

Current Concerns

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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Switzerland has a future. On the positive power of individuality About the book by Gerhard Schwarz

by Marianne und Werner Wüthrich

The liberal economist Gerhard Schwarz, for many years economics editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" and for several years managing director of the think tank Avenir Suisse, has written an excellent book about Switzerland in generally understandable language. It is an example of how identification with the Swiss model is characteristic of the vast majority of the population, regardless of political persuasion.

The book by the current president of the board of the *Progress Foundation* is an expression of the conviction that Switzerland's success, which has lasted for over 150 years, is not primarily due to economic reasons, but is based on the system of pronounced political self-determination. At the same time, this political system "grants citizens more participation and freedom [...] than any actually existing alternatives". (p. 13)

"A state built from the bottom up"

The first part, so titled, begins with the subchapter "Future Needs Provenance". For "you cannot preserve an order and develop it further if you do not know on what historical foundations it rests". (p. 18) One of the most important foundations that has developed in Swiss history is the coopera-

tive principle: "What is really special about Switzerland, above all others, is its cooperative self-image." (p. 29) It is "this voluntary association from the bottom up, starting with the citizens, through the communes and cantons, to the language regions and the Confederation, that is unique". In fact, according to Schwarz, the concept of the "Confederation" is "so central that almost everything else is derived from it". (p. 32) For example, communal autonomy and federalism, the principle of subsidiarity and the militia principle.

As an illustrative example, *Gerhard Schwarz* explains the understanding of citizenship as communal citizenship: "You become a citizen of the Swiss Confederation and of a canton by becoming a citizen of a Swiss commune." Citizenship is not granted by an executive authority, but by the communal parliament or assembly: "The citizens of the commune decide whether they want to accept someone new into their cooperative or not." The author mentions that this practice is "controversial" today because it does not give the person seeking naturalisation any right to naturalisation despite fulfilling the requirements under federal law. But Swiss citizenship not only confers rights and obligations, it is also "an expression of integration into a new homeland". (pp. 33)



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"Direct democracy – the people in the driver's seat"

In the chapter "Institutional peculiarities", (semi-)direct* democracy (*part of the decisions are made by parliament) rightly takes first place due to its central importance for the country and the citizens. The direct democratic instruments are also an "outgrowth of the cooperative understanding of the state". (p. 37) *Gerhard Schwarz* illustrates the differentiated Swiss organisation of citizens' voting and electoral rights with vivid descriptions (pp. 37–46). Three examples, which should also be of interest abroad, will be highlighted here:

– The late introduction of women's voting and electoral rights (1971) "is often cited with a pitying smile as evidence of the failure of the system". The author points out that Swiss direct democracy works particularly slowly: "In it there is [...] only the slow, evolutionary, laborious path of small steps." In contrast to other countries that had introduced women's suffrage much earlier through a parliamentary decision, in Switzerland a popular vote was necessary to amend the constitution accordingly. This decision was taken voluntarily by Swiss men

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«Switzerland isn't just known for chocolate and army knives»

On the eve of the Biden-Putin meeting of 16 June 2021

"A word about where we are tonight: Geneva, Switzerland. A city that is no stranger to deal making and peace keeping. Everywhere you look in Geneva, there are symbols on what can be accomplished when the world works together. The League of Nations headquarters here after World War I, the Red Cross founded here, and the Geneva Conventions signed here. Switzerland isn't just known for chocolate and army knives; the Swiss have long been known as being neutral. Geneva

is a city that creates the space for diplomacy. United States and Russia have his tree here too. This Château [La Grange] is where *Ronald Reagan* met the leader of the Soviet Union, *Mikhail Gorbachev*, in 1985. [...] Now, the City of Peace hosts his next historic summit. And tomorrow all eyes here on Geneva, and we'll be here to witness it, with you."

Source: @NorahODonnell. CBS News
(Columbia Broadcasting System)
on 15 June 2021

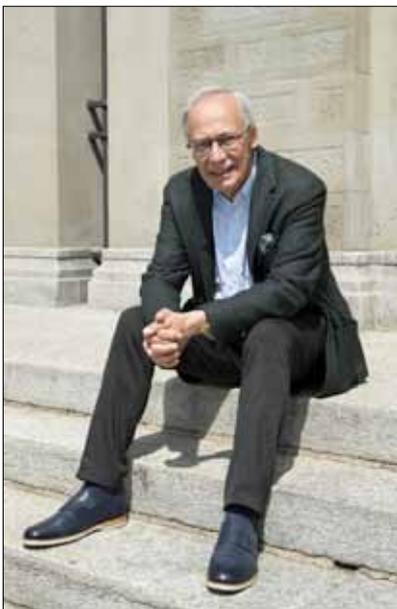
"Switzerland has a ..."

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in 1971 with a whopping two-thirds majority. Gerhard Schwarz makes the point: "Those who resent the tenacious adherence to the male-only right to vote and the slowness of the process will tend to approve of semi-direct democracy only to the extent that it produces results within a useful period of time that correspond to their own values and ideas". (p. 38)

- The usually relatively low voter turnout (sometimes less than 50 per cent) does not mean that the other 50 per cent are not interested in what is happening in the state: "Because of the large number of elections and votes, many citizens only participate in votes that particularly interest or concern them. [...] Nevertheless, one cannot speak of a spectator democracy, because such abstinence is quite rational. Those who are affected can participate in decision-making." (p. 41)
- The claim that the people are incapable of judging complex issues properly is "refuted by Swiss reality. Of course, decisions are made that a majority of experts consider to be wrong, that contradict international majority opinions or that, in retrospect, are also regretted by the majority of the people and considered to be an error. But is it different in parliamentary systems? The Swiss people truly do not have to be ashamed of their voting results; they make no more mistakes than the parliaments of neighbouring countries [...]" (p. 43)

The direct democratic principle is also directly reflected in the elections of parliaments and cantonal and communal executives (see box on p. 3 "Cantonal State



Gerhard Schwarz (picture Desirée Good)

"Only federalism down to the level of the communes can hold together a nation characterised by so many and such great differences of religion, culture, language, geography and topography." (Gerhard Schwarz)

councillors and parliamentarians receive their mandate directly from the people").

The "militia principle – participation in the citizens' state"

Even though it is more difficult to find enough volunteers in many Swiss communes today than it was twenty or thirty years ago, in Switzerland "about one in three people over the age of 15 still does some kind of voluntary work, i.e. unpaid work for the community". For the functioning of Swiss communes, civic engagement is, as the author notes, "still indispensable", (p. 48). As important examples, he mentions work as a communal councillor (executive), cantonal councillor (legislative), in school or church administration, in social authorities or in the fire brigade. Like direct democracy, the idea of militia stems from the cooperative understanding of the state (p. 50). Thus, the mandate of a local councillor — except in large cities — is part-time and is only modestly compensated financially — one does not become a communal militia councillor to earn good money but to make a contribution to the common good.

Incidentally, the members of the National Council and the Council of States are also "militiamen": although they have almost a full workload and receive corresponding attendance fees, each of them has, as Schwarz writes, "kept one leg in business, ideally in the private sector" (p. 49).

The effects of the militia principle on the relationship between citizens and authorities are inestimable: "Militia representatives are [...] closer to the citizens, more pragmatic and — because they are less economically dependent on their mandate — internally more independent. In short: they are more grounded and closer to the people" (p. 49). The author adds that therefore the trusting in authority respect that, for example, their German neighbours have for the authorities, is unknown to the Swiss" (p. 50).

You can read an example of this in the box on p. 6 "Militia principle: the citizen in the true sense".

Remarkable facts about federalism

After this look at some of the pillars of the Swiss understanding of the state, which the author brings closer to the reader in a lively and original way, the other contents of the book will only be touched on selectively here, so as not to go beyond the scope of a book review.

Two statements on federalism should nevertheless be singled out. One seems noteworthy to us from the pen of a liberal: "One can of course ask whether in a globalized, highly labour-divided, mobile and digitized world such small-scale communities are still appropriate [...]. On the contrary, however, I personally consider small, manageable conditions to be a necessary counterweight to the growing complexity of the world" (p. 56). The second statement is the astute observation that the trend towards centralisation is precisely not conducive to Switzerland's internal cohesion: "Only federalism down to the level of the communes can hold together a nation characterised by so many and such great differences of religion, culture, language, geography and topography" (p. 59).

