

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*

Unity in diversity – the United Nations in the 21st century*

by Professor Dr Dr mult. h.c. Hans Köchler, President of the International Progress Organization



Hans Köchler
(picture hans-
koechler.com)

I speak to you today from Vienna where the third headquarters of the United Nations is located, and I am very pleased to address your gathering under the auspices of the Long Beach chapter of UNA-USA** in California, the birthplace of the United Nations.

It is impressive that, together with the *Better World Campaign*, UNA-USA represents the single largest civil society group in support of the United Nations worldwide.

Commitment to diversity as basis of global peace was the message that the founders of the world organization solemnly proclaimed in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. In the name of “We the Peoples of the United Nations,” they reaffirmed the “*equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.*” The respect of diversity, implying equal recognition of each member state of the United Nations, is also embodied in the Charter’s principle of *sovereign equality*. The *unity of purpose* among the members of the United Nations can only be achieved, and preserved, if they accept each other in all their diversity – of ethnicity, cultural traditions, and political or economic systems. In 1945, after the cataclysm of World War II, this was one of the basic messages of the founders of the organization: lasting, sustainable peace requires mutual acceptance of diversity!

When the organization was founded in San Francisco, the number of member states was relatively small – 51 – compared to today’s membership of 193. Many peoples still lived under colonial rule or under the yoke of foreign domination. In the 21st century, the United Nations – as the world’s largest grouping of sovereign states – has come to embody the diversity of humankind, including the *multitude of national interests*, more than any other inter-governmental undertaking. This brings with it unique *challenges* as well as *opportunities*.

Due to the rapid progress of globalization since the end of the Cold War, each people, nation, and cultural community has become much more aware of the *differences* between civilizations, cultures, value systems, and lifestyles – simply because of constant, and inescapable, global *interconnectedness* in all fields, whether political, social or economic. The impact of communication technology and the “virtual reality” in its wake, including the New Social Media, cannot be underestimated in today’s “global village.”

The preservation of peace

The *preservation of peace – raison d’être* of the United Nations – will depend on how the international community deals with the ever more complex diversity of the world. In a most basic sense, only an order of peace embodies the *unity of humankind*. In view of the Charter’s founding principle of *sovereign equality* of states, no country must jeopardize this unity by using the United Nations to impose its own system or lifestyle upon the rest of the world. This also is implied in the Charter’s other founding principle, namely the *non-use of force* in relations between states. To state it yet again, *unity of purpose* (in the maintenance of global peace) requires *recognition of diversity* at all levels – of state and people, internationally as well as domestically. It also necessitates *mechanisms for resolving differences* on the basis of mutual respect. This is what the Charter of the United Nations is all about.

The composition of the Security Council

In order for the UN to face the challenges of our global era, the composition of the organization’s highest decision-making body, the Security Council, should reflect the increasing diversity of the international community. Upon its foundation, in 1945, permanent membership in the Council corresponded with the balance of power among a relatively small number of states (that was not yet fully representative of the peoples of the world). More than 75 years later, with almost all sovereign states having joined the UN, the geopolitical realities have changed. Vast areas of the globe – Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia – are not represented at the level of permanent membership. To remain relevant in the emerging multipolar world – after almost half a century of a bipolar balance of power, followed by a brief period of unipolarity – and to retain its problem-solving capacity in the face of increasingly complex security challenges, it will be essential for the United Nations to adapt its Charter and to “update,” so to speak, the list of permanent members. Because of the veto, reform will be a gargantuan task; but *inclusivity* in terms of permanent membership will be indispensable to preserve the *unity of purpose* among all its members.

Diversity in the area of cultural identity

Apart from the field of international security, *diversity and inclusivity* are of utmost importance also in the area of *cultural identity*. I would like to express the hope that the role of the *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations*, comprising, as of today, 127 nations including the United States, will be strengthened in the face of increasing tensions along cultural and ideological lines at home and abroad. The threat of armed conflict emanating from alienation between cultures should not be underestimated.

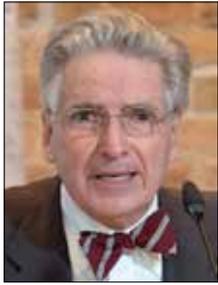
On this solemn occasion, may I also express the hope that the United States

* Lecture at the United Nations Day Celebration, hosted by the *United Nations Association of the United States of America* (UNA-USA) Long Beach Chapter, in cooperation with the *Global Peace Foundation* in Long Beach, California, USA on 31 October 2021. © International Progress Organization, 2021

** The *United Nations Association of the United States of America* (UNA-USA) is a nonprofit grassroots organization dedicated to promoting political and public support for the United Nations among Americans.

Migration and geopolitics: the Belarus-Poland border crisis

by Alfred de Zayas and Adriel Kasonta*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)



Adriel Kasonta
(picture ma)

It is crucial to cut through the hype and posturing to ensure this crisis does not escalate into dangerous conflict

Fake news and fake law make it difficult to understand the highly politicised mi-

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"Unity in diversity ..."

continued from page 1

will rejoin the most important specialized agency of the United Nations in this field, namely UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – of which it was a founding member in 1946. I further hope that the US will also accede to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005. Without active participation of the United States, the international community's policies and programs for the preservation of cultural diversity at the global level will not be effective. Without active US participation, the international community's policies and programs for the preservation of cultural diversity at the global level will not ultimately be effective. I am convinced that civil society organizations such as UNA-USA can play a decisive role in that regard.

In conclusion, I wish the *United Nations Association of the United States of America* and the *Global Peace Foundation* further success in their noble mission to support the UN in the creation of a just and peaceful world!

I thank you for your attention. •

grant crisis in the Mediterranean, in the Balkans and on the border between Poland and Belarus.

After separating facts from propaganda and removing the corporate media's prism of anti-Lukashenko agitation – which has more to do with the fact that the European Union is questioning the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election that took place in Belarus than the migrant crisis on the ground – it is vital to stay factual, concentrate on the actual problem that is unfolding on the borders, and the possible consequences of its mismanagement.

What are the facts?

It is reported that since the beginning of 2021, more than 30,000 migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria have tried to cross the Polish-Belarusian border, and the surge reached its peak in August when more than 15,000 attempts alone were made, according to the Polish authorities.

Although Minsk is accused of luring migrants by offering Belarusian visas and organising transport to the EU border, and strong language is employed by Warsaw, no hard evidence to confirm these accusations has been provided so far, while the gravity of the allegations would require that such evidence be presented before any further actions are taken.

"This is a political crisis, created to destabilise the EU," Polish Prime Minister *Mateusz Morawiecki* told reporters in Warsaw after talks with European Council President *Charles Michel* on November 10. "This is a manifestation of national terrorism, revenge by Lukashenko for our support for democratic elections in Belarus."

Whatever we may think of President Alexander Lukashenko and the state of democracy in Belarus under his rule, the authors of this article find it astonishing that Poland, which according to the *Freedom House* index published last year, was downgraded from "consolidated democracy" to "semi-consolidated democracy" and labeled this year by a *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) report as world's "most autocratising country," prefers to make the situation on its border even worse rather than find a peaceful solution.

Sanctions not the best course

Despite the ongoing pressure from the West concerning the outcome of the 2020 elections and the set of new sanc-

tions being imposed on Belarus by the EU for allegedly mounting a "hybrid attack" by encouraging migrants from the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa to cross the border into Poland, it does not appear that this will move anybody in Minsk.

As a matter of fact, ever since Lukashenko was re-elected last year, he has managed to rescue the economy from recession and significantly increase the country's trade volumes, importantly thanks to exports to the EU.

Notably, Minsk is the biggest exporter of wood and metals to the bloc, and there is no consensus among the EU members when it comes to restrictions on potash and petroleum imports from Belarus.

The supply-chain disruptions and the COVID-19 pandemic also work in Belarus' favour. While the former increased demand for Belarusian products such as furniture and machinery, the latter, followed by the country's loose approach to lockdowns, has contributed to the country's growth, as a *World Bank* report suggests. Furthermore, almost US\$1 billion from the *International Monetary Fund* provided in August increased its foreign-currency reserves.

With 36.1% growth in worldwide exports between January and September and 5.8% growth in GDP in the second quarter year on year, and deepening economic and political integration with Russia, Lukashenko does not have much to be bothered about, as far as the economy is concerned.

Military escalation

As the migration crisis on the Belarus-Poland border continues, and tension is rising due to heavy military deployments on the ground, the possibility miscalculating the situation has significantly increased.

On November 10, at the request of Lukashenko, Russia sent two *Tupolev Tu-22M3* strategic bombers to help Belarus navigate the situation at the border. Moreover, two Russian Tu-160 strategic missile-carrying bombers accompanied by Belarusian Su-30SM fighters conducted a joint air patrol "for the purposes of ensuring military security of the Union State [Russia-Belarus]," Russia's Defense Ministry reported last Thursday.

On top of that, Minsk expressed the need to obtain nuclear-capable *Iskander* systems from Moscow to deploy in the

continued on page 3

"Migration and geopolitics ..."

continued from page 2

south and west of the country, Lukashenko said in an interview with Russia's *National Defense* magazine.

Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia have expressed concern over the crisis on the border with Belarus and said in a joint statement issued by the countries' defense ministries that the current situation "increases the possibility of provocations and serious incidents that could also spill over into the military domain."

While Poland, Lithuania and Latvia consider triggering NATO's Article 4, Latvia has already deployed 3,000 troops on the ground and Ukraine plans to deploy 8,500 additional soldiers and police officers over the crisis on the border with Belarus, it is worth noting that General *Nick Carter*, chief of the UK defense staff, reminds us of greater risk of an accidental war breaking out between the West and Russia.

"I think we have to be careful that people don't end up allowing the bellicose nature of some of our politics to end up in a position where escalation leads to miscalculation," Carter said in an interview with *Times Radio* on Sunday.

Don't confuse migrants with refugees

To make the right decision, we must get our epistemology right – something the corporate media deliberately sabotage. For instance, it is essential to remember that migrants are not necessarily refugees, and the legal regime for refugees cannot be carried over to migrants.

