

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*

Respect instead of disparagement – resolving conflicts through dialogue

Experiences and lessons learned after decades of war in the Near and Middle East

Lecture by Karin Leukefeld at the 2021 annual conference of the working group "Mut zur Ethik"*



Karin Leukefeld
(picture ef)

Against the backdrop of the crises and wars in the Middle East of which I have reported for more than 20 years, there are many examples of lack of respect, of abundant belittling and demonisation, and of proposals for conflict resolution, but also for offers of dialogue to prevent war and destruction.

The suffering of the Palestinians, Kurds and Iraqis

Palestinians who have been demanding their rights for more than 70 years and who, despite endless concessions and peace negotiations, still live as refugees in camps in their own country, and also in camps in neighbouring countries, with no prospect of a better future.

Kurds fighting for recognition – a similar fight, by the way, to the one the Tamils in Sri Lanka are fighting, which we heard about yesterday. And who continue to be fought against and disenfranchised in Turkey, who have become stooges of Western interests in northern Iraq. Who are heavily armed in north-eastern Syria as foot soldiers of Western interests and otherwise manage the poverty and could not prevent the occupation of Kurdish villages in Afrin or the destruction of Christian villages.

Let us talk about Iraq. Since 1980, repeatedly embroiled in wars, economically, politically, socially destroyed.

In February and March 2003, probably millions of people worldwide took to the streets against the threat of a new war in Iraq. At that time, the country had been under UN sanctions for almost 13 years. In a brain drain that lasted for years, well-educated Iraqis had left the country in their thousands. 500,000 children had died of diseases because there were too few medicines. In the south of the country, in the province of Basra, the population suffered from the consequences of



Peace activists in Baghdad in January 2003. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

the use of depleted uranium munitions, which had been used in large quantities by US and other troops during the war in 1991 – the expulsion of the Iraqi army from Kuwait: stillbirths, congenital malformations that led to death. Cancers and no medication.

What the US and Britain were planning was a dastardly raid on a devastated state. Iraq had nothing left to defend itself:

- Radar and air defence installations in the no-fly zones had been bombed.
- The last Scud missiles had been destroyed by the Iraqis themselves under Western pressure.
- The alleged weapons of mass destruction did not exist.

Amer al-Saadi, the Iraqi negotiator with UN envoy Hans Blix, said at the time: "How are we supposed to prove that we do not have something we do not have?"

Futile efforts for peaceful solutions

I met Hans von Sponeck – whom we heard here yesterday – in Baghdad at the turn of the year 2002/03, when he was trying to mediate peace talks between Western states and Baghdad. Konstantin Wecker – a very well-known musician in Germany – came to Baghdad with a peace delegation and gave a touching concert in front

of an Iraqi audience. Hundreds of peace activists from all over the world came to protect Iraq's civilian infrastructure – electricity plants, water treatment plants, clinics, schools – against attacks.

But nothing helped, the war began. Even a sandstorm that raged for days through the Iraqi desert at the time could not stop the invading US troops and the coalition of 45 willing states that accompanied the US army. Without a mandate from the UN Security Council, more than 200,000 troops led by US forces advanced on Baghdad from Kuwait in the south, from Jordan in the west and from the Kurdish autonomous regions in the north.

Destruction of Iraqi culture and access to the country's oil

Hundreds of cameras documented the attacks on Baghdad live. The occupying army took up quarters in the *Palistine Hotel*, which until then had been a base for international media. A statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled in front of the cameras, the government was disbanded as was the Iraqi army. Ministers, government officials and military officers were put on the wanted list. Their faces and names were printed and publi-

continued on page 2

"Respect instead of disparagement ..."

continued from page 1

cised as a card deck of the "Most Wanted". Saddam Hussein was the ace of hearts.

In front of British and US soldiers sitting in their tanks, the *Iraqi National Museum* was looted. The Iraqi Oil Ministry was occupied by US soldiers and hermetically sealed off with walls and barbed wire.

A US government official, *Paul Bremer*, was appointed as "civil administrator" in Iraq. Always – even when wearing a suit and tie – Bremer wore the dust-coloured, military combat boots of the US army – the occupier.

No respect for Iraq and its people

There was no respect for Iraq and its people, there was much belittling and lying. Conflict resolution and dialogue in and for Iraq were not wanted.

Conflict resolution through dialogue? From what I – what we – heard here yesterday, it is not an easy thing. Rather, it is a lifelong task – with no guarantee of a good outcome.

What to do when one side refuses to engage in the dialogue?

What to do when one side does not want it and refuses to engage in the dialogue?

What if there is no trust?

What if one side is strong and the other side is weak?

What if there are lies and deception?

What if untruths are spread about each other?

What if there are forces boycotting a dialogue?

What if intelligence services launch provocations, so-called false-flag operations, which are blamed on one side or the other, as the case may be?

What if a dialogue is started without the serious will to find a solution?

What if important forces remain excluded from the dialogue?

What if there are different understandings of what a dialogue is and what its goal is?

Other cultures know good solutions

Matin Baraki yesterday said about his home country Afghanistan: Afghans have their own way of solving conflicts, one should leave them alone. When a conflict arises, a person of respect and trust is appointed in the village, in whose house negotiations are held to resolve the conflict. This person selects participants from all circles of people and groups affected and involved in the conflict and invites them. Then they "talk, negotiate and drink tea" for weeks until an agreement is reached. In order to find a consensus on political and other matters that affect everyone, the

Afghans have the *Loya Jirga* – which, by the way, also exists in some of the neighbouring Central Asian states.

Something similar exists in the Arab world, where tribal associations and Bedouins have found a way to avoid conflicts; for example, in Iraq, where Sunni tribes marry their children, their sons, to the daughters of Shiite tribes in order to avoid religious conflicts among themselves. Because when a family is created that unites both religions, people show consideration for each other. And there is also a rule that says: "If an enemy of mine enters my house, he is safe."

Western states want to tell the others what to do and what not to do

In the Western states, this understanding of conflict resolution does not exist. The Western states assume that they tell the others what to do and what not to do. The West considers itself to be a community of values that recently wants to implement legally non-binding norms, standards and rules of conduct in addition to the legally binding norms of international law with the instrument of the "rule-based order [...]" (Question by Die Linke in the German Bundestag, Berlin, and answer by the Federal Government).

"These are, for example, the punctual payment of contributions, the multilateral cooperation with the aim of a cooperative world order or informal associations in groups of friends or alliances. The political term also refers to various international forums and their decision-making rules as well as negotiation processes." (<https://www.andrej-hunko.de/bt/fragen/4736-muendliche-frage-zur-definition-des-begriffs-der-regelbasierten-ordnung-durch-die-bundesregierung>)

"Rules-based order" instead of international law?

This establishes a parallel structure to the United Nations. And it is said by the German government: "This is our understanding of foreign policy." There is the international law, but we have created a rules-based order that precisely dictates our terms to the others. Groups of friends, for example the "Friends of Syria", which were founded when the UN Security Council did not want to authorise an invasion and air strikes on Syria. Or alliances, the so-called anti-IS alliance, which started bombing in Syria, in eastern Syria, in 2014. Ostensibly to hit IS, but on fact all of Syria's oil production facilities have been destroyed.

In other words, the West is telling the world how to live. How to bring up and educate their children. What their women should do. What they should and should not grow, what they should and should not produce. Who they should and should not trade with and on what terms. What accel-

erates climate change and what should be done about it.

Armies and wars are a "major contributor to climate change"

As an aside: The US Department of Defense, so the Pentagon – more precisely the military fleet, the fighter jets, ships, etc. – is the "largest institutional consumer of fossil fuels". The US-led "anti-terror wars" are a "major contributor to climate change", according to a long-term study by the *Watson Institute* at Brown University (Rhode Island, USA) on the "costs of war" that have been and are being waged by the USA in the "global war on terror" since 11 September 2001 (<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/about/Overview%20One%20Pager%202021.pdf>).

Can someone, a government, with such a self-image of its own superiority even conduct a solution-oriented dialogue?

In Syria the attempts at dialogue have been thwarted

In Syria, we have seen how approaches to conflict resolution through dialogue have been destroyed: When a conference of the Syrian opposition in Damascus in the summer of 2011 was looking for a way out of the increasing militarisation, the West, together with Turkey, supported the founding and arming of the "Free Syrian Army" – abroad, namely in Turkey.

And when the government and the opposition prepared a "conference for a national dialogue", the efforts for an inner-Syrian understanding were torpedoed by both sides: Syrian intelligence arrested leading opposition figures. A Syrian opposition sitting abroad accused the opposition in Syria of being "puppets of the regime".

When representatives of the internal Syrian opposition wanted to hold talks with the Arab League in Cairo, they were called traitors and agents and pelted with eggs and tomatoes by the foreign opposition on the way there.

When *Kofi Annan*, then Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Syria, presented an agreement to resolve the Syrian conflict in June 2012, signed by the foreign ministers of the P5, the five veto powers in the UN Security Council, the ink was not yet dry when the then US Secretary of State *Hillary Clinton* told journalists that the agreement could only play a role when Syrian President *Bashar al-Assad* was no longer in office.

Do foreign politicians know what the common good is?

Does the *bonum commune*, the common good, matter in relations between states? I wonder, given what I have observed for 20 years and also what I heard here yes-



Seen in Sweida/Syria: “Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’” (Luke 10.5) (picture Karin Leukefeld)

“Respect instead of disparagement ...”

continued from page 2

terday, whether the common good is discussed at all among diplomats, politicians and military leaders?

I don't have the impression. It is true that the attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and also in Syria were claimed to be about “freedom and democracy”, against the terror, about the rights of women and girls, about the protection of minorities, about a free press, an end to torture, against corruption and nepotism. But in fact it was only about their own interests.

This may sound banal, because it is said again and again in politics: “There are no friendships between states, only interests.” But at the end of the day, it is always about

people, about their structures, which they have developed over generations and centuries. So the question of the common good. I deny the states and their leaders and the military the concern for the common good of the people. What they show, what they demonstrate, does not speak for it.