In the middle of the world – and yet unique: Swiss neutrality

When it comes to locating Switzerland in the world, perpetual neutrality is in first place, as it does in Gerhard Schwarz's book. He endorses the viewpoint of *Carl Spitteler*, the Swiss Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1919: "In his judgement, an exaggerated sense of mission in foreign policy is incompatible with neutrality"¹ (Schwarz pp. 73). Consequently, Gerhard Schwarz, like many other Swiss, takes the view that candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council would "hardly serve the role of a neutral and mediator" (p. 132). Rather, he argues, Switzerland has a far more useful instrument at its disposal with its tradition of providing its good offices: "Instead of constantly questioning neutrality, it is more advisable to provide ongoing, discreet and effi-

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"What is really special about Switzerland, above all others, is its cooperative self-image." It is "this voluntary association from the bottom up, starting with the citizens, through the communes and cantons, to the language regions and the Confederation, that is unique." (Gerhard Schwarz)

Heavy rain and flood disaster in Germany – an interim assessment

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

In the week from 11 to 17 July 2021, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, but also Austria and Switzerland, were hit by very heavy rainfall, resulting in some catastrophic flooding and landslides. Many lives were lost. This time, regions in the German states of Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia, but also in Bavaria and Saxony, were particularly hard hit. The media have reported extensively, pictures of the catastrophe, the destruction and devastation have reached people worldwide. Here, without claiming to be exhaustive, we will merely give an interim assessment.

Sympathy and condolences, as well as the willingness to provide help, go to the relatives of the many fatalities and those still missing, to the many injured, to the many thousands of people, some of whom have lost all their belongings.

Overwhelming willingness to help

And indeed, sympathy and compassion have been demonstrated in view of the disaster. Yes, there are also the “curious” obstructing the relief workers and sometimes even putting themselves in danger – and also a few looters. But the scope and extent of the real help provided is once again overwhelming – enormous donations in kind and money stand alongside the energetic help of many on the ground. Volunteers, but also helpers from the fire brigades, the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), the German Red Cross (DRK), the German Lifesaving Association (DLRG), the police and the Bundeswehr have done a great job. A quote from the “Mittelbayerische Zeitung” of 17 July expressed it well: “A glimmer of hope in these gloomy times is the support offered and provided by other federal states, by local authorities and volunteers, and also from abroad. In times of need – and not in fine Sunday speeches – we can see what real cohesion and solidarity are about. With this spirit, this commitment, Germany will also withstand this terrible test by the forces of nature.”

Difficult search for causes

Of course, the question of the causes and possible lessons to be learned from the disaster is also raised. Here opinions differ, and one can get the impression that it is not always just about the cause, but also about other motives. After all, Germany is in the middle of a federal election campaign, and the EU Commission has just



Residents of the village of Schuld in Rhineland-Palatinate begin the clean-up work. (picture keystone)

adopted a very extensive “climate protection programme”.

Yet it is still relatively easy to explain the acute weather situation in a scientifically serious way. But opinions differ even on the question of the connection between the rainfall and the floods and landslides. While some say that human intervention in nature, for example the sealing of soil surfaces, is the problem, others emphasise that this played a “clearly subordinate role” in the places most affected by the disaster.¹

The question of whether the disaster control warning systems worked adequately is also controversial. It is justified to again consider supplements to the widespread electronic systems, for example sirens.

Beware of the climate change claim

Whether it really serves the cause to establish a direct link between the disaster and climate change, as numerous politicians of almost all parties and many media have done, is questionable. The German radio station *Deutschlandfunk* asked a number of scientists about the connections between climate change and the persistent heavy rain.² None of the scientists questioned climate change, but when asked about the direct connections, many of them were rather cautious. One example: *Sebastian Sippel*, senior researcher in the Climate Physics Research Group at the Institute for Climate and Atmosphere at ETH Zurich said: “It is still very difficult to causally attribute individual events to climate change. This is probably also true for the current heavy rain.” The scientists do see connections

between a long-term increase in temperature and specific weather events. They say that warmer air can absorb more water vapour before it rains down. In concrete terms: air that is 1 degree Celsius warmer can absorb 7 per cent more water. So there can be more water when it rains. Or: If the temperature difference between the poles and the equator decreases, the flow velocity of the air masses also decreases and, in result, longer-lasting weather conditions such as heat or rainy weather are more likely to occur. But to draw direct conclusions from such statements for an event like the one in the week from 11 to 17 July is probably quite daring. Many concrete questions have not yet been scientifically clarified.

What we can do in future

There is no reason not to do something about air, water and global warming – as far as that is possible. Here, too, there are still open questions. But anyone claiming today that he (or she) could prevent events like the natural disaster in Germany in the future with his climate protection programme, is a quack.³ *Jürgen Jensen* of the *Institute for Water and Environment* was asked by *Deutschlandfunk*: “What could have been done to prevent the loss of human life and the destruction of buildings and roads?” His answer was: “That’s a difficult question, I’m afraid you can’t prepare for it sufficiently. It is more of a natural disaster in that case than it was a controllable weather event.”

"Heavy rain and flood disaster ..."

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Which is not to say that there is nothing we can do in future. In the same interview, the same expert mentions better personal precautions, including sensible behaviour in the event of a disaster (unfortunately, there were also people who went back into their houses despite clear warnings and were harmed). Precautions can also be taken when planning and building, for example, by avoiding endangered areas.

Finally, civic engagement, especially among young people, deserves to be supported and strengthened. Young people in the volunteer fire brigade, the German Red Cross or the scouts can not only learn to provide meaningful help, even in the event of a disaster, but also strengthens their entire personality by such involvement.

Prevent man-made disasters

One last thing: This time, Germany has been hit particularly hard. The images of destruction and devastation in individual localities are reminiscent of images from other parts of the world to which we have perhaps already become too accustomed. Catastrophes that are even greater in scale. Also, images from regions where the destruction and devastation are obviously due to human behaviour. Most strongly where wars are raging. Here, human beings, those responsible, can indeed do something to end suffering, to end it immediately. And prevent in advance such man-made catastrophic events from happening in the first place.



Volunteers in Dernau/Ahr in Rhineland-Palatinate. (Picture stma)

The flood disaster in Germany and its neighbouring countries is another occasion to pause and reflect on what really is important in life and how we want to live in future.

¹ Thus Jürgen Jensen of the Institut for Water and Environment in an Interview with Deutschlandfunk of 15 July 2021; https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/forscher-zu-unwetter-katastrophe-risiko-fuer-solche.676.de.html?dram:article_id=500356

² https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/klimawandel-oder-nur-wetter-was-die-wissenschaft-dazu-sagt.1939.de.html?drn:news_id=1281103 of 16 July 2021. A report by Bayerischen Rundfunk of 13 July argues similarly: "For a single event, however extreme, it is impossible to say that climate change

was the cause." (<https://www.br.de/wissen/wetter-extremwetter-klimawandel-100.html>)

³ There are also media that have realised this. For example, the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* wrote on 18 July 2021: "Quite a few politicians are trying to politicise the floods in a confrontational way. This will hardly work. [...] Those who want to charge politics and intellectual life with alarmism will lose." And the *NZZ am Sonntag* of the same day wrote: "The relatives of the victims and the citizens of the devastated villages will need help to find their way and to rebuild destroyed existences. What they don't need are climate activists in politics, the media and, unfortunately, also in science, who see in the catastrophe above all the confirmation of their own climate-political world view: We've always told you so. Those who talk like this declare extreme events to be educational measures [...]" A day earlier, the Belgian newspaper "De Standaard" had already written: "This should be a time for aid, not for political gimmicks, let alone mutual accusations."

German-American "Washington Declaration"

km. German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* visited the USA shortly before the end of her term on 15 July 2021, received an honorary doctorate from Johns Hopkins University and was also received by US President *Joe Biden*. It is not known what the two discussed in concrete terms, but they presented a "Washington Declaration" to the public.¹ The text is around four pages long, is only specific at one point – a German-American Futures Forum ("US-German Futures Forum") has been set up – and is otherwise written with the familiar formulas that allow one's own actions to be summarised under the heading "We are the good guys". The leadership claim of both governments is particularly emphasised:

"We recognise our responsibility to lead in the development of global solutions to shared challenges."

When the very next sentence reads, "Our citizens' lives are subject to disruption by a range of international forces that demand a collective response." Then it becomes clear that it is not about the world community as a whole working together, but about "jointly" fighting the "bad guys". These are not specifically named, but they are not difficult to guess. One should also read the detailed analysis of the Russian foreign minister, which *Current Concerns* documented in its No. 16 of 21 July.

