachin corridor, which connects the capital Stepanakert (Khankendi in Azerbaijani) with the provincial town of Goris in the south of Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic had to grant Azerbaijan transit rights between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan in the ceasefire agreement of 9 November last year. People, goods and means of transport will be allowed to pass through this kind of corridor, under the supervision of Russian border troops. The most obvious option is to reopen the road and railway line in the Arax River valley on the southern border with Iran. However, the condition of these carriers of transport and the cost of restoring them are unclear. This corridor would also de facto be under the supervision of the Iranians, who can follow what is happening on the riverbank road from the Iranian southern bank, where a road also runs.

The success in last autumn's war obviously went to Ilham Aliyev's head: now he is also laying claim to a transit corridor in Syunik province in southern Armenia – claiming he will use force if necessary.<sup>5</sup> As things stand, this can only mean that he wants to bring a corridor there under his military control. So far, the bellicose words of the strong man in Baku have hardly attracted any attention outside the

South Caucasus region, and only the joint information platform of the BRICS countries has issued a statement yet.<sup>6</sup>

Now that the weather conditions allow military operations in the high mountains of the Caucasus again, Aliyev has followed up his words with deeds: On the morning of 12 May, Azerbaijani troops advanced to Sev Lich (literally: "black lake") at 2,700 m above sea level on the border with Armenia, as well as to two adjacent dominant heights. That this is by no means only about securing the border is shown by the fact that by now at least 400 Azerbaijani soldiers are standing 3.5 km deep in Armenian territory.<sup>7</sup> In high alpine terrain, this cannot be justified by navigational errors and inaccurate maps. One could safely dismiss this as high alpine sabre-rattling if Lake Sev itself were not the source of the Vararakh River, which flows through the provincial town of Goris. And Goris, in turn, is an important transport hub in this mountainous region, where the road from Yerevan branches out: South to the provincial capital Kapan and on to the border with Iran, East to the Lachin corridor and Stepanakert.

The occupation of Armenian territory at Lake Sev is interpreted by Armenia as a first step towards implementing Aliyev's threats to force a transit corridor. This is

continued on page 9

Letter to  the Editor

### Books, a guiding hand for life

*Eliane Perrets* articles are read with great interest and pleasure.

As a child, I had three books:

"Struwelpeter" ("Shaggy Peter") with terrible stories: Hans looked in the sky and fell in the water, was rescued. Zappelphilip ("The Story of Fidgety Philip") disappeared under the tablecloth. Children who laugh about a black person were dunked in ink. The thumb-sucker had his thumbs cut off.

Another book was "Globi, the children's friend" which was friendlier. The third book was illustrated by a farmer with beautiful pictures of the countryside: flowers, spiderwebs, trees ... I no longer remember the story since I couldn't read at the time. At the age of 9, I became ill for a long period and read "Heidi" by *Johanna Spyri*. Someone lent me books by *Olga Meyer*, *Elisabeth Müller* and romance novels (actually for older people).

My Mother brought me a book, "Mutterli" by *Josef Reinhard* (the story of a school girl taught by *Johann Heinrich*

*Pestalozzi*). Furious, I threw the book on the floor: "I want children's books!" I cried until I fell asleep. Later, I did read the book. It portrayed phases in a woman's life of as a young, pock-marked woman, as a doctor's wife, as a mother and as a grandmother. I experienced what humanity, goodness, motherhood and achievement for the community could be. This book was a guiding hand for my life.

I read everything I could get hold of. My vocational teacher after school had a wonderful library where I could borrow whatever I chose and where my choice of a good book was educated. Books were and are very valuable for me and I have tried to pass this on to my day-care children.

Books have opened the world for me.

Dear parents, take the time to look at books with children, to read to them and to read together with them. Let yourselves be advised. There are so many valuable books which can be guiding hands for life.

Marianne Wehrle

#### "If you want to find a solution ..."

continued from page 6

fada (uprising, revolt) from 1987 to 1993. It was triggered by the death of four Palestinians in Gaza Strip in December 1987 by an Israeli truck. "But the causes of the Palestinians' uprising lay deeper: they had been living under Israeli occupation since the Six-Day War in 1967. Their own political groups were banned, whether radical or moderate. A state of their own thus became ever more remote. This fuelled despair and anger." The Oslo Accords of 1993 between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasir Arafat ended the First Intifada (Source: Schäuble, Martin; Flight Noah. "The First Intifada and the Oslo Peace Agreement". Federal Agency for Civic Education, 28 March 2008)

Source: Vienna Film Archive of the Labour Movement, [www.wifar.at](http://www.wifar.at)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



**“Caviar and war in the Caucasus”**

continued from page 8

quite understandable. The topography here only allows the route Lachin – Goris – Sisian – Nakhichevan. The implementation of these threats would have far-reaching consequences for the existence of the Armenian state. Aliyev would first have to justify why the corridor along the Arax River is not enough.

**Caviar, football and screaming teenagers**

Thanks to its wealth, Azerbaijan has been able to buy its way into the “European community of (shared) values” in recent decades. In an effort to ensure security of supply and diversify suppliers of oil and gas, European politicians have made repeated pilgrimages to Baku to strike lucrative deals with President Alyiev.<sup>8</sup> Azerbaijan sees itself as holding a key role for oil exports from the Caspian Sea via non-Russian networks and as a hub for oil and gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Europe.<sup>9</sup> In the past, the legendary “caviar diplomacy” and poorly disguised bribery of Western politicians compensated for the lack of direct synergies of interest.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to its good political and economic relations with Europe, Baku also managed to make itself the venue of the *Eurovision Song Contest*<sup>11</sup> in 2012 and that European Football Championship which is about to begin.<sup>12</sup>

Azerbaijan’s main ally is Turkey. Its NATO membership means that Western military leaders still feel close to Turkey. For example, Turkey pushed through the shelving of Nato cooperation with Austria. Conversely, Austria complained about Turkish hacker attacks.<sup>13</sup> Turkey is obviously dearer to the “Western community of values” than is Austria. In form of the refugee issue, Turkey has a lever in its hand that allows it to pressure the Europeans almost at will. The constant influx of refugees from Syria ensures that this lever will remain effective for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the Europeans would in turn have to rely on cooperation with the unloved Russians and Iranians to settle the conflict in Syria. So here, too, the Europeans are caught between Scylla and Charybdis.

