

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*

Nobel Peace Prize Committee joins in the new Cold War 2021 awards raise many questions

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

It is exactly 10 years since *Dieter Deiseroth*, former judge at the German Bundesverwaltungsgericht (Federal Administrative Court) summarised the criticism of the Norwegian lawyer *Fredrik S. Heffermehl* of the awarding of various Nobel Peace Prizes in an article for the German journal *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (10/2011)¹. Deiseroth, who was an honorary scientific advisor to the *International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms* (IALANA) and the *International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War* (IPPNW), died in 2019. Heffermehl has also had his say in *Current Concerns*² and published the first edition of his book, “The Nobel

Peace Prize. What Nobel Really Wanted”, in 2008, which has since been translated into several languages. In it, Heffermehl explained that the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which is made up of politicians, continuously disregards the criteria for awarding the Nobel Peace Prize as laid down in *Alfred Nobel’s* will of 1895.

Alfred Nobel’s conditions for the award of the Nobel Peace Prize

Nobel had stipulated that the prize should be awarded annually “to the person who has worked most or best towards the fraternisation of nations and the abolition or reduction of standing armies and the hold-

ing or promotion of peace congresses”. According to these standards, Fredrik S. Heffermehl found in 2008, at least 51 of the 121 Nobel Peace Prizes awarded up to that time were unjustified.

Norwegian Nobel Committee – “Blind loyalty to NATO”?

Heffermehl’s answer to the question of the reasons for this was summarised by Dieter Deiseroth: “The author sees the reasons for the negative development of recent decades primarily in the failure of the Norwegian Parliament. Since 1948 it has divided the five seats of the Nobel Committee according to proportional
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Good protection of press freedom?

by Fredrik S. Heffermehl, lawyer and writer, Norway



In 2021, Nobel’s prize once again followed the ideas of its Norwegian awarders. In its editorial, the leading Norwegian daily “Aftenposten” again was delighted: The Committee had “awarded

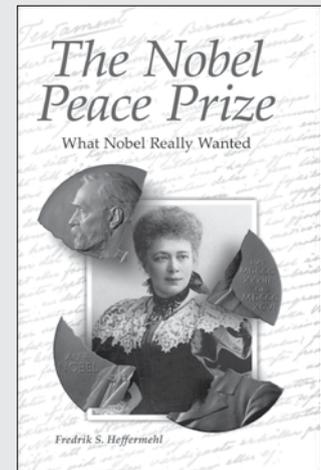
the prize to two people on the front-line fighting for the right to freedom of expression and who do not give up despite pressure and threats”. But were the two winners really first in line?

In all the enthusiasm people should not forget that *Nobel* created a prize for global disarmament, not a prize for freedom of the press. Also in 2021 the committee could easily have promoted Alfred Nobel’s vision of peace. One of the candidates this year was of utmost relevance to ridding the world of the politically enormously powerful global military order that Nobel wanted the prize to fight. The most acute and deadly threat to press freedom in the world today is the US campaign against *Julian Assange*.

Australian Assange, founder of *WikiLeaks*, deserves the thanks of world

public opinion for exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Russian press freedom is, after all, a local problem, but the US attack on Assange is seeking prevent media around the world from reporting critically on US abuses of power and crimes. So far, Assange has been deprived of his health and freedom for ten years. He is being held in isolation as a political prisoner in the Belmarsh maximum security prison in London, without charge or sentence, his treatment is torture. His courageous revelations could soon cost him his life. A Nobel committee faithful to Alfred Nobel’s vision of peace could have protected Assange from an egregious rights violation through extradition and life imprisonment in the United States.

And now the great paradox: Fortunately for the Nobel Committee, the freedom of the press it praises so highly does not work. If it had worked in matters of (unchecked) militarism, the world would no longer continue believing that Nobel established the prize for anything that could be labelled “peace”, the media would long ago have told people that the Norwegian-administered prize had betrayed Nobel’s main idea of global cooperation on disarmament as indispensable to peace. With vigilant media



the Nobel Committee could not have got away with its betrayal of the core of the Nobel Prize. My 14 years of trying to explain and defend the Nobel idea have failed because the world media support the powerful military-industrial sector and are unable to see global disarmament as the only realistic means in a world with so many life-threatening problems.

(Translation *Current Concerns* and Fredrik Heffermehl)

"Nobel Peace Prize Committee joins ..."

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party representation. The special qualification, skill and experience, which are relevant for the assessment of the allocation criteria, did virtually not play any role for the selection of committee members. *Only the basic consensus on Norwegian security policy that had evolved since the beginning of the Cold War in the late 1940s had to be observed. For the members of the committee compliance with Norwegian foreign policy – and consequently concepts of military strength and an almost blind loyalty to NATO – were more important than respect for Alfred Nobel's testament.*" (emphasis km)

Yet today actual peace policy is so extraordinarily important

The Nobel Peace Prize is considered the most important annual award for peace policy action. In fact, such action is urgently needed in the current world situation. It is no longer only regionally limited conflicts and wars that require a peace policy response; the world is in the midst of an escalating global conflict and confrontation situation; many are speaking of a new global Cold War. In our Western media, we can daily see how the enemy image of Russia and China is being shaped like in a campaign, and this matches with actual foreign and military policy decisions. The world is arming itself in many ways, not least in propaganda, and is moving further and further away from the goal of peace. In particular, the USA and its allies are finding it very difficult to accept that they have to give up the hegemonic position they established after 1990 (keywords: "new world order", neoliberal globalism, "global governance" with "rules-based order") – in favour of equal rights for all states and in favour of the right of peoples to self-determination, as the United Nations Charter dictates. In the back and forth between the great powers USA, China and Russia, it is not always easy to see what exactly is happening. This makes it even more important to look at cause and effect.

Questionable awarding of the 2021 prize

This year's awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize on 8 October to the Russian journalist *Dmitry Muratov* and the Philippine journalist *Maria Ressa* is clearly not a contribution to peacebuilding and once again does not comply with the guidelines Alfred Nobel laid down in his will. In particular, the awarding of the prize to

the Russian journalist is quite obviously another piece in the mosaic of the new Cold War.

This judgement is not pertaining to the quality of the journalistic work of the two prize winners. This should not and cannot be judged here. Following the press release of the Nobel Prize Committee, the journalistic work of both laureates is concentrating on a sharp criticism of the internal conditions in their countries. Muratov had "defended freedom of expression in Russia for decades under increasingly difficult conditions". His newspaper is the "most independent newspaper in Russia today, with a fundamentally critical attitude towards power". The paper offers "fact-based journalism and professional integrity". All this cannot be verified here, and the question may be asked why and to what end the Nobel Committee, which cannot carry out scientific research in Russia, is so certain in its judgement and who its "witnesses" are.

The Russian government itself has commented through the president's press spokesman, *Dmitry Peskov*. He stated Muratov was courageous and talented: "We can congratulate Muratov, he works consistently according to his ideals. He stands up for his ideals." However one may classify these statements, they earned sharp criticism in the West. The "Frankfurter Rundschau" wrote on 8 October: "A gesture that can hardly be surpassed in cynicism." Such judgements are also formulated very quickly and are more in keeping with the new Cold War.

Euphoric reactions from the West

In general, the reactions of Western media, journalists' associations and politicians to this year's award ceremony were downright euphoric. The purpose is immediately obvious. For example, a headline in *Zeit-Online* on 8 October reads: "Writing against Putin and Duterte". And in another article: "The Nobel Peace Prize for two journalists is perhaps the most political act of the Nobel Committee in a long time. This award intervenes in an open field battle between authoritarian rulers and civil societies, between systematic repression and defiant disclosure of what is really going on in the world." Or the "Frankfurter Rundschau" of the same day: "For the autocrats Putin and Duterte, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize 2021 is an open humiliation." The prizes had been awarded to "two journalists who loudly and audibly fight for freedom of the press, denounce oppression in their countries and risk life and limb to do so". The Nobel Committee had thus sent a "great signal".

As expected, US President Joe Biden also spoke out: "Ressa, Muratov, and journalists like them all around the world are on the front lines of a global battle for the very idea of the truth."³ The question arises, however, how this commitment to truth compares with the US treatment of whistle-blowers and journalists like *Edward Snowden*, *Chelsea Manning*, *Daniel Hale* or *Julian Assange*.

Alfred Nobel ignored again

What Alfred Nobel really wanted to achieve with his prize is almost nowhere addressed, neither by politicians nor by the media. The Nobel Committee has tried to construct connections by saying that freedom of expression is "a prerequisite for democracy and lasting peace". And in the last paragraph of its press release, the committee even made an explicit effort to explain in two sentences that this year's awarding of the prize was entirely in the spirit of Alfred Nobel. However, one must have considerable doubts about this – when looking at the facts, especially the handling of this award by Western politicians and media. If one adds to this the state of freedom of expression in many Western countries, the term "double standards" comes to mind again, one could also say: hypocrisy.