A few days after the Chancellor's visit to the USA, an "agreement" between the

German and US governments on *Nord Stream 2* was publicly announced. The pipeline "may" now be completed if Germany at the same time gives Ukraine a big helping hand. This also eliminates this small "disruptive factor" for the new Washington-Berlin axis.

It is not known that Angela Merkel asked the citizens of her country for their opinion before her talks in Washington and before signing the "Washington Declaration". What is known, however, is that the majority of Germans do not hold with the fight of the "good guys" against the "bad guys" today.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/state-ments-releases/2021/07/15/washington-declaration/>

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cient proof that such neutrality can benefit world peace and stability" (p. 131).

Switzerland recently proofed this in Geneva, where it made its neutral ground available to the presidents of the two great powers Russia and the USA, so that they could shake hands and talk. It is these small steps that are now required to come closer to the hope of the peoples for a more peaceful world. (See box on p. 1 "Switzerland isn't just known for chocolate and army knives").

Like Good Offices, Gerhard Schwarz acknowledges Switzerland's active support of the ICRC "one of the greatest institutions Switzerland maintains as a service to the world community, and whose headquarters in Geneva have not least to do with neutrality" (p. 74).

"The Place in Europe and in the world"

Like numerous Swiss liberals, but also those from all other political corners, Gerhard Schwarz is a staunch opponent of an institutional framework agreement between Switzerland and the EU: "If Switzerland wants to preserve and develop its Unique Selling Point, which means, its unique political system, it has every reason and every moral justification to move outside the EU, as much as it feels that it is part of Europe." (p. 85) From an economic point of view, the author – like the

State councillors and parliamentarians receive their mandate directly from the people

m.w./w.w. On 18 June, *Mario Fehr*, member of the Zurich cantonal government, announced that he was leaving the SP (Swiss Social Democrats) because of differences of opinion with the cantonal party leadership. The Swiss uniqueness: because Fehr was elected by the people, he remains in office even without party membership. This is because cantonal voters do not elect a party, but individuals to their government. The five or seven or nine people, depending on the canton, who receive the most votes, are elected. Incidentally, Mario Fehr had the best election result in 2019, which means that he also received many votes from citizens who did not vote for him because of his party affiliation, but because they were content with his previous leadership. Although the party leadership will not nominate him for another period of office, he therefore has good chances if he wants to run again in 2023 as a party independent or for another party.

majority of the population, by the way – considers it reasonable to keep the more than 140 bilateral agreements with the EU alive, but Switzerland must "not pay any price for them" and also "not necessarily strive for a permanent deepening and expansion of the treaties with the EU" (p. 84). He points out that "Switzerland, despite its small size, is an important economic partner of the EU, in many respects number two or three after the USA and China". (p. 83) A long period without new contracts should therefore be understood "not as a catastrophe, but as an expression of strategic patience" (p. 84). These are remarkable statements from Gerhard Schwarz.

The author also recalls that Switzerland's trade "with the rest of the world" is already on a par with that with the EU and is continuing to develop strongly (p. 87).

A word about the great social importance of the dual professional education

Gerhard Schwarz dedicates a separate chapter to "Space for Entrepreneurship", which, in addition to various assessments from a market economy perspective, also emphasizes the great importance of dual professional education, "which is part of Switzerland's economic and social DNA". (p. 99) As long-time vocational schoolteachers, we are particularly pleased that the author is defending himself against pressure from the OECD for greater academization. He points out that the Swiss education system "not only does better justice to the various skills and better exploits the existing educational potential, but also serves social cohesion". In just a few sentences, he aptly demonstrates the great advantages for individual young people as well as for the Swiss economy and society (p. 100).

"Working for the future"

In the chapter "Working for the future" the author proposes a wide range of reforms to "secure the long-term future viability of the country while preserving individual freedom as much as possible" (p. 111): proposals to the "key properties" of the direct democracy, to strengthen the militia concept and the non-centralism, for participation in the world in the humanitarian fields of activity.

It goes without saying that Gerhard Schwarz, as a liberal, also focuses on free trade, more competition and less state.

But he does not put economic reforms first, "because the freedom of the market is indeed one of Switzerland's success factors, but not as distinct as the political system is one of its unique selling points". (p. 112)

This assessment is confirmed by the following report, which was recently read

in the daily press: According to the ranking of the "Institute for Management Development (IMD)", Switzerland is 2021 – the year the negotiations with Brussels were broken off! – the most competitive country in the world. There are a striking number of small countries among the top ten countries. Switzerland has always been in the top five over the past five years. Reasons for this year's first place include the "world's best infrastructure", the "unsurpassed constitution of public finances" and the "institutional framework" of Switzerland.²

An example out of the plethora: The revitalisation of the militia concept

In order to promote the participation of broader sections of the population in public life, it is important for Gerhard Schwarz to "always look for people under 35, of retirement age and/or with a foreign passport" when filling vacant positions. "However, it should be crucial to upgrade the militia work." (pp. 119) The author gives specific suggestions for this:

- Time-credit-exchange: This idea has already been implemented in St. Gallen and Vorarlberg, especially in the social field. For the militia services provided, time credits are transferred to a time account that can be used if necessary (p. 120). One example are transport services, for example for transport to a doctor or to a hospital.
- General compulsory service for men and women "in the army, civil protection and numerous civilian activities, including politics": As Gerhard Schwarz notes, this reform proposal by Avenir Suisse has "probably triggered the most constructive echo" (pp. 120). One objection: an obligation contradicts "a central aspect of the militia concept, the voluntariness". Of course, the choice from the diverse range of militia activities would have to be left to the individual.

Strengthening of non-centralism – importance of the Council of States and the majority of the Cantons ("Ständemehr")

"Federalism is probably even more at risk in Switzerland than the other younger pillars of the system, such as direct democracy or the militia concept. [...] The creeping tendency towards centralization and a mere enforcement federalism should be put to a halt", above all by relocating competences from the federal government to the canton and commune level, according to the author (p. 122). One should expressly agree to this assessment.

Two important pillars of non-centralism, which fortunately have endured,

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are the Council of States and the majority of the cantons. According to the author, the composition of the Council of States (two seats per canton, one seat per half-canton, regardless of the very different population figures) must not be shaken. "Reform proposals such as the one to take cities into account in the Council of States [...] aim to undermine federalism because they want to give more weight to the population and the electorate. But that is exactly what federalism does not want. It is a counter-program to democracy, to the principle of 'one man, one vote'". According to the author, the two-chamber system wants to favour the rural regions (p. 123).

The same applies to the majority of the cantons: Its purpose in votes (?) is to "prevent that the majority of the people formed in the urban centres of the Swiss midlands is sweeping over the rest of the country" (p. 123). Today there are proposals to reduce the weight of the rural cantons. Also, Gerhard Schwarz is – not quite consequently – not completely averse to such considerations (p. 124). In

fact, the majority of the cantons is the far more effective instrument for strengthening federalism than the council of states, because in the former the people speak directly. A consolation for anyone who does not want the majority of the cantons to be diluted: this would not stand a chance in a referendum.

Excellently different

We conclude our remarks on this book, which is well worth reading, with Gerhard Schwarz' recommendation to us Swiss, «to stop constantly quarrelling with the smallness of our own country and to think that salvation lies only in size. Rather, Switzerland should understand and cultivate its cosmopolitanism – fuelled by multilingualism, small spaces and, above all, smallness – as a trump card. Switzerland is more global and international than most countries in the world – it should stay that way". (p. 149)

¹ Spitteler, Carl. "Unser Schweizer Standpunkt" (Our Swiss point of view). Speech of 14 December 1914

² Fuster, Thomas. "Die Schweiz ist erstmals wettbewerbsstärkstes Land der Welt" (For the first time, Switzerland is the most competitive country in the world). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 18 June 2021

**Militia principle:
The citizen in the full sense**

m.w./w.w. In his obituary for the recently deceased entrepreneur and politician *Ulrich Bremi*, former Federal Councillor *Kaspar Villiger* pays tribute to this "citizen in the full sense" who "rendered outstanding services to our country". Bremi began his "picture-book Swiss career" with an apprenticeship as a mechanic, followed by a school-leaving certificate, studies, military service and a career as an officer. He became an entrepreneur and chairman of the board of directors of well-known Swiss companies, at the same time a cantonal councillor and finally a member of the National Council. Kaspar Villiger: "He became the model of the citizen who put the knowledge and skills he had acquired in his professional life at the disposal of the community [...] for the common good." For in the Federal Assembly there was a need for "people who bring a full rucksack to Berne, and not people who want to pick up a full rucksack in Berne. Ueli Bremi embodied this principle in an exemplary manner."

