

# 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*

## UN Security Council finds compromise on border crossing aid delivery operations Syria rejects “politicised mechanism”

by Karin Leukefeld, Bonn and Damascus



Karin Leukefeld  
(Picture Tilo  
Gräser)

After weeks of disagreement as to whether the “humanitarian corridor” leading from Turkey to Idlib via Bab al-Hawa crossing point be closed, the UN Security Council last Friday adopted a compromise.<sup>1</sup>

The new UN Security Council Resolution 2585 (2021) intends to continue aid delivery operations for an initial period of six months. An extension for another six months is subject to the issuance of a report by the UN Secretary-General after six months.

The report should debate on whether transparency is ensured in the control of border crossing aid delivery operations. Specifically, it should include details on the distribution mechanism, the number of beneficiaries, operating partners in Idlib involved in border crossing aid deliveries, locations where aid deliveries are stored and from where they are distributed and the volume and nature of items delivered. Furthermore, the report should provide information on the implementation of efforts to improve all modalities of “cross-line” humanitarian deliveries inside Syria and “early recovery projects”.

### 30 minutes of debate

US Ambassador to the UN *Linda Thomas-Greenfield* welcomed the fact that the United States and the Russian Federation were able to come together on a crucial matter long debated in the UN Security Council. The compromise was also important for the broader United Nations beyond the specific issue, the ambassador said, showing that “we can do more than just talk.”

Russia’s UN Ambassador *Vasily Nebenzya* expressed similar satisfaction. He said Russia was satisfied that the Council managed to reach an important point of convergence on such a complex topic. “We are grateful for this,” Nebenzya

said. The US delegation worked “in the spirit of the commitments achieved during the recent summit held between Presidents *Vladimir V. Putin* and *Joseph R. Biden*” in Geneva, a non-official UN transcript of the council meeting said. Through the adoption of the new resolution, the Council had given the green light for the ultimate replacement of the cross-border mechanism with cross-line aid deliveries inside Syria. This would be in line with the core principles of UN international humanitarian law.

British UN Ambassador *Barbara Woodward* nevertheless emphasised that Syria remains one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarian workers and called for maximum efforts to ensure their safety inside the country. Mexican UN Ambassador *Alicia Guadalupe Buenrostro Massieu* welcomed that renewal of the Bab al-Hawa crossing will afford “certainty to the planning and budgeting for humanitarian action”. French UN Ambassador *Nicolas de Rivièrè* expressed regret that, at least temporarily, only one border crossing instead of the requested three ones were reopened. Again, he insisted that France and its European partners would not finance reconstruction in Syria or lift sanctions if a credible political process was not launched pursuant to resolution 2254 (from 2014). Like his Mexican predecessor, de Rivièrè rejected the idea that after six months the UN Secretary General’s report should provide details on specific humanitarian partner organisations.

The Indian UN representative *T. S. Tirumurti*, on the other hand, called for enhanced assistance to all citizens of Syria, which was once a “fulcrum of Arab culture” and a leading voice in the region. Discrimination, preconditions, and the politicization of assistance to Syria had to come to an end, he said. The adopted Resolution 2585 would reassure the people of northwestern Syria, he said, but the Security Council also had to reflect on the rest of the country, which was in dire need of reconstruction aid. Stability would only be achieved if Syria’s sovereignty and territo-



The UN Security Council agreed on 9 July that the Bab al-Hawa border crossing will remain open for the time being. The other border crossings are closed. (Graphic vecteezy, cc)

rial integrity be preserved, this being the only way to ensure that external actors refrain from further destabilising the situation in Syria.

Similar comments were made by the Chinese UN representative *Zhang Jun*. The cross-border aid deliveries were based on an exceptional arrangement that was controversial both politically and legally. There had to be a transition to cross-line delivery of humanitarian aid within Syria. However, the unilateral sanctions (imposed by the EU and the USA) against Syria were the main obstacle to improving the country’s humanitarian situation.

### Who receives the aid?

According to OCHA, more than 1,000 trucks with food, medicine “and other goods” reach Idlib province every month. They pass through Bab al-Hawa border crossing point, controlled on one side by Turkey and on the other side by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The aid deliveries via Bab al-Hawa are intended exclusively for Idlib and for the areas of Afrin, Azaz, and Jbeil Saman in the northwestern province of Aleppo. These areas are controlled by Tur-

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**"UN Security Council finds ..."**

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key and armed jihadist opponents of the government called "rebels" by Western media and politicians.

Since January 2018 Afrin has been occupied by Turkey and an army of jihadists who had previously waged war in Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus. Before these troops invaded Afrin, up to 300,000 Syrian Kurds lived there. Today, they are living as internally displaced persons in camps of Tell Rifaat or in Sheikh Maqsood, a Kurdish neighbourhood under self-government in the north of the city of Aleppo. The "border crossing aid delivery" is not intended for them.

The city of Azaz has been a hub for Western intervention in the name of humanitarianism since the war's beginning in 2011. Weapons, fighters and assistance were smuggled in via the town, which is close to the Syrian-Turkish border crossing Bab al-Salam. The German organisation "Grünhelme" has been at the forefront in Azaz since summer 2012. In the meantime, Azaz is considered the headquarters of the Western-backed "government-in-exile" launched by the National Council for Revolutionary and Oppositional Forces of Syria (Etilaf) based in Istanbul.

Idlib is controlled by HTS. The organisation was previously known as the al-Nusra Front, an affiliate of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and a Syrian offshoot of al-Qaeda. Since the beginning of the war the leader of HTS and its various predecessor organisations has been Saudi-born Syrian *Abu Mohamad al-Julani*. In 2003, he joined al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and eventually became a POW of the US-led war alliance against Iraq. Released from the British-run Bucca Prison Camp in Basra in 2008, he, together with *Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi*, eventually rebuilt the since then crushed Islamic State in Iraq. It became the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Al-Julani is an internationally listed Islamist terrorist, and the US has offered a \$10 million reward for his capture.

Meanwhile, al-Julani is offering himself to the West as a "partner against Assad". In December 2015, al-Julani, then still the leader of the al-Nusra Front, was interviewed extensively by the Qatari news channel *al-Jazeera* wearing a combat dress. Two more extensive interviews of al-Julani followed in February 2021 with U.S. television station PBS and its frontline journalist *Martin Smith*. This time, the fighter wore a suit and a white shirt without a tie and stated that he wanted to establish relations with the

West. He offered the US to put his combat unit, HTS, at the service of the Western alliance to fight Assad and his allies Russia and Iran. Passages from the interview were published in the PBS feature "The Jihadist"<sup>2</sup>.

Al-Julani claims to have 10,000 men under arms, offering them to the West as allies. In the meantime, the "salvation government" installed by HTS is recruiting young men from families who had sought shelter from the war as internally displaced persons in Idlib, but who do not see themselves as supporters of HTS ideology. Those who keep on supporting the Syrian state in Idlib suffer persecution.

### Humanitarian corridors strengthen the power of the jihadists

The humanitarian corridors to Idlib called for by UN diplomats and Western states and their aid agencies directly benefit HTS and al-Julani and consolidate its power. HTS collects customs duties from trucks entering Idlib via Bab al-Hawa. The relief goods provide the population with basic supplies that HTS and its supporters do not have to worry about. At the same time, the families and supporters of HTS fighters and officials also benefit from the aid. Newly established companies in the computer, telephone, electricity or water supply sectors under HTS control benefit from the material and financial reconstruction aid, which reaches Idlib and elsewhere via the "Syrian Reconstruction Fund" (SRTF). The money is administered by the German *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (KfW) and distributed according to contractual agreements that KfW has concluded with the "National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces" (Etilaf) based in Istanbul.

Although the organisation and its leader al-Julani are internationally listed as terrorist, close relations already exist between them and Turkey, Etilaf and the Western "friends of Syria" such as the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other states. The US and its partners in Europe, Israel and the Arabian Gulf are supporting forces in Idlib and around Aleppo that want to create an "Islamic State" and secede from Syria. In the northeast of Syria, they are promoting a "Euphrates province" that is to profit from Syrian oil, wheat, water and cotton. Meanwhile, NATO partner Turkey is colonising parts of northern Syria and forming a new army with jihadists.

### A huge operation

A few days before the UN Security Council vote, the EU Commissioner for Hu-

manitarian Aid and Crisis Prevention *Janez Lenarcic* had visited Bab al-Hawa. There was no "viable alternative" to the border crossing, he said. "It is a huge operation."<sup>3</sup>

According to the German Foreign Office, Germany is the "second largest humanitarian donor" in humanitarian aid for Syrians in Syria and in camps in neighbouring countries. In 2020, the German government provided 672 million euros, more than 102 million euros for the northwest of the country. At the Brussels donor conference for Syria and neighbouring countries, Germany made the largest pledge of 1.738 billion euros and will continue to make a substantial contribution to financing the aid plans drawn up by the United Nations.

But, as German Foreign Minister *Heiko Maas* stated in a G-7 statement at the end of May, Germany will not participate in reconstruction measures in areas of Syria controlled by the government, nor will it lift the unilateral sanctions against the country, which are not legitimised under international law. This does not apply to Idlib, Azaz, the jihadist-Turkish-controlled hinterland of Aleppo and the Kurdish-US-controlled northeast of the country.

### Syria is not heard

It is one of the rituals of the UN Security Council that representatives of the countries whose situation and future are being debated can be present and speak at the debates, but have no right to co-decide on resolutions. In the past, the Western UN ambassadors had more than once demonstratively left the room when the Syrian representative took the floor.