Where are the personalities who stand up for peace?

At the end of this article there should be a quotation from the German *Nachdenkseiten*, which does credit to the name of this website. It is taken from an article by *Albrecht Müller*. He is the editor of the *Nachdenkseiten* website and was a political advisor to the Nobel Peace Prize winner *Willy Brandt*. On 9 October he wrote: "The Nobel Committee's decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the Russian journalist Muratov shows the misery of our time. It serves to build up an image of Russia as an enemy and to whitewash the situation in the West. The building of the image of the enemy promotes further confrontation and ultimately the danger of a bad military confrontation."

But where are the personalities who today actually stand up with all their energy and determination for what was – rightly – so extraordinarily important to Alfred Nobel more than 125 years ago? •

¹ Also published in *Current Concerns* No. 27 of 2 July 2012

² E.g. in *Current Concerns* No. 31 of 30 July 2012 with a reprint of the final chapter of his book "The Nobel Prize. What Nobel Really Wanted"

³ <https://bd.usembassy.gov/statement-by-president-joe-biden-congratulating-nobel-peace-prize-winners/> of 8 October 2021

UN summit stays silent on root causes of our failing food system

by Hans Rudolf Herren*, Founder of Biovision and president of the foundation board



Hans R. Herren
(picture © Peter Lüthi, Biovision)

The global forum has wasted the chance to consider real alternatives to our corporately, environmentally harmful ways of producing what we eat.

It should have been a leap forward for the future of the planet, but instead it's been a textbook example of how not to run a summit. The UN Food Systems Summit was designed to turn the page on our failing food system and point the way towards a climate-resilient, food-secure, and equitable future. Instead, we're back to square one: a grab bag of good, bad, and ugly 'solutions,' yet a deafening silence on the root causes of the problems we face.

An international summit on food was long overdue. Our food system doesn't work for humans, animals, or the planet. Food production pumps out vast quantities of greenhouse gases that warm the planet, responsible for 37% of emissions. We're experiencing rising levels of obesity and malnutrition while progress on hunger has gone into reverse, with a tenth of the world's population going hungry last year.

Agriculture is key to change

Transforming the way we produce, process, and consume food is key to addressing all these problems. The summit was a critical opportunity to secure the kind of changes that simply don't happen outside of these exceptional moments. So, what went wrong?

Excessive corporate influence over the summit – a sector largely responsible for the dire state of food systems – has caused controversy from the outset.

* Hans Rudolf Herren is a Swiss agriculture and development expert. In 2008, he co-authored and co-chaired the *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development* (IAASTD) of the World Agricultural Council, commissioned by six UN agencies and the World Bank. Herren was the first Swiss to be awarded the *World Food Prize* in 1995 and the *Right Livelihood Award* in 2013. Herren received the latter award together with *Biovision – Foundation for Ecological Development*, which he founded in 1998.

The summit formed a close partnership with the *World Economic Forum*, a private-sector organisation set up to defend business interests, and was co-sponsored by the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* whose private sector connections are no secret.

This sparked a boycott by groups representing peasant farmers and small-holder producers through to international NGOs

Their concerns were well-founded. Food and agri-business talked the talk on food system transformation in the build-up to the summit, nodding to climate, livelihoods, nature, transparency and more. But there are no guarantees corporations will walk the walk if governments don't hold them to account.

Lack of ambition has been another major obstacle to success. The case for wholesale reform has never been clearer: new figures last week found that 87% of global agricultural subsidies, totalling \$540 billion, are damaging to climate, nature, and human health. Yet the Summit failed to chart a clear course towards more sustainable food production.

Agroecology stands ready as a solution

Agroecology has been found to increase crop yields by almost 80%, improve people's access to food and reduce hunger, boost farmers' earnings, and build resilience in the face of floods, droughts, and other shocks but it remains severely underfunded.

While the summit produced some commitments on subsidy reform, and a handful of governments are starting to take agroecology seriously, most funds will continue to prop up a more-or-less business-as-usual approach.

For example, the summit has been used as a launchpad for AIM (Aim for climate), a US climate initiative to increase support for 'climate smart' agriculture that is largely focused on ameliorating the climate impacts of the current – heavily polluting – approach to food production rather than shifting to genuinely sustainable agricultural systems.

The summit has also been used to fundraise for the *Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa* (AGRA), an initiative bankrolled by the Gates Foundation and headed up by *Agnes Kalibata*, the summit's special envoy. More money for AGRA means

more top-down solutions designed for Africans, not with them.

The summit's final calling card has been a top-down, non-transparent way of working. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the 'Scientific Group,' which was set up to fast-track advice to policy-makers, but which has come under fire over its bias in favour of industry friendly, high-tech solutions.

No more "Business as usual"

Organisers have been forced to abandon plans to turn this group into a permanent body but attempts to advance this version of science will outlive the summit – threatening to undermine the crucial work done by existing institutions, such as the *Committee on World Food Security*, whose scientific body brings together a more diverse range of voices including producers and civil society.

Together, these failures have delivered a summit that has taken us further away from the real solutions on food and climate.

Where do we go from here?

Getting back on track means building consensus around ideas, like agroecology, that have been proven to make a difference. To do that, governments must build on, not undermine, existing institutions, such as the *Committee on World Food Security*, which have the buy-in and genuine participation from people on the frontlines of the food, health, and climate crisis. This is the right forum to take back the agenda of transforming our food systems and take forward the ideas that will deliver it.

The climate and biodiversity summits give us another chance to get food system transformation on the table. Governments need to recognise this opportunity and put a fair and sustainable food system at the heart of a deal to cut CO2 and methane emissions, at the heart of a deal to cut deforestation, and at the heart of spending decisions.

The Food Systems Summit has served up business as usual dressed as something new. In the face of urgent climate, health, and environmental crises, we can't afford to make that mistake again. •

Source: <https://news.trust.org/item/20210923105350-u68zs/> of 13 October 2021; first published by Thomson Reuters Foundation

Global Hunger Index 2021 documents backward steps in the fight against hunger

The global fight against hunger is dangerously off track, and the world is drifting farther away from its binding goal of ending hunger by 2030. The latest UN reports already revealed the alarming news that the number of people living in hunger and poverty is growing again after years of decline. Throughout the world, around 811 million people are going hungry, and 41 million are on the brink of a famine. Circumstances are especially desperate in Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Madagascar, and South Sudan. The latest edition of the *Global Hunger Index* evaluates the nutrition situation in 128 countries and confirms significant setbacks in the fight against hunger. Forty-seven countries will fail to achieve a low level of hunger by 2030, including 28 in Africa South of the Sahara.

“The past year has unfortunately seen our fears borne out. Famines are back, and multiple crises are causing the number of people going hungry to keep rising. The coronavirus pandemic has further exacerbated the tense nutrition situation in many countries in the Global South, and millions of families have lost their livelihoods. However, hunger continues to be driven primarily by war and climate change. The poorest and weakest are especially hard hit by the effects of climate change despite doing the least to cause it. The climate crisis is a question of justice. This means that at the upcoming climate conference in Glasgow this November, we need to set clear and binding goals for reducing CO2 emissions and financial support to promote climate resilience,” urges Mar-

lehn Thieme, chair of the board of *Welthungerhilfe*.

Devastating interactions between conflicts and hunger

This year, the Global Hunger Index reveals how dangerous interactions between conflict and hunger can be. The number of violent conflicts has risen in recent years, and in eight out of ten countries with alarming or extremely alarming hunger levels, conflicts significantly contribute to hunger.

“More than half of all undernourished people live in countries shaped by conflict, violence, and fragility. Where war is raging, harvests, fields, and key infrastructure are destroyed. Having left their villages for fear of assault and armed violence, people are forced to depend on humanitarian aid for survival. When hunger and poverty are prevalent, conflicts increase as well. We need viable political conflict resolutions and the strengthening of the right to food. The use of hunger as a weapon of war must finally be penalised consistently. Furthermore, we need flexible funding models that better account for the reciprocal relationship between food and peace,” underlines Thieme.

Source: Press release of the *Welthungerhilfe* of 14 October 2021; <https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/news/press-releases/2021/2021-global-hunger-index/>

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km. What kind of world is it in which 811 million people go hungry and the situation is getting worse rather than better? The press release of Welthungerhilfe writes that the current Global Hunger Index confirms “significant setbacks in

the fight against hunger”. Although there have been well-developed programmes for a very long time, the implementation of which could eliminate hunger in the world!

Welthungerhilfe rightly cites climatic conditions as well as conflicts and wars as two main causes of the hunger catastrophe. Elsewhere, it has drawn attention to the major problem that more and more small farms in hunger-stricken countries are (have to be) abandoned and large (often foreign) investors buy up the land and abuse it for their profit and power interests. Added to this are trade conditions that powerfully favour the rich countries of the North. All at the expense of the poorest people in the world!