But the peoples know what the common good is

The peoples, on the other hand, have more of an understanding of the “common good” because the underlying ethical principles are at least very similar on essential issues. This understanding must be promoted, which is blocked – again by the West – by unilateral punitive measures such as sanctions, travel restrictions

and exclusion from international committees.

An example, one of many: There are international meetings of parliamentarians that are organised in different countries. There are parliamentary meetings where members of parliaments from all over the world come together and discuss with each other for a week – an international *Loja Jirga* one could perhaps say, in any case an important event.

But the Syrian parliamentarians were denied entry, for example, by Canada, which belongs to the US-led circle of Syria's friends. And other trips by parliamentarians or ministers from Syria were also not possible because these unilateral pu-

continued on page 4

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"Respect instead of disparagement ..."

continued from page 3

nitive measures mean that they are not allowed to enter, for example, Europe. Talk and understanding between the peoples is obviously not wanted. And only the peoples must and can ultimately enforce it, I believe that this coming together must be possible after all.

The great importance of direct interpersonal encounters

The best understanding of the common good in relationships is between people directly, but it is not self-evident. It needs to be worked on.

Alienation is increasing. People are becoming isolated from each other. Globalisation is standardising, and not in the interest of the common good. New, so-called social media are giving rise to different parallel realities, the discourse on "identity" is splitting society into many small interest groups.

Direct, personal discussions about the meaning of the common good or other questions that are important for a good development of social coexistence are rare. And then for me the big question: What are the media doing in this situation? Are they doing justice to their task? - Those who try are often accused of spreading "fake news", false reports. And in Germany, one has gone over to shutting down video channels and really inciting against people.

And where do young people go?

More questions than answers

So there are actually more questions than answers. But certainly, the questions are always important to arrive at an answer.

For my work as a journalist, I have set myself rules beyond the general journalistic standards, which are often no longer observed, personal rules, because I believe that without this personal determination, one also becomes a pawn. These rules come from peace education and have proved – at least for me – to be a good compass for understanding difficult conflict situations, for not letting conversations break down, for being able to analyse crises and conflicts, for encouraging reflection and understanding, but also for recognising my own limits, but also my own possibilities.

De-escalation instead of escalation

It is about respect. And for that I have a chart that I would like to show you (see box below). It's about the question whether in a conflict you escalate or de-escalate a situation. The idea is: de-escalation enables a conversation, escalation blocks it. And what we have seen politically over the last twenty years – maybe longer – is that there is more and more escalation from certain Western sides.

It happens that it escalates

- when you create facts against another side,
- when you use abusive language,
- when the personal integrity of the other side is undermined,

- when there is no separation between a matter in dispute and persons,
- when a power struggle is slugged out (causing uncertainty about how to proceed),
- when international organisations, i.e. the UN, are not being involved,
- when only one-sided interests are taken into account,
- when existential needs are not recognised,
- when international law is not respected (I only say: rule-based world order),
- when camps are formed,
- when the other side is left with no way out, and
- when unwritten rules are violated.

All this escalates and leads to the fact that a dialogue, a conflict resolution, cannot be found. That is actually what we have seen in the conflict in the Middle East for over 70 years.

What de-escalates – and that, I think, should be a gauge, or this at least is the compass by which I orientate myself:

- to agree on a course of action,
- using a language where the other person listens (i.e. accepting language),
- ensure the personal integrity of the other person (this card game against officials in Iraq, where they are put on a list of so to say "most wanted", violates the personal integrity of that person to the highest degree),
- condemn a thing, accept the person (so if one disagrees politically with something, with a course of action, one should still accept the person who stands for it – even a government official must be accepted),
- the guarantee of security must be given,
- international organisations should be involved,
- interests are considered equal (not that the interests of the Western world are considered higher and more valuable than those of the rest of the world),
- existential needs are recognised,
- international law is respected,
- there must be an offer of cooperation,
- a balance is to be sought, not division, separation or exclusion of anyone, and
- unwritten rules must be respected.

You have to try to understand

To be able to do that, you have to engage with your counterpart. You have to try to understand society, you have to try to understand the history of the person you are in conflict with.

This is a big task, a long task, and the outcome is not always certain, but it is the only possibility we have, and we have to work at it.

Escalation and De-escalation

What escalates	What deescalates
- creating facts	- concerted action
- offensive language	- accepting language
- undermining the personal integrity of the conflict partner, embarrassment	- personal integrity guaranteed
- missing of separation from thing and person	- condemn the thing, acknowledge the person
- power struggle, uncertainty about how to proceed	- guarantee of safety
- lack of involvement of international organisations	- involvement of international organisations
- consideration of unilateral interests	- interests are considered equal
- existential needs are not recognised	- existential needs are recognised
- international law not respected	- international law respected
- political camp formation	- offering of cooperation
- leave no alternative	- search for balance
- breaking of unwritten rules	- follow unwritten rules

Compiled from Günther Gugel, Lilli Jäger: Konflikte XXL. CD-ROM. Tübingen 2002 (Translation Current Concerns)

Afghanistan 2021: Graveyard of empires – test case for global justice*

Statement by the President of the International Progress Organization (I.P.O.) Professor Dr Dr h.c. mult. Hans Köchler



Hans Köchler
(picture hans-koechler.com)

Vienna, Austria
22 September 2021

On 31 August 2021, the President of the United States declared that the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan was “about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries.” Implicitly admitting that nation building was not an “achievable goal,” he insisted that the United States should “move on from that mindset” and should “learn from our mistakes.” (*Remarks by President Biden on the End of War in Afghanistan, The White House, State Dining Room, August 31, 2021*)

After 20 years of war: collapse of the artificial political structure

After a period of 20 years of military engagement, the withdrawal of all foreign troops has led to the immediate collapse of the artificial political structure, kept in place by the invading power, and has enabled the domestic resistance – the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) – to reestablish governmental authority on the entire territory of Afghanistan in a matter of days. It is worthy of note that the U.S. withdrawal was in implementation of an “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” concluded on 29 February 2020 in Doha, Qatar between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the United States of America. (Bizarre as it may be in terms of diplomatic sophistry, the official identification of the Afghan party in the text of the Agreement – as “*the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban*” – cannot hide the fact that, through the conclusion of this bilateral agreement, the United States has *de facto* recognized the Islamic Emirate, under whichever label, as international negotiating partner.)

The victims of war...

“Operation Enduring Freedom” that began with an all-out aerial attack on 7 October 2001 initiated the “longest war in American history” (President Joseph Biden). The armed intervention was por-



The Panjshir Valley with the Panjshir River in northeastern Afghanistan – a beautiful natural setting, but also fought over in all Afghanistan wars. (picture Keystone)

trayed as a “global war on terror,” with dubious UN justification. It resulted, on the Afghan side, in the death of over 47,000 civilians, almost 70,000 military and police, and more than 51,000 fighters of the Taliban. 2,448 American service members and more than 3,800 U.S. contractors died on the American side.

... and the crimes of the invading forces

In the course of two decades of military operations, personnel of the invading forces, including U.S., U.K. and Australian soldiers, committed exceptionally serious war crimes and crimes against humanity. The facts have been independently researched and revealed by international media and civil society organizations, and are now being investigated by the *International Criminal Court* (ICC). A report issued on behalf of the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (“Brereton Report”), though only released in a redacted version, documents gruesome crimes by Australian personnel in the period between 2005 and 2016. It reveals, *inter alia*, a cult of crime among Australian troops, known as “bleeding,” where junior soldiers are often required by their superiors to murder prisoners “to get their first kill.” Numerous detailed reports exist on other serious violations of international humanitarian law such as the killing of 47 Afghan civilians, most of them women and children, attending a wedding procession in the Haska Meyna

District of Nangarhar Province on 6 July 2008, by U.S. forces. The group was hit in succession by three bombs from U.S. military planes. The most recent deadly attack by U.S. forces against civilians occurred on 29 August 2021 when a U.S. drone killed 10 innocent civilians in Kabul. The many instances of indiscriminate killing of civilians in the course of drone attacks are further evidence of a new kind of *asymmetric warfare* in which superior technology enables the attacker, at zero risk, to inflict lethal harm on defenseless victims that had the bad luck to become a misidentified “target of opportunity.”

The task of the International Criminal Court

It will be up to the *International Criminal Court* to investigate and prosecute cases of war crimes (e.g. murder of prisoners and civilians) and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of Afghanistan since 1 May 2003, the date on which the country’s accession to the *Rome Statute* entered into force. Already in 2018, the *International Criminal Court* had formally registered a total number of 699 victims’ representations detailing atrocities committed by all warring parties in Afghanistan, not to speak of the 1.7 million individual allegations of war crimes received by the

* Intertitles by the editors

"Afghanistan 2021: Graveyard ..."

continued from page 5

Court by January of that year. (*Associated Press*, "International Court says it's 'undeterred' by US threats," 11 September 2018) Initially, the Court faced serious obstacles to the exercise of jurisdiction since the President of the United States, on 11 June 2020, issued Executive Order 13928 threatening "officials, employees, and agents, as well as their immediate family members" with sanctions should the ICC assert jurisdiction over personnel of the United States. ("The International Criminal Court in the Web of Power Politics." *I.P.O. news release*, 26 June 2020) Although President Biden, while continuing to assert U.S. objection to the Court's jurisdiction, revoked the Order on 2 April 2021, the incident has demonstrated the enormous difficulties for international criminal justice in the context of power politics.

