

# 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*

## From Vietnam to Afghanistan: US leaves deserts behind and calls it peace

Interview with Professor Dr jur. et phil. Dr Alfred de Zayas



Alfred de Zayas  
(picture ma)

Retired UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order Alfred-Maurice de Zayas has sat down with Sputnik to discuss the hasty evacuation from Kabul, the consequences of

the nearly 20-year occupation of Afghanistan, and how the international community can help the Afghan people tackle a humanitarian crisis. *Current Concerns* has added two questions to the interview.

**Sputnik:** Do you think the US withdrawal and the Taliban's victory will really bring an end to the 20-year war? What are the odds of Afghanistan being dragged into a new violent civil war now?

**Alfred de Zayas:** A Pandora's box was opened when President George W. Bush falsely made Afghanistan responsible for 9/11, although the alleged perpetrators (if indeed they were) were not Afghans but Saudi Arabians under Osama bin Laden. Twenty years of devastating bombardment of Afghanistan, destruction of infrastructures, killing of tens of thousands of civilians, pollution through depleted uranium weapons, destruction of ecosystems, and infrastructures do leave a legacy of trauma and hatred.

The US should never have gone into Afghanistan in the first place, as we should not have gone into Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Grenada, Nicaragua, Libya, or Syria. The US thoroughly destabilised Afghanistan and it is not impossible that the conflict will now degenerate into a civil war – a continuing tragedy for the long-suffering Afghan people.

Can there be peace? *Tacitus* described a similar situation to describe how Roman legions made a desert everywhere – and

Dear readers of *Current Concerns*  
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Pumping water at a well – children in Afghanistan. (picture Ahmad Baraki)

then call it peace, *solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* [they make a desert and call it peace] (Agricola). We think that we wash our hands of the mess we caused and leave, but the crimes may come back to haunt us.

**What are the major consequences of the 20-year occupation of Afghanistan by the US?**

A spike in worldwide terrorism was a direct result of the US aggression in Afghanistan. As an American living abroad, I consider that my personal safety has been affected. I look at cause and effect. I ask myself, why do people hate the United States? The answer lies in America's supposed "mission" to export American-style "democracy" to all corners of the world. Except that when we say "democracy" we mean capitalism. We Americans claim we want to bring happiness and human rights to all peoples of the globe. But did anyone ask us to be so altruistic?

The US and the media conglomerates concocted the narrative that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are the "bad guys" and must be hunted down like rabid dogs. We are the world's sheriff that must eradicate lawlessness.

In the process, we ourselves commit gross violations of human rights, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Maybe the *International Criminal Court* will conduct an honest investigation into US and NATO Crimes, but this is only *ex post facto* justice. Any moderately intelligent observer looks for root causes of problems. The root of Afghanistan's misery can be found in British imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and in US neocolonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The US was never really interested in "nation-building" – just in geopolitics, bearing in mind that Afghanistan borders Iran and Pakistan. The US wants to control the region and only wants client governments, not independent nations.

**Current Concerns:** Some would think that you have sympathies for the Taliban and Islamists.

I have denounced the crimes of the Taliban many times and demanded that they not go unpunished. I hope that the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague will continue its investigation into the crimes of the Taliban – but also of the US and NATO.

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**"From Vietnam to Afghanistan ..."**

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I reject all terrorist actions of the Taliban, just as I condemn the state terrorism of the Pentagon. But one does not have to generalise and sweep everything in. Certainly not all Taliban are terrorists. As an American, I ask about the causes of conflicts. Certainly, we Americans have contributed to it, we provoke not only the Islamists – we provoke ordinary people, of Muslim faith, when we interfere in their internal affairs. We provoke the Palestinians when we deny them the right to self-determination, when we defend Israel's crimes against the Palestinians. We provoke all humanity when we presume to have a "mission" to export "democracy". Will we Americans sometime understand that people of different cultures have their own ideas, as recognised in the UN Charter and the UNESCO Constitution?

*What are the main reasons behind Washington's "Saigon moment" in Afghanistan, as well as the US intelligence community's failure to predict the swift seizure of Kabul by the Taliban and immediate collapse of the Ghani government?*

US intelligence has failed again and again, but the mainstream media gives us a different narrative and anaesthetises the American public into accepting "fake news" and obviously inadequate Pentagon excuses.

I am not at all surprised at the amateurishness of the US withdrawal. We in the US tend to believe our "pundits" in the CIA, *Heritage Foundation*, and other elite "think tanks". As *Julius Caesar* well knew – we believe our own propaganda – we tend to believe what we want to believe. *Quae volumus, ea credimus libenter* ["We gladly believe what we want to believe"] (*de Bello civile*).

What amazes me is not that we are witnessing this debacle – but that we do not learn from prior debacles. Of course, the

devastation of Afghanistan was a catastrophe for the Afghan people – but a bonanza for the American military-industrial-financial complex.

America needs perpetual war to feed the insatiable military machine, which demands trillion-dollar budgets. It would be better to devote our tax dollars to conflict-prevention, health preparedness, education, etc.

*What's your take on the current humanitarian situation in Afghanistan? What measures should be taken by the international community to prevent further crises in the country and ensure the Afghan people's free self-determination, democratic state-building, and human rights protection?*

I have enormous empathy for the suffering of the Afghan population. Today more than ever they need international solidarity, the assistance of UN agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organisation, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environmental Programme.

The Afghan people are already suffering a "humanitarian crisis" – but until now only few seemed to care, because the "good guys" – meaning the US and NATO – were there defending democracy and human rights. Now that the "good guys" have been kicked out, we realise that the radical Islamists have taken over. The mainstream media now will disseminate a stream of reports from compliant non-governmental organisations who will duly denounce the Afghan authorities for all sorts of violations of civil and political rights.

However, what the Afghan people need today are fundamentals – the right to food, water, shelter, health, employment. This will cost billions of dollars. Those countries who participated in the merci-

less bombardment of Afghanistan have a legal and a moral duty to make reparations to the Afghan people. Will they? Probably not.

*Do you think the US, UK, and their NATO allies have left Afghanistan for good or can we expect them to come back in the future?*

Geopolitically the US and NATO want to control not only the Middle East, but most of Asia as well, including Afghanistan. As things stand, the US, UK, and NATO are not as wealthy and powerful as they once were, and their populations have different priorities than their "elites". Even though the defeat of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Southeast Asia is complete, old habits die hard. And yet, France, which was defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and the US in 1975 – never returned to Vietnam.

It would be good for the world and the Afghan people if the US, UK, and NATO would "grow up" and accept realities. As the Spanish Dominican *Francisco de Victoria* already wrote in 1530 at the University of Salamanca, every nation has a right to choose its own form of government, even if it is not the best. What the international community owes the Afghan people is a genuine commitment to peace and the right to development of all nations and peoples. The UN Secretary General has a big task in his hands – and *Antonio Guterres* can do it – if the US, UK, and NATO let him.

*Current Concerns: Don't you think your attitude towards American foreign policy sounds unpatriotic?*

Not at all. A patriot is precisely the one who wants to ensure that his country follows justice and the rule of law. A patriot promotes the rule of law by demanding honest actions from his government and accountability from his politician.

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## Current Concerns

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# Give Afghanistan a chance

After more than 40 years of war, peace to the Afghan is to be desired

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

On 14 and 15 August 2021 armed groups, commonly referred to as the Taliban, entered the Afghan capital Kabul and took control of the city. The Afghan president in office until then, Ashraf Ghani, had left the country hours earlier. The takeover of control in Kabul happened largely without a fight. Whether this will end the more than 40 years of war in and against Afghanistan is still not clear at present. The further development will also depend on how the world of states reacts to the new situation in Afghanistan.

The record of the NATO so far over the past 20 years is devastating. There are no reliable figures available. However, it is certain that not only more than 3,500 NATO soldiers and more than 70,000 Afghan security forces died, but more than 100,000 civilians have been killed or injured. The US drone war alone in recent years has cost the lives of thousands of Afghan civilians, including more than 2,000 children.

The US *Watson Institute* calculated the cost of war for the USA in April 2021 to be of 2,26 trillion US dollars<sup>1</sup>, and that is only the cost to one country. Hardly anyone talks about how high the cost to the people of Afghanistan have been. Once again it has been confirmed that a war, any war, brings immeasurable suffering to the people affected.

## Leave Afghanistan in a hurry?

But not everyone shares this view. On 15 August, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag (German Federal Parliament), *Norbert Röttgen* of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), piped up several times on Twitter. He said for example: “This day is an immeasurable disaster. It is the consequence of the fatal decision to leave Afghanistan precipitately and our inaction in the aftermath of that decision. A failure of the West with dramatic consequences for Afghanistan and our credibility.”<sup>2</sup> Röttgen thus stands for a reading that does not question the war itself in Afghanistan, but rather its end. He is concerned about the reputation and the potential loss of the previous position of power of the NATO states and not the fact that the reputation has long since been destroyed – ever since the military alliance has been waging wars all over the world. This reading includes the images of Afghans storming the airfield in Kabul, clinging to planes, desperate to leave the country; it includes the concentration of our politics and media on the question of how could be accomplished to get as many people as possible to leave Afghanistan; and it includes horror stories about the new rule of the Taliban.

## Or opportunity for the country?

Another interpretation sees the takeover of state power by the Taliban as an op-

portunity for the country. The main argument for this view: Now, at last, there may be finally a chance to end more than 40 years of warfare in and against the country, and that the country can go a self-determined path.

The Taliban spokesman, *Zabihullah Mujahid*, said at the Taliban’s first international press conference in Kabul 17 August<sup>2</sup> that the Taliban were seeking the formation of a strong Islamic government in which all parties and social groups would participate, including the Taliban’s former enemies.

All employees of the former government and the Western states were pardoned, no matter what their role was. Literally, *Zabihullah* said: “The animosities have come to an end and we would like to live peacefully. We don’t want any internal enemies and any external enemies.” They wouldn’t want any problem with the international community. They needed their help in rebuilding the country. But they also expected the international community to respect the right of the Afghans to manage their own affairs. The Afghans had the right to determine their own policies in accordance with their own values.

*Zabihullah* called on his compatriots not to leave the country, their skills

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## “From Vietnam to Afghanistan ...”

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*Charles de Gaulle* defined patriotism as follows: “Le patriotisme, c’est lorsque l’amour du peuple auquel vous appartenez passe en premier. Le nationalisme, c’est lorsque la haine des autres peuples l’emporte sur tout le reste.” I fully agree with this.

The patriot loves his country and its citizens. The nationalist hates the others. I consider myself a patriot. Here are my own thoughts on this:

Patriotism means different things to different people. For me it entails citizen solidarity in promoting justice at home and resisting official lies, apologetics, euphemisms, crime and tyranny. Patriotism requires a commitment to truth and readiness to counter “fake news” and skewed political “narratives” Internationally, patriotism means averting harm from one’s country by pro-actively seeking dialogue and understanding so as to contribute to peace and justice – *pax et iustitia*. Some adolescents

and young soldiers often think that patriotism can be boiled down to the formula “my country right or wrong”, and thus unwittingly risk becoming cannon fodder, victims of war-mongers and war-profiteers, who do not risk their own skins and let others die for their profits. Patriotism cannot and does not require knee-jerk “my country right or wrong”, a formula that can only be described as an irresponsible cop-out, which only invites governments to abuse our trust, waste tax dollars in foreign interventions, breach our privacy through illegal surveillance, and commit any number of geopolitical crimes. A true patriot says “not in my name” and demands accountability from government so that our countries are indeed on the path to peace and justice.

*Horace’s* noble-sounding maxim “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” (it is sweet and appropriate to die for one’s country) must be recast in constructive terms: It is sweet to live for one’s country! Indeed, that is what *Cicero* meant with *caritas patriae*. Who qualifies as a patriot? For me, every citizen who takes democracy seriously and

demands transparency and accountability from the authorities. Among patriots in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I count whistleblowers who uncover criminal activities by both government and the private sector. They are gatekeepers of the social order. Surely *Edward Snowden* is a patriot, as he risked life and career because of his conscience. We can learn more in his riveting book “Permanent Record”. We all owe him a debt of gratitude. By contrast, who is not a patriot? Every opportunist who advances his/her career at the expense of the common good, anyone who manipulates public opinion through sensationalism, evidence-free allegations, sabre-rattling and ends up dragging the country and its young soldiers into criminal wars. The security of every American has been seriously compromised by these very hawks, sometimes hailed by the media as “patriots”.

Source: First publication of the *Sputnik* section: <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/202108171083636590-from-vietnam-to-afghanistan-us-leaves-deserts-behind-and-calls-it-peace-ex-un-expert-says/> of 17 August 2021



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were required, he said. With regard to the women in the country, the Taliban spokesman said that they were women's rights within the rules of Sharia law. Women would have access to education, the health care system and other areas. There would be no discrimination against women. With a view to the media, Zabihullah demanded objectivity. They could criticise the work of the Taliban in order to improve it. Finally, with regard to the Taliban today and those of 20 years ago, he said there was a big difference between them in terms of maturity and vision.

**Statements by the Taliban not be dismissed as propaganda**

One should not immediately dismiss these statements as propaganda.

*Conrad Schetter*, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Institute for Political Science and Sociology at the *Bonn International Centre for Conversion* (BICC), said in an interview with the Swiss radio station *SRF* ("Echo der Zeit") on 16 August, that the Taliban had been "trying to build up trust for one or two years. Even during the negotiations with the Americans, the Taliban strongly stick to their statements. [...] Time and again, the Taliban have confirmed that they are ready to respect their commitments. They want to win the trust of the international community. They want to express that they are capable to govern."

**"The Taliban want to rule in this country in the long term"**

The political scientist *Matin Baraki*, previously a lecturer at the University of Marburg and an Afghan living in Germany for many years, with established con-

tacts in the country (see also article on page 6), was asked by the website *www.hessenschau.de* on 16 August whether the Taliban were not to be expected to take revenge on the local forces, the auxiliary forces of the occupying powers. His answer: "That is what is being spread in the media. But there are now two statements by the Taliban in which people who work for the armed forces or other foreign organisations are called upon to stay. After all, they are skilled workers who are needed. That is why the Taliban say: we won't hurt them – if they regret the collaboration. [...] We don't know if the Taliban keep their promises. We are not clairvoyants. But the Taliban want to rule in this country in the long term. If they want to do that, they have to get along with the people who live there."

**"The Taliban do not want to repeat their sad fate a second time"**

It is also interesting to study media outside NATO predominance. For example, *RT German* on 16 August: "Russia does not believe that Afghanistan will turn into a version of the *Islamic State* (IS) under the Taliban, the Russian envoy of the [Russian] president for Afghanistan, *Zamir Kabulov*, told the *TASS* news agency. 'No, I don't have that worry,' he said in response to a question on the subject. 'I have seen in reality how the Taliban have fought the IS, and fought it hard, in contrast to the Americans and the whole of NATO, including the Afghan leadership, which has fled and which has not confronted the IS, but only bowed to it'. [...] The President's envoy also called for step-by-step monitoring of developments in Afghanistan, saying it was easy to 'move away from reality with a rich imagination. [...] The Taliban, as they

have said, and I also sense very sincerely here, do not want to repeat their sad fate a second time.'"

**Ashraf Ghani wanted to flee with four cars full of cash**

The same website cites the spokesman of the Russian embassy in Kabul, *Nikitas Ischenko*, on the same day: "As for the collapse of the regime [of Ashraf Ghani], it is best characterised by the way Ghani fled Afghanistan: four cars were full of money, they tried to put some of the money in a helicopter, but it did not fit. And some of the money was left on the runway."

