

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*

The importance of a solid, values-based fundament Values in today's Russia and the radical change in values in the West

by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation



Vladimir Putin
(picture TASS)

cc. The International "Valdai Discussion Club" is a multi-day international meeting of journalists, politicians, scientists and public figures held each autumn in Russia since 2004. The plenary sessions deal with Russia's

foreign and domestic policy, focusing on a different topic each year. This year's topic was "Global Shake-up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values and the State". Again this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin took the opportunity on 21 October to give a lengthy lecture followed by a discussion with the audience. We are documenting the parts of this year's lecture in which the Russian President expressed fundamental thoughts about the values and their history in his country and the change in values in Western countries.

The second point I would like to draw your attention to is the scale of change that forces us to act extremely cautiously, if only for reasons of self-preservation. The state and society must not respond radically to qualitative shifts in technology, dramatic environmental changes or the destruction of traditional systems. It is easier to destroy than to create, as we all know. We in Russia know this very well, regrettably, from our own experience, which we have had several times.

Just over a century ago, Russia objectively faced serious problems, including because of the ongoing World War I, but its problems were not bigger and possibly even smaller or not as acute as the problems the other countries faced, and Russia could have dealt with its problems gradually and in a civilised manner. But revolutionary shocks led to the collapse and disintegration of a great power. The second time this happened 30 years ago, when a potentially very powerful nation failed to enter the path of urgently needed, flexible but thoroughly substantiated reforms at the right time, and as a result it fell victim

to all kinds of dogmatists, both reactionary ones and the so-called progressives – all of them did their bit, all sides did.

"No revolution was worth the damage it did to the human potential"

These examples from our history allow us to say that revolutions are not a way to settle a crisis but a way to aggravate it. No revolution was worth the damage it did to the human potential.

Third. The importance of a solid support in the sphere of morals, ethics and values is increasing dramatically in the modern fragile world. In point of fact, values are a product, a unique product of cultural and historical development of any nation. The mutual interlacing of nations definitely enriches them, openness expands their horizons and allows them to take a fresh look at their own traditions. But the process must be organic, and it can never be rapid. Any alien elements will be rejected anyway, possibly bluntly. Any attempts to force one's values on others with an uncertain and unpredictable outcome can only further complicate a dramatic situation and usually produce the opposite reaction and an opposite from the intended result.

We look in amazement at the processes underway in the countries which have been traditionally looked at as the standard-bearers of progress. Of course, the social and cultural shocks that are taking place in the United States and Western Europe are none of our business; we are keeping out of this. Some people in the West believe that an aggressive elimination of entire pages from their own history, "reverse discrimination" against the majority in the interests of a minority, and the demand to give up the traditional notions of mother, father, family and even gender, they believe that all of these are the mileposts on the path towards social renewal.

"Rely on our own spiritual values, our historical tradition and the culture of our nation"

Listen, I would like to point out once again that they have a right to do this, we are keeping out of this. But we would like to ask them to keep out of our business

as well. We have a different viewpoint, at least the overwhelming majority of Russian society – it would be more correct to put it this way – has a different opinion on this matter. We believe that we must rely on our own spiritual values, our historical tradition and the culture of our multi-ethnic nation.

The advocates of so-called 'social progress' believe they are introducing humanity to some kind of a new and better consciousness. Godspeed, hoist the flags as we say, go right ahead. The only thing that I want to say now is that their prescriptions are not new at all. It may come as a surprise to some people, but Russia has been there already. After the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks, relying on the dogmas of *Marx* and *Engels*, also said that they would change existing ways and customs and not just political and economic ones, but the very notion of human morality and the foundations of a healthy society. The destruction of age-old values, religion and relations between people, up to and including the total rejection of family (we had that, too), encouragement to inform on loved ones – all this was proclaimed progress and, by the way, was widely supported around the world back then and was quite fashionable, same as today. By the way, the Bolsheviks were absolutely intolerant of opinions other than theirs.

"In a number of Western countries, we are amazed to see the domestic practices from our distant past"

This, I believe, should call to mind some of what we are witnessing now. Looking at what is happening in a number of Western countries, we are amazed to see the domestic practices, which we, fortunately, have left, I hope, in the distant past. The fight for equality and against discrimination has turned into aggressive dogmatism bordering on absurdity, when the works of the great authors of the past – such as *Shakespeare* – are no longer taught at schools or universities, because their ideas are believed to be backward. The classics are declared backward and ignorant of the importance of gender or race. In Holly-

The Assange case lacks any legally valid basis

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

On 27 and 28 October 2021, the next step in the odyssey in the appeal proceedings for the extradition of *Julian Assange* to the USA took place at the London High Court.¹ Numerous supporters were (again) on site demanding his immediate release.

This time, the USA accused the British judiciary of making false assumptions about Assange's state of health when making the decision. In January 2021, district Judge *Vanessa Baraitser* had refused the American request to extradite Assange on the grounds that his mental health was affected and that the detention conditions awaiting him in the US were unacceptable.

The US lawyer, *James Lewis*, has now argued that Assange had good reason to

exaggerate his symptoms. The US had also promised not to use “special methods” in the event of extradition to the US and Assange, who is an Australian citizen, if convicted would be allowed to serve his sentence in an Australian prison.

Julian Assange's lawyer claimed the CIA's recently published attack plans by Yahoo² against him: “There has been talk of killing, kidnapping or poisoning Mr Assange.”

The court decision is expected in the coming weeks. This can then be appealed again. If extradited, Assange faces 175 years in prison under the US Espionage Act of 1917 which has been dug up again.

Many people around the world have been campaigning for Julian Assange for

years. Considering all the history since the US war crimes were made public by *WikiLeaks*, it is like a nightmare. As recently as 2010, the mainstream media had pounced on the publications of the documents on war crimes in Iraq (*Collateral Murder*) and Afghanistan (*Afghan War Diary*); soon after, the hunt for Julian Assange began: Escape to the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2012, constant secret surveillance by the CIA, his abduction from the embassy in 2019, solitary confinement, psychological torture, rape allegations (withdrawn), the perjury of an Icelandic “witness” (instrumentalised by the FBI) and much more. Politicians, intellectuals, public figures, internation-

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“The importance of a solid ...”

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wood memos are distributed about proper storytelling and how many characters of what colour or gender should be in a movie. This is even worse than the agit-prop department of the *Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*.

Countering acts of racism is a necessary and noble cause, but the new ‘cancel culture’ has turned it into ‘reverse discrimination’ that is, reverse racism. The obsessive emphasis on race is further dividing people, when the real fighters for civil rights dreamed precisely about erasing differences and refusing to divide people by skin colour. I specifically asked my colleagues to find the following quote from *Martin Luther King*: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by their character.” This is the true value. However, things are turning out differently there. By the way, the absolute majority of Russian people do not think that the colour of a person's skin or their gender is an important matter. Each of us is a human being. This is what matters.

“The debate over men's and women's rights has turned into a perfect phantasmagoria”

In a number of Western countries, the debate over men's and women's rights has turned into a perfect phantasmagoria. Look, beware of going where the Bolsheviks once planned to go – not only communalising chickens, but also communalising women. One more step and you will be there.

Zealots of these new approaches even go so far as to want to abolish these concepts altogether. Anyone who dares mention that men and women actually exist, which is a biological fact, risk being ostracised. “Parent number one” and “parent number two,” “birthing parent” instead of “mother,” and “human milk” replacing “breastmilk” because it might upset the people who are unsure about their own gender. I repeat, this is nothing new; in the 1920s, the so-called Soviet Kulturtraegers also invented some newspeak believing they were creating a new consciousness and changing values that way. And, as I have already said, they made such a mess it still makes one shudder at times.

Not to mention some truly monstrous things when children are taught from an early age that a boy can easily become a girl and vice versa. That is, the teachers actually impose on them a choice we all supposedly have. They do so while shutting the parents out of the process and forcing the child to make decisions that can upend their entire life. They do not even bother to consult with child psychologists – is a child at this age even capable of making a decision of this kind? Calling a spade a spade, this verges on a crime against humanity, and it is being done in the name and under the banner of progress.

Well, if someone likes this, let them do it. I have already mentioned that, in shaping our approaches, we will be guided by a healthy conservatism. That was a few years ago, when passions on the international arena were not yet running as high as they are now, although, of course, we can say that clouds were gathering even then. Now, when the world is going

through a structural disruption, the importance of reasonable conservatism as the foundation for a political course has skyrocketed – precisely because of the multiplying risks and dangers, and the fragility of the reality around us.

The conservative approach: do no harm

This conservative approach is not about an ignorant traditionalism, a fear of change or a restraining game, much less about withdrawing into our own shell. It is primarily about reliance on a time-tested tradition, the preservation and growth of the population, a realistic assessment of oneself and others, a precise alignment of priorities, a correlation of necessity and possibility, a prudent formulation of goals, and a fundamental rejection of extremism as a method. And frankly, in the impending period of global reconstruction, which may take quite long, with its final design being uncertain, moderate conservatism is the most reasonable line of conduct, as far as I see it. It will inevitably change at some point, but so far, do no harm – the guiding principle in medicine – seems to be the most rational one. *Noli nocere* [do no harm], as they say.

Again, for us in Russia, these are not some speculative postulates, but lessons from our difficult and sometimes tragic history. The cost of ill-conceived social experiments is sometimes beyond estimation. Such actions can destroy not only the material, but also the spiritual foundations of human existence, leaving behind moral wreckage where nothing can be built to replace it for a long time. •

Source: en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66975 of 21 October 2021;

Because they do not want peace ...