On the one hand, the *Geneva Refugee Convention* provides refugee status to individuals who have a well-founded fear of persecution. However, this convention was not drafted to facilitate mass migration and should not be instrumentalised for that purpose, which would entail a bad-faith interpretation of the text and the intention of the drafters.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that there is no international treaty that declares migration to be a human right or imposes obligations on states to accept migrants. The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* is silent on the issue of migration.

The only treaty concerning migrants is the *Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*, which does not regulate migration itself, but only the conditions of migrants once they have obtained legal residence in host countries. Only 56 states have ratified this convention – not Belarus or Poland, nor Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, etc.

The corporate media do not tell us so, but international law is absolutely clear

on the concept of state sovereignty when it comes to migration. The entry of aliens to a country is exclusively within the domestic jurisdiction of each state. Indeed, it is part of the very essence of sovereignty.

A state may, of course, open its borders to migration, but nothing in international law requires it to do so.

Bearing in mind the potential health, social and economic impacts of migration, no democratic country should simply open its borders without first consulting with the resident population.

Let us not forget that the ontology of a state entails an obligation to defend the welfare of its citizens, and this may in some circumstances require the closing of frontiers, for example because of health, social or economic considerations. Paramount is the well-being and social cohesion of the population of each state.

The way forward

Given that according to *Fabrice Leggeri*, director of the EU border agency *Frontex*, the influx of migrants from the Middle East through Belarus is going to increase and "we have to be ready to ... face this situation for a long time," the authors of this article believe that a great effort has to be made by all sides to bring this crisis quickly to an end and avoid military conflict, which would be disastrous not only for Europe but the entire international community.

Hoping that cool heads will prevail, we find sensible the OSCE (*Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*) Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation in October that the governments of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland pool their efforts to ensure access to food, water, medical services and temporary shelter for the people trapped in the border area between their countries.

Bearing in mind that "European values" encompass the Judeo-Christian philosophy of human fraternity and a commitment to assist persons in distress, a short-term solution must be found that overcomes the geopolitical considerations of big and small countries alike.

Moreover, the authors support the idea presented by the OSCE PA's chairman of the *Ad Hoc Committee on Migration*, *Kristian Vigenin*, that "in the face of challenges presented by irregular migration, it is important to develop a coordinated policy response with all countries along the migration path to prevent further irregular arrivals" – something that has to include direct dialogue with Lukashenko, no matter how strongly we may feel about the country's current course, as this has nothing to do with the problem that we want to solve.

We very much welcome the fact that German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* has decided to put political differences with Belarus' leader aside and chosen dialogue over conflict.

Most important, we must look at the root causes of the migration and try to devise durable solutions, which must include preventive strategies, such as helping rebuild the infrastructures of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, which were destroyed in proxy wars driven by outsiders.

Following *Andrew Bacevich's* logic, the authors believe that all parties involved in the destruction of the Middle East should "accept ownership of the consequences stemming from ... [this] misguided act," and admit that in the process, gross human rights violations and war crimes were committed, resulting in a "push factor" generating uncontrolled migrations.

Prevention means reconstruction so that the populations of the victim countries have a future and can stay in their homelands, where they undoubtedly would prefer to live in a familiar environment, rather than migrating to the West where they risk their own and their children's lives for an uncertain future.

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The new German government says: “Dare more progress”

The foreign policy agenda will not bring more peace

by Christian Fischer, Cologne

In the following article, there will not be a comprehensive appreciation of the coalition agreement made by the upcoming SPD-Green-FDP government. The author's intention is to take a look at foreign policy perspectives, even though there are enough topics, starting from citizen's income to cannabis liberalisation or LGBTI support for developing countries as well, to investments in the future, that could give us worries for the times to come.

Is it permitted for an old white man to utter critical words about a young woman who is now going to be Germany's foreign minister? Let's try it this way: It is an intellectual challenge to imagine a 40-year-old person, whose professional experience consists of a party career and, before that, trampoline bronze medals, as the head of the diplomatic corps and as the representative of German interests abroad. I am hardly up to this challenge. Is it any consolation that similar biographies are not atypical among our political elite?

But what matters are not the persons (not even mine), but only the contents, as we were repeatedly told. The content is in the coalition agreement. So, let's take a look. The title “Mehr Fortschritt wagen” (dare more progress) probably deliberately recalls the words of *Willy Brandt* “Mehr Demokratie wagen” (dare more democracy). This slogan at least sounded pleasant. When it comes to progress, one always should ask oneself: Where are we progressing to? Or: What are we moving away from? What are we leaving behind?

At first, the intentions appear quite conservative. Commitment to NATO obligations, to the transatlantic alliance, to the UN and to human rights. These are no surprises. One even reads about the goal of making Germany and, if possible, the whole world free of nuclear weapons and reviving international disarmament talks. It remains somewhat unclear, however, whether disarmament is being primarily demanded by others or by oneself. After all, one also reads about the explicit commitment to armed drones, a successor system for the *Tor-*

nado fighter and the need to increase the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr in order to meet the “strategic challenges and security threats of our time”. This can be used to justify almost any military deployment worldwide – wait, no: explicitly, there should be no export of armaments to states participating in the war in Yemen. That's a good thing, but there was once a time when arms exports to any crisis zone, let alone a war zone, were prohibited. Those times are long gone, even if, at EU level, they are now calling for “more binding rules for a restrictive arms export policy”.

The “progress” becomes more concrete when looking towards Eastern Europe. We (we!) are ready for a constructive dialogue with Russia and want to work on future issues. That sounds good. Furthermore, we want to pay attention to the interests of “our partners” in Central and Eastern Europe. We demand – from Russia, of course – an end to the violence in eastern Ukraine and an end to the annexation of Crimea, which was/is contrary to international law. It wants to be a partner for democracy movements in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Belarus; the first three are to be supported in their efforts to implement reforms in the direction of the EU.

Adding to this the objective formulated elsewhere, postulating that EU and NATO should cooperate more intensively, one wonders how a constructive dialogue with Russia can be possible considering these openly declared intentions of interference. It's as if – in a different course of history – the Soviet Union had tried to make Alaska and California (or Austria and Scandinavia) into Soviet republics.

In plain terms: the plan is to advance further East economically and militarily. If we remember that even *Hans-Dietrich Genscher*, FDP Foreign Minister for 18 years, described the eastward expansion to Poland and the Baltic States as the biggest mistake since the Second World War (cf. *Current Concerns* No. 25/26 of 26 November 2021). Then this “progress” towards the east is a logical continuation of this biggest mistake. In the Far East, relations with China are to be “shaped in the dimensions of partner-

ship, competition and system rivalry”, whatever that means. Anyway, relations with China are to be coordinated in close consultation with the EU and the USA on the basis of human rights and applicable international law.

The progress made on the European Union is also worth mentioning. There is an explicit desire to develop the EU into a federal state. To this end, the “right of initiative” in the European Parliament is to be “strengthened”. (Note: it would have to be introduced in the first place, up to now the Parliament has no right of initiative for legislation); at first an European electoral law for this Parliament has to be introduced. (Note: up to now the EU Parliament is elected according to nationally very different rules), whereby transnational lists should then also be possible. (Note: then citizens could elect? Portuguese MPs in Germany and vice versa). The basis of this European Federal State should be the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The *European Court of Justice* is also to be supported in the execution of its verdicts, and national laws are to be checked more closely concerning their conformity with EU law. As stated elsewhere, the Council of Europe should be strengthened against “authoritarian Council of Europe members”.

In a word, the dissolution of nation states with the aim to create a European federal state is the declared and decided objective of this government. All EU members (note: not all are NATO members!) must join the transatlantic alliance and the expansion towards the East if they do not want to be side-lined as “authoritarian”. The “strategic sovereignty of Europe” is to be increased, but there is no mention about the sovereignty of nations or the protection and scope of our Basic Law. Did the voters of this government realise this? Is that what they wanted?

These first indications of “progress” in foreign policy already show that the previous direction – away from our national democracy, away towards the East – has not been abandoned, but is to be continued swiftly with fresh personnel. We citizens will have enough to do to monitor this government to see whether it represents our interests. •

The EU shows teeth – Federal Councillor Cassis stands firm

Recent developments in Swiss EU policy

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

A few days after the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N) travelled to EU headquarters, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis met with EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovic, Switzerland's new contact person, on 15 November. In their subsequent statements to the media, both maintained their position, Federal Councillor Cassis with dignified composure, the EU Commissioner in his usual commanding tone, lacking any understanding of the Swiss state model. Meanwhile, Swiss EU turbos are making a new attempt to get the supposedly urgently needed electricity agreement out of the drawer, and the head of the Department of Defence, Federal Councillor Viola Amherd, is eyeing military cooperation with the EU within the framework of the "Permanent Structured Cooperation" (PESCO).

The FAC members of the National Council were not exactly received accommodatingly in Brussels. They were snubbed because Brussels did not even want to recognise the release of the cohesion billion by the parliament as a contribution to détente.

Remarkable words of the NEBS President

Particularly noteworthy is the clarity with which SP National Councillor Eric Nussbaumer complained about the EU Commission's "power play". Nussbaumer is President of the "New European Movement Switzerland NEBS", which campaigns for Switzerland's accession to the EU. Nevertheless, he said in Brussels that "it has 'ideological overtones' when Brussels [...] regards Switzerland's desire to associate with *Horizon Europe* as cherry-picking". After all, Switzerland is also contributing money to the programme, and research cooperation is of mutual interest. With such an attitude, says Nussbaumer, Brussels is not doing itself any favours, because it is also scaring off the pro-European forces in Switzerland.¹ A wise realisation – better late than never.

Like fire and water

The statements by Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis and EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovic in two separate interviews after the 15 November meeting were like fire and water.

