

Christmas 2021: The promised peace demands action

by Peter Küpfer

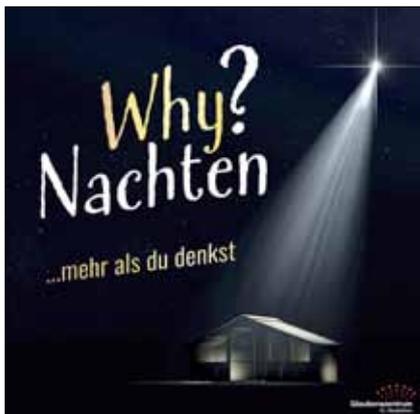
This Advent, “Christmassy” feelings only want to appear very hesitantly.

The signs are not pointing to the good news of peace, but rather to confrontation, worldwide (as the articles in this issue of Current Concerns show once again) and within our Western societies. And then there is the increasingly excessive Christmas hype ... Especially here in Switzerland, it seems these days as if we all absolutely have to hunt down quickly the delights, we missed last year (because of Corona) before the next pandemic peak puts a spoke in our wheel.

Nevertheless, we receive many a Christmas card in which friends or relatives wish us a peaceful and contemplative pre-Christmas period. A pious hope? Rather an expression of a real need. For Christmas remains for many a time when we are receptive to deeper dimensions of our being, more so than any other time of the year. This includes the question of meaning.

A poster invites contemplation

These days, my gaze falls on Advent posters near our churches, modestly designed and for that very reason powerful, which draw attention to the meaning of the main festival of the Christian world. With the words “Why?Nachten” they create concernment in the viewer, they invite him to take a little breath in the midst of the hustle and bustle. Why Christmas? What are we actually celebrating? It can't be that the sometimes merciless hunt for ultimate gifts and culinary extravagances is all that



“The whole world at the crib”, constellation of figures by the Toggenburg artist Karl Uelliger, carved from firewood blocks he collected himself (detail with the holy couple with child in the centre). Donation by the artist’s widow to Swiss Fischingen Abbey TG, where the constellation, consisting of 128 figures, is on permanent display.

(Picture Peter Küpfer)

drives us humans at this time of year. Or does the unrestrained Christmas rush that breaks out in many places have something to do with the fact that we seek in the purchased object (i.e., in an outward appearance) what we are lacking *inwardly*? More human compassion, more connectedness?

If this is the case, we should not wonder about our hustle and bustle. Because we can't address this lack with hoarding purchases and extravagances. They are then what psychology calls *substitute objects*. Seen in this light, it is often not so much the brand watch or the hype perfume or the hottest smartphone of the moment that makes us so stressed. It is probably something quite different: the hope that one of the gift packages carefully piled up under the Christmas tree will trigger a grateful smile in the recipient, a sign of his or her emotional connection with the giver: a piece of certainty of experiencing more of what every child long for, and not only the child, for human solidarity, yes, let's say it: for *emotional security* in all this hustle and bustle.

Creating this feeling of security in their children was the undisputed ideal of the family in earlier times. It was precisely for this reason that Christmas could become a classic family celebration in our latitudes. If this succeeded, and the decisive factor was the mood in the family, not the exclusive gift, then the annually recurring miracle of Christmas was able to genuinely enchant children's hearts, even if the family lived in great material modesty. – If you don't believe it, read Peter Rosegger's autobiographical novel “Als ich noch der Waldbauernbub war” (When I was still the forest farmer's boy).

The commercialisation of our life is flattening Christmas

Today, the term “mindfulness” is widely used. Many testify that they lack it in interpersonal contact. It is what we used to call respect for the other person, especially the weaker one, also *caring*. This natural concern for one's fellow human being,

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ings used to be stronger. I remember that on Christmas Eve, my parents, who were hardly very "socially minded" throughout the year, invited the reclusive widow on the top floor of our block of flats into our living room for the distribution of presents.