And again, the same website from the same day: "China has asked the [...] Taliban to take over power in Afghanistan peacefully and smoothly. 'The situation in Afghanistan has changed significantly, and we respect the will and decision of the Afghan people,' Foreign Ministry spokeswoman *Hua Chunying* told the press in Beijing on Monday. An end to the war and the establishment of peace are both the unanimous wish of the more than 30 million Afghans and the common expectation of the international community and countries in the region."

**How do the NATO countries react? So far, no lessons learned from the mess!**

What has been the reaction of those responsible in NATO's domain so far? *Matin Baraki* once again: "You can't send the German Armed Forces to Afghanistan again, as the CDU's foreign policy spokesman said. I was really speechless. Where have these people been living for the last 20 years? They have not learned any les-

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**The Afghanistan Papers – never forget!**

*mw*. The *Afghanistan Papers* were published on 9 December 2019 in the "Washington Post"<sup>1</sup> and hit the world like a bomb. They contained hundreds of interviews with high-ranking military and civilian leaders of the Afghan war, on the basis of which *John Sopko*, US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan (SIGAR), wrote a report for the US Congress. The results of the interviews were so disastrous that the US government wanted to keep the report secret. The journalist *Craig Whitlock*, however, fought for years for the publication of the documents and finally succeeded.

The worldwide outrage in the media after the report in the "Washington Post" was great. *Der Spiegel*, e.g., wrote: "A 2,000-page report exposes how the US government and military systematically whitewashed the con-

flict. Now the dossier has been published – thanks to a lawsuit." The insight from the interviews: "Not a single one of the generals or senior officials actually believed in a positive outcome of the operation or even a victory. Nevertheless, they all publicly claimed the opposite."<sup>2</sup> Because the interviewees assumed that their statements would not be published, they spoke openly.

*Der Spiegel* quotes some statements by decision-makers:

- General *Douglas Lute*, chief adviser to Presidents *George W. Bush* and *Barack Obama* for Afghanistan: "We lacked a basic understanding of Afghanistan – we didn't know what we were doing. We didn't have the faintest clue."
- *Dan McNeill*, Commander of US Forces in Afghanistan (2003/2004 and 2007/2008): "There was a lot of talk,

but there was no plan. I tried to define what 'winning' meant, but no one could tell me."

- *Michael Flynn*, lieutenant general in Afghanistan and later National Security Advisor to President Donald Trump: "We had no idea what our job was."

Only one and a half years have passed since the publication of the *Afghanistan Papers*. So much suffering and destruction, so many dead and injured, the destruction of the country of Afghanistan and its people – forgotten already?

<sup>1</sup> "U.S. officials misled the public about the war in Afghanistan". In: *Washington Post* of 9 December 2019

<sup>2</sup> *Koelbl, Susanne*. "Geheimerbericht zum US-Einsatz in Afghanistan. Der Krieg und die Lügen" (Secret report on the US mission in Afghanistan. The war and the lies). In: *Der Spiegel* of 11 December 2019

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sons from the mess. 40 years of war, including 20 years of NATO and German Armed Force operations have not solved the conflict. Former Chancellor *Helmut Schmidt* already has said: "We should finally stop playing world's policeman. I think we should leave it to the Afghans to solve their problems. They will do a better job than NATO or the German Armed Force."

**They still pretend as if they only wanted the best**

After all, one has to get the impression that hardly any of those responsible in NATO's dominion fundamentally question its war against Afghanistan – even when there is talk of the "greatest debacle" in NATO's history (according to the CDU's chancellor candidate *Armin Laschet*, cited on [www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de) of 16 August 2021). With a renewed "robust" German Armed Force mission, Laschet not only wants to bring the Germans' "local staff" in Afghanistan to Germany, but also the country's women's rights activists. *Annalena Baerbock*, the chancellor candidate of *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, [the Greens] urges that at least 10,000 local staff members who have worked for the German Armed Forces and "NATO partners" in Afghanistan in recent years to be brought to Germany. Chancellor *Angela Merkel* still pretends to have acted for the "good" when she characterises the events in Afghanistan as follows: "For the many who have built on progress and freedom, especially women, these are bitter events" (cited on [www.spiegel.de](http://www.spiegel.de) of 16 August 2021). The neo-conservative US politician John Bolton is even of the opinion that Afghanistan now will fall "back into the 15<sup>th</sup> century"; because the Taliban are a group of "medieval religious fanaticism" (cited on [www.tagesspiegel.de](http://www.tagesspiegel.de) of 16 August 2021). The "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" commented on 16 August: Twenty years after 9/11 the project 'Rebuilding Afghanistan' was still only at the beginning. It was not yet viable on its own."

At the same time, the geopolitical Cold War continues. "Afghanistan: *Putin's* dangerous flirt with the Taliban" headlined the "Luzerner Zeitung" on 16 August, and on the same day you could read on *Spiegel Online*: "Afghanistan. China wants 'friendly relations' with the Taliban."

**One could know better**

This is how attention is deflected, facts are suppressed, denied and/or ignored. Yet one could know better, for years. On 17 August, a newspaper, which is usually quite favourably disposed towards NATO such as the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", investigated the question of why the Afghan state was able to collapse within a few days. The answers have been known for a long time. The newspaper says: "If you want to understand why Afghanistan crumbled within two weeks, you have to look back 20 years, keep the *Zeitgeist* in mind and what it had done to the West. [...] What has gone wrong the past years will keep historians busy for years."

**The West and corruption in Afghanistan**

The newspaper names the problem of severe corruption and the West's responsibility for it. The problem was billions of so-called aid money that ended up in the wrong pockets under the eyes of the donors. The USA itself has been investigating the problem for years – but without consequences. Regarding to a report by the responsible investigative body *Sigar* (*Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*) it was written in March 2021: "As has long been reported, foreign aid has distorted the Afghan economy and aggravated the corruption problem." The newspaper writes "Billions of dollars in development aid have flowed into Afghanistan." But also: "Currently, 14 million people in Afghanistan do not have enough to eat." It writes: "For years, the West supported a government of kleptocrats." And: "In the end, the corruption in Afghanistan was so pervasive that people couldn't get a document authenticated or an identity card issued without paying a bribe." So, Afghans had "had enough of the state", "which was more of a facade than an institution".

**"We shot an incredible number of people, but as far as I know, none of them turned out to be a threat"**

"We shot an incredible number of people, but as far as I know, none of them turned out to be a threat." This is how the newspaper cites US General *Stanley McChrystal* on US warfare. The citation dates back to 2009. Things had not improved since then. On the contrary: "Civilians were killed in night-time house searches, later by drone attacks." The result was an "al-

ienation of the Afghan population from foreign troops". The newspaper also mentions the *Afghanistan Papers* published in 2019 (see box on page 4): "In the documents, former soldiers say that bad news and criticism were not welcome at headquarters in Kabul." Even after the invasion of the Taliban in Kabul, US Secretary of State *Antony Blinken* spoke of a "successful" US mission in Afghanistan. What caps it all off: Almost at the same time with the NATO disaster in Afghanistan, the US citizen *Daniel Hale*, who as a whistle-blower had already drawn attention to the devastating consequences of the US drone war in 2015, was sentenced to 45 months in prison in the USA. The public knows from Daniel Hale that 90 per cent of the drone victims are civilians – many thousands of people.

**"So, it is not war that can bring peace, but only justice"**

*Jürgen Rose*, then still an active officer in the German Armed Force, gave a speech at a peace demonstration in Stuttgart in October 2001, shortly after the start of the NATO war against Afghanistan. "Crusade against terrorism?" was his title. What he said at that time is still relevant today. A quote from this speech should therefore conclude this article: "So it is not war that can bring peace, but only justice. In a modification of the well-known Roman motto, thus the device must be: if you want peace, serve peace! This struggle for peace must be waged for the souls and hearts of the people in the Islamic countries – but it is inconceivable that bombs and missiles could lead to success. Every bomb on Afghanistan increases the hatred and resentment against the USA in the Muslim world immeasurably. [...] The nations of the world who call themselves civilised should not fall into the jargon of terror and counter-terror. In view of the terrible catastrophe of New York and Washington and the now looming, at least as horrible, hunger and refugee catastrophe in Afghanistan, they should instead devote all their energies to improving the unbearable political, economic and social conditions in that region of the world." •

\* Translation of all quotes by *Current Concerns*

<sup>1</sup> <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/human-and-budgetary-costs-date-us-war-afghanistan-2001-2021>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.veteranstoday.com/2021/08/17/transcript-of-the-talibans-first-news-conference-in-kabul/>

# “After 20 years of civil war and 20 years of NATO war the Afghan peoples only long for peace!”

by *Matin Baraki, Marburg*



*Matin Baraki surrounded by his family in Afghanistan. (Picture Ahmad Baraki)*

Taliban at the gates of Kabul, Taliban in Kabul? No, the Taliban have been back in the presidential palace since 15 August 2021. “The war is over,” a Taliban spokesman announced immediately. The US puppet *Mohammad Ashraf Ghani*, equipped with a US passport, has fled. The thoroughly corrupt puppet regime, made up of American and Euro-Afghans in a coalition with compliant warlords, has capitulated. The Taliban, driven out by the USA and NATO in 2001, have taken power again in the Hindu Kush. This is the biggest defeat of the USA after its historic disaster in Vietnam. It is also a defeat for the self-proclaimed “international community” consisting of NATO countries. As a result of their intervention and as a parting gift, these Western powers have handed over a Taliban regime to the Afghans.

In the last four weeks, as the Taliban have advanced, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the newly formed People’s Militias have, for the most part, surrendered without a fight. The ANA soldiers, who were supposed to be well trained and equipped by NATO countries, no longer saw the point of sacrificing themselves for a regime that was deployed and controlled from abroad. The ANA soldiers and also the officers of the lower and middle ranks have in some cases not received their pay for up to six months. The 4.1 billion US dollars a year

that flowed into Kabul from abroad to supply and finance the ANA ended up in the pockets of the upper administrators and officers.

The Taliban of today are not the Taliban of 1996 or 2001, when they were led by the so-called village mullahs (clerics). The current Taliban leaders have graduated from Pakistani theological colleges. They have learnt not only military combat strategy but also diplomacy and politics. They made a treaty commitment to the US to withdraw its army from Afghanistan in February 2020 in the Qatari capital Doha. That was the treaty surrender of a superpower. Now the Taliban want to rule Afghanistan. They know that even the Afghanistan of today is not the Afghanistan of 1996. A new generation has emerged, open and partly educated, that wants to live differently. The Taliban will have to take this into account if they want to rule the Hindu Kush in the long term. The signals in this regard point in that direction. When they took Kunduz a week ago, women from there told me that nothing had been done to them. In Kabul, they now check the cars, give the drivers a pass if they don’t find any weapons, and then let them drive on. The shops are only partially open. People are going shopping without being harmed, as I heard directly from Kabul today, 16 August.

Since the surrender of the Kabul administration, government and senior ad-

ministration officials, as well as American and Euro-Afghans, have been trying to leave the country. So have those people who have dollars. At Kabul airport, thousands of people are waiting for a chance to take off.

The Taliban have issued a statement that they need these professionals, they should stay in the country and help with the reconstruction. Those who worked with the foreign enemies and infidels should only regret it. Even before the capture of Kabul, Taliban delegations held talks in Moscow, Tehran and Beijing. They let it be known that no danger would emanate from Afghan soil for its neighbours. The Taliban want international recognition and all-round cooperation, especially on the economic level, to rebuild the country. China wants the southern route of its “Silk Road” to pass through Afghanistan. Both the Taliban and Afghanistan’s neighbours have a great interest in a stable Afghanistan. Now, that the foreign powers are gone and the corrupt administration has capitulated, there is hope for a peaceful country in the Hindu Kush. This is also the first and most important thing that the absolute majority of Afghans want. After 20 years of civil war and 20 years of NATO war, the Afghan peoples only long for peace! Let us wish and grant this for them. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# “Russians and Ukrainians are one people”

by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation

*ww. Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, has written a long article regarding the current situation in the Ukraine and the shared history of the Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, he posted it in Russian and Ukrainian on the Kremlin website.<sup>1</sup> It is unusual, that a residing president turns to the public, primarily to the Russian and the Ukrainian public, in this way. It is not surprising, that the Russian President has attracted a great deal of attention with it. In the Western media, Russia-bashing was obvious, some journalists even insinuate that the Russian President has plans for war.*

*The overflowing criticism caused one thing: the attentive reader becomes curious and wants to know what Putin really said in his article. He sets out to find the English translation. The sub-headings are set by Current Concerns.*

*Briefly, regarding the beginning of the article: Here Vladimir Putin illuminates in great detail the “turning points” in the thou-*

*sand-year history of the “ancient Rus”. Ancient Rus is the vast space where the three states of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are located today. He identifies much that the peoples living there have in common – not only in language and religion. Last but not least, he mentions the common struggle in the Great Patriotic War in World War II against the German aggressors, which was victorious because everyone pursued a common goal and stood as one.*

*At the end, Vladimir Putin talks about the years from 1992 until today, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of new states such as Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. His remarks on the current situation convey details and contexts that Western media do not report. They are explosive and worrying. This concluding part of his long article is to be reproduced here verbatim.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> from 12 July 2021

The Russian Federation recognised the new geopolitical realities: and not only recognised, but, indeed, did a lot for Ukraine to establish itself as an independent country. Throughout the difficult 1990s and in the new millennium, we have provided considerable support to Ukraine. Whatever “political arithmetic” of its own Kiev may wish to apply, in 1991–2013, Ukraine’s budget savings amounted to more than USD 82 billion, while today, it holds on to the mere USD 1.5 billion of Russian payments for gas transit to Europe. If economic ties between our countries had been retained, Ukraine would enjoy the benefit of tens of billions of dollars.

## Close economic relations over centuries

Ukraine and Russia have developed as a single economic system over decades and centuries. The profound cooperation we had 30 years ago is an example for the European Union to look up to. We are natural complementary economic partners. Such a close relationship can strengthen competitive advantages, increasing the potential of both countries.

Ukraine used to possess great potential, which included powerful infrastructure, gas transportation system, advanced shipbuilding, aviation, rocket and instrument engineering industries, as well as world-class scientific, design and engineering schools. Taking over this legacy and declaring independence, Ukrainian leaders promised that the Ukrainian economy would be one of the leading ones and the standard of living would be among the best in Europe.

Today, high-tech industrial giants that were once the pride of Ukraine and the entire Union, are sinking. Engineering output has dropped by 42 per cent over ten years. The scale of deindustrialisation and overall economic degradation is visible in

Ukraine’s electricity production, which has seen a nearly two-time decrease in 30 years. Finally, according to IMF reports, in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic broke out, Ukraine’s GDP per capita had been below USD 4 thousand. This is less than in the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Moldova, or unrecognized Kosovo. Nowadays, Ukraine is Europe’s poorest country.

Who is to blame for this? Is it the people of Ukraine’s fault? Certainly not. It was the Ukrainian authorities who waisted and frittered away the achievements of many generations. We know how hardworking and talented the people of Ukraine are. They can achieve success and outstanding results with perseverance and determination. And these qualities, as well as their openness, innate optimism and hospitality have not gone. The feelings of millions of people who treat Russia not just well but with great affection, just as we feel about Ukraine, remain the same.

Until 2014, hundreds of agreements and joint projects were aimed at developing our economies, business and cultural ties, strengthening security, and solving common social and environmental problems. They brought tangible benefits to people – both in Russia and Ukraine. This is what we believed to be most important. And that is why we had a fruitful interaction with all, I emphasise, with all the leaders of Ukraine.