The EU Commissioner "gave Switzerland the tariff at the meeting", noted the "Tages-Anzeiger".² This is what Šefčovic really tried to do: Until the WEF in January, he called for a "quick start", a "roadmap"

"The fact that an electricity agreement with the EU is supposed to bring more security of electricity supply does not become any truer through frequent repetition. Despite this, however, EU turbos continue to use this link undeterred. In turn, even Federal Councillor *Simonetta Sommaruga*: 'However, an electricity agreement would not mean that we would automatically have enough electricity. All countries need more electricity.'"

for the solution of the four "key questions", namely "a dynamic adoption of law, state aid, dispute settlement and a mechanism for regular cohesion fund contributions". In response to the interviewer's comment: "So the old disputes that caused the Framework Agreement to fail ...", Šefčovic replied: "They have not disappeared into thin air. If we want a perspective, we have to solve these important disputes." The EU had been patient with Switzerland for a long time, but now it finally needed "legal clarity and predictability".³

Federal Councillor Cassis, meanwhile, was unimpressed by his opponent's brisk course: "Negotiations are not an issue at the moment. We are dealing with highly political issues, not technical ones. When the Federal Council broke off the negotiations on the Framework Agreement in May, it did not do so with the intention of starting negotiations again straight away." First and foremost, he said, it was about getting to know each other and initiating a political dialogue. "We had a good and open exchange", said Federal Councillor Cassis, "Maroš Šefčovic gave me the impression of an attentive contact person with a pragmatic attitude." (*Tages-Anzeiger* of 19 November 2021)

"There is no command issuing and no command receiving between the EU and Switzerland"

Asked whether Switzerland would meet the "deadline" by January, Ignazio Cassis replied: "A deadline was not an issue during our talks." And he added: "There is no command issuing and no command receiving between the EU and Switzerland. Each side represents its interests and each side communicates its wishes. The Federal Council knows the EU's wishes. They are not new." In response to the comment that listening to him and Mr Šefčovic gave the impression that they had not partici-

pated in the same conversation, Federal Councillor Cassis replied: "What he communicated afterwards had relatively little to do with our meeting." (*Tages-Anzeiger* of 19 November 2021)

This statement makes one prick up one's ears: Is the same EU Commissioner, who apparently showed himself willing to talk in private, acting outwardly as a tough mouthpiece for the hardliners in the Commission and the EU Council? Fortunately, we Swiss have a hard "skull". We will not be so unwise as to let Brussels impose a "framework" on us that does not suit us.

Electricity agreement with the EU does not bring security of electricity supply

The long-term supply of electricity is a problem that we will not be able to avoid solving, and this does not only apply to Switzerland. A few very smart people are taking advantage of this situation to convince the Swiss population that we absolutely need an electricity agreement with Brussels in order to maintain our security of electricity supply. With this in mind, an interpellation⁴ is on the agenda of the Council of States for the winter session, to be discussed on 2 December.⁵ Council of States member *Benedikt Wüth* (CVP/Die Mitte SG) justifies his interpellation as follows: "The electricity situation is urgent and cannot be delayed". His first question to the Federal Council was accordingly: "Does the Federal Council share the view that a de-blocking of the stalled electricity negotiations is in Switzerland's interest?"

To this end, it must be made clear: The fact that an electricity agreement with the EU is supposed to bring more security of electricity supply does not become any truer through frequent repetition. Despite this, however, EU turbos continue to use

"The EU shows teeth ..."

continued from page 5

this link undeterred. In turn, even Federal Councillor *Simonetta Sommaruga*, head of the *Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications* (DETEC) and one of the two Federal Councillors who wanted to stick to the negotiations on the Framework Agreement in May this year, admits: "However, an electricity agreement would not mean that we would automatically have enough electricity. All countries need more electricity."⁶ In other words: If, for example, Germany shuts down its nuclear power plants and stops producing coal, it will need its own electricity and will be able to supply Switzerland with less or no electricity in the event of an electricity shortage in winter – with or without an electricity agreement. Council of States member Würth also knows this. So, what is his interpellation really about?

Electricity agreement is out of the question for democratic and legal reasons

From Switzerland's point of view, integration into the EU electricity market is out of the question; it would almost certainly be rejected in the inevitable referendum.

Council of States member Benedikt Würth reveals with his third question that his real aim is to crack popular resistance to EU law: "Can the Federal Council imagine offering a dispute settlement mechanism as well as the regulation on state aid along the lines of the failed Framework Agreement for a specific electricity agreement with the EU?"

In plain language: via an electricity agreement, the hammers are to be forced on the electorate, which is precisely what they do not want:

- dispute settlement mechanism = obligation to accept the case law of the *European Court of Justice* (ECJ), including the adoption of EU law (because the case law of the ECJ concerns the application of EU law)
- regulation on state aid = ban on cantonal and communal subsidies and shares in power plants, i.e., compulsion to privatise Swiss power plants, almost all of which are currently in the hands of the cantons and communes. For according to Article 107/108 of the *Treaty on European Union*, state aid is "incompatible with the internal market". Above all, this would hand over the precious treasure of our hydropower to the EU internal market, i.e., it would be sold off to the highest-bidding foreign corporations. And in the event of a dispute, the ECJ would probably not rule in favour of the village in Valais or Graubünden that wants to keep its power plant.

The clou of the Würth interpellation: "The balancing of interests between a reduction

in sovereignty and added value in terms of security of supply and the marketing of Swiss electricity can be well and practically communicated and discussed in terms of domestic policy." Here the strategy is being delivered to pull the wool over the people's eyes: If we don't want to freeze in winter, we'll just have to bite the bullet and give up our sovereignty (including ownership of the power plants). In return, we are allowed to sell and buy our electricity via the EU grid.

In reality, the Swiss electricity grid has long been interconnected with the grid of the EU states. For example, *Axpo*⁷ has been investing in wind power in northern Germany for years, and our neighbouring states will be so happy to have Swiss pumped-storage plants in the future when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. In other words: the EU is not only highly interested in North-South transit on the roads (overland transport agreement), but also with regard to the electricity grid – but hardly anyone talks about this.

What is Switzerland doing in the EU military project PESCO?

As every year, the ETH study "Security 2021" finds that "Support for Swiss neutrality remains unchanged and is almost unanimously supported by the respondents."⁸ In view of this clear popular will, the eager efforts of the Federal Council and part of parliament to integrate Switzerland into military alliances are a constant source of annoyance. In addition to the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP), in which Switzerland has been marching along for a long time without the consent of the people, the Federal Council is also recently considering participation in the EU military project PESCO (*Permanent Structured Cooperation*), which was established in 2017.

On the homepage of the German Federal Ministry of Defence you will find more details about PESCO, for example that "the European armed forces [!] [...] will be made more compatible in terms of organisation and equipment so that they can jointly assume responsibility for security and defence policy". Or that the signatories have undertaken to "regularly increase their defence budget and gradually increase investment spending for defense equipment to 20 per cent in the medium term". The relationship between PESCO and NATO is not entirely clear: "The military cooperation between EU members complements that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization."⁹ As if NATO had not already caused enough damage! Incidentally, the targeted upgrade is not exactly climate-friendly either ...

And in this monumental EU military programme with 46 projects, neutral

Switzerland should absolutely be part of it according to the wishes of the head of the *Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport* (DDPS), *Viola Amherd*? To this end, she was recently invited to a meeting of EU defence ministers in Brussels – what an "honour"! "For Germany, which initiated the concept, it is about creating an 'army of Europeans'", says the "*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*", and it continues: "Switzerland would hardly go that far". Amherd, however, praised the Framework Nations Concept in Brussels as a platform that promotes multinationalism in the field of security and defence."¹⁰

In which areas DDPS head Amherd envisions military cooperation with the EU, she did not want to reveal to the "*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*". On the other hand, she announced very candidly that "any legal adjustments were not necessary. The military partnership with the EU in no way calls into question Switzerland's requirement of neutrality, since there can be no question of deploying troops". This astonishing point of view not only ignores the direct democratic rights of the citizens, but also shows a peculiar view of Swiss neutrality: It cannot be that the Federal Councillor believes that all activities except a war effort by the Swiss army meet the requirement of neutrality. •

¹ Steinvorth, Daniel. "Schweizer Parlamentarier sind enttäuscht von der EU" (Swiss parliamentarians are disappointed with the EU). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 11 November 2021

² Walser, Charlotte. "Was er kommuniziert hat, hatte relativ wenig mit unserem Treffen zu tun" (What he communicated had relatively little to do with our meeting). Interview with Ignazio Cassis. In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 19 November 2021

³ Israel, Stephan. "Ich möchte schnelle Ergebnisse. In einem Jahr können wir viel erreichen". (I want quick results. We can achieve a lot in one year). Interview with EU Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič. In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 17 November 2021

⁴ With an interpellation, a member of the Parliament requests information from the Federal Council on a federal domestic or foreign policy matter. The Federal Council answers the interpellation in writing, the author can request a discussion on it (in this case in the Council of States).

⁵ "Deblockierung der Stromverhandlungen mit der EU" (Deblocking the electricity negotiations with the EU). 21.4042 *Interpellation*

⁶ Walser, Charlotte; Häne, Stefan. "Frau Bundesrätin, gehen in der Schweiz demnächst die Lichter aus?" Interview mit Simonetta Sommaruga. (Madam Federal Councillor, will the lights go out in Switzerland soon? – Interview with Simonetta Sommaruga. In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 27 October 2021

⁷ The energy group Axpo Holding is 100% owned by the cantons of north-eastern Switzerland and their cantonal utilities. It supplies around 3 million people and several thousand businesses.

⁸ ETH Zürich. Center for Security Studies. *Security 2021. Foreign, Security and Defence Policy Opinion Shaping Trends* 22 June 2021

⁹ <https://www.bmvg.de/de/themen/gsvp-sicherheitsverteidigungspolitik-eu/pesco>

¹⁰ Steinvorth, Daniel. "Die Schweiz will sich am EU-Militärprojekt PESCO beteiligen" (Switzerland wants to participate in the EU military project PESCO). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 21 October 2021

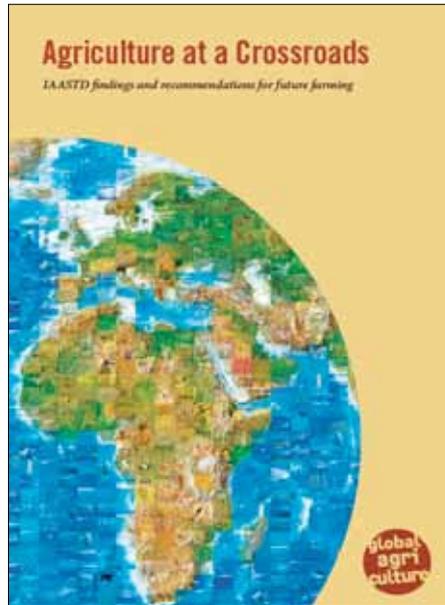
“Agriculture at a crossroads” was the conclusion in 2009 – and today?