Current Concerns has repeatedly pointed out alternatives to this unjust and people-killing world economic and world agricultural order. The “International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development” (IAASTD) and the initiatives that have become active with it, especially in the poor countries of the world, are outstanding – but they often must feel like Sisyphus, who rolls the stone upwards, only to see it roll down again when he reaches the top.

Deceived by the ideology of market radicalism, many people in our countries believe that the world’s possibilities are limited to a zero-sum game. Fighting poverty and hunger would have to be at our expense. That is absolutely wrong. But this is the way to keep the world divided and to disrupt human solidarity. We must not agree with this. •

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UN? Which UN?

Multilateralism in the 21st Century

by Dr h. c. Hans-C. von Sponeck, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations*

The major theme of the moment on “what is common in the relations of people, nations and states” includes references to the UN as the largest relationship community in the world. Which UN is meant? The UN has many “faces”!

There is the political face in New York as the legislative, with the Security Council and its five permanent members – China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States – and the General Assembly with 193 member states. Then there is the legal face in The Hague as the judiciary, with a court and its 15 judges. And finally, there is the worldwide operational face as the executive branch with a Secretary General and 55,000 staff distributed among the many specialised agencies, funds and programmes such as UNICEF, the Development Programme (UNDP), WHO, UNESCO, FAO, the World Food Programme, the World Bank, the Refugee Programme (UNHCR) and others. After 75 years, this important UN framework unfortunately still stands on three shaky legs.

75 years of a political UN: Disappointed expectations ...

“Peace”, “security” and “progress” for people, for *all* people, was the expectant promise of three statesmen, *Stalin*, *Roosevelt* and *Churchill*, at Yalta in 1945 after a devastating Second World War. The UN with its political face, the Security Council, was to ensure this. In the same year, 51 states signed a corresponding peace charter in San Francisco. It did not take long for the world to sense that this commitment was nothing more than a painful illusion. The three great powers succumbed to their geopolitical self-interest. The UN, which was supposed to build a community of states, quickly became the theatre of the Cold War. Many people in East and West became victims of the cold. The Security Council was unable to fulfil its mandate even in the first years of the UN.

In the following decades, many colonies had become sovereign states. They joined the UN with pride and expectation, in the firm belief that they would be accepted as equal members of the UN General Assembly. This too was a fallacy.

The unexpected reunification of the two German states, 45 years later, and the signing of the so-called Charter of Paris of 1990, also called the Freedom Charter, by Western and Eastern European states as well as the USA, Canada and the USSR, made the world breathe a sigh of relief. This “Paris ray of hope” with its return to the fundamentals of human relations and the creation of new common ground between the people of the socialist and capitalist worlds was a valuable signal for the world and also for the multilateralism of the United Nations. “Never again war” was the promise. New wars in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Rwanda/Burundi and elsewhere in the 1990s turned the dream of peace among people, nations and states into a nightmare. It became colder again in the political UN.

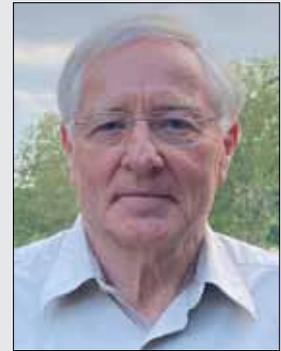
... but also great successes

Looking back over the 75 years of the UN shows that despite all the hot and cold wars of that time, the UN succeeded in creating vital international law, including the comprehensive human rights covenants for political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. The General Assembly gave its approval to sustainable development goals, and in a star moment, it signified that there is a shared moral obligation of people, nations and states to work for an international *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) for countries that are unable to manage themselves. This should prevent genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression.

These are unquestionably great successes of the political UN. Once again it is the five permanent members of the Security Council who have decisively ignored, violated or broken the established law. Current examples of ruthless power politics can be found in Chechnya, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Libya, Xinjiang and Afghanistan, among others. They occupy the world’s conscience and demand fundamental reforms of the political UN.

Fundamental reforms of the political UN are required

The West, with its 8% of the world’s population, does not want any fundamental reform of the UN Charter and is defending the status quo in the Security Council, where it claims three of the five permanent seats. Africa and Latin America, with 19% of the world’s population, have no permanent seat at all, and Asia, with 60% of the world’s population, only have one such seat on the Security Council.



Hans-C. von Sponeck
(picture ma)

Hans von Sponeck was with the UN for 32 years. During this time, he worked in New York, Ghana, Pakistan, Botswana, India and was the Director of the UNDP European Office in Geneva. From 1998 to 2000, as UN Coordinator and Assistant UN Secretary-General, he was responsible for the humanitarian programme “Oil for Food” in Iraq. In February 2000, he resigned in protest against the sanctions policy against Iraq. Hans von Sponeck is the recipient of several awards, including the *Coventry Peace Prize* of the Church of England, the *Peacemaker Award* of the *Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility* and the *Bremen Peace Prize*. He is currently working with *Richard Falk* on a book on UN reform “*Liberating the UN: Realism Beyond Geopolitics*” (provisional title) which will be published in 2022.

The “rest” of the world, the other 92%, no longer want to accept Western domination and especially American unilateralism. The geopolitical dynamics and the great power competition between China and the USA will lead to considerable global unrest in the near future. The bandaged political mainstay of the UN must be healed. The call for a new international security structure is therefore getting louder because an institution is needed that is capable of preventing crises, wars and the human suffering that goes with them.

The UN’s second pillar, the *International Court of Justice* (ICJ), has not played the role that is needed to decisively improve relations between people, nations and states over the course of 75 years of the UN. The upcoming reforms of the ICJ include replacing the limited “advisory” function in such a way that the court can make legally binding decisions and is accessible not only to states and the political UN, but also to civil society.

* Lecture “Mut zur Ethik” – Annual Conference: “The bonum commune in relations between people, nations and states: Solving problems and conflicts with dignity – with one another rather than against one another” 3–5 September 2021 in Sirnach (TG). (Translated from German)

"UN? Which UN?"

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**Many positive things
at the operational UN**

There are many positive things to report about the third pillar, the executive, the operational UN. Here the 55,000 UN employees are deployed to help children through UNICEF, to promote the health of all people through the WHO and to fight pandemics such as COVID-19, through the World Food Programme (WFP) to reduce hunger, through UNHCR, the United Nations – Refugee agency to protect people on the move, through the FAO, the agricultural organisation, to improve the food supply, but also in the many other UN agencies that have to do with sustainable development.

Financing the UN – fact check

Some wealthy governments have spoken of their financial contributions to the UN system as victims. This is a malicious false statement. A closer look at the facts has shown that of three selected countries – Germany, the USA and Bhutan – on a per capita basis Bhutan, the small underdeveloped state in the Himalayas, pays more than Germany and that the USA makes by far the smallest contribution!

**Successes despite limited
finances and political interference**

Despite the embarrassingly limited financial possibilities of the OECD countries and the political interference, especially by the United States, in the work of the UN system, this pillar has succeeded in improving its structure and content considerably. In the third decade of the 21st century there are no programmes that do not include sustainability, climate change and human rights, especially women's rights. Today, cooperation with people on the ground and the importance of local knowledge are taken more and more seriously by the operational UN. The UN field offices of the specialised agencies, programmes and funds have found each other and are integrating more and more – a slow, often frustrating process that has led to UN teams with a leader, a team, a pro-

gramme and often with a budget in a "UN house". A valuable multilateral common ground arises here in the sense of a pronounced ethic of peace.

**Operational UN works
even in crisis and war zones**

This UN approach works, even where crises and wars pose significant dangers to staff, e.g., currently in the Tigray province of Ethiopia, in Haiti and in Myanmar. Even in Afghanistan, the operational UN system remains on the ground. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) is negotiating with the Taliban; WHO continues to bring medicines into the country – only trauma medicines are new; national and international UNICEF staff are present in all 34 provinces of the country; WFP, the World Food Programme, is transporting food by land and air to Afghanistan. It was a courageous and important political decision by *António Guterres*, the UN Secretary-General, not to close the UN offices.

And another thing: cooperation between the political, the legal and the operational UN was practically nonexistent until recently. In Iraq under sanctions, eleven different UN units were active, dealing with security, humanitarian and human rights tasks. From the beginning of the sanctions in 1990 until their end in 2003, there was no cooperation at all. Today, this incredible deficit of isolated action is largely replaced by evolving cooperation. UN development programmes, political missions and peacekeeping military operations are increasingly prepared and carried out jointly. To say the least, the walls between the three UN legs are crumbling. This is a good development.