Acting Syrian UN Ambassador *Basam Sabbagh* stressed during the debate on 9 July that Russia and China had pointed out important aspects of the humanitarian problems in Syria, including the effects of COVID-19 and the unilateral sanctions. Western states ignored these aspects. Their insistence on the cross-border mechanism "serves their interests and not the alleviation of the suffering Syrian people", Sabbagh said. Calling the mechanism a "lifeline" would be tantamount to "psychological blackmail" of public opinion in their countries. The preservation of Syria as a sovereign and independent state is persistently disregarded, he said. •

<sup>1</sup> [www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14577.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14577.doc.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/the-jihadist/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/the-jihadist/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-united-nations-cross-border-operations-under-66>

## Wolves in Switzerland – the Federal Council must act!

Open letter from the Swiss Association for the Protection of Rural Habitats from Large Predators (Berne) to Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga, Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) of 6 July 2021

Dear Ms Federal Councillor

The representatives of the mountain cantons urgently call upon you as head of the responsible Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) to take rapid measures against the uncontrolled spread of the wolf. The situation in the affected regions is threatening to get completely out of control. In the canton of Grisons and in other cantons, conditions prevail we have been warning about for years and which are now sadly part of everyday life:

- A sharp increase in deadly attacks on protected flocks of sheep and emergent cessation of alpine pasturing already at the beginning of the grazing season, as recently happening in the regions of Klosters or in the Goms.
- Attacks on herds of cows, which lead to panic and cow crashes.
- Possible encounters with the wolf at any time of day or night.
- Roving packs of wolves in and around villages, without shying away from humans and their possessions.
- Keeping cattle in species-appropriate loafing yards can hardly be practised safely any more.
- Herd protection efforts have to be increased constantly. Damages continue to increase even on protected meadows and alps.
- Alpine tourist regions are becoming unsafe for humans.

There is an urgent need for action and clarification on numerous points that were not

dealt with in the framework of the previous amendment of the Ordinance, such as in the areas of

- protection and safety of the population,
- creation of priority areas for livestock and wildlife,
- preventive regulation of the wolf population,
- clear definition of protectable and non-protectable pasture areas with validation of the cantonal alpine pasture planning by the FOEN,
- full compensation for herd protection measures and payment of summering contributions despite premature cessation of alpine pasture after wolf attacks,
- support for tourism regions concerning protection of guests and safeguarding of hiking trails,
- enforcement of the Swiss request to downgrade the protection status of the wolf in the Bern Convention.

As the Federal Council explained in its answers to the parliamentary requests, a baseline study by Agroscope is expected in autumn 2022 which will describe the necessary action required and propose measures. In autumn 2023 the Federal Council will then publish a report on the subject. In the face of the urgent need for action, the affected population feels being left alone and not being taken seriously with the prospect of a report in two years' time. What is needed now are practice-oriented solution approaches, which could for ex-

ample be tested within the framework of geographically and timely restricted pilot projects. The results of the pilot projects will create the necessary basis for nationwide effective measures.

Without the possibility and the perspective to counteract the massive increase in wolf attacks, the affected mountain areas will bleed to death in a short time. The care and the maintenance of an open landscape of the biodiverse mountain pastures are in danger. There is a threat of scrub encroachment of whole valleys and the associated loss of biodiversity.

We would therefore like to enter into a dialogue with you, Madam Federal Councillor, as soon as possible, and present our concerns to you at first hand. Furthermore, we would be pleased to show you possible options for action which could support the alpine and pasture farming in dealing with the wolf.

We look forward to receiving your invitation.

Kind regards

NR Monika Rüeegger  
(Co-President IG-Security),  
Georges Schnydrig and  
Germano Mattei

(Co-Presidents of the Swiss Association  
for the Protection of Rural Habitats from  
Large Predators)

(Translation Current Concerns)

## Who determines the values in the EU “community of values”?

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

17 EU heads of state have recently written a letter to the EU Commission criticising a “law on stricter action against paedophilia and for the protection of children” passed by the Hungarian parliament. The law, they say, discriminates against people on the basis of their sexual orientation and is therefore unacceptable. The heads of state called on the Commission, as “guardian of the treaties”, to ensure compliance with EU law. In response, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the Hungarian law violated “the fundamental values of the European Union” and was “a shame”. She announced possible infringement procedures against Hungary.

For a Swiss legal expert this proceeding raises a number of questions: What is the denounced law about? The EU has 27 member states: What is the opinion of the other nine states (besides Hungary) that have not signed the letter – or, put another way, who determines the values in the EU

“community of values”? And how do the EU leaders deal with the diversity of cultures in the Union?

### What is the Hungarian Child Protection Act about? The parents' right to educate their children

What exactly it says is not easy to find out if you don't understand Hungarian, because in the media the actual content of the law is mixed with free interpretation and emotional comments higgledy-piggledy. One can filter out that it is about the protection of children and young people. The law prohibits printed matter and videos about non-heterosexual activities aimed at children and young people under 18. Advertising homosexuality, transsexuality and gender reassignment to minors is also prohibited. There are no restrictions for adults over the age of 18.

What is the aim of the law? According to the German *Tagesschau*, head of gov-

ernment Viktor Orbán explains that the law is not directed against homosexuality; he himself defends the rights of homosexuals. Rather, the meaning of the regulation is that the Hungarian state recognises the right of parents to educate their children. For example, parents have the right to decide how to raise their children with regard to sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Many people in Europe, including Switzerland, share this understanding of education.

### Democratic debate on values between the member states must be guaranteed

17 EU heads of state have criticised Hungary's new law, only two of them from Eastern Europe (Estonia and Latvia). That means nine governments did not sign the letter to the EU Commission: Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Malta. Some, like Poland and Slovenia,

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**"Who determines the values ..."**

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openly side with Hungary. This shows that the views in the different cultures on family and child-rearing issues are different.

Hungarian lawyer and publicist *Soma Hegedős* writes: "The big question is whether Hungary or any other member state in this situation still has the right, as a member state of the European Union, to take a particular political view on these issues."<sup>2</sup> Hegedős points out that "the European Union was created on the basis of international treaties according to which the member states – within the framework of a confederation of states – accept certain values as common [Art. 2 TEU], while at the same time preserving their own constitutional identity" [Art. 3 and 4 TEU]<sup>3</sup>.

Because the member states signed the founding treaties of the European Union as equal contracting parties, "the possibility of a democratic debate on values between the member states must be respected and guaranteed", Soma Hegedős explains the legal situation.

**All EU states are equal,  
but some are more equal  
(loosely based on George Orwell)**

In glaring contrast to the legal situation is the way different cultural values are dealt with in the European Union today. Some Western European governments have risen to impose their view of "common values" on other countries. Some expressions used towards Hungary have no place in a union of states committed to peace in Europe. In addition to Commission President von der Leyen, who was heard in all the media in and outside Europe ("The Hungarian law is a shame."), Luxembourg's Foreign Minister *Jean Asselborn* declared that Orbán was "hopeless", that he would "no longer get on the European track". This is unfortunately a fitting image: If 27 states are to be shunted onto a "European track", there is no more room for different gauges. Dutch Prime Minister *Mark Rutte* even found that Hungary

no longer had any business in the EU (*dpa News*, 25 June 2021).

**How to force recalcitrant member states onto the "European track"**

The rulers in Brussels cannot kick Hungary out of the EU without further ado, but they have invented other punishment mechanisms: the withdrawal of voting rights, for example, if the European Council unanimously determines that "there has been a serious and persistent breach by a member state of the values referred to in Article 2" (TEU Art. 7 para. 2 and 3). This means that it would take the votes of all the heads of government of the other 26 states to bring Hungary to its knees.

Most recently, however, the Council and the Parliament of the EU have added a few more wrinkles: On 16 December 2020, they adopted a "new policy instrument" that would "allow [the EU] the suspension of budget payments to a member state violating the rule of law".

For many EU states, this is a real hammer blow – after all, most of them are dependent on money from Brussels. In order to discipline Hungary, Poland or Slovenia, for example, the EU bodies have overturned the unanimity principle here: "The decision on the suspension will have to be taken by the Council acting by a qualified majority on the proposal of the European Commission."<sup>4</sup> Hungary and Poland have filed a complaint with the European Court of Justice because of the lack of legality of this regulation. Whether they will be proven right there is doubtful based on previous experience with the ECJ.

In the third thesis of his speech of 19 June 2021 (see box on page 5: "We are racing towards an imperial European Union"), Hungary's head of government Viktor Orbán characterises this "rule of law mechanism" as a purely political instrument of power. In a first step, the Commission was transformed from a politically impartial guardian of the Treaties into a political body. In a second step, it produced so-called "rule of law reports" on the indi-

vidual member states, the data for which was supplied by "fake civil-society organisations" such as George Soros' network. Based on this, the democratically elected governments of the member states would be evaluated and – if "necessary" – punished. Orbán concludes: "This is an abuse of power, the power which the member states have granted to the Commission."

For the Swiss legal expert, too, it is clear that the EU "rule of law mechanism" has little to do with the rule of law. Rather, its purpose is to bring states that want to save a piece of their sovereignty and their cultural values over the period of their EU membership onto the "European track".

**Recommended to the  
Swiss population for reflection**

The Swiss Federal Council did well to break off negotiations on an institutional framework agreement with the EU. Those who had hoped for "more legal certainty" through such an agreement should take note of how the power clique in Brussels deals with its own member states. In its dealings with other states, including major powers, the small state of Switzerland relies best on its independence, its strengths and its flexibility. It is better not to rely on the legal certainty promised by a major power! •

<sup>1</sup> "Orbán hält an LGBTQ-Gesetz fest" [Orbán sticks to LGBTQ law]. In: *Tagesschau* of 24 June 2021

<sup>2</sup> Hegedős, Soma. "Gastkommentar. Regelung gegen pädophile Straftäter. Ungarns Ziel: Gender-Ideologie darf in Europa nicht zur Staatsdoktrin werden". [Guest commentary. Regulation against paedophile offenders. Hungary's goal: Gender ideology must not become state doctrine in Europe]. In: *The Epoch Times* of 25 June 2021

<sup>3</sup> Article 3 (3) TEU: "It [the Union] shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced." Article 4 (2) TEU: "The Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local self-government. [...]"