**The role of Iran and Georgia**

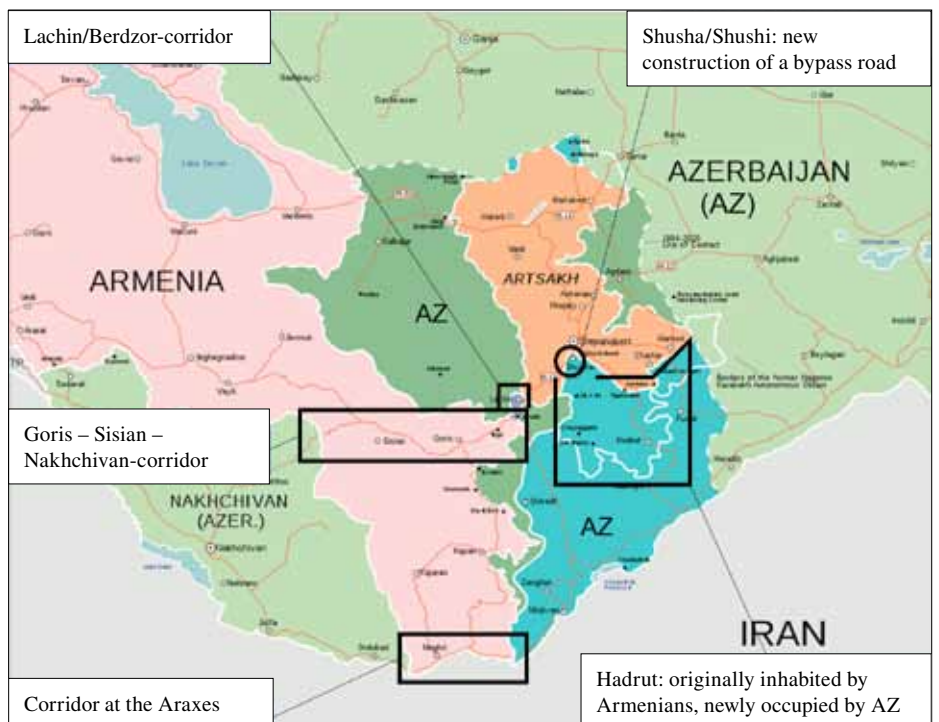
Armenia is one of the few countries that has been able to maintain good relations with Iran, which is all the more important for the small country because Armenia’s borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey are hermetically sealed. The Zurich Protocol on the Normalisation of Relations between Armenia and Turkey of 10 October 2009, which provided for the opening of the borders, was never implemented.<sup>14</sup> The Armenian diaspora in Iran is accepted and the Armenian Orthodox Church enjoys some privileg-

continued on page 10



The arrow on the upper map points towards Lake Sevlich (located on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan – Azerbaijani troops have crossed the border there) or the region where Azerbaijani troops have positioned themselves at or beyond the border with Armenia. The bold black lines represent important road connections. Goris is located in Armenia at the road junction that leads in an easterly direction to the Lachin corridor (see map opposite) and finally to Stepanakert/Khankendi in Nagorno-Karabakh and in a westerly direction through the middle of Armenian territory to Sisian (Armenia) and from there south-westwards to Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan). This route is also marked on the map opposite: from the Lachin corridor via Goris and Sisian to Nakhchivan.

This map also shows below the corridor along Armenia's southern border with Iran with two roads, one north and one south along the river Arax forming the border. (Artsakh = Arzakh = Nagorno-Karabakh)



Source: <https://theconversation.com/nagorno-karabakh-in-the-aftermath-of-war-armenia-faces-an-upalatable-choice-161375>, Comments by the author

### “Caviar and war in the Caucasus”

continued from page 9

es in the Islamic theocracy.<sup>15</sup> The stronger the tensions in the Persian Gulf become, the more Iran is interested in a calm situation in and around Armenia. An agreement in the dispute over the JCPOA nuclear deal would give Iran new freedom of action, which it could use to participate in efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict. Consequently, Aliyev is currently under pressure.

In what way and to what extent Azerbaijan is able to motivate its northern neighbour Georgia to take an anti-Armenian stance remains to be seen. During the war last autumn, information circulated that Turkey was supplying Azerbaijan with weapons through Georgian territory. At the same time, anti-Armenian demonstrations took place in Georgia – rumoured to be organised by Azerbaijanis.<sup>16</sup>

### And the West?

During last autumn’s war, the Armenians complained about the passivity of Russia and the West. Indeed, the US did nothing to stop Azerbaijan’s military aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh. Even now that President Aliyev has laid claim to Armenian territory in Syunik, nothing has been heard of US President *Biden*. Given Azerbaijan’s heavy dependence on oil and gas exports, it would be quite easy to put the Aliyev regime in its place – if one wanted to. With regard to Turkey, the Americans seem to be more concerned about the purchase of Russian weapons than about its participation in military aggression.<sup>17</sup> The US government has comforted the Armenians somewhat in recent weeks, as US President Joe Biden has used the term “genocide”. Whether this was more than a cosmetic use of the term remains to be seen.

By stationing border troops on the Turkish-Armenian border, Russia has long made it clear that a Turkish attack on Armenia would immediately escalate into a Turkish-Russian conflict. In the event of such a conflict, Turkey can hope for but little support from NATO. Rumours are currently circulating that *Erdogan* wants to motivate Azerbaijan and Ukraine to take coordinated action against Russia.<sup>18</sup> It is not a rumour, however, that Turkish nationalists, including the “Grey Wolves”, are fighting on the side of Ukraine in the Donbass.<sup>19</sup>

With the stationing of a peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia has practically become the guarantor of the continued existence of the Republic of Arzakh. Russia has long tried to maintain good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, but is now forced by Aliyev’s claims in Syunik to take a clear position: now a non-member of the *Collective Security Treaty Organisation* CSTO is making claims on the territory of an ally, and these cannot be justified under international law. According

to the international community, the Republic of Arzakh, is part of Azerbaijan under international law, and if Russia’s intervention in favour of the Republic of Arzakh might have been interpreted as a breach of international law, the legal situation is clear in the case of Syunik. If Russia does not intervene there, the cohesion of the CSTO is gone. Through his military successes and Western passivity, Ilham Aliyev in Baku apparently sees himself in a position to trample on international agreements and threaten a sovereign country. If the West does not oppose such behaviour because it is not prepared to cooperate pragmatically with Russia and Iran, then it is to be hoped that it will at least give Russia a free hand to protect its ally from destruction. •

<sup>1</sup> see <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/55023/>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> see <https://www.syriaahr.com/en/188040/> and <https://www.syriaahr.com/en/194516/>

<sup>4</sup> on the Madrid Principles see [https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSS-Analysen\\_131-DE.pdf](https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSS-Analysen_131-DE.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> see <https://oc-media.org/aliyev-threatens-to-establish-corridor-in-armenia-by-force/>, <https://armenianweekly.com/2021/03/13/aliyev-once-again-threatens-armenia-with-war/>, <https://armenian.usc.edu/aliyev-makes-territorial-claims-on-armenia-yet-again/>, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31215235.html>, <https://www.civilnet.am/news/600496/aliyev-threatens-to-solve-the-meghri-corridor-issue-by-force-armenian-mfa-responds/?lang=en>, <https://jam-news.net/response-to-aliyevs-statements-claims-on-the-territory-of-armenia-yerevan-zangezur-syunik-sevan/>

<sup>6</sup> see <https://infobrics.org/post/32936/>

<sup>7</sup> see <https://www.fr.de/politik/rote-linien-am-schwarzen-see-90612220.html> and <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/neue-spannungen-zwischen-armenien-und-aserbajdschan-17341621.html>

<sup>8</sup> see in the case of Switzerland: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/kaviar-diplomatie-schweiz-keine-korruption-stattdessen-kooperation/46545688>

<sup>9</sup> see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31999D0614>. The basis for energy cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan is the Energy Charter Treaty of 16 April 1998 and the assistance programmes based on it: TACIS (Technical Assistance for CIS), INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) and TRACE-CA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Central Asia).