No sign of détente in autumn 2021

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Actually, by mid-August 2021, with Afghanistan, it should have become clear to everyone that the wars of the USA and its European NATO allies are a major disaster. Actually – because on 14 October, the German Armed Forces placed an advertisement throughout Germany to recall their 20-year deployment in the war in Afghanistan in a very absurd way. On a size of 15 x 20 cm, the contours of a German soldier and a German tank together with its crew could be seen in the twilight (probably in Afghanistan), and the sentence could be read in large white letters: “You have done Germany all honour.”

Written smaller underneath: “*bundeswehrkarriere.de* remembers 20 years of the Afghanistan mission”. Then, with a picture, the German Defence Minister *Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer* has her say: “I am firmly convinced that the German Armed Forces can be proud of their mission in Afghanistan. Our soldiers have fulfilled all the orders given to them by the Parliament. [...] In taking stock, we must now consider what was good, but also what we must do better for the future.”

No pause in view of the failure

These sentences also show what conclusions were drawn. No pausing in view

of one’s own failure, but rather the call for “more of the same”: one wants to “do it better” in the future. On 21 October, the day of the NATO defence ministers’ meeting in Brussels, the still acting German minister confirmed this in an interview with the *Deutschlandfunk*. On 21 October, the day of the NATO defence ministers’ meeting in Brussels, the still acting German minister confirmed this in an interview with the *Deutschlandfunk*.

Germany, together with Portugal, Slovenia, the Netherlands and (the actually neutral) Finland, had formulated a “concept paper” according to which, says the *Deutschlandfunk*, a “rapid military reaction force of the European Union” in “addition” to NATO and with a “coalition of the willing” should be able to “act robustly and swiftly” all over the world.

In general, EU Europe is to be further armed, including nuclear. “This is the way of deterrence”, said Kramp-Karrenbauer. Who is to be “deterred”? Russia! “We have to make it very clear to Russia that in the end – and this is, after all, the deterrence doctrine – we are also prepared to use such [military] means [...]” Even the *Deutschlandfunk* spoke of “figures of speech like in the times of the East-West conflict”.

Propaganda formula “deterrence”

It must be added that the NATO formula of the “deterrence” was already a propaganda formula in the first Cold War. The Soviet Union had no territorial claims beyond the results of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945. With its strong army, it wanted to prevent renewed devastation in its own country as in the war against *Napoleon* and *Hitler*.¹ This is even more true for today’s Russia. To accuse it of a desire for conquest is not justified by the facts. So far, only the USA (with its NATO allies) wanted to be the “world’s sole superpower” with a claim to rule over the whole world. Such megalomaniac ideas do not exist in other states of the world – not even in Russia.

The opposite direction of more peace

Like the tips of icebergs, other reports of the past two weeks are to be added. All of them show the opposite direction of more peace:

- After the expulsion of eight Russian diplomats (with the usual accusation of spying) from the Permanent Mission of Russia to NATO in Brussels, Russia suspended its entire embassy in Brussels and the NATO Military Liaison Mission in Moscow on 1 November.

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“The Assange case lacks ...”

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al lawyers, human rights organisations, media representatives worldwide, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Assange’s family members – they are all campaigning for his release – and more are joining ...

One of them is the Swiss *Nils Melzer*, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and professor of international law. Recently, at a lecture³ at the University of Zurich, he stated that the entire approach in these proceedings was grotesque. All this was happening in constitutional democracies and not in authoritarian systems. The integrity of our constitutional system was at risk. He also pointed out that since 2010, the discussion had increasingly focused on the person of Julian Assange and no longer on the actual facts of the case, the exposed war crimes and their prosecution under the rule of law.

“This whole case, really from a legal perspective, doesn’t have a valid basis”,

Nils Melzer summed up in an in-depth interview with *Randy Credico* “Live-on-the-Fly” from 10 October 2021.⁴ In this interview Melzer finds clear words: “Every single time when they are supposed to actually bring the evidence, they start moving the goalposts and manipulating the procedures and the evidence. [...] That is a typical pattern of show trials where you are basically abusing the legal system for the purposes of persecution.” The *Yahoo News* report: “clearly proves that this is a bad faith proceeding against Assange. That this is not about the law. It is about intimidating journalism. It is about suppressing press freedom. It is about protecting impunity for state officials.” And, concluding the most important thing of the *Yahoo* report, “those governments that are after Julian Assange, the methods that they are considering, that they are employing, disprove any notion of a good faith effort to enforce the law. It is clear proof and evidence that this proceeding against Julian Assange is il-

legal. It pursues an illegal purpose of intimidating journalism. It employs illegal means, and therefore it is not sustainable under the rule of law. [...] The question really is not whether Julian Assange is a perfect person or whether he has made mistakes or not. The question really is how do the states behave? That is why this case is so important. It concerns all of us. If our authorities are allowed to kill and kidnap and torture people, and invade other countries without a legal basis, without being subject to accountability under the rule of law, then we have crossed the line into a form of government that is no longer anything to do with democracy.” •

¹ *Current Concerns* has repeatedly reported.

² “Kidnapping, assassination and a London shoot-out: Inside the CIA’s secret war plans against WikiLeaks” In: *Yahoo News* of 26 September 2021

³ www.eiz.uzh.ch/EIZ/web/eiz/event/melzer2021.aspx

⁴ *Nils Melzer* interviewed by *Randy Credico* at “Live on the Fly”; <https://consortiumnews.com/2021/10/10/andy-credico-interviews-nils-melzer-on-julian-assange/>

"Because they do not want peace ..."

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- According to the Russian Foreign Minister *Sergey Lavrov*, the basic conditions for a joint work are no longer given. The official statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry said on 18 October: "These NATO actions have shown that the bloc is not interested in an equal dialogue or joint efforts to defuse military-political tension. Its policy towards Russia is becoming increasingly more aggressive. The myth about the alleged 'Russian threat' is being promoted, in part, to strengthen the bloc's internal affinity and to make it look important in the current geopolitical circumstances."
- The US government wants to use its sanctions in a more targeted way in the future, making the "sword" of sanctions sharp again. This was reported by the "New York Times" and the "Wall Street Journal" on 18 October. In the future, sanctions should be coordinated more closely with the allies so that they are also fully supported by them. In the past ten years, the number of sanctions adopted had increased tenfold and had risen to around 1,000 sanctions per year during *Donald Trump's* term in office. However, many of these sanctions could have been undermined in the meantime. This is to be prevented in future.
 - On 20 October, the European Parliament awarded this year's "Sakharov Prize" "for freedom of thought" to *Alexei Navalny* – among other things for his "immense personal bravery". Navalny is a convicted criminal in Russia. The Norwegian NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg* warmly welcomed the award ceremony.

**Also, the new
German government wants
to remain on a confrontational course**

- And what is the coming German government planning? In the twelve-page exploratory paper for the coalition negotiations of the SPD, *Alliance 90/The Greens* and the FDP, the last two pages state: "Germany's responsibility for Europe and the world". There is nothing new there. The previous German path is merely to be pursued more resolutely: more EU, more military "responsibility" in the world. It is about enforcing a "rules-based international order" – not about international law. They want to cooperate above all with "those who share our democratic values". The US idea of an "alliance of democracies" is supported. It is also about "systemic competition with authoritarian states and dictatorships". "The transatlantic alliance" continues to be the "central pillar" of German and EU-European military policy and the "NATO is an indispensable part" of German security. The phrases are familiar, including who is meant by "authoritarian states and dictatorships". The short paragraph about a "disarmament policy offensive" stands quite lost.

If the NATO states then always say at the same time that they are ready for a "dialogue", then that is not trustworthy. But perhaps the NATO states understand something different by dialogue than is generally meant by the word. Perhaps for the NATO states "dialogue" does not mean that equal partners with different views and respect for each other seek a dialogue in order to understand each other better and, in a good case, to move towards each other. Perhaps dialogue for the NATO states means that the dialogue

partner must first fulfil NATO's conditions.

Be that as it may, the prospects for a turnaround in international politics towards more peace remain poor.

**"Peace is not everything, but
everything is nothing without peace"**

It is now 50 years since a renowned German politician and different SPD Chancellor, *Willy Brandt*, was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize. Ten years later, on 3 November 1981, Willy Brandt said: "Peace is not everything, but everything is nothing without peace." How far has Germany, how far has EU-Europe moved away from this fundamental idea!

The questions remain: What can move the political leaders in EU-Europe to distance themselves from the bellicose attitude of US policy and to follow an independent, truly peace-political path? Is this still possible without a major catastrophe? And what can move the citizens of Europe to stop watching silently – for whatever reason – but to exercise and fulfil their right and duty as sovereigns? •

¹ cf. on this Wimmer, Willy. *Die Akte Moskau* (The Moscow File), 2016, pp. 11f. There you can read: "In early summer 1988, the Defence Working Group of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group flew to Washington for a working visit. [...] The trip went directly to the CIA headquarters in Langley. We should detach ourselves – was the message in the large discussion group – from what we had heard for decades about military potentials and strategies in the conflict between East and West in Europe. The results of a study on this topic were clear: The Soviet Union was pursuing purely defensive intentions. It is solely about defence to protect 'Mother Russia'. The Warsaw Pact's previous strategy was ultimately only the consistent reaction to the murderous attacks of *Napoleon* and *Hitler*, so it had nothing to do with aggression at all."

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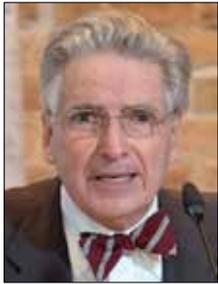
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The high cost of “mistakes” in US drone strikes

by Alfred de Zayas and Adriel Kasonta*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)



Adriel Kasonta
(picture ma)

The “tragic mistake” that killed part of a family in Kabul has drawn a rare Pentagon apology, but that is not enough.