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament. "Rule of law: new mechanism aims to protect EU budget and values. EU affairs. Updated: 08-07-2021 (Qualified majority under the

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# “Liberal democracies” vs. “authoritarian regimes”?

## Propaganda clichés do not contribute to international understanding

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

More than 100 years ago, on 2 April 1917, the US President Woodrow Wilson approached the US Congress, requesting it to agree to American troops going to war in Europe. “Freedom must be defended, and democracies must be protected,” the German Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education] paraphrased the president’s speech in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Both the Senate and the House of Representatives agreed by majority vote. Four days later, on 6 April, the US declared war on the German Empire. “Defending freedom and protecting democracies” – that sounds topical. Today the formula is: The “liberal democracies” must stand together against the “authoritarian regimes” of the world. What to make of this?

More than 100 years ago, when the USA entered World War I, the US president’s

formulation had little to do with reality. An important ally of the USA in the war against the Central Powers was Tsarist Russia. Although there had been an uprising against the Tsar’s autocracy in February 1917 (the so-called February Revolution), even now – the country was still at war – there was no question of democracy and freedom. Great Britain and France, the main allies of the USA, were the biggest colonial powers of their time. Freedom and democracy did not exist in the colonies of either country. The USA itself had also become a colonial power in 1898. The inhabitants of the US colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific were also given neither freedom nor democracy.

The US president’s justification for the war was, however, another example of a long-standing tradition of portraying oneself as “good” and the enemy as “evil”. Why are people always receptive to such

simple contrasts? They have little to do with reality. The actual reasons for the US entering the war in 1917 were also different.

### Legal standards

Wouldn’t it make more sense to orientate on legal standards based on natural law, which the states have agreed on and which leave room for the peoples’ right to self-determination? Law should also be based on social ethical considerations. Hence the foundation in natural law. And indeed, many regulations of international law, for example, can be traced back to such social-ethical considerations.<sup>2</sup> Just think of the *United Nations Charter* of 1945 or the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. It is certain that there is no state in the world that could not improve in this respect. It would be ideal if, in the pro-

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## “We are racing towards an imperial European Union”

Extracts\* from a speech of the Hungarian prime minister  
Viktor Orbán on the conference “Thirty Years of Freedom” in Budapest on 19 June 2021

“Our first thesis is that we are racing towards an imperial European Union. Instead of a Europe of nations, in Brussels we see the construction of a European superstate, for which no one has given a mandate. There is no such thing as a European demos: there are only nations. And without a demos, it is impossible to build a democracy; therefore the construction of the Brussels empire is necessarily leading to a democratic deficit. We want something utterly different: we want a democracy of democracies, the basis of which is formed by the nations of Europe. Let us not be afraid to say this out loud: we democrats, who stand on national foundations, are confronting the empire builders – who are also, in fact, the opponents of democracy.

Our second thesis is that today Brussels is being directed by those who see integration not as a means, but as an end: an end for its own sake. This is why they want to override all national interests and traditional values. Rather than hindering this ambition, the EU’s legal system and institutions are promoting it. This is why our political opponents are striving to weaken the natural communities that form the very foundations of European culture: they are targeting the nation, regions, Christian and Jewish communities of faith, and families. This is why the Hungarian government says that the phrase “an ever closer union” must be struck from the text of the Treaties of the EU at the first available opportunity.

Our third thesis is that Brussels has outsourced a considerable amount of its power, channelling it to networks organised and controlled from outside Europe – primarily to the Soros networks and the interests of the US Democrats which stand behind them. This has happened in the following way. As a first step, the Commission was shifted away from the politically impartial position of “Guardian of the Treaties”, and was transformed into a political body. This did not begin in secret, but with a public announcement by President Juncker. Incidentally, this is why the British and the Hungarians did not support Mr Juncker’s election as President of the Commission – and this is also what eventually led to Brexit. The second step was that the Commission – now transformed into a political body – decided to prepare “rule of law reports” on the Member States of the EU. These country reports, however, are not compiled on the basis of the opinions, documents or factual statements of the Member States: this work is outsourced to NGOs, fake civil-society organisations operating in the Member States. In reality these are political organisations which typically, almost without exception, belong to George Soros’s transcontinental network – something which they themselves do not deny. The third step is that, on the basis of these data services and opinions, the democratically elected governments of Member States are evaluated, and there are even attempts to punish those which do

not meet with approval. This is an abuse of power, the power which the Member States have granted to the Commission. [...]

Our fifth thesis is that the next decade will be a period of dangerous challenges: mass migration, infectious disease and pandemics. It is in this dangerous era that we must create security and be successful in the world economy. Restoring European democracy is a precondition for success. Therefore, in the interest of protecting the national and constitutional identities of Member States, a new institution must be created, with the involvement of the constitutional courts of the Member States.

Our sixth thesis is that, in terms of European democracy, the European Parliament has proved to be a dead end. It only represents its own party, ideological and institutional interests. Rather than adding to the European Union’s strength, it diminishes that strength. We must therefore significantly increase the role of national parliaments: nations’ legislatures should send representatives to the European Parliament, based on the model of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In addition to this, national parliaments must be given the right to halt the EU’s legislative process if they believe that it undermines national powers; in other words, a “red card” system must be introduced.”

\*You can find the complete speech in its official English translation here: <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/4772>

### “Liberal Democrats’ ...”

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cess, states also constructively supported each other within the framework of good international relations and resolved their conflicts exclusively by negotiations.

#### Who has broken international law?

The past decades have shown, however, that in particular the binding force of law in international relations has suffered greatly. And one must add that those states which have committed substantial breaches of law in the process were the USA and other member states of NATO, states that today supposedly have stepped up to defend freedom and to protect democracy. In addition, breaking the law in international relations, for example waging a war of aggression in violation of international law, also has negative consequences for the freedom and democracy within a state. A policy of confrontation shuns freedom and democracy. It is therefore not surprising that the German party *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, striving for power in Germany, has now dropped its long-standing demand for more direct democracy and referendums.<sup>3</sup> The word “referendum” also no longer appears in the programme for the coming Bundestag elections.

The interim result is that the formula that in future a “community of values” – another propaganda formula – made up of “liberal democracies” must defend itself against increasingly brazen “authoritarian regimes” has little to do with reality.

What is it about then?

#### Accusations and content

A view at how some powerful states in the EU are dealing with the EU country Hungary and its government gives a first clue. Hungary’s government is accused of no longer respecting the foundations of the EU “community of values”, of breaking with the rule of law, of being illiberal and its prime minister of being corrupt.

On 19 June 2021, at a conference in Budapest, this prime minister gave a remarkable speech (“Thirty Years of Freedom”) that has not been mentioned in the media of the “liberal democracies”,<sup>4</sup> which should be widely discussed. Among other things, he formulated theses on the state of the EU (see also box), which state: “Our first thesis is that we are racing towards an imperial European Union. Instead of a Europe of nations, in Brussels we see the construction of a European superstate, for which no one has given a mandate. [...] Our second thesis is that today Brussels is being direct-

ed by those who see integration not as a means, but as an end: an end for its own sake. This is why they want to override all national interests and traditional values. [...] Our third thesis is that Brussels has outsourced a considerable amount of its power, channelling it to networks organised and controlled from outside Europe – primarily to the *Soros* networks and the interests of the US Democrats which stand behind them.”

#### When you do not like to hear something ...

Those setting the tone in the EU do not like to hear such things. Just as those in charge in the USA and in the other NATO states did not like to hear what the Russian President had to say about the geopolitics of the USA and NATO at the Security Conference in Munich in 2007. The list could be extended arbitrarily. One could also say that, when confronted with considerations they do not like to hear, many of those responsible tend to attack with polemics instead of dealing with the content of such statements. At best, the statements themselves are denounced with the label “conspiracy theories”. Or they are considered as part of foreign (for example Russian) hybrid warfare and disinformation. How liberal and democratic is that?

#### ... disrupting the political agenda

There are usually power-political goals behind such defensive reflexes. This is particularly true of the current relations between the “liberal democracies” of the NATO states and the “authoritarian regimes” in Russia and China. It makes no sense at all to keep reviewing and correcting the countless accusations against these two states or to put into context. New accusations are constantly being conjured out of the hat – until better relations are on the agenda again. To put it differently and more pointedly: The poor state of relations between the “liberal democracies” and Russia and China is less the result of what these two countries are accused of than the other way round: as long as those responsible in the “liberal democracies” want to worsen relations with Russia and China, there will always be new accusations.

Such constructs do not contribute to international understanding. ●

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/politik/hintergrund-aktuell/245922/kriegseintritt-der-usa> of 4 April 2017. *Wilson* stated literally: “The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.” (source: [https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print\\_friendly.php?flash=false&page=transcript&doc](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=false&page=transcript&doc)

=61&title=Transcript+of+Joint+Address+to+Congress+Leading+to+a+Declaration+of+War+Against+Germany+%281917%29)

<sup>2</sup> cf. e.g. Sutor, Bernhard. *Politische Ethik. Gesamtdarstellung auf der Basis der Christlichen Gesellschaftslehre*, Paderborn 1992, p. 266ff.

<sup>3</sup> cf. <https://www.mehr-demokratie.de/presse/einzelansicht-pms/gruener-parteitag-streicht-direkte-demokratie-aus-programm/> of 22 November 2020  
Conversely, this means that the promotion of a democratic, especially direct-democratic political culture is a very essential contribution to securing peace. One person who pointed out these connections immediately after the Second World War and promoted the cooperative, federal model with its centre of communal freedom everywhere in post-war Europe was the Swiss historian *Alfred Gasser*. His book “Gemeindefreiheit als Rettung Europas” (Communal Freedom as the Salvation of Europe), published in the first edition in autumn 1943, is still worth reading today. In the chapter “Gemeindefreiheit und Völkerfrieden” (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1946, p. 243ff.) on page 244 one can read the significant sentence: “All communal-federal democracies of the present day, built from the bottom up, are characterised by a non-militaristic popular attitude.”