<sup>10</sup> see <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/korruption-wie-aserbajdschan-westliche-politiker-korruptiert/27001696.html?ticket=ST-741635-XV1zrjJObjBjgVaHMkq-ap3>, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus228873279/Korruptionsaffaere-Wie-Aserbajdschan-deutsche-Politiker-umgarnt.html>, <https://www.transparency.de/aktuelles/detail/article/kaviardiplomatie-durch-aserbajdschan-betriff-deutsche-politiker/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://eurovision.tv/country/azerbajjan>. Eviction of residents: <https://www.hrw.org/de/news/2012/02/17/aserbajdschan-rechtswidrige-raumungen-im-vorfeld-des-eurovision-song-con-test>. <https://www.dw.com/de/eurovision-und-menschenrechte-in-baku/a-15888936>

<sup>12</sup> See [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/em-spielort-aserbajdschan-baku-muessie-ausfallen.1346.de.html?dram:article\\_id=495897](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/em-spielort-aserbajdschan-baku-muessie-ausfallen.1346.de.html?dram:article_id=495897), <https://www.watson.ch/sport/fussball/319736782-baku-auf-der-kippe-fussball-em-2021-mit-fans-in-den-stadien-geplant>, <https://www.fussball-wm.pro/em-2021/stadien-spielorte/nationalstadion-baku/>

<sup>13</sup> see <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000053273618/anriffe-auf-ministerien->

*bundesheer-enttarnte-tuerkischen-hacker from 2017, as well as https://kurier.at/politik/inland/cyber-terrorist-nach-angriffen-auf-oesterreich-enttarnt/248.912.062*, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/mutmasslicher-cyber-terrorist-ist-auf-dem-weg-in-die-tuerkei/249.110.096>; on blocking cooperation: <https://www.diepresse.com/5222874/tuerkei-blockiert-nato-kooperation-mit-oesterreich> and <https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/tuerkei-blockiert-weiter-oesterreichs-nato-kooperation/311.430.787>

<sup>14</sup> see <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/mediennmitteilungen.msg-id-29446.html> and <https://www.foraus.ch/posts/vom-stillen-tod-der-grossen-vertraege-was-ist-eigentlich-aus-den-zuercher-protokollen-geworden/>

<sup>15</sup> see <https://horizonweekly.ca/en/81665-2/> and <https://agbu.org/news-item/the-islamic-revolution-a-blessing-in-disguise-for-iranian-armenians/>; and even today the cooperation seems to work: It is possible that the Armenian airline Fly Armenia Airways has sold a Boeing 737 to the Iranian Caspian Airlines: <https://www.aerotelegraph.com/iran-mysterioeser-flug-einer-armenischen-boeing-737>

<sup>16</sup> The Georgian government immediately denied such reports: <https://dfwatch.net/clear-disinformation-georgia-denies-it-is-allowing-turkish-weapons-shipment-to-azerbajjan-54284>. See also <https://oc-media.org/features/armenophobia-the-oldest-form-of-xenophobia-in-georgia/>

<sup>17</sup> on the S-400s in Turkey, see <https://anfdeutsch.com/aktuelles/us-sanktionen-gegen-tuerkei-treten-in-kraft-25498>

<sup>18</sup> see <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/tuerkei-und-ukraine-russland-als-gemeinsamer-gegner-17199135.html>; and the arms trade also works: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-tuerkei-erdogan-1.5261283> and <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/ukraine-tuerkei-russland-101.html>

<sup>19</sup> see <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Graue-Woelfe-vor-der-Krim-3377105.html>

## Current Concerns

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögel, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

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Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

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# A sovereign Switzerland is best for all – for us Swiss and for the world

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

Some EU accession turbos want to conjure up a “mercredi noir”. For all friends of a politically independent Switzerland, however, 26 May 2021 is a “jour de fête”: The Federal Council has declared the negotiations with Brussels on a framework treaty to be over, and the day before, FDFA head *Ignazio Cassis* was able to announce the highly pleasing news that the upcoming summit meeting between US President *Joe Biden* and Russian President *Vladimir Putin* will take place on Swiss territory, in Geneva. No coincidence for any thinking contemporary.

## Breakup of the negotiations on the Framework Agreement – A courageous decision by the Federal Council

In the past weeks and months, more and more Swiss people from all political corners and from workers’ and entrepreneurs’ circles have understood that the institutional framework agreement drawn up by the EU bureaucracy simply doesn’t fit the liberal Swiss model of the state based on direct democracy and federalism – whichever way you look at it. Current Concerns has regularly reported on the unsilenced signals from the population. Since the Federal Council began to think aloud about ending the negotiations, the opposing forces began roaring: “Operation libero”, NEBS (New European

Movement Switzerland) and all the others tried to dissuade the Federal Council from its commitment to a sovereign Switzerland. They did not succeed.

Chapeau to the Federal Council! The fact that he has decided to draw a clear line after many years of unsatisfactory negotiations is the best proof of the uniqueness of the Swiss model. Because it became increasingly obvious that the sovereign would never ever agree to the principle of adopting EU law and EU court decisions in the referendum, the Federal Council has shown itself to be a true servant of the people. The disappointed EU turbos in the mainstream media can still bluster that the abortion is a “sign of weakness” and that the Federal Council does not have a plan B.

Of course, in Swiss style, the Federal Council does not have a single monumental plan B. Rather, it has many plans B ready and will develop more, for research cooperation, for further access of medical technology companies to the EU market and for everything that will come up in the next few years. In cooperation with Brussels, but also increasingly with the individual neighbouring countries or other EU member states. And of course, Switzerland, which is financially strong, is also ready to contribute to meaningful projects in less strong EU states – provided it is not

pestered by the Brussels bureaucracy with arbitrary actions.

## Russian-American summit meeting in Geneva is in the tradition of Switzerland’s good offices

On 16 June, the presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden will meet in Geneva to discuss “the full range” of pressing issues and restore “predictability and stability” to bilateral relations, said White House spokeswoman *Jen Psaki*, according to *SRF News* on 25 May.

It is a great honour for Switzerland to have been awarded the contract alongside other applicants such as Austria and Finland – but not by chance. “The Good Offices are part of the diplomatic offer of neutral Switzerland. It has experience as a host and, with the international Geneva, has a platform that is predestined for such a meeting. The role of host requires diplomatic and organisational tact.

The discretion of the Swiss authorities is appreciated, also in this case”. Thus the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 25 May under the title “Biden and Putin meet in Geneva. Swiss diplomacy achieves a spectacular success”. For the Russian government in particular, it is certainly an important aspect for this election that Switzerland is neither an EU nor a NATO member. Let’s stick to it!

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# Pesticide- and Drinking Water Initiative – nothing new in Switzerland’s direct democracy

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

On 13 June we will vote on two agricultural initiatives. The pesticide initiative wants to ban both the use of pesticides on farms and the import of food treated with pesticides altogether. The drinking water initiative wants to set ecological standards for farmers even higher than before. For example, direct payments should only be paid if the farmer does not use pesticides and only keeps as many animals as he can feed with fodder from his own land. Neither initiative is “unique”. Most of their elements can be found in previous initiatives. They have a history and are part of a long tradition of popular initiatives, which will be examined below.

In the 1960s, Switzerland’s economy was booming. Strong immigration, housing shortages, inflation and a heavy burden on the environment soon led to major problems. The Federal Council and parliament tried to dampen the euphoric mood in the country and took numerous emergency measures against the overheating of the economy. These included credit restrictions and even construction bans. It was not enough. The water quality, for example, in Lake Zurich (from which the city of Zurich takes its drinking water) and also in other lakes increasingly deteriorated, so that the authorities had to ban swimming in Zurich and also in other places. This was an alarm signal.