According to the initial reporting from the US officials, the 29 August drone strike aimed at annihilating members of the militant group *Islamic State-Khorasan* (ISIS-K) was described as a successful operation that destroyed a car filled with “multiple suicide bombers” posing an imminent threat to US-led troops leaving Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

The celebratory mood did not last long, as witness reports that emerged shortly after the incident in Kabul’s Khwaja Burgha neighborhood debunked the Pentagon’s narrative by exposing the ugly truth. The casualties were not terrorist savages but 10 innocent members of the *Ahmadi* family, including seven children.

After photos showing victims right before their deaths had emerged and actual footage of their horror began circulating on social media, it became clear that the youngest victims were just two years old. Another one killed in the strike was a 36-year-old former Afghan serviceman and employee of the US charity organization *Nutrition & Education International*, identified as *Zamaray Ahmadi*.

Although because of the public pressure the Pentagon was later forced to admit that the assassination of these civilians was a “tragic mistake,” and “ex gratia condolence payments” to the *Ahmadi* family have been raised during a recent

online meeting between Under Secretary of Defense for Policy *Colin Kahl* and the founder and president of *Nutrition & Education International*, Dr *Steven Kwon*, the accountability for similar actions remains the great unknown.

As of 18 September, the US had made no direct contact with the family of the victims, according to *Emal Ahmadi*’s 22-year-old nephew *Farshad Haidari*, who told the *Agence France-Presse* news agency, “They must come here and apologise to us face-to-face.”

Furthermore, despite Defence Secretary *Lloyd Austin*’s assertions last month that the Pentagon “will endeavour to learn from this horrible mistake,” there is little hope that this is the case – bearing in mind that the similar incidents concerning killing large numbers of civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria had already taken place in the past, according to numerous reports by “The New York Times” and *Reuters*, among others.

In fact, “the military has repeatedly suppressed information on civilian casualties,” as *Nick McDonell*, author of a 2018 book titled *The Bodies in Person: An Account of Civilian Casualties in American Wars*, argues. “The drone program is opaque, with extremely limited accountability for anyone involved.”

Bearing in mind that most of the US drone strikes in Afghanistan have taken place in rural areas, and the fact that there is a direct correlation between the intensity of strikes and decries in the investigation of civilian deaths in their result, there is little hope for meaningful justice for the victims, apart from this isolated case.

Public outrage depends on the attention that the mainstream media will pay to drone killings. From the perspective of international humanitarian law (*The Hague* and *Geneva Conventions*), it is clear that drones are indiscriminate weapons and therefore illegal because they contravene the two core rules of IHL – the distinction between military and civilian targets and the principle of proportionality.

Moreover, they entail serious violations of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), which the US and all NATO countries are bound to observe.

It is worth noting that the concluding observations of the UN Human Rights Committee following the examination of the US fourth periodic report in 2014 condemned targeted killings using unmanned aerial vehicles as contrary to Article 6 of the ICCPR.

“The Committee is concerned about ... the lack of transparency regarding the criteria for drone strikes, including the legal justification for specific attacks, and the lack of accountability for the loss of life resulting from such attacks”, we can read in the document.

“The Committee remains concerned about the State party’s very broad approach to the definition and geographical scope of ‘armed conflict’, including the end of hostilities, the unclear interpretation of what constitutes an ‘imminent threat,’ who is a combatant or a civilian taking direct part in hostilities, the unclear position on the nexus that should exist between any particular use of lethal force and any specific theatre of hostilities, as well as the precautionary measures taken to avoid civilian casualties in practice (articles 2, 6 and 14).”

Similarly, in his 2010 report to the Human Rights Council, Professor *Philip Alston* denounced indiscriminate killings through drones and concluded that the rationale given for their use “eviscerate the human rights law prohibition against the arbitrary deprivation of life. In addition, drone killing of anyone other than the target (family members or others in the vicinity, for example) would be an arbitrary deprivation of life under human rights law and could result in State responsibility and individual criminal liability.”

In 2014, *Ben Emmerson*, the UN special rapporteur on counterterrorism, issued a damning report condemning the “accountability vacuum” for civilian killings by drones.

As a UN independent expert on international order, one of the authors of this article agreed with Alston and Emmerson and decried the institutional impunity of the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, insisting that there is state responsibility – both civil and penal – and an obligation by those states causing “collateral damage” to make reparations to the victims and their families.

Unfortunately, although empirical evidence demonstrates the incompatibility of the use of drones with international law, the US will continue ignoring the Human Rights Committee and the special rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council because they lack enforcement mechanisms.

It seems that drones will continue to be used with impunity until the international community agrees to exercise universal jurisdiction over war criminals, arrest them when they enter their jurisdiction

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Adriel Kasonta is a London-based political risk consultant and lawyer. He is an expert at the *Russian International Affairs Council* (RIAC) in Moscow and former chairman of the *International Affairs Committee* at the oldest conservative think tank in the UK, *Bow Group*. Kasonta is a graduate of *London School of Economics and Political Science* (LSE).

Where work is no longer worthwhile in Germany

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



Eberhard Hamer
(picture ma)

Over the past two weeks, the author has had several dramatic conversations about the living standards of the interlocutors. Dramatic news from this: At the lower edges of the middle and lower classes, the standard of living or even the ex-

istence can no longer be secured through personal contribution. There is a dramatic increase in the number of cases in which the net income from work slips below social benefits.

This affects most in the lower income groups and in eastern Germany. Anyone who earns 1,200 to 1,300 euros net for hard work often lives at the subsistence level, especially as a single parent or a single earner with several children. The interviewees have calculated that after deducting rent, heating, electricity, water, insurance and car costs, they often have less than the Hartz IV rate (440 euros) available per month for consumption, while the "Hartz IV" also get an apartment, clothing, heating, etc. from the state and have no commuting costs.

An East German driver complained: "I have 1,160 euros net a month for my family. To do this, I have to be on the highway eight hours a day, accept all the risks, be afraid of every police check, whether all the regulations have been observed, and being reproached by customers or the boss if I do not meet the deadlines due to traffic jams."

"The high cost ..."

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and thus vindicate the rights of the victims of such savagery.

Above all else, the question remains: What is the right amount of money that can make up for the loss of innocent life?

The mainstream media would be well advised to cease whitewashing these crimes, playing down the human cost of drones and disseminating disinformation about a supposed "legal black hole." The priority must always be to provide immediate assistance (not just money) to the victims and ensure that the new prosecutor at the *International Criminal Court* vigorously and expeditiously investigates these crimes.

A gardener with a child complained: "With 1,300 euros net plus 450 euros from my wife's earnings, we don't have 500 euros a month after deducting fixed costs. And now the fuel prices for both of us are rising by more than 100 euros per month as well as the food prices, so that our livelihoods are getting smaller and smaller. We've been thinking for a long time whether it wouldn't be more profitable if we both become 'Harzers', get the housing and fixed costs from the state, no longer have two car costs and prefer to earn something on the side."

A journeyman plumber who was looking for an apartment and wanted to get married soon was particularly vitriolic. He couldn't find an apartment and should have furnished it on his own; but he was familiar with several cases in which immigrants were given not only an apartment but also the facility from the state, although they never worked here and probably never will.

Rising inflation and a possible economic crisis will exacerbate such marginal group problems. Then there will not just be hundreds of thousands, but millions, whose existence and therefore standard of living is slipping and who will be dependent on social benefits. If you also take into account that more than half a million immigrants make a living in our social system every year, it is already certain that the current level of social benefits for individuals can no longer be guaranteed, even if due to inflation social security contributions rise.

Paying even higher social contributions is already no longer possible, especially for the two million small businesses and self-employed people, puts them in the gap between personal and social contributions, too.

In future, the state will have to pay social benefits not only to Germans, but also to an additional half a million additional immigrants every year, which puts public social finances in a double bind between falling social contributions and increasing social demands.

Not only is the lower edge of the lower class threatened to crumble into the social system, many self-employed people now earn less than Hartz IV. The lockdown alone has destroyed more than half a million self-employed people who previously paid taxes and social security contributions and are now struggling with the subsistence level or have to drop into the social network. They weren't just self-employed and small business owners. We estimate that around 10 to 20% of medium-sized en-

trepreneurs in Germany are frustrated, would like to quit and are only active because they do not see any livelihood security to risk the break.

At the weekend, a master electrician (with two employees) complained to the author that he "wanted to finish at the end of the year". Reason: the bureaucracy of approvals and controls that is growing over his head, the widening gap between achievable prices and employee costs (three times the net wage) as well as the illness of an employee lasting several weeks, which leads to a cost burden that drain the already low profit of this year. The corona restrictions in customer traffic were now the last line for his decision.

A master carpenter from East Germany with four employees gave up because he was no longer making a profit in the second year due to Corona and wood prices, so he and his employees "had to be hard-working from morning to evening for less than Hartz-IV". In contrast to his colleagues, he would not even have had a lack of orders and could now close his company without losses. He probably doesn't need social assistance because he has a tenement house.

The *Mittelstandsinstitut Niedersachsen* expects that of our five million entrepreneurs, not only 160,000 to 200,000 will emigrate from Germany because of the poor general public data, but another 100,000 will give up their independence, summed up 300,000 to 400,000 businesses would be closed this year and the following. The loss of around half a million entrepreneurs would lead to public revenue losses of 8 to 9 billion euros and, above all, hit the social security funds.

The tendency towards a decreasing number of service providers, i.e., decreasing taxes and social security contributions, and vice versa, an increasing number of social benefit claimants with a further influx of social immigrants can only be financed in the short term, will force drastic corrections from the coming government and it will force to reduce the standard of living of large parts of the middle and lower classes.

Our gender hippie generation has not only vilified our top performers as "disgusting white Germans", but also set themselves up for a diverse life of pleasure and fun without performance and voted accordingly. However, they will soon be caught up by the economic reality, namely that social benefits can only be financed from productive performance and that ecological dream and social life is less and less affordable if the despised top performers stop performing.