Villiger, Kaspar. "The citizen in the full sense". Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 19 June 2021

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"The Swiss Lectures – World Order and the Rule of Law"

The book "The Swiss Lectures – World Order and the Rule of Law" is the extended edition of the German book "Schweizer Vorträge – Texte zu Völkerrecht und Weltordnung" (2019). The English book is a collection of all articles by *Hans Köchler* published in the Swiss journal *Current Concerns*, from 2011 to 2021. The articles summarise lectures given in Switzerland to readers of *Zeit-Fragen*, the German edition of *Current Concerns*. The book also contains further analyses and interviews on pressing issues of our times.

Hans Köchler's approach combines basic legal-philosophical analyses with an assessment of current developments in law and world affairs. In one of his texts he writes:

"In philosophical – or more specifically, hermeneutical – terms, we can only understand ourselves if we are able to relate to other identities. This is true for the individual person as it is for a collective of individuals. [...] Realizing that knowledge of other cultures is indispensable for knowing oneself will also help to create a new and solid basis for what is called peaceful co-existence, namely a harmonious living together of communities – cultures and civilizations as well as states" (p. 24f).

„May this English edition encourage readers to further deepen their appreciation for the dialogue between cultures and people, to advance the awareness of the benefits of diversity and exchange rather than violent power politics, and to acknowledge the 'resulting need to

reach an understanding beyond ideological boundaries' (pp. 70f below)." (Preface of the Editors, p. 10)

The Author

Hans Köchler (*1948) is emeritus professor of philosophy. From 1990 until 2008 he served as Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Innsbruck (Austria). Köchler's research interests

include legal and political philosophy, hermeneutics, and philosophical anthropology. As co-founder and president (since 1972) of the *International Progress Organization* (Vienna), he has committed himself to the causes of peace and inter-cultural dialogue. This has been evident in numerous publications and lectures all around the globe, as well as in his engagement in many international organizations. Köchler served in committees and expert groups on international democracy, human rights, culture, and development. In 2019 he was appointed as member of the University Council of the *University of Digital Science* (Berlin). Since 2018 he has taught at the *Academy for Cultural Diplomacy* in Berlin. Hans Köchler lives in Vienna.

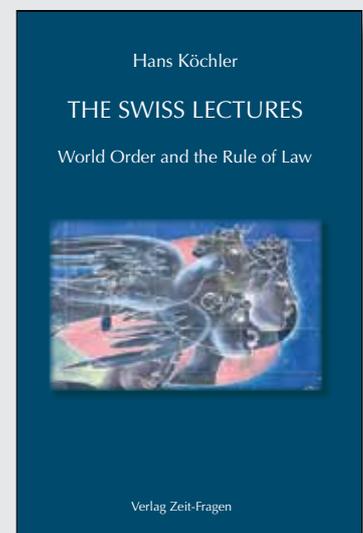
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Germany and the Bundeswehr after the flight from Afghanistan

Prof. Dr. Eberhard Hamer, *Mittelstandsinstitut Niedersachsen e. V.*

The Bundeswehr, it is said, has “with-drawn” from Afghanistan. What sounds so nice means: The war in Afghanistan is lost, the Americans have ordered a withdrawal, hence the previously uninformed German troops are practically on the run.

After the loss of a war and the escape of the troops, the question of guilt, costs and benefits of this war should be discussed. From the beginning the German war game was gratuitous, senseless, militarily useless and could only be explained as a colony doing its duty according to the order of the ruling colonial power.

Political and military consequences should also be drawn from the disaster in Afghanistan:

1. It was nonsensical to “defend Germany’s freedom in the Hindu Kush” (*Peter Struck*), and merely undertaken to show loyalty to the USA, who risked this adventure themselves and ordered their satellites to join them. The decision to go to war in Afghanistan was made by the United States alone, as was the withdrawal. We only took part “out of solidarity”.

The reference to the duty of assistance in Art. 5 of the NATO treaty is now proving to have a catch to it: Wherever the USA starts war, they can mobilise the solidarity of its NATO vassals, NATO has become an accessory to American foreign and military policy; it does not represent the vassals’ interests, but only those of the leading power USA. This can become even more dangerous in future than it was in Afghanistan, if NATO Secretary *Stoltenberg* is not stopped in his US-ordered incitement against Russia. The fact that the USA describes Russia and China as enemies against itself and thus against NATO may be the preparation of a new war also for the vassals. Had *Putin* not reacted judiciously on several occasions, NATO would already have been at war in Ukraine. China is in fact a competitor to the USA, but not an enemy of Europe. The new NATO war orientation corresponds to the world power pol-

itics of the dollar empire, but not to European or even German interests. Too much loyalty or vassalage could plunge us into new military adventures here.

First insight: German politics must not allow war and peace to be determined by third parties. We have to pursue an independent foreign and military policy geared towards our own interests.

2. In Afghanistan it was never clear what goal the Bundeswehr had there, what was the purpose of its deployment there and what plan this was supposed to serve. The bottom line is that it guarded the CIA’s drug fields, led a regional shadowy existence and was only an alibi of German participation in American world power plans.

This is not a reproach to the Bundeswehr; it has been abused by its own US-dependent politicians who today will no longer know of the reasons why they sent the German Bundeswehr to Afghanistan in the first place, why they caused billions of dollars in costs, why they sacrificed the lives of German soldiers and why they kept playing at war against the will of our people.

Just as our troops rushed headlong and haphazardly to war on American orders, they have now fled with the loss of 59 soldiers and a prodigious quantity of military equipment, and they are still bringing tens of thousands of fighters from Afghanistan, who do not want to fall into the hands of the victors.

Second insight: the carelessness with which the federal government and the Bundestag decided to participate in this war and to extend it must end. No war may be waged from German soil. Ultimately, our troops should protect our country (its borders) instead of engaging in US international adventures.

Donald Trump and *Emanuel Macron* have rightly disputed the sense NATO makes today. We are no longer threatened in Europe, we have peace treaties with one another including cooperation, and we should give up an attack

alliance with military world power behaviour (NATO).

3. The flight of American and German troops from Afghanistan could signal a military turning point in world politics. Even with the help of its satellites, the US was no longer able to conquer a small country like Afghanistan. As in Vietnam – despite its technical superiority – it lost another war.

It would therefore be advisable for its satellites to remain militarily cautious towards the newly declared enemy China, so as not to be involved in the war policy and bear the costs of another US military defeat. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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The everyday shortage

Lebanon, formerly the “Switzerland of the Orient”, is sinking into political chaos and economic hardship

Karin Leukefeld, Bonn and Damascus



Karin Leukefeld
(picture ef)

The economic situation in Lebanon is deteriorating noticeably. Electricity and food are hardly affordable. “My monthly wage has shrunk to 80 US dollars, the equivalent of about 1 million

Lebanese pounds, LBP. The money dissolves in your hands when you go shopping. A litre of milk costs LBP 15,000, and powdered milk is hard to come by. We can forget about meat; a kilo costs 100,000 pounds.”

Aschraf works behind the reception counter of the Beirut hotel, and this time the young man looks still skinnier and paler than usual when the author asks him how he is. “Rent, additional electricity, drinking water, the kindergarten for our son, we wouldn’t be here anymore without family help from abroad. We mustn’t get sick because we wouldn’t be able to pay the medical expenses”, he continues, “not even to speak about the political chaos.”

Hyperinflation and mass unemployment

The Lebanese pound has lost around 80 per cent of its value since the beginning of the economic and financial crisis in autumn 2019. The price of one US dollar currently fluctuates on the black market between 13,500 and 15,000 LBP. The official exchange rate is one tenth, 1,500 LBP. Under the pressure of the black market, the banks have meanwhile increased the rate to almost 4,000 LBP. In view of the ongoing hyperinflation, withdrawals from one’s own account are limited.

According to the World Bank, at the end of 2020 around 40 per cent of the officially around 6 million Lebanese (including refugees) had lost their jobs as a result of the economic and financial crisis and the Corona lockdown of almost eight months. The approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees are particularly hard hit by unemployment, although they continue to receive financial support and benefits in kind from UN or international aid organisations. According to UN research, 80 per cent of the officially 180,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have lost their jobs.

All others who still have work or are receiving pensions have to accept massive slumps in their salaries due to high inflation. Professors’ pensions have fallen from around 3,000 US dollars to 400 US dollars a month, and teachers receive only around 100 US dollars a month instead of 1,000 US dollars.