Something of this Christmas spirit of natural neighbourly participation must have even reached World War soldiers in the last century, of whom there are several testimonies that trench and position fighting ceased on the fronts in many places at Christmas. It is said that "enemy" soldiers on both sides of the trenches even gave each other gifts and communicated with each other, either in bumpy German or French or Russian. Under these conditions, sign language was also sufficient, for example the exchange of photos of one's own children. This feeling that in the soldier in front of me I suddenly see the father, in the enemy the person who understands and shares my homesickness, is something we owe to a primal ability firmly given to the human species, no matter what we call it: concern, sense of community, sensitivity, compassion or empathy. Without *care* and then also solicitude, no child could survive; without it, humanity would have died out long ago, among other things from its own fomented aversions and wars.

The hope that people can (and should) meet in a *spirit of brotherhood*, as enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 after the end of the last great world war and recognised by its member states through their membership of the United Nations (the USA was one of the founding states), is as old as the human race itself. This hope for peace in the world becomes a promise in the Christmas event, as it appears in the pictorial words of the Christmas story. In these times, it is again being read and recited in various languages all over the world, for many the only consolation in threatening times.

The biblical promise of peace is not a gift to mankind but a mandate to all of us

The most popular of these Christmas readings is the Christmas story according to *Luke*. It has "everything in it" that we "knew" from childhood: the crowded inn, the stable, the child bedded on straw. Then the shepherds; their fear when suddenly the sky lights up as bright as day and the choirs of angels appear, sounding the meaningful words: "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth to men of good will", in the version of the Latin Vulgate: "Gloria in aeternis Deo et pax in terra hominibus bonae voluntatis". *Luther* and *Zwingli*, who also wanted to translate the

original Greek text completely from it into German, introduced variants: "... peace on earth *among men of his good pleasure*" (*Luther*) and "peace on earth among men in *whom God is well pleased*" (*Zwingli*). I was always struck in this passage by the grandeur of the image that emerged: the sudden radiance of the stars in the middle of the night, then the heavens opening up, the heavenly hosts with their jubilant song, and the power in the simplicity and simultaneous mysteriousness of their message. As a young person and a saucy critic of all that exists, I could not help noticing in this passage each time the great discrepancy between the promised peace in the world and the numerous wars in our reality that still haunt it. It also seemed to me that the Bible was promising us humans too much here.

With my meagre knowledge of Latin, however, the passage "*pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*" never quite left my mind. What did it mean, this "*bonae voluntatis*", to people of *good will*? In view of the promise of peace in the "heavenly choirs", as it became clear to me many years later, this addition could only have one meaning: It had to mean: willing to stand up *for peace* with all one's strength. Seen in this way, the variants also confirm the basic idea: peace in the world is not simply a gift from God, a Christmas gift, so to speak, and that is that. People must *do something for peace* in the world: they must have the *honest will* to live in a way that is pleasing to God, i. e., peacefully among themselves, or in such a way that God can be pleased with them (by keeping the commandments, especially "Thou shalt not kill", as well as the "new commandments", as Christ lived them and immortalised them in the Sermon on the Mount). Thus, *if* and to the extent that they conduct themselves peacefully, they will also find more pleasing before God, before themselves and before their fellow human beings. They thus become more peaceful and thus more apt to come closer to the great goal of humanity.

In contrast, the biblical Christmas story becomes for me a highly modern trend-setting text. (Will it also soon be turned merely into a so-called "narrative"?) The promise of peace, however, at least if one reads it in the way suggested here, is already linked to a condition in the Christmas story. Do we belong to the people of "*bonae voluntatis*", are we of "*good will*", that is, willing to do good? Then we must also work for the good. In view of a world still torn apart by wars and in view of the birth of the "Prince of Peace", it is not difficult to define this good more precisely. *It is all that we contribute so that this world and the people who inhabit it can live in peace*. The Christmas story confronts us all with the inescapable question: *where*

is your contribution to more peace in the world?