The climate of lawlessness and impunity

If a new beginning is to be made after the withdrawal of all coalition troops from Afghanistan, the errors and crimes of the past will have to be addressed. This relates, first and foremost, to the climate of lawlessness and impunity in which the occupying forces operated, and which a senior researcher for *Human Rights Watch* described as "a sick culture that essentially treated Afghans living in (...) contested areas as if they were all dangerous criminals – even the children – or simply as not human." (*Associated Press*, 20 November 2020)

The failure of "nation-building"

The unsuccessful imperial adventure in Afghanistan – after similar failures of the British and Soviet empires in earlier centuries – is further evidence that great powers never learn the lessons of history. Hubris of power, nurtured by success in the Cold War, made the United States embark on a project of "régime change" that was destined to fail from the outset. The arrogance and naiveté of a nation-building doctrine that ignores a people's historical and cultural roots should have been recognized as such right after the collapse of the Soviet Union's ideological efforts. The difficulties of "pacification" under Afghanistan's unique conditions of geography and ethnic diversity could have been common knowledge since *Alexander's* ruthless campaign in ancient Bactria and Sogdiana (covering parts of the territory of modern-day Afghanistan) in the 4th century BC.

Funds of the state of Afghanistan

After 40 years of war, including 20 years of high-tech warfare in the 21st century,

conducted in the name of "civilization," Afghanistan now seems to return to its roots. The system set up by the invading powers proved to be the most corrupt in the country's recent history, and lacked the will to defend itself. The new political and constitutional structure now gradually emerging must not be obstructed by those who, unjustly and unsuccessfully, undertook to change the political landscape by military force. Blocking the foreign reserves of the central bank of Afghanistan (*Da Afghanistan Bank*, DAB) – \$10 billion in assets held in the U.S. or with the *International Monetary Fund* and other financial institutions abroad – constitutes an outright violation of international law, in fact a policy of economic blackmail pursued by a sore loser on the battlefield. These are funds of the state of Afghanistan, not of the Taliban or any other actor. Withholding the money will only further aggravate the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Engaging constructively with the new Afghan government

Also, the international community, and in particular the United Nations, should constructively work with the new authority, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. It is pointless to insist on the recognition of diplomats of a non-existing government – whose leader and highest functionaries have fled the country, carrying with them huge amounts from state coffers – as representatives of Afghanistan.

For an end to coercive economic measures

If the community of states is indeed committed to the cause of global justice, UN member states should suspend all coercive economic measures that are the legacy of an era of confrontation and only punish the people of Afghanistan collectively. On 17 September, the United Nations Security Council unanimously renewed the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Time has come for the Council to review its targeted sanctions régime concerning Afghanistan in light of recent developments. Because of the veto rule in the Security Council, there is a real risk that the Council will be hostage of its past sanctions resolutions.

Return to an international legal framework

As the course of domestic development and the prospects of reconciliation and political stabilization are still fragile and uncertain, nothing should be done to further aggravate the situation. States should take seriously their international responsibility under the United Nations Charter and cooperate with Afghanistan on the

basis sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs. Those actors that have intervened militarily should shoulder their responsibility under international humanitarian law. The individuals who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity on the territory of Afghanistan must be held accountable. Impunity for international crimes will not only undermine peace and stability in the country and the wider region, but also will erode the international rule of law on which world order is and must be built in the 21st century. The challenge before the International Criminal Court – including investigating and potentially prosecuting personnel from a powerful non-State Party on the basis of territorial jurisdiction – is enormous, and the outcome is uncertain.

Once again, an empire has been brought to its knees

Irrespective of whether justice will eventually be done in matters of state or personal criminal responsibility, nothing can change a course of history that more than once brought an empire to its knees – in the moment when it set out to "pacify" the world by force. •

Source: <https://i-p-o.org/Koehler-Afghanistan2021-IPO-nr-22-09-21.pdf>

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How the new Cold War determines German politics

Russia and Germany have elected their national parliaments

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Good German-Russian relations are of great importance for peace in Europe. But at present there can be no talk of prosperous co-existence. Instead, there is a kind of new Cold War.

In September, both countries elected their national parliaments: in Russia on three days from 17–19 September and in Germany on 26 September.

Only two questions are to be touched upon here: Do the election results reflect the will of the people? And: Is it possible to project the politics of both countries after the elections, especially regarding the German-Russian relations?

In the new Cold War, the Western states repeatedly deny the legitimacy of the political systems of the countries against which they are waging this war. In dealing with Russia, it is part of the repertoire to accuse those responsible in that country of electoral fraud, while at the same time talking about wanting to promote and support the democratic opposition and civil society in the attacked country (i.e. working on regime change) – something that is hardly an issue with allies, independent of their political system.

It was therefore not surprising that the democratic legitimacy of the new Russian parliament was questioned in many German-language media and by officials. Even in Russia itself, people were reckoning with this even before the elections. Here is just one example: *Thomas Röper*, a German living in St. Petersburg, runs the German-language website *Anti-Spiegel*. Already on 16 September, one day before the start of the elections in Russia, this internet site wrote¹ that the EU Parliament had passed a 32-page report on the same day listing numerous measures against Russia. The *Anti-Spiegel* writes: “Pretty much everything is to be done against Russia, short of a military attack.”

EU accusations of electoral fraud based on controversial sources

The EU report also says that the EU will not recognise the upcoming parliamentary elections if they are “recognised as fraudulent”. The *Anti-Spiegel* also addresses the question of who is very likely to strongly influence the EU decision on this: the Russian NGO *Golos*. *Golos* is considered a “foreign agent” in Russia, not least because of its funding coming from the EU and the US, including USAID and the *National Endowment for Democracy* (NED). Even the *Wikipedia*

entry on *Golos* states that this kind of funding has at least taken place “in the past”. The *Anti-Spiegel* writes that *Golos* conducted special training for its election observers and adds: “But the West’s aim is to present the election as rigged. So, at the training sessions *Golos* openly tells the election observers that the goal is to present the election as illegitimate, and they are told how they can provoke violations themselves, which *Golos* can then report. Significantly, some 1000 violations are flagged on *Golos*’ site even before the election.” The *Anti-Spiegel* also provides a link as proof, a video of such training at *Golos*. The fact that there were also election observers from other countries, for example the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS), who spoke of a largely orderly election process in Russia is not mentioned in our media.

Be that as it may, on 20 September, four days after the article in the *Anti-Spiegel* and one day after the elections in Russia, the public radio station *Deutschlandfunk*, which is broadcast throughout Germany, interviewed a representative of *Golos* early in the morning, who was able to explain why, in his opinion, the elections in Russia were rigged. On the same day, the radio news reported every half hour that *Golos* had judged the Russian elections to be rigged. And on the same day, the German government spokesman *Steffen Seibert* demanded “clarification” from Russia regarding the accusations that the elections were falsified.

It is interesting, however, that although there is now loud talk of electoral fraud, the Russian election result has nevertheless *not* been officially recognised. Obviously, people are (still?) afraid of dealing with Russia in the same way as with Belarus. Realpolitik plays a role here again – but the mood has been set.

Doubts about the democratic legitimacy of elections to the German Bundestag

Doubts about the democratic legitimacy of the elections to the German Bundestag have not been expressed in our media. Although major electoral fraud in the strict sense has probably not occurred and the failures of the Berlin authorities are still an exception, there are some indications for critical questions. Here are just a few:

1. Lack of equal rights for all parties and candidates

There has never been any question of equal rights for all parties and candidates



In Switzerland, such signs can be seen in many places before a referendum. After the elections to the German Bundestag on 26 September 2021, the question arises again: Why don't Germans more resolutely demand referendums at the national level and thus decisions by the citizens on the matter? (picture ma)

in federal elections. This time too, of the 47 parties admitted to the election by the Federal Election Commissioner, almost only the seven parties that already have seats in the Bundestag were given attention in the media coverage. Due to numerous other obstacles – including the 5% clause – only two parties have managed to enter the Bundestag as new parties since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949: *Die Grünen* and the *Alternative für Deutschland*. Here, too, however, hopes of a more public-interest-oriented shift in emphasis in actual politics have proved deceptive.

2. Our media tried to manipulate the elections

The media, including the public broadcasters, tried to manipulate the election campaign in several ways. This ranged from the very selective, hardly representative selection of supposedly average citizens for TV question rounds to party representatives which obviously followed the opinions of the editors, to the lack of neutrality of the media presenters in the political talk rounds. Even the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” ran the headline on 20 September: “*Weltanschauung führt Regie* [World view directing]. The election campaign shows where the heart

continued on page 8

"How the new Cold War ..."

continued from page 7

beats politically among journalists from ARD, ZDF and Co." An example: In an ARD programme entitled "How are you doing, Germany?", a 16-year-old school-girl, who pleaded for much more digitisation in schools, and a young woman involved in *Fridays for Future* were supposed to speak for the concerns of German youth. Both are allowed to have their opinions – but they are hardly representative of German youth.

3. There is no ruling chancellor in Germany's constitution

What was particularly noticeable this time compared to many previous elections was the strong concentration of the election campaign conducted by the media on the three candidates for chancellor, *Annalena Baerbock* (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), *Armin Laschet* (CDU) and *Olaf Scholz* (SPD). As if the chancellor were to be elected in the federal elections. Hardly once was it mentioned that Germany, according to its constitution, is supposed to be a parliamentary democracy and not a chancellorship. The strong focus on the candidates for chancellor does not fit the German constitutional order.

4. Party state instead of popular sovereignty

Article 20, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law states: "All state authority is derived from the people. It shall be exercised by the people through elections and other votes and through specific legislative, executive and judicial bodies." Article 21 states: "Political parties shall participate in the formation of the political will of the people." Since its foundation, the Federal Republic of Germany has abandoned the central position of the people in political life and the serving function of the parties and has developed into a party state. The academic criticism of this, for example by *Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider* or *Hans-Herbert von Arnim*, is well founded. Although less than 5% of citizens are members of a party, today the parties dominate all state organs. In fact, state power in the Federal Republic of Germany has never emanated from the people. And the constitutionally required possibility of voting is still denied to citizens at the national level. Even the Green Party, which claims to be citizen-friendly, has dropped the demand for referendums from its programme.