Hardly any reserves

Foreign reserves in the Lebanese Central Bank have been halved within a year. While they were still around 30 billion in February 2020, they were officially stated at 17.5 billion US dollars in March 2021. According to a report by the American University of Beirut AUB (in December 2020), Lebanese governments have spent around 40 billion US dollars on the country’s electricity supply since 1992, and yet only about 60 per cent of general electricity needs are met. The money was not used to modernise and expand the country’s electricity plants and grid, but instead disappeared in expensive contracts with, in some cases, foreign electricity providers.

The Turkish power supply ship *Orhan Bey* of the Turkish company *Karadeniz Powership*, which is anchored north of Saida and fed electricity into the national grid, ceased operations in mid-May because, for 18 months, invoices in their millions had not been paid. The population tries to compensate for the daily lack of

electricity by buying electricity from local and private large-scale generators.

Lack of foreign currency

Lebanon has neither a strong agriculture nor industry, and therefore needs foreign currency to buy wheat and medicines on the world market; these are (still) subsidised. Although the country has large gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea, it does not have the money to extract and market its gas. There is also a dispute between Lebanon and Israel over the delimitation of the deposits along the southern maritime border.

The World Bank estimates the damage and economic losses suffered by the country from the explosion in the port of Beirut in early August 2020 to amount to between 6.7 and 8.1 billion US dollars. The personal losses suffered by the population through death or serious injuries to relatives with long-term consequences and trauma cannot be quantified financially.

Skilled workers leave the country

Around 50,000 well-trained skilled workers left Lebanon in 2020, but an exact number is not available. Professional associations estimate that up to 20 per cent of doctors have migrated or want to leave the country. Around 400 pharmacies had to close in 2020; 70 per cent of pharmacy

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Silent commemoration of the victims. Port of Beirut, September 2020.
(picture Karin Leukefeld)

“The everyday shortage”

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graduates want to migrate in order to find work in the Arab Gulf States, Latin America, Europe or Australia.

Traveling to neighbouring Syria has become complicated

The trip to Syria, too, has become complicated. For ten years, there have been no direct flights to Damascus from European airports, due to EU sanctions. Travellers take a taxi or shared taxi from Beirut via one of the three northern border crossings in the direction of Tartus, Homs or Aleppo or via another border crossing to Damascus. A Lebanese driver brings the travellers to the Lebanese border, where a taxi from Syria is parked – on the other side. While the travellers take care of departure formalities, the drivers communicate via mobile phone about their respective locations. The luggage is conveyed on foot across the border to the Syrian vehicle, which waits until the travellers have passed passport control on foot and can get into the Syrian vehicle. Only vehicles with special permits – mostly organised by local travel companies – can still offer direct journeys between Aleppo or Sweida and Beirut, including a PCR test. Nor are UN members and diplomats or politicians hindered.

“I haven’t had any passengers for months,” says *Moutaz*. “Nobody wants to travel since Corona has come into existence, and Lebanon hardly allows Syrians to enter anyway. We can only hope that the border will reopen soon.” For more than ten years and in every season of the year *Moutaz* has driven the author safely between Beirut and Damascus and vice versa. Not only the transport business has been at a standstill since March 2020. On the Lebanese side, shops, restaurants and cafes have been closed for more than a year because travellers stay away. “I’m lucky,” says *Moutaz*. “I have a son in Sweden who sends me 150 US dollars a month so our family can survive.” For *Moutaz*’ “family” does not only mean his wife, another son and daughter, but also his brothers and sisters and their families, who all support one another.

Fear of sanctions

In March 2020, the closure of the border between Syria and Lebanon was declared a COVID-19 protective measure. In the meantime, however, it has become clear that the almost standstill in the transfer of people and goods between the two countries has a political reason. Lebanon – at least an influential part of the political elite – is giving in to the pressure from the USA, France, Great Britain and Germany to implement the economic sanctions against Syria unilaterally imposed by the EU and USA.



Beirut. Armenian Street. Joint Christian Committee for social service in Lebanon. Registration. Vouchers and cash assistance for residents only. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

Above all, the “Caesar Act” imposed by the USA threatens anyone who trades with Syria. By closing its border with the neighbouring country, Lebanon is probably expecting Western help in getting its own economically catastrophic situation under control again.

The result is that deliveries of oil, medicine, and food as well as technology transfer are brought to a standstill. Even aid organisations that are active in Syria have problems transporting gasoline or transferring money to pay employees.

Confusing bureaucratic hurdles have to be overcome in the EU and in the USA in order to bring in anything to Syria – even if it is only a small, technical spare part for a machine. Banks, insurance companies and transport companies have gone out of business because of the risk of being penalised by the EU or the US.

Smuggling alone is flourishing

In the EU it is said that there is an “overcompliance” with EU penalties or the US Caesar Act on the part of the banks or other companies. According to the EU delegation for Syria, which works from Beirut, humanitarian aid is exempt from the sanctions.

The unilateral economic sanctions against Syria ensure that at least one branch of the economy has achieved enor-

mous sales: smuggling is flourishing. Petrol from Lebanon changes hands in the no man’s land between the borders even in broad daylight, as the author herself could observe. And for a corresponding surcharge goods, people and weapons find their way over dozens of smuggling paths through the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)



(graphic Commons/zf)

A plea for more solidarity

On the book by Sahra Wagenknecht: *Die Selbstgerechten. Mein Gegenprogramm – für Gemeinsinn und Zusammenhalt* (The Self-Righteous. My alternative approach – towards sense of community and solidarity)

by Carola and Johannes Irsiegler, Gräslikon

When in March 1999 NATO started bombing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Germany actively took part in this war, many people all over Europe were appalled. How could it have happened that a Social Democratic-led government would support this first war on European soil since 1945? How could it come to this “major sin of the left” – a left that twenty years ago had demonstrated for peace and social justice and now succumbed to the propaganda salvos of the then Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer?

It is the great merit of the German politician Sahra Wagenknecht, to address this development and its effects from a left-wing perspective in her book “*Die Selbstgerechten. Mein Gegenprogramm – für Gemeinsinn und Zusammenhalt*” (The Self-Righteous. My alternative approach – towards sense of community and solidarity), published in 2021.

Sahra Wagenknecht is very well known in Germany. She is a left-wing voice who repeatedly comments on various political developments thereby demonstrating a high degree of independence. For years she has been campaigning for social justice and has been a vehement critic of the social cuts of the last decades in Germany – very much in the spirit of a political left position. The daughter of an Iranian father and a German mother grew up in the former GDR. She studied philosophy, modern German literature and economics before completing her doctorate in the latter subject. At the time of the German reunification, she became a member of the PDS party, which later became the *Left Party*, and was a member of the party’s executive board from 1991 to 1995 and again from 2000 to 2007. From 2010 to 2014, she was Deputy Chairperson of the party, and from 2015 to 2019 Chairperson of the Left Party in the German Bundestag.

The divided society and its friends

Starting with the question why left-wing parties nowadays fail in their ambition

* Translators note: Sahra Wagenknecht is using the German term “linksliberal” to describe politicians, who on the one hand support cultural liberal positions, while on the other hand putting forward economic neoliberal concepts. In the UK this was Tony Blair, in the US Bill Clinton. A translation word by word would mean left liberal, but we know, that Sahra Wagenknecht doesn’t mean “left” in the sense of a leftist point of view like that one of Bernie Sanders.

to appeal to citizens and therefore to get elected, Sahra Wagenknecht first describes the current state of many Western countries’ societies: “It seems that our society has lost the ability to discuss its problems without aggression and with a minimum of decency and respect. [...] The question therefore arises: Where does the hostility come from that now divides our society on almost every major and important issue?” (p. 10/11) Unlike published opinion, she doesn’t consider the rising right to be responsible for the vitriolic political climate in Germany and the USA: “The rising right is not the cause, but itself the product of a deeply divided society.” (p. 11) Instead, she focuses on the role of the left: “Left liberalism* has played a major role in the decline of our debate culture. [...] Whether refugee policy, climate change or Corona, it is always the same pattern. Left liberal arrogance fuels right-wing gains in terrain.” (p. 13)