Popular vote on 28 November 2021

On the vote on the Nursing initiative

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

On 28 November 2021 the Swiss electorate will once again be called upon to vote. We will be voting on a popular initiative proposing a new constitutional article and also, indirectly, on a counter-proposal of the Swiss Parliament, which will introduce a new law (Federal Law of 19 March 2021 on Nursing Training). Both the popular initiative and the counter-proposal aim at improving the healthcare system in a sustainable way.

In case of rejection of the popular initiative, the counter-proposal will be enacted, unless a referendum is launched. In this case, there will be another national vote on the counter-proposal. Even for the Swiss voter who is used to democracy this is a challenge. (Since the introduction of these popular rights in 1874 and 1892, there have already been more than 600 referendums).

Undoubtedly, Switzerland has one of the best healthcare systems. However, there is no doubt that it still has to be improved. There are about 10,000 job vacancies in the nursing sector. In addition, a large proportion of doctors and nursing staff come from abroad. Furthermore, an increasing number of well-trained nursing professionals are changing jobs or even careers after just a few years. There's a need for a debate on the causes and on possible solutions.

Popular initiative of the nursing association and counter-proposal of the parliament

The Nursing initiative wants to improve working conditions. The initiators propose a national collective bargaining agreement. Demands from the trade unions are already on the table. For example, *Roland Brunner* of the Zurich section of the *Association of Public Services Employees VPOD* said: 10 percent more salary for nursing staff, a reduction in weekly working hours to 36 hours and retirement age 60 with full pension – as in the construction sector (“*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 27 October 2021). This might temporarily probably rather increase the staff shortage. The parliamentary counter-proposal doesn't want any new regulation in this respect. Working conditions and wages would remain primarily in the responsibility of the cantons, companies and social

partners. Regional differences – for example due to different living costs – could be taken into account as before. Furthermore, in exceptional cases, a collective bargaining agreement could be declared generally binding by the competent authorities on federal and cantonal levels. This approach has proven to be effective. In addition, it is controversial whether the main issue for nursing staff is the question of wages. Most nursing professionals want, above all, to have more time to care for and look after patients. That is why they have chosen this fulfilling profession.

Direct billing at the expense of the health insurance

Both the initiative and the counter-proposal want to allow more nursing professionals to bill the health insurance companies directly – without a doctor. This might well only be possible in *Spitex* (outpatient care and nursing services). It is doubtful whether this would lead to less administrative work and more time for the patient. At least, Parliament's counter-proposal has a safety mechanism built in: If costs rise above average, the cantons could limit the number of nursing professionals or nursing organisations billing directly.

Are standardised and centralised regulations useful?

Switzerland has gathered good experience with decentralised, flexible solutions. A few years ago, an initiative by the Social Democrats aiming at introducing a national standard health insurance fund was clearly rejected by the people. A popular initiative requiring standardised minimum wages for all professions had no chance as well. Flexible, bottom-up regulations – with company and regional collective labour agreements – are in line with the direct democratic system. They have been the basis for the industrial peace that has been contributing significantly to Switzerland's economic success since the Second World War. In addition, in the current situation of staff shortages the nursing staff unions have a good negotiating position.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush?

The Federal Council and Parliament want to strengthen the ongoing training efforts

in the nursing sector. The Federal Council wants to provide immediately additional 1 billion francs (for the period of eight years) if the initiative is rejected and the new law of the counter-proposal enters into force. If the initiative is accepted, Parliament will have to draft a law to implement the new constitutional article, against which opponents could launch a referendum, and there might be another vote.

Open questions

Neither the popular initiative nor the parliamentary counter-proposal provide answers to other problem areas in the healthcare system. The vote on 28 November must therefore be a starting point to keep on discussing further reform steps in the healthcare system in general and in an integral way – for example, on the question of how the profession can become more fulfilling and enjoyable again. •

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

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

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Concordance – a model of democracy that promotes consensus and ensures internal peace

by Dr phil. René Roca, Research Institute for Direct Democracy (www.fidd.ch)

The term “concordance” means “agreement” and has become an integral part of Switzerland’s political culture. It refers in particular to the executive body at the federal level, the seven-member Federal Council. The parties with the largest electoral strength share the executive seats among themselves, thus forming a quasi-all-party government. Linked to this is the principle of collegiality, which means that decisions taken jointly are supported and defended by all members vis-à-vis the outside world. This results in a body characterised by stability and often also by continuity. In the medium to long term concordance and collegiality thus ensure a decision-making mechanism that is characterised by amicable agreement and broadly supported compromise solutions. These principles of Swiss politics are not enshrined in the Federal Constitution, so they represent a kind of “customary law”, which can also be found to a greater or lesser extent at the cantonal level.

Concordance democracy contrasts with so-called “competitive democracy”, which is a hallmark of most other democracies worldwide. After elections, the party with the largest number of voters takes over the government or forms a coalition government with one or more other parties. At the next elections, with new majorities, everything can be completely different again. This puts a severe strain on the predictability of politics.

In Switzerland, the term concordance characterises not only the Federal Council but also the other political powers and bodies. All major political parties are included in the consensus-based decision-making process. Particularly when it comes to the allocation of political offices and leadership positions in the administration, the army and the judiciary, the principle of concordance ensures that the parties are taken into account in proportion to their strength.

Historical roots

Historically, concordance democracy has developed in Switzerland since the 1930s. Totalitarian political ideologies such as Fascism and Stalinism, as well as the world economic crisis, caused a polarisation between the labour movement and the conservative forces in Switzerland as well. With the expansion of direct democracy at the federal level (referendum in 1874, popular initiative in 1891) Switzerland’s political culture stood on a solid foundation at the time. Nevertheless, the First World War and especially the gener-

al strike of 1918 posed serious problems for Swiss politics. A central demand of the workers’ movement was proportional representation in order to challenge the liberal supremacy that had held sway since the founding of the federal state in 1848 and had been cemented by majoritarian elections. The demand was met in 1919 with the first proportional elections to the National Council. This slowly eased the fronts between the conservative alliance (Bürgerblock) and the communist and social democratic parties. The *Social Democratic Party* (SPS) clear endorsement of military national defence for the first time in 1935 finally broke the ice. The conservative or bourgeois parties no longer considered the SPS a class enemy and were willing to fight the political battles on the democratic floor. This also strengthened cooperation between the parties, which finally culminated in the election of the first Social Democrat, *Ernst Nobs*, to the Federal Council in 1943. With the approval of a second seat in 1959, the SPS was represented in the collegial body of the Federal Council virtually in proportion to its party strength; the quasi-all-party government was perfect. This constellation was given the name “magic formula”.

The “magic formula” of the Federal Council

The corresponding party-political composition of the Federal Council, namely two SP politicians, two from the FDP, two from the CVP and one from the BGB/SVP, lasted from 1959 to 2003, making it probably the most powerful expression of concordance democracy. In Switzerland in particular, the alternative, an executive based on a (narrow) majority – a “competitive democracy” – is considered inefficient, as the opposition could make the work of government much more difficult by submitting too many referendum proposals.

However, the SPS in particular, and since the 1990s the SVP as well, have repeatedly torpedoed consensus politics by bringing their own political agenda into play, mainly by putting forward their own initiatives. Although this stimulates politics, it then always leads to the intervention of the other parties, which accuse the SPS and SVP of deviating from the government consensus and threaten them with expulsion from the Federal Council. In 2003 the electoral mathematics of the magic formula was restored with the voting out of a CVP Federal Councillor and the election of a second SVP Fed-

eral Councillor. Following an interlude from 2007 with a BDP Federal Councillor – the *Conservative Democratic Party* (*Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei*; the BDP) emerged after the split from the SVP – the “normal state” has prevailed once again with a de facto “magic formula” since 2015.

Political significance

Alongside federalism, direct democracy and the militia principle, concordance is a central pillar of Swiss political culture that has stood the test of time. Its advantages over a “competitive democracy” are obvious, because it acts to loosen the grip on political power in several ways, not least with the help of direct democracy: there is no “party dictatorship”; authoritarian individuals have little chance to make their mark; there is less corruption and more transparency in the political process.

However, even in a concordance democracy, constructive opposition is possible and can be quite efficient. The main opposition is the citizen’s vote, which can intervene in the political process at any time by means of direct democracy. In addition – apart from the problematic opposition policy of the pole parties SPS and SVP outlined above – smaller parties not involved in the government also have the possibility of pursuing intra- and extra-parliamentary opposition. A good example of this is the success of the Greens and Green Liberals as a result of the climate debate, which in the medium term could shake up the now existing “magic formula”.

Another important feature of the Swiss concordance system since the post-war period has been the inclusion of referendum-capable associations in political decisions. A referendum-capable association is an association with at least 50,000 members which, by activating its members alone, could bring about the necessary number of signatures in a referendum within a short period of time. With the so-called consultation procedure, these associations are given the opportunity to comment on bills before they are dealt with in parliament. In most cases, a compromise is then negotiated to make a referendum unnecessary. In general, the principle of concordance – the quest for compromise – promotes a smooth and objective political process that leads to good and reasonable solutions to immediate problems. We must make sure this continues in the future. •

First publication: <https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch> of 15 September 2021

The EU member states are the “masters of the treaties”

What the EU bodies’ dispute with Poland is really about

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 19 October, the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki gave a much-noticed speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. On the one hand, it dealt with the concept of the rule of law and the relationship between EU law and the national constitutions of the member states; on the other hand, Mateusz Morawiecki asked the question that is burning under the nails of many EU Europeans: In which direction is the ball rolling? With his statement, he wanted to explain to the EU parliamentarians and the EU Commission the heavily attacked ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court of 7 October and to address the audience on the possibility of an EU of sovereign member states. Those who were familiar with the court’s decision and had heard the Polish Prime Minister’s statement (with simultaneous German translation) rubbed their eyes in amazement at the irrelevant reactions of politicians and the media. Had some listeners not been listening at all?