**Prerequisite for peace
and the common good**

In summary: The three-legged UN has achieved a lot in 75 years, but decisive reforms and adjustments have not yet taken place. The political UN has not lived up to its tasks, it has largely failed. Great powers like the USA, China and Russia have a lot of guilt loaded on their shoulders in

this respect. They must understand that the great common, peace and the well-being of all people, will only have a chance if:

- Unilateralism gives way to multilateralism;
- monologues become dialogues;
- convergence and compromise take place;
- civil society is understood and taken seriously;
- causes, not just symptoms, are recognised and addressed;
- and when all policymakers are held accountable.

Turning a UN table with edges into a round table, with the conversation as a plane, remains the great challenge for people, nations and states in the 21st century. •

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Belarus – On the current situation and politics of a country, which has become the target of an openly hostile attitude

by Aliaksandr Ganevich, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Switzerland*

cc. In accordance with the principle of “*audiatur et altera pars*” (“hear also the other side”), *Current Concerns* also wants to let those speak for themselves who are otherwise only talked and written about. Last year, the Republic of Belarus was again strongly in the headlines after the presidential elections conducted there. We do not need to repeat what was written and broadcast about it in the West. However, it could also be the case that in reality things in this country are different from the way they are usually presented to us. The following is the text of the speech by Aliaksandr Ganevich, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus in Switzerland, which he has made available to us for publication.

I am pleased to be here today to describe the current situation in my country and around Belarus. I thank the organisers of this year's conference “*Mut zur Ethik*” for the invitation and the interest in what is happening in my country.

Negative headlines and a ray of light

In recent months, the Republic of Belarus has often been in the headlines, also in the Swiss media. The focus has been almost exclusively on negative aspects. Journalists liked to report repressions and arrests, every occasion was used to attack and demonise the state leadership of my country.

Against this background, Professor *Bachmeier's* great article in the independent journal *Current Concerns* in October 2020 was really like a ray of light. I think the article still remains topical and best explains what happened in Belarus after the presidential elections a year ago and what – or who – was behind it.

Another look at the mass protests after the elections

To summarise this in a certain sense, I would like to quote the President of the Republic of Belarus, *Alexander Lukashenko*, who said the following during the Big Conversation with mass media on 9 August 2021, some weeks ago:

“As for the peaceful mass protests, we have seen that they were anything but peaceful. We can show you photo and video recordings where our OMON people [editor's note: Special Purpose Police Unit] were run over by cars. We can show you policemen with serious injuries. Tell me, who started these riots? Did I need this war? Absolutely not. I wanted everything to be peaceful and calm. Anything else would be detrimental to me.”

According to the head of state, unauthorised mass protests were financed from the West. The coup attempt was planned before the official election results were announced.

The President expressed his conviction: “We have passed a very tough test, the test on national unity. We have everything to come through this phase of recent history with dignity. Our people can think, they are educated and they stand up for the interests of sovereign Belarus. There is an understanding (agreement) that there is one goal in mind with regard to the representation of national interests, namely the preservation of the state.”

Measures were necessary and are also being taken in many other democratic countries

We are convinced that the reaction on the part of the security authorities would have been very similar in the West in such a situation. We have already witnessed much tougher police action in France, Germany and other democratic countries.

The authorities in Belarus should prevent the chaos that could endanger the life and health of our citizens and also be exploited by third forces in their own interests. It is clear to what serious consequences it can lead if such a situation gets out of control.

The fate of Belarus is decided by its people

We firmly believe that the fate of Belarus will not be decided by street rallies with dubious external mediation, but by the Belarusian people themselves in a civilised manner and strictly within the legal framework.

The situation in Belarus has visibly calmed down and normalised in recent months. People have returned to normal life, businesses are functioning, state organs are fulfilling their tasks, there are no riots or mass actions.



Aliaksandr Ganevich (picture wp)

Aliaksandr Ganevich has been the Extraordinary Ambassador and Plenipotentiary (First Class) of the Republic of Belarus in the Swiss Confederation since 2020. He was born in Lida, Grodno Region. He completed his education at the Military Command School in Ussuriysk, at the *Moscow Diplomatic Academy* and at the Diplomatic School of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. Since 1993 he has worked in the diplomatic service in Minsk, Berlin, Bern and Munich.

Aliaksandr Ganevich is married and has two children.

He speaks Belarusian, Russian and German.

The economy is developing in a dynamic way, for example, Belarusian exports have increased by 37.8% in the first seven months of this year, and exports to the countries of the European Union have even doubled.

What the constitutional reform is about

On 11–12 February 2021, the 6th All-Belarusian People's Assembly was held in Minsk, where strategic issues of the future development of Belarus were discussed. The Forum was attended by a total of 2,400 delegates, including parliamentarians and employees, representatives of religious organisations and NGOs, representatives of the private business, pensioners and students. Leaders were invited from all registered political parties and movements, including the opposition. Almost 60% of the delegates were younger than 50.

The discussions held and decisions taken during the Forum confirmed the determination of the majority of Belarusians for changes in social and political life. The

* Lecture “*Mut zur Ethik*” – Annual Conference: “The bonum commune in relations between people, nations and states: Solving problems and conflicts with dignity – with one another rather than against one another” 3–5 September 2021 in Sirmach (TG). (Translated from German)

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process of constitutional reform, which is actively underway in Belarus right now, should serve this purpose. The following stages are envisaged:

- Preparation and discussion of the draft of the new Constitution in 2021;
- Conduct of the popular referendum on this issue in early 2022;
- Adjustment of legislation to the new Constitution in 2022.

Core elements of the new Constitution are to include:

- Redistribution of powers between the president and the government, the president and the parliament, regional and local authorities;
- anchoring of a fair social contract;
- the special role of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly as a constitutional body.

On 16 March 2021 the Constitutional Commission was formed, headed by the Chairman of the Constitutional Court. The body consists of 36 people, including representatives of state bodies, associations, companies, legal scholars and other experts.

The draft constitution is almost ready and will be submitted for public discussion in the coming weeks.

Promotion of social and economic human rights

Among the central topics of discussion during the 6th All-Belarusian People's Assembly was the promotion of social and economic human rights. The course of maintaining the welfare state as the "immutable national brand" of Belarus was confirmed.

The government will strengthen and further develop the following areas:

- State guarantees of pension support for the population;
- Free health care and education;
- Support for large families, orphans and other vulnerable groups;
- Promotion of corporate social responsibility;
- State support for the constructive activity of traditional confessions and the preservation of religious peace;
- Preservation of the ideological foundations of the Belarusian nation and its historical and cultural heritage; support for art and culture;
- Special attention to work with young people, education to patriotism and formation of a healthy lifestyle.

New investment projects and regional development

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus announced 500 new investment projects in industry. It is planned to develop at least five new innovative industries: Electric Transportation, Bioindustry, Pharmaceuticals, Robotics, and Composite Materials Manufacturing.

A regional development program will be implemented, focusing on cities with over 80,000 inhabitants, improving the quality of life, supporting infrastructure projects, road construction and renovation.

The government will further develop the traditional industries – mechanical engineering, chemical industry, agriculture – on a new technological and digital basis.

Determined to prevent any interference in the internal affairs of Belarus

In Belarus, we are committed to a civilised dialogue between the government and society in order to meet the current needs and challenges. In doing so, we are determined not to give in to external pressures on our country and to prevent any interference in the internal affairs of Belarus.

For the first time in the history of our country we are confronted with such a massive external attack. This pressure takes various forms, including the imposition of ever new sanctions against our country, which are in fact aimed at undermining its economic stability and thus weakening state sovereignty.

Sanctions: wrong, destructive, futile, against international law

In this sense, we deeply regret decisions of the Swiss side to adopt EU sanctions against the Republic of Belarus. These are not only measures against specific citizens and companies, but also sectoral economic sanctions, which are aimed at important sectors of the Belarusian economy and will cause negative consequences, especially for employees and their families.

We remain firmly convinced that sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy are completely wrong in today's mutually interdependent world and cannot bring about positive changes. They force sanctioned states to take countermeasures, which impairs the development of bilateral relations. A sanctions spiral is always destructive and dangerous for both sides.

Belarus has constantly opposed and continues to oppose the violation of the

universally recognised principles and norms of international law. We are convinced that unilateral sanctions have no legitimacy and are futile from the outset.

No one benefits from the fact that the West has imposed an actual blockade of Belarus, including a completely unfounded blockade of air traffic with our country.

Unless it satisfies ambitions of individual politicians and radicals who want to increase their political capital through such actions. These politicians start from the false premise that the government in Belarus is supposedly weak and will be overthrown by the people. But this is self-deception. The mindset of "the more harm to the people, the worse for the regime" is untenable and counterproductive for everyone. Of course, there will be some costs to deal with, but ultimately Belarus will withstand it and continue its progressive development. Everyone will only lose by blockades and sanctions.