Notes on the IAASTD and the ten years since

by Beat Kissling and Petra Hagen Hodgson*

“The causes of the COVID-19 pandemic, or any other modern pandemic, are not a great mystery”, noted Peter Daszak during a workshop by IPBES¹ in July 2020. “The same human activities that are pushing forward climate change and biodiversity losses are also increasing the risk of pandemics through their impact on our environment. Changes in the way we use land, the expansion and intensification of agriculture as well as unsustainable trade, production and consumption affect nature and lead to more contact between wildlife, livestock, pathogens and humans. This is how pandemics arise.”² These causal relationships are little known by the general public.³ Yet, the current experiences with COVID-19 may perhaps contribute to people’s awareness of the problematic role of prevailing industrialised agriculture for the well-being of humans and nature.

In fact, the relationship between pandemics and industrialised agricultural, trade and distribution systems have been well known at least since the 2009 *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development* (IAASTD) report. The IAASTD explained the occurrence and geographical spread of infectious diseases as a result of “intensification of crop production and animal husbandry”, “economic factors such as expansion of international trade as well as low producer prices”, of “mutations and evolution of pathogens” and the “speed with which people travel around the world.”⁴ The report also outlined counteractive measures. It stated: “Integration and co-ordination of political and agricultural measures and pro-



grammes along the entire food chain can counteract the spread of infectious diseases. Examples of these are extended crop rotations, greater crop diversity and lower herd densities, less transport and exchange of livestock across large geographical distances.”⁵ As can be seen from the explanations, the risk of pandemics increases in particular with a dwindling biodiversity. In 2010, scientists⁶ were able to show that among the general extinction of species, so-called ‘buffer species’, which make the spread of viruses more difficult or hinder it altogether, die out faster than other species such as the classic intermediate hosts of the pathogens, that spread them.⁷

The “Green Revolution” and its consequences

The current rapid extinction of species is a recent phenomenon in human history. The so-called “Green Revolution” of the 1960s,⁸ with which the *World Bank* intended to combat the hunger problem in the poor countries of the South, plays an important role. A whole bundle of agricultural innovations were made to permanently combat hunger. It became possible to breed high-yielding cereal varieties which had a greater number of calories. However, these varieties required the cultivation of pure monocultures and the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

At the same time, this method of cultivation forced small farmers, most of whom were economically disadvantaged, into buying hybrid seeds for higher yields and to take out loans to be able to finance

them. Subsequently they became dependent on the agro-corporate suppliers. The age of industrialised or chemical agriculture based on high technology had begun. The “Green Revolution” was celebrated and adapted almost worldwide. Only gradually the serious damages and consequential costs for nature and people associated with it became apparent to the greater public. The global damage to the environment and thus also to the poorer rural population in the developing countries was a topic of discussion at the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

At the turn of the millennium the UN set a sign as the situation for several hundred million undernourished and poor people had not improved despite the celebrated “Green Revolution”. With the adoption of the millennium development goals it put the “fight against extreme poverty and hunger” at the top its agenda. The aim was to reduce the amount of people who have less than one US dollar a day to live on and the amount of people who suffer from hunger by half by 2015. A good two years later, several UN agencies initiated the preparation of a comprehensive report on the state of the world’s food systems, the IAASTD.

Meaning and content of the IAASTD

Over the course of four years, more than 400 scientists analysed the world’s food systems on all continents. They looked back 50 years to establish the necessary changes for the coming 50 years in order to overcome hunger and poverty while, at the same time, protect nature in a sustainable way. The retrospective analysis was not very edifying. Alongside millions of hungry people, the report showed the even larger amount of people suffering from obesity and malnutrition. It revealed that although billions of tons of grain are produced, half of it is not processed as food, but used as animal feed for meat consumption, for the production of fuel or as industrial raw material. In addition, it identified the current global food system as one of the most significant causes of climate change, species extinction, environmental pollution, water scarcity, preventable diseases, child labour, poverty and injustice.

In 2009, this balance sheet gave rise to the motto: “Business as usual is not an option”. The goals of the “Green Revolution” had fundamentally failed despite an

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The article appeared in its first version in the journal *Kultur und Politik* 2/2021. Both authors have updated the text for *Current Concerns*.

Culture and Politics is the journal of the *Bioforum Switzerland*. It is a forum for sustainable organic agriculture.

Bioforum Switzerland grew out of the *Möschberg* tradition, the birthplace of organic agriculture in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. It is an association made up of farmers and many others interested in organic farming from all parts of the country. The editors of *Culture and Politics* strive to reflect the legacy of the organic pioneers, to develop it further and to make it useful for the present and the future.

“Agriculture at a crossroads’ ...”

continued from page 7

increase in production. At the same time, this type of food system proved to be a serious burden on nature. The IAASTD called for a necessary paradigm shift: instead of focusing solely on an increase of production, driven by a purely technological and economical perspective, a multifunctional agriculture should be strived for, an agriculture, that includes ecological as well as social aspects. The support and encouragement of small farmers was seen as the key solution to the manifold problems. Small farmers should be able to de-

velop their indigenous knowledge in cooperation with science; they should be given access to the necessary means (financial resources, land, networking and cooperation opportunities, infrastructure resources and access to human rights, especially for women) in order to be empowered to develop sustainable, innovative solutions in food production – as a basis for the necessary, fundamental change. Small farmers, who are already responsible for 70% of food production worldwide, should at last be recognised and given a voice. In order to describe this notion of agriculture based on diversity and being in harmony with nature the term of *agroecology* was used in the report.



NaturGut Katzhof in Switzerland. (picture Petra Hagen Hodgson)

At the time of the publication of the IAASTD report back in 2009, it was hardly noticed. The world’s attention and thus the attention of politicians rested on the financial crisis. At least, the crisis and its repercussions led to a more critical thinking about the globalised economy. It was no coincidence that the political scientist and economist *Elinor Ostrom* was the

first woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Economics at that time. In many years of worldwide research, she had been able to prove that people are very well able to manage common good without being profit-oriented. Her findings refuted the reductionist view, popular in economics at the time, that all people should be understood as *homo economicus*; this unfounded view provides a convenient justification for all forms of social inequality and misery, as if poverty and hunger were consequences of a natural or fated selection process. Following *Ostrom’s* socio-ethical approach to economics, the UN declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

High time for the long overdue paradigm shift

Since then, the commitment to a different form of economic activity which respects human rights influenced discussions about the failures of industrialised agriculture and nutrition. In 2011, *Benedikt Haerlin*, who was a member of the supervisory board of the IAASTD from 2002 to 2008, acting as a representative of North American and European non-governmental organisations (NGOs), noted that a change in thinking had indeed taken place in wide circles of agricultural science and agricultural policy. More so, he stated that “the message of the IAASTD is part of the standard of scientific and political analysis”⁹. However, as *Hans Herren*, co-author and co-chair of the IAASTD, noted ten years later,¹⁰ NGOs were the sole contributor to a relevant dissemination of the IAASTD instead of state institutions or political representatives. In 2020, *Herren* and *Haerlin* took stock together with other authors and editors of the IAASTD with the publication of the book “Transforma-

tion of our food systems. The making of a paradigm shift”¹¹. Thirty articles contained in the publication examine the extent to which the findings of the IAASTD have been put into practice over the past eleven years. Recent reports and statements by important agricultural policy organisations such as FAO, UNCTAD, CFS or HLPE¹² are discussed in the book. Furthermore, numerous local and regional initiatives around the world are presented. Some articles deal with the transformation of food systems towards agricultural biodiversity and show different agroecological approaches worldwide. Others discuss the 2018 UN-proclaimed rights of smallholders and other people working in rural regions and their possibilities to make their voices heard. Others again focus on the relationship between food systems and health (of people and nature). All these articles confirm *Haerlin’s* impression of a civil society awakening, first expressed in 2011. Lastly, few articles focus on the resistance to the long overdue change and the failure of politics to initiate the paradigm shift on a broad societal level.

Agroecology, an agriculture of values: social, ecological, economic and democratic

While in economics and politics the solution to the problems at all levels of society (also globally) is essentially seen in technological progress (above all by means of digitalisation and artificial intelligence), *Haerlin* speaks in his introduction of a “dehumanisation” of agriculture. He demonstrates that instead of relying on values, one relies entirely on technological instruments. In contradiction to this still prevailing view, *Haerlin* argues for “[r]ehumanising, reconnecting, rebuilding and restoring the resilience of our food systems”¹³ as an answer to the undeniable challenges. Regarding agroecology, he points out that in the past, it was seen as a single concept. Today, this notion is understood as thousands of locally different forms of implementation – traditional as well as new forms. Agroecology is “both as a social and cultural concept and as a set of agricultural and food system practices [...] one of the most holistic and convincing approaches to the challenges of the new paradigm”¹⁴. As already described in the IAASTD report, smallholder farmers¹⁵ are still today regarded as the most important actors in the agro-ecological transformation process. Various authors emphasise the mostly respectful attitude of indigenous farmers towards nature. This is viewed as a

“Agriculture at a crossroads’ ...”

continued from page 8

clear contrast to the approach of affluent industrialised countries to nature, fostering high-tech mass production based on the idea of dominating, instrumentalising and exploiting it.

The underestimated importance of consumers in industrialised countries

The utilitarian approach to nature has led, among other things, to a situation in which industrialised countries produce cheap food in abundance (with enormous amounts of food waste) and have a population suffering from serious health issues as a result of malnutrition and overeating. The cheaply produced food ultimately claims its price through its consequential costs: initially, for the regeneration of the severely impaired natural environment and, in the longer term, for the damage to people’s health.