She is critical of the self-righteousness in the ranks of those on the left who “had switched sides” (p. 97) and whom she classifies under the term “left liberalism”. They are the “winners of the social changes of the last decades.” (p. 97) According to Sahra Wagenknecht, the increasing split in society is rooted in “the loss of security and common ground”, which was “linked to the demolition of the welfare states, globalisation and the economic liberal reforms”. (p. 14) Globalised, uncontrolled capitalism has turned ordinary people into losers, while the winners are the owners of large financial and business assets and a new academic middle class in the major cities, who represent the actual left liberal milieu. Sahra Wagenknecht disapproves of left-wing parties having abandoned the idea of subordinating capitalism to a legal framework and thus taming it, and instead, adopting the concept of an “unleashed market society” (p. 125) like that of *Margaret Thatcher* and *Ronald Reagan*. “That the former British prime minister once answered the question about her greatest political success with ‘*Tony Blair* and *New Labour*’ was [...] an expression of a profound truth.” (p. 125)

The left liberal leadership has continued the policy of social cuts. “The old neoliberalism and the political agenda of unleashed markets and global greed already lost public backing at the beginning of the 21st century. It seems however evident that these policies couldn’t have been contin-



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ued without the new left liberal backing.” (p. 139)

From her left-wing point of view, Sahra Wagenknecht criticises the path that some left opinion leaders have embarked on in recent decades. They turned themselves into stooges of neoliberalism and globalisation, followed the “third way” of Blair, *Jospin* and *Schröder* and gave away their original concerns for peace and social justice. This development already had started in the 1980s with the change from the old social democratic leadership to a younger generation. In pursuing neoliberal economics, turning money into even more money, they have resorted to any means, even war.

How left-wing parties lost focus on social concerns

Instead of focussing on social concerns, left parties today are mainly concerned with “questions of descent, gender and sexual orientation” and the “rules of correct mode of expression.” (p. 99) Sahra Wagenknecht reveals the philosophical background of this “mania” in the theoretical work of French de-constructivists like *Michel Foucault* and *Jacques Derrida*, pointing out its devastating social consequences: “Identity-politics of left liberalism, which encourages people to define

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"A plea for more solidarity"

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their identity on the basis of ancestry, colour, gender or sexual orientation, not only constructs common interests where there are none at all. It also splits societies where cohesion would be urgently needed. This is achieved by continuously putting alleged minority interests in opposition to those of the majority and by encouraging members of minorities to separate themselves from the majority and to remain among themselves." (p. 114)

It's the old principle of domination through 'divide et impera'! Left liberalism alienates left parties "from the traditional middle class, the working class and poorer non-academics, who are neither socially nor culturally addressed by the liberal-cosmopolite narrative, but – rightly! – perceive it as an attack on their living conditions, their values, their traditions and their identity." (p. 139) In doing so, the left liberals display arrogance by claiming that their way of life and their convictions be the standard for all. Sahra Wagenknecht is worried about the fact that the left is increasingly losing voters to the right-wing parties, which are "the new workers' parties." (p. 175) As long as the political left fails to offer a convincing political programme that not only appeals to the growing number of less affluent academics, but also meets the social interests and values of workers, service employees and the traditional political centre, more and more people from these classes will either turn away from politics or search for a new political home on the other side of the political spectrum.

**Not migration,
but promote real development**

Migrants are among the losers of neoliberalism and globalisation, as they are exploited as cheap labour. "Between countries at a similar level of development, freedom of movement in the choice of where to live and work is a gain in freedom. Between poor and rich countries, on the other hand, it widens the gap, lowers wages in the richer country and worsens living conditions for those who are already disadvantaged." (p. 169) This truly "cannot be a left project [...]". (p. 169) Instead of promoting migration, those who really want to promote development and fight poverty on a global level have to go other ways. Ms Wagenknecht mentions as the first and most urgent step "an end to Western wars of intervention and the armament of civil wars through arms deliveries". (p. 170) She also calls for a trade policy that allows poorer countries to apply what has helped successful economies in the Far East out of poverty: "tariffs to protect their own industries and agriculture,

state subsidy policies, sovereignty over their own raw materials and arable land [...]" (p. 170) For the refugees in the slum camps of this world, the UN organisations on the ground would have to be provided with significantly more financial resources.

**A programme for togetherness,
cohesion and prosperity**

Sahra Wagenknecht devotes the second part of her book to the question of what needs to be done to find a way out of these social aberrations. She begins by recalling the anthropological foundations of our humanity: "Despite the much-vaunted individualisation of modern societies, human beings are still communal beings. (p. 205) This is in line with the findings of modern anthropology and psychology, which start from the social nature of human beings. The so-called homo economicus, which today's economists wrongly assume, is an "egoistic being without social references and community ties [...]". (p. 209) On the other hand, for the democratic state to continue to exist, it needs a "fund of commonalities and common values". (p. 214) Without a sense of community and cohesion, there is a threat of "a society that is ruled by markets and big companies and has said goodbye to the claim of democratic design". (p. 214) Values such as public spirit, solidarity and co-responsibility are needed. The sources of this thinking are rooted in Catholic social teaching as well as in social democracy. She also sees a positive approach in the economic school of ordoliberalism, the Freiburg School, which subordinated the economy to the rules of the constitutional state and thus founded the successful concept of the social market economy. "The strong European welfare states of the post-war period could not have emerged without such a foundation." (p. 215)

Community and belonging

Subsequently, Sahra Wagenknecht develops a programme based on community-oriented conservative values. She describes conservative values as, among other things, the desire for stable communities and for belonging. She states: "By anchoring common values, communities create meaning, identity and security. The longing for social bonds is not the result of subjugation, as one of the masterminds of left-liberalism, Michel Foucault, has claimed. The imprinting of man by his history and national culture is therefore also not a prison from which he must be freed." (p. 224) And she continues: "The stable family is also not a cage, but for many people a dream of life, which the economic environment increasingly makes unrealisable." (p. 224) She reminds

us that the "tamed market economies of post-war Europe [...] were a far more tolerable society for a large majority than the disinhibited, globalised capitalism of our time". (p. 224) It is a matter of "becoming aware that an orderly world, stability and security in life, democratic societies with a real sense of we and trust in other people [...] is not only the past, but can also be the future". (p. 225)

On the importance of the nation state

As a democrat, Sahra Wagenknecht recognises that the sovereign nation state is the basis for democratic coexistence and only in it the protection of the weaker can be guaranteed: "More democracy and social security can therefore not be had through less, but only through more nation state sovereignty". (p. 243) National identities cannot be decreed from above, but must grow historically. In this sense, she is also critical of the attempt to "unify the EU by centralising decision-making competences in Brussels [...]" (p. 244). In her opinion, the EU should not be dissolved, but "transformed into a confederation of sovereign democracies" (p. 244). For centralist action, instead of more commonality and great European answers to the problems of our time, has produced growing tensions and conflicts.

The individual countries, Sahra Wagenknecht suggests, should follow the Swiss model and allow more direct democracy (p. 267). A genuine democracy must also guarantee and finance the provision of public goods: "Hospitals and universities are not profit centres. Hospitals are supposed to heal. Nursing homes care, schools impart knowledge and universities conduct independent research, and they all need finances, personnel and competence to fulfil this public mission." (p. 266) She advocates an industrial policy based on sustainable technologies, a re-organisation of monetary relations and a "de-globalisation and re-globalisation of our economy" (p. 316).

On a global level, Sahra Wagenknecht calls for solidarity-based cooperation based on state sovereignty. She rejects the undermining of nation-state sovereignty through supranational institutions, because this disenfranchises the population and mainly benefits the economic elites. (p. 246)

Sahra Wagenknecht herself describes her book as a proposal for what the left could do better in order to reach more people again, especially those who are not privileged. It is a plea for more social cohesion and a confrontation with those tendencies that stand in the way of this.

If Sahra Wagenknecht succeeds with her book in making politics more oriented towards the common good again, much will be gained for all of us. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Democracy does not mean simply doing what you want!

It needs education in the sense of the common good.

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

The summer holidays are coming! Switzerland, Croatia, Thailand, Spain, Majorca, whatever the holiday destinations may be, they give us the opportunity to get to know other cultures and other ways of living together. Over long periods of history, each country has developed its own cultural identity with its values, traditions and forms of coexistence. The history of a country therefore includes myths and historical facts. Knowing them is important for rooting people in their country. They are therefore an essential part of the school curriculum as a component in the formation of a child's personality and for his or her sense of belonging beyond the narrower circle of the family. In Switzerland, for example, people live together in four different language regions, each with a different cultural background. They have come together in long processes of debate and agreement to form a direct-democratic nation of will, in which today people can co-determine the fundamentals of living together to a very high degree. This includes rights and duties. Seeing them as part of shaping one's own life is laid down in education.