Polish legislation comes into the cross-hairs of the EU “values watchdogs”

Since the “national conservative” PIS (*Law and Justice Party*) won the most votes in Poland and therefore the majority of seats in parliament, the EU Commission and the *European Court of Justice* (ECJ) have repeatedly intervened in the Polish state structure. With a so-called rule of law mechanism, the EU institutions have been taking action against legislative amendment in the area of the judiciary in particular since 2017. Without dealing with the contents of these laws in detail, it should be noted here: All law revisions are decided by the legally elected parliament. The fact that the parliamentary majority often approves the government’s drafts is nothing unusual elsewhere.

– 5 November 2019 – Decision of the ECJ: Parts of a law on ordinary courts amended by the Polish Parliament are “incompatible with Union law”: namely, the reduction of the retirement age for judges and the competence of the Polish Minister of Justice to extend the term of office of judges (endangering the “independence of the Polish courts”), as well as a different retirement age for male (65 years) and female (60 years) judges (“discrimination on grounds of sex”).¹ Note: We Swiss women are lucky that we have

not concluded a framework agreement with Brussels, because the still lower AHV age for women also violates “discrimination based on sex”.

– April 2020 – Decision of the ECJ: The Polish Disciplinary Chamber, responsible for disciplinary proceedings against judges, endangers “judicial independence”. In August 2021, the Polish Supreme Court, under pressure from the EU, provisionally suspended the disciplinary chamber.²

Conclusion: The main accusation of the Western “values watchdogs” is that politics or rather the PIS party, elected by the people but unloved in Brussels, influences the courts. In reality, the EU leaders are probably bothered by something quite different: Poland and other states in Eastern Europe insist on determining their own state structure and cultural values.

By the way, the closest European alliance between the executive and the judiciary is undoubtedly that of the EU Commission and the European Court of Justice, which – almost always – skilfully play into each other’s hands.

Polish Constitutional Court: Constitution remains the supreme law of the Republic of Poland

In view of the ECJ’s interference in Polish law, the decision of the Polish Constitutional Court of 7 October is quite understandable.

From the decision of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal: The European Court of Justice had interfered in the procedure for appointing judges according to the Polish Constitution by controlling and criticising the “legality of the procedure for appointing judges [...]” in Poland (ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, paragraph 2 lit a). This was incompatible with the Polish Constitution. By its broad interpretation of various articles of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the European Court of Justice had authorised the EU institutions to “act outside the limits of the competences conferred by the Republic of Poland in the Treaties” (paragraph 1 lit a).

However, according to the Polish Constitutional Court, the European Union had been “founded by equal and sovereign states”, which had merely transferred certain competences to the EU. The constitution of the individual state – in this case Poland – remains “the supreme law of the Republic of Poland” (para. 1 lit b). Otherwise, “the Republic of Poland cannot function as a sovereign and democratic

state” (para. 1 lit c).³ Who can object to a state – even as an EU member – remaining sovereign and democratic and abiding by its constitution?

Protest against the absolute power of the ECJ and the EU Commission

The storm that roared through the Western media after this judgement is known to every newspaper reader. How else are Poland or Hungary or any other EU member state supposed to defend themselves when the European Court of Justice, in conjunction with the EU Commission, grants the Union more and more powers that go beyond the contents of the EU treaties? Those who don’t spurt will be pressured and punished, as Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* demonstrated in Strasbourg on 19 October – even before the Polish Prime Minister had his say.

“We cannot and we will not allow our common values to be put at risk,” she declared with much pathos. The judgement from Warsaw was “a direct challenge to the unity of the European legal order”. And she immediately enumerated the punitive measures she intends to set in motion against Poland: further infringement procedures and, above all, the application of the rule of law mechanism.⁴

The rule of law mechanism under Article 7 of the EU Treaty was recently extended by the EU Council to allow Brussels to suspend or reduce payments to individual member states if they “violate the rule of law”. So that member states cannot protect each other from this real hammer (who can afford to do without the but millions and billions from Brussels?), the unanimity principle in the rule of law mechanism was overturned.⁵

Von der Leyen put the thumbscrews on the Polish government in Strasbourg, so to speak, by threatening it with just such contribution cuts.⁶ The ECJ already granted the Commission’s request on 27 October: One million euros a day in fines for the “serious and irreparable damage” Poland was causing to the EU legal order. On top of that, half a million euros a day has been imposed since September for Poland’s failure to abandon lignite mining; already in 2017, the ECJ imposed a daily fine of 100,000 euros for deforestation in a nature reserve.⁷ As I said: the package deal between the EU Commission (executive) and the European Court of Justice (judiciary) works perfectly well – it can

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"The EU member states are ..."

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even be used to interfere in the domestic energy supply and forestry law of individual states.

No wonder, the Polish Prime Minister then defended himself – with clear words against the blackmail and against the overstepping of competences by the EU institutions: "This is not how democracies do things!" However, he also extended his hand to the future path as equal, sovereign states (see box below).

As is well known, there is no legal recourse against the rulings of the ECJ. As the supreme authority, it determines which law and which values are to apply in the

EU "community of values". This confirms the wisdom of the Swiss Federal Council in breaking off the negotiations on the Framework Agreement with Brussels – we freedom-loving Swiss and our popularly determined law would otherwise have been put through the wringer !

¹ "Commission welcomes ECJ ruling on retirement age for Polish judges". European Commission statement of 5 November 2019

² "Justizreform. Polen legt Disziplinarkammer für Richter begrenzt lahm". (Judicial reform. Poland cripples disciplinary chamber for judges to a limited extent). *Deutsche Welle* of 6 August 2021

³ "Assessment of the conformity to the Polish Constitution of selected provisions of the Treaty on European Union" Constitutional Tribunal K 3/21 Ref. K 3/21. Judgment in the name of the Republic of

Poland of 7 October 2021. <https://trybunal.gov.pl/postepowanie-i-orzeczenia/wyroki/art/11662-ocena-zgodnosci-z-konstytucja-rp-wybranych-przepisow-traktatu-o-unii-europejskiej>

⁴ Steinvorth, Daniel. "Im Streit um die Rechtsstaatlichkeit in Polen droht von der Leyen mit Sanktionen der EU" (In the dispute over the rule of law in Poland, von der Leyen threatens with EU sanctions." In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 19 October 2021

⁵ See Wüthrich, Marianne. "Who determines the values in the EU 'community of values'?" In: *Current Concerns* of 21 July 2021

⁶ Steinvorth, Daniel. "Im Streit um die Rechtsstaatlichkeit in Polen droht von der Leyen mit Sanktionen der EU" (In the dispute over the rule of law in Poland, von der Leyen threatens with EU sanctions." In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 19 October 2021

⁷ Steinvorth, Daniel. "Polen zu saftiger Strafzahlung verurteilt" (Poland sentenced to hefty fine). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 28 October 2021

From the speech of the Polish Prime Minister

Poland's head of government, Mateusz Morawiecki, was not deterred by the hubbub following the ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court, but went into the lion's den, or rather the EU Parliament in Strasbourg. Here are some striking excerpts from his speech.

– *Rules of the game must be the same for all*

"Politics must be based on principles. The main principle which we profess in Poland and which is the basis of the European Union is the principle of democracy.

Therefore, we cannot remain silent when our country - including in this Chamber - is attacked in an unfair and biased manner. [...]

It is unacceptable to extend powers, to act by means of accomplished facts. It is unacceptable to impose one's decisions on others without a legal basis. It is all the more unacceptable to use the language of financial blackmail for this purpose, to talk about penalties, or to use even more far-reaching words against certain Member States. [...] That's not how democracies do things."

– *The European Union is not a state*

"Union law precedes national law – to the level of the statutes and in the areas of competence granted to the Union. This principle applies in all EU countries. But the Constitution remains the supreme law. If the institutions established by the Treaties exceed their powers – Member States must have the instruments to react."

– *Principle of the primacy of Union law must not undermine national constitutions*

It's all over town: Some other constitutional courts in EU countries have already protested against the absolute usurpation of power by the ECJ. In this sense, the Polish head of government quotes from decisions of the French Constitutional Council, the Danish Supreme Court and the German Federal Constitu-

tional Court and names other states with similar court decisions. For example: "The Constitution prohibits the transfer of powers to such an extent that would mean that [a state] cannot be considered a sovereign and democratic country." All these national constitutional courts have one thing in common, says Mateusz Morawiecki: they insist on their "right to control whether Union law is applied within the limits of what has been entrusted to it".

– *Constitutional pluralism and deciding the future path of the EU*

"Constitutional pluralism means that there is space for dialogue between us, our countries and legal systems. This dialogue also takes place through court rulings. How else are courts supposed to communicate if not through their rulings? However, there can be no consent to giving instructions and orders to states. This is not what the European Union is about. We have a lot in common, we want to have more and more in common - but there are differences between us. If we are to work together, we must accept existence of these differences, we must accept them, we must respect each other".

"The Union will not fall apart from the fact that our legal systems are different. [...] Today there are two attitudes we can adopt: either we can agree to all extra-legal, extra-treaty attempts to limit the sovereignty of European countries, including Poland, to the creeping expansion of the competences of institutions such as the Court of Justice, [...] – or we can say: "No, my dears" – if you want to make Europe into a nationless superstate, first gain the consent of all European countries and societies for this."

– *Poland respects the treaties with the EU within the framework of its constitution*

"I will repeat once again: the supreme law of the Republic of Poland is the Constitution. [...] However, it is also worth

emphasising that the Polish Tribunal, also in the recent ruling, has never stated that the provisions of the Treaty on the Union are wholly inconsistent with the Polish Constitution."