Good bilateral relations between Belarus and Switzerland are in the interest of both countries and peoples

We continue to believe that the maintenance and development of good bilateral relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Swiss Confederation would fully correspond to the interests of our countries and peoples. Belarus is interested in the continuation of inter-parliamentary cooperation, rhythmic work of the *Swiss-Belarusian Joint Economic Commission*, development of mutual trade and successful activity of Swiss enterprises in our country, mutual support within the framework of international organisations.

Ready for dialogue on an equal footing and on the basis of mutual respect

Despite the openly hostile attitude of many Western states, the Republic of Belarus continues to reaffirm its readiness to continue and develop dialogue on an equal footing and on the basis of mutual respect.

We call on all partners not to make hasty and emotional decisions based on insufficient and often inaccurate information, to break with the logic of confrontation, to recognise the harmfulness of the sanctions policy, and to return to pragmatic and effective way of dealing with each other that would benefit all.

Thank you for your attention and I am pleased to answer your questions. I would also be very interested in your comments and suggestions. ●

Danger of war in the South Caucasus

by Ralph Bosshard

Despite the ceasefire arbitrated by Russia, which put an end to the six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in autumn 2020, the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh is still smouldering. This spring the conflict began to spread further and linking up with other conflicts, so that today an escalation into a regional war in the South Caucasus can no longer be ruled out. Nuclear powers could also be drawn into it. The last few days have seen an intensification of the situation with increasing time pressure.

Since last April, Azerbaijan has been making bolder and bolder territorial demands on its neighbour Armenia, which go far beyond the territorial dispute in Nagorno-Karabakh. Baku not only wants transit rights for land transports between the Azerbaijani motherland and the exclave of Nakhichevan, as stipulated in the ceasefire agreement of 9 November 2020, but an actual corridor through the southern Armenian province of Syunik.¹ Such a corridor was never mentioned in the ceasefire agreement.² In the meantime, Azerbaijan continued its incursions against Armenian territory in various places. Through these incursions against indisputably Armenian territory, the danger now arises that Russia, as an ally of Armenia, is being drawn into a war. In September, Azerbaijan threatened to blockade the road between the two Armenian towns of Kapan and Goris



Iran and Azerbaijan. (map Ralph Bosshard)

in the Syunik Province, which runs for stretches across Azerbaijani territory.³ This threat, in turn, provoked Tehran, because this road is important for the traffic between Iran and Armenia. In the event that Azerbaijani troops invaded Armenia and drove the Armenian army out of the Syunik region, Iran has already explicitly threatened military intervention.⁴

The conflict has become even more explosive in recent weeks through openly expressed Israeli threats against Iran associated with the dispute over its nuclear programme.⁵ In addition, recently, there was an exercise by the Turkish, Pakistani and Azerbaijani navies in the Caspian Sea, south of Baku.⁶ This exercise, which took place not far from the Iranian border, was seen as a provocation in Tehran and triggered the deployment of Iranian troops on the border with Azerbaijan.⁷

In this heated climate, the calls by US President Joe Biden seem almost anaemic, and France, too, has already ruled out concrete support for Armenia.⁸

Time is running out

The time frame for a military solution of the conflict in southern Armenia is getting narrow, because the onset of winter will soon make military operations more and more difficult. And the more the parties to the conflict could be tempted to quickly bring about a fait accompli

in order to put themselves in a favourable position for next spring.

In the negotiations on the nuclear agreement (*Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action JCPOA*) between Iran and a group of states consisting of China, Russia, France, Great Britain, Germany and perhaps soon again the USA, could be before long under time pressure as well.

After the election of *Ebrahim Raisi* as the new Iranian president last August, negotiations were suspended for the time being. Israel in particular has been pressing for a complete break of the negotiations and has repeatedly predicted that Iran will soon have produced enough weapons-grade uranium to build its first nuclear weapon.⁹ Behind closed doors experts at the International Atomic Energy IAEA, however, say that the construction of the first Iranian nuclear weapon will not happen so quickly after all.

Poker over prisoners

In the meantime, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has also taken up the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Their draft resolution "Humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan" roughly illustrates which narratives the European parliamentarians are willing to accept from the conflict parties.¹⁰ European parliamentarians consider reports

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Ralph Bosshard (picture wp)

Ralph Bosshard studied General History, Eastern European History and Military History, completed the Military Command School of the ETH Zurich and the General Staff Training of the Swiss Army. This was followed by language training in Russian at the Moscow State University and training at the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Army. He is familiar with the situation in the South Caucasus from his six years at the OSCE, where he was, among other things, Special Advisor to the Swiss Permanent Representative.

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on the participation of mercenaries hired by Turkey in Syria and sent into the war in Nagorno-Karabakh as plausible. However, the comparison between these mercenaries and those Armenians from the worldwide diaspora who returned to the old homeland to fight against the Azerbaijani aggression seems somewhat bizarre. Here, obviously, the Azerbaijani deputies have prevailed.¹¹

For months, Armenia has been complaining that Azerbaijan has still not released all the Armenian prisoners of war from autumn last year. At present 48 Armenians are said to be still in Azerbaijani custody.¹² The corresponding evidence apparently was too sound to allow Azerbaijan to deny this fact. Understandably Armenia fears that Azerbaijan is trying to blackmail it with these prisoners. The cynical game with prisoners of war could prove dangerous for Baku, because the Russian-brokered ceasefire explicitly includes the return of all prisoners of war. The Azerbaijani President *Ilham Aliyev* apparently believes, based on his military superiority, that he can afford such a blatant breach of the ceasefire agreement. Should he be testing Russia's patience too much, he could be charged for it.

Ilham Aliyev walking a tightrope

Azerbaijan's political system thrives on the fact that the bulk of the revenues from oil and gas production goes to a small political elite, at the centre of which is the Aliyev clan. Meanwhile, the population is granted just enough of it so that it does not become rebellious. In addition, significant financial resources are needed to secure the goodwill of influential circles in the West. It is known that financial contributions to politicians and diplomats have already reached five-digit euro amounts.¹³ The political survival of the Aliyev regime thus depends to a large extent on income from oil and gas production. Without this, it quickly becomes dangerous for the Aliyev clan. The crisis of 2014, when prices plummeted, may have served as a warning to Baku.¹⁴

The dependence of the Azerbaijani economy on revenues from oil and gas production remains high, but revenues will no longer reach 2010 levels in the foreseeable future.¹⁵ Many production facilities are now old, and oil production for over 100 years has caused ecological damage that will cost the country dearly to repair. A lot of money has been invested in prestige projects, especially in Baku. Anyone who drives out of Baku into the countryside will quickly see that not much of the income from oil and gas has stuck there. In economic terms, Azerbaijan currently



Syunik Province. (map Ralph Bosshard)



Incidents. (map Ralph Bosshard)

has little to offer apart from oil and gas. The Azerbaijani government needs to diversify and is therefore trying to make a name for itself as a trading hub for oil and gas from Turkmenistan. The Europeans are happy to go along with this, because they hope that oil and gas from the Caspian Sea could reduce their dependence on Russia.¹⁶

More generally, Azerbaijan wants to make greater use of its advantageous geographical position between Asia, Europe, Iran and Russia.¹⁷ It would like to benefit from the *Belt & Road Initiative* launched by China and establish itself as a regional hub for the international transport of goods from east to west as well as from south to north (Tehran–Moscow). This gives new importance to the development of the transport infrastructure. Among other things, this concerns the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway connections and those from the Iranian city of Rasht to the Russian border at Yalama, as well as the seaport of Alyat.

Long before the war last autumn, the intensive cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan in the field of armament was already evident.¹⁸ Parallel to this, intelligence cooperation is also likely to have developed, about which, naturally, not much is published. However, it is more than plausible that Israeli intelligence services are active in the south of Azerbaijan in order to listen in on Iran. Tehran will certainly also consider the possibility that Israel is conducting drone attacks against Iranian nuclear laboratories from Azerbaijani territory or at least procuring the necessary intelligence from Azerbaijan.¹⁹ If such an Israeli operation were indeed to cause serious damage to Iran, Tehran's wrath could well hit the rulers in Baku.

Armenia in a fix

In recent decades, Turkey and Azerbaijan have tried to isolate and starve Armenia economically. Armenia's and Arzakh's borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan are

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hermetically sealed. All the more important for Armenia is the open border with Iran in the south and with Georgia in the north. The export of agricultural products and mining are of central importance for the Armenian economy. Conversely, the open border is also important for Iran, which has been battered by economic sanctions for decades.²⁰

The exact number of Armenian soldiers killed in the autumn of last year is not conclusively known, but according to the latest findings it is likely to be between 3700 and 3900. This is an enormous number for a small nation of about 3 million people and an active army of 45,000 men. It is thus clear that the losses of the six-week war have left a massive gap in the ranks of the armed forces of Armenia and the Republic of Arzakh.²¹ It will probably take years for them to recover from this blood-letting. In the next few years, the Armenian government's options for military action will be limited. This is also known in Baku.