<sup>4</sup> <https://berlin.mfa.gov.hu/assets/96/90/24/149dc45817f01882280dacc72bc2f2966bf1854d.pdf> of 19 June 2021; on 5 July, the government of Hungary placed an advertisement in the German *Bild* newspaper to explain its position on the EU to the public outside its own country; on 2 July 2021, a coalition of 16 parties from 15 EU states had adopted a “Declaration for the Future of Europe” which took up numerous ideas from Viktor Orbán’s speech. However, this declaration then caused numerous negative headlines.

## 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

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*Subscription details:*

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

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

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# Citizen diplomacy instead of confrontation – Town twinnings are ambassadors of understanding

## Impressions from the 16<sup>th</sup> German-Russian Town Twinning Conference in Kaluga

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller



Cultural performances are part of hospitality: the dance collective of the Kaluga Philharmonic Orchestra at the “Celebration Dance of Kaluga” at the opening of the conference. (Picture German Russian Forum)

The 16<sup>th</sup> German-Russian Town Twinning Conference took place in Kaluga, Russia, from 28 to 30 June 2021. The city of Kaluga is located on the Oka River, about 190 km southwest of Moscow, and is celebrating its 650<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. The theme of the conference, which was held due to the pandemic in hybrid format, was “Strengthening Municipal and Regional Relations – Enhancing new Horizons”.

The conference, part of the ongoing Year of Germany in Russia, marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German Wehrmacht’s attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Several times, the appeal “Let us make peace” (see *Current Concerns* No. 15 of 8 July 2021) was acknowledged by the conference participants.

### Despite travel restrictions ...

Despite travel restrictions the event was a great success and a ray of hope for German-Russian relations, which are currently strained at the political level. The Ger-

man Federal Government had classified Russia in the highest Corona risk category at short notice on 29 June, which meant a 14-day quarantine for all those returning to Germany. This is why many German participants had to cancel their trip to Kaluga. It was a pity that due to the travel restrictions, prominent contributors such as former Chancellor *Gerhard Schröder*, former Vice-President of the German Bundestag *Antje Vollmer* and the Chairman of the Board of the German-Russian Forum *Matthias Platzeck* could not attend in person. The German-Russian Forum was co-organiser.

### Welcoming messages at the ceremonial opening

At the ceremonial opening in the concert hall of the Kaluga Region Philharmonic, the great importance of the town twinning was emphasised in greeting messages by Russian President *Vladimir Putin*, Russian Foreign Minister *Sergei Lavrov* and German Foreign Minister *Heiko Maas*. “I have no doubt that you

will hold fruitful and substantive discussions, which will help to further develop our constructive partner ties and also strengthen the trust and understanding between the people of Russia and Germany,” the Russian President said. “The response to any turmoil in our relations is not less but more dialogue between Germany and Russia,” said *Heiko Maas*. Numerous other greetings from German and Russian officials and dignitaries followed. Many German participants who followed the event online expressed their solidarity and good wishes in the “chats”.

“At times when things get difficult at the political level, relations between cities and municipalities can help overcome some obstacles. Municipal and regional partnerships are ambassadors of understanding.” This statement by *Matthias Platzeck* was a kind of guiding star of this year’s conference as well.

The second day began with a panel discussion on “What can dialogue between municipalities and politics for German-

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# Are economic sanctions Cold War or already a hot one?

by Professor Dr Eberhard Hamer, *Mittelstandsinstitut Niedersachsen e.V.*

On 21 June 2021, the EU Council of Ministers agreed on economic sanctions against Belarus “in order to have a lasting impact on the country’s export earnings”. The sanctions are officially justified by the arrest of two activists of that “colour revolution” that has been attempted for half a year now – with funds from the USA, the EU (60 million euros) and *George Soros* – in order to remove the elected president *Alexander Lukashenko* from office. Both arrested persons wanted to fly over Belarus on a Latvian plane. The plane landed in Minsk because of a bomb threat.

Sanctions are always an attack on the sanctioned country. The EU calls the landing of the Latvian plane a violation of free air traffic. The EU, cheated out of its 60 million revolutionary subsidies, responds with economic sanctions, the precursor to a state of war.

Sanctions as economic warfare have been introduced and become common in the last 20 years, and are used against friend and foe, especially by the USA, whenever the Americans are not handed freely the means to achieve their economic or world power goals:

- for example, against Iran, because it does not let American companies sell its oil,
- and against Russia, because that country also wants to remain independent as a world power and oil competitor. Since Russia also snatched the dominion over the Black Sea away from the USA through Crimea, US sanctions no longer know any limits.
- Germany and German companies are also subject to sanctions because of *Nord Stream 2*, because this country takes the liberty of buying Russian gas instead of American gas, as the latter is too expensive.

– Recently, China, as a primarily digital enemy, is also being hit with sanctions on Chinese companies, imports and persons.

– Many other countries, among others Syria, Afghanistan, North Korea, Nicaragua, Venezuela, have been harmed by American economic sanctions because they “presumed” to resist American world power aspirations or to compete with the American economy.

The dollar empire tolerates neither dissent nor recalcitrance.

Technically speaking, any country could complain to international organisations such as the UN, WHO, etc. in the case of unilateral economic sanctions, and even initiate legal proceedings against the sanctioner. In practice, however, this is not successful because all these international organisations are paid with

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## “Citizen diplomacy ...”

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Russian relations accomplish?” German Ambassador *Géza Andreas von Geyr* highlighted the chequered history of the Germans and Russians, “with glorious high points and very bitter eras. No country in the world and no people in the world can escape from its history and its biography; both determine our actions today and our future.” It was important for Germans to keep reminding themselves of everything that has happened in German-Russian relations and for which Germans also bear responsibility; this also had to be expressed, as well as the gratitude for the reconciliation that Germans experienced after these shoals of history. “This reconciliation is a great achievement, especially on the part of the Russians towards the Germans; civil society takes place on this basis. [...] The Russians [have shown us] generosity [...] and offered human greatness and very early [...] reconciliation in order to get into a good common people-to-people coexistence.”

*Pavel Savalny*, the Chairman of the State Duma’s Energy Committee and the Russian-German Parliamentary Group, stressed the importance of a profound scientific reappraisal of history and its dissemination “in order to be able to comprehend certain phenomena of the present. [...] I am always concerned with this history of the reconciliation of great peoples. The history of Russia and Germany is the history of wars, but also the history of friendship. It is our task today to do everything to ensure that we do not forget this

history and to remember the victims [...] and to do everything to ensure that war is never again waged between our peoples – never again war also in the context of today’s politics. Germany is a very special country for me. There are above all the people who – perhaps somewhat differently from other European peoples – understand Russia and the Russians a little better; they have a deeper understanding than the others, and that is an important basis for our dialogue.”

## Important contribution of youth

Among many other important topics, the issue of passing on the relay baton to the younger generation was also discussed. As a representative of civil society, Dr *Andrei Tsarev*, Chairman of the Board of the Interregional Organisation for the Support of People with Intellectual Disabilities and Psychophysical Disorders “Equal Opportunities”, is optimistic about the future with regard to youth exchange. His experiences with young people from Germany showed that they are very willing to cooperate and also like to contribute to the common good. “The young people who come to us are very committed and interested. They like to participate; they get involved and they contribute significantly to our German-Russian projects.”

These projects aim to help people; this is concrete work on site with older people, people with disabilities or with children who have been left without a family.

In the afternoon, the focus was on an International Business Forum as well as

practical work and exchange in five working groups on the following topics:

1. Municipal and regional cooperation.
2. Vocational orientation for young people: How can vocational exchange succeed?
3. Inclusion and participation “Living in dignity for all”.
4. German-Russian twin towns and remembrance for the future “22 June 1941/2021 is a European date”.
5. Health.

This is only a small insight into the rich discussions and talks as well as the numerous German-Russian projects. It is this form of citizen diplomacy, which has a future and form a pleasant counterbalance to all the tensions on the political and media level. Time and again, the importance of personal people-to-people relations was emphasised, on which committed civil society engagement is based. A respectful and friendly atmosphere accompanied the entire event and was definitely noticeable online. The important economic relations between the two countries were also repeatedly mentioned, which are well on their way despite the media drumfire against Russia by most Western media.

New planned town twinnings (Bremen and Tula, Weimar and Borovsk) are to complement the 102 German-Russian city partnerships already in place. At the end of the conference, the city of Essen invited participants to the next town twinning conference in 2023.

It was worthwhile to have been present.



# The Law, the Rights and the Rules

by Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs

cc. What follows is a recent article by Sergei Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, for the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*. The English translation is the version authorised by the Russian Foreign Ministry. Subheadings have been added by the *Current Concerns* editorial team.



Sergej Lawrow  
(Bild [www.mid.ru/de/fotogalereia](http://www.mid.ru/de/fotogalereia))

The frank and generally constructive conversation that took place at the 16 June 2021 summit meeting between presidents Vladimir Putin and Joseph Biden in Geneva resulted in an agreement to launch a substantive dialogue on strategic stability, reaffirming the crucial premise that nuclear war is unacceptable. The two sides also reached an understanding on the advisability of engaging in consultations on cybersecurity, the operation of diplomatic missions, the fate of imprisoned Russian and US citizens and a number of regional conflicts.

The Russian leader made it clear, including in his public statements, that finding a mutually acceptable balance of interests strictly on a parity basis is the only way to deliver on any of these tracks.