Many consumers do not realise until now that they themselves contribute to the industrialised food systems with their preference for cheap products. Many do not realise, that they even encourage politicians not to invest public money in the support of agroecological systems and thus deepen the status quo. According to various voices in the publication “Transformation of our food systems”, far too little is being done to encourage public awareness for healthy food. Few know, for instance, that organic food would actually, if the real (also external) costs of industrialised food were included in the price, be much cheaper. Also, not many are aware that industrialised agriculture is responsible for a large proportion of greenhouse gases (including humus depletion, artificial fertiliser production, methane and nitrous oxide). One must ask oneself, why citizens are not given a real understanding of the significant preventive work of a farmer who produces healthy food (without pesticides or antibiotic residues).

The influence of the “new multilateralism”

But what are the main obstacles to the long overdue change in agriculture? According to several articles of “Transformation of our food systems” it is a case of a few very influential, enormously profiting interest groups who, despite the IAASTD findings that have been available for eleven years, still have no qualms about continuing to push forward the compaction and poisoning of arable soil, accepting chemical and drug contamination of groundwater, clearing primeval forests and overexploiting resources in order to increase meat production, allowing undignified animal factories and animal transports over long distances, highly en-

ergy-intensive food transports around the world and the like – all of that for the sake of profit alone. The authors particularly blame a lack of will and courage of politicians for maintaining a food system with so many victims and few winners and for spending billions of taxpayers’ money on subsidising it (conventional industrialised agriculture).

It is, in particular, the Canadian winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize (1985), *Pat Mooney*, who shows that the politics of western industrial countries have not imposed any regulation on the excessive business practices of globally active agribusinesses in recent decades. As a result, an oligopoly of four gigantic, globally operating corporations has established itself: these are *Bayer/Monsanto*, *ChemChina/Syngenta*, *BASF* and *Corteva*, which control up to two-thirds of the global market for genetically modified seeds, synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, etc. In addition, according to Mooney, the well-known digital corporations as well as the world’s most influential asset management groups such as *BlackRock*, *Vanguard* and *State Street* are highly interested in investing in the food business.¹⁶

Mooney’s analysis on international agricultural policy was confirmed by the UN *World Food Summit* (WFS) held in September 2021, which was organised in close cooperation with the *World Economic Forum* (WEF). In the run-up to the food summit, there were talks of a “new multilateralism” as, for the first time, the WEF, as the representation of the world’s most influential private business and financial companies, negotiated the future of global food systems as an equal partner, so to speak, with the participating countries. Mooney thus describes the problems of this summit in clear terms: “For the first time in UN history a Summit has

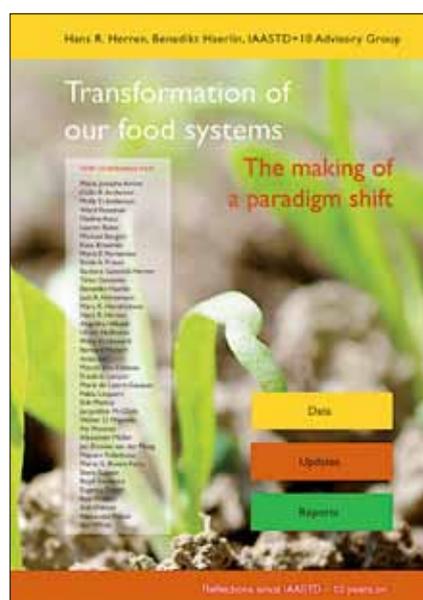
been managed and structured by the agri-food industry”.¹⁷

It is also thought-provoking that the former Rwandan Minister of Agriculture, *Agnes Kalibata*, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) since 2014, was appointed by UN Secretary-General *Antonio Guterres* as Special Ambassador of the World Food Summit. AGRA, whose stated goal is to bring the ‘Green Revolution’ (i.e. increasing food production on a chemical basis) to Africa’s smallholder farmers, was founded and subsequently funded by the *Rockefeller Foundation* as well as the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* in 2006. AGRA promised to cut hunger and poverty by half by 2020. This, however, never became true, on the contrary, it became a real disaster.¹⁸

Acknowledgment of the Federal Council in the support of agroecology

At the World Food Summit, Switzerland was among “the first signatories of a newly formed coalition of governments and organisations that aims to strengthen agroecological approaches in research, policy and investment in the coming years,”¹⁹ writes *Frank Eyhorn*, executive director of *Biovision*, in a press release published immediately after the UN. He further states that President *Guy Parmelin* “explicitly acknowledged the support of agroecology in Switzerland’s international cooperation” in his address and described “it as the basis for continuing the dialogue in Switzerland for the transformation of our food system”²⁰. This statement may seem surprising in light of the two failed agricultural initiatives in June 2021 and the rather hesitant development of agricultural policy in Switzerland. But it reflects that the scepticism in the Swiss population towards the use of pesticides in agriculture has consistently grown nevertheless. This attitude is also expressed in the parliamentary initiative “The risk in the use of pesticides”, which received broad public support in the consultation process.

The reasons for the rejection of the referendums known as the “pesticide initiatives” probably go back to the fierce opposition by the bulk of the farming community. The majority of farmers feared that they would no longer be able to secure their livelihood if the initiatives were adopted – understandably so, especially since they could not count on the support of the majority of the Swiss citizens. The grave importance of the farming community in guaranteeing a healthy diet was, and unfortunately still is today, too little understood by many. The demand for cheap food (i.e., produced with chemical aids) is still much greater than for organ-



continued on page 10

“Agriculture at a crossroads’ ...”

continued from page 9

ically produced food. At the same time, parliament and the executive branch continue to establish many incentives to maintain an industrial approach to agriculture with their subsidy policy. *Christian Hofer*, Director of the *Federal Office for Agriculture*, instead emphasises the need to adopt a holistic approach to agriculture. He calls for “everyone from the farmer to the consumer to take joint responsibility for a sustainable food policy”.²¹ Hofer explains the holistic approach with the following words: “The challenges facing the food system, such as limited resources, overuse of ecosystems, food waste, health costs resulting from malnutrition, etc., are complex and interwoven. They can only be solved if the individual sectoral policies of agriculture, environment, spatial planning, health, economy, etc. work together and are coherently coordinated.”²²

Furthermore, he underlines the importance of the role of the consumers, whose purchasing behaviour essentially determines what is produced and how. After the extremely emotional voting campaign around the agricultural initiatives, *Biovision* and other committed institutions, which are at the forefront of trying to pass on an understanding of the principles of agroecology to the general public, see particular importance in the re-establishment of a dialogue between all those involved and, in particular, the education of young people. Such a dialogue is important and promising. After all, who should be opposed to finally defeating hunger in the world, ensuring a secure future for

coming generations, and truly caring for nature?

As the authors of “Transformation of our food systems” clearly express, the transformation or the paradigm shift to a nature- and people-friendly/oriented nutrition can only be achieved, if the people decide with conviction to go along this path. As soon as people understand that agroecology is a deeply ethical concept of agriculture, it will not take much persuasion to jointly take the necessary steps to achieve it. After all, the spirit of agroecology, based on equal cooperation between traditional indigenous knowledge and science as well as on the cultivation of democratic relationships, and being designed to foster a resilience-supporting relationship between people and nature, is strongly reminiscent of Albert Schweitzer’s timeless ethic of “reverence for life.” ●

¹ Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

² Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft (11 November 2020): IPBES-Bericht: Natur- und Artenschutz beugt Pandemie vor. (Future Foundation for Agriculture (11 November 2020): IPBES report: Nature and species conservation prevents pandemic.) Berlin, link: <https://www.weltagrabericht.de/aktuelles/nachrichten/news/de/34156.html>

³ But see “Vom Nutzen der Viren und Schaden der Zoonosen” (“On the benefits of viruses and the harm of zoonoses”); in: *Kultur und Politik* 3/2020

⁴ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)/Vereinigung Deutscher Wissenschaftler (2009): *Synthesebericht – Weltagrabericht. International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development* (IAASTD)

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 171; <https://www.weltagrabericht.de/fileadmin/files/weltagrabericht/IAASTDBerichte/IAASTDSyntheseDeutsch.pdf>

⁶ In this article, the generic masculine is understood to be gender-neutral and thus applies to all people.

⁷ Brunner, J. (2 December 2010). “Artenschwund gefährdet menschliche Gesundheit. Veränderung

natürlicher Ökosysteme begünstigt Überleben von Krankheitsüberträgern.” (Species loss endangers human health. Changes in natural ecosystems favour the survival of disease vectors.) In: *scinexx – das wissensmagazin*. Link: <https://www.scinexx.de/news/geowissen/artenschwund-gefaehrdet-menschliche-gesundheit/>

⁸ “Weitere Gründe sind in der Entwaldung und anderen Nutzungsänderungen zu suchen.” (Other reasons are to be found in deforestation and other changes of use.)

⁹ Haerlin, B. (9 December 2011). Genug statt mehr. *Le Monde diplomatique*

¹⁰ Herren, H. R. (8 January 2021). *Transformation of Our Food Systems: The Need for a Paradigm Shift. Panel Discussion*, Oxford Real Farming Conference.

¹¹ Herren, H. R. & Haerlin, B. & IAASTD+10 Advisory Group (2020). *Transformation of our food systems. The making of a paradigm shift*. Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft & Biovision, Berlin/Zürich

¹² FAO = Food and Agricultural Organization, UNCTAD = United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, CFS = Committee on World Food Security, HLPE = High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition

¹³ Herren, H. R. & Haerlin, B. & IAASTD+10 Advisory Group (2020), p. 18f.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 19

¹⁵ They are often the real driving force in smallholder agriculture. Their social and cultural equality was already one of the declared goals of the IAASTD Report.

¹⁶ Mooney, Pat. in: Herren & Haerlin, 2020, cf. p. 37ff.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 39

¹⁸ Wise, Timothy A. (July 2020). *Failing Africa’s Farmers: An Impact Assessment of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa*. Study report, Tufts University, Global Development and Environmental Institute, *Working Paper* No. 20-01

¹⁹ Eyhorn, Frank. *Press release* on 24 September 2021, Media Releases Switzerland, National Press Portal, 29 October 2021, Link: <https://www.presseportal-schweiz.ch/pressemeldungen/un-ernaehrungssystemgipfel-den-worten-der-schweiz-muessen-jetzt-taten-folgen>

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Statement at the “Forum Kurswechsel”, organised by BIOVISION on 2 December 2020, <https://www.biovision.ch/berichtforumkurswechsel/>

²² *ibid.*



Agroecology in the Philippines, AGROECO. Self-sufficiency also helps to nourish oneself during economic crises. (Picture Geonathan Barro/Fastenopfer on sehen-und-handeln.ch)

“You know, if you do it like this, it’ll go well ...”