Agriculture was also booming. The import of cheap feed led to an undesirable increase in production. Problematic was the emergence of specialised, soil-independent farms with mass livestock farming, which were mainly run on cheap feed from abroad. The focus was on pig and poultry farming and large farms with fattening cattle. It became possible on a large scale to keep more animals than the own soil could provide in fodder. This disastrous development was a product of the euphoric mood in the then booming economy. Environmental protection and animal welfare were neglected because almost every economic project promised a quick profit.

The feed was also linked to the later BSE scandal. The widespread, unnatural feeding of animal meal to ruminants was identified as the cause of BSE, which can lead to a variant of *Creutzfeld-Jakob disease* in humans and to death. This shock greatly alarmed the population and further sensitised them to all issues of agriculture.



The GMO moratorium was passed by the Swiss people in 2005 and has since been extended several times by parliament, until today. (Picture keystone)

## The people take on environmental issues

Already in the 1970s, the conviction was gaining ground that agricultural policy had to be reoriented. Not only the surpluses, but also animal welfare and the acute questions of environmental and water protection were of great concern to the population. The term “animal factory” soon became a political battle cry. In addition to the previous “milk lake” and “butter mountain”, there were now also “meat mountains”. The Federal Council tried to stop the unhealthy development by massively increasing the price of cheap feed from abroad with tariffs. However, this angered the small farmers who owned only a few hectares of land and could better make ends meet with the cheap feed from abroad. The situation had become difficult.

There were three landmark referenda: in 1971, the people approved a new article on environmental protection in the Federal Constitution with over 90 per cent of the vote. This was followed in 1973 and 1975

by two further referenda on animal protection and on the protection of water and hydropower. Both proposals were also accepted with very high approval in all cantons.

Modern waste incineration plants and sewage treatment plants were built all over the country, so that the situation soon improved. In many communes and regions, citizens’ movements were formed that advocated socially and environmentally compatible production methods. The SP and the bourgeois parties turned green. Green parties were formed in numerous cantons, and in 1987 they merged to form the Green Party of Switzerland. As the left-wing Progressive Organisations of Switzerland POCH gradually dissolved during these years, most of their activists joined the Greens. And – who would be surprised – there came years with many popular initiatives and referenda. It was to be one of the most intensive direct-democratic debates in the

continued on page 13



**"Pesticide- and Drinking Water Initiative ..."**

continued from page 12

history of the federal state. But let's take it one step at a time.

**Introduction of the milk quota system and the first referendum**

In the 1952 Agriculture Act, the Confederation had undertaken to take over the entire volume of milk at a price fixed by the state. As more and more surpluses became apparent, in March 1968 Parliament discussed introducing milk quotas, i.e. limiting the quantity of milk with official measures. In 1971 the Federal Council appointed a commission of experts with the professors *Hans Christoph Binswanger* and *Hans Popp*. They not only examined the question of milk quotas, but also looked into the idea of direct payments to secure farmers' incomes – detached from the milk price fixed by the state. However, the time was not yet ripe for this.

When the surpluses continued to rise, the Federal Council introduced milk quotas by emergency law in 1977, with the authorities calculating the amount of milk each individual farmer was allowed to deliver according to certain criteria.

An ordinary legislative resolution by parliament soon followed. The "Union des Producteurs Suisse", together with other farmers' committees, launched a referendum. The people did not follow the protest from agriculture and approved the law in 1978 with 68 per cent.

**First precursor of today's Drinking Water- and Pesticides Initiative**

A next popular initiative was not long in coming. In 1978, the "Zentralverband der Milchbauern" (Central Union of Dairy Farmers), together with animal rights activists, launched the initiative "Against excessive feed imports and animal factories" with 165,000 signatures. The proposed constitutional article largely coincided with the Federal Council's policy, but went one step further: the initiative demanded that the Federal Council not only limit the import of imported feed, but also determine the permissible quantity for each individual farm. In other words, the federal government was to ration feed. The Federal Council and Parliament accepted the objective of the popular initiative and incorporated individual points – but without "feed rationing" – into the Agriculture Act. For example:

Large animal stocks were to be reduced and the number of animals per farm limited. A permit was required for the construction of new stables and the conversion of existing ones. The envisaged upper limits: 250 head of large fattening cattle, 1,000 fattening pigs, 1,200 laying hens, etc. The revised Agriculture

**What already applies today: High hurdles for farmers who want money from the federal government**

cc. According to the *Federal Office for Agriculture* (FOAG), anyone claiming direct payments must "meet(s) the requirements of the ecological performance certificate (ÖLN) on the entire farm" (Ordinance on Direct Payments; DZV Art. 11).

"The proof of ecological performance includes:

1. the keeping of livestock in accordance with animal welfare legislation (DZV Art. 12)
2. a balanced manure balance (DZV Art. 13) [among other things, 'the number of livestock shall be adapted to the location']
3. soil testing (DZV Art. 13) [on the individual plots, 'to optimise the distribution of manure']
4. an appropriate proportion of biodiversity promotion areas (DZV Art. 14) [3.5 to 7 % of the utilised agricultural area].
5. proper management of sites in inventories of national importance

(Art. 15) [e.g. fenlands or amphibian spawning areas]

6. regulated crop rotation (DZV Art. 16)
7. appropriate soil protection (DZV Art. 17) ['requirements for soil cover and erosion protection']
8. targeted selection and application of plant protection products (DZV Art. 18) [for example 'untreated control windows' for fungicides in rape]
9. specifications concerning seed and plant material (DZV Art. 19)
10. requirements concerning special crops (Art. 20)
11. requirements concerning buffer strips (Art. 21)"

(<https://www.blw.admin.ch/blw/de/home/instrumente/direktzahlungen/oe-kologischer-leistungsnachweis.html>)

The ecological performance record currently in force therefore already contains essential points of the two popular initiatives. In any case, the direct payments from the federal government are by no means easy money for Swiss farmers.

Act came into force, and the Central Union of Dairy Farmers withdrew its popular initiative. It had thus exerted pressure on politicians and at least partially achieved its goal.

The referendum of the "Union des Producteurs Suisse" and the popular initiative of the dairy farmers were the prelude to a whole series of referenda and initiatives from the people and counter-proposals from parliament. In the process, it becomes clear that a vote in direct democracy does not simply mean saying yes or no, but that the exercise of popular rights sets the legislative process in motion and can provide guidance to Parliament, so that sometimes a vote does not even occur.

**"Gnue Heu dune" (That does it) – next forerunner in the eighties**

In 1980, some farmers founded the "Association for the Protection of Small and Medium-Sized Farmers" VKMB and elected the charismatic *René Hochuli* as its president. They did not agree with the revision of the law and continued the fight against "soil-independent meat factories and mass production farms". In 1985, they launched the popular initiative "For a real peasant agriculture". "That does it" and "We want to remain farmers!" were their slogans. They represented traditional family farms that worked with fodder from their own farm. Only such farms should enjoy full agricultural protection, was their message. Animal factories, mass farms and the like, on the other hand, were not worthy of protec-

tion (demands that are still being made today). The Federal Council proposed to reject the initiative without a counter-proposal on the grounds that its concerns were partly justified. However, the initiative was overshooting the mark, and parliament had already decided on measures.