“Attempts to decide whose values are better, and whose are worse, seem pointless. Instead, the West must simply recognise that there are other ways to govern that may be different from the Western approaches, and accept and respect this as a given.”

There were no objections during the talks. However, in their immediate aftermath, US officials, including those who participated in the Geneva meeting, started asserting what seemed to be foregone tenets, perorating that they had “made it clear” to Moscow, “warned it, and stated their demands.” Moreover, all these “warnings” went hand in hand with threats: if Moscow does not accept the “rules of the road” set forth in Geneva in a matter of several months, it would come under renewed pressure.

Of course, it has yet to be seen how the consultations to define specific ways for fulfilling the Geneva understandings as mentioned above will proceed. As Vladimir Putin said during his news conference following the talks, “we have a lot to work on.” That said, it is telling that Washington’s ineradicable position was voiced immediately following the talks, especially since European capitals immediately took heed of the Big Brother’s sen-

timent and picked up the tune with much gusto and relish. The gist of their statements is that they are ready to normalise their relations with Moscow, but only after it changes the way it behaves.

## Does the West still only want to do what it thinks is right?

It is as if a choir has been pre-arranged to sing along with the lead vocalist. It seems that this was what the series of high-level Western events in the build-up to the Russia-US talks was all about: the Group of Seven Summit in Cornwall, UK, the NATO Summit in Brussels, as well as Joseph Biden’s meeting with President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

These meetings were carefully prepared in a way that leaves no doubt that the West wanted to send a clear message: it stands united like never before and will

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## “Are economic sanctions ...”

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US money, staffed with US personnel and run according to US purposes. Moreover, the USA is economically still so strong that counter-sanctions against the USA (such as, for example, EU counter-sanctions) are ineffective, purely token actions. Only the strong can blackmail the weak, but not vice versa.

With these sanctions, the USA wants to economically force the governments of other countries to change their policies, to correct or to submit them. In practice, however, it is rather the citizens of the sanctioned country who suffer from these sanctions, because they lack important goods, because their economy is blocked, because their prosperity is destroyed. Those who suffer are always at the bottom, rarely at the top. In this respect, economic sanctions – regardless of whether they are effective at all – always harm an entire people.

This has been demonstrated for decades in Iran, whose economy has been

brutally blocked by US sanctions. The resulting impoverishment hit the people, not the country’s politicians. It is the same with the sanctions against Russia, against Belarus, and others. Ultimately, therefore, economic sanctions are not a strategic means against a political leadership, but an asocial damage to the prosperity of an entire people.

The sanctions against Venezuela seem particularly anti-social. Just because this country wants to sell its oil itself and not hand it over to American companies, the entire population has been kept in the most bitter misery for years; more than 3 million Venezuelans have left their poorhouse by fleeing, there is a lack of all necessities. In contrast, Venezuela could be a rich country if it were free to sell its oil itself, if the Americans did not claim economic domination over this country and its oil and try to enforce this through sanctions.

Sanctions are a hostile act against a free country, an act of economic war. They are also described as such by the sanctioners (USA or EU) and also have damaging

consequences in the sanctioned country, as would do a military war.

The USA tried out sanctions when ever it realised that it had regularly failed with hot war, i.e. with military war of conquest by its own troops: in Vietnam, in Afghanistan, in Syria, etc. Economic war is therefore already a campaign against a country, but not yet a military campaign.

Nevertheless, economic sanctions are illegal under international law, contradict all international trade laws and trade regulations, and thus flout all international law. Power shall break justice. Law is only supposed to apply when it is on the side of the powerful. And it is not even permitted to charge the powerful lawbreakers.

So, when the EU imposes sanctions on Belarus, it is committing an act of war, it is acting in violation of international law, and this is purely an act of revenge, because Lukashenko will not allow the EU co-financed revolution to take place, because he refuses to hand Belarus over to NATO.

But it is pretty bad that at the same time the EU officials claim to be acting in the name of law and order.

### "The Law, the Rights and the Rules"

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do what it believes to be right in international affairs, while forcing others, primarily Russia and China, to follow its lead. The documents adopted at the Cornwall and Brussels summits cemented the rules-based world order concept as a counterweight to the universal principles of international law with the UN Charter as its primary source.

### "Rules" instead of International Law

In doing so, the West deliberately shies away from spelling out the rules it purports to follow, just as it refrains from explaining why they are needed. After all, there are already thousands of universal international legal instruments setting out clear national commitments and transparent verification mechanisms. The beauty of these Western "rules" lies precisely in the fact that they lack any specific content. When someone acts against the will of the West, it immediately responds with a groundless claim that "the rules have been broken" (without bothering to present any evidence) and declares its "right to hold the perpetrators accountable." The less specific they get, the freer their hand to carry on with the arbitrary practice of employing dirty tactics as a way to pressure competitors. During the so-called "wild 1990s" in Russia, we used to refer to such practices as laying down the law.

### Reunification of the "Western family"

To the participants in the G7, NATO and US-EU summits, this series of high-level events signalled the return by the United States into European affairs and the restored consolidation of the Old World under the wing of the new administration in Washington. Most NATO and EU members met this U-turn with enthusiastic comments rather than just a sigh of relief. The adherence to liberal values as the humanity's guiding star provides an ideological underpinning for the reunification of the "Western family." Without any false modesty, Washington and Brussels called themselves "an anchor for democracy, peace and security," as opposed to "authoritarianism in all its forms." In particular, they proclaimed their intent to use sanctions to "support democracy across the globe." To this effect, they took on board the American idea of convening a Summit for Democracy. Make no mistake, the West will cherry pick the participants in this summit. It will also set an agenda that is unlikely to meet any opposition from the participants of its choosing. There has been talk of democracy-exporting countries undertaking "enhanced commitments" to ensure universal adherence to "democratic standards" and devis-

ing mechanisms for controlling these processes.

### New Anglo-American Atlantic Charter

The revitalised Anglo-American Atlantic Charter approved by Joseph Biden and Boris Johnson on 10 June 2021 on the sidelines of the G7 Summit is also worth noting. It was cast as an updated version of the 1941 document signed by *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and *Winston Churchill* under the same title. At the time, it played an important role in shaping the contours of the post-war world order.

However, neither Washington, nor London mentioned an essential historical fact: eighty years ago, the USSR and a number of European governments in exile joined the 1941 charter, paving the way to making it one of the conceptual pillars of the Anti-Hitler Coalition and one of the legal blueprints of the UN Charter.

By the same token, the New Atlantic Charter has been designed as a starting point for building a new world order,

terms of international affairs, Beijing is accused of being too assertive in pursuing its economic interests (*The Belt and Road initiative*), as well as expanding its military and, in general, technological might with a view to increasing its influence. Russia stands accused of adopting an "aggressive posture" in a number of regions. This is the way they treat Moscow's policy aimed at countering ultra-radical and neo-Nazi aspirations in its immediate neighbourhood, where the rights of Russians, as well as other ethnic minorities, are being suppressed, and the Russian language, education and culture rooted out. They also dislike the fact that Moscow stands up for countries that became victims to Western gambles, were attacked by international terrorists and risked losing their statehood, as was the case with Syria.

Still, the West reserved its biggest words to the inner workings of the "non-democratic" countries and its commitment to reshape them to fit into the West-

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"Neither NATO, nor the EU intend to divert from their policy of subjugating other regions of the world, proclaiming a self-designated global messianic mission. [...] With its contemptuous attitude towards other members of the international community, the West finds itself on the wrong side of history. [...] Serious, self-respecting countries will never tolerate attempts to talk to them through ultimatums and will discuss any issues only on an equal footing."

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but guided solely by Western "rules." Its provisions are ideologically tainted. They seek to widen the gap between the so-called liberal democracies and all other nations, as well as legitimise the rules-based order. The new charter fails to mention the UN or the OSCE, while stating without any reservations the adherence by the Western nations to their commitments as NATO members, viewed de facto as the only legitimate decision-making centre (at least this is how former NATO Secretary-General *Anders Fogh Rasmussen* described NATO's role). It is clear that the same philosophy will guide the preparations for the Summit for Democracy.

### Russia and China – "authoritarian powers"?

Labelled as "authoritarian powers," Russia and China have been designated as the main obstacles to delivering on the agenda set out at the June summits. From a general perspective, they face two groups of grievances, loosely defined as external and internal. In

ern mould. This entails bringing society in compliance with the vision of democracy as preached by Washington and Brussels. This lies at the root of the demands that Moscow and Beijing, as well as all others, follow the Western prescriptions on human rights, civil society, opposition treatment, the media, governance and the interaction between the branches of power. While proclaiming the "right" to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries for the sake of promoting democracy as it understands it, the West instantly loses all interest when we raise the prospect of making international relations more democratic, including renouncing arrogant behaviour and committing to abide by the universally recognised tenets of international law instead of "rules." By expanding sanctions and other illegitimate coercive measures against sovereign states, the West promotes totalitarian rule in global affairs, assuming an imperial, neo-colonial stance in its relations with third countries. They are asked to adopt the democratic rule under the model of the Western

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choosing, and forget about democracy in international affairs, since someone will be deciding everything for them. All that is asked of these third countries is to keep quiet, or face reprisals.

**Such uncompromising policy leads nowhere**

Clearheaded politicians in Europe and America realise that this uncompromising policy leads nowhere, and are beginning to think pragmatically, albeit out of public view, recognising that the world has more than just one civilisation. They are beginning to recognise that Russia, China and other major powers have a history that dates back a thousand years, and have their own traditions, values and way of life. Attempts to decide whose values are better, and whose are worse, seem pointless. Instead, the West must simply recognise that there are other ways to govern that may be different from the Western approaches, and accept and respect this as a given. No country is immune to human rights issues, so why all this high-browed hubris? Why do the Western countries assume that they can deal with these issues on their own, since they are democracies, while others have yet to reach this level, and are in need of assistance that the West will generously provide.