Even after the events in Kiev of 2014, I charged the Russian government to elaborate options for preserving and maintaining our economic ties within relevant ministries and agencies. However, there was and is still no mutual will to do the same. Nevertheless, Russia is still one of Ukraine’s top three trading partners, and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are coming to us to work, and they find a welcome reception

and support. So that what the “aggressor state” is.

When the USSR collapsed, many people in Russia and Ukraine sincerely believed and assumed that our close cultural, spiritual and economic ties would certainly last, as would the commonality of our people, who had always had a sense of unity at their core. However, events – at first gradually, and then more rapidly – started to move in a different direction.

## Ukrainian elites cut ties with Russia

In essence, Ukraine’s ruling circles decided to justify their country’s independence through the denial of its past, however, except for border issues. They began to mythologise and rewrite history, edit out everything that united us, and refer to the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation. The common tragedy of collectivisation and famine of the early 1930s was portrayed as the genocide of the Ukrainian people.

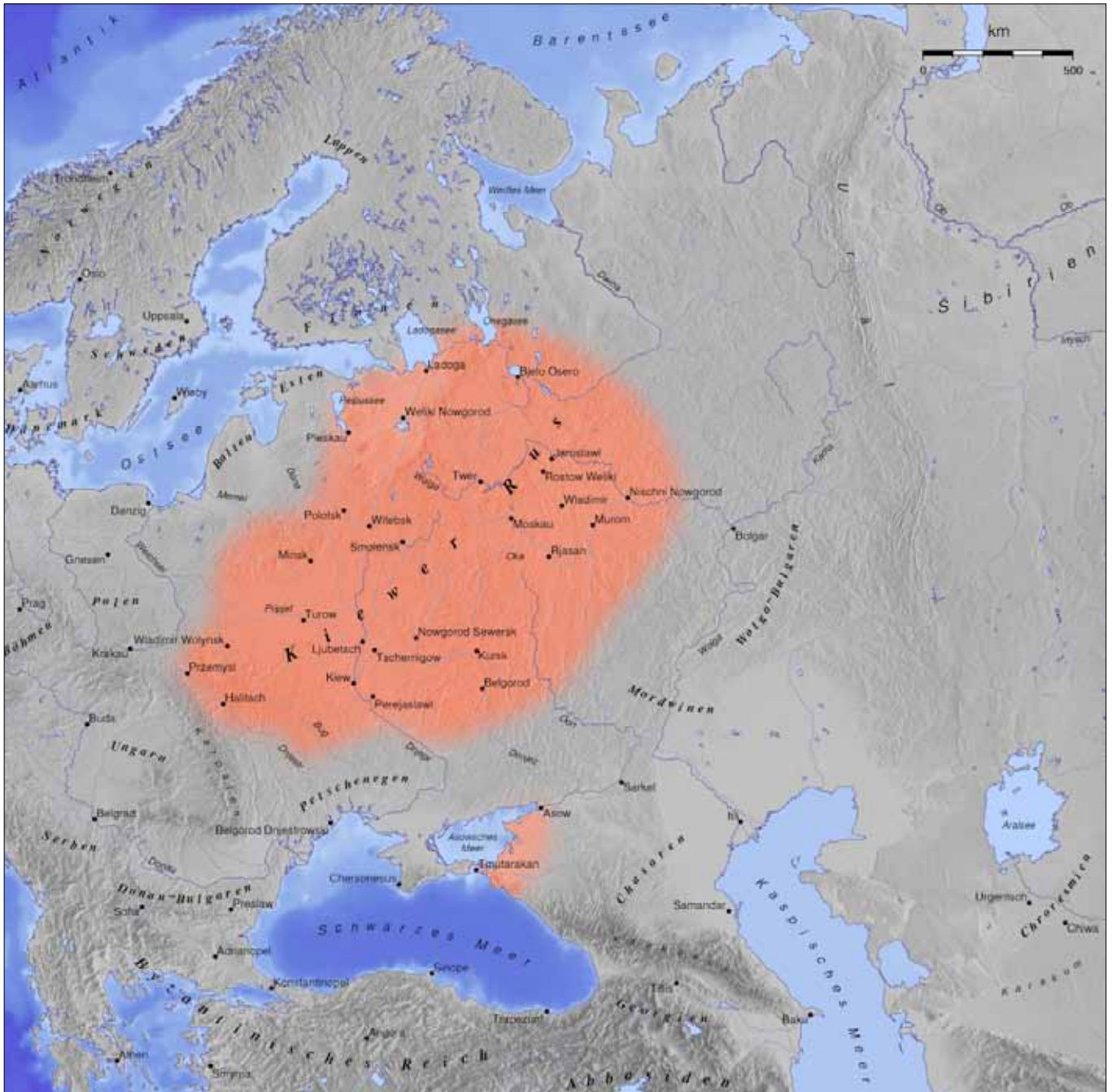
Radicals and neo-Nazis were open and more and more insolent about their ambitions. They were indulged by both the official authorities and local oligarchs, who robbed the people of Ukraine and kept their stolen money in Western banks, ready to sell their motherland for the sake of preserving their capital. To this should be added the persistent weakness of state institutions and the position of a willing hostage to someone else’s geopolitical will.

## Western interference

I recall that long ago, well before 2014, the US and EU countries systematically and consistently pushed Ukraine to curtail and limit economic cooperation with Russia. We, as the largest trade and economic partner of Ukraine, suggested dis-

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The birthplace of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine: Kievan Rus around the year 1000 AD. (graphic Wikipedia)

“Russians and Ukrainians ...”

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discussing the emerging problems in the Ukraine-Russia-EU format. But every time we were told that Russia had nothing to do with it and that the issue concerned only the EU and Ukraine. De facto Western countries rejected Russia’s repeated calls for dialogue.

Step by step, Ukraine was dragged into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia. Inevitably, there came a time when the concept of “Ukraine is not Russia” was no longer an option. There was a need for the “anti-Russia” concept which we will never accept.

The owners of this project took as a basis the old groundwork of the Polish-Austrian ideologists to create an “anti-Moscow Russia”. And there is no need to deceive anyone that this is being done in the interests of the people of Ukraine. The *Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* never needed Ukrainian culture, much less Cossack autonomy. In Austria-Hungary, historical Russian lands were mercilessly exploited and remained the poorest. The Nazis, abetted by collaborators from the OUN-UPA<sup>1</sup>, did not need Ukraine, but a living space and slaves for Aryan overlords.

Nor were the interests of the Ukrainian people thought of in February 2014. The legitimate public discontent, caused

by acute socio-economic problems, mistakes, and inconsistent actions of the authorities of the time, was simply cynically exploited. Western countries directly interfered in Ukraine’s internal affairs and supported the coup. Radical nationalist groups served as its battering ram. Their slogans, ideology, and blatant aggressive Russophobia have to a large extent become defining elements of state policy in Ukraine.

**New seeds of discord**

All the things that united us and bring us together so far came under attack. First and foremost, the Russian language. Let me remind you that the new “Maidan”

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**“Russians and Ukrainians ...”**

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authorities first tried to repeal the law on state language policy. Then there was the law on the “purification of power”, the law on education that virtually cut the Russian language out of the educational process.

Lastly, as early as May of this year, the current president introduced a bill on “indigenous peoples” to the Rada. Only those who constitute an ethnic minority and do not have their own state entity outside Ukraine are recognised as indigenous. The law has been passed. New seeds of discord have been sown. And this is happening in a country, as I have already noted, that is very complex in terms of its territorial, national and linguistic composition, and its history of formation.

There may be an argument: if you are talking about a single large nation, a tri-une nation, then what difference does it make who people consider themselves to be – Russians, Ukrainians, or Belarusians. I completely agree with this. Especially since the determination of nationality, particularly in mixed families, is the right of every individual, free to make his or her own choice.

But the fact is that the situation in Ukraine today is completely different because it involves a forced change of identity. And the most despicable thing is that the Russians in Ukraine are being forced not only to deny their roots, generations of their ancestors but also to believe that Russia is their enemy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us. As a result of such a harsh and artificial division of Russians and Ukrainians, the Russian people in all may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions.

Our spiritual unity has also been attacked. As in the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a new ecclesiastical has been initiated. The secular authorities, making no secret of their political aims, have blatantly interfered in church life and brought things to a split, to the seizure of churches, the beating of priests and monks. Even extensive autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church while maintaining spiritual unity with the Moscow Patriarchate strongly displeases them. They have to destroy this prominent and centuries-old symbol of our kinship at all costs.

I think it is also natural that the representatives of Ukraine over and over again vote against the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the glorification of Nazism. Marches and torchlit processions in honour of remaining war crimi-

nals from the SS units take place under the protection of the official authorities. *Mazepa*, who betrayed everyone, *Petliura*, who paid for Polish patronage with Ukrainian lands, and *Bandera*, who collaborated with the Nazis, are ranked as national heroes. Everything is being done to erase from the memory of young generations the names of genuine patriots and victors, who have always been the pride of Ukraine.

For the Ukrainians who fought in the Red Army, in partisan units, the Great Patriotic War was indeed a patriotic war because they were defending their home, their great common Motherland. Over two thousand soldiers became Heroes of the Soviet Union. Among them are legendary pilot *Ivan Kozhedub*, fearless sniper, defender of Odessa and Sevastopol *Lyudmila Pavlichenko*, valiant guerrilla commander *Sidor Kovpak*. This indomitable generation fought, those people gave their lives for our future, for us. To forget their feat is to betray our grandfathers, mothers and fathers.

**“Anti-Russia” project provokes confrontation and civil war**

The anti-Russia project has been rejected by millions of Ukrainians. The people of Crimea and residents of Sevastopol made their historic choice. And people in the southeast peacefully tried to defend their stance. Yet, all of them, including children, were labelled as separatists and terrorists. They were threatened with ethnic cleansing and the use of military force. And the residents of Donetsk and Lugansk took up arms to defend their home, their language and their lives. Were they left any other choice after the riots that swept through the cities of Ukraine, after the horror and tragedy of 2 May 2014 in Odessa where Ukrainian neo-Nazis burned people alive making a new Khatyn out of it? The same massacre was ready to be carried out by the followers of *Bandera* in Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk and Lugansk. Even now they do not abandon such plans. They are biding their time. But their time will not come.

The coup d'état and the subsequent actions of the Kiev authorities inevitably provoked confrontation and civil war. The *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* estimates that the total number of victims in the conflict in Donbas has exceeded 13,000. Among them are the elderly and children. These are terrible, irreparable losses.

Russia has done everything to stop fratricide. *The Minsk agreements* aimed at a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbas have been concluded. I am convinced that they still have no alternative. In any case, no one has withdrawn their signatures from the Minsk Package of Meas-

ures or from the relevant statements by the leaders of the Normandy format countries. No one has initiated a review of the United Nations Security Council resolution of 17 February 2015.

During official negotiations, especially after being reined in by Western partners, Ukraine's representatives regularly declare their “full adherence” to the *Minsk agreements*, but are in fact guided by a position of “unacceptability”. They do not intend to seriously discuss either the special status of Donbas or safeguards for the people living there. They prefer to exploit the image of the “victim of external aggression” and peddle Russophobia. They arrange bloody provocations in Donbas. In short, they attract the attention of external patrons and masters by all means.

**“Anti-Russia” Project under the Protectorate of the Great Powers ...**

Apparently, and I am becoming more and more convinced of this: Kiev simply does not need Donbas. Why? Because, firstly, the inhabitants of these regions will never accept the order that they have tried and are trying to impose by force, blockade and threats. And secondly, the outcome of both *Minsk 1* and *Minsk 2* which give a real chance to peacefully restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine by coming to an agreement directly with the DPR and LPR with Russia, Germany and France as mediators, contradicts the entire logic of the anti-Russia project. And it can only be sustained by the constant cultivation of the image of an internal and external enemy. And I would add – under the protection and control of the Western powers.

This is what is actually happening. First of all, we are facing the creation of a climate of fear in Ukrainian society, aggressive rhetoric, indulging neo-Nazis and militarising the country. Along with that we are witnessing not just complete dependence but direct external control, including the supervision of the Ukrainian authorities, security services and armed forces by foreign advisers, military “development” of the territory of Ukraine and deployment of NATO infrastructure. It is no coincidence that the aforementioned flagrant law on “indigenous peoples” was adopted under the cover of large-scale NATO exercises in Ukraine.

This is also a disguise for the takeover of the rest of the Ukrainian economy and the exploitation of its natural resources. The sale of agricultural land is not far off, and it is obvious who will buy it up. From time to time, Ukraine is indeed given financial resources and loans, but

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### “Russians and Ukrainians ...”

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under their own conditions and pursuing their own interests, with preferences and benefits for Western companies. By the way, who will pay these debts back? Apparently, it is assumed that this will have to be done not only by today’s generation of Ukrainians but also by their children, grandchildren and probably great-grandchildren.

The Western authors of the anti-Russia project set up the Ukrainian political system in such a way that presidents, members of parliament and ministers would change but the attitude of separation from and enmity with Russia would remain. Reaching peace was the main election slogan of the incumbent president. He came to power with this. The promises turned out to be lies. Nothing has changed. And in some ways the situation in Ukraine and around Donbas has even degenerated.

In the anti-Russia project, there is no place either for a sovereign Ukraine or for the political forces that are trying to defend its real independence. Those who talk about reconciliation in Ukrainian society, about dialogue, about finding a way out of the current impasse are labelled as “pro-Russian” agents.

### ... unacceptable for many Ukrainians

Again, for many people in Ukraine, the anti-Russia project is simply unacceptable. And there are millions of such people. But they are not allowed to raise their heads. They have had their legal opportunity to defend their point of view in fact taken away from them. They are intimidated, driven underground. Not only are they persecuted for their convictions, for the spoken word, for the open expression of their position, but they are also killed. Murderers, as a rule, go unpunished.

Today, the “right” patriot of Ukraine is only the one who hates Russia. Moreover, the entire Ukrainian statehood, as we understand it, is proposed to be further built exclusively on this idea. Hate and anger, as world history has repeatedly proved this, are a very shaky foundation for sovereignty, fraught with many serious risks and dire consequences.

All the subterfuges associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would

like to say that this way they will destroy their own country.

### Common cultures – two sovereign states

The incumbent authorities in Ukraine like to refer to Western experience, seeing it as a model to follow. Just have a look at how Austria and Germany, the USA and Canada live next to each other. Close in ethnic composition, culture, in fact sharing one language, they remain sovereign states with their own interests, with their own foreign policy. But this does not prevent them from the closest integration or allied relations. They have very conditional, transparent borders. And when crossing them the citizens feel at home. They create families, study, work, do business. Incidentally, so do millions of those born in Ukraine who now live in Russia. We see them as our own close people.

Russia is open to dialogue with Ukraine and ready to discuss the most complex issues. But it is important for us to understand that our partner is defending its national interests but not serving someone else’s, and is not a tool in someone else’s hands to fight against us.

We respect the Ukrainian language and traditions. We respect Ukrainians’ desire to see their country free, safe and prosperous.

I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilisational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people.