Why we need to pass on our experience to the next generation

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and remedial teacher

“Oh, look at those cute little swans!” Many people will surely associate the image of this swan family with security, protection and warmth. The mother swan is swimming ahead of her young and, with the necessary care, she introduces them to life. To do this, she can fall back on her innate natural instinctive behaviour. In this way, her young can acquire the necessary tools for coping with life, while being protected from danger as far as possible. The same task presents itself to us when it comes to the education of our children. What swans, and of course other animals, are endowed with through their species-specific instincts, humans must acquire by means of a learning process. But what should this look like?

“Should we act like this or like that?”

If you keep your eyes open for the problems of parents, you will observe a picture of great uncertainty. “Should we do it like this or like that?” Parents have difficulties in making decisions, in leading the way for their children and in passing on their experiences to them. Accordingly, many children today lack the basic skills they need for a healthy development of their personality.

This is also shown by a large-scale new study from Germany in which 1,231 educators and primary school teachers were asked about their perception of the children they care for. The study involved 22,511 children. The results show that thorough reflection is called for and action is needed. 40% of the children show abnormalities in the area of language, 19% in their motoric and 30% in their social development. Interestingly, the interviewees were particularly struck by the lack of pronunciation, a skill that the child acquires in dialogue with its caregivers. This dialogue seems to be missing or to be reduced alarmingly. Incidentally, this is a development that has been observed for some time (cf. Nestor, 1995). The study also described that many children are no longer able to engage in a game in an age-appropriate way. This affects 47% of two- to three-year-olds, 56% of four- to five-year-olds, 37% of six- to seven-year-olds and 24% of eight- to nine-year-olds. This finding is particularly thought-provoking, as we know how important play is for the healthy development of a child’s personality and that it lays the foundations for successful learning (cf. Perret, 2020). In other words, the learning process of the child seems to be fragile at the beginning



(picture keystone)

“The next generation is our future. Just as the young swans count on their mother, our children must be able to count on their parents to pass on their knowledge and experience to them. However, this natural process seems to have been stalled.”

of life, and any insecurity of the parents can promote undesirable developments.

“Now we simply give him his pasta ...”

Carlos has been a pupil in a second primary school class in a day school for a few weeks. Everyone has lunch together there. Now he is sitting in front of his plate with rice, meat and some salad. He puts his head in his hands and big tears roll down his cheeks. The food remains untouched. This is always the case, except when there is pasta. Then Carlos has a gigantic appetite. Of course, the subject is brought up in the next contact with his parents. His mother explains her son’s behaviour very frankly: “You know, Carlos had problems eating even when he was a little toddler. That’s why we had a total fuss at every meal. It’s not that he had allergies, which should have been taken into account. No, Carlos simply didn’t want to eat anything he didn’t already know. His favourite food was pasta or sushi. At some point I had enough. Now he just gets his pasta and sometimes sushi. Fortunately, he likes eating fruit and drinking milk, so he has no deficiencies. For my husband and me, of course, I then cook something else ...”

Obviously, Carlos has learned something that is wrong, and he has not been guided to change it. Many mothers and fathers feel like Carlos’ mother does. They rightly do not want to use any drill or harshness to teach their children to behave sensibly. But what other ways are there? In Carlos’ case, it was obvious not only at mealtimes how insecure and helpless he was in the face of those everyday situations entailed in a child’s life. But independence is learned – just as is a lack of independence. So, Carlos was actually left high and dry. But do children not have a right to learn what it takes to succeed in life and enjoy living together with their fellow human beings? Article 11 of the Swiss Federal Constitution states: “Children and adolescents have the right to the special protection of their integrity and to the encouragement of their development.” But what is needed to this end?

“I can do it myself ...”

Kindergarten is over. Viola rushes into the cloakroom. She quickly has the shoes with Velcro fastenings on her feet. Then she takes her jacket off the hook and holds it out to the kindergarten teacher. Her silent

continued on page 12

“You know, if you do it ...”

continued from page 11

expectation is: “Put it on for me!” When the kindergarten teacher does not react, Viola angrily throws the jacket on the floor. Jonas, who shares her school desk, wants to put on his jacket, too. First the wrong way round, the fastener is at the back. But then he has done it, and with a flushed head, he pulls up the zipper and laughs: “I can do it myself!” Jonas has already been able to acquire a bit of independence. He is proud of this and it encourages him to take the next steps. This is how he grows in his self-esteem. This need neither pressure nor drill, but a new challenge – or the next “zone of development” (*Lev Vigotsky*) – into which the adult carefully guides him. In between, Jonas is allowed to linger a little and be happy about his learning success, because learning also includes emotional reverberation and always the necessary leisure. When a child associates its learning success with itself and its own efforts, its self-esteem will grow. Not so, however, when the obstacles are removed from its path. In that case we raise children to be princes and princesses who hardly have to deal with the reality of life, and therefore cannot grow along with this.

The satisfaction of getting to know one’s own skill and ability

Parents have no greater desire than to raise a self-confident child who moves freely and faces his or her life tasks successfully. For this, children need a strong and stable relationship with their parents, who provide food, physical closeness and security. In this way, they instil in the child trust in interpersonal relationships and a sense of social connectedness. This is the basis for becoming an active member of the human community. *Alfred Adler*, the founder of individual psychology, drew attention to this as early as in the 1930s. Later research in developmental psychology, especially on attachment theory, confirmed Adler’s findings. For parents and educators, it is important to correctly perceive the signals and needs of the child and to react adequately to them, but also to involve the children in the activities of everyday life as players and to give them tasks appropriate to their age. If children are spoiled and not asked for anything in return, they hardly learn to defer their wishes, to tackle unpleasant things or to control impulses, as for example, not to simply hit the other child in the sand box, which does not immediately surrender its shovel, but to ask for it and to accept the answer. Otherwise, children are blocked from achieving success and mastering difficult situations on their own. For this, they must have the opportunity to deal with upcoming tasks and to show what they can

achieve – something children would like to do!

“Pampering prevents the child from testing its own abilities and from having the satisfaction of getting to know its own skill. So, it is tempted to avoid demands and to obtain attention with behaviours practised in early childhood,” stated psychologist and psychotherapist *Annemarie Buchholz-Kaiser*. Unfortunately, pampering and overprotection are very common in our countries. Not because today’s parents mean less well for their children than those in the past, but because they are insecure, align themselves with fashionable trends and hesitate to show their children the way based on their life experience. They often attach too little weight to their own person and their task, or they hope that any problems will later be straightened out in the playgroup, kindergarten or school. In this context, we sometimes have to speak of an actual role reversal, because the child sets the tone in the relationship.

“No other generation of young people has so far shown as many disruptive patterns as today’s”.

Whether we call them helicopter-, curling- or lawnmower-parents; their protecting their children from all challenges deprives these children of the chance to gain their own age-appropriate experience, to accept consequences, and not to resign in the face of failure but to seek better solutions on their own initiative. They therefore lack the emotional experience that success and failure bring. Unlike Jonas who is proud to have closed the tricky zipper through his own thought and effort. These emotional experiences would be important, such as the disappointment over the shovel that was simply not obtainable, the enjoyment of a shared meal, the sadness over the teddy bear that has been explored with meticulousness and scissors, and which is now lying there with an open belly (and hopefully will not be thrown away, but “healed” with the help of mum or dad), the guilty conscience over a wrong committed and the liberating feeling of relief at having made something good again. These are all important steps on the way to emotional maturity! Many children today seem to lack this, and this lack can leave pathological traces, as the generation researcher *Rüdiger Maas* writes: “No generation of young people has so far shown as many disturbance patterns as the generation of today. Disorder patterns such as ADHD, ADD, anorexia, bulimia or borderline appear more and more often.” The aspects mentioned must be included when researching the causes of such disorder patterns. Did these children have a training ground to learn to control their im-

pulses, to empathise with the emotional state of those around them, to not constantly revolve around themselves, to endure frustrations, to concentrate on another person with interest and attention and to not be constantly driven by inner and outer restlessness... And this is to mention only a few symptoms relevant for diagnosis?

Every generation has different tasks

The next generation is our future. Just as the young swans count on their mother, our children must be able to count on their parents to pass on their knowledge and experience to them. However, this natural process seems to have been stalled. Not in all families, of course, but studies point to a large number of children who are affected. Such an erroneous development can only be explained by analysing processes in society as a whole.

Every generation of parents has different challenges. In the years after the Second World War, parents, marked by the war and the misery of their childhood years, organised their lives economically. They were hardworking and disciplined and complained little. And they hoped to spare their children their own experiences of horror and deprivation. The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s helped the next generation of parents, the “baby boomers”, to achieve a modest prosperity, which they acquired by means of diligence, determination and loyalty to their employers. They wanted to pass on these values, unfortunately often combined with rigid educational concepts, but with the well-intentioned goal that their children should one day be better off than they had been.