**Messianism does not help solve real problems**

International relations are going through fundamental shifts that affect everyone without exception. Trying to predict where it will take us is impossible. Still, there is a question: messianic aspirations apart, what is the most effective form of government for coping with and removing threats that transcend borders and affect all people, no matter where they live? Political scientists are beginning to compare the available toolboxes used by the so-called liberal democracies and by "autocratic regimes." In this context, it is telling that the term "autocratic democracy" has been suggested, even if timidly.

These are useful considerations, and serious-minded politicians who are currently in power, among others, must take heed. Thinking and scrutinising what is going on around us has never hurt anyone. The multipolar world is becoming reality. Attempts to ignore this reality by asserting oneself as the only legitimate decision-making centre will hardly bring about solutions to real, rather than farfetched challenges. Instead, what is needed is mutually respectful dialogue involving the leading powers and with due regard for the interests of all other members of the international community. This implies an unconditional commitment to abide by the

universally accepted norms and principles of international law, including respecting the sovereign equality of states, non-interference in their domestic affairs, peaceful resolution of conflict, and the right to self-determination.

**The West wants to slow down the process of the emergence of a polycentric world ...**

Taken as a whole, the historical West dominated the world for five hundred years. However, there is no doubt that it now sees that this era is coming to a close, while clinging to the status it used to enjoy, and putting artificial brakes on the objective process consisting in the emergence of a polycentric world. This brought about an attempt to provide a conceptual underpinning to the new vision of multilateralism. For example, France and Germany tried to promote "effective multilateralism," rooted in the EU ideals and actions, and serving as a model to everyone else, rather than promoting UN's inclusive multilateralism.

**... and it wants to do so with its "rules"**

By imposing the concept of a rules-based order, the West seeks to shift the conversation on key issues to the platforms of its liking, where no dissident voices can be heard. This is how like-minded groups and various "appeals" emerge. This is about coordinating prescriptions and then making everyone else follow them. Examples include an "appeal for trust and security in cyberspace", "the humanitarian appeal for action", and a "global partnership to protect media freedom". Each of these platforms brings together only several dozen countries, which is far from a majority, as far as the international community is concerned. The UN system offers inclusive negotiations platforms on all of the abovementioned subjects. Understandably, this gives rise to alternative points of view that have to be taken into consideration in search of a compromise, but all the West wants is to impose its own rules.

**Sanctions in violation of the UN Charter**

At the same time, the EU develops dedicated horizontal sanctions regimes for each of its "like-minded groups," of course, without looking back at the UN Charter. This is how it works: those who join these "appeals" or "partnerships" decide among themselves who violates their requirements in a given sphere, and the European Union imposes sanctions on those at fault. What a convenient method. They can indict and punish all by themselves without ever needing to turn to the UN Security Council. They even came up

with a rationale to this effect: since we have an alliance of the most effective multilateralists, we can teach others to master these best practices. To those who believe this to be undemocratic or at odds with a vision of genuine multilateralism, President of France *Emmanuel Macron* offered an explanation in his remarks on 11 May 2021: multilateralism does not mean necessity to strike unanimity, and the position of those "who do not wish to continue moving forward must not be able to stop ... an ambitious avant-garde" of the world community.

Make no mistake: there is nothing wrong with the rules per se. On the contrary, the UN Charter is a set of rules, but these rules were approved by all countries of the world, rather than by a closed group at a cosy get-together.

**"The Law" and "the rules"**

An interesting detail: in Russian, the words "law" and "rule" share a single root. To us, a rule that is genuine and just is inseparable from the law. This is not the case for Western languages. For instance, in English, the words "law" and "rule" do not share any resemblance. See the difference? "Rule" is not so much about the law, in the sense of generally accepted laws, as it is about the decisions taken by the one who rules or governs. It is also worth noting that "rule" shares a single root with "ruler," with the latter's meanings including the commonplace device for measuring and drawing straight lines. It can be inferred that through its concept of "rules" the West seeks to align everyone around its vision or apply the same yardstick to everybody, so that everyone falls into a single file.

While reflecting on linguistics, worldview, sentiment, and the way they vary from one nation or culture to another, it is worth recollecting how the West has been justifying NATO's unreserved eastward expansion towards the Russian border. When we point to the assurances provided to the Soviet Union that this would not happen, we hear that these were merely spoken promises, and there were no documents signed to this effect. There is a centuries-old tradition in Russia of making handshake deals without signing anything and holding one's word as sacrosanct, but it seems unlikely to ever take hold in the West.

Efforts to replace international law by Western "rules" include an immanently dangerous policy of revising the history and outcomes of the Second World War and the Nuremberg trials verdicts as the foundation of today's world order. The West refuses to support a Russia-sponsored UN resolution proclaiming that glorifying Nazism is unacceptable, and

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rejects our proposals to discuss the demolition of monuments to those who liberated Europe. They also want to condemn to oblivion momentous post-war developments, such as the 1960 UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, initiated by our country. The former colonial powers seek to efface this memory by replacing it with hastily concocted rituals like taking a knee ahead of sports competitions, in order to divert attention from their historical responsibility for colonial-era crimes.

**The "rules-based order" is the embodiment of double standards**

The "rules-based order" is the embodiment of double standards. The right to self-determination is recognised as an absolute "rule" whenever it can be used to an advantage. This applies to the Malvinas Islands, or the Falklands, some 12,000 kilometres from Great Britain, to the remote former colonial territories Paris and London retain despite multiple UN resolutions and rulings by the International Court of Justice, as well as Kosovo, which obtained its "independence" in violation of a UN Security Council resolution. However, if self-determination runs counter to the Western geopolitical interests, as it happened when the people of Crimea voted for reunification with Russia, this principle is cast aside, while condemning the free choice made by the people and punishing them with sanctions.

**Encroaching on the very human nature**

Apart from encroaching on international law, the "rules" concept also manifests itself in attempts to encroach on the very human nature. In a number of Western countries, students learn at school that *Jesus Christ* was bisexual. Attempts by reasonable politicians to shield the younger generation from aggressive LGBT propaganda are met with bellicose protests from the "enlightened Europe." All world religions, the genetic code of the planet's key civilisations, are under attack. The United States is at the forefront of state interference in church affairs, openly seeking to drive a wedge into the Orthodox world, whose values are viewed as a powerful spiritual obstacle for the liberal concept of boundless permissiveness.

The insistence and even stubbornness demonstrated by the West in imposing its "rules" are striking. Of course, domestic politics is a factor, with the need to show voters how tough your foreign policy can get when dealing with "autocratic foes" during every electoral cycle, which happen every two years in the United States.

Still, it was also the West that coined the "liberty, equality, fraternity" motto. I do not know whether the term "fraternity" is politically correct in today's Europe from a "gender perspective", but there were no attempts to encroach on equality so far. As mentioned above, while preaching equality and democracy in their countries and demanding that other follow its lead, the West refuses to discuss ways to ensure equality and democracy in international affairs.

**"This approach is clearly at odds with the ideals of freedom"**

This approach is clearly at odds with the ideals of freedom. The veil of its superiority conceals weakness and the fear of engaging in a frank conversation not only with yes-men and those eager to fall in line, but also with opponents with different beliefs and values, not neo-liberal or neo-conservative ones, but those learned at mother's knee, inherited from many past generations, traditions and beliefs.

It is much harder to accept the diversity and competition of ideas in the development of the world than to invent prescriptions for all of humanity within a narrow circle of the like-minded, free from any disputes on matters of principle, which makes the emergence of truth all but impossible. However, universal platforms can produce agreements that are much more solid, sustainable, and can be subject to objective verification.

**Exceptionalism complex**

This immutable truth struggles to make it through to the Western elites, consumed as they are with the exceptionalism complex. As I mentioned earlier in this article, right after the talks between Vladimir Putin and Joseph Biden, EU and NATO officials rushed to announce that nothing has changed in the way they treat Russia. Moreover, they are ready to see their relations with Moscow deteriorate further, they claimed.

Moreover, it is an aggressive Russophobic minority that increasingly sets the EU's policy, as confirmed by the EU Summit in Brussels on 24 and 25 June 2021, where the future of relations with Russia was on the agenda. The idea voiced by *Angela Merkel* and *Emmanuel Macron* to hold a meeting with Vladimir Putin was killed before it saw the light of day. Observers noted that the Russia-US Summit in Geneva was tantamount to a go-ahead by the United States to have this meeting, but the Baltic states, siding with Poland, cut short this "uncoordinated" attempt by Berlin and Paris, while the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry summoned the German and French ambassadors to explain their governments' actions. What came out of the debates at the Brussels summit was an in-

struction to the European Commission and the European Union External Action Service to devise new sanctions against Moscow without referring to any specific "sins," just in case. No doubt they will come up with something, should the need arise.

**Aimed at the subjugation of other regions of the world**

Neither NATO, nor the EU intend to divert from their policy of subjugating other regions of the world, proclaiming a self-designated global messianic mission. The North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation is seeking to proactively contribute to America's strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region, clearly targeted at containing China, and undermining ASEAN's role in its decades-long efforts to build an inclusive cooperation architecture for Asia-Pacific. In turn, the European Union drafts programmes to "embrace" geopolitical spaces in its neighbourhood and beyond, without coordinating these initiatives even with the invited countries. This is what the Eastern Partnership, as well as a recent programme approved by Brussels for Central Asia, are all about. There is a fundamental difference between these approaches and the ones guiding integration processes with Russia's involvement: the CIS, the CSTO, EurAsEC and the SCO, which seek to develop relations with external partners exclusively on the basis of parity and mutual agreement.

With its contemptuous attitude towards other members of the international community, the West finds itself on the wrong side of history.