The vote was held on 24 June 1989. In the run-up to the vote, tempers ran high. Shortly before the ballot, the small farmers' association withdrew from the Swiss Farmers' Union (SBC) because it did not support their initiative. This split the farming community into two camps – a division that still has an impact today. There was great excitement when it became clear that the courageous action of the small and medium-sized farmers met with sympathy among the population. The close result was surprising: the initiative was rejected with a scant 51 per cent of the vote. However, a clear majority of the cantons rejected it. Despite the defeat, this was a major success for small and medium-sized farmers, and it was a clear signal to the authorities.

During these years, two initiatives in the environmental field were accepted by the people: the initiative for the protection of the high moors (1987) and a little later (1994) the initiative for the protection of the Alps against excessive transit traffic. Both had been submitted not by political parties but by citizens' movements, and both were intended to have a significant impact on policy.

continued on page 14

**"Pesticide- and Drinking Water Initiative ..."**  
continued from page 13

### Expert report: Paradigm shift on direct payments

In the meantime, the Federal Council had appointed a second expert commission chaired by Professor Hans Popp on the subject of direct payments. This commission presented a report in 1992: Farmers could no longer count on prices continuing to rise as they had in the past, it said. The milk price set by the federal government had risen from 80 centimes to over 1.10 Swiss francs between 1980 and 1990 – to compensate for inflation and within the framework of the parity wage (today: by 65 centimes). The dismantling of border protection within the framework of the coming WTO and the expected rapprochement with the EU would – according to Hans Popp – lead to falling prices in the future. However, the loss of income could be compensated for with direct payments that are independent of price and are based on area, number of animals or criteria such as integrated production IP or organic farming. Agriculture should become "multi-functional" in the future. In other words, it should contribute to a secure supply of food for the population, to the preservation of natural resources, to the maintenance of the cultural landscape and to the decentralised settlement of the country. The public services should no longer be compensated primarily through prices, but through direct payments.

This revolutionary approach should be incorporated into a new constitutional article.

### Further debates and referenda in the period leading up to the new constitutional article of 1996

After small farmers' withdrawal from the umbrella organisation, the *Swiss Farmers' Union* (SFU) tried to move off the defensive. As early as 1989, it launched the popular initiative "For an environmentally sound and efficient agriculture" and furthermore, it drafted a proposal for a new constitutional article. The farmers had been gathering more than 260,000 signatures in a relatively short period of time. Parliament addressed the concern raised by the SFU reacting in two ways: on the one hand, it drafted an own counter-proposal for the new constitutional article. On the other hand, it incorporated the main concern of the initiators into the ongoing reform of the Agriculture Act. The SFU was satisfied with the outcome of this process and withdrew its popular initiative.

In the first half of the nineties, two further popular initiatives for a new constitutional article were submitted: on the one hand (1990) by the committee of WWF Switzerland and the Green Party

## Article on agriculture in the Federal Constitution, adopted in the referendum of 9 June 1996\* (corresponds verbatim to today's Article 104 FC)

FC Art. 31octies

- 1 The Confederation shall ensure that agricultural sector, by means of a sustainable and market-oriented production policy, makes an essential contribution towards:
  - a. the reliable provision of the population with foodstuffs;
  - b. the conservation of natural resources and the upkeep of the countryside;
  - c. decentralised population settlement of the country.
- 2 In addition to the self-help measures that can reasonably be expected in the agriculture sector and if necessary, in derogation from the principle of economic freedom, the Confederation shall support farms that cultivate the land.
- 3 The Confederation shall organise measures in such a manner that the agricultural sector fulfils its multi-functional duties. It has in particular the following powers and duties:
  - a. supplementing revenues from agriculture by means of direct subsidies in order to achieve of fair and adequate remuneration for the services provided, subject to

- proof of compliance with ecological requirements;
  - b. encouraging by means of economically advantageous incentives methods of production that are specifically near-natural and respectful of both the environment and livestock;
  - c. legislating on declarations of origin, quality, production methods and processing procedures for foodstuffs;
  - d. protecting the environment against the detrimental effects of the excessive use of fertilisers, chemicals and other auxiliary agents;
  - e. at its discretion, encouraging agricultural research, counselling and education and subsidise investments;
  - f. at its discretion, legislating on the consolidation of agricultural property holdings.
- 4 For these purposes, the Confederation shall provide both funds earmarked for the agricultural sector and general federal funds.

\* English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. This translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.

("Farmers and consumers – for an agriculture close to nature") and on the other hand (1993) by the committee "Gnue Heu dune" (small farmers), which in its proposal aimed at protecting the interests of family farms more strongly.

On 12 March 1995, three proposals on agriculture were put to the vote: Parliament's counter-proposal to the withdrawn popular initiative of the Swiss Farmers' Union, and two referenda on issues of milk quota and the financing of joint agricultural advertising campaigns (which the Association for the Protection of Small and Medium-Sized Farmers refused to support).

The voters rejected all three proposals. The discomfort with official agricultural policy had increased. This might have been due to the BSE scandal smouldering in the background at the time.

12 March 1995, however, was not the end of the debate. In the Federal Council's bureau was an initiative of WWF Switzerland and the Green Party waiting to be put to the vote. It also submitted a proposal for a new constitutional article.

1996: Yes to the agricultural article 31octies (Art 104 of the current Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999).

The National Council and the Council of States proceeded as follows: They first

one worked out a counter-proposal to the present popular initiative of WWF Switzerland and the Green Party. As a starting point they used the proposal they had drawn up themselves, which however, had been rejected by the people on March 12, 1995. They improved this draft so convincingly that WWF Switzerland and the Green Party withdrew their initiative, so that in the end the parliamentary proposal alone was put to the vote. The result surprised – this time positively: The people and all cantons very clearly approved it on 9 June 1996, with almost 78 per cent of the votes. There was great relief in Bern. The series of "nay" votes in the agricultural sector had come to an end. The text of the referendum of 9 June 1996, is included in the current Federal Constitution as Article 104.

The electorate already approved paragraph 3d at that time, which states, "It [the federal government] shall protect the environment from degradation by excessive use of fertilizers, chemicals, and other adjuvants."

### Success also from a democratic point of view

The new constitutional article has been the result of several years of challeng-

continued on page 15

### "Pesticide- and Drinking Water Initiative ..."

continued from page 14

ing interaction – by the people, the parliament with the responsible commissions and the Federal Council with the responsible federal office. Farmers with their associations, individual activists and citizens' movements, several initiative committees, political parties and various NGOs such as WWF Switzerland all contributed to this process.

Whoever looks at the result from a political perspective will be impressed and will conclude that direct democracy has made the population highly aware of politics and agricultural issues. Indeed, there is hardly a broader base of support for politics. Direct democracy has succeeded in meeting the challenge and thus contributes to political stability and cohesion.

#### The debate about the structure of the direct payments starts

Two years later (1998), the popular initiative "For low-priced food and ecological farms" of the small and medium-sized farmers (VKMB), which they had already submitted in 1993, was also submitted to a vote. The small farmers opened the debate on the structure of the newly introduced direct payments. Only real farms – especially family farms – should enjoy full agricultural protection. This would require direct payments to be limited upward: "Farmers produce in a way that is close to nature and animal-friendly. If they meet this condition, they are entitled to direct payments to compensate for their performance, insofar as these are necessary to achieve an adequate income. However, direct payments should not exceed a maximum of 50,000 Swiss francs per farm."