– *Clear legal basis instead of creative reinterpretation*

"The phenomenon of democratic deficit has been discussed for years. And this deficit has been getting worse. Never before, however, has it been so visible as in the last few years. Increasingly, through judicial activism, decisions are made behind closed doors [...] And more and more often – it is done without a clear basis in the treaties, but through their creative reinterpretation. And – without any real control. [...] Today that process has reached such a stage that we have to say: stop. The European Union's competences have their limits. We must no longer remain silent when they are exceeded."

– *A Europe that fights for justice, solidarity and equal opportunities*

"Honourable Members. I want a strong and great Europe. I want a Europe that fights for justice, solidarity and equal opportunities. A Europe which is capable of standing up to authoritarian regimes. A Europe that prioritises the latest economic solutions. A Europe that respects the culture and traditions from which it has grown. A Europe that recognizes the challenges of the future and works on the best solutions for the whole world. This is a great task for us. For all of us, dear friends. Only in this way will the citizens of Europe find in themselves hope for a better tomorrow. They will find in themselves the will to act and the will to fight. It is a difficult task. But let's undertake it. Let's undertake it together. Long live Poland, long live the European Union of sovereign states, long live Europe, the greatest place in the world! Thank you very much."

Source: <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/statement-by-prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-in-the-european-parliament>

Can we learn from China?

by Moritz Nestor

In the 2009 German edition of Yu Dan's book "Konfuzius im Herzen – Alte Weisheit für die moderne Welt" (Confucius from the Heart. Timeless Wisdom for Modern Life)* it says:

"In modern people's eyes, to be content to be poor while holding fast to one's principles tends to imply a certain lack of get up and go. Everybody is working hard to develop their own career in the face of fierce competition, and it seems that how much a person earns, and their professional status (or lack of it), has become the most important thing of success. But the fiercer the competition, the more we need to adjust our outlook, and our relationships with others. With this in mind, how should we conduct ourselves in a truly human way in the twenty-first century?" (p. 34)

The book by Yu Dan, born in 1965, a professor of Chinese Literature at China's Beijing Normal University, assistant to the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Media and Head of the Department of Film and Television Media, attempts to provide solid answers for conduct of life from the perspective of Chinese philosophy – for today's self-confident China. And for "us humans". More than 10 million copies of her Confucius book have already been sold to an enthusiastic audience. The German edition was published in 2009, generously supported by the Translation Fund of the Press and Publication Office of the People's Republic of China. The English edition was published in 2009, translated by Esther Tyldesley. Chinese television also delights millions of viewers with Yu Dan's broadcasts of the Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu).

For Yu Dan, the 2,500-year-old teachings of *Confucius* are like a healing hot spring:

"The only possible role for me is that of someone who has been immersed in the spring myself, testing it with my own body and blood, like the thousands and thousands of people who over the last two thousand years and more have stepped themselves in this hot spring, and experienced its gifts. The good will see goodness in it, and the wise see wisdom." (p. 10)

Between these and similar lines, one feels as if one can read out what it meant that Yu Dan became familiar with the 2,500-year-old teachings of Confucius at the age of six at the hand of her grandfather, a literary scholar and philosopher.¹

"Classics like Confucius inspire awe in us humans", says Yu Dan. But even more: It was *"in its inclusiveness and fluidity, the wisdom in which so many people have immersed themselves down the ages, so that every life and every individual, though per-*

ceiving it differently, and following different paths, can arrive at last at the same final goal. In China we say 'The truth has never been far away from the ordinary people' and here this is certainly the case. It seems to me that the sages never used obscure classical quotations to intimidate people [...]." (pp. 3 of the English book)

When Yu Dan says "in us as human beings" and that our individual lives "can arrive at last at the same final goal," she is emphasising the natural law content of Confucianist doctrine, to put it in Western terms. Then the European reader can further reflect on this for himself and compare with his own cultural development when, where and how the basic principles of the Confucianist doctrine appear under other conditions and on other mental paths and in another language also in the European natural law philosophy, in Christianity and in the personalist psychology and anthropology. And he finds for himself today a precious wisdom that elevates him above the populist chatter of the day: That natural law is not just a "particular Catholic doctrine", but that it has been established especially in the thousand-year-old advanced civilizations, such as China with its 5,000 years and "old Europe" with its 2,500 years: Expression of humane thinking and feeling: that man is born with an "intention to walk upright, with human dignity", as *Ernst Bloch* once wrote.

To give just one example: Confucius taught in China 2,500 years ago. In ancient Europe, the statesmen and philosophers of the Greek Enlightenment created the first great works of democratic and natural law thinking in somewhat the same time. Although they followed different paths than Confucius, they arrived at the same goal as the great Chinese master: that all cultures are "based on the same common values" because they are human beings despite their individual differences: the *zoon politikon*, as *Aristotle* says. In political terms, this means that there is something supra-temporal in human nature against which state action must be measured so *that justice can be achieved*. Confucius and the ancient Greeks recognised that power alone does not create justice. Peace alone is not enough. It must be a *just peace*. The Confucianist educated Chinese ruler had to act for the good



Confucius, here in a traditional depiction from the Tang period, probably lived 551–479 B.C. (picture Wikipedia)

of the people, otherwise the people had a right to resist.

The European reader will be humbled by the reading, for he will see how moral-philosophical and state-political thinking emerged in China 2500 years ago, with which China was far ahead of Europe.

"Time is precious"

Yu Dan frames her answer to the question "How can one still behave in a truly human way in the twenty-first century?" in a kind of parable:

Scientists once wanted to find out the life energy of pumpkins. To do this, they put different weights on them, in each case just enough so that the fruit was not crushed but could continue to grow. All of them except one could be cut with a knife without any problems when they were ripe. One, however, had been particularly long and heavy. When it was ripe and one wanted to cut it open, the knife and the axe slipped off and one had to fetch a chain-

"Can we learn from China?"

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saw. Its flesh was as tough as the wood of a mature tree.

For Yu Dan this is a portrait *"about life itself, a splendid metaphor for the world we modern people live in and for the inner vitality we should develop. [...] 'Time is precious' – this is true today more than ever. To wait until the age of seventy, that takes too long. Let's rather start here and now. The Analects of Confucius and the other Confucian classics – in general, all the insights and learnings that the ancient sages left us – ultimately has only one, essential purpose: their study should help us to make better use of our own lifetime. It should save us from detours and let us become faster people with noble character and human love in our hearts. [...] This way we do justice to our own heart as well as to our place in society. [...] therein lies the significance of the wise men of antiquity: that they pointed out with simple words a path that their followers could follow over the centuries [...] Thus they have become saints and for the Chinese the soul of a nation."* (p. 218)

In addition to his biological age, man always has a *"spiritual and social age"*. There is nothing to be said against reaching one of the higher stages of the path of life even at the age of twenty or thirty. Yu Dan translates the image of the pumpkin as follows: *"We should learn at an early age to transform the external pressure that weighs on us into internal resistance."* (p. 217)

"At fifteen, I set my heart on learning"

What does the Chinese classic tell us Europeans about learning? The path of man's life begins with learning, says Confucius: *"At fifteen, I set my heart on learning."* *"Learning without thinking is useless. Thinking without learning is dangerous."* And: *"Excess is worse than not far enough."* (p. 196) Other countries act on the assumption, as Yu Dan points out, *"that successful learning must bring about a change in action,"* i.e., an increase in efficiency, a change in the value system, and better adaptation to the demands of society.

In China, on the other hand, she writes, *"it was always believed that a change in thinking marked the success of learning. Learning, therefore, consisted of adopting a foreign point of view [...] and in turn being able to pass on what one had heard to others."* (p. 195) Independent thinking and applying what has been learned in a *"relaxed way of learning"* is an inseparable part of learning.

"At thirty, I took my stand"

In his early twenties, a person begins to become an independent part of society. By the time he is thirty, he should be "autono-

Confucius, from the book "Lun yu"

"If a noble man is respectful without lacking anything, and courteous and decorous in his dealings with others, then all on the world continent are brothers." (12.5)

"A noble man acts in harmony with others but does not seek to be like them; the small man seeks to be like others and does not act in harmony." (13.23)

"A noble man cultivates himself and thereby brings peace to others." (14.42)

"A noble man makes demands on himself, a small man makes them on others." (15.21)

"A noble man cares for the sake of Dao (the right path), not for the sake of merit. [...] He worries about the Dao, not about his poverty." (15.31)

"Nowadays, reverence is understood to mean care. But care can be given even to horses and dogs. Without respectful vigilance, what is the difference [from caring for one's parents]?" (2.7)

A scholar asked Confucius *"what was humanity"*. Confucius replied, *"Be respectful in private life, act respectfully when you take a matter in hand, and be benignly in dealing with others."* (13.19)

"Outside the house, behave as if you were receiving a distinguished guest.

If the people are put to work, then behave as if they were at a great sacrificial celebration. What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others. In this way one will not incur enmity either in the state or in one's clan." (12.2)

The student asked about humanity. Confucius said, *"Cherish humans."* (2.22)

A scholar asked: *"Is there anything that consists of one word that can be followed throughout life?"* Confucius: *"That is probably equal treatment (shu): what you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others."* (15.24)

"For a human being, if he himself desires to exist in the world, he also helps others to do so. And if he desires perfection, he also helps others to it." (6.32)

Mencius, student of Confucius:

"The desire for dignity is an ambition shared by all human beings. But every single human being has a dignity within himself, which he just does not think about (liang gui)." (6A17)

From: Laass, Henner et al. Lesebuch Interkultureller Humanismus. Texts from three millennia. Schwalbach/Ts. 2013, pp. 96-98 and p. 103

(Translation Current Concerns)

mous," says Confucius, meaning above all an inner autonomy with which one finds one's place in society: No longer blue-eyed, but also no longer lost or rebellious. At the heart of *"truly enriching learning"* is thus the development of a personality and the applicability of what has been learned, which also means: having self-confidence.