5. No solid political formation of will

It is questionable whether the election campaign was or can and should be a contribution to a solid "formation of the

political will of the people". An indication of the justification of this criticism is the strong shifts in approval among the various parties, which poll results in the election year made clear. Every fortnight, the Infratest Dimap Institute asked potential voters who they would vote for if there were federal elections on the forthcoming Sunday.² For CDU/CSU, the results fluctuated between 35% (on 7 January 2021) and 20% (on 2 September 2021) – the actual election result was 24.1%. This was a huge drop in approval and then also in votes and can hardly be explained by changes in the actual policies of the Union parties. The same applies to *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, which peaked on 6 May with 26% of potential voters, but had subsequently dropped to only 15% by 16 September – election result: 14.8%. The SPD stood at only 14% on 6 May and rose to 26% by 16 September – election result: 25.7%. These figures, too, cannot be explained by changes in the actual political performance to date or that which can be expected from these two parties in the future. Other considerations (factors) must have played a much greater role.

In addition, the area of foreign policy, which is important for every country, and thus also the questions of war and peace, was almost completely excluded from the election campaign conveyed by the media – if one disregards the rigid commitment of Baerbock, Laschet and Scholz to NATO. Even the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" headlined in a commentary on 13 September: "Topics of the second trial: Foreign policy? Wrong!" This was also true for the clash of the three candidates for chancellor in the first and third television trial. It is very likely that all three candidates are more or less forced in line (aligned) in this policy area. The possible, even critical questions of the voters were thus left out.

The "Self-Righteous" will get an even tighter grip on Germany

What policies can be expected after the two parliamentary elections? No definite statements can be made about this now. While the elections in Russia did not indicate any fundamental changes, they did give indications of more dissatisfaction with the ruling president's party than in the last elections. This will have more to do with domestic politics than with foreign policy. What is to be wished for Russia is a policy that – oriented towards firm values – enables the country to make further progress for the people living there and, in doing so, to overcome step by step the heavy burdens from the times of the Soviet Union and the nineties of the last

century. It is to be hoped that the new Cold War imposed on Russia will not absorb too many forces and resources and that even the unfortunately unavoidable security efforts will always keep the values at stake in mind.

There can be no certain forecasts for German politics either. The formation of a government has only just begun. What is certain, however, is that *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* will again co-govern at the federal level in Germany. Domestically, therefore, the "left liberal" agenda of the "Self-Righteous"³ described by *Sahra Wagenknecht* will dominate even more than it already has. Green climate policy will demand a lot from the citizens. The "left liberal" dictate of opinion will become more powerful. The political freedoms of citizens will come under even more pressure. Political positions that are oriented towards traditional values – which is also very important to Russian politics – will be discriminated against even more than before. In terms of foreign policy, the leading politicians of *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* are all set for the new Cold War – which does not bode well for German-Russian relations.

What remains for citizens to do?

The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" wrote on 25 September: "The idea of the people as the 'sovereign' who decides on politics, as it exists in Switzerland, is alien to the Germans. Here, the culture of subservience is popular, the idea that it is better for the government to take over and regulate business anyway." Such polemics cannot be the last word.

What remains for the citizens to do? What all German governments' bodies doings must not be left to the parties and influential lobbyists alone in the long run. The state's importance for the common good is too great to be ignored. There is probably no other way than to help even more than before to lay further foundations for a direct democratic and peace-promoting political culture in Germany with many small and prudent steps. This is also still possible in Germany. •

¹ <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/eu-parlament-will-russische-wahl-nicht-anerkennen-und-der-spiegel-verbreitet-neue-luegen/> of 16 September 2021

² <https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/sonntagsfrage/> of 16 September 2021

³ Wagenknecht, Sahra. *Die Selbstgerechten. Mein Gegenprogramm für Gemeinsinn und Zusammenhalt.* (The Self-Righteous. My alternative approach – towards sense of community and solidarity) Campus-Verlag Frankfurt am Main 2021; cf. the book review *Current Concerns* No. 17 of 7 August 2021

Switzerland in Europe and the world

News from Parliament and the Federal Council

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 1 October, the three-week autumn session of the Swiss Parliament came to an end. Among many other topics, the National Council and the Council of States once again dealt with the cohesion payments demanded by Brussels. The Council of States also dealt with the question of whether the free trade agreement with the Mercosur states – the wording of which is not even known to parliament – should be subject to an optional referendum.

Meanwhile, Switzerland's new contact person in Brussels, Maroš Šefčovič, did not exactly present himself as an equal partner. The President of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin, and the head of the FDFA, Ignazio Cassis, were in New York for the 76th UN General Assembly, where the former gave a fitting rebuttal to the Brussels proposals. But there are also statements on Switzerland-EU relations from democratically-minded politicians from our neighbouring countries.

In New York, Federal Councillor Cassis campaigned for Switzerland's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council, which is questionable from the point of view of neutrality. However, the two Federal Councillors also performed Switzerland's actual tasks in the world by offering humanitarian assistance or Good Offices to various countries.

This is a tour d'horizon of Swiss foreign policy in recent weeks.

Commission once again sets the tariff – President of the Confederation Guy Parmelin counters

The Slovak Vice-President of the EU Commission and new contact person, Maroš Šefčovič, got straight to the point: the institutional issues remain unchanged on the table for the EU, he explained. The EU needed a "dispute settlement mechanism" with Switzerland and a "forum to talk about state aid". As soon as Switzerland was ready to settle these issues in a "substantive discussion", he was ready.¹

At the very beginning of his new mandate, Šefčovič thus smoothly ignored the fact that the Federal Council had ended the negotiations on the Framework Agreement precisely because the anti-democratic demands from Brussels are incompatible with Switzerland's understanding of the state.

But what is most important to the EU Commission is apparently the money. After the second cohesion billion (which has since been released by the parliament in Bern), Switzerland, similar to the EEA

states, would have to make regular payments in the billions as a "price" for participation in the EU's internal market: "When you see what Norway is doing, you can understand that we expect the same from a country as prosperous as Switzerland", said Maroš Šefčovič according to the "Tages-Anzeiger" of 22 September.

The harsh manner of the EU Commissioner went down badly with the Swiss Federal President. We have to speak the same language, Guy Parmelin said from New York. If you want to compare Switzerland with Norway, you can only compare comparable things. "We have invested several [more than 20] billion francs in the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA), all by ourselves. Norway has not invested one franc in the NRLA." As for the "price of participation in the EU internal market", President Parmelin noted that the EU has an annual trade surplus with Switzerland in the billions. "All these as-

pects must be discussed as a whole and at the political level", he said.²

After all, Federal Councillors Cassis and Parmelin also used their stay at the

Seat on the Security Council or Good Offices – you can't have it all

UN to take care of the principal tasks of neutral Switzerland, the offer of Good Offices and humanitarian aid. For example, they met the Colombian President Iván Duque and remarked that Switzerland was making a "historic" contribution to the peace progress in Colombia and was helping the country economically as well. The Federal Councillor also spoke with the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, and explained that Switzerland was planning to support the country "economically and with education programmes".³

Let's stick to it – neutral Switzerland can't have it all.

¹ Gsteiger, Fredy. "Schweizer Kandidatur für Uno-Sicherheitsrat ist auf guten Wegen" (Swiss candidature for UN Security Council is well on the way). Interview with Ignazio Cassis SRF Echo der Zeit of 21 September 2021

² Widmer, Paul. "Lassen wir Malta doch den Vortritt im Sicherheitsrat!" (Let Malta go first in the Security Council!) in: NZZ am Sonntag of 16 September 2018. See also: Wüthrich, Marianne. "Big question mark on Federal Council foreign policy programme. What has neutral Switzerland got to do on the UN Security Council?" in: Current Concerns No. 15 of 22 July 2020

³ "Parmelin und Cassis an 76. Uno-Konferenz in New York." (Parmelin and Cassis at the 76th UN General Assembly), Blick of 22 September 2021 (SDA/gbl)

Cohesion payments yes – but Brussels must abide by the law

In fact, the Federal Council has been willing to pay for a long time. In August, it now called on parliament to quickly deblock the CHF 1.3 billion. It added: "At the same time, the Federal Council will continue to work to ensure that Switzerland is not discriminated against by the EU and is not treated differently from other third countries in equivalence procedures."³ As previously outlined in *Current Concerns*, Parliament had already approved the funds in December 2019, but blocked the disbursement due to punitive measures taken by the EU against Switzerland in violation of the law and the treaty.⁴

"Switzerland in Europe ..."

continued from page 9

Now, after a lengthy tug-of-war with the Council of States, the National Council has made it possible for both chambers to vote on the release of the second cohesion contribution at the very end of the autumn session. In its press release of 17 August, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Council of States had requested the release of the funds without conditions in order to "send a positive signal to the EU and take a first step towards de-escalation". In order to prevent a hasty decision, however, the Council of States had put the item on the agenda for the second last day of the autumn session (i.e. the Council of States wanted the National Council to decide on it not until the winter session). On 27 September, however, the National Council decided by a narrow majority to put the cohesion bill under the roof this session (*swissinfo.ch* of 27 September 2021 / *Keystone-SDA*). Following the Council of States, it made its decision on Thursday evening (30 September).

The result: The Council of States approved the release of the second cohesion contribution by 30 Yes to 9 No, the National Council by 131 Yes to 55 No. It is to be hoped that the EU Commission will appreciate this positive signal from Bern by ending its punitive measures that are contrary to treaties and international law.

Illegal attack by the EU Commission against the Swiss medtech industry – Switzerland's sovereign response

So far, the Swiss in politics and business have skilfully handled the illegal and contrary to contract chicaneries from Brussels and have always entered the ring with a plan B, which works perfectly well. Switzerland has been organising and financing its participation in the *Erasmus+* student exchange programme for years (and even much cheaper). The Federal Council has taken ingenious counter-measures to take advantage of the repudiation of the Swiss stock exchange as being equivalent to the EU's stock exchanges (*SRF News* of 1 July 2019). The Federal Council recently decided on sophisticated "transitional measures until Switzerland's intended association" for the *Horizon Europe* research programme, the financing of which it will submit to parliament in the winter session.⁵

One can understand the annoyance of the EU bureaucrats when the smart Swiss promptly put a spoke in their wheel. But the fact that they vent their anger with increasingly blatant breaches of law – that must be put to an end.