**Russia will discuss any issues only on an equal footing**

Serious, self-respecting countries will never tolerate attempts to talk to them through ultimatums and will discuss any issues only on an equal footing.

As for Russia, it is high time that everyone understands that we have drawn a definitive line under any attempts to play a one-way game with us. All the mantras we hear from the Western capitals on their readiness to put their relations with Moscow back on track, as long as it repents and changes its tack, are meaningless. Still, many persist, as if by inertia, in presenting us with unilateral demands, which does little, if any, credit to how realistic they are.

**Protection of own national interests**

The policy of having the Russian Federation develop on its own, independently and protecting national interests, while remaining open to reaching agreements with foreign partners on an equal basis, has long been at the core of all its posi-

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tion papers on foreign policy, national security and defence. However, judging by the practical steps taken over the recent years by the West, they probably thought that Russia did not really mean what it preached, as if it did not intend to follow through on these principles. This includes the hysterical response to Moscow’s efforts to stand up for the rights of Russians in the aftermath of the bloody 2014 government coup in Ukraine, supported by the United States, NATO and the EU. They thought that if they applied some more pressure on the elites and targeted their interests, while expanding personal, financial and other sectoral sanctions, Moscow would come to its senses and realise that it would face mounting challenges on its development path, as long as it did not “change its behaviour,” which implies obeying the West. Even when Russia made it clear that we view this policy by the United States and Europe as a new reality and will proceed on economic and other matters from the premise that we cannot depend on unreliable partners, the West persisted in believing that, at the end of the day, Moscow “will come to its senses” and will make the required concessions for the sake of financial reward. Let me emphasise what President Vladimir Putin has said on multiple occasions: there have been no unilateral concessions since the late 1990s and there never will be. If you want to work with us, recover lost profits and business reputations, let us sit down and agree on ways we can meet each other half way in order to find fair solutions and compromises.

**What the West should understand**

It is essential that the West understands that this is a firmly ingrained worldview among the people of Russia, reflecting the attitude of the overwhelming majority here. The “irreconcilable” opponents of the Russian government who have placed their stakes on the West and believe that all Russia’s woes come from its anti-Western stance advocate unilateral concessions for the sake of seeing the sanctions lifted and receiving hypothetical financial gains. But they are totally marginal in Russian society. During his June 16, 2021 news conference in Geneva, Vladimir Putin made it abundantly clear what the West is after when it supports these marginal forces.

These are disruptive efforts as far as history is concerned, while Russians

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“We will persist in promoting the emergence of an international relations culture based on the supreme values of justice and enabling all countries, large and small, to develop in peace and freedom. We will always remain open to honest dialogue with anyone who demonstrates a reciprocal readiness to find a balance of interests firmly rooted in international law. These are the rules we adhere to.”

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have always demonstrated maturity, a sense of self-respect, dignity and national pride, and the ability to think independently, especially during hard times, while remaining open to the rest of the world, but only on an equal, mutually beneficial footing. Once we put the confusion and mayhem of the 1990s behind us, these values became the bedrock of Russia’s foreign policy concept in the 21st century. The people of Russia can decide on how they view the actions by their government without getting any prompts from abroad.

**Platforms of dialogue**

As to the question on how to proceed on the international stage, there is no doubt that leaders will always play an important role, but they have to reaffirm their authority, offer new ideas and lead by conviction, not ultimatums. The Group of Twenty, among others, is a natural platform for working out mutually acceptable agreements. It brings together the leading economies, young and old, including the G7, as well as the BRICS and its like-minded countries. Russia’s initiative to form a Greater Eurasian Partnership by coordinating the efforts of countries and organisations across the continent holds a powerful consolidating potential. Seeking to facilitate an honest conversation on the key global stability matters, President Vladimir Putin suggested convening a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that have special responsibility for maintaining international peace and stability on the planet.

**Bringing more democracy to international relations**

Efforts to bring more democracy to international relations and affirm a polycentric

world order include reforming the UN Security Council by strengthening it with Asian, African and Latin American countries, and ending the anomaly with the excessive representation of the West in the UN’s main body.

Regardless of any ambitions and threats, our country remains committed to a sovereign and independent foreign policy, while also ready to offer a unifying agenda in international affairs with due account for the cultural and civilisational diversity in today’s world. Confrontation is not our choice, no matter the rationale. On 22 June 2021, Vladimir Putin published an article “Being Open, Despite the Past,” in which he emphasised: “We simply cannot afford to carry the burden of past misunderstandings, hard feelings, conflicts, and mistakes.” He also discussed the need to ensure security without dividing lines, a common space for equitable cooperation and inclusive development. This approach hinges on Russia’s thousand-year history and is fully consistent with the current stage in its development. We will persist in promoting the emergence of an international relations culture based on the supreme values of justice and enabling all countries, large and small, to develop in peace and freedom. We will always remain open to honest dialogue with anyone who demonstrates a reciprocal readiness to find a balance of interests firmly rooted in international law. These are the rules we adhere to. •

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# Human energy needs freedom

by Carl Bossard

*Those who accompany young people on their learning and life paths need freedom. This is often forgotten in reforms, including the most recent KV (Commercial Trainee) restructuring. A plea for the renaissance of a buried concept.*

“They who fear the use of freedom are its secret opponent.” So wrote *Hans Saner*, philosopher and personal assistant to *Karl Jaspers*.<sup>1</sup> It is an impressive sentence. And Saner added: “Many would like to grant freedom, if they only knew that no one makes use of it.”

## Switching to “output control”

If you look at the school landscape and consider the many reforms of recent years, you quickly realise what has radically changed: Schools are no longer told what to teach in terms of content. Today, it is decreed in detail and precisely regulated what the pupils must be able to do in the end – and in some cases also prescribed how this is to be achieved. (Individual-) competencies are stipulated, and in an extraordinarily small-parcelled way. In music, for example, a child is required to “be able to sensorimotorily perceive his or her body and to react in a music-related way”.

This means, according to science, a paradigm shift: the state strategy is switching from “input” to “output” control. Thus, the efficiency of school educational work is to be increased and teaching is to be measured by operationalised output. Now, kindergarten children as young as five are tested for letters and reviewed on numbers.

## Everyday pedagogical life is obsessed with regulation

Teachers therefore note the loss of professional freedom and the advance of a regulatory administration; it wants to be assured and achieve the qualification goals with a multitude of rules and regulations. This exactly is only possible with extensive regulations. Let us recall the voluminous Curriculum 21, which is 470 pages long and comprises 363 competencies, divided into more than 2300 competency levels. But too many directives paralyse the mind and inhibit spontaneity and creativity. The rule of thumb: the thicker and denser the set of rules, the more restricted and limited the freedom.

## In the tentacles of administrative shackles

The many requirements demand agreements and coordination within the team; they lead to structurally induced extra work – this with increasingly heterogene-



(Picture A. Wetekamp)

ous and demanding classes. It is therefore not surprising that “many teachers are reducing their workload to protect themselves from overload”, as *Christian Hugli*, President of the *Zurich Teachers’ Association*, soberly states.<sup>2</sup> In the Canton of Zurich, for example, this leads to the fact that at the moment around 550 positions are still unfilled for the new school year.

Many feel trapped in the tentacles of administrative shackles with their paralyzing effect. They complain about the corset of artificially constructed complexity of today’s school worlds. “Everything is so tightly structured,” explains a 31-year-old dropout.<sup>3</sup> And an experienced teacher sums up his years of teaching with “school in chains”: it was becoming more and more strictly standardised.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore not surprising that every sixth teacher quits already in the first year and half of the new teachers leave the classroom again after five years at the latest, as a study showed. The teacher shortage is coming to a head.

## Freedom has a correlate: responsibility

Freedom is “the first and indispensable condition” for education, wrote the reformer of the Prussian education system and theorist of freedom, *Wilhelm von Humboldt*.<sup>5</sup> Presumably, the great educational reformer knew that anyone who is on the road with pupils needs freedom. He does need it to teach like he needs a morning coffee to wake up. Freedom as an elixir! But it is not the unbound, uncontrolled freedom, but the freedom from unnecessary pro forma regulations and formal requirements, from norms and shackles. It is not the freedom for pedagogical dolcefarniente, even for casualness or mini-

malism, no, it is the freedom to choose the “*méthodos*”, the way to the goal.

What is meant is the freedom of shaping the school’s mission and to work pedagogically with the children and young people – for the benefit of the class for which a teacher is responsible. And this last point contains the decisive correlate to freedom: responsibility. Freedom and responsibility form a junction – they are something like two important pillars of good teaching and good schools. They must not decouple, because without personal responsibility, freedom degenerates into arbitrariness.

## The humane cannot be forced with regulations

Taking responsibility requires freedom. That is why freedom must not be muzzled in schools. You have to dig it out of the sand again and again, otherwise it will remain nothing but a missed reality. For most teachers, freedom is a basic condition. In freedom lies the core of all pedagogical work.

Only in this way teachers can react correctly to the situation, respond spontaneously to the children and allow creative things to emerge from the moment. Humour and wit, imagination and fantasy do not blossom in the narrow dress of regulations; they need a humus of freedom. But the humane cannot be forced by rules. What appeals to us as humanly cannot be outsourced to the numerical or controlled by bureaucratic shackles.

## Human energy comes from freedom

An effective education policy should believe more in people and less in systems and structures. Good teachers with empa-

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# What do we need in the last stage of life?

## Report of a geriatric nurse

by Maria Froitzheim, Heike Hupe, Marilies Kupsch, Sylke Reeckmann, Cologne

Although Germany is one of the countries with the highest standard of living in Europe and the world, it performs poorly in terms of the number of caregivers compared to other European countries. German hospitals and nursing homes have long experienced a shortage of nursing staff, which has been exacerbated by the Corona crisis. Many smaller hospitals and intensive care units were already closed before the pandemic, jobs for nursing staff and doctors had been cut, and nursing staffing ratios had been changed. They saved even on hygiene articles, so that nursing homes, for example, repeatedly had neither enough gloves nor masks. The president of the German Nursing Council, Franz Wagner, sees a need for an additional 50,000 positions in the medium term.