Man was not created for war but for peace

With this "remembrance work" in the direction of one of the roots of our culture, the question then also finds an answer as to why our Christmas celebration is still and every year anew characterised by the brightly lit Christmas tree and why gifts are so indispensably part of it (not only expensive ones!). The Christmas story according to *Matthew* tells us about the three kings or wise men from the East and the gifts they bring to the newly born "King of Kings" to pay homage to him. Though bassly astonished at his poor camp, they lay them at his feet: Frankincense, gold and myrrh. In this way they testify to their recognition of the "new" ruler, whom they misunderstand as a worldly ruler. They too follow the star and thus the light that came into the world with the birth of Christ. So much for the now very worldly symbolism around Christmas.

The redemption it promises does not fall from heaven. Redemption is man's work, as well as the evil in the world. Today, we see how far we are still at a distance from turning it into lasting good. In view of the world's ongoing wars, redemption of humanity from "evil" is essentially redemption from the scourge of war. Redemption from evil, however, cannot be achieved by one state alone, quite contrary to what the warmongering forces trumpet to the world. In the individual-moral area of good and evil, the state or the great power, especially if it pursues a policy of world supremacy, is quite in the wrong place. According to *Hans Köchler*, a state is primarily responsible to its people, it is bound by the bonum commune, the common good (cf. Köchler, Hans "Common good or reason of state? Thoughts on peace in the global age", *Current Concerns* No. 21 of 29 September 2021). Every state must take the common good of its peoples as its guideline. Dragging a nation into a war of aggression can never mean promoting the welfare of its people. Every war causes deaths and destruction, in the wars of our time even mainly civilians. *Friedrich Schiller* is right. In his immortal *Ode to Joy*, set to music in *Beethoven's* 9th symphony, he puts friendship first. Mankind is and remains a social being, and friendship is the link between them. That also states, even great powers, should *meet in friendship* is something there would have been plenty of opportunities after the promise of Bethlehem 2021 years ago. It still exists. Problems like war, hunger or COVID can most likely only be solved "permanently" when we have understood that. It doesn't have to take another 2000 years. •

Afghanistan: An infuriating, man-made catastrophe points toward massive suffering for Afghan families

*Statement from Dominik Stillhart, Director of Operations
for the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the end of a six-day visit to Afghanistan*

I am livid. Pictures viewed from afar of bone-thin children rightly elicit gasps of horror. When you're standing in the pediatric ward in Kandahar's largest hospital, looking into the empty eyes of hungry children and the anguished faces of desperate parents, the situation is absolutely infuriating.

It's so infuriating because this suffering is man-made. Economic sanctions meant to punish those in power in Kabul are instead freezing millions of people across Afghanistan out of the basics they need to survive. The international community is turning its back as the country teeters on the precipice of man-made catastrophe.

Sanctions on banking services are sending the economy into free-fall and holding up bilateral aid. Municipal workers, teachers, and health staff haven't been paid in five months. They walk up to two hours to work instead of taking public transportation. They have no money to buy food; their children go hungry, get dangerously thin, and then die.

At the pediatric intensive care unit, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports at Mirwais Regional Hospital in Kandahar, the number of children suffering from malnutrition, pneumonia and dehydration more than doubled from mid-August to September.

More broadly, severe and moderate global acute malnutrition is up 31% around Kandahar compared to the same period in 2020. Region by region the severity of child malnutrition can be up to



Dominik Stillhart, Director of Operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross, during his recent trip to Afghanistan: "The empty eyes of hungry children are not something one soon forgets. [...] Ultimately, this is in everybody's interest as it will help prevent Afghanistan from slipping back into conflict and violence, and help give Afghans more means to remain in their country."
(picture ©Mohammad Masoud Samimi/ICRC)

three times the emergency rating. This is a serious food crisis even before the worst of winter sets in.

New support for hospitals

Amid a sea of heartache is one small silver lining: The ICRC on Monday began supporting 18 regional and provincial hospitals and the 5,100 staff who work in

them to help prevent total collapse of the public health system in Afghanistan.

This support, slated to last six months, includes funding for running costs and medical supplies, and will ensure the continuity of nearly half a million medical consultations per month.