The latest attack is on the Swiss medical technology industry. According to the

Free trade agreement with Mercosur – subject to an optional referendum no ifs, no buts

On 20 September, the Council of States voted in a somewhat convoluted way that the free trade agreement between the EFTA member states (Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) and those of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) should be subject to an optional referendum. This means that the citizens, if they wish so, should have the last word.

The main issue was the preliminary examination of an initiative by the canton of Neuenburg, which called on parliament "to examine whether it [the agreement] should not be subject to an optional referendum".

In its explanatory statement, the Grand Council (Parliament) of Neuenburg mainly states: "The watch-, pharmaceutical- and machine tool industries would benefit from Switzerland signing the agreement. For agriculture, on the other hand, this agreement would be problematic, as it could increase the competitive pressure on domestic agricultural production. According to Article 104 of the Federal Constitution, trade agreements must contribute to the sustainable development of the agricultural and food economy. But all indications

are that this agreement will not contribute to sustainable development". Moreover, the agreement has "only very weak control and sanction mechanisms" in the event of violations. The parliament of Neuenburg concludes that "for such an important agreement, it is crucial that the Swiss people can vote on it".

One can only agree with this view, and this is also what the Council of States did by – and this is where it gets convoluted – "not giving a follow-up" to the standing initiative because "the concern is already fulfilled". This is because the Federal Council had "already assured" that in future all free trade agreements would be subject to an optional referendum, as was the case with the agreement with Indonesia. With its decision on the Neuchâtel cantonal initiative, the Council of States has thus fortunately expressed the view that in future all free trade agreements should be subject to an optional referendum.

Source: 20.316 *Standesinitiative*. "Für ein Referendum zum Freihandelsabkommen mit dem Mercosur" (For a referendum on the free trade agreement with mercosur). Debate in the Council of States, 20 September 2021 (SDA report)

German homepage *medizin-und-technik.industrie.de*, Switzerland is "one of the world's most attractive and innovative medical technology locations and an important trading partner in the EU". The medtech industry exports products for about 12 billion Swiss francs per year, half of them to the EU. Shortly after the Federal Council broke off negotiations on the framework agreement in May this year, the EU Commission declared that Swiss certificates for medical technology products would no longer be accepted in the EU. In doing so, it violated the "Agreement on the removal of technical barriers to trade", which is part of the Bilateral I agreements. However, the shot backfired, because the medtech industry had expected this breach of law by the EU and had its plan B ready: Since May 2021, Swiss companies have been organising the certification of their products in the EU so that they can continue to export there in the future.

So far, so good – one might think. Now, however, the EU Commission has used a sledgehammer. It announced that it also would no longer accept thousands of already certified products – retroactively!⁶

That's unbelievable! To add the non-compliance of the prohibition of retrospective legislation, which applies in every state under the rule of law, to the previous violations of right and contract – that is not possible at all! Anyone who has

hoped for more legal certainty from Switzerland's closer integration into the EU should become thoughtful. As the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (*SECO*) has announced, Switzerland is now taking legal action: It is demanding the summoning of the mixed committee (the arbitration board provided for in the Bilateral Agreements), thus forcing the Brussels bureaucrats to the table.

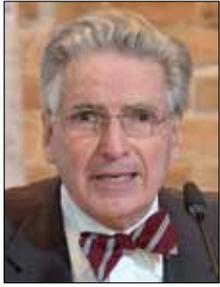
Gratifying support from our neighbourhood

Fortunately, Switzerland and its qualities are highly appreciated, especially in our neighbouring countries. Many Europeans, for example, count on Swiss medical technology. Based on an expert opinion, the European Medtech industry association states that, the EU's actions violate EU and WTO law in addition to the bilateral agreements. According to the Ministry of Economics, Labour and Tourism of Baden-Württemberg, the illegal non-recognition of Swiss products threatens supply bottlenecks in our neighbouring countries. Switzerland is the third most important market for Germany as to the import of medical technology, and it contributes significantly to emergency, trauma and diabetes care. Baden-Württemberg now wants to join forces with other German states as well as other EU states to "continue to ensure reliable supply

continued on page 12

The UN must live up to the Bandung Spirit to achieve equitable international order

by Adriel Kasonta and Alfred de Zayas*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)



Adriel Kasonta
(picture ma)

It's said that "history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce," but we are far from suggesting that we are facing the latter.

As UN Secretary-General *Antonio Guterres* stated before the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, which began on September 21, the focus of this summit is the U.S.' "cold war" with China.

"We need to avoid at all cost a Cold War that would be different from the past one, and probably more dangerous and more difficult to manage," Guterres told *The Associated Press* in an interview.

Interestingly, the same dilemma occupied the thoughts of the participants to "the first intercontinental conference of coloured peoples in the history of mankind," as former President of Indonesia *Sukarno* called the Bandung Conference, which took place on 18–24 April 1955.

The conference in Indonesia was a response from African and Asian countries to the San Francisco Conference in 1945, which excluded many of the newly independent colonial countries from participation, and by default playing any significant role in the management of international affairs. In this sense, Bandung was more representative of the Third World than the conference in the U.S., which gave birth to the UN Charter and was dominated by the West.

At that time, similarly to what we are experiencing today, tensions between two geopolitical "colossuses" – the U.S. and Soviet Russia – were the origin of the international instability.

Fear of nuclear war and return to the pre-independence state of affairs resulted in an incredible determination to achieve peace and cooperation among the Global

"When global imperialism practiced by the U.S. has replaced neo-colonialism, it is our duty to rediscover what Indian historian *Vijay Prashad* called 'the Bandung Spirit' and critically re-engage with notions of sovereignty, human rights, and the international economic order. [...] All human beings share similar needs and aspirations, which the UN Charter acknowledges. Let us apply the UN mechanisms in the spirit of multilateralism and international solidarity, without allowing any state to abuse them to achieve its particular foreign policy goals."

Southern nations, which ultimately decided that the UN would be the best possible place to raise their voice.

These countries brought the truly "universal" nature of international law into Geneva, as it was at Bandung when the interplay between the discipline and imperialism was formally challenged. But most importantly, the conference questioned the Eurocentric interpretation of the global order.

When global imperialism practiced by the U.S. has replaced neo-colonialism, it is our duty to rediscover what Indian his-

torian *Vijay Prashad* called "the Bandung Spirit" and critically re-engage with notions of sovereignty, human rights, and the international economic order.

The version of sovereignty and international relations that we have in mind is the one that relies on the "Five Principles of Coexistence," which include

1. mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,
2. non-aggression,
3. non-interference in internal affairs,

continued on page 12

The Principles of Bandung

cf. The *Non-Aligned Movement* (NAM) was founded during the Cold War as an organisation of states that did not want to formally ally themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but wanted to remain independent or neutral. The basic concept for the group emerged in 1955 during discussions at the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, Indonesia.

The ten Bandung Principles are the last part of the Final Communiqué of the 1955 Bandung Conference under the title of "Declaration on the promotion of world peace and cooperation".

- Ten Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence
1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
 2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
 3. Recognition of the equality of all races and of the equality of all nations large and small.
 4. Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country.

5. Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. (a) Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers.
(b) Abstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries.
7. Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration or judicial settlement as well as other peaceful means of the parties' own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of mutual interests and co-operation.
10. Respect for justice and international obligations.

Source: bandungspirit.org

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Adriel Kasonta is a London-based political risk consultant and lawyer of Jewish and Tanzanian descent.

"Switzerland in Europe ..."

continued from page 10

chains and provision in the field of medical technology".⁷

Similarly, Austria's Minister for Europe *Karoline Edtstadler* recently said at an EU meeting: "It is important for Austria that Switzerland remains on the agenda." Switzerland is not only in the heart of Europe, but is also "a very important partner for Europe".⁸

The young *Lukas Mandl* from Lower Austria, member of the European parliament and there rapporteur for Switzerland, also proves himself to be a good neighbour. For him, it is "clear that not only Bern, but also Brussels is liable for the breakdown [of the negotiations on the Framework Agreement]. We have seen how it will not work. If we put the cart before the horse and then remain in entrenched positions, we will lose the plot".⁹

Lukas Mandl calls blocking Switzerland in the *Horizon Europe* research programme an "own goal for the EU". Because: "Switzerland is the global leader in research. It would be important to have Switzerland there, as a shining example." He does not envisage a relaunch of bilateral relations as a rehashing of the

failed Framework Agreement, but rather as a permanent political dialogue: "This is also the wish of Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis. Mutual understanding will only grow in the process." Now the EU Parliament must "persuade the Commission to be flexible, so that this dialogue can become substantial and will not be stifled again in a narrow corset".

As rapporteur on Switzerland in the EU Parliament, Lukas Mandl is pleased that the Republic of Austria wants to raise the issue of Switzerland at the next EU summit, and he hopes for constructive contributions to the discussion, especially from our neighbouring countries: "After all, they are closer. But ultimately it should be clear to all member states that Switzerland is important as a valuable member of the European family of states." For our part, we are pleased about this appreciation and happy to return it. •

¹ Fellmann, Fabian; Israel, Stephan. "Kohäsionsbeitrag der Schweiz – Brüssel fordert schon die nächste Milliarde" (Switzerland's cohesion contribution – Brussels is already demanding the next billion). In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 22 September 2021

² Washington, Oliver. "Die EU und die Schweiz – wer schuldet wem was?" (The EU and Switzerland – who owes what to whom?) *Radio SRF, Echo der Zeit* of 22 September 2021

³ "European policy: Federal Council refers dispatch on the release of the second Swiss contribution."