Windy reasoning

When Armenia and Azerbaijan declared themselves independent in 1991 and became member states of the UN and participating states of the OSCE, the dispute over the affiliation of the autonomous republic of Nagorno Karabakh was already underway. The dissolving Soviet Union had previously been unable to resolve this dispute. Even then it had to be known that the Karabakh question would have to be solved within the framework of the UN or the OSCE. Apart from that, the state borders of the new members of the international community of states were undisputed. However, the borders between the various administrative units of the Soviet Union were often not clearly marked in the terrain. Inaccuracies in border demarcation remain to this day.²²

In its territorial claims on Armenia, the Azerbaijani government relies on the Caucasus kingdom of the so-called Albanians, who are not to be confused with those in the Balkans. Their kingdom existed from the 2nd century BC until the early 8th century. The ancient Albanians spoke a Caucasian language and professed the Christian faith similarly early as Georgians and Armenians.²³ The oldest evidence of the Caucasian-Albanian language was found in 1975 in St. Catherine's Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula. This is one of the oldest monasteries of Christianity still inhabited and is located at the foot of Mount Sinai, where, according to tradition, God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush. Thanks to its isolated location, the monastery has never been destroyed. Approximately 4000 peo-

ple still live in Azerbaijan whose mother tongue is Udish and who can be regarded as descendants of these Albanians in the broadest sense. They profess Christianity. Where the remaining 10 million Azerbaijanis get the legitimacy to make territorial claims on Armenia is not clear. The fact that the Azerbaijanis, as predominantly Shiite Muslims and speakers of a Turkic language, base their territorial claims on ancient Caucasian Albania is frivolous. The investigation of the narrative of the Caucasian Albanians called for by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is urgently needed.²⁴

Infrastructure and mineral resources

Since ancient times, ancient Persia has played an important role as a hub between West and East. With the independence of the republics of Central Asia from the Soviet Union in 1991, Iran became a transit country for the young republics to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, all the more so because Afghanistan has never really been stabilised since the withdrawal of the Soviet army. The Iranian port of Chabahar on the coast of the Gulf of Oman recently aroused India's interest because it can use this port to bypass the arch-enemy Pakistan in its traffic with Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, the port's transport connections on land still need to be massively improved. In the north of Iran, Bandar-e Torkaman (formerly Bandar-e Shah) is a port on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. It was already an important transshipment point for US aid shipments to the Soviet Union during the Second World War as part of the Lend-Lease Programme through the so-called "Persian Corridor".²⁵ In Bandar-e Torkaman, the American relief supplies were loaded from the railway onto freighters. Today, Azerbaijan can still be bypassed in this way. This would render Azerbaijani investments in railway infrastructure useless. In contrast, the mountainous roads in southern Armenia will never reach the capacities that rail and sea links in the Caspian Sea region have. Consequently, the Azerbaijani provocations on the Kapan-Goris road should not be interpreted as measures against a potential competitor, but as an attempt to further encircle Armenia and isolate it from its neighbour Iran.

After the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the interpretation of transit rights in the ceasefire of 9 November last year could not be settled, Russia once again stepped in. Rumour has it that an agreement has been reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia that the latter will be compensated with 250 million dollars annually for granting transit rights to its neighbour.²⁶ If so, Azerbaijan would solidly finance its arch-enemy Armenia in

the future. This, in turn, would massively change the outcome of the autumn 2020 war, which was so unfavourable for Armenia. This would then also be a great success for Russian diplomacy and a first step towards normalising political-economic relations in the South Caucasus.

In the course of the dispute over transit rights, Baku also applied pressure by military means, among other things. The rulers in Baku have experience with this. The places where armed incidents have occurred in recent months are telling.²⁷ Anyone who has driven along the Vardenis-Martakert Highway from Lake Sevan to the Terter Valley will have noticed the mines on both sides of the road. There is the gold mine of Sotk, where the precious metal can be extracted particularly profitably in open-cast mining. A little further south, near the village of Verin Shorzha, is the gold mine at Tsartsar Mountain. This spring, Azerbaijani troops took up positions near these localities at or perhaps already across the Armenian border, from where they can easily monitor the activities around the mines and, if necessary, disrupt them by shelling.

The situation is similar near the villages of Aravus and Tekh at the transition between Armenia and the Laçın corridor, where copper and molybdenum deposits lie dormant in the ground in addition to gold. Not far away, Azerbaijani troops invaded Armenian territory at Lake Sev or Sevlich, which is of great importance for the water supply of the Armenian city of Goris. And finally, in July, there was prolonged fighting in the quadrangle near Yeraskh, where Iran, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan border each other.²⁸ In all these cases, the suspicion arises that the aim of these military operations is to deny Armenia access to its natural resources and thus put it under pressure. The economic objective of Azerbaijani warfare is becoming increasingly clear.

Assessment

After its defeat in the war against Armenia in 1994, Azerbaijan complained, not entirely unjustifiably, that it had been deprived of control over significant parts of its territory. Frustrated by years of lacklustre efforts by the international community to implement the so-called Madrid Principles, disappointed by the hard-line stance of the Pashinyan government and humiliated in last July's border skirmishes, Baku opted for a military solution. In the six-week war last autumn, Azerbaijan recaptured much of the territory it had lost in 1994 and, by capturing parts of Hadrut province, indicated that it is willing to solve the problem as a whole by military means. However, the events of the last few months have gone far beyond the mil-

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“Protecting nature must become protecting mankind”

by Moritz Nestor

The famous Swiss zoologist and anthropologist *Adolf Portmann* (1897–1982) wrote his essay “*Naturschutz wird Menschenschutz*” (“Protecting nature becomes protecting mankind”) in 1971. A pleasingly balanced and profound statement on nature conservation. Especially in today’s public debate about climate change and species protection, it would be a scientific voice that could bring a little more prudence and calm into the power and opinion struggle heated up by ideologues with media power.

For the most striking thing about the prevailing talks on climate and nature protection in the mass media is a tendency that is directed more and more against human beings: Biodiversity in nature is claimed, but only for bear, lynx, wolf & Co. As if the human species were not part of nature as well. Man, the “greatest richness of the globe”, where is he protected? The unspirit [Un-Geist] is becoming more and more widespread that man as the alleged enemy of nature (“cancer” of the earth, according to a deep ecologist) must be fought: There are too many of us, therefore the earth is suffering and is “striking back” with severe weather and natural catastrophes. For the animals “each day is Treblinka”, a cynic once wrote. Away with “anthropocentrism”, *Peter Singer* keeps preaching to us! Since the 1980s, radical deep ecologists¹ and green philosophers have been demanding a “dying back” (in the words of the U.S. deep ecologist William D. Aiken) of mankind, and they have been developing totalitarian solutions to protect “democracy in nature”, whatever they mean by that. It is worth taking *Jean-Christophe*

Rufin’s book “100 Stunden” (“Le parfum d’Adam”) from the shelf once again. In its scientific appendix, the worldwide acting radical to militant Eco scene is described.

But where is a conservation of nature hand in hand with the protection of man? Hand in hand with the protection of man against war, nuclear threat and contamination, against millionfold of deaths by starvation and against the most blatant economic exploitation by neoliberal totalitarianism, the kind of which we have never experienced before? And hand in hand with the protection against depriving man from his protective communities, which occurred around that time as radically as never before, when *Margaret Thatcher* proclaimed in 1981: “Who is society? There is no such thing!”² Man, whose nature is culture (Portmann) and who cannot survive without communities and societies, is robbed of his nature that way and is denatured to a *Robinson*.

Some say the world has turned into a village due to digitalisation. There may be some truth about that in a certain sense. But this poses the question even more urgently: What shall we do with the people who are now no longer living “far back in Turkey”? Right in front of the huts of our village one shameless war of aggression is waged after the other by Western capital and power alliances, one culture after the other is extinguished. We know about the millions of people starving and dying of hunger worldwide, we know about the politically intended drug epidemics, we know about the death house Africa, we know about the genocides and, and,



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and – and in our “neighbourhood” of the “global village” life goes on as if nothing had happened at all. Today’s horror story about the Anglo-American empire withdrawing from all nuclear non-proliferation treaties and establishing a new Anglo-American nuclear alliance: The worst nuclear high-technology – which by its very existence is threatening the life of all humans, of all animals, and in general of all life on earth even more than ever before – is being spread by the USA even more purposefully and even further. This is hardly perceived as terrifying news and will be forgotten tomorrow when better protection of aquarium fish will be demanded in all the newspapers and broadcasting stations. Not one of the nature conservation groups and parties that are dominating the discourse by capital and media power is including the protection of human beings from war and exploitation in their program. For which one of the competitors for power, who seek to elicit our votes, is nature protection also protection of man? Who else should protect at all!?