For large farms, this would have been clearly insufficient. However, the starting position for this referendum was unfavourable for the initiators, as the sovereign had shortly before approved the new agricultural article by a large majority. The discussion about the structure of direct payments was still premature. Experience had yet to be gained. On 27 September 1998, the small farmers' initiative was therefore clearly rejected by 77 per cent of the cantons.

#### On the system of direct payments

Today, the federal government spends about CHF 4.5 billion on agriculture every year. Whereas in the past about two-thirds was used to support prices, today it is about 20 per cent. In turn, federal expenditure on direct payments has risen to over 75 per cent.

Today, direct payments are based on very different criteria: According to the area and according to the number of animals fed on grass or hay. There are special contributions for mountain farmers

who farm in difficult terrain, as well as for near-natural, environmentally friendly or particularly animal-friendly production methods.

Depending on how direct payments are structured, the development of agriculture can be steered. This was the starting point for other popular initiatives and for the two initiatives that will be put to the vote on 13 June 2021. At first, however, the issue of genetic engineering was in the foreground: agro-multinationals announced that they would genetically modify crops in such a way that the use of pesticides would become largely unnecessary – an argument they still use today. Resistance followed.

#### GMO-free agriculture

In 2003, a committee consisting of farmers, environmentalists and consumer protectionists launched a popular initiative "For food from GMO-free agriculture". It actually wanted a ban. Since this was not legally possible because of the WTO, it stipulated that Swiss agriculture must remain GMO-free for five years after the adoption of the article (moratorium). The research sector was excluded from the ban.

The Federal Council rejected the initiative. It was controversial in parliament. The Council of States clearly rejected it by 32 votes to 5. In the National Council, however, there was a tie, so that the President of the Council decided with her vote in favour of rejection. The people saw things differently and voted in favour by a clear majority on 27 November 2005. Since then, the GMO moratorium has been included in the transitional provisions of the constitution and in the law and has been extended several times by parliament – until 2021.

#### Fair food, food security, food sovereignty

In 2018, two popular initiatives and a counter-proposal by parliament were put to the vote. With its initiative, the Swiss Farmers' Union SBC pursued the goal of stabilising the declining degree of self-sufficiency. Parliament drew up a counter-proposal – somewhat more restrained. The SBC withdrew the initiative and the parliamentary counter-proposal was accepted in the referendum with a relatively large majority. The initiative of the farmers' union *Uniterre* pursued a holistic approach that encompassed life on the farm, such as social security for the farmer's wife and the like. An extensive, detailed catalogue of demands was intended to guarantee food sovereignty. The initiative was relatively clearly rejected by the sovereign.

The Fair Food Initiative of the Greens demanded that the federal government

promotes food from a near-natural and animal-friendly agriculture with fair working conditions. The strict regulations should also apply to imports, similar to the current pesticide initiative. It, too, was rejected by the sovereign.

#### March 2021: Parliament passes law on the reduction of pesticides and fertilisers

Swiss agriculture has changed massively in recent decades: More organic, more IP-Suisse, less synthetic chemical pesticides, strict regulations for animal husbandry, declining cow and pig populations, biodiversity, more consumer proximity. Thanks to direct democracy, we now have a high level of environmental protection and animal welfare in Switzerland – higher than in the EU, for example. The concepts of the drinking water and pesticide initiatives fit into the tradition of the agricultural policy of the last sixty years, which has been strongly influenced by the people.

The National Council and the Council of States – as was often the case in the past – did not simply reject the two initiatives, but in the spring session of 2021 passed a "law for fewer risks from pesticides", which amends the Chemicals Act, the Water Protection Act and the Agriculture Act (Federal Act of 19.3.2021). It is now stipulated that the risks associated with the use of pesticides for rivers and lakes, near-natural habitats and groundwater used as drinking water are to be reduced by 50 per cent by 2027. In addition, fertilisers (nitrogen and phosphorus) must be "adequately reduced" by 2030. No referendum is planned against this law. According to the media release of 18 March 2021, its provisions are intended to "take the wind out of the sails of the two popular petitions". This is because Switzerland will receive the world's most stringent pesticide law.

On 13 June – as so often before – the sovereign will decide whether there should even be a complete ban on pesticides. The challenging issue of the pollution of health and the environment by synthetic chemical substances will remain in focus in any case – also thanks to direct democracy as we live it in Switzerland. •

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# Lithium battery or fuel cell – whose future is it?

## Attempt at a stocktaking and a forecast

by Winfried Pogorzelski

Everybody talks about the blessing of battery-powered electric cars. For some time now, all the well-known car manufacturers have been offering corresponding models for some time now, from small cars to mid-range cars, luxury limousines to the so-called SUVs, the off-road sedans that now populate our roads unmissable. Anyone who read the newspapers in spring with a certain curiosity for this topic will have hardly missed the fact that there are more and more reports about another propulsion technology, namely the fuel cell. It generates electricity from hydrogen and oxygen and uses it to drive an electric motor. A vehicle operated in this way does not emit pollutants, but water vapour. Not only is the air not polluted, it is even purified. Is a long-cherished dream finally coming true here, or should everything be a little more complicated after all?

It is astonishing that for a long time so little was heard and read about the hydrogen-powered fuel cell, while people have been working diligently and successfully behind the scenes on the development of this technology for many years. Few may be aware that in Switzerland, for example, there is already a hydrogen filling station network – albeit a modest one – and some trucks are on the road between Lake Constance and Lake Geneva for major Swiss companies such as *Coop*, *Migros* and *Fenaco*.

### Battery-powered electric cars: technology, manufacture, performance

Instead of an internal combustion engine, a common electric car is powered by an electric motor, which – like mobile phones and notebooks, by the way – is powered by a lithium-ion battery. Such a battery can be recharged again and again over a long period of time, so that total ranges of between 50,000 and 100,000 km per vehicle and battery can be achieved. Electric cars are very pleasant to drive: they have a good acceleration, drive in only one gear and therefore consist of far fewer individual parts than a petrol-driven vehicle, which makes them less in need of



Emmi is testing two of the world's first Hyundai hydrogen lorries. The vehicles are supplied with 100% renewable hydrogen via the Hydros spider H<sub>2</sub> filling station network that is currently being set up in Switzerland. (Picture Emmi)

repair and thus cheaper to maintain. On-site, they produce no emissions and run almost silently.

Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite and platinum are needed to manufacture the batteries. The worldwide deposits of these materials are likely to be sufficient for a long time. When all factors are taken into account, it has been calculated that the environmental friendliness of a vehicle becomes fully apparent from a mileage of 50,000 km. When a battery needs to be replaced, it can still be used as a stationary energy supplier for a while; afterwards, its components are recyclable.

### Disadvantages of battery-powered electric vehicles

If you list the disadvantages of these vehicles, you name exactly the areas that are constantly being worked on at full speed to improve them: too few charging stations, relatively long recharging time, too short a range (currently about 500 km on average), costly disposal or reuse of the batteries, limited range of vehicles (so far mainly vehicles from the mid-range upwards), great danger in serious accidents because a fire in the battery cannot be extinguished on site (the vehicle has to be immersed in a pool of water), high purchase price.