A mature personality, in Western terms, *"controls heaven and earth equally"*. Yu Dan explains that this formulation comes from the Chinese creation myth and encompasses *"the ideal of personality of the Chinese people: a person who, on the one hand, floats completely freely above things in his idealism and imagination and does not care about the rules and obstacles of the material world in this space, but who, at the same time, stands with both feet on the ground and influences things through his actions in this world. Thus, the one who is only driven by idealism and is without 'grounding' is not an idealist, but a dreamer. On the other hand, he who is too 'earthy,' that is, without thinking of heaven, has only the worldly in mind, is not a realist, but a pragmatist."* (pp. 22)

"At forty, I became free from doubts"

Between thirty and forty are the best years of our lives: one learns to limit oneself and to find the *"right balance"*, says Confucius, as if he had read Aristotle, who said in his doctrine of virtue that man

can reach the stage around forty where he had integrated the *"measure of the mean"* into his conduct of life. *"Not giving in to joy, anger, sadness and cheerfulness – that is the mean; giving in to them, but keeping the right measure, that is harmony."* (p. 206) Thus, according to Confucius, a state of harmony arises in us that makes possible a life of peace. According to Confucius, this creates a state of harmony within us that enables us to lead a life of peace. Man radiates serenity and peace of heart and has become a useful member of the community. This is what Yu Dan meant when she said that the mature personality does not let himself be driven by idealism alone as a dreamer without a grip on reality, but is someone who *"has both feet firmly planted on the ground and influences things through his actions in this world"*.

We in the West today would do better to learn to listen to other countries and cultures. Because we have forgotten to do that, if we ever could. Open colonialism was not long ago. But it lives on internally in our inability to listen. We could learn a lot from Confucius. •

* Note of the translators: As the German translation of Yu Dan's book is much more detailed than the English one, the quotes, if not otherwise indicated, have been translated from the German.

¹ China Daily [2009-06-09 16:10:31]; <http://news.cultural-china.com/20090609161031.html> (1/27/2013 1:19:00 PM)

Does freedom begin with gaming?

The duty of states to protect their youth

by Dr. Eliane Perret, curative educator and psychologist

The increasing media consumption of children and adolescents always gives rise to discussions. When the People's Republic of China announced new regulations at the end of August this year to protect its adolescent generation, many press reports appeared criticising this approach. However, it would be time to seriously address this issue.

Football training, piano playing, ballet, floorball – and where is the gaming?

After the summer vacations, the students of the upper school introduced themselves to each other with a profile. It was about their favourite subject, their favourite colour, their favourite drink, their favourite leisure activity and other favourite things. They talked about intensive soccer training, playing the piano, ballet, floorball, building remote-controlled cars and other things. I was amazed, because I had read that most young people in Switzerland spend several hours a day in front of a screen and that the amount of time young people spend on their mobile phones has increased significantly compared to the last survey, especially on weekends. 40% of young people regularly play video games, get information via *social media* and communicate with their friends and relatives via mobile phone. Everyday media life has been dominated by mobile phones and the Internet for quite some time, and hardly any young person does not use a mobile phone or the Internet on a daily basis, according to the *James Study 2020*. However, “chilling out”, “hanging out with friends”, or even “gaming” came last in the aforementioned profiles, if at all, and only somewhat coyly. Were our students among the rare exceptions?

China: Restricting online gaming time

During the same period, there were reports in the media that the Chinese government wanted to restrict the online gaming time of its children and young people. The commentaries in our press were consistently skeptical to dismissive, with talk of “rigorous methods”, “absurd regulations” and “drastic measures”. Such unanimity always invites closer scrutiny! – China's National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) had announced that henceforth online game providers would have to ensure that they would only offer their services to minors (under 18 years of age) on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, and for one hour at a time from 8 to 9 pm. In addition, the companies would have to ensure that users log in and register with



“Wouldn't it be time to rethink what we provide (or even expect) as ‘mental food’ for our children and young people? To connect globally, to treat the efforts of other countries with respect, to evaluate each other's experiences and learn from each other?”

their real names, thus revealing their age. Online companies that fail to implement these measures would be subject to legal prosecution. According to press reports, the Chinese tech company *Tencent* has already implemented this directive with a corresponding technology.

A good environment for healthy development

So in China, children and teenagers will no longer be allowed to play on the computer on school days in the future. The announcement urges families, schools and other sectors of society to fulfil their responsibility to protect minors in accordance with the law and create a good environment for the healthy development of minors.

The business newspaper “Economic Information Daily”, part of the state-run *Xinhua* news agency, had previously called for gaming platforms to take social responsibility and not simply chase profits, stating that video games have become a “spiritual opiate” and “electronic drugs” that prevent children from learning and alienate them from their own culture. A characterisation reminiscent of the Opium War, which began the period of China's subjugation to the economic interests of major Western powers. A description that should not simply be shelved, even if the

newspaper article in question was subsequently revised and toned down.

Family trouble spot – justified concern

As I read this, a conversation with a mother and her son crossed my mind as we discussed his school development. We were concerned that for some time he had seemed unsleeping in the mornings, seemed absent from class, and had severe mood swings. When the conversation turned to his leisure activities, the temperature in the room dropped at least ten degrees, and the son looked at his mother with an icy stare. She told that she was very worried about her son's “gaming”. They had regulations, but her son would have a thousand excuses and find ways around them. She suspected that he was online at night and therefore unsleeping, although they had taken measures against that as well. Unfortunately, her husband and she would not agree; he himself would also often play online games. What the mother described to us was not unusual. For a long time, this topic has been part of many school discussions, often in connection with poorer performance, conspicuous tiredness and unusual lack of interest. Apparently, this is not only a Chinese problem!

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"Does freedom begin with gaming?"

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Chinese online gaming industry – a long story

In China, too, computer games have long since ceased to lead a niche existence. The country has been the world's largest market for online games since 2009. In 2013, it grew by 33 % compared to the previous year (it was more than ten billion Swiss francs), and the plan was for a growth rate of at least 22 % per year until 2017. The biggest growth was in mobile games, which can be played on smartphones or tablet computers. The Chinese online gaming industry is dominated by private investors. In the beginning, the government supported the development of the games industry and saw in games opportunities to strengthen national consciousness. The majority of games produced in China were therefore set in fictional game worlds with a historical background. The most popular games, however, have long come from the USA and Korea.

Possible negative influence not an issue at first

In the early days of computer games, a possible negative influence of computer games on violent, aggressive behaviour was not a topic of discussion in China. On the contrary, competitive computer gaming was recognised as an official sport by the Chinese National Sports Association as early as 2003. Ten years later, the Chinese sports administration founded the official national team for computer games. Today, we speak of e-sports. The number of regular online gamers increased rapidly between 2004 and 2014 from 20 to around 340 million Chinese (half of all Chinese internet users). Game consoles (PlayStation, X-Box) were banned for a long time. Most games could be downloaded for free, but buying game time and tools to make the game a success was a lucrative business. In 2003, after a proliferation of games, the Ministry of Culture classified online games as cultural activi-

ties on the internet that needed a permit. For a few years, the government supported the production of domestic games, which were supposed to convey the national spirit, the zeitgeist and a healthy upbringing of the youth. However, foreign games such as *World of Warcraft* (WoW) remained the most popular. Over time, they became aware of the problems associated with the games and in March 2018, the licensing authority restructured itself. It should henceforth examine games for possible ethical problems and also effectively counter the increasingly spreading internet addiction and physical problems such as rampant short-sightedness.

No carnage, no blood, no revealing depictions

As a result, the game market stood still for a few months. Then the new Ethics Committee for Online Games reviewed the first twenty games. Eleven of them had to be remedied, the remaining nine were banned, among them *Fortnite*, which is played worldwide and known to be highly addictive, while WoW and *League of Legends* had to be remedied. They no longer wanted games with revealingly depicted women, blood, carnage and content that distorted history. Finally, new regulations were introduced in 2019. Underage users were prohibited from consuming online games between 10pm and 8am. The maximum playing time was set at one and a half hours on weekdays and three hours for weekends and public holidays, with one hour allowed daily during holidays. In addition, 8 to 16-year-old gamers were allowed to spend a maximum of 28 Swiss francs per month on additional in-game purchases, while 16 to 18-year-olds were allowed twice that amount. These regulations were the first attempt to protect the mental and physical health of the growing generation and to prevent children and young people from slipping into an addiction to online games

Reaction to the gambling industry's unchecked appetite for profit

However, there was only limited compliance with the regulations and ways were found to circumvent them. For example, clever game developers tricked the "blood ban" by changing the colour of the blood. Therefore, the existing problems remained and led to the regulations published in August 2021. With them, such games can be denied a licence to sell.

The current government measures are therefore not in a vacuum, but a reaction to a development that made them necessary. "It is time for our country to tackle this problem head on," commented *Tong Lihua*, director of the *Beijing Child Rights Aid and Research Centre*, on the latest regulations, adding that the latest move was

a reaction to the gambling industry's unchecked desire for profit, which was betting on the high probability of addiction.¹

Gaming addiction – a heavy burden for all

The *World Health Organisation* (WHO) has included computer game addiction with the code 6C51 in the latest version of the classification system of mental diseases. It is due to come into force on 1 January 2022. An addiction is a heavy burden for the person affected and his or her entire environment. This is impressively shown in a film by Swiss television about the life of a 30-year-old man whose life revolved around computer games for ten years.² He spent up to 20 hours a day gaming, became increasingly neglected and was hardly capable of real interpersonal contact. By the time he was 20, he had quit his apprenticeship and spent his time in front of the screen, cut off from the world around him and run down. It took a determined push from outside for him to venture into rehab on a farm in the Bernese Oberland and attempt a new start in life. The long time in which he had refused the tasks of life became obvious and he had to learn to cope with a normal everyday life. But the addiction caught up with him again and again, so that he finally had to decide on inpatient treatment in an addiction clinic.