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Emergency appeal for ICRC Afghanistan aid

ef. "We are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe that is preventable. The financial sanctions applied to Afghanistan have paralysed the banking system, affecting every aspect of the economy." This is how the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, began her report on the situation in Afghanistan before the UN Security Council on 17 November 2021. China and Russia also pushed for Afghanistan's reserves to be released. Time and again, the UN warns of a humanitarian catastrophe in the country.

Finally:

- On 10 December, the World Bank released \$280 million in aid to Afghanistan through the end of December.
- On the same day, the US issued formal guidelines allowing personal remittances to flow to Afghanistan, protecting senders and financial institutions from US sanctions against the Taliban.

And yet: the humanitarian aid needs in Afghanistan are still enormous. The ICRC has remained on the ground after the change of government and is providing urgently needed humanitarian aid throughout the country; it has not withdrawn its staff from Afghanistan.

The ICRC indicates how much money is needed to be able to provide concrete aid:

90 Swiss francs
feed a needy family fleeing a conflict for two months.

150 Swiss francs
provide a community with 80 jerry cans to store and transport vital drinking water.

500 Swiss francs
provide temporary shelter for 40 families displaced by conflict.

Donate online:

[www.icrc.org](https://www.icrc.org/en/donate/afghanistan?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=zeit-fragen&utm_campaign=afghanistan&utm_content=current-concerns)
and:
https://www.icrc.org/en/donate/afghanistan?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=zeit-fragen&utm_campaign=afghanistan&utm_content=current-concerns

Donate by bank or postal transfer:

Bank transfer:
CH97 0024 0240 FP10 0883 2

Postal transfer:
Account number 12-5527-6 / IBAN CH66 0900 0000 1200 5527 6

*International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
19 Avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva
Switzerland*

Who is the aggressor?

NATO and Russia with a view to Germany and Ukraine

by Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Jochen Scholz, Berlin

The propaganda in the German mainstream press about aggressive Russia is now adopted by many in German politics and society. At best, this shows complete cluelessness. This also applies to the question of why relations between Germany and the Russian Federation are now so desolate. It is therefore necessary to clarify what to make of the military threat to Ukraine posed by Russian troops, as claimed by NATO – just now again at its meeting in Riga – and as recently expressed by the German Lieutenant General (ret.) Brauss.¹ Brauss was NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Force Planning from 2013 to July 2018. Today, he is a "Senior Associate Fellow at DGAP (German Council on Foreign Relations), working in the fields of European security and defense, NATO development, and NATO-EU cooperation."²

Looking at the facts, one can only be amazed at the vehemence with which Russia is held responsible for the security situation in Eastern Europe. One should never forget to ask the question what is action and what is reaction, and above all not to confuse the both.

Promises of the NATO states ...

Here are a few references to such historical facts:

1. The telephone conversation between President *Bush* and Chancellor *Kohl* in May 1990.³

2. The promised implementation (transformation of NATO into a consultative body) at the following NATO summit in London.⁴
3. The *Charter of Paris* in the same year.⁵
4. And what happened next? With the Wolfowitz Doctrine, also known as the "No-Rivals-Plan", all agreements were turned into their opposite.⁶

All further strategy documents since that time have gone in the direction taken at that time.

... and yet NATO eastward expansion

NATO's eastward expansion today sees the alliance on the Russian border. Former US Ambassador to Moscow *Jack Matlock*, who participated in all the reunification negotiations in Moscow, commented, quote: "I'm sure if Bush had been reelected and *Gorbachev* had remained president of the USSR, there would have been no NATO expansion during their tenure. There was no way to commit successors, and when *Gorbachev* was deposed and the USSR broke apart, their arrangements became moot."⁷

US-Neocons and the "Project for the New American Century"

The essence of NATO's eastward expansion was and still is evident from the letter from *Willy Wimmer*, former State Secretary in the German Ministry of Defence and in 2000 Vice-Chairman of the *OSCE Parliamentary Assembly*, to then-



Jochen Scholz (picture ma)

Jochen Scholz was a lieutenant colonel in the German armed forces. As such, he served for several years with NATO in Brussels and then – during the NATO war against Yugoslavia – in the German Federal Ministry of Defence. There he noticed that the official speeches of the responsible politicians about blatant human rights violations by Serbia did not correspond to what he could gather from the reports of the experts on the ground. Because of these lies by the politicians, he left the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1999.