Today, these words may be perceived by some people with hostility. They can be interpreted in many possible ways. Yet, many people will hear me. And I will say one thing – Russia has never been and will never be “anti-Ukraine”. And what Ukraine will be – it is up to its citizens to decide.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> of 12 July 2021

<sup>1</sup> OUN-UPA: The *Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists* (OUN) was a Ukrainian nationalist organisation founded in Vienna in 1929. Its military arm was the *Ukrainian Insurgent Army* (UPA), founded in 1942. During the World War II, the UPA collaborated at times with Nazi Germany. (Editor’s note)

## Ukraine – for a federal structure with as much autonomy as possible for the various parts of the country

www. Reactions to President *Vladimir Putin’s* essay were prompt – and not only in the media. The President of Ukraine, *Volodymyr Selensky*, commented that the Russians were only “distant relatives” (*RT German* of 29 July 2021). More informative is a nationwide survey conducted by the Ukrainian sociological institute *Rejting*, which was published in the media on 28 July. However, it was conducted without the population in the war zone of the Donbas (otherwise the poll would probably have been even more “pro” Putin):

41 per cent of Ukrainians approve of the historical unity of Ukrainians and Russians despite the civil war. Young Ukrainians in particular have an above-average opinion that they belong to the same historical and spiritual space as Russians. Thus, 44 per cent of Ukrainians between the ages of 18 and 29 agreed with Putin. There are large regional differences: the east, bordering the Donbas, agreed most with Putin’s statement with 65 per cent, followed

by the south with 56 per cent. In central Ukraine (around Kiev), on the other hand, only 22 per cent agreed (*forum.ukraine-nachrichten.de* of 28 July; *RT German* of 28 July 2021).

The survey shows the diversity in Ukraine, so that really only a federal state structure is an option that grants the individual parts of the country as much autonomy as possible and allows for an independent foreign policy that is as neutral as possible and includes all neighbours, including Russia.

The *Minsk Agreement*, which aims at a peaceful settlement of the conflict, also points in this direction. Point 11 of the agreement calls for constitutional reform and special consideration of the territories in the Donbas. Vladimir Putin is convinced that even today there is “no alternative” to this. It is surprising that the major Western powers involved (Germany and France) do not demand the implementation of this agreement more forcefully. Why? – President Putin gives an answer.

# Neutrality and the politics of peace with the example of Austria\*

by Professor Dr Dr h.c. mult. Hans Köchler

## I Background and historical information

In the context of this presentation, ‘neutrality’ is understood in the sense of *international law*, i. e., concerning relations between sovereign states. It does not pertain to value judgement in moral or ideological terms. Neutrality must, therefore, be distinguished from ‘neutralism’, which, in the past, was often used polemically to describe a position referred to as ideological neutrality – in the sense of equally val-

uing the rival systems of capitalism and socialism. This stance was falsely attributed to the non-aligned states during the Cold War. I will show later why this attribution was not justified.

Since we deal here with neutrality in the domain of politics, I will attempt a brief operational definition of the latter. ‘Politics’ is the organization of the collective (communal) will with the purpose that humanity rises above the *state of nature*, i. e., that every member of the community is enabled not only to *survive*, but also – through the division of labor in society – *to live in freedom and dignity*. This would not be possible without the organization-

al form of the state – or only possible for a few individuals at the expense of everyone else. The political objective implies that not only *democracy*, but also *peace* – both internally and externally – are central concerns of the community. Ensuring peace is also the quintessence of the *rule of law* as the absence of arbitrariness: vis-à-vis the individual (within the state) as well as vis-à-vis the collective or nation (between states).

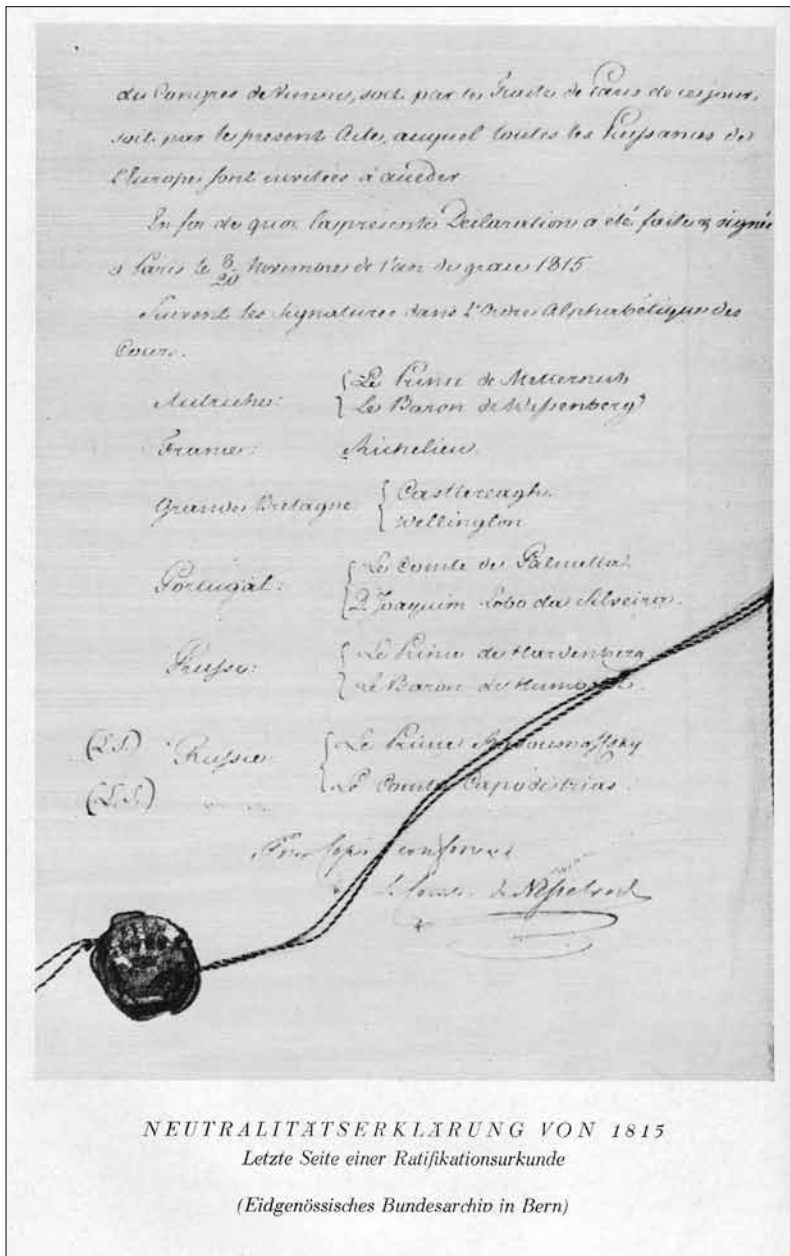
In the context of *international politics*, in concrete terms, neutrality means that, for the sake of peace and its own independence, a state keeps out of interstate disputes, i. e., does not participate in wars, does not join (military) alliances, and does not allow any other state to use its territory for war-related purposes. The latter also precludes the stationing or accommodation of foreign troops in peacetime. In this sense, neutrality – as a *principle of the state* – must be perpetual, not merely related to a particular occasion (and thus limited in time). What neutrality does not preclude, however, but in fact demands, is the ability and willingness of the neutral state to defend itself in the event of an attack. This is in line with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which enshrines the right to self-defense.

Since peace between states is one of the noblest goals of the international order – it is, in Kantian terms, the “*Bedingung der Möglichkeit*” (condition of the possibility) for the realization of the fundamental rights of people (in political, economic as well as social terms)<sup>1</sup> –, the neutrality of a state under international law is, almost by definition, a matter of the *common good*. This applies domestically, regionally and globally. In this sense, neutrality is at the intersection of the *ideal* of peace and the *reality* of international politics. However, states often only become aware of this ideal-real nexus when the inter-state order suddenly falls apart at the seams. If, in a given region, the rivalry of the dominant actors (major powers) leads to the use of force and destabilization, it is in the *general interest* – that is, in the interests of peace – for individual states to opt for a policy of neutrality. This applied for example to the situation in Europe after the Napoleonic wars with respect to Switzerland as well as it did apply to the constellation following the Second World War with respect to Austria.

A brief historical review is appropriate, in fact essential, to aid understanding of the present. The Congress of Vien-

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\* Presentation for readers of Zeit-Fragen in Savognin, Canton of Grisons, Switzerland, 30 July 2021. Translated from German.



Declaration of Neutrality of 1815 – last page of a ratification document (picture Federal Archives in Bern)



**"Neutrality and the politics ..."**

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na of 1814–1815 officially established the nexus of 'ideal' and 'real' for the first time and, explicitly referring to the common good ("general interest"), declared "neutrality" as the *international status* of Switzerland. In the declaration of March 20, 1815, the powers gathered in Vienna ("les Puissances") stated "que l'interêt générale réclame en faveur du Corps Helvétique l'avantage d'une neutralité perpétuelle".<sup>2</sup> The states further declared that once Switzerland had acceded to (i. e., agreed to) this declaration, they would guarantee its perpetual neutrality within its new borders. The original text speaks of "reconnaissance et garantie de la part de toutes les Puissances de la neutralité perpétuelle de la Suisse dans ses nouvelles frontières". It seems quite remarkable that neutrality was explicitly spoken of as an *advantage* ("avantage") for the Helvetic state and it was emphasized that the *common good* required such a status, to the benefit of Switzerland.

At a meeting in Zurich on 27 May 1815, the assembly of the Swiss cantons ("Diète", or "Tag-satzung") explicitly endorsed the declaration of the Congress of Vienna. The relevant "Act d'accession" states, verbatim from the formulations in Vienna: "La Diète exprime la gratitude éternelle de la Nation Suisse envers les hautes Puissances qui [...] promettent solennement de reconnaître et de garantir la neutralité perpétuelle que l'interêt générale de l'Europe réclame en faveur du Corps Helvétique."<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the Swiss Assembly expressly notes that the *European common good* requires the status of perpetual neutrality.

In structural terms, the constellation was still quite similar over a century later – after the Second World War – with regard to Austria. It seems to me an interesting aperçu of history that an international status, which was proposed to Switzerland (de facto: linked with a promise of guarantee) in Vienna in 1815 by the great powers of the time, was explicitly determined in 1955 as the status of an independent Austria. In the context of the negotiations for the "State Treaty" with the victorious powers of the Second World War, neutral-

ity "according to the Swiss model" was introduced into the text of the so-called *Moscow Memorandum* of 15 April 1955.

Here, too, the nexus of *ideal* (peace) versus *real* (international realpolitik as power politics) cannot be overlooked. In the constellation of the Cold War – when two ideologically defined blocs suspiciously faced each other in Europe – it was essential for *Austria* to declare itself perpetually neutral in order to convince all occupying powers (especially the Soviet Union) that *none of them* could derive a strategic advantage from the simultaneous withdrawal of *all of them*. It was also in the *general interest* of preserving peace (not only in Europe, but also this time – in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – in the world as a whole) that a country geographically situated be-

dere in Vienna. On the day after all occupying troops had left the country, the Austrian Parliament enshrined neutrality in the constitution ("Bundesverfassungsgesetz vom 26.10.1955 über die Neutralität Österreichs"). This date has been celebrated as Austrian National Day ever since.

The conditionality – that the constitutionally neutral status was only decided *after* the signing of the State Treaty and the withdrawal of all foreign troops – was particularly important for Austria's self-image as a sovereign state. Constitutional law experts like to characterize the obligation entered into in the Moscow Memorandum in terms of a so-called "*Verwendungszusage*" ("pledge to implement"), which Austria had given of its own free will. In reality, however, the calculus of



Jawaharlal Nehru (center), Prime Minister of India, welcoming Austrian Foreign Minister Karl Gruber at the Bürgenstock on 20 June 1953. Nehru had invited Gruber to this meeting, at which Gruber requested Nehru's good offices for the negotiations with the Soviet Union on the State Treaty and the sovereignty of Austria.

(Picture ETH-Bibliothek Zurich, Picture Archive / Photographer: Boog)

tween the blocs should be neither a deployment area nor an ally of competing powers. The Moscow memorandum stated that the Austrian government would make a declaration in a form that commits Austria internationally to exercise perpetual neutrality as practiced by Switzerland.

In the constellation of the time, the reference to the proven Swiss model served an important confidence-building purpose vis-à-vis the world powers. The Moscow Declaration proved to be the key to the agreement of *all* Allied powers to the "State Treaty", which was solemnly signed exactly a month later at the Belve-

realpolitik – similar to that made in the case of Switzerland in 1815 – was decisive. It was clear to everyone in the country that without such a pledge (or, in plain English: declaration of commitment) there would be no state treaty with subsequent troop withdrawal – just as, in 1815, the great powers of the time made their guarantee of Switzerland's independence in the new borders – albeit dressed up in elegant diplomatic French – dependent on its acceptance of the Vienna Declaration (which proclaimed neutrality as an advantage for Switzerland).

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**"Neutrality and the politics ..."**

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**II The hidden and suppressed history of Austrian neutrality**

In positioning 'Swiss-style' neutrality as the constitutional status of Austria in the post-World War II era of decolonization, one significant aspect in terms of history and international politics is usually overlooked, indeed, one might say, largely suppressed. I mean the role played by some of the leading founders of the Non-Aligned Movement in support of Austria on its way to full independence as a perpetually neutral state. At that time, solidarity between the states struggling for their independence was still strong. This was also the era in which the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia began to define their new-found position in terms of "non-alignment" – as equidistance or neutrality in the Cold War between the two great power blocs – and in which they created the organizational structures to articulate this policy. The decisive events were the

Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 (the "Bandung Conference") and the Belgrade Conference in 1961, which established the Non-Aligned Movement. (Two decades later, I cooperated with the Secretary-General of the Belgrade Conference, *Leo Mates*, the then head of President *Tito's* cabinet, in the organization of an international conference on "The Principles of Non-alignment".)<sup>4</sup> With regard to Austria's wish to regain and secure its independence as a permanently neutral state, probably the most important politician from this group of states was the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Reference should also be made here to Indonesian President *Sukarno*, the organizer of the Bandung Conference.

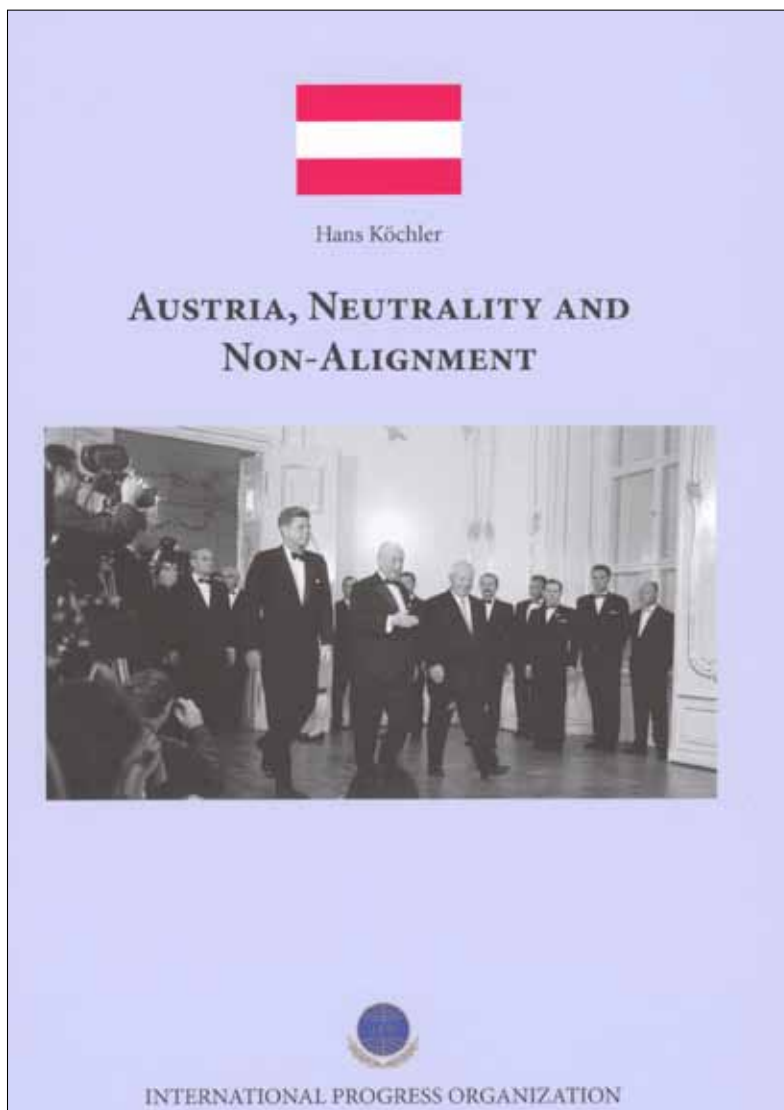
There was a structural connection between the issues defined by neutrality and non-alignment. Common criteria were undoubtedly *peaceful coexistence* based on non-interference in internal affairs and, in particular, *non-participation* in the organizational structures of the two power blocs of the time. It is important to note

that neutrality in the military sense – as practiced by Austria and Switzerland – also means that a state does not interfere in the affairs of other states and, thus, *tolerates* their specific political and ideological systems. *Tolerance*, however, does not mean *endorsement* or domestic *implementation*. Accordingly, the polemical criticism of "neutralism" leveled at the Non-Aligned Movement did not hit the mark. Moreover, the history of the interventionist policy of the West, especially after the Cold War, shows that ideological interference always brings with it the danger of armed conflict.