So, what did Adolf Portmann say in 1971? “Our problem has arisen in the Occident – today’s devastation of the original world and its transformation into a

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²³ here and in the following: see Wolfgang Schulze: *CAUCASIAN ALBANIAN (ALUAN), the Language of the “Caucasian Albanian” (Aluan) Palimpsest from Mt. Sinai and of the “Caucasian Albanian” inscriptions*, o.O. 2001, online at http://wschulze.userweb.mwn.de/Cauc_alb.htm. See also the homepage of the Palimpsest Project: <http://sinaipalimpsests.org/>. Cf. Zaza Aleksidze, J.-P. Mahé: “Découverte d’un texte albanien: une langue ancienne du Caucase retrouvée” (Albanian text discovered: an ancient Caucasian language recovered); in: *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1997, pp. 512–532, online at https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_1997_num_141_2_15756; cf. also Zaza Aleksidze, J.-P. Mahé: “Le déchiffrement de l’écriture des Albaniens du Caucase” (The deciphering of the writing of the Albanians of the Caucasus); in: *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2001, pp. 1239–1257, online at https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_2001_num_145_3_16334.

²⁴ see Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2391, op. cit., Article 18.6.

²⁵ see the article *Leih- und Pachtgesetz* (Lend-Lease Act); in: *aus-der-Zeit* vom 18 February 1941, online at <https://www.aus-der-zeit.ch/books/der-zweite-weltkrieg-band-02/page/leih-und-pachtgesetz-%2818021941%29>. Cf. “Bandar Shahpur – World War II – Persian Gulf Command”, online at http://www.parstimes.com/travel/iran/bandar_shahpur_gallery1a.html.

²⁶ see “Newspaper: Armenia-Azerbaijan agreement details known” in *News.am*, online at <https://news.am/eng/news/663217.html>.

²⁷ here and in the following: “New Armenia-Azerbaijan border dispute: 3 villages and gold, copper, silver and molybdenum deposits”; in: *Nagorno Karabakh Observer* of 5 September 2021, online at <https://nkobserver.com/archives/6867>. Cf. also “Armenia foils Azerbaijani army offensive in Gegharkunik” in *Panarmenian Netvom*, 28 July 2021, online at <https://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/294621/>.

²⁸ see <https://twitter.com/NKObserver/status/1417255693107834881>.

“Protecting nature must become ...”

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world of man has proceeded from the technology of the Occident.” The rise and global spread of this historically unprecedented new technology is the fruit of the Christian age. “Nobody can reflect and face the tragic situation of our times without tackling this fundamental fact.” But considering the enormous extent of the global devastation caused by modern technology one “not ready without further ado to describe the liberation struggle of the occidental spirit from the dogmatic chains of the church only in the picture of the ascent from night to light [...]. From the perspective of our time and despite the new threats posed by technology, nobody will approve of the Church now in retrospect. [...] But the knowledge that a great spiritual power for centuries was able to effectively wage the battle against scientific curiosity in life praxis, draws the attention of today's perplexed and threatened people to a central problem of our time. Today, where is the force or the forces, that could lead a widely recognized need to fight actively against the threat from technology? [...] Significant for the confusion of the minds when researching the causes of the emergence of technology is the attempt on behalf of American sociologists, seconded by theologians, to explain the Judeo-Christian worldview as responsible for it. According to this view, guilty of the rise of technology is the conception of man as the supreme creature of the whole Creation, the creature called to rule and created for it, which is widespread in the old biblical and Christian teachings! This claim completely ignores the much more important fact that despite this attitude towards Man, the Judeo-Christian dogmatics has prevented every explosive development of research and technology for 2,000 years to the best of its ability out of the clear stance against curiosity. [...] The Gestaltungen [Portmann's expression for life forms, MN] around us, emerging without us and before us in millions of years, are elements of a living world, which we cannot produce ourselves, and whose complexity

“But where is a conservation of nature hand in hand with the protection of man? Hand in hand with the protection of man against war, nuclear threat and contamination, against millionfold of deaths by starvation and against the most blatant economic exploitation by neoliberal totalitarianism, the kind of which we have never experienced before? And hand in hand with the protection against depriving man from his protective communities, which occurred around that time as radically as never before, when *Margaret Thatcher* proclaimed in 1981: ‘Who is society? There is no such thing!’ Man, whose nature is culture (Portmann) and who cannot survive without communities and societies, is robbed of his nature that way and is denatured to a *Robinson*.”

and mysteriousness of which stands all the more clearly before us the more we learn through research about the microcosm of the substance of life. This deeper insight must awaken in us a sense of reverence for that which has become without our contribution, a new reverence fostered by knowledge, a knowledge not just about new discoveries in research, but of the responsibility to our posterity, which has the right to exist in the fullness of life that still surrounds us today. For the future, only the building up of such reverence [...] can provide the legitimation of a new attitude towards nature [...] out of which will and power can become effective to contain today's boundless egoism of profit or technical ambition. [...] The protection of non-human life is the protection of our own existence from horrible mental devastation. Thus, today the word protection of nature receives a new broader meaning: as environmental protection for the preservation of the prerequisites of man's existence - as preservation of the living, which we cannot create ourselves. [...] It won't be long until the protection of nature as a way of protect-

ing man will also become a guiding principle of the utmost importance for the orientation of research. – It is a great task of education at all levels of human activities [...] to find new standards of moderation.” (translated by *Current Concerns*)

This is how the anthropologist Adolf Portmann, looking back on his more than half a century of rich experience in teaching, research and life, he draws the conclusion for a truly humane protection of nature. This conclusion neither leads to the confrontation of the deep ecologists and Malthusians against man: protection of nature from man by “massive die backs” – nor to the affectation of dictatorship by green populists. •

¹ A mystical philosophy of nature that does not fight the real destroyers of nature (toxic waste producers, fertiliser industry, nuclear industry, etc.), but the human species itself, which it wants to reduce to one billion in order to save the Earth (Gaia). Has nothing to do with ecology as a scientific discipline, but borrows its terminology.

² Thatcher, Margaret. “Interview for ‘Woman's Own’ (‘No Such Thing as Society’).” In: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation: Speeches, Interviews and Other Statements*. London 1987 (retrieved 17 August 2021)

The Free State of the Three Confederations (Freistaat der Drei Bünde) – a democratic jewel

by Marianne and Werner Wüthrich

For every friend of direct democratic sovereign Switzerland, it was a treat to be present in Ilanz on 2 October 2021. The historical development of the unique model of the Canton of Graubünden and its contribution to direct democracy in Switzerland was presented in a scholarly synopsis to the 90 or so participants, who listened with rapt attention.¹ The core of this model will be developed here from the presentations, in free reproduction.

“Without an actively lived culture of peace, there can be no direct democracy.” These introductory words by René Roca opened minds and hearts to the history of the Free State of Graubünden (Grisons) with its three confederations (Gotteshausbund, Grauer Bund and Zehngerichtenbund) and to the unique democratic rights of the approximately 50 communes with judicial authority (Gerichtsgemeinden). These rights shaped the legal order and blueprints for lasting peace in these communes and in the entire State of the Three Confederations.

The mountain canton of Graubünden, with its 150 valleys and its 7,105 km², is by far the largest canton in Switzerland (total area 41,285 km²). A Landsgemeinde (cantonal assembly), as other mountain cantons held them for the citizens of the entire canton, would therefore have been virtually impossible. Nevertheless, the people of Graubünden had organised their free state on a strong communal foundation since the 14th century (almost as early as the Swiss Confederates), and they had even put this down in writing in the Ilanz Letters of Articles (Artikelbriefe) of 1524 and 1526. Thus, it was possible to hold the triple federation state together through the storms of the Reformation and the Grisons turmoil – at the time of the Thirty Years’ War – until the occupation of Switzerland by Napoleon in 1798. A remarkable achievement! Until the time of the Helvetic Republic, the Free State of the Three Confederations was an associated state under Swiss Confederate influence; in 1803, Graubünden became a federal canton in Switzerland.

Sovereign communes with judicial authority determine their own destinies from the 16th century onwards

The Triple Federation was a loose confederation of states with a federal structure, first and foremost coordinating foreign policy and the joint administration of the subject territories. However, it was not the *Bundstag* (the federal diet) that “called the shots”, but the approximately 50 communes with judicial authority, for example Ilanz with twelve



Map of the Drei Bünde from Fortunat Sprecher von Bernegg, 1618. (picture ma)

neighbourhoods (communes). They had sovereignty in all internal matters, but they also determined the policies of the Three Confederations in an original way – through the referendum. Much later, when laws were made subject to popular referendums in the cantons of St. Gallen and Lucerne in the 19th century, the Graubünden referendum law served as a model.

The fact that the villages in the valleys worked together early on to regulate their legal affairs on a democratic basis had its origins in the way they also worked together in other ways. For the management of their forests and alps, for the use of water and as mule packers for the transport of travellers and goods across the Alps, the people of Graubünden – like the people of Uri or Valais – had been uniting in cooperatives since the 13th/14th century. They were therefore used to solving together everyday issues as well as legal disagreements. They did this by means of “Mehren” (majority decisions) in the assemblies of the communes with judicial authority.