21.050 Business of the Federal Council. *Federal Council media release* of 11 August 2021

⁴ "'Horizon Europe' and cohesion billion are two pairs of shoes". In: *Current Concerns* of 17 August 2021

⁵ "'Horizon Europe': Federal Council adopts transitional solutions for inaccessible parts of the programme for the attention of Parliament". *Federal Council press release* of 17 September 2021

⁶ von Burg, Denis; Schmid, Adrian. "Nach dem Aus für den Rahmenvertrag – Die Schweiz setzt Brüssel unter Druck. Im Streit um die Anerkennung von Medtech-Produkten könnte Bern auch Hilfe aus den Nachbarländern bekommen" (After axing the framework agreement – Switzerland puts Brussels under pressure. In the dispute over the recognition of medtech products, Bern could also get help from neighbouring countries). In: *SonntagsZeitung* of 26 September 2021

⁷ von Burg, Denis; Schmid, Adrian. "Nach dem Aus für den Rahmenvertrag – Die Schweiz setzt Brüssel unter Druck. Im Streit um die Anerkennung von Medtech-Produkten könnte Bern auch Hilfe aus den Nachbarländern bekommen." (After axing the framework agreement – Switzerland puts Brussels under pressure. In the dispute over the recognition of medtech products, Bern could also get help from neighbouring countries). In: *SonntagsZeitung* of 26 September 2021.

⁸ "Parmelin kontert Šefčovič. Neuer Ansprechpartner – Der neue Schweiz-Verantwortliche der EU-Kommission redet Klartext" (Parmelin counters Šefčovič. New contact person – The new Switzerland officer of the EU Commission talks plain language). In: *SRF News* of 21 September 2021

⁹ Israel, Stephan. "Interview mit EU-Abgeordnetem – 'Ich halte es für völlig falsch, die Schweiz hinzuhalten'" (Interview with EU delegate – 'I think it is completely wrong to stall Switzerland'). In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 23 September 2021

"The UN must live up ..."

continued from page 11

4. equality and mutual benefit, and
5. peaceful coexistence.

The mentioned principles are in line with some of the most established doctrines of classic international law as found in the UN Charter, namely Article 2(1) of the Charter, Article 2(4), and Article 2(7).

In an era of stark inequality and impending environmental catastrophe unimaginable ever before, we continue to be stalked by the same threat of global extinction as our predecessors from Bandung.

We, therefore, are in complete agreement with Ambassador *Chen Xu*, permanent representative of China to the UN Office at Geneva, who rightly argues in his recent joint statement on the international order that "a democratic and equitable

international order is essential to the promotion and protection of human rights."

We also believe, in full support of the statement, that it can only be maintained if all parties commit themselves to "practice true multilateralism," without any exceptions, as it was so many times the case in the past.

When negotiations are at an impasse, when states dig their heels in, it is time to "undig" them in a spirit of compromise.

The secretary-general has a sacred duty to facilitate peace, development and human rights at any cost. His good offices should be received in good faith by both the U.S. and China.

Switzerland is a neutral country with a long history of mediation. The president of Switzerland, *Guy Parmelin*, should be asked by both the U.S. and China to mediate.

We all need to unlearn the predator in us, unlearn discrimination, unlearn hubris.

If the UN Charter is seen as a world constitution, and if all states do their part to implement the UN's agenda, we can have peace and prosperity.

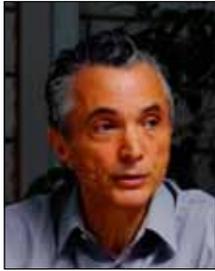
All human beings share similar needs and aspirations, which the UN Charter acknowledges. Let us apply the UN mechanisms in the spirit of multilateralism and international solidarity, without allowing any state to abuse them to achieve its particular foreign policy goals.

We have to choose between confrontation and cooperation, and only the latter can secure the survival of the human species. •

Source: news.cgtn.com/news/2021-09-22/The-UN-must-strive-to-achieve-equitable-international-order-13Laq8GwN81/index.html of 22 September 2021

Micro-tax – an initiative against systematic risks in the financial casino

by Professor Dr Marc Chesney



Marc Chesney (picture wp)

The tax burden is far too high for most households and SMEs. It is poorly distributed and expresses a dysfunction of the state. In a time of digitalisation, taxing so much labour is counterproductive.

The tax system is out of date, unfair and of an exaggerated complexity. The United

States' tax code illustrates this Kafkaesque drift: it consists of 75,000 pages.¹

The financial sector has seized power. This marks the failure of democracy. Its dynamic forces are contrary to social and economic development. It imposes costs and growing complexity on society. The tax system should once again undergo an in-depth revision. For this, one thing is decisive: the volume of electronic transactions is excessively high in most countries. In Switzerland and in a number of other developed countries, it is approximately 150 times respective GDPs.

A tax on all electronic payments should be introduced.²

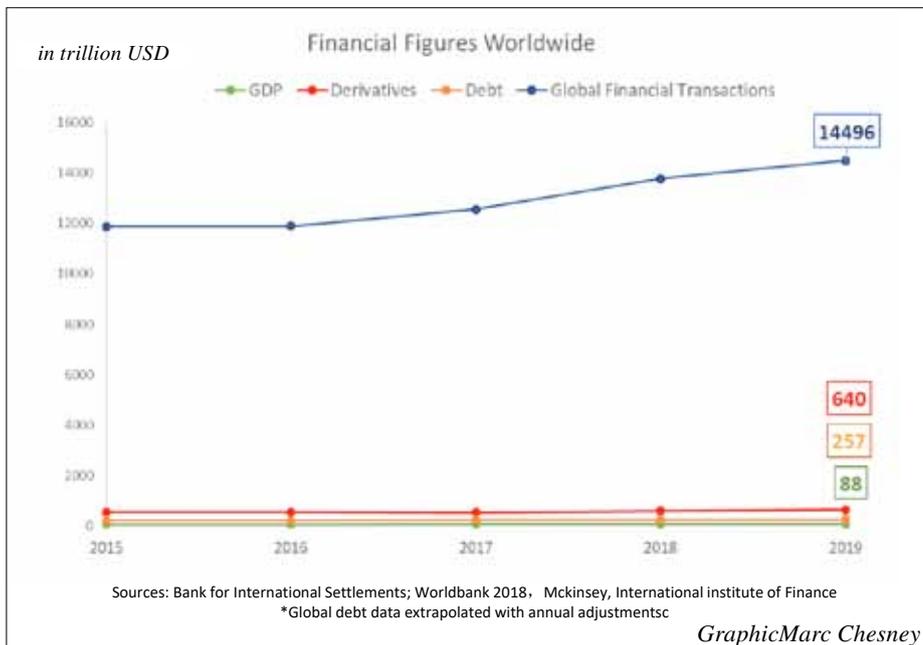
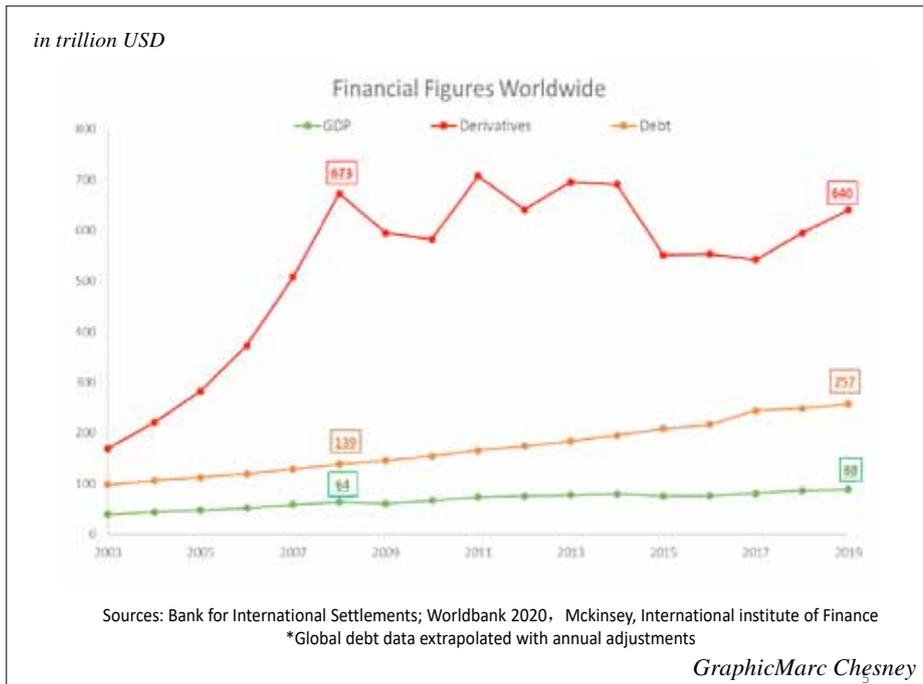
A rate of 0.2 % or even 0,5 % would be low in comparison with the VAT rate, but certainly already too high for the financial lobbies. In view of the financial amounts in circulation, it would represent a true manna for most of the states currently over-indebted.

Switzerland offers a particularly interesting example of the flows such a tax would create. Electronic transactions reached in 2020 an enormous amount of at least CHF 100,000 billion francs.³

A tax of only 0.2 % on every electronic transfer would bring in CHF 200 billion francs, i.e. a little below a third of the Swiss GDP. This amount is higher than the sum of all the taxes collected in this country, estimated at around CHF 145 billion. In short, a low automatic tax on all electronic payments would theoretically allow this country, and most others, to reduce, maybe even abolish, most other taxes! Theoretically of course, as this would result in a reduction in the number of transactions on stock markets, bond markets, Forex markets ... it would probably be necessary to increase it to 0.5 % for it to keep its profitable nature. A reduction in the volume of financial transactions would however be very useful as it would also help decrease the unbridled speculation on financial markets. Such a tax would also have the advantage of seriously limiting tax fraud as all electronic transfers are in principle automatically detected and recorded. This issue is currently addressed in Switzerland with the possible launch of a so-called popular initiative.

In the case of France and Germany, as in most developed countries, with a conservative estimate of all electronic financial transactions corresponding to 100 times GDP, a rate of 0.5 % would suffice to generate an amount greatly exceeding all current tax revenues.⁴

Therefore, a single and simple micro-tax with particularly low costs of collection, should be, on the international level, supported by states, most households and SMIs as it would mean simplification of administrative work and a large drop in taxes. Yet, it has not even been considered! Why? It obviously fails to please major banks responsible for the overwhelming majority of financial transactions. With such a tax, big banks and most hedge funds would pay more taxes than is currently the case, and tax optimisation



"Micro-tax ..."

continued from page 13

and tricks of all types would be more difficult to apply!