President Sukarno, who was a regular visitor to Vienna in the 1950s and 1960s, expressed most succinctly the meaning of peaceful coexistence. In his opening speech at the Bandung Conference on 18 April 1955, he described "peaceful coexistence" as an element of world order that a state can strengthen through a policy of neutrality or non-alignment. His carefully drafted speech, indeed a statement of principles, makes many pronouncements of today's leaders pale in comparison. It was also implicitly a formulation of what we in the *International Progress Organization* later propagated as 'dialogue between different civilizations' (1972) and what, at the UN General Assembly in New York, was suggested more than a quarter of a century later (2000) by Iranian President *Khatami* as the basis of a peaceful world order.

In his speech, Sukarno explicitly referred to the *diversity* of religions, ideologies, and economic as well as political and constitutional systems in the global community of nations. Already then – half a century before the slogan was in vogue – he formulated the principle of "*unity in diversity*" while emphasizing the interdependence (i. e., the need for one another) of all states and peoples. On this basis, he formulated the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, which embodies the principle of *reciprocity* that is essential to all dialogue. Sukarno appealed to the representatives of the states gathered in Bandung and to the international public to take to heart the maxim of "live and let live," which also means refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of other states. He characterized the states gathered in Bandung in terms of a "body of enlightened, tolerant opinion, which seeks to impress on the world that all men and all countries have their place under the sun."<sup>5</sup>

There is an interesting temporal coincidence. Sukarno delivered the speech in Bandung, with the plea for an enlightened and tolerant attitude toward all peoples and states, exactly three days after the Moscow Memorandum was signed, estab-



*Hans Köchler. Austria, Neutrality and Non-Alignment, Vienna 2021, ISBN 978-3-900704-28-5*

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**"Neutrality and the politics ..."**

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lishing Austria's commitment to perpetual neutrality, on 15 April 1955. The Indonesian head of state paid his first state visit to Austria in the following year (September 1956). It was followed by several more visits – including a second, weeklong state visit in 1963.

The doctrine of equal coexistence was later adopted by the founding assembly of non-aligned states in Belgrade in September 1961. The leaders gathered there spoke of a transition "to a new order based on cooperation between nations, founded on freedom, equality and social justice for the promotion of prosperity."<sup>6</sup>

The closeness of Austria's efforts to achieve neutrality to the concerns of the Asian and African political leaders gathered in Bandung who would later form the Non-Aligned Movement was even more evident in the support that Indian Prime Minister Nehru gave Austria at the most difficult time before the conclusion of the State Treaty – in the delicate negotiations with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Switzerland comes into play again here, this time as a neutral meeting place. On 20 June 1953, Nehru received the Austrian Foreign Minister *Karl Gruber* on the Bürgenstock, high above Lake Lucerne. He had met Gruber a few days earlier on the sidelines of the coronation of *Elizabeth II* in London and invited him to visit him in Switzerland. During the meeting, which went down in history as the Bürgenstock Initiative, Gruber asked Nehru to mediate in Moscow. Despite the usual diplomatic denials immediately after the meeting became known, Nehru kept his promise. The Indian ambassador in Moscow was instructed to bring into play – as a confidence-building step – a voluntary neutrality commitment by Austria, and to present this as an Indian idea (in order to allow Austria a face-saving withdrawal, if necessary). Even though Soviet Foreign Minister *Molotov* reacted skeptically at first, two years later, the proposal was part of the Moscow Memorandum, which paved the way for the State Treaty. *Bruno Kreisky's* famous statement is to be understood against the background of these historical facts: "Nehru's name will forever be associated with the history of our neutrality." (Kreisky later served as Foreign Minister and Federal Chancellor of Austria.)

The "neutral non-aligned community of thought", as it could casually be called, was also evident in the fact that Nehru was the first politician to pay a state visit to the newly re-established Austria – barely a month after the signing of the State Treaty. It was rumored at the time that Nehru also particularly felt attached to the Austrian cause because the Habsburg Empire

– unlike the British Empire, for example – had never maintained colonial territories.

Historically, it is also of interest that Austrian neutrality was sealed six years before the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement (in Belgrade in September 1961) – but practically at the same time as the Bandung Conference. These were the years when Austria took neutrality seriously and performed its role as a new member of the United Nations on the basis of strictly staying out of international disputes. The policy was also reflected in the instructions issued by Foreign Minister *Leopold Figl* to the Austrian delegation in New York. For the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly (1957–1958), he instructed the diplomatic representatives to abstain from voting on all decisions on 'measures' but, at the same time, to support all initiatives toward decolonization (the term Figl used was "anti-colonialism") and to always affirm the principle of the self-determination of peoples.

**III Development of the neutrality doctrine and the constraints of realpolitik**

This was also the time of constructive cooperation with the countries that were considered to belong to the 'Third World' and which – like Austria – wanted to stay out of the quarrels of the First and Second Worlds. One of the main concerns of Austrian policy was to secure neutrality as an integral element of a sustainable *policy of peace*. In a statement to Parliament in Vienna on 25 March 1971, Foreign Minister *Rudolf Kirchschläger* summarized the essence of the policy of perpetual neutrality. He stressed the need for independence on all sides, adding that this must be accompanied by the establishment of constructive and friendly relations with as many states as possible. His quite realistic assessment was that "a small country situated between rival ideological blocs can best develop in an atmosphere of détente and cooperation." In this sense, he propagated a policy of so-called "active neutrality".

However, as has so often been the case in international politics, a U-turn occurred in Austria's neutrality policy. With the shock of the disintegration of the old bipolar order at the beginning of the 1990s, nations oriented themselves – over-zealously and suddenly – with the newly emerging unipolar constellation, which they prematurely believed would be "perpetual". In order to adapt to this new order, Austria gave up its perpetual neutrality – de facto and probably also de jure. Austria joined the EU and "adapted" the country's constitution in such a way that participation in military operations within the framework of the European Union became possible. (No in-depth conceptual analysis is needed to see that this is incompatible with

the concept of *military* neutrality). In this way, Austria became, as it were, a 'party' in all international political conflicts in which the EU, driven by the global interests of its largest member states, plays a role – all the way to the Hindu Kush (if I may allude to a recent dictum in German politics) and to the Sahel region of Africa.

Despite the erosion of the principle of neutrality – actually its negation in the course of Austria's growing integration into the power politics of Europe and the Atlantic region –, the concept gained new relevance in international affairs at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – not only for Austria, but also for countries on today's geopolitical fault lines. We are witnessing the emergence of a new multi-polar constellation that is beginning to replace the hegemony of the United States. In this scenario – unlike in 1945 – tensions are emerging between powerful actors in a growing number of regions, e.g., between Russia and the EU/US or NATO alliance, China and the US, or China and India. In this constellation, it is particularly prudent for small and medium-sized states to stay out of the conflicts and rivalries of the major powers. This is (1) in a country's *self-interest*, properly understood (so that it is not targeted – and then abandoned, as the sad fate of many US allies has proven); it is also (2) in the overriding interest of stabilizing zones of tension, where it can be

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**Thucydides dilemma**

"Anyone who remembers his history lessons from long ago may still know that *Thucydides*, a strategist and author, lived in ancient Greece. Athens, the then 'great power', watched the emerging Sparta with increasing displeasure. The competition between the two finally erupted in the 5th century BC in the long Peloponnesian War, which led to the defeat and loss of importance of Athens (Thucydides reported in detail on this under the title 'The Peloponnesian War').

*Graham T. Allison*, Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at *Harvard Kennedy School*, wrote in his book 'Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?' (2017) coined the term 'Thucydides Trap', referring to developments such as those that affected Athens and Sparta at the time, and the USA and China for example today.

That is, a dominant great power feels rivalled, displaced, then seriously threatened by an ascendant, which may lead to war."

*Frick, Gotthard. Thucydides trap – a newborn strategic concept. In: Current Concerns No 30 of 5 January 2021*



**"Neutrality and the politics ..."**

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argued that the greater the "alliance-free space" (geographically and legally), the greater the chances of consolidation and peace. This could also give new relevance to the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is obvious that such an approach is diametrically opposed to NATO's new doctrine of "non-Article 5 crisis response operations", which effectively turns the entire world into a theater of operations. However, what the world needs most urgently in the current constellation (that begins to resemble the former Cold War scenario – in Europe, but also in East and Southeast Asia), are not constantly expanding military alliances such as NATO, but "zones of peace" formed by states that follow a policy of neutrality not in an ideological sense, but in the strict meaning of international law, i. e., of "military neutrality" – similar to the idea of peaceful coexistence succinctly formulated by Sukarno in Bandung more than six decades ago. This, however, would require a renewed focus on the global 'need for one another' – in Sukarno's words: "to develop a true consciousness of the interdependence of men and nations for the well-being and survival on earth."

Great power politics, still enabled and encouraged by the voting procedure of the UN Security Council,<sup>8</sup> will hinder the realization of this vision, at least for the time being. The 'realignment' of the nuclear superpowers – the US, China, and Russia – envisaged by the late *Zbigniew Brzezinski*, US National Security Advisor under President *Carter*, will probably remain a wishful dream.

Developments point in the direction of a global showdown in which the much-invoked 'international rule of law' may become irrelevant. The 'Thucydides dilemma' – involving the US and China – appears to be quite real. Thus, it will be all the more important to secure and expand 'neutral spaces' (in the geostrategic, but also in the literal, location-based sense) so that the 'powers' – 'les Puissances' as they were apostrophized by the Congress of Vienna – have an *incentive* and find *space* to negotiate their differences.

I would like to conclude with what is almost a platitude: The fewer the states that join the alliances of these powers, *the better* will it be for peace. The greater the number of states that commit themselves to genuine neutrality in the sense of non-alignment, *the more precarious* will be a

conduct of power politics that regards war as *ultima ratio*. ●

- <sup>1</sup> For clarification, it is important to note that a *necessary* condition (conditio sine qua non) is not a *sufficient* condition.
- <sup>2</sup> "Déclaration des Puissances sur les affaires de la Confédération Helvétique, du 20 Mars 1815", quoted from the official records of the Congress of Vienna: *Actes du Congrès de Vienne*. Brussels: Weissenbruch, 1819.
- <sup>3</sup> "Acte d'accession (en date de Zurich le 27 Mai 1815) de la Confédération Suisse à la Déclaration des Puissances réunies au Congrès de Vienne, en date du 20 Mars 1815," op. cit.
- <sup>4</sup> Hans Köchler (Ed.), *The Principles of Non-alignment: The Non-aligned Countries in the Eighties – Results and Perspectives*. London/Vienna: Third World Centre, 1982.
- <sup>5</sup> Original text of the speech: "Address given by Sukarno (Bandung, 18 April 1955)," in: *Asia-Africa speak from Bandung*. Jakarta: Indonesia – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955, pp. 19–29.
- <sup>6</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belgrade, 6 September 1961: Final Document – Section on Nuclear Disarmament and Related Issues, quoted according to: *Non-Aligned and Developing Countries: Basic Documents*. New Delhi: Indian Society of International Law, 1970, p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> For the details, also see Hans Köchler, *Austria, Neutrality and Non-alignment. Studies in International Relations*, Vol. 36. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2021, Chapter I.
- <sup>8</sup> See also: Hans Köchler, *The Voting Procedure in the United Nations Security Council*. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1991.

**"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"* (pp. 24).

*„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**

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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.

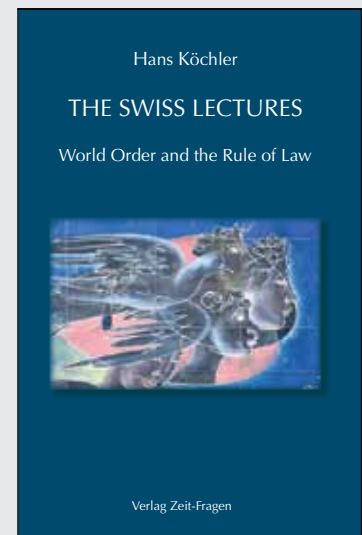
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Federal referendum of 26 September 2021

## Marriage for all?

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The Federal Council justifies the introduction of “marriage for all” succinctly in the voting booklet: “Couples of the same sex should have the same rights as couples of different sexes. They should also be able to marry. The opening of marriage also leads to equal legal treatment in naturalisation, adoption and reproductive medicine.” (p. 28) If the referendum proposal is accepted, various provisions of marital law and parent-child relationship in the Swiss Civil Code (SCC), the Reproductive Medicine Act and other laws would have to be amended.

Three committees with parliamentarians from the CVP/Die Mitte, EDU (Federal Democratic Union), EVP (Evangelic People’s Party) and SVP called for a referendum against these changes in the law and against the opening of the institution of marriage for same-sex couples respectively. They also succinctly counter the argument of “equal rights” for all with the argument: “The ‘privilege’ of marriage between a man and a woman is based, among other things, on biological facts. This is not discrimination. The principle of equality states that equal things must be treated equally and unequal things unequally.” (Voting booklet, p. 26)

Anyone who wants to find out what exactly is to be changed by reading the text of the referendum (pp. 30) will come across a number of newly formulated articles in various laws. The main sticking points are presented here.

### Today’s Partnership Act largely corresponds to Marital Law in terms of content

Since 1 January 2007, the Federal Act on the Registered Partnership between Same-Sex Couples (Partnership Act) has been in force in Switzerland, regulating the registration, legal effects and dissolution of the partnership as well as the Parent-child Relationship. This legal form was described by the Green Liberal parliamentary group, which initiated “marriage for all” in parliament in 2013, as “second-class marriage”, as “downgrading based on biological differences”, which is “incompatible with a liberal image of society and a modern constitutional state”.<sup>1</sup>

This assessment is contradicted by the compilation of differences and similarities between marriage and the registered partnership, which the *Federal Office of Justice* (FOJ) compiled in March 2018 for the attention of parliament.<sup>2</sup> In fact, according to the FOJ, there are many more similarities than differences. For example, the

most important provisions on marital union and property law also apply to partnerships, as do the provisions on the parent-child relationship, insofar as this is possible from a substantive point of view. The adoption of a partner’s children (stepchild adoption) has been permitted since 2018, analogous to marriage; only joint adoption is not permitted today according to Art. 28 of the Partnership Act.