Other ethnic communities lived together in a similar way at that time. In the 19th century, the Graubünden democracy theorist Florian Gengel held that people’s rights, as they existed in the old Graubünden, were due to all peoples even without legal stipulation, because they had their basis in natural law, i.e. they belonged to them by nature. In Switzerland, the sovereignty of the people was the basis of all constitutions (Stefan G. Schmid).

The Graubünden referendum – a fascinating form of direct democracy

The old Graubünden referendum was the “real pivot of Graubünden democra-

cy” (Florian Hitz). Decisions on domestic policy issues were, as mentioned, made sovereignly by the communes with judicial authority at their citizens’ assemblies. With regard to foreign policy (treaties with foreign countries) and the joint administration of the subject territories (Valtellina, Chiavenna, Bormio), the communes had a right of referendum, the results of which were coordinated in the Three Confederations. In the 17th/18th century, the right of referendum was extended to other areas. Decisions were made in the “Bundstag” (in Chur, Ilanz or Davos), to which the communes with judicial authority sent their messengers, or in the “Beitage” (adjunct assemblies), which met in smaller and changing compositions as needed.

And now we come to that feature which is special, one might almost say “revolutionary” – or rather evolutionary, which was developed without violence on cooperative, democratic ground: In the all-Federation decisions, “the communes with judicial authority played a more important role than the Bundstag” (Florian Hitz). Each messenger cast his vote (in larger communes two or three votes) in the *Bundstag*. In doing so, he had to follow the precise instructions given to him by his commune. If the messengers had no instructions on a question, no decision could be taken. Thus, the Council of the Federation functioned in a similar way to the Swiss Tagsatzung (executive and legislative council), where the envoys had to follow the instructions of their cantons and no decision could be taken in the event of major disagreement. In more difficult

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times, the "Bundstag" had to meet more frequently, in those cases the communes reported their answers to the referendum questions in writing.

The individual communes with judicial authority reached their responses by means of pluralities (Mehren). This could involve highly demanding questions, such as whether and which treaty should be concluded with Venice. Accordingly, the answers of the communes were often not limited to a yes or no; instead, the citizens discussed detailed contents and came to differentiated results. The Old Grisons referendum was also unique in its content: answers such as "perhaps", "on condition that ..." or "yes, but ..." were possible. The heads of the Three Confederations had to sort out the diverse opinions and decide on this basis according to the will of the majority.

Through the demanding discussions and decision-making in the communes with judicial authority, the people of the Grisons were able to acquire a civic education and basic values long before the adoption of compulsory schooling in the 19th century (René Roca).

The "Bundstag" and the right of referendum of the communes with judicial authority existed until after the founding of the Swiss federal state in 1848, when it had to give way to the individual right to vote (*Jon Matthieu*). But even in today's constitution of the Canton of Graubünden, the communes still have an optional right of referendum: according to Article 17, "1,500 voters or one tenth of the communes" can demand a referendum on resolutions of the Grand Council (cantonal parliament) on laws, intercantonal or international treaties or on major expenditure (financial referendum).

How the people of Graubünden coped with the difficult time of the Reformation

While in the 16th century, in the other countries of Europe the rule was "cuius regio, eius religio" – that is, the landlord determined the confession of his subjects, with a change of faith often being forced on people several times over, whenever there was a change of power – the Swiss solved this difficult task in different ways, not all of them democratic. The people of Appenzell, for example, divided themselves into a Catholic Innerrhoden and a Reformed Ausserrhoden, in some cantons there were Reformed and Catholic communes or parts of cantons, Central Switzerland remained Catholic, and in Bern, Geneva and Zurich the city councils determined the introduction of the Reformed faith (also for the rural population!) and closed the monasteries.

In Graubünden, too, there were secular noble families as well as bishops and

abbots who wanted to impose their faith and their right on the population. But the citizens managed to elect their pastors and later also other officials themselves – in their usual way, i.e. by the "overruling" ("Übermehren") of the feudal lords by the people (*Randolph Head*). This was not so easy, it was a tense time, but the people of Graubünden managed this democratically and thus in the long term preserved confessional peace.

Letters of Articles and Religious Dispute as the Foundation of the Free State

The Free State of the Three Confederations consolidated its statehood with the two Ilanz Letters of Articles (Artikelbriefe) of 1524 and 1526 – a statehood of its own kind (without common authorities). This laid the ground for confessional peace. The Articles determined the place of the churches in the Free State by granting the judicial communes the right to determine whether they wanted to remain Old Believers or to become Protestants. (Individual freedom of faith was not yet provided for at this time). In addition, in the "Gotteshausbund" they forbade the bishop of Chur and in the other two confederations all clergy from granting secular offices. The bishop was elected by the cathedral chapter – with the consent of the "Gotteshausbund". Ecclesiastical abuses were to be put a stop to. For example: If a person, whether man or woman, is ill or dying, no clerical person, be it priest, monk or nun, may persuade the sick person to make a will without the rightful heirs being present. Apparently, ecclesiastical legacy hunting was a problem.

What was revolutionary was that land charges (levies, tithes) were to be reduced or even abolished. The Free State thus gradually became a country of free peasant landowners who had to pay only limited dues on their land. People agreed to "allow free trade".

In 1526, the Ilanz Disputation took place. The Chur pastor *Johannes Comander* had written 18 Reformed theses (Disputationsthesen) and had them printed in

Augsburg. (These were also to be the subject of the Bern Disputation a little later (1528). The abbot of St. Luzi, together with clergymen from the cathedral chapter, instigated legal action against Comander. The "Bundstag" scheduled religious discussions in Ilanz on the basis of Comander's disputation theses. The result of the disputation was that he was not condemned; instead the Diet concluded that priests were to be allowed to "read mass or preach the word of God" (*Jan-Andrea Bernhard*). This conciliatory decision paved the way for the peaceful coexistence of the two confessions for centuries to come.

The Ilanz Articles heralded the coming of a new political and economic world in the Free State. The people in the communes ruled the Free State – and not the bishop or any lords. The Ilanz Articles were valid as national law until the end of the Free State in 1798. They set the direction for internal development and shaped the strong autonomy of Graubünden's communes until today. •

¹ The canton of Graubünden and its contribution to direct democracy in Switzerland. Dr. phil. *René Roca* at the 7th Academic Conference of the Research Institute for Direct Democracy FIdD.

Presentations by Dr. phil. René Roca: "Der Kanton Graubünden und sein Beitrag für die direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz – ein Überblick" (The canton of Graubünden and its contribution to direct democracy in Switzerland – an overview); Professor Dr. theol. *Jan-Andrea Bernhard*: "Kirche und Staat – die Wirkung der Ilanzer Artikelbriefe und Disputationsthesen" (Church and state – the impact of the Ilanz Article letters and disputation theses); Dr. phil. *Florian Hitz*: "Das altbündnerische Referendum. Seine Praxis im Ancien Régime und seine Rezeption bei bündnerischen Rechtshistorikern der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts" (The old-Grisons referendum. Its practice in the Ancien Régime and its reception by Grisons legal historians in the first half of the 20th century); Professor em. Dr. *Jon Mathieu*: "Formen 'demokratischer' Politik im neuzeitlichen Graubünden" (Forms of 'democratic' politics in modern Grisons); Professor Dr. iur. *Stefan G. Schmid*: "Florian Gengel (1834–1905) – ein Bündner Theoretiker der direkten Demokratie (Florian Gengel (1834–1905) "A Grisons theorist of direct democracy"); Professor Dr. *Randolph C. Head*: "Gab es eine frühneuzeitliche Demokratie? Eine zeitgenössische Perspektive aus graubündnerischer Sicht" (Was there an early modern democracy? A contemporary perspective from the Graubünden point of view).

Conclusions reached on the occasion of the seventh academic conference of the Research Institute for Direct Democracy

1. Since the late Middle Ages and early modern times, the canton of Graubünden has been a "laboratory" for the promotion of political participation and the development of democracy in Switzerland.
2. The "old Grisons referendum" was, as a federal referendum, a central point of reference and model for the constitution of the legislative veto in the 19th century, i.e. modern direct democracy in Switzerland.
3. The Swiss historian *Adolf Gasser* particularly emphasised the importance of "communal freedom" and, linked to this, the importance of the cooperative principle

for Swiss history. European history, he said, was strongly marked by the contrast between two different attitudes, namely "domination and cooperation".

The history of the canton of Graubünden is an impressive example of how the cooperative principle was successfully developed. Today, there is a danger that the cooperative principle "from the bottom up" will last no longer, but that the principle of domination "from the top down" will increasingly prevail.

Dr phil. René Roca