Moreover, after the dependence on oil and coal, humans seem to be moving into a new dependence on raw materials that are not even known to the general public and that are largely extracted in Latin America and Asia with serious

consequences for humans and the environment; their final disposal is costly. In the background of the strong propagation and the downright boom in the production of these vehicles, political and economic interests also seem to play a certain role, at least that is the conclusion of a French film entitled "Environmental sinner E-car?".

### Functioning of a fuel cell car

On the other hand, we have heard very little about the development of this variant of an electric vehicle. That changed this spring. Instead of a lithium-ion battery, these vehicles have a fuel cell and a hydrogen tank.

Hydrogen achieves a very high energy density in the gaseous and deep-cooled aggregate state in which it is also stored at the filling stations. In the process of energy production, hydrogen and oxygen are brought together; they react with each other to produce water (this is the reverse of the electrolysis of water, which produces hydrogen and oxygen). This electrochemical process produces heat and electrical energy. The latter drives the electric motor that sets the vehicle in motion. Like the battery-powered electric car, this type of car also produces no emissions during operation. The range of heavy-duty vehicles is greater than that of battery-powered ones, eliminating the need for lengthy recharging. Filling a tank with hydrogen takes hardly any longer than refilling with fossil fuel.

continued on page 17



## "Lithium battery or fuel cell ..."

continued from page 16

### Hydrogen – a reliable

#### energy supplier also in other aspects

The production and use of hydrogen have a future, even apart from car propulsion by fuel cells. It is already used for many purposes, such as in the food industry, in the desulphurisation of fuel or as a fuel for soot-free flames. Also, against the background of the Paris UN Climate Agreement of 2015, the production of hydrogen is to be promoted worldwide so that it can be an environmentally friendly energy supplier not only for mobility, but also for important industries such as chemicals and steel. If the electricity demand is generated from non-constant renewable sources such as sun and wind, hydrogen technology can provide secure power supply during a so called dark lull, when neither the sun is shining nor the wind is blowing.

#### Disadvantages of the vehicle propulsion system with a fuel cell

At present, 98 % of hydrogen is still produced from hydrocarbons such as natural gas, crude oil and coal. Around 40 % of this is produced as a by-product in chemical processes such as crude oil refining. Production and storage of the element require a lot of energy, and this energy must come from renewable sources if the eco-balance of the fuel cell-powered vehicle is to be positive. Hydrogen is stored and transported in gaseous form under high pressure or in liquid form at minus 253 degrees Celsius in extremely insulated double-walled tanks. The use in automobiles requires high safety requirements with regard to tightness, fire and so-called burst safety, so that safe driving is guaranteed.

#### The future has already begun: No vibrations as with the conventional

Diesel lorries, smooth and delay-free operation of the five-speed converter automatic, impressive torque development, minimal driving noise in the cabin even at top speed on the motorway – with words like these, long-distance drivers rave about lorries powered by hydrogen and fuel cells.

Few people are aware that hydrogen technology has already been used in Switzerland for some time, namely in heavy goods transport (traffic): since October 2020, the first seven 36-tonne fuel cell lorries from the South Korean brand *Hyundai* have been in service in Switzerland for Coop, Migros, Fenaco and other large companies. This pioneering act is made possible by the network "Förderverein H2 Mobilität Schweiz" (in cooperation with *Hyundai Hydrogen Mobility* with the Swiss start-up *H<sub>2</sub> Energy*), to

which filling station operators and transport companies belong and which wants to set up CO<sub>2</sub>-emission-free motorised individual transport within the framework of a closed hydrogen cycle, which must not only be economical but also environmentally friendly: The hydrogen is produced only with electricity from renewable energy sources. In March 2021, 46 lorries were in operation, which can already access eight hydrogen filling stations (*AVIA, Agrola, Coop*) between St. Gallen and Lausanne.

The expansion of the refuelling station network is progressing: five are currently in operation along the east-west axis and enable the trucks to be used throughout the entire Central Plateau between Lake Constance and Lake Geneva. A fully loaded 36-tonne lorry with a range of around 400 km can already travel from Lausanne to St. Gallen without stopping to refuel. By 2023, a nationwide infrastructure should be in place throughout Switzerland.

Hydrogen propulsion is now also an option for rail transport: the French group Alstom, the world's second largest company in the manufacture of rail vehicles, has developed a hydrogen train that can be used in place of diesel locomotives where railway lines cannot be electrified well because of their routing. A prototype experienced its premiere in northern Germany between Cuxhafen and Buxtehude during an eighteen-month test phase starting in 2018. Afterwards, such a train was also tested in the Netherlands and in our neighbouring country Austria, where it proved itself under the most difficult topographical conditions.

#### A look into the future: Climate protection sets the agenda

*Martin Schatzmann*, specialist editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" for the mobility department, expresses optimism: "Hydrogen conquers commercial vehicles" – the title of a recently published article.

This year, the range of commercial vehicles such as delivery vehicles and vans produced by *Renault* and the *Stellantis* automotive holding company – consisting of *Citroen, Opel, Peugeot* and other brands – will be expanded. *Hyundai, Toyota* and *Renault* also produce passenger cars with fuel cells.

For both alternative drive types – lithium-ion battery and fuel cell – optimisation efforts are in full swing: work is constantly being done to improve the vehicles, make them more user-friendly, more environmentally friendly in production and operation and, last but not least, more cost-effective and to ensure that their components can be recycled.

The end of the combustion engine seems inevitable; the future belongs to the

new drive systems presented here, which will complement each other. The most important trigger for this probably irreversible development is likely to be the decisions taken at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015, where the participating states pledged to do everything in their power to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by the period between 2045 and 2060 in order to bring global warming down to below 1.5 degrees Celsius. This ambitious goal not only determines the discussions about our future mobility, but also to a large extent the current political debates and election campaigns. •

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# “Inestäche, umeschlah, durezieh und abelah” (Pierce, fold over, pull through, drop)

## Knitting – tradition and history

by Brigitte von Bergen

“I cannot live without knitting.” “Our mother likes reading to us, while my sister and I are knitting.” “Self-knitted items should be beautiful and special, then they become favourite pieces.” “I love knitting while listening to a radio play.” “While watching TV, I knit, my hands need something to do.” These are some spontaneous statements about knitting by 14 to 93 years old women and girls.

### Fascination of wool and stitch

If you go to a wool store today, you will see a huge colourful palette and a rich selection of soft merino wool, sock wool, fine mohair to luxurious cashmere, to angora and alpaca wool. Never before the selection has been so large as it is today. It makes your fingers itch, and the joy of knitting is reawakened.

Due to the lockdown during the Corona pandemic last year, people stayed at home, and many women have been inspired again by new knitting ideas and have started knitting. All it takes is two knitting needles and wool, and you can start knitting. Knitting is just an intertwining of the stitches with the help of knitting needles. In addition there is the well-known Swiss German saying: “Inestäche, umeschlah, durezieh und abelah” (Pierce, fold over, pull through, drop). All children, boys and girls together, learn to knit in school with this saying. One stitch after the other is finished, and then comes the next one. This is how a surface is created. The rich patterns are knitted only with right and left stitches.