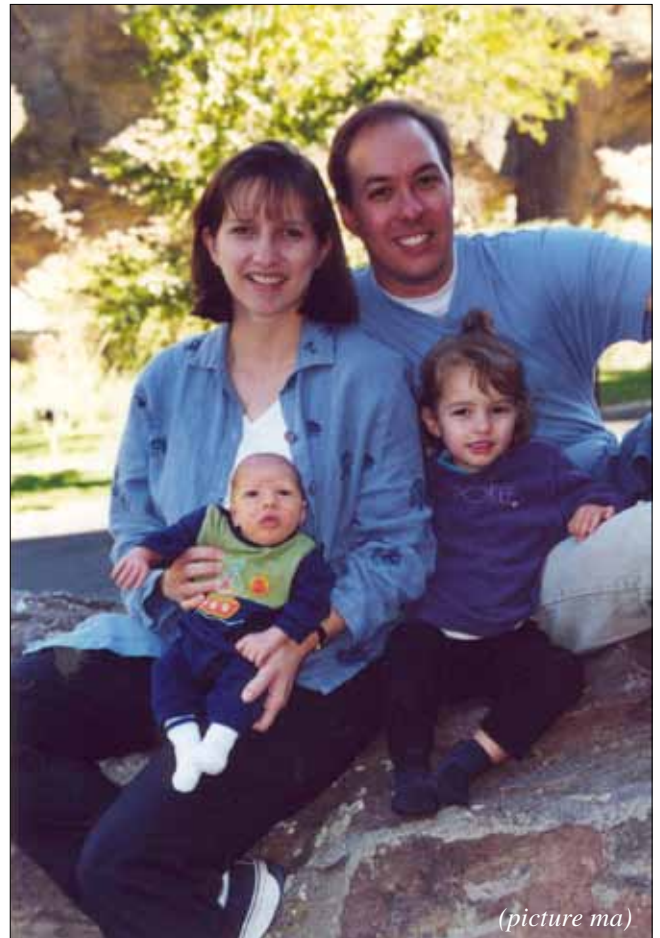
In the event of the death of a partner, the legal right of inheritance and the survivor’s compulsory share is identical to the regulations for married couples. Under current law, the disadvantageous treatment of widowers compared to widows with regard to survivor’s pensions also applies to married couples. The Swiss parliament will probably change this because the *European Court of Human Rights* has recently judged the Swiss regulation to be discriminatory. The dissolution of the partnership is regulated in the same way as a divorce, including maintenance arrangements, the splitting of AHV contributions and the equalisation of pension fund contributions.

Simplified naturalisation for foreign partners is being drafted in analogy to the regulations for married couples, but the Council of States has temporarily suspended it until after the decision on “marriage for all”.

If one goes through this largely equivalent legal status of the registered partnership in comparison to marriage, one wonders why there is an additional need for “marriage for all”. Why is breaking up the institution of marriage so urgent?

### Adaptation to the legal order in “the” – not really all – EU-member states

The *Green Liberals’* 2013 proposal was guided, among other things, by the desire to bring the Swiss legal institution of marriage into line with that in the EU area. In any case, they justified their request with the fact that many other countries, “including the European states of France, Spain,



(picture ma)

Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, have already legalised same-sex marriage”. By 2017, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom and Malta had joined them, and finally Austria in 2019.<sup>3</sup> The German Bundestag approved the bill in June 2017 after prolonged opposition from the CDU/CSU. Euronews reported on 30 June 2017 under the title “With at least 70 Union votes – Bundestag approves ‘marriage for all’”. “Chancellor *Angela Merkel* was not one of them. For her, the protection under Article 6 of the Basic Law includes marriage between a man and a woman.”

In contrast, EU member states from the Roman Catholic and Christian-Orthodox cultural areas such as Italy, Romania, Greece and Cyprus, but also practically all EU countries in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Croatia) have introduced registered partnerships for same-sex couples, but not marriage.<sup>4</sup> Apart from Switzerland, in no other country could the people decide on this – except in Croatia: there, on 1 December 2013, two-thirds of the voters voted in favour of writing marriage into the con-

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**"Marriage for all?"**

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stitution as a union between a man and a woman.<sup>5</sup>

Despite pressure from Brussels, a considerable number of EU member states are sticking to marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Of our neighbouring states, two (Germany and Austria) have only recently spoken out in favour of "opening up" marriage, Italy is sticking to marriage between a man and a woman, and Prince *Hans-Adam II* of Liechtenstein caused quite a stir in the press in February this year when he declared that "in principle, he has nothing against the demand for marriage for all, as long as it does not involve the adoption of children". Liechtenstein does know the registered partnership, without adoption rights and without sperm donation, but not marriage for all.<sup>6</sup>

**Sperm donation for lesbian couples in violation of the constitution**

The most controversial point of the draft law is that lesbian couples would have legal access to sperm donation. The referendum committees focus on this point: "In this way, <marriage for all> violates Article 119 of the Federal Constitution. This article allows medically assisted procreation even for heterosexual couples only in case of infertility or the risk of a serious illness, indeed. To classify lesbian couples as infertile contradicts all valid definitions." (Voting booklet, p. 26)

On 14 June 2015, a majority of the voters approved the new Article 119 paragraph 2c of the Federal Constitution on reproductive medicine, trusting in the narrowly defined conditions for legally regulated sperm donations for the benefit of married couples (consisting of a man and a woman according to the Swiss understanding of the law). The Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) reminded parliament of the clear legal situation with regard to "marriage for all": The exclusion of same-sex couples from reproductive procedures is based directly on the Federal Constitution, "since the constitutional concept of infertility can only be applicable to heterosexual couples". Therefore, "access to reproductive medicine for same-sex married couples requires a constitutional amendment in any case".<sup>7</sup>

The National Council's Legal Affairs Committee initially concluded to postpone "sensitive points" such as "access to reproductive medicine" until later to avoid the failure of the proposal in the referendum.<sup>8</sup>

In the course of the parliamentary debates, however, Parliament invalidated its own "salami-slicing" by packing sperm donation for lesbian couples into the referendum proposal, contrary to the FOJ's instruction on the law. To achieve this, the corresponding articles 16, 23 and 24 in the

Reproductive Medicine Act (RMA) are to be reformulated, for example Art. 24 para. 3 introductory sentence: "Concerning the woman for whom the donated sperm cells are used and her husband or wife, the following data is to be recorded:[...]" (Voting booklet, p. 37; emphasis mw)

In addition, the referendum committee under the title "Child welfare is neglected": "Sperm donation is being transformed from an exceptional medical case into the legal rule – without consideration of the consequences for the children. [...] Children need role models of both sexes – but sperm donation for lesbian couples will deny them a father by law." (Voting booklet, p. 27)

**Oocyte donation already on the agenda – will surrogate motherhood be next?**

Under the heading "Strictly regulated reproductive medicine", the Federal Council asserts: "The bill does not schedule any further adjustments in reproductive medicine. Anonymous sperm donation, oocyte donation and surrogate motherhood remain prohibited for all couples." (Voting booklet, p. 29) This is how the Federal Constitution reads:

*BV Art. 119 para. 2 d. The donation of embryos and all forms of surrogate motherhood are unlawful.*

But won't this lead to male couples being put at a disadvantage compared to female couples? At least this is the argument the referendum committees fear: "By unconstitutionally reinterpreting 'infertility' in the bill as 'unfulfilled desire to have children', other groups (single people, gay couples) will also be able to refer to their unfulfilled desire to have children in the future. Calls for oocyte donation and ethically questionable surrogate motherhood are likely to follow soon." (Voting booklet, p. 27)

Anyone who says otherwise is lying. Because even before the vote on 26 September, a parliamentary initiative was submitted to the National Council – tactically unwise – with the heading: "Finally legalising oocyte donation in Switzerland now as well!"<sup>9</sup> According to the arguments: "The donation of sperm cells is permitted [...]. *Most recently, parliament also legalised access to sperm banks for lesbian couples as part of its approving of 'marriage for all'.*" (emphasis mw. The initiators seem to have "forgotten" that this will be finally decided by the sovereign). And there we have the "argument" that it is discriminatory to allow sperm donation while banning oocyte donation, "even though there are no valid reasons to distinguish between the two types of gametes".<sup>10</sup>

The next step, legalisation of surrogate motherhood – whereby a woman is used to bear a child for two men – might be a bit more difficult in the age of female supremacy. But we'd better not bet on it.

Those who aim at breaking down all that is reliable and connecting between people, both on a small scale (family) and on a large scale (sovereign nation-state), may not even refrain from doing so.

Fortunately, in Switzerland the people can decide on the law – even on 26 September 2021.

**Preserve marriage and family as the foundation of society**

*BV Art. 14 right to marriage and family  
The right to marriage and family is guaranteed.*

Although the Constitution does not explicitly mention that Article 14 means marriage of a man and a woman, this has always been clear from a legal point of view and from the substance. Thus, the referendum committees state: "The Federal Supreme Court and the Federal Council have always interpreted the right to marriage as a permanent union of a woman and a man (Article 14 of the Federal Constitution). Only the union of a man and a woman has in itself the capacity to pass on life, which is why it must be protected as a central cornerstone of society and the state. Introducing 'marriage for all' with a mere amendment to the law is clearly unconstitutional." (Voting Booklet, p. 26)

Contrary to the general understanding of the law, the Federal Office of Justice (FOJ) explained to parliament why an amendment to the law would do the trick. Its reasoning: The legislator was "not prevented by Article 14 of the Federal Constitution from relying on its legislative competence under civil law to open up the legal institution of marriage to persons of the same sex". Therefore, this is possible with an amendment of the law, "a revision of the constitution is not necessary for this".<sup>11</sup> Do you understand that? It is not really to be understood either.

The odd legal opinion of the FOJ was subsequently adopted by the National Council's Committee, the Federal Council and finally the majority in the National Council and the Council of States. What they did not say, but everyone knows: a rejection in the referendum is more likely if, in addition to the people's majority, the majority of the cantons must be reached (this is the case with constitutional amendments).

However, there are also parliamentarians who oppose the "opening up" of the concept of marriage. A considerable number of CVP politicians in the National Council and the Council of States voted against marriage for all. At least some of them – who, despite the anaemic new name of their party ("Die Mitte" The Middle), still feel like Christian democrats – still stand by it and, according to their own statements, will put a No in the ballot box.<sup>12</sup>

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# Does the “99 per cent initiative” fit into Switzerland’s federal tax system?

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

On 26 September, we will vote on a popular initiative that wants to change our tax law. It aims at taxing capital “more fairly” throughout Switzerland and thus relieving 99 per cent of the population. In 1874, almost 150 years ago, voters approved the Federal Constitution, the broad guidelines of which are still valid today. The right of referendum was new. A few years later, the right of initiative was added, enabling citizens to propose amendments to the constitution and put them to a vote. Since then, more than 600 plebiscites have taken place at the federal level. Something has been standing out in the long time to the present: There are areas of law that are particularly frequent subjects of plebiscites. These include agriculture and taxes. We have seen quite a few “agricultural votes” in recent years, and now there will be another “tax vote” on 26 September. (Since World War II, there have been 55 votes on public finance issues at the federal level alone, many of which ended in a nay vote.)<sup>1</sup>

There is a peculiarity to tax referenda that must be kept in mind: The pronounced fiscal federalism, which exists in such a way only in Switzerland. Each of the 26 cantons has its distinct tax sovereignty, as the lawyers call it. This means that each canton has the independent right to levy taxes. This inevitably leads to substantial differences and to tax competition (which is mitigated by financial equalisation). The com-

munes also levy their own taxes within the framework of communal autonomy. For them, there is a financial equalisation within the canton.

Voters vote on all major expenditures as well as on taxes in their canton and commune.

The Confederation, on the other hand, does not have the right to levy taxes independently. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Confederation financed itself through customs duties alone. When these were no longer sufficient, in a referendum the citizens provisionally assigned the right to levy taxes to the Confederation. The first time this happened was in the middle of World War I. This right had to be renewed every few years – each time by means of a plebiscite. The federal financial regulations (with today’s direct federal tax and value added tax) has been anchored in the constitution since 1958. But it is limited in time as well. This means that the two federal taxes must be confirmed by the people as a whole every few years. Initially, this was done every five years, later at longer intervals. The last two votes took place in 2004 and 2018. The next one will follow in 2035. (In addition, tax rate and tax tariffs are directly included in the federal constitution. For even a small tax increase of, say, 0.1 per cent, a constitutional amendment and the approval of the electorate is needed). – Once again, the cantons have the actual tax sovereignty in Switzerland. This is the background to the following remarks.



Wüthrich, Werner. *Wirtschaft und direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz*, 2020, Verlag Zeit-Fragen Zürich; ISBN: 978-3-909234-24-0. The book can be ordered at: Zeit-Fragen, Redaktion und Verlag, Postfach 8044 Zürich; E-Mail: [redaktion@zeit-fragen.ch](mailto:redaktion@zeit-fragen.ch); SFr. 36,00

## Now let us look at the upcoming tax vote

The Young Socialists have submitted this popular initiative (“Relieve wages, tax capital fairly”). The demand is that, in Switzerland, income from capital (es-

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## “Marriage for all?”

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In the National Council debate of 3 June 2020, Pirmin Schwander (SVP SZ), among others, voiced what should appeal to many people in the country: “We are clearly of the opinion that the current constitutional term means marriage between a man and a woman. In our opinion, we cannot simply remove and discuss this at the level of law and say: Yes, now it's just different! In our opinion, there is no public discourse today that indicates that an open concept of marriage has crystallised in Switzerland since the adoption of the Constitution.”

The understanding of marriage as a cohabitation of a man and a woman is anchored in a large part of the population. In a recent survey by *Tamedia* (“Tages-Anzeiger” of 13 August 2021), more than 60 per cent of Swiss respondents said they would vote “yes” or “rather yes” to “marriage for all”. Most people have nothing

against cohabitation per se: everyone can decide for him/herself how they want to live. But the fact that children are allowed to grow up with a father and a mother whenever possible – and the term “marriage” is connected with this – is something we should not move away from. •

<sup>1</sup> 13.468 *Parlamentarische Initiative Ehe für alle*. (13.468 Parliamentary Initiative Marriage for All.) Submitted to the National Council by Green Liberal parliamentary group (Kathrin Bertschy) on 5 December 2013

<sup>2</sup> Federal Office of Justice FOJ. 13.468 *Parlamentarische Initiative Nationalrat (Fraktion GL) Ehe für alle. Auslegung betreffend die Auswirkungen der Öffnung der Ehe in den verschiedenen Rechtsbereichen* [13.468 Parliamentary initiative National Council (GL parliamentary group) Marriage for all. Analysis of the effects of opening up marriage in the various areas of law] of 27 March 2018. Appendix 1: Tabellarische Übersicht “Ehe und eingetragene Partnerschaft”: Wichtigste Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede (Tabular overview “Marriage and registered partnership”: most important similarities and differences)

<sup>3</sup> “In welchen EU-Ländern gibt es die Homo-Ehe?” (Which EU countries have gay marriage?) In: *Euronews* of 13 July 2017

<sup>4</sup> Hardegger, Angelika. “Die Ehe für alle auf einen Blick”. (Marriage for all at a glance) In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 28 July 2021

<sup>5</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleichgeschlechtliche\\_Ehe#Kroatien](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleichgeschlechtliche_Ehe#Kroatien)

<sup>6</sup> Meier, Günther. “Der Fürst provoziert Schwule und Lesben” (The Prince provokes gays and lesbians). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 18 February 2021

<sup>7</sup> Federal Office of Justice FOJ. 13.468 *Parliamentary Initiative National Council* (GL parliamentary group) Ehe für alle. (Marriage for all) Analysis, p. 5

<sup>8</sup> “Ein weiterer Schritt in Richtung Ehe für alle” (Another step towards marriage for all). *Media release* of the Committee for Legal Affairs of the National Council of 6 July 2018; in the same spirit: *media release* of the Federal Council of 29 January 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *Parliamentary initiative* 21.421 of 17 March 2021

<sup>10</sup> *Parliamentary initiative* 21.421 of 17 March 2021

<sup>11</sup> Federal Office of Justice FOJ. 13.468 *Parliamentary initiative National Council* (GL parliamentary group) “Ehe für alle. Auslegung betreffend die Auswirkungen der Öffnung der Ehe in den verschiedenen Rechtsbereichen” (Marriage for all. Analysis of the effects of opening up marriage in the various areas of law) of 27 March 2018, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Odermatt, Marcel. “Feiglänge im Bundeshaus” (Cowards in the Federal Parliament). In: *Weltwoche* of 2 July 2021

**"Does the '99 per cent initiative' ..."**

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pecially interest and dividends) above a certain limit (to be determined by parliament) be taxed at double the rate. The additional revenue of about 10 billion francs is to be used for social purposes.