Who would wish that on our growing children?

And for us? – Motion for funding!

Two years ago, in the German Bundestag, the parliamentary group of the FDP submitted the motion *Smart Germany – Games – Driver for Innovation and Creativity*.³ Based on the statement that in 2018 games and game consoles generated 4.4 billion euros, the applicants want to improve Germany as a gaming location and make it a know-how leader. To this end, they demand the recognition of e-sports as a sport that teaches team spirit, social behaviour, the ability to express oneself through language and foreign language, and media competence, and that also requires training, diligence and excellent motor skills. Furthermore, the applicants describe online games as an important economic and cultural asset. They emphasise the importance of *Serious Games* in medicine, therapy, companies, the military and education. Among other things, the petitioners demanded that a comprehensive games promotion be established and financially supported at the federal level in the federal budget and that the "German Computer Game Award be made a top award with international lighthouse character."

Tencent

The world's most successful operator of online games is by far the Chinese Internet company *Tencent*. Foreign companies do not have direct access in China to distribute their games, only Chinese companies are entitled to the appropriate licenses. *Tencent* has a marked-dominating role in the distribution of non-Chinese games. With a volume of eight billion US dollars between June 2014 and June 2015, it was the global bestseller, since then the group has further consolidated its position by taking over major foreign online game providers.

Pause! See anew! Thinking about it ...

Johannes Vermeer. On Reflection – On the exhibition in Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister

by Gisela Schlatterbeck-Kersten

When the exhibition of paintings by the Dutch painter *Jan Vermeer* was announced in the Dresden State Art Collections in March of this year, two things caught my attention.

To announce an exhibition – which would bring some hype – with the title “On Reflection”¹ touched me deeply. In my student days, Vermeer’s painting “Dorfstrasse” (Village Street) in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam had occupied me intensely. I really had to pause when I came out of the big hall with the giant painting of *Rembrandt’s* “Night Watch”, because Vermeer’s relatively small-format paintings take time to decipher all the small-scale “messages” the painting offers.

On the other hand: Pause? Why?

One has to imagine: A painting that has been reproduced many, many times, about which many interpretations have been written, this “Letter-Reading Girl at the Open Window” is almost suddenly reinvented for the art viewer in the course

¹ Translator’s note: “On Reflection” is the official English translation of the German title “Vom Innehalten” in Dresden; in German: “Innehalten” actually means “to pause” and is used several times in the article.

of the restoration, is to be reinterpreted, brings to light many aspects about paintings and their history in general.

Someone, presumably after Vermeer’s death, had induced to paint over a detail that was perhaps disturbing or even offensive to him, namely a naked putto above the girl’s head. And today, when it is possible to X-ray a painting, it was clear: there had been an intervention, not by the painter himself, but later.

And experts discussed whether one should take the risk of undoing such an intervention. A commission decided to restore the painting “Letter-Reading Girl” to the state conceived by the painter.

It is impressive to follow this restoration process in videos.

Pause! Seeing anew! Thinking about what can now be seen, comparing it with other paintings by Vermeer, with paintings by colleagues, a show of works from the Golden Age of 17th century Dutch painting, now on display in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Art Gallery Old Masters) in Dresden.

It’s important to know that you have to get tickets for a time slot at which you’ll be admitted. The good thing is that the exhibition is never crowded, although you can stay as long as you like. It’s soothing-

ly quiet there, the visitors considerably letting everyone stand in front of the paintings in peace.

The only bench is in the last room, here the painting “Letter-Reading Girl at the Open Window” has its place. There you are finally in front of the painting, of which you can see the close-ups of the restoration process and colour analyses in the anteroom.

The invitation to pause is especially directed at the paintings of Jan Vermeer. Most of the paintings have a hidden meaning. An educated viewer of the 17th century could probably decipher the meaning of the putto with a bow, who is still stepping on a mask lying on the floor. We today recognise a Cupid, but overlook the masks on the floor in the background of the painted picture. What are they supposed to mean? Masks serve the purpose of disguise, that is, of falsehood. So, the Cupid means love, he steps on the mask as falseness, so true love is probably meant.

Or in the image of the “Woman with the Scales”. She pauses until the gold scale is in balance. On the table you see pearl necklaces and gold jewellery. And

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“Does freedom begin with gaming?”

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A single sentence was dedicated to the German children and young people who are now affected by media addiction and in need of treatment, numbering around 700,000. The motion was later rejected. However, the CDU, CSU and SPD agreed to allocate 50 million euros to the federal budget in 2019 for the introduction of a games fund, with a further 50 million each per year to be made available until 2023. It was described as a historic step for games funding in Germany.

In July 2021, Swiss game developers also wrote to the Federal Council seeking financial support in the face of the current crisis. They see themselves as an industry that tinkers with new visual storytelling and sets the highest artistic standards for itself, and emphasise the opportunities to participate in the global market for computer games, which last year turned over between 160 and 173 billion dollars. At the federal level, the issue is a draft law to “protect minors from content in films and video games that may endanger their

physical, mental, psychological, moral or social development”, in the awareness that children and young people are currently not sufficiently protected from harmful content and that this would also be made more difficult by the global context of the internet and the internationality of the market. This was preceded by several motions and stand initiatives, some of which had called for a complete ban on video games that glorify violence. The draft law focuses on the protection of young people through the declaration and observance of age limits by means of clearly visible age labels and additional content information and the promotion of media competence.⁴

Working together on the problem

Back to the beginning and China’s efforts to protect the mental and physical health of the growing generation, as is the task of every state. Wouldn’t it be time to rethink what we provide (or even expect) as “mental food” for our children and young people? To connect globally, to treat the efforts of other countries with respect, to evaluate each other’s experi-

ences and learn from each other? Perhaps the thoughts of *Tien Haibo*, a Chinese online game developer, would not be a bad guide, who said in light of the new regulations: “Those who believe that they will lose business opportunities or that their business model will suffer as a result of this policy are probably producing content that deserves to be taken off the market. A healthy gaming market should not produce such games in the first place.” •

¹ http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/02/c_1310164734.htm. “Why China acts tough to limit online gaming for minors?” accessed 17 October 2021.

² “Game Over – Im Sog der Computerspielsucht.» (Game over – In the Wake of Computer Game Addiction) Documentary from 12 March 2020. www.srf.ch, retrieved 15 October 2021

³ *Smart Germany – Games – Treiber für Innovation und Kreativität*. Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 19/14059. (Smart Germany – Games – Driver for Innovation and Creativity. German Bundestag, 19th legislative period, printed matter 19/14059). 16 October 2019

⁴ Swiss Federal Act on the Protection of Minors in the Areas of Film and Video Games (JSFVG) and Dispatch on the Federal Act on the Protection of Minors in the Areas of Film and Video Games. www.news.admin.ch, retrieved 19 October 2021



Johannes Vermeer: *Letter-Reading Girl at an Open Window*. (Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, Widener Collection) (picture © Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Wolfgang Kreische)



Johannes Vermeer. *Woman with the Scales*. (Washington National Gallery of Art) (picture Fotogalerie Vermeer-Ausstellung)

"Pause! See anew! Thinking about it ..."

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again, a painting in the background: the Last Judgement, Christ as the Judge of the World. Then a meaning to be read along could be the question of justice, honesty or even charity. But these references are really only in the background. Each painting is a treasure.

There was one more interesting discovery: in some of the gilded frames I noticed a fine cut all around in the middle of the frame width, I even saw hinges and a tiny keyhole. When I asked the warden if this was an interchangeable frame, he explained, probably glad for the change, that the King, as owner of the collection, showed selected visitors some paintings without the pane in front to make the oil colours glow even more beautifully. •

Exhibition: Johannes Vermeer. *On Reflection*; 10 September 2021 to 2 January 2022 in the *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister* (Art Gallery Old Masters) in the Zwinger Dresden – State Art Collections; Interesting is also the video: *Die Restaurierung von Johannes Vermeers "Brieflesendes Mädchen am offenen Fenster"* (The Restoration of Johannes Vermeer's "Letter-Reading Girl at an Open Window")

811 million people on this earth are starving. 41 million are on the brink of famine. What should be positively mentioned is that it is often possible for the *World Food Programme* and other helping agencies to alleviate the greatest need. However, the emergency situation is in many places too great: In Somalia, from October to December 2021, 3.5 million people will require humanitarian help. Somalia has approximately 14.4 million inhabitants. In Somalia, approximately 1.2 million children under the age of five are acutely malnourished and require help. Droughts, flooding, the locust plague and the civil war, which has been going on for 30 years, are the main reasons for the hunger crisis in Somalia. Our organisation, *Swisso Kalmo* is active in this country for over thirty years. ([\[lmo.ch\]\(http://lmo.ch\)\) The budget of the *World Food Programme* in 2021 was 7.4 million US Dollars. However, 12.3 billion are actually necessary. That is a lot of money. If one were to compare this amount with the global arms spending, then 12.3 billion US Dollars is small amount. 1981 billion US Dollars have been invested by countries all over the world for their armies last year. That is 161 times more than it would take for the World Food Programme to alleviate the greatest need on earth. With a fraction of the world's military expenditure, it would be possible to provide everyone with enough food and clean drinking water, to provide them with medical care and enable all children to be able to attend school.](http://www.swissoka-</p>
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Heinrich Frei, Zurich

Letter to  the Editor

A fraction of the military expenditure could eliminate poverty