Love, warmth and security

It is human nature to join together and to organise the tasks of life in joint support and according to local conditions. This gives rise to the feeling of being rooted in one's culture. For every child, therefore, the task is to feel at home in its own living environment. In order for this to succeed, the child needs supportive relationships that begin in the first hours of its life. Through the love, warmth and security that a child experiences in its first relationships, it begins to connect with its fellow human beings and builds up a feeling of security and being protected. Of course, it is part of protecting children from danger and therefore also prohibiting them from doing certain things. But such prohibitions must always be combined with respect and compassion for the child. In the successful scenario, the child will develop the necessary courage and strength to face life's tasks. This corresponds to the social nature of the human being and is the basis for the free development of its personality. However, this also includes introducing the child to its tasks in life and demanding of it an age-appropriate contribution to social life.

“Out of the Children always a surprise”

The author of books for young people, Ernst Kappeler (1911–1987), thus described the hope that opens up with each new human life when it finds its way to a fulfilled way of life and thus contributes to the light and warmth it needs in our world. A secure bond with its adult reference persons makes it possible for it to explore the world more safely and freely every day, to have personal experiences and to develop its abilities and skills. We can and must pass on our knowledge and life experience to it and be a model for it how to connect with its fellow human beings. But being free and finding one's place in life can only be achieved by observing the good of all. Only then will its sun rise. This is what the adults have to model for the child and guide it to do. Then they accompany it on its way to becoming a responsible fellow player. But what does that mean?

Making life “easier”?

Time and again there are encounters that make us think. Recently, a little boy was on his way to kindergarten on his scooter. Next to him walked his father, with his offspring's small rucksack dangling from his hand. It probably contained the snack box with healthy delicacies. But I asked myself, aren't these funny little backpacks meant to hang on the shoulders so that the hands remain free for pushing the pram – or for riding a scooter? But now it was rocking on his father's hand, literally “making life easier” for his son. But is that really a help, a labour of love for a child? The “distribution of tasks” between the two of them seemed very natural to me, as if it were often usual in their common everyday life. Such situations are not unusual and can be observed in many forms today. But how was the little boy supposed to develop the feeling of being able to tackle his tasks and contribute something in this way? In other words, it is about giving already young children age-appropriate tasks in living together, because a healthy relationship always consists of mutual give and take.

“I am big and I can do it already”

Recently, I came across a compilation entitled “I'm big and I can do it already” which listed age-appropriate housework (chores) for children. For the little ones of kindergarten age in the above exam-

ple, this would include putting away his toys, wiping the kitchen table, drying dishes, preparing a small snack, making the bed, cleaning up spills, etc.¹ Carrying your own backpack with your own snack to kindergarten would fit right in.

Marty Rossmann, an American researcher, has studied the importance of such everyday tasks for the development of children and has followed their life courses into adulthood. She came to an interesting, but actually obvious conclusion: Children who were already involved in the tasks of everyday family life at the age of three to four were best prepared for a successful life. If, on the other hand, they did not have to take responsibility for living together at home (domestic life) until the age of 15 or 16, they were most at risk of serious problems in their professional and personal development.² Not surprising, but once again reason to think about what this means!

Ability to think for oneself and helping out

The desire to help and to contribute to living together is part of human nature. It is worthwhile, for example, to study the surprising research findings of the American psychologist and anthropologist Michael Tomasello, stating that even very young children between the ages of 14 and 18 months are able to grasp the intention of an adult who is looking for something and to give him the decisive hint with a pointing gesture.³ This is not made possible by genetic programmes, but rather the child's thinking is already socially predisposed at birth.

Psychologist Kiley Hamlin and her research team were also able to show that even infants react positively to figures who help others and reject those who behave unfairly. The little ones saw three different coloured figures, one of which was trying to climb a hill. One figure pushed her up the hill, while the third figure prevented her from doing so. Afterwards, the babies were allowed to choose a character and, regardless of colour, they chose the helper character whose behaviour they obviously liked best.⁴

Supporting a healthy need

The children thus have the prerequisites to develop into fellow players, so that later in life they are not primarily concerned with “self-optimisation”, but derive satis-

"Democracy does not mean ..."

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faction from making their contribution to the common good. For us adults, it is important to take up this wish and strengthen it. But unfortunately – if we are honest with ourselves – we adults make it impossible for children to help spontaneously. It takes us too long when a child tries to peel the potatoes, or we unnecessarily fear that the child might hurt himself. However, it is worth putting up with a possibly less perfectly peeled potato and a dirtier kitchen to support the child's healthy need to participate, take responsibility and use their own skills.

Reward and praise? Yes, but ...

Rewards and praise are often an unquestioned part of education today. For emptying the dishwasher or vacuum cleaning you get a treat or a bonus on your pocket money, for tidying up you get to stay up an extra hour. Such reward systems are also common in many classrooms, in the hope of steering children's behaviour in a positive direction. They are borrowed from behavioural therapy concepts and hardly do justice to the differentiated emotional life of a child. Often, however, rewards destroy the child's plan to bring joy or surprise to the other person and undermine their feeling of community.

Here too, there is now careful scientific evidence that clearly shows that reward limits children's readiness to help.⁵ Wanting to help is an expression of natural compassion and is already present in very young children. Often, therefore, more would be done with a smile, a delighted encouragement or a friendly glance as an expression of emotional closeness. Or how about a game or trip together in the time gained through mutual support?

Equivalence does not mean equality!

If we want our children and young people to grow into life with confidence and feel strong, it is not just a question of what we can do for them. It is just as important to give them the opportunity to contribute

to the coexistence of all. In recent decades, there has been a great deal of uncertainty among many parents in this regard. They do not know what role they should play towards their children. They rightly try to avoid humiliating behaviour towards their children, which they may have experienced themselves, and want to be their children's "best friends", to treat them with equivalence. But they cannot ignore the fact that they are ahead of their children in knowledge and experience, and must assume educational responsibility. Because equivalence is not equality! Equivalence means to know and to feel that the children and all fellow human beings in general have the same right to respect and human dignity, regardless of personal differences and abilities.⁶

"I take care that nothing happens to him ..."

It is true that in recent years and decades there has been a rough atmosphere in interpersonal company, especially among young people, which gives cause for concern.⁷ But it affects only a small part of the growing generation, who lack meaningful tasks and goals in life. For the majority of children and young people, the desire to participate and contribute is still there. I recently experienced an impressive example when I stepped out of the front door to get the newspaper from the mailbox. There was a little boy of kindergarten age crouching on the street, a brown something in front of him. I thought it was risky, because there were always cars coming along the neighborhood street. When I came closer, I realised that the brown something was a ponderous hedgehog that had strayed into the street in the bright daylight. The boy looked at me perplexed. Obviously, he was aware of the danger the hedgehog was in. But what to do with this prickly thing? I went over to him. It was clear to us that we had to get the hedgehog to safety. I suggested to him that I could go to our house and get a shovel to take him away from the road and bring him to safety. He was visibly relieved and said, "Yes, and I'll stay with him during this time and

take care that nothing happens to him!" Our plan succeeded, and together we reasoned that he would be fine in the bushes of a meadow on higher ground. Then we said goodbye. The little boy continued on his way home. It seemed to me that he had grown a little. Reverence for life begins in the small, I thought.

It's human nature

It is a need inherent in human nature that drives us to join together and support each other. For each child, his or her family environment is different again and is also interpreted by him or her individually. The child experiences how economic, cultural, religious and social influences shape his or her environment and how adults react to them. Family and social life is shaped by these influences. Here, too, it is important to take the relevant research findings seriously, which show that people feel freest and happiest when they can shape their lives together in equivalence. Constitutionally guaranteed rights of co-determination, as is common in direct democracy, increase life satisfaction and thus also the willingness to make a contribution. For democracy does not mean the freedom to do what one wants! Without mutual respect for the freedom of the other, without human togetherness, there is no real freedom. •

¹ Müller, A. (2018). *Schonen schadet. Wie wir unsere Kinder heute verziehen.* (Sparing harms. How we spoil our children today.) Bern: Hep-Verlag, p. 133

² Müller, A. (2018). *Schonen schadet. Wie wir unsere Kinder heute verziehen.* Bern: Hep-Verlag, S. 132

³ cf. Tomasello, M. (2009). *Why We Cooperate*, MIT Press.

⁴ This experiment by Kiley Hamlin and her team is described in: Grolimund, F./Rietzler S. (2019). *Geborgen, mutig, frei. Wie Kinder zu innerer Stärke finden.* (Secure, courageous, free. How children find inner strength.) Freiburg i. B. Herder-Verlag, p. 110

⁵ cf. Tomasello, M. (2009). *Why We Cooperate*, MIT Press.