The initiators calculate that only one per cent of taxpayers would be affected, while 99 per cent would be relieved. – The arguments for or against are not to be listed here. That is done in detail in the media. Below, the focus is on the question of whether this initiative fits into Switzerland's tax system.

**Would the direct federal tax be affected?**

This would probably not be the case, because the highly progressive federal tax is capped. Article 123 a) of the Federal Constitution states: "The Confederation may levy a direct tax a) of not more than 11.5 per cent on the income of natural persons." [...]

**Would the cantons be affected?**

Yes – they would have to implement the demands of the initiative in their tax laws. It is quite possible that their population would not accept the intervention from above in their tax sovereignty. – A look back at similar popular initiatives in the last hundred years would suggest this conclusion.

**One hundred years ago**

In 1921, parliament proposed to extend the war tax until the debts from World War I would have been paid off. The Social Democrats (SP) did not agree. They launched a popular initiative "For the levying of a one-off wealth tax" on the rich as an alternative to the official policy. The proceeds of the tax – according to the SP – should be used not only to pay off the war debts but also for social purposes. The working class had been hit hardest by the misery, the privations and problems of the war. Quite a few Swiss had also profited from the war (the so-called "war profiteers"), and it would have been more than justified that especially the rich and the profiteers should have to pay the war debts. The rate of the proposed levy was high. Specifically, rich people with assets worth about 10 million francs today would have had to pay a one-time levy of 20 per cent of that amount, and even richer people would have had to pay considerably more. At that time, there were not so many "rich" people. A very small minority of just six per mille of taxpayers would have been affected by this tax, and a majority of 99.4 per cent was to be substantially relieved.

**Fairer and more sensible: popular initiative  
"Micro-tax on cashless payment transactions"**

www. Signatures are currently being collected for a popular initiative that aims at establishing a micro-tax. All online payments and transfers are to be taxed anonymously at a low rate of maximum 5 per mille (0.05 per mille in the first year). As explained by the initiator, Professor *Marc Chesney*, a financial scientist at the University of Zurich, this should initially generate at least 10 billion francs or more. Gradually, this is to replace the federal taxes (value-added tax, direct federal tax and stamp duty), which are to be reduced accordingly, and also the

cantons are to be taken into account. In this way, the booming financial sector is to be more involved in the financing of the commonwealth. The idea is impressively simple and is also supported by banking circles. – In any case, this tax does not affect the tax sovereignty of the cantons. (cf. *Martin Neff*, Chief Economist *Raiffeisen*. "The power is in the microcosm. Why the micro-tax initiative very much deserves support." In: *Current Concerns* No. 14 of 22 June 2021; cf. also *Raiffeisen Economic Research*; *economic-research@raiffeisen.ch*)

Feelings ran high in the referendum campaign. The Sunday of 3 December 1922 was to go down in the history of direct democracy. 89 per cent – almost all eligible voters – went to the polls! Such a high turnout has never been achieved again to date. Almost 90 per cent of those who voted rejected the popular initiative. Large sections of the workers voted no. At that time, the SP had a voter share of about 30 per cent. The social problems after the war were indeed great; however, this vote showed that most workers were not prepared to engage in radical "class struggle" through plebiscites. The reflex to the massive encroachment on the tax sovereignty of the cantons must have played a role. Yet there were plebiscites on how to repay war debts also after World War II.

**... in more recent times**

In 1973, the *Landesring der Unabhängigen* (National Ring of Independents LdU, founded by *Gottlieb Duttweiler*, who was equally the founder of *Migros*) launched the popular initiative "for fairer taxation and the abolition of tax privileges" in the form of a general proposal. The initiators wanted to introduce a uniform tax system throughout Switzerland. A federal tax on the income and assets of natural persons and on the earnings and capital of companies was to replace the cantonal taxes. The cantons would participate in the federal tax in proportion to their financial needs. Inheritance tax would also be regulated uniformly. The many opponents of the initiative accused this of wanting to turn the federal structure of the Swiss state upside down and introduce a centralist system. – A clear majority of those who voted also saw it that way and rejected the initiative in 1976, and almost all the cantons also said nay.

In 1977, the Social Democrats submitted the popular initiative "For a wealth tax". The pivotal sentence was: "The Confederation shall ensure that incomes above 100,000 francs are subject to a uniform minimum tax throughout Switzer-

land." The people and all the cantons rejected this.

2010: The Social Democrats' "Fiscal Justice Initiative" demanded uniform minimum taxation of high incomes and assets throughout Switzerland. 58.5 per cent of voters and most cantons rejected it.

In 2014, the people rejected the SP's initiative "Stop tax privileges for millionaires (abolish lump-sum taxation throughout Switzerland)" with 59 per cent of nays. (Shortly before, the people had abolished this type of taxation in the canton of Zurich).

In 2015, the Social Democrats submitted the initiative for a new federal tax that wanted to tax "inheritances worth millions" uniformly and also retroactively. The sovereign rejected this with over 70 per cent of nays. In contrast, most cantons have abolished inheritance tax for direct descendants and spouses in recent years because the inherited assets were already taxed once as income and assets within the family.

All the popular initiatives depicted above have one thing in common. They intended to intervene to a greater or lesser extent in the tax sovereignty and thus the sovereignty of the cantons, and enforce materially uniform regulations. In doing so, they triggered reflexive resistance, even when there were factual reasons for an aye vote. It was often a question of freedom before "justice". – To date, none of these initiatives has found a majority among the people. The Young Socialists' initiative of 26 September will probably fare no better.

(For more details, see the author's book published by *Zeit-Fragen* in 2020: *Wirtschaft und direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz – Economy and Direct Democracy in Switzerland*). •

<sup>1</sup> *admin.ch*, Chronologie Volksabstimmungen (Chronology of popular votes); Linder, Wolf et al. *Handbuch der eidgenössischen Volksabstimmungen 1848–2007* (Compendium of Confederate Referenda 1848–2007), Bern 2010

# 15 years of “BioKräuterei Oberhavel” – a successful model

Interview with Traudel and Matthias Anders

*Current Concerns: You and your wife are the founders of the “BioKräuterei Oberhavel”. How do two teachers, already fully occupied with their jobs, manage to set up and maintain a functioning farm?*

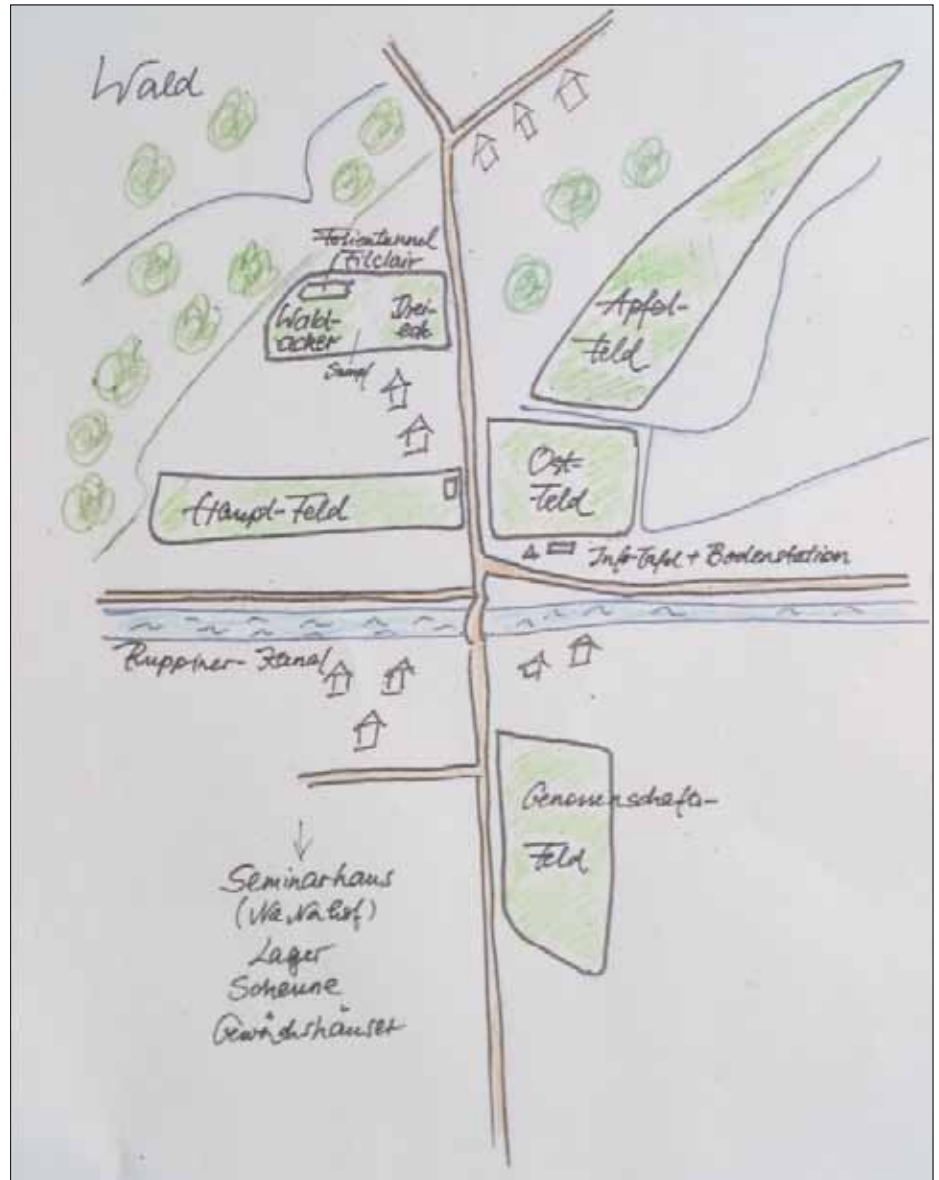
*Matthias and Traudel Anders: In 2006 we founded the BioKräuterei with a not so clearly outlined idea. As teachers in the vocational school sector, we saw many trainees who were placed in a so-called state-supported measure as part of the dual training instead of in a farm and were treated as second-class trainees. The products of this measure did not have to stand up to the customers and the level of requirements was at the lower level. This increased discouragement for many trainees, and we wanted to support young people with a training facility in “real time mode”.*

In addition, we often found the situation in the education system unsatisfactory, as many bureaucratic measures distracted from what was actually happening in education. We found building a meaningful alternative rather relieving.

At the same time, we saw that there were hardly any small farms in Brandenburg. Large-scale industrial agriculture had clearly taken over and still does. Since we had little capital available and did not want to get into debt, we decided to start with high-quality organic herb cultivation.

*Today you are more than just a single farm. How is the organic herb farm structured, how big is it, how many employees do you have? What kind of organisation is necessary?*

In 2006 we bought two hectares of land and registered the farm as a sole proprietorship. In the meantime, we cultivate seven hectares and employ five gardeners, two trainees and three part-time workers. In 2012, we founded a cooperative, the “BioAnbau Oberhavel eG”. With the cooperative capital, we were able to build two greenhouses to cherish our own young plants. The BioKräuterei rents the greenhouses from the cooperative, which has 100 members by now. The establishment of a farm was and is also a prerequisite for being allowed to fence in arable land, drill wells and erect smaller buildings and construction trailers. Relatively soon we were asked to show a profit for tax purposes in order not to lose our classification as an agricultural enterprise. With the help of initially many voluntary helpers and a production and marketing strategy tailored to each other, it was possible for the farm to slowly become self-



*The different plants of the organic herb farm. The apple field is the most recent joint action: up to a hundred apple trees are to be planted here to improve the soil structure, create a favourable small-scale ecological climate – high trunks are important carbon stores and, thanks to deep roots, play an important role during dry phases.*

*(picture BioKräuterei Oberhavel)*

supporting and for more employees to be taken on.

*You have the word “organic” in your name, moreover you work according to the methods of “regenerative agriculture”. What do you mean by this and where does it come from?*

From the beginning, we joined an organic farming association of smaller farms in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The few small farms that exist in Brandenburg are mostly organically certified farms. At the same time, we have become certified organic according

to EU guidelines. After the heavy rain disaster of 2017, we intensively looked into regenerative agriculture, as our soils suffered a lot from the floods. For up to half a year, the soils were under a 20 to 30 cm layer of water, which meant that the entire soil life, including earthworms, was severely damaged. Soil damaged in this way is unable to provide sufficient nutrients for crops to grow.

With organic farming, which we have practised since the foundation of the farm, we have cultivated a high level of biodiversity and have not used mineral ferti-

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**"15 years of 'BioKräuterei ..."**

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lisers and synthetic chemical pesticides. We have approached the humus build-up of the poor Brandenburg soil with green manure, compost applications and other approved organic fertilisers. The heavy rainfall event in 2017 (300 litres of rain per square metre in 24 hours) showed us two things: on the one hand, the structure of the soil was severely damaged by the "water roller"; on the other hand, this damage was significantly less in the densely vegetated green manure areas. But it also showed us that we had not managed to build up the soil optimally with the previous cultivation method. This referred not only to its ability to let water through, but also to weed pressure, soil structure and more.

*At that time, you started regenerative agriculture. Can you briefly explain what the layperson must imagine by this?*

Regenerative agriculture is a method of cultivation that has come to Europe mainly from Anglo-Saxon agriculture (W. Albrecht, N. Kinsey, C. Jones, E.R. Ingham and others).

Europe, although it also had forerunners here (A. Thaeer, A. Petersen, E. Henning and others). Dietmar Näser, Friedrich Wenz and Ingrid Hörner were responsible for its dissemination and further development here.

In 2016, we met Dietmar Näser during a training course on regenerative agriculture at an organic farm field day. Regener-



*Soil revitalisation through microorganisms with a homemade deep loosener – old, light tractor with new tools. (picture BioKräuterei Oberhavel)*

ative agriculture focuses above all on soil life and soil structure, i.e. exactly what was clearly damaged in our area after the heavy rain disaster. In these respects, regenerative agriculture goes beyond "normal" organic farming, although organic farming also has its beginnings. The consistent involvement of soil life and the inclusion of the interaction between plant roots and their microbial partners in the soil are the hallmarks of regenerative agriculture and at the same time show its potential. In order to successfully feed a plant, the soil life is specifically activat-

ed, which in turn feeds the plant. The soil is thus not an empty vessel into which is "fertilised" what the plant extracts according to the nutrient analysis. Over-fertilisation and plant diseases can thus be avoided, a better humus layer can be built up and the water-holding capacity can be increased. The build-up of humus is always accompanied by the binding of CO<sub>2</sub> in the soil. In addition, the content of health-promoting minerals and other secondary plant substances in the plant is increased.

In 2018, we had an exceptional harvest after the first application of this approach. The dry summers in subsequent years present us with further challenges, and we are glad that we have been able to improve the soil conditions.