Chancellor *Schröder*.⁸ He discusses the contents of the Bratislava conference in 2000, which was held on behalf of the State Department by the *American Enterprise Institute*, whose working group "Project for the New American Century"⁹ published the strategy paper "Rebuilding America's Defenses"¹⁰ a few months later, to which only neocons con-

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But it's not enough

Drought, failed harvests, and the economic collapse are all driving the increase in malnutrition. Rising food costs are pushing proteins and other staples out of reach. As the harsh winter sets with temperatures below freezing, the suffering will be immense as people lack the cash to heat their homes.

What can be done?

First, states must engage with Afghanistan. This is the only way to prevent a total collapse of essential services like health care and education. Political considerations should not interfere with humanitarian action. A political solution must be found to avoid irreparable humanitarian consequences.

And this is technical but important. Foreign assistance to Afghanistan is currently put in question as donors ask themselves how they can comply with their

legal obligations stemming from relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Simply put, some donors feel they can either comply with the resolutions and their own law – thereby denying life-saving assistance – or provide such assistance through organizations such as the ICRC and others.

Suppliers and banking services will have similar impediments. The ICRC is calling for a clear carve-out for impartial humanitarian organizations engaged in exclusively humanitarian activities, and for its translation into domestic legislation. It is in everyone's interest to see humanitarian activities operating smoothly in Afghanistan.

Amid what we know will be a tragic winter, the ICRC will step up its response to the most urgent humanitarian needs, but humanitarian assistance is only part of the solution. The existing and projected needs are beyond any humanitarian organization's capacity to deal with or solve.

More than 22 million Afghans will face crisis or emergency levels of acute hunger

between November and March 2022, according to the latest IPC* report. The desperation can be seen in the huge crowds lining up in front of banks at 5 a.m. in the hope that they can withdraw a little bit of cash.

The empty eyes of hungry children are not something one soon forgets. It makes my plea to the international community even more urgent: that it rapidly finds creative solutions to save millions of Afghans from deprivation and despair. Ultimately, this is in everybody's interest as it will help prevent Afghanistan from slipping back into conflict and violence, and help give Afghans more means to remain in their country. •

* The *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* (IPC) indicates the severity of a food security situation and provides decision-makers with strategically relevant information that focuses on short-term goals to prevent, mitigate or reduce severe food insecurity that threatens lives or livelihoods.

Source: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/catastrophe-toward-suffering-afghan> of 22 November 2021

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tributed. Ten individuals from the working group served in the George W. Bush administration beginning in 2001, including *Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz*. The implementation of the Bratislava intentions occurred in 2002, and NATO was expanded to include the three Baltic states, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

Preventing German-Russian coexistence ...

Fifteen years after Bratislava, *George Friedman*, then head of the private intelligence agency STRATFOR, gives a talk at a Chicago think tank, puts on a slide (see map) in the subsequent press conference and declares as a constant goal of American foreign policy to prevent a prosperous German-Russian coexistence.¹¹

... and "containment" as in the Cold War

A year earlier, Friedman had already used the graphic in a STRATFOR article¹² under the title "The new containment", thus reactivating the name for the strategy of containing the Soviet Union, the *Truman Doctrine*¹³ which marked the beginning of the Cold War in 1947.

In this respect, one can imagine that after President Putin's 2001 speech in the German Bundestag¹⁴ all alarm bells went off on the other side of the Atlantic.