Such a tax would also help reduce market volatility and would have another positive effect of almost putting an end to financial transactions conducted in milli or microseconds.

It should be noted that such a tax, even introduced in a limited number of countries would already have positive effects. On the one hand, it would stabilise the economy of those countries as casino finance activities would tend to be moved abroad. On the other hand, it would have a knock-on effect on citizens and companies of other countries who would look on with interest and see that it is possible to really reduce taxes and simplify the fiscal system.

Mention should be made that this tax idea differs from the famous Tobin tax. Indeed, it should not be added to already existing ones, but would tend to replace them, by reducing the tax burden of most households and companies, especially SMEs, and by increasing that of big banks which are undertaxed.⁵

Furthermore, it is not a question of only taxing financial transactions on stocks, bonds or foreign exchange but rather on all electronic payments, including, for example, those concerning supermarket or restaurant invoices and cash machines. •

¹ In 1913, it only had 400 pages. This complexity generates huge costs for the American taxpayer. 6.1 billion hours each year are spent trying to understand the pertinent passages of this code and to complete the tax return, which corresponds to a total cost of close to \$ 234 billion. Cf. Federal Tax Laws and Regulations are Now Over 10 Million Words Long, Scott Greenberg, 8 October 2015, Tax Foundation.

² As far as I know this idea was initially introduced in the 1970s by René Montgranier, who presented it as "the egg of Columbus". See his book entitled: *La Clé de la crise, Éditions économiques financières et sociales*, 1985, p. 108-120, as well as the article: *Pour une taxe sur tous les mouvements de fonds, Multitudes* 3/2011. In the 1990s, Professor Edgar Feige, from the University of Wisconsin, then subsequently Simon Thorpe, director of research at CNRS at Toulouse, as well as Bernard Dupont in Genève, developed a similar idea. Felix Bolliger, in his article "Reinvent the System – Microsteuer auf Gesamtzahlungsverkehr", 2013 also worked on this concept.

³ See annexe 2 of the monthly bulletin of economic statistics of the National Swiss Bank (BNS) of

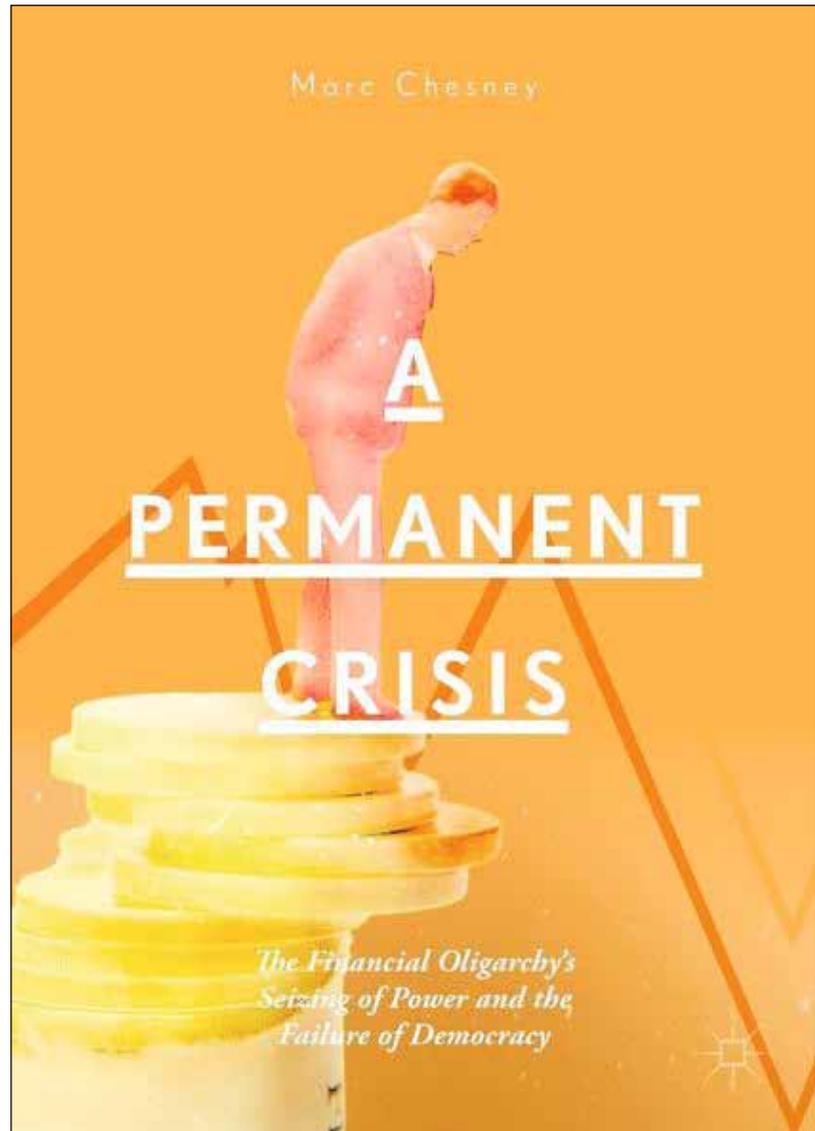
April 2013 "Trafic des paiements dans le Swiss Interbank Clearing SIC», cited by Bolliger Felix. The calculation method used by BNS was altered between January and April 2013, and payment traffic for 2012 therefore dropped from close to CHF 95,000 billion to approximately CHF 30,000 billion (and reached around CHF 45,000 billion in 2020). Transfers between the current accounts of Banks to BNS and their financial trading accounts in the SIC system are from then on excluded from the data. Despite this statistical reduction, financial transfers continue to be extremely high because the SIC system only records a part of the transactions. One has to consider those that on foreign exchange markets (FOREX) concern the franc that add an amount of close to CHF 40,000 billion a year, treated either over-the-counter or on the EBS platform. One also has to consider transfers made

inside each financial establishment, operations on derivatives and check that the high-frequency transactions have been taken into account... An estimate of CHF 100,000 billion for the total number of transactions appears to be fairly conservative!

⁴ See: Un économiste veut remplacer tous les impôts par une seule taxe, Julien Marion, *BFM*, 30.10.2016..

⁵ To this regard see the statements made by Gerry Rice, IMF spokesperson in Washington, on 31 January 2013. According to Rice, "The financial sector is undertaxed and must pay an equitable part in order to attenuate the costs of the current crisis [...]"

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



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“Homeless” and “Wiseli finds her place”

Two wonderful stories by Johanna Spyri

by Diana Köhnen

Johanna Spyri wrote a great many stories in addition to the classic children’s book “Heidi”, which made her world famous and which was filmed several times (most recently with Bruno Ganz as Almöhi, 2015). Unfortunately, many of them are out of print. Two have been reprinted, which I would like to present to the reader: “Homeless” and “Wiseli finds her place”. Johanna Spyri repeatedly emphasised that she wrote “stories for children”, but always added “and for those who love children” (Thürer, p. 50).

“Homeless” tells the story of the Italian boy *Rico*, who grows up in Sils-Maria in the Engadine. His father works in railway construction and often spends many weeks away from home. He is also involved in road construction between Sils and the Maloja Pass and in building houses in St. Moritz. He finally finds work in St. Gallen.

Rico’s father is a tall, good-looking man, and *Rico* is the spitting image of him. *Rico*’s mother and siblings died early, so *Rico* grows up alone with his father and a cousin who lives in the house. The boy often goes for walks with his father, which take him through the beautiful valley up to Maloja. The father sings many songs and melodies that over time become familiar to the boy. One of them is “Uno sera – in Peschiera”, which the boy always sings.

One day, the father returns from work injured and ill, having received a deep wound on his head while blasting stones. It does not heal as expected and the father finally dies. Now a sad time for *Rico* begins, which is only brightened up by *Stineli*, the neighbour’s child. She and her grandmother are fond of *Rico*, while the cousin cannot find a kind word for him. *Rico* longingly tells *Stineli* about a lake a few days’ journey away behind the Maloja, but he doesn’t know its name. It is linked to his origins. *Stineli* is convinced that he can probably find out what the lake is called – and eventually he learns the name, it is Lake Garda.

Stineli’s career is also described in the story; she is the eldest girl in a household with four children and has to do all the work in the household and with the goats alongside her mother. But her grandmother, who knows about her friendship with *Rico*, always gives her days off, which she then spends with *Rico* in nature at Lake Sils. In connection with *Rico*, the teacher who accompanies the songs the children sing at school on his violin is also important. For example, they sing:

*Little lambkins, come down
From the bright sunny height;
The daylight is fading,
The sun says, ‘Good-night!’
And a lake like another,
That from water is made.
And if they forgot it,
It hurt not a bit.
And the lambkins, and the lambkins...”*

When *Rico* plays this song for him on the violin, the teacher is surprised; however, he realises that this is not magic, but that *Rico* has read this song from his fingers. One day the teacher falls ill and subsequently dies. Before that, he bequeaths his violin to *Rico*. When the grandmother presents it to him, *Rico* cannot contain himself with joy and from then on plays all the songs on the violin, and *Stineli* and he sing these songs together.

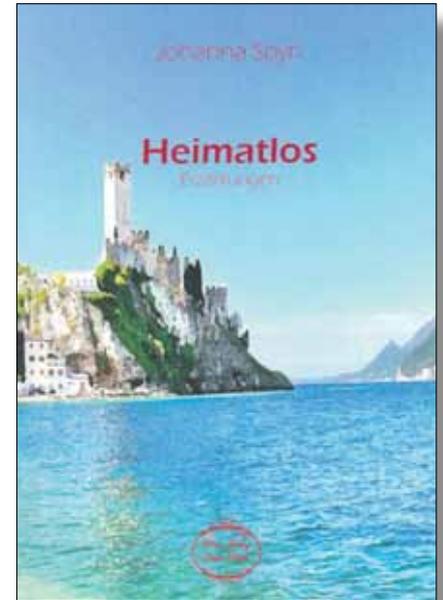
Once again, the grandmother scolds *Rico* with harsh words, so he decides to leave the house and never return. He sets off for Peschiera on Lake Garda. On the way he meets a coachman who gives him a lift, and finally also a sheep dealer who faithfully accompanies him.