*How does this differ from the traditional treatment and cultivation of the soil with fertilisers, as developed by the German chemist Justus von Liebig?*

Fertilisation according to Liebig only considers the mineral nutrient conditions in the soil ("law of the minimum"), i.e., the missing nutrients are added. The consideration of soil life plays no role. In the long term, however, this unfortunately leads in many cases (see above) to the degradation of the humus layer and increases the susceptibility of the plants to pests.

*How do you distribute your products?*

In nearby Berlin, we first offered our products – herbs, wild herbs, edible flowers – to interested market visitors at three Berlin weekly markets. The market customers still appreciate our expanded range of products. The initial supply to organic wholesalers did not add enough value; given our high biodiversity of 140 crops, wholesalers were not a suitable partner.

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*Within the framework of the community supported agriculture, the BioKräuterei regularly organises so-called participatory days: After all, the members are not only consumers, but also in solidarity with the production process. On such days, larger projects are tackled. The participants' reactions show that they find this work in the fresh air not only instructive and satisfying, but also very much appreciate the social contacts and the togetherness. (picture BioKräuterei Oberhavel)*



**"15 years of 'BioKräuterei ..."**

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We then expanded the supply to individual organic shops, organic chains and the upmarket gastronomy. This was successful, but was also always associated with an indeterminate purchase volume and required a logistical effort. Therefore, in 2015 we decided to start with a CSA (*community supported agriculture*), also called *SOLAWI (solidarity agriculture)* or "contract farming". In the beginning, we delivered to 65 buyers (shares), today to 210 buyers (shares). Together with the supply to the markets, this forms the distribution of our products.

*What is meant by "solidarity" in your understanding? In which ideological tradition do you see yourself with this term? Do you see yourself as part of the green organic movement?*

The idea of the marketing method known in Germany as "solidarity agriculture" goes back to a Japanese initiative in the 1960s. Concerned mothers no longer wanted their children to eat conventional, contaminated food. They made an agreement with a farmer who they guaranteed to buy all his produce, on one condition: He was not allowed to use synthetic pesticides. The first "Teikei" (meaning partnership-cooperation) was thus born. Around the same time, similar initiatives developed in Europe. In 1978, the cooperative "Les Jardins de Cocagne" in Geneva was founded according to the same principle and called itself "contract farming". In 1985, the idea reached the USA and Canada as well as the UK, where it became known as "community supported agriculture" (CSA). In France, AMAP (*associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne*) was founded with the same aim.

The farms and institutions are not uniform; there are cooperatives, associations, family businesses, sole proprietorships and civil law partnerships. But fundamental to all of them is the connection between producers, growers and consumers. The consumers are "in solidarity" with the producers, the harvest is shared, i.e., surpluses are distributed, but also the consequences of a failed harvest are borne by

Weeds are often bioindicators (indicator plants), they give clues about the condition of the soil: about soil compaction, about soil life, also about the lack of certain minerals. For example, we succeeded in driving out a tenacious weed (couch grass) through soil revitalisation measures and the addition of molasses (sugar) – it has sweet-tasting, i.e., sugar-containing roots (!) – previously we had tried this for ten years in vain with mechanical measures.

the consumers. It is not a question of a specific form of organisation, but rather of consumers "moving closer" to the food produced in their environment or region, experiencing the effects of the weather more closely, and thus learning to value their food more again.

After the storms of 2017, we had a bad harvest and the CSA/SOLAWI, our cooperative and friends helped us a lot.

The planning and production for a group of participants that is already determined before the season is precise, and it also prevents a surplus economy, which unfortunately can be found again and again in agriculture.

The *BioKräuterei* is part of a "movement" in that it pursues a common concern with many people and businesses around the world: to produce healthy food for people's nutrition in an environmentally friendly way through resource-conserving cultivation.

*The BioKräuterei works entirely without pesticides and without synthetic chemical fertilisation. In your opinion and experience, could larger farms also work with the method of "regenerative agriculture"? Is this not something that can only work on small farms like yours?*

We do not use pesticides and "chemicals" as the terms are commonly understood; our approach is to strengthen the soil and plants so that they are not attacked by insect pests, for example, or, if they are attacked, they can fight them off. Plant diseases and insect infestations are always an indicator that there is a deficiency or surplus of, for example, nitrate in the soil. For example, we have been able to successfully control potato beetles with a clay meal solution. However, as in medicine, it is not always just one agent, the causative agent or the remedy, but a number of factors must always be taken into account to achieve plant health. For example, the condition of the soil in question, i.e. the region, the location, the history of the soil and/or the weather and thus the climate must be taken into account.

Many larger farms are turning to regenerative agriculture, especially after the last dry summer years. We have met farms with up to 5,000 hectares in seminars. Soil fatigue can no longer be stopped by conventional methods of fertilisation, and the increasing development of resistance to pesticides and herbicides is also forcing many farmers to rethink. Fundamen-



*Brochure about the development and the different areas and concepts of the farm. It can be ordered at BioKräuterei Oberhavel, Hans-Loch-Str. 14, 16515 Oranienburg, Tel.: +49 (0)3301-575505 or info@biokrauterei.de.*

tally, however, it is questionable whether the problems can be brought under control by large-scale monoculture farming. The *World Agricultural Report* of 2009 shows – with reference to Swiss structures, by the way – that small-scale agriculture produces more productively, healthier and, above all, more sustainably than monoculture and large-scale plantation farming. This makes small-scale agriculture ground-breaking for the world food situation.

*So, would your model also be a model for how society as a whole could eventually manage without "chemicals"?*

A high level of biodiversity, the development of humus-rich soils, the avoidance of surplus farming and monocultures, and the production of nutrient-rich food can make the use of pesticides, as they are commonly understood, superfluous. Incidentally, this is also what the renowned Swiss FiBL (*Research Institute of Organic Agriculture*) reports in its media release of 2 July 2019: "Rapid success in reducing pesticide pollution is possible. However, a future without pesticide pollution needs other, costly but feasible solutions in the agroecosystem." Today's techniques allow "not only organic farming to improve its practices today, but also to envisage the whole of Swiss agriculture going without herbicides by 2025."

# The “small world” in the classroom

## What the devastation of war and economic hardship entail

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

*In many school classes today, children are gathered from all over the world. Some families have been here for generations, others only recently. For teachers, the challenging task arises of bringing their students together and helping them to become rooted in their current homeland without losing the emotional connection to their country of origin.*

### From Greece, Spain, Kosovo, Iraq or Peru

The summer holidays are over. The pupils are back in their classrooms. Full of expectation and with many good intentions of what they want to do well or even better in the new school year. A few days before, many of them had been far away: in Greece, Spain, Kosovo, Iraq or even Peru, with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, as far as the current situation allowed. A “small world” in our classroom! Most of these children and young people were born here. Among them are Muslims, Jews or even Hindus, others are Christians or do not belong to any religious community. This has been the case for a long time. This gives us moving insights into the lives of families.

### What should we do?

I think of *Lorenzo*, for example, and wonder what happened to him. He had great difficulties in learning and did not get along with the children. His example shows many problems that parents who come to us from a different cultural background can be confronted with. Lorenzo would always have liked to know and be able to do everything already. He found it difficult to sit down and learn the spelling of words laboriously. Instead, he shifted his activity to disruptive actions in class, with which he disturbed the more diligent and successful classmates in their learning. He often adopted a disrespectful tone towards us adults and did not listen to our reflections. The parents were also unhappy and at a loss. He also did not know what to do with his free time. He admired colleagues who hung around in their free time and became more and more oriented towards them. We kept asking ourselves how he could take a better path and could count on the support of his parents.

### Honest, hardworking people who master their lives

Lorenzo's mother was Croatian but grew up in Bosnia, his father came from Italy. He came to Switzerland from Calabria at the age of sixteen to look for work. Since then, he has worked in the construction industry. During the short holidays, he tries to recover

from his demanding, harsh job. Every year, the family visits one of their home countries in turn. Lorenzo's mother had a job in the hospitality industry, which was also a tough job, but she liked it. Both were honest, hard-working people who managed their lives. The father could only rarely take part in the parent-teacher meetings, but the mother included him in all pending issues.

### She had no other choice

I quickly got into good contact with her, and so on one occasion she told me the complicated path that had led her to Switzerland:

“My mother had worked in Switzerland before I was born. When she was pregnant with me, the family returned to Bosnia. I was born there. My father soon went back to Switzerland and my mother also followed him a year later. My older brother and I lived with our grandmother from then on. She was a strict woman. But she gave us a lot of love and was like a second mother to us. I like to think of her. After nine months, our mother came back to Bosnia for three months at a time. We were always happy. The situation with us children depressed her very much, she missed us. Today I can understand how bad it must have been for her. But the economic situation in our country left her no other choice.”

### We were proud to be Yugoslavs

A Swiss friendly family helped her to get a permit so that we could move to Switzerland to live with her. That's why I spent my first years of school there. When my younger sister was born in 1983, we children returned to Bosnia with our mother. In the meantime, she had saved some money, which she used to open a small restaurant in our home country. We were happy to be home again, but missed our father very much. Despite everything, I have good memories of that time in Bosnia. We were Catholic, but had many Muslim friends. That wasn't a problem then, you were just friends with each other, no matter what religion you belonged to. We were proud to be Yugoslavs. When *Josip Tito* died in 1980, it was a great loss for our country. I attended school in Bosnia until 1989.

### If I had listened to my mother ...

Actually, my mother would have liked me to work in the restaurant with her. But that didn't suit me. Out of defiance and youthful carelessness, I decided to go to Switzerland. So, at the age of 17, I came back to the country where I had spent the first years of my life. I worked in different restaurants and hotels. It was a hard time for me. I often wished I had listened to my moth-

er. I worked for nine months at a time, then returned home. After three months, I went to Switzerland for another season. In the meantime, my mother had built up an existence for all of us in Sarajevo. Together with what my father sent us from Switzerland, we had enough money and could afford a lot. That was a nice time.

### Within a few hours we lost everything

Then the first Bosnian war broke out in 1991. We tried to flee to Croatia, where we originally came from. We were Croats and Catholic, but with our Serbian family name we were quickly classified as undesirable Serbs. So, we returned to Bosnia. Then, for a short time, some peace returned to our lives. In 1993, the second war broke out. Within a few hours we lost everything we had built up, for which my family had worked hard and had done without a lot. That was on 3 June 1993! We gathered in the church. I didn't have anything with me. I remember how I froze and the priest gave me his blue jacket. We all hoped that it would soon be over. At that time, we had taken in 20 refugees in our house, who had now also lost everything. But then we were told that it was much too dangerous to stay here, we had to leave.

### Religion and ethnicity were not important

We received support from friends, neighbours and acquaintances; our religion and ethnicity did not matter. For example, there was a very poor Roma of Muslim faith. He had often asked for food from us in the restaurant in the past and my mother had always given him something. Now it was he who saved our lives because he urged my mother to leave immediately. We would have been shot otherwise. We hurriedly gathered what we found and wanted to take with us. By ten o'clock in the morning we had packed everything we absolutely needed into a car. My mother fled together with my grandmother and my little sister. There was no more room for my grandfather, my brother and me, so we fled on foot. My mother was very afraid for us. But we found each other again, happy to be alive. When it seemed possible, we risked returning home again. But in the meantime, there had been a fire in our house. My mother had hoped to find something in the ruins, because she had hidden silver and photos in the cellar.

### Our life's dream was destroyed

In the meantime, looters had taken everything that was usable in our house. Of course, there were those who took advan-

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**"The 'small world' in the classroom"**

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tage of our emergency situation. That's just the way it is in war! But later we experienced something wonderful. We got our photos back through the Red Cross. A teacher of mine, she was Muslim, had taken these photo albums and given them to the Red Cross. So at least we got back some memories of our wonderful time. On the way, we met a Roma woman whom we had always supported. Now it was she who tried to comfort us. 'Now we are all poor', she said. So, we received gifts from many people, even if we didn't know them. People helped each other. Finally, we fled to Croatia in a lorry. A very difficult time followed for all of us. My father was still working in Switzerland. We were glad that at least he was safe, but now we were completely on our own.

**"I wanted to do everything well with my son"**

That's why we finally decided to join him in Switzerland. That was in 1994. I worked in canteens and restaurants. That's where I met my present husband. That was the most beautiful reward for the difficulties I had had! We soon got engaged and married. It was a very small wedding celebration, not as it had been customary at home in the past. A year later our son was born. I wanted to make everything good with him. After all the years of deprivation, fear and despair, I wanted to have a good time now. So, I fulfilled all his wishes and gave in to his insistence in all respects. Today I know that this was not good, but he should not be burdened by my history. My mother kept pointing out to me that I was spoiling my son too much. I did not hear that. But now I have to do everything 180 degrees differently, just like my mother always told me! Only then will he have a chance."

Her story touched me. I also understood better why Lorenzo struggled so much to tackle his tasks in life constructively. This conversation became an important milestone in our collaboration.

**Devastating life situations through no fault of their own**

Lorenzo's example is just one of many. They mirror the situation in our world. For most of the children and young people I remember, there were serious reasons that had forced their parents or grandparents to leave their homeland. For no one turns his back on his homeland voluntarily and with a light heart. Whether it is wars that violate international law or a country that becomes the theatre of proxy wars for the strategic interests of major powers or the shameless exploitation of mineral resources that drives people into hunger and misery, for many, fleeing to Europe is the last

**"Our efforts must be based on respect for the cultural achievements of the different countries that make up our 'little world' in the classroom. In this way, it can become a learning field how we can meet and learn from each other in equality and mutual respect."**

resort out of a devastating living situation that is not their own fault.

**Seeking common ground**

Often, however, life in their place of refuge is not easy. Not only the language, but also the foreign cultural customs and social co-existence can be very challenging. Those who try to integrate these families must also be aware of this. Often the exoticism is emphasised, the life of the foreigners that is different from our culture. But this is not very helpful. The main weight must not be on emphasising the otherness, but we must look for what we have in common. That which unites all people, such as concern for the well-being of the family and children, the desire for peaceful coexistence, the desire for meaningful work, and so on.

**Mutual respect**

Our efforts must be based on respect for the cultural achievements of the different countries that make up our "little world" in the classroom. In this way, it can become a learning field how we can meet and learn from each other in equality and mutual respect. In the process, it may well be that we are confronted with completely foreign ways of reacting and behaving, which in some cases are also not compatible with our legal system. It is then up to these children and young people, and possibly also to their parents, to respect our basic rules. This paves the way for them to acquire the tools they need for doing later on development work in their country of origin and to show other people there the basics of how to be able to master life.

**Danger of alienating oneself from one's own culture**

But we have to be aware, especially nowadays, that many of these families have a cultural background that we can learn from, especially when it comes to social life. Lorenzo's mother had mentioned a problem that many families know in a similar way. Their children begin to one-sidedly admire the fashionable trends of current European culture and, against the background of a rather patriarchal orientation of their own culture, they can conclude that no rules apply here and what would never be possible at home is allowed. Their parents experience that their own children are alienated from their culture and they do not dare to say anything

against it, but also do not understand why in our country children are allowed almost everything and why children often show little respect for their parents. Here we would do well to return to the natural orientation that children have towards their parents and other adults.

**Educating children to be team-players**

In this sense, we could all learn from each other. The school has an important role to play in this process. It is a "small world" in the classroom where all children, domestic and foreign, can learn to abide by the rules established in the community.

For the teachers, it is important to definitely demand and enforce these rules. In fact, together with all parents, we face the same problems and the same task: namely, to educate their children to be team-players who are able and willing to contribute to the common good. •

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