The passing on of previous experiences was called into question a few years later by the 1968 movement, as this was associated with a break with values that is still little reflected or is even idealised today. A new style of parenting, the so-called anti-authoritarian upbringing, was now the order of the day; children became “partners” who were to be helped to live a life free of “constraints”. Not all parents adopted this radical form, but they tended to distance themselves from the educational practice they had experienced themselves and wanted to do things differently, better than their own parents! It was argued that children should have a good time and not be burdened too early with the demands of life. But how else can a child acquire the feeling that it can count on its own strengths? This development was continued by the following generation of parents. Today, many parents seek to make the relationship with their children as friendly as possible. Being one’s daugh-

continued on page 13

A life for freedom, equality and peace

On the death of Mikis Theodorakis

by David Holzmann

ΑΡΝΗΣΗ (Στο περιγιάλι το κρυφό)

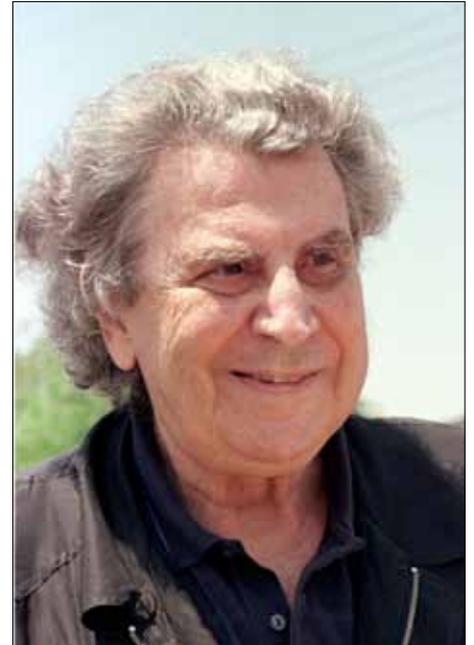
Στο περιγιάλι το κρυφό
κι άσπρο σαν περιστέρι
διψάσαμε το μεσημέρι,
μα το νερό γλυφό
Πάνω στην άμμο την ξανθή
γραψάμε τ' όνομά της
Ωραία που φύσηξε ο μπάτης
και σβήστηκε η γραφή
Με τι καρδιά, με τι πνοή,
τι πόθους και τι πάθος
Πήραμε τη ζωή μας λάθος
Κι αλλάξαμε ζωή

Source: <https://lyricstranslate.com/de/larnisi-arnisi-refusal.html/>
Current Concerns

* The text of the Greek poet and diplomat, Giorgos Seferis (1900-1971) was set to music by Mikis Theodorakis and made into a secret hymne of resistance against the Greek military dictatorship (1967-1974). Refer to www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDEb4EYmaQY

Renunciation (in the hidden bay)*

In the hidden bay,
white as a dove,
we became thirsty at noon,
but the water was salty.
Atop the sand so golden-bright
we wrote her name,
How lovely did the wind blow,
and it erased the writing.
With such heart, such spirit,
Such desires and such passion
we lived our lives; erroneously!
and then altered our ways.



Mikis Theodorakis (1925-2021) speaks at an anti-Nato and peace demonstration near Dhekelia, a British base in Cyprus, on 16 May 1999. (Picture keystone)

On 2 September 2021, I was invited to give a talk at a congress in Thessaloniki. On the way from the airport to the hotel the taxi driver asked me what kind of music I would like to listen to. I answered that, as I was in Greece now, I would like to listen to Greek music. The taxi driver burst into tears and told me that Mikis Theodorakis passed away this day. In broken English and Italian, he told me what this musician and national hero meant to the Greeks. When we arrived at the hotel, we were listening again to Mikis Theodorakis' music for almost another hour. Always live music, always the audience was singing along ...

Mikis Theodorakis (29 July 1925–2 September 2021), a revered and highly acclaimed musician who became renowned beyond domestic borders for his music to the film “Zorba the Greek”, was a determined opponent of the NATO invasion of Serbia and the illegal US war against Iraq. He was one of the few famous personalities that protested vociferous against these wars. He was often criticised, even by the communists. They said that he had been on the left-wing political spectrum during the Second World War and in the time of the Greek military dictatorship and then switched to the right-wing political spectrum at the

end of the 1980s to the *Nea-Dimokratia** (New Democracy). From Theodorakis' biography, from his statements, it becomes understandable why mainstream media had been incorrectly labelling his change of course as a pact with power. Under the Anglo-American-backed dictatorship, the Greek partisans only had the communists in the Soviet Union as their supporters. With other partisans in

continued on page 14

“You know, if you do it ...”

continued from page 12

ter's “best friend” is considered a sign of quality. Parents' own experiences are passed on only hesitantly, “after all, it's a different time now”.

The digitalisation of our everyday life gave an important boost to this development. You no longer have to ask the more experienced generation. Google knows, too ... But despite the apparent closeness, the distance between the generations is in danger of increasing, because the value of previous experiences is relativised. An (unintentional) distancing can also be observed in other areas of everyday life: The small child in the pram no longer looks at the mother, who would chat with it, show and explain things to it again and again (and thus encourage it linguistically!); the child looks out into the world and discovers – left alone – this and that, while

the mother is on the mobile phone with a friend.

This leaves the child feeling insecure and empty, and it will seek to fill this emptiness elsewhere. Today, consumerism and digital devices offer corresponding opportunities and court the customer segment “children”. A true feeling of emotional connection, reliability, warmth, protection and security cannot develop in this way.

Mothers often feel a diffuse lack and unconsciously try to compensate for it by praising their child excessively and accommodating its wishes. In doing so, however, they do not help their child to face life's tasks courageously and confidently. Instead, a generation of princes and princesses is growing up who care little about the concerns of the community but insist on their exclusive status. Is it not time to discuss these fundamental educational issues in depth?

The following books and articles have accompanied my writing:

Kaiser, A. (1981). *Das Gemeinschaftsgefühl – Entstehung und Bedeutung für die menschliche Entwicklung*. (The feeling of community – origin and significance for human development.) Zurich: Verlag Psychologische Menschenkenntnis

Kissling, B. (2022) *Sind Inklusion und Integration in der Schule gescheitert? Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung*. (Have inclusion and integration in schools failed? A critical examination.) Bern: Hogrefe-Verlag

Maas, R. (2021). *Generation lebensunfähig. Wie unsere Kinder um ihre Zukunft gebracht werden*. (Generation unfit for life. How our children are being deprived of their future.) Munich: Yes Publishing

Nestor, M. “Besorgniserregende Zunahme schwerer Sprachstörungen” (Worrying increase in severe speech disorders). In: *Current Concerns* of 23 September 1995.

Perret, E. “‘Scrabble’, ‘Ligretto’, ‘Chicken out’, ‘Halma’ and ‘The Nasty Seven’ – what are these?” In: *Current Concerns* of 11 December 2020.

Wunsch, A. (2013). *Die Verwöhnungsfall. Für eine Erziehung zu mehr Eigenverantwortung*. (The indulgence trap. For an education towards more personal responsibility) Munich: Kösel-Verlag

“A life for freedom ...”

continued from page 13

captivity, under daily torture, Theodorakis had the hope of receiving help from the Russian Communists and their followers. When Theodorakis realised that the political left-wing was increasingly abandoning its ideals of freedom, equality and peace, he resigned from his political office and left the party.

Thus, Theodorakis henceforth criticised the left-wing political spectrum for abandoning this human desire for democracy, peace and freedom in favour of more power and violence. However, Theodorakis adhered to the fact that he and many on the political left-wing had fallen in the fallacy of having had support for their struggle

against the dictatorship in communism. He never made a secret of this. He saw himself on the political left-wing but with the values of social justice and unrelenting advocacy for peace and against war.

In addition to symphonies, chamber music, choral works, oratorios, ballet music, operas and film music, Mikis Theodorakis also composed more than a thousand songs – again and again on current occasions or in honour of companions – with which he not only conquered the hearts of the Greeks. The joy of his music was paired with respect for his always upright and human integrity. With music he had the possibility to connect people of different political views, to unite for more peace and reconciliation. His music com-

bined European symphonic music – models were *Robert Schumann* and *Franz Schubert* – with the traditional folklore of his home country, Greece. He helped to revive the “bouzouki” (a musical instrument popular in Greece; member of the long-necked lute family) which once had been banned by the Nazis and the dictatorship. At his concerts, he always included songs that the audience could sing along with. Music, according to Mikis Theodorakis, is meant to unite and reconcile people. You can find many of his concerts, songs and texts on the internet. •

* *Nea-Dimokratia* is a liberal-conservative party in Greece, founded in 1974 by *Konstantinos Karamanlis* after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship.

«We Greeks say ‘No’ to barbarity»**Mikis Theodorakis Speech of 26 April 1999 on the NATO Bombings in Serbia**

cc. During the Yugoslav War, Greece was the only NATO member which refused NATO warplanes to use the Greek airspace and bomb Serbia from the South. Athens was the only capital where thousands of citizens demonstrated against the bombing in a daily base.

On the evening of 26 April 1999, a large concert was held in Syntagma Square in the centre of Athens in support of the Serbs and in condemnation of NATO's attacks against their country. Mikis Theodorakis, whose contribution formed the conclusion and highlight of the event, gave a memorable speech there in front of more than 50,000 participants, who regularly interrupted him with a thunderous cheer (to be seen on video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=if9n20iM01E>):

“Yesterday [25 April 1999], the heads of state and government of the member states of NATO signed

- the death sentence of the United Nations,

- the death of international law,
- the law of the jungle,
- the law of the strongest.

The United States, with the connivance of the European countries, can now

- judge,
 - sentence,
 - punish,
- whom they view as objecting to their designs.

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that we are about to enter another Middle Age era. So, get a hold of warm, wool clothing, muffles, gloves, boots – bitter cold lies ahead.

As I have stated since the start of the raids, all that is being said about ethnic cleansing is merely pretext. I have said that they (NATO) don't care about dialogue and agreements; their sole aim is to turn the heretic Yugoslavia into scorched earth. And they intend to do just that, transform Serbia into a desert made up of dust and blood, displaying it to the next victims, warning them ‘look,

this is what lies ahead if you don't succumb.’

We, the Greeks should be proud since we were the only ones who all together and in union said ‘NO’ to barbarity. We shall stand by the victims, by the Serbs.

We want our singing today to overpower the air-raid sirens and missile blasts.

‘Belgrade, today we sing for you.’

Let us all sing very loudly to be heard.

‘We are on your side.

Be courageous!

Justice is on your side. And justice always triumphs in the end.’

I could say that we should sing, so Europeans can hear us, but I'm afraid, it's a waste of time. Most of them are blind and deaf ...”

Source: www.sarantakos.com/kosovo/ks-17mikis.html

“Goodbye, great conductor! Serbia will remember you.” With these words, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, bid farewell to Mikis Theodorakis.