“The old road was there below. Oh! he knew that well; and there, there were the great shining red flowers with such green leaves. A little stone bridge ought to be there, somewhere over the outlet of the lake: he had often passed over that little bridge, but could not see it where he stood, however.

Rico started off, as if driven by the longing that now took possession of him. Down the road he ran; and over there, – yes, that was the little stone bridge. Everything came back to him: there he had crossed, and somebody held him by the hand, – his mother. Suddenly his mother’s face came before his eyes quite distinctly; he had never seen it so clearly before. He remembered how she had stood there and looked at him with loving eyes. It all came back to his mind with a rush.

He threw himself down on the ground by the bridge, and cried and sobbed aloud, ‘O mother! where are you, mother? Where is my home, mother?’ He lay there for a long, long time, and cried until his great sorrow was somewhat stilled. He thought his heart must burst, and as if all the grief that had been hitherto pent up within his bosom must now find an outlet.”

Rico’s violin playing and his melodious voice help him to get in touch with the people of Peschiera. He gets to know many villagers, and they help him to gradually feel at home. The reader will find out



Spyri, Johanna. *Heimatlos. Erzählungen. Friedeburg 2014, Rosa-Verlag*
ISBN 978-3-95816-010-1

whether he will see *Stineli* again and what he experiences in Peschiera when he sets off with Johanna Spyri on the journey to the Upper Engadine and Lake Garda, but I don’t want to give too much away.

The second story, “How *Wiseli* found her way”, is set in a little village in the Bern region. The girl *Aloise*, also called *Wiseli*, is at the centre of this story. She is nice to look at, likes to sing along with the piano, and she is very shy. So she doesn’t dare ask the other children if they will lend her their sledge one day when they are hurtling down the slope at full speed in winter. *Otto*, the colonel’s son, becomes her protector, lends her his sledge and defends her against *Chäppi*, his classmate, who wants to harm *Wiseli*. He also guards his younger sister *Miezi* like gold. When the children tell the story, their father supports *Otto* in his request:

“That’s right *Otto*,” says the dad. “You must do honour to your name, for the defenceless and persecuted you must always be a knight.”

The flashback and dialogue also tell the story of *Wiseli*’s mother, who was funny and bright, played all kinds of tricks and never did her schoolwork. The quiet *Andres*, her class comrade, befriended her at the time and described himself as the author of the pranks, taking the blame on himself to exonerate the girl. But to everyone’s astonishment, the girl married a factory worker who lived in the village,

continued on page 16

“Homeless’ and ...”

continued from page 15

and not Andres, which made him very sad. That one was very rude to her and the children, five of whom died, only Wiseli remained alive. Six months after an accident at the factory, Wiseli's father died and her mother was left alone. Yet Wiseli's mother also died, but not without giving Wiseli the following advice: “Remember that, Wiseli! When one day you can no longer see a way ahead of you and it becomes very difficult for you, then think in your heart”:

*“To God you must confide
Your sorrow and your pain;
He will true care provide,
And show you heaven again.
For clouds and air and wind
He points the path and way,
Your road He'll also find,
Nor let your footsteps stray.”*

Wiseli now comes to the hard-hearted cousin Godfather and the cousin, who is in no way inferior to him in this respect, and to the three boys, including the violent Chäppi. Wiseli is harshly treated, driven to work and is therefore temporarily unable to go to school, the only place where she revives. On her way to school she passes the house of the carpenter Andres, who always has kind words for her and whose beautiful garden she marvels at. Wiseli is absent from school so often, however, that the teacher takes notice and therefore approaches the foster parents. Because she is treated well by her classmate Otto, she takes over his tidying up at school, which he doesn't like to do. She also talks to Andres more often, to whom she finally delivers something from the mother: “Yes; at the very end, when my mother could do nothing more, she drank up the nice syrup that you put on the kitchen-table for her, and it refreshed her very much; and she

charged me to tell you that she thanked you for it very much indeed, and for all the many acts of kindness that you had shown her; and she said, ‘He always felt kindly to me.’” Now Wiseli perceived that big tears rolled from Andrew's eyes and fell over his cheeks. He tried to say something, but could not speak. He pressed the child's hand, turned him about, and went into the house.” Wiseli eventually finds advocates in the village who are well-disposed towards her. How the story ends for her cannot be said here.

The book is warmly recommended to children and adults. It shows how, despite a difficult childhood, a person can take courage and shape his or her life in a meaningful way. The fate of children in Switzerland in the late 19th century is also touchingly portrayed and the negative consequences of industrialisation come up. It is to be hoped that many more stories by Johanna Spyri will be reprinted. •

Johanna Spyri



Johanna Spyri was born on June 12, 1827 in Hirzel in the canton of Zurich. She was the fourth of six children of the country doctor *Johann Jakob Heusser* and the poet *Meta Heusser-Schweizer*. Her father was

a doctor with heart and soul, also operated and cared for the mentally ill in his home. Johanna probably owed her poetic talent to her mother. She wrote spiritual chorales, among others the chorale “O Jesu Christ, mein Leben” (O Jesus Christ, light of my life), which is still sung in the Reformed churches of Switzerland (Thürer, pp. 14). After the village school, Johanna was first taught by *Pastor Salomon Tobler*, who had a fine library. Here she studied the works of *Homer* and *Goethe*. The subtitle of her most famous novel, “*Heidis Lehr- und Wanderjahre*” (Heidi's Years of Wandering and Learning), is reminiscent of Goethe's education novel “*Wilhelm Meisters Lehr- und Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years and Apprenticeship)”. She also learned about the ballads of *Friedrich Schiller* and *Ludwig Uhland* there, and the children performed classical plays at home. Later Johanna attended a girls' secondary school in Zurich and then studied French for a year in Yverdon in Vaud. In her youth, she also accompanied her older brother on a trip to the Engadine. He married *Regina von Flugi* from Graubünden, through which Johanna also became familiar with the Romansh world. She shared her love for the Grisons mountains with the siblings *Conrad-Ferdinand* and *Betsy Meyer* (Thürer, pp. 22). The writer compared the cheerful Johanna, with whom he was later to have many conversations, to a “clear

bubbling mountain stream” (Thürer, p. 23).

Johanna was not granted the opportunity to study like her brothers. However, her mother made sure that she was taught in Zurich by the good language teacher *Maria Pfenniger*. Afterwards, she managed the household in Hirzel with her mother and taught her two younger sisters (Thürer, pp. 23).

In 1852 she married *Bernhard Spyri*, a lawyer and editor of the *Eidgenössische Zeitung*, who later served as town clerk in Zurich. On 17 August 1855, their son *Bernhard Diethelm* was born. Johanna Spyri took a lively interest in her son's education, for example learning Latin with him and supporting him during his law studies. She herself joined the supervisory committee of the girls' secondary school in Zurich at the request of the school president (Thürer, p. 28). The couple also met *Richard Wagner*, who had fled to Switzerland for political reasons, and attended lectures in a private circle.

However, the genius cult of the art enthusiasts was repugnant to Johanna Spyri, it did not correspond to “her by nature simple and reasonable nature” (Thürer, p. 31). The acquaintance with the Meyer family was already established by both mothers and lasted throughout their lives. Thus, Johanna maintained a lively correspondence with *Betsy Meyer*, and *Betsy* seemed to mean more to her than the contact with Johanna to *Betsy*. *Conrad Ferdinand Meyer* appreciated Johanna's literary judgment (Thürer, p. 32).

Kinship and friendship ties existed with *Bremen* through her aunt's husband in Zurich, and it was the *Bremen* pastor *Vietor* who encouraged Johanna to write. He suggested that she publishes her manuscript “*Ein Blatt auf Vronys Grab*” (A Leaf on Vrony's Grave) in 1871. This was followed by “*Ihrer keines vergessen*”, “*Aus frühern Tagen*”, “*Daheim und in der Fremde*”, “*Aus*

dem Leben”, “*Im Rhonetal*”, “*Ein goldener Spruch*”, “*In Leuchtensee*” and “*Die Stauffermühle*”.

In 1878 her first children's book “*Homeless*” was published. The two volumes of “*Heidi*” were published in 1879 and 1881. The novel became a worldwide success and was translated into more than 50 languages.

From 1882 to 1886, Johanna Spyri wrote many other children's stories such as “*Vom This, der doch etwas wird*”, “*Der Toni vom Kandergrund*”, “*Was der Grossmutter Lehre bewirkt*”, “*Moni der Geissbub*”, “*Beim Weiden-Joseph*”, “*Das Rosen-Resli*”, “*Was Sami mit den Vögeln singt*”, “*Und wer nur Gott zum Freund hat, dem hilft er allerwegen*”, “*In sicherer Hut*”, “*Vom fröhlichen Heribli*”, “*Aus den Schweizerbergen*”, “*In Hinterwald*”, “*Einer vom Hause Lesä*”, with which she wanted to have an educational effect. The shining examples and the cautionary examples were part of this education of the children.

In 1884, husband and son died shortly after each other. “Even if the double loss went deep for her, she was faithful and vigorous enough to overcome it. Above all, she saw a task before her that fulfilled her. That was writing, the representation of experienced and imagined life.” (Thürer, p. 35)

From 1885 until her death in 1901, in addition to writing poetry and traveling, Johanna Spyri maintained friendly contact with *Conrad Ferdinand Meyer* and with many who had come to know and appreciate her work, such as *Hermann Grimm*, the son of *Wilhelm Grimm*, who with *Jakob Grimm* had published the *German Children's and Household Tales*. She also met many school classes who were enthralled by the novel “*Heidi*”.

Source: Thürer, Georg. *Johanna Spyri and her Heidi*. *Schweizer Heimatbücher 186*, Bern 1982, Paul Haupt Verlag