⁶ cf. Dreikurs, R./Soltz V. (1991). *Children: The Challenge*, Penguin Books.

⁷ cf. "No! We don't want that kind of interaction ...". In: *Current Concerns* No. 15 of 8 July 2021

Dried-up pastures – emaciated animals – starving people

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières help people help themselves

by Heini Hofmann

Médecins Sans Frontières MSF is larger and more well-known than Vétérinaires Sans Frontières VSF. But in recent years Vétérinaires Sans Frontières VSF has also developed into a powerful organisation. Currently it consists of twelve national units, which not only provide emergency aid as its humane partner organisation, but also offer sustainable help for self-help.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse is a non-profit association of Swiss veterinarians based in Berne, which successfully relies on the One Health strategy. They do not only work in an emergency-curative way, but in a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary way, because the health of humans and animals as well as the integrity of the environment are much more interconnected than one might think. An example of this are the transferable diseases between humans and animals (zoonoses). Also, when farm animals suffer, people go hungry.

Overcoming obstacles to achieve success

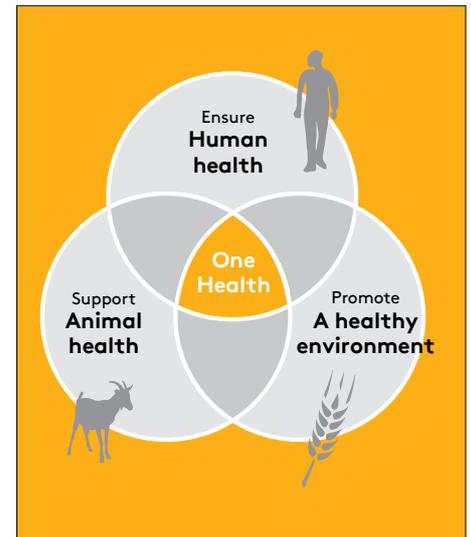
This “borderless” aid began almost half a century ago with the founding of the humanitarian aid organisation *MSF International* in Paris in 1971. This sympathetic principle of help “beyond the backyard” was then adopted by veterinary medicine

as VSF International, based in Brussels. While the Swiss human medicine branch *MSF Suisse* was founded in 1981, the Swiss veterinary section *VSF Suisse* was founded in 1988, at the veterinary faculty in Berne following a motivating lecture by the director of *VSF France*. After difficult early years for the founders, success came: in 1999, the Zewo-certification mark, and in 2004, a business volume of 5 million Swiss francs. But suddenly, from 2010 onwards, negative annual accounts led to a crisis, and they even considered dissolving the association. In 2013, a dramatic wake-up call went out to the Swiss veterinary profession: Save VSF Suisse!

This had an effect: a new power team headed by *Ueli Kihm* (professor of veterinary medicine and former director of the *Federal Veterinary Office*) achieved the turnaround with great commitment and persistence, with positive business results since 2014 and continuous growth. In addition to professional management, an increase in the project portfolio, the optimisation of processes and control systems as well as a gratifyingly increased willingness to donate have contributed to this.

A clever business model

Today, the Brussels-based *VSF International* coordinating office has a network in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Its national members



One Health Principle: Not just professional emergency aid, but networked help for self-help. (Graphic VSF Suisse)

coordinate their activities geographically and exchange experiences. *VSF Suisse* currently concentrates on six countries in the West and Horn of Africa: Mali and Togo as well as South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. By supporting small-holder family farms and nomads who depend on livestock farming, the poorest among the poor are helped.

In sub-Saharan Africa, almost one in two people lives below the poverty line, and almost one in four suffers from malnutrition. According to Kihm, aid campaigns with a multiplier effect, such as the one in Kenya, are therefore in demand: “The whole village now benefits from the project of providing camels to needy families and supporting disadvantaged women’s groups in processing and marketing the milk; because from production to consumption, breeders as well as small farmers and milk sellers are involved.”

VSF Suisse follows a smart business model: based on projects that are internationally tendered and solicited by governments, large aid organisations and private donors. They include veterinary assistant education and training as well as agricultural training. Currently, there are 45 such ventures per



Veterinary aid: Trained assistant treats a dromedary (South Sudan). (picture VSF Suisse/Tom Martin)

"Dried up pastures ..."

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year with a turnover of around 7 million francs, with administrative costs accounting for less than 10 per cent.

Sick livestock = starving people

In arid regions of the Horn of Africa, where farming is not an option, animal husbandry on large natural pastures is the most sensible principle of land use. But in times of drought, when the sparse grass withers, the water sources dry up, the emaciated animals hardly give any milk, become susceptible to disease and their market value plummets, while, vice versa, food and feed prices explode, the people soon go hungry too – a vicious circle. The result: carcasses of dead farm animals everywhere and exhausted nomads in reception camps.

Emergency aid is needed first: distribute water to the population and nutritious food to families with malnourished young children. But even this emergency aid is not only designed to save lives, but also to protect the livelihoods of the needy in the long term, i.e. distribution of animal feed to save the breeding stock of cattle, sheep, goats and camels in order to rebuild the herds, which takes years. In addition, local pharmacies are supplied with veterinary medicines and animal owners with treatment vouchers.

And because natural disasters are expected to be even more severe in the future, it is important to support the population in rebuilding their livelihoods on a broader basis. Therefore, *VSF Suisse* is involved in repairing water points and irrigation canals, introducing the cultivation

of forage and vegetables, and strengthening markets for animal products. This increase in the resilience of people and animals helps nomads and small farmers to control both, yield and income as well as their own health.

One-Health – the key to success

What makes sense tends to prevail: In recent years, the One Health strategy has spread like wildfire as a fashionable term among all major governmental organisations such as WHO, FAO or OIE, but also among NGOs and institutional donors such as the World Bank and USAID. *VSF Suisse* has been working according to this networked principle at the interface of human, farm animal and environmental health since its inception, without making a big fuss about it.

The One Health Principle is particularly appropriate where interactions between humans, livestock and the environment are high and public services are scarce. This is the case in the areas of operation of *VSF Suisse* in Africa. Here, complex situations must be managed: namely disease transmission via food and water and/or transmission between animals and humans. Furthermore, the impact of environmental problems must be managed. Therefore, cooperation between human medicine, veterinary medicine and environmental sciences is called for, and veterinarians are sensitised to this.

"In addition to the One Health strategy, it is important for *VSF Suisse*," the management emphasises, "to treat those affected as rights holders and not merely as victims, and to maintain good contacts at eye level both with beneficiaries and with part-

How to help

h.h. *VSF Suisse* is currently active in 8 countries in Africa: Ethiopia, Djibouti, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Togo. In these countries, 45 projects are being implemented in parallel. The *VSF Suisse* network is growing continuously. The same is hoped for in terms of support. Information about donations, membership or the Friends Association: www.vsf-suisse.org

ners and authorities." Therefore, the staff in all projects are local people and not Swiss. Human proximity and communication in the local idioms are the key to success in helping people to help themselves. This is also confirmed by long-serving staff members.

A touching example

Bearing in mind that one seventh of the world's population suffers from hunger and that a child dies of malnutrition every few seconds, the fight against hunger is something that concerns everyone. It is true that development cooperation is often criticised for controversial procedures or inflated administrative costs. "But the principle," Kihm is convinced, "of supporting the poorest of the poor – even in small units – by helping them to help themselves, as *VSF Suisse* does, is not disputed by the majority."

Europe's affluent society, which can afford to dispose of about half of a carcass, buy drinking water in plastic bottles, freeze food stocks, enjoy seasonal fruits all year round and help itself at any time in overflowing shopping temples, can hardly imagine how contrary the living conditions are in countries plagued by drought and war. To illustrate this, Ueli Kihm tells the story of a South Sudanese boy: his name is *John Lomoi*: "His father was killed in gang warfare and his stepfather beat him. When he ran away from home in despair, the army picked him up and recruited him as a child soldier. He saw his friends suffer and die. When he was freed, *VSF Suisse* gave him two sheep and a survival kit with fishing rods, mosquito nets, soap, a cooking pot and vegetable seeds. Today, John lives independently and even attends school; he wants to become a veterinarian." For the aid workers, this is one of many examples that inspire them to keep going. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



Reintegration project: Former child soldier receives a vaccinated goat (South Sudan). (picture VSF Suisse/Tom Martin)