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Humanity is always an option

In memory of Ignazio Silone's "Emergency Exit"

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Sometimes, books written many decades ago have more to say about our world today, our politics and us humans than all the media coming to us every day. Such books, carefully interpreted, can also be a help in orienting ourselves in our world today and in taking meaningful steps in life. Above all, they can stimulate our thinking, appeal to our compassion, and thus strengthen our humanity. At least this is what the author of the following lines thinks regarding a book published 55 years ago by the great Italian writer Ignazio Silone.

Socialist of conscience in a time of political abysses

Ignazio Silone's book, which first appeared in English translation in 1968, is entitled "Emergency Exit". It is a kind of biography of the author, beginning with thoughts about his childhood and his relationship with his father, a poor small farmer in the Italian Abruzzi, and ending with a detailed essay about the time in which the book was written: the time of the incipient European affluent society in the first post-war decades. Silone had experienced the political abyss in the decades before the end of the Second World War, was himself a player on the political stage for years, but drew consistent conclusions from his political experience becoming mainly a writer and fellow human being in his later years.



Ignazio Silone (1900–1978)
(picture ma)

His German publisher writes about him: "Ignazio Silone (actually *Secondo Tranquilli*) was born on 1 May 1900 into a family of small farmers in the mountain village of Pescina. His childhood was marked by economic hardship and social

"Fundamental trust: 'It is based primarily on the inner certainty that we human beings are free and responsible human beings; it is based on the fact that human beings have an unavoidable need to participate in the reality of others; it is based on the possibility of a wordless understanding of souls. Is not this possibility proof of the fraternal bond between human beings? Love for the oppressed arises from this as a necessary consequence that cannot be shaken by any historical disappointment, for it is not a love that is concerned with its own advantage, and its permanence does not depend on success.'"

(Ignazio Silone)

tensions. His political commitment developed early: in 1917 he became involved in self-help organisations improving the social position of agricultural workers. A year later, he moved to Rome where he began his political career by joining the socialist movement. These activities were already observed by the police in 1919, which did not prevent him from founding the *Italian Communist Party (PCI)* the following year with *Antonio Gramsci* and *Amadeo Bordiga*. As a member of the Central Committee, he was responsible for international contacts. In 1922, the year of the fascist takeover, he was arrested in his Trieste editorial office. After his release in 1923, he went underground for good. He went on to Germany, France and Spain, but returned to Italy in 1925. Two years later, in Moscow, he witnessed the political liquidation of *Trotsky* and *Zinoviev* imposed by Stalin. Silone's protest against it marked the beginning of his estrangement from the Communist Party. In 1929, his ideological isolation began as the leadership of the PCI split into Moscow loyalists and independents; in 1931, he was expelled from the party under pressure from the *Communist International*."

Love for the poor and oppressed

Regarding his books, which he began writing in Swiss exile from 1930 onwards, it states: "Silone was critical of the fascist politics of his homeland and increasingly took a distanced position against the dictatorial leadership of the parties committed to the resistance. It was not world revolution that drove him but love for the poor and oppressed. This is also manifest-

ed in his style, which is characterised by a simple language that can be understood by a wide range of readers. Throughout his life, however, Silone remained an outsider."

And after the war? "After the liberation of Italy in October 1944, he returned to Italy, but found it difficult to gain a foothold among intellectuals. His anti-ideological, individualistic understanding of socialism increasingly isolated him from Marxist dogmatists. Instead, he called for a redefinition of the socialist ideal as a utopia, which should be linked to timeless idealistic values and ideals of the Christian occidental tradition. Renunciation of ideology, freedom of thought for the members and a non-hierarchical organisation were enormously important to him. However, his anti-ideological, liberal programme met with little response. Increasingly disappointed, he withdrew from party work and from 1950 onwards devoted himself only to his literary works. He died in a Geneva clinic on 22 August 1978. The close connection between life, politics and work is characteristic of this deeply human and committed novelist."

Compassion and empathy instead of nihilism

Much of what is presented here becomes vivid in the book "Emergency Exit". The title of the book takes up that of the chapter in which Silone describes his experiences in Moscow at the time of Stalin and his inner turning away from the Communist Party.

continued on page 16

"Humanity is always an option"

continued from page 15

Each chapter of this book is well worth reading. Here, only one will be discussed in more detail. It is entitled "The Choice of Companions"* and is an impressive testimony to his changing relationship to the political significance of the proletariat, the working class, a restatement of the reasons for his turning away from the Communist Party, but above all a confrontation with the nihilism prevalent in his time among intellectuals, writers, and artists.

"The number of writers who have voluntarily gone to their deaths in various countries during the last decades is greater than in any previous epoch." So reads the first sentence of the chapter. And already in the second, there is an answer to the question of the cause: "It seems to me that most of these sad cases, as different as they are externally, have a common background: what *Nietzsche* called the nihilism of the new age".

Even freedom can be wasted senselessly, if it does not serve life

Silone defines the nihilistic attitude as "equating the true, the good and the right with self-interest", as a "'Conviction that all doctrines of faith and doctrines are mere words and that, in the end, all that matters is success". Even freedom, "if it does not serve life but is senselessly wasted, can be nihilistic, turn into slavery and lead to suicide or crime".

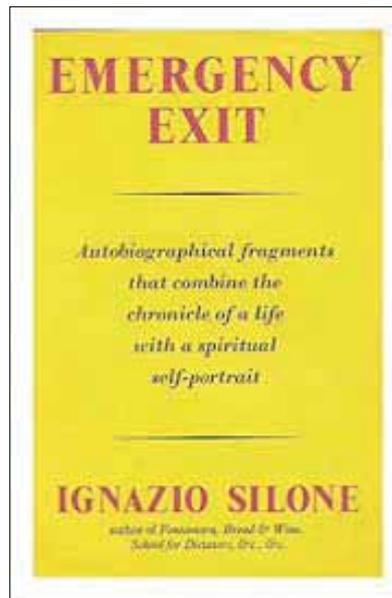
Nihilism also includes the abuse of words and ideas: "Without any concerns, traditional moral and religious values had been called to support the threatened interests, thereby calling them into question".

Silone goes on to discuss the relationship between the emergence of nihilism and the political and social situation of his day: The "frailty of the myths of progress on which the capitalist view of life and way of life were based", which became apparent during the First World War, the "authoritarian restoration" in the 1920s and 1930s, which promised to be a "remedy" for nihilism, but in fact "aggravated the evil". Finally, he goes into fascism. In its various forms, it meant "the enthronement of nihilism". Even after the Second World War, nihilism had not disappeared, "its deadly germs" lived on "in the depth".

Strength that arises in the human being from his attachment with his neighbour

"What is to be done?" Silone asks. His answer is "I see only one way of liberation: to advance from the surface of the emerging phenomena into the depths and to explore them courageously with absolute intellectual honesty and sound sensibility". Writers like *Albert Camus* had threaded the path away from an initially nihilistic attitude that believes nothing but sense-

lessness in life, towards a real way out. "Camus finds the remedy for this bleak feeling of senselessness in compassion. 'The world in which I live I find disgusting [...] but I feel solidarity with the people who suffer.'" Thus, in Camus' novel "The Plague", the life of the characters are "no longer presented as an indifferent sequence of arbitrary events, but as an encounter of people who suffer together and struggle against the same fate." After further examples, Silone speaks of a "way out of nihilism thanks to a strength that arises in the human being from his attachment with his neighbour".



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Conscience instead of party ...

Silone describes how he had joined the socialist and communist movement because of his early companions, the day labourers of his birthplace, and had believed for many years that he could overcome nihilism and solve the social question with the help of the class of proletarians. Now, however, he had to realise that the proletariat, the working class, was deeply divided and that even as a class it was no longer a guarantor of progress. It was much more a matter of the conscience of the individual.

He opposes the "nihilistic worship of power and success" with the advocacy of rights. He writes: "If what is understood by right and wrong is at all recognisable, it is certainly not through the ephemeral emphasis that power and success confer". Using the example of the Spanish Civil War, he explains what it means to think and act only in terms of parties and their struggles for power. Not least with regard to his own, the Communist Party, he writes about parties: "The deadly mechanism is always the same: every organisation or institution arises to fight for an

ideal; but gradually it identifies itself with this ideal and finally puts itself in its place, and its own interest comes first in the scale of values. [...] The party members do not feel aggrieved, they even see an advantage in the fact that they are finally relieved of any personal responsibility." He quotes from a letter written in the spring of 1938 by *Simone Weil*, who had sympathised with the Republican side in the Civil War: "One goes out as a volunteer, filled with ideals and a spirit of sacrifice, and all of a sudden a fight for freedom becomes a kind of mercenary war, only with much more cruelty and less respect for the enemy."

... and fidelity to people

Thinking and acting according to one's own conscience is something else: "In any case, fidelity to the people who were persecuted for their love of freedom and justice is a commandment of personal honour that obliges us more than any abstract programmatic formulation." So, it is not the party that can lead to overcoming nihilism and solving the social question, but only thinking, feeling and acting as responsible fellow human beings.

This is based on a fundamental trust: "It is based primarily on the inner certainty that we human beings are free and responsible human beings; it is based on the fact that human beings have an unavoidable need to participate in the reality of others; it is based on the possibility of a wordless understanding of souls. Is not this possibility proof of the fraternal bond between human beings? Love for the oppressed arises from this as a necessary consequence that cannot be shaken by any historical disappointment, for it is not a love that is concerned with its own advantage, and its permanence does not depend on success. How, with these certainties as the basis of life, is one to resign oneself to the fact that in the poorest and most unfortunate creatures human possibilities are simply stifled? And how is one to understand a morality that turns a deaf ear to this essential obligation? But this obligation has nothing to do with political machinations." For: "It is undoubtedly the worst blasphemy to use the oppressed as a stepping stone to come to power oneself, and then to betray them, for they are the most defenceless of men."

And all this without becoming unrealistic: "We must honestly admit that we do not know a panacea. There is no panacea for social hardships. It is already a lot if we have enough confidence to move on. We must walk under an ideologically dark sky; the old clear southern sky with its shining stars is now overcast, but the remaining sparse light at least allows us to see where we put our feet." •

* All quotes translated by *Current Concerns*.