A knitted work easily finds a place in a handbag. Wherever you have to wait, you can take it out – in the waiting room, at the children’s playground. There, mothers often talk to each other about their knitting. With the advent of the “women’s liberation” from the typical female role, this culturally transmitted tradition was displaced. Hardly any woman dared to show



The “Cozy Winter” triangular shawl knitted from wool with different generous knitting patterns. (Picture M. Mielinger)

herself in public with a knitting. Fortunately, this has changed again.

### Cultural history of knitting: Is knitting a female handicraft?

Originally, knitting was a male profession. The first professional knitting guild was founded in 1268 in Paris. Others followed in the upper Rhine valley, in north-eastern Switzerland, in Alsace and in Baden. Knitting was considered to be an honourable and lucrative craft. The Nuremberg guild of hosiery and pants knitters accepted only persons who had completed a four-year apprenticeship and an equally long period as a journeyman. To pass the demanding master craftsman’s examination the production of a round beret, a pair of stockings, a camisole (thin silk top), a pair of gloves and especially a carpet of up to 20 fresh colours with figures, flowers and foliage, two by three meters in size, was prescribed. Such a masterpiece from 1749 is in the possession of the cathedral parish of Lindau on Lake Constance (see illustration). How this large piece was knitted is not known.

The art of knitting is very old, it is not known exactly where it was developed. One assumption is that the actual originators of knitting were the Copts in Egyptian Bahnasa. Knitted garments from the 4th and 5th century were discovered there. Magnificent coffin cushions from the 13th century were found in northern Spain in a royal tomb. They are very finely worked with elaborate patterns and with gossamer yarn. Knitting as well as other handicrafts were widespread since the Renaissance in the 15th century in women’s convents.

### The steel knitting needles

The earlier knitting needles were made of wood, bone or goose feather quills. Since one could wire, knitting needles have been produced in large numbers, fine, smooth, straight needles. This was a sensation. Especially England with the large flocks of sheep had a correspondingly large amount of wool. This was spun very finely, for weaving the fine English wool fabrics and for knitting. A knitting boom was triggered. The zeal in knitting for God’s Son and God’s reward went so far that English priests forbade the clattering of needles during the service. After that, for a long time, knitting was no longer done on Sundays in England. Toward the end of the 16th century, there were 200,000 home workers in England, who annually exported 20 million pairs of knitted stockings to Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands.



This is how you knit right-hand stitches. (Picture BvB)

Women as well as men knitted in all work where their hands remained free, be it herding sheep on stilts, as night watchmen on guard duty, even carrying loads over long distances. Girls were only allowed to read while knitting.

### The time of industrialisation

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the heyday of industrialisation. Factories were built, especially for textile processing and the machine industry. Men earned a living for their families in the factories. Their wives took care of the children, did housework and knitted for the family. They often did home work for the textile mills as well. *William Lee*, an English clergyman, developed the first knitting machine in 1589. It achieved astonishing results and was therefore strongly opposed by the professional knitters and the guilds. In spite of everything, this further development brought about machine knitting at the end of the 19th century, which gave new impetus. This was the beginning of jersey processing as we know it today in many variations, from underwear to outerwear and sportswear.

The factory owners’ wives filled their time against chronic boredom with knitting of fine things. Thus arose the opinion, knitting was a woman’s business. They knitted very beautiful fine clothes for their children, dolls, lace doilies for the whole apartment. They wanted to mark themselves off from the working families, who needed warm clothes for the family.

### The jumper – a new discovery after the First World War

During the First World War, when the men were on the frontier as soldiers, more and more women also here in Switzerland had

continued on page 19



### “Inestäche, umeschlah ...”

continued from page 18

to work in the factories and needed comfortable work clothes. The hand-knitted jumper became an important discovery in Switzerland at this time. It became a popular garment for work and leisure for both women and men all over the world. At that time, eastern Switzerland was still the stronghold of the textile industry, but this branch of the economy then collapsed in the 1920s. Women and also men took on knitting jobs as a means of earning a living in the misery of unemployment. They knitted jumpers, socks, gloves and hats. Fine stockings for women were also popular as fashionable dresses became shorter. They went from house to house with them, offering the beautiful hand-knitted things.

#### The fishery needed warm water-repellent jumpers

The special thing about the woollen jumper is its ability to absorb a lot of moisture without getting wet; it dries quickly and its stretchiness is comfortable when working. You have to air it out well and wash it only rarely. The uni-coloured Guernsey fisherman's jumpers, the black and white Norwegian jumpers with stars and the coloured Shetland jumpers became famous.

The famous Guernsey fisherman jumpers have been knitted in England and Ireland since the 17th century. What is special about these jumpers is that they are very tightly knitted, without seams, almost windproof and water-repellent. Many of the knitting patterns used come from the lives of fishing families. The knitted-in patterns are symbols: cables for ropes, cross lines for ladders, diamonds for fishing nets, fish bones for the catch. The recognisable zigzag line is called the wedding line and reflects the ups and downs of a marriage. Every family had its own patterns, which the mothers passed on to their daughters. So, you could tell from the jumper which family the wearer came from. These jumpers are still very popular among sailors today.

The Norwegian *Ebba Drolshagen* wrote the first book about the history of knitting: “Two right, two left”. A young goatherd in Norway invented the well-known octagonal Norwegian star, an octagonal star knitted in black and white, while she was herding goats in the year 1857. Mittens with two stars were worn by almost all Swiss skiers in the 1950s, as well as the classic Norwegian jumper, knitted in black and white with stars. The

A man becomes a human being in the real sense by forming his heart, his manual skills and his mind. This is how *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi* describes it.



Masterpiece of a knitted carpet from 1749. (Picture Stadtmuseum Lindau, © Kirchenstiftung Münster Unserer Lieben Frau zu Lindau)

round yoke, which joins body and sleeves without seams, is also well-known. The jumpers from the Shetland archipelago are knitted in five colours. In these multicoloured knitted jumpers, the coloured threads are knitted along, creating a multi-layered surface that is correspondingly warmer.

#### Work school

In the canton of Zurich, the *Swiss Society for Common Good* (SSCG) called for the establishment of work schools in 1830 to teach girls “feminine work”. The Education Council soon declared work schools as compulsory for all girls. They learned to sew and mend dresses, knit and stitch socks. This education of the girls promoted general prosperity. A capable housewife could apply what she had learned and saw in it her task, her purpose and her joy. Handicraft lessons were included in the curriculum, and in parallel, handicrafts were taught to the boys so that they learned how to handle tools. Thanks to this continuous systematic teaching over many years, the children acquired handicraft skills and the foundation was laid for vocational skills.

#### On the meaning of knitting today

The large triangular shawl shown here with its various knitting patterns is both, warm-

ing and eye-catching. Knitting this shawl trains the coordination of both hands, the dexterity in interlacing the stitches. Counting and calculating the knitting pattern promotes imagination, making the knitting patterns demands concentration, and perseverance is also trained when knitting this beautiful triangular shawl. The variety of colours and wools and the knitting booklets with suggestions available today allow for creativity without limits. While knitting, one can chat, sing, read, listen to the radio, watch TV. But knitting is also an excellent training for the fine motor skills of the hands. Knitting has a relaxing effect and promotes cognitive skills. All this has a positive effect on the brain, heart and mind. Nothing lifts the attitude to life as much as creating beautiful things with handicrafts and thus filling the leisure hours of the day!

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