(picture keystone)

### The nursing emergency in Germany

Although this emergency became clearer at the beginning of the Corona crisis, nursing staff were applauded for their high level of commitment and demands for improvement were followed by promises and even some changes, the situation has not fundamentally improved to this day, but has worsened, with thousands of nursing staff quitting.

The Corona crisis brought the gravity of the crisis to light. The cause of this deplorable state lies in the thirty-odd years of neoliberalism as an economic form, which put profit first and abandoned the common good as the supreme principle as well as the meaning and purpose of the economy. As in other areas of social co-existence, the health care system no longer focuses on people and their needs, but on the greatest possible material gain. This explains the underpayment and low appreciation of the work of nurses. There is a scarcity of qualified staff and temporary employment agencies sometimes pay

higher wages which causes a high fluctuation rate and a bad climate among the employees. Due to staff shortages, nurses work a lot of overtime. They are forced to work under undignified conditions against their own ethos and are therefore completely overworked.

### Personal report of a geriatric nurse

The report of a geriatric nurse who for these reasons recently quit her job with a heavy heart in a private nursing home illustrates the discrepancy between what constitutes the work of caring for an old and sick person and what has sadly become commonplace in nursing care today as a result of neoliberalism.

At the beginning of the crisis, after many years of working as an outpatient nurse Ms R., a sixty-year-old trained nurse, decided to take over the nursing management of a quarantine ward in an old people's home. Due to her qualified training, her experience, and her high level of commitment, she brought with her the necessary security and calm-

ness for this responsible task. She began her work with great pleasure, managed the ward successfully and soon enjoyed a high reputation among both the elderly and her colleagues. After the management of the quarantine ward was no longer necessary, Ms R. decided to work in another ward. Unfortunately, over time, conditions deteriorated. This was reflected in an ever-increasing shortage of nurses, and in poor management, which made the nurses feel unfairly treated and unappreciated. In addition, they were ordered to perform tasks not related to their profession (for example, to perform housekeeping duties). Ms R. tried to speak to the director of the home on behalf of her colleagues and to lobby for better conditions but was met with incomprehension and ignorance. After working under these undignified conditions for a long time, she quit, despite her concern for the elderly and her colleagues, in order not to become ill herself.

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### "Human energy needs freedom"

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thy and professional passion are the be-all and end-all of schools. But they need freedom – not primarily regulations. They need trust – not pressure through decrees. Human energy comes from freedom, not from directives on teaching methods and operationally narrow guidelines, as imposed by current education policy.

Politicians and administrators must therefore allow teachers more freedom and encourage them at the same time to make use of it. This requires courage, be-

cause freedom can also always be abused. In this case, school administrators must intervene. Quickly and relentlessly. To engage in a conflict of freedom is still better than teachers peacefully withering away in conformity, as the philosopher Hans Saner once expressed.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saner, Hans. *Die Anarchie der Stille*. (The Anarchy of Silence.) Basel: Lenos Verlag, 1996, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Donzé, René. «Zürcher Lehrer sollen mehr arbeiten.» (Zurich teachers should work more.) In: *NZZ am Sonntag* of 23 May 2021, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Sigg, Pascal; Kuster, Sabine. "Drang nach Freiheit: Warum viele junge Lehrer wieder aussteigen. (The

urge for freedom: Why many young teachers drop out again.) In: *St. Galler Tagblatt* of 21 June 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Meier, Walter. *Schule in Ketten*. *Sachroman* (School in chains. Non-fiction novel.) Muri b. Bern: Eigenverlag (self-published), 2015

<sup>5</sup> von Humboldt, Wilhelm. *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen*. (Ideas on an attempt to determine the limits of the effectiveness of the state.) Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006, p. 22

<sup>6</sup> Saner, Hans. *Zwischen Politik und Getto. Über das Verhältnis des Lehrers zur Gesellschaft*. (Between Politics and the Ghetto. On the relationship of the teacher to society.) Basel: Lenos and Z-Verlag, 1979, p. 27

Source: *Journal 21* from 12 June 2021

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

**"What do we need ..."**

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**The life situation of the ageing person**

Ms R. told us very impressively how she worked with the elderly and how she succeeded in getting closer to them and giving them hope. We have tried to summarise her experience:

The life situation of the ageing person is similar to the phase at the beginning of life. Due to the loss of physical or even mental abilities, the old person becomes increasingly dependent on his or her fellow human beings and – like a small child – is in an emotionally overly sensitive position. Death is approaching the fear of pain, loneliness and dying increases. More and more, the question arises whether one has been a good person.

When moving into a retirement home, a turning point is added to this already difficult situation, which often increases worries and fears. People with dementia also feel this way. Often, they are suddenly torn away from their familiar surroundings, their home, which still gave them a certain degree of safety. Their own free living and creative space increasingly falls away. The fear of being left alone, the difficulty of adjusting to a completely new, foreign environment and becoming dependent on unknown people often leads to disorientation, depression or sometimes even suicidal thoughts.

The task of a nurse is now to take care of the people in this extremely sensitive state and to accompany them in their last stage of life, to help them in a caring and human way, to find solutions for the problems they face and to structure the path together with them. This path can be long or short. Sometimes the condition of the elderly person is not so bad when he/she moves in. Sometimes they deteriorate rapidly afterwards, some live in the home for several more years. Many lose touch with the outside world over time. The caregivers bring the world back to them to some extent in their seclusion. Their task is to understand the concerns and fears and, together with the elderly, to organise their special situation well. Ms R. reports that sometimes a conversation helps, sometimes a spontaneous gesture or a favour that goes beyond the normal work to make the old person feel seen.

From her experience, she considers it essential that empathy and attention are characterised by a sense of hope and confidence: Over time, the elderly person and the caregiver get to know each other, become friends, share the burden, cooperate and slowly progress step by step at the pace set by the old person. The caregiver can help to reconcile with life and the new

situation. The decisive factor is the type of attention, not the time.

This kind of support requires a great deal of self-confidence and openness on the part of the caregiver. When interacting, he must be free of his own thoughts, worries and insecurities and radiate optimism. The caregiver must not refer to the old people's peculiarities or bad habits and must not be afraid of them. Only in this way can they succeed in conveying trust, security, and safety to them.

Some elderly people expressed to Ms R. that she was like a mother to them. A high sense of responsibility as well as willingness to try, independence and commitment was developed and trained by Ms R. already as a child in her own life situation. Her life experiences, a long, serious examination of herself and psychological knowledge help her to understand the old person and to form a bond with him, which gives hope and strength to alleviate suffering.

However, Ms R. also points out that cooperation of the entire team who surround the elderly, especially the severely ill or dying person is required. In this situation, it is particularly important to gather and guide the observations and actions of all those involved, be it the relatives, the doctor, the priest, the housekeeper or the cleaner. This high responsibility is also in the hands of the nurse, as she knows the elderly person the best. She accompanies, comforts, and supports the relatives. The nurse's experience in dealing with the seriously ill and knowledge of palliative care are important in relieving pain and calming the sick person. She recognises the

first signs of death and initiates the necessary steps to accompany the person. She ensures that the dying person is not left alone but is cared for and protected as if by a mother at the beginning of their life.

**Summary**

All this shows what high demands, skills and knowledge, personal stability and resilience are required of geriatric nurses in their profession to be able to pursue it with joy and satisfaction. It also shows that their task can be a deeply humane and gratifying work if the conditions of the person both personally and professionally are given.

With her moving report, Ms R. gave us an insight into the situation of old people in general and into her experiences in a retirement home. In view of what this generation has created for us which was born out of hardship and need – the prosperity in which we live – we owe a debt of gratitude and good care for a dignified end of life. This has been shamefully forgotten in many cases today and is reflected, for example, in the shortage of nurses.

Our elderly are also witnesses of the past, their wisdom and experience are a great asset from which the younger generation can benefit greatly. Of course, we also owe a great debt of gratitude to the geriatric nurses who, despite undignified conditions, take on the highly demanding task of accompanying our elderly people on the last part of their life's journey unseen every day.

Thanks to Ms R. for her commitment and for her report! •

Letter to  the Editor

**That one must be ashamed of being a German**

I am incredibly happy about your newspaper. To be lied to is insulting and among other things, violates our basic right: "Human dignity shall be inviolable". Especially when lies are used to manipulate the reasons for war.

I have been living in a nursing home for one year. Here, many nations work peacefully together at a youthful age. These caregivers help us caretakers, despite a great lack of personnel, and keep the business afloat.

One assistant comes from Nepal, three caregivers on our floor come from Russia, which is being hounded in such a way, that one must be ashamed of being a German. Gorbachev seems to be forgotten. I have friends in Novosibirsk, we meet each other in the Trans-Siberian Railway. They were, during *Gorbachev's* regime, our guests here for two weeks. I had been in Novosibirsk for two weeks in the uni-

versity district of Akademgorodok. Travel by train through Kazakhstan to Alma Ata, a mountainous tour up to almost 3,000 meters above sea-level, near Alma Ata. Nowhere did I find hate, despite the destructive Second World War with about 27 million deaths. Not even in St. Petersburg, alias Leningrad. There is a controlled, highly unjust manipulation of the past, Holocaust on everyone's lips, Russian suffering is mostly kept dead-silent. It looks to me as if, as "reparations", we are obliged to participate in new injustices within the framework of NATO. In such a way, old injustice is given birth to new injustice. Germany and France are a stroke of luck, the "chain" has been broken.

Ernst Udo Kaufmann,  
Müllheim (bei Freiburg, i. Br.)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)