Friedman's remarks could be called *Continuity of History and Strategy*, in reference to another term (Continuity of Government) The anti-Russia propaganda complains about the development of Russian hypersonic missiles. Well, who unilaterally terminated the ABM Treaty in 2001 and at the same time started to deploy the AEGIS missile defence system in Eastern Europe and on ships? Should Russia have stood by, exposed itself to the US blackmail calculus? A calculus that US political scientists *Keir A. Lieber* and *Daryl G. Press* describe as follows on page 22 of an analysis as follows,¹⁵ which also appeared in the leading US foreign policy journal *Foreign Affairs*:

"Although both criticisms are cogent, even a limited missile shield could be a powerful complement to the offensive capabilities of US nuclear forces. Russia has approximately 3,500 strategic nuclear warheads today, but if the United States struck before Russian forces were alerted, Russia would be lucky if a half-dozen warheads survived. A functioning missile defense system could conceivably destroy six warheads. Furthermore, the problem of differentiating warheads from de-



With this map (without the German-language inscription on the right-hand side), *George Friedman* illustrated what he meant by a "cordon sanitaire" separating Russia from Germany.

coys becomes less important if only a handful of surviving enemy warheads and decoys are left to intercept. Facing a small number of incoming warheads and decoys, US interceptors could simply target them all."

US missile system to neutralise Russian second-strike capability

To the point: Neutralising Russia's second-strike capability through the missile defence system. When the two authors presented their 2006 study at the *Einstein Forum* in Potsdam in 2007, not a single journalist from our major national newspapers was present.

Plans of conquest by the Ukrainian government

A leap into the year 2021, as far as Russian troops on Ukraine's eastern border are concerned.

Do you know this decree of the National Security Council of Ukraine from March 2021?¹⁶

"On the strategy of evacuation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

In accordance with the provisions of Article 4 of the Law of Ukraine 'On the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine', the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, having considered the draft Strategy of de-occupation and reintegration of the Timorese occu-

ried territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, has decided:

- 1. recommendation of the draft strategy for de-occupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.*
- 2. requesting the President of Ukraine to approve the Strategy for Deconcentration and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol.*
- 3. the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to develop and approve within three months a plan of measures for the implementation of the strategy for the evacuation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.*

Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council O. Danilov."

Russia should not be allowed to react to this, especially since one can be sure that such decisions are not made in Ukraine without Washington's and London's approval or acquiescence?

Transatlantic one-size-fits-all sauce

I could go on citing a plethora of documents that refute your claims of Russia's aggression. I also recommend reading

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Horst Teltschik's book "Russian Roulette" and reading *Zbigniew Brzezinski's* book "The Grand Chessboard"; then it will become clear why things have turned out the way Teltschik laments.

And: Forget about reading in the "Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung" comments and articles by journalists *Kohler, Frankenberger, Vesper, Busse, Friedrich Schmidt, Ross, Sturm*, if they deal with Russia. In other major daily newspapers, too, you will be served exclusively transatlantic one-size-fits-all sauce. The times when *Karl Feldmeyer*¹⁷ could still write editorials are long gone. Only now and then can one still find enlightening things in the feuilleton, as these two examples show: an article by Reinhard Merkel and one by Hans-Christof Kraus, the only German scholar who understood the basis of any US strategy with regard to the Eurasian continent.

Minsk agreements are sabotaged

In the light of current events, let us take another look at the situation in Ukraine. If it has not been possible – so far at least – to admit it to NATO, one cannot help thinking that the unresolved conflict over Donetsk and Luhansk should also remain unresolved from the point of view of some Western countries. For then a means is always at hand with which the Russian Federation can be accused of an aggressive policy. The most recent example is the failure to hold a meeting in the so-called *Normandy format*,¹⁸ which was planned for 11 November and for which the German and French foreign ministers blamed Russia in a joint statement,¹⁹ without citing its reasons.

If the matter were not so serious, it could be dismissed as a farce. Foreign Minister *Lavrov's* collar has probably burst. Because after prior announcement to his partners, he made the diplomatic note exchange available to the international public.²⁰

It is clear from it that the German and French sides had no intention to influence Ukraine to finally comply with its obligations under the *Minsk II Agreement*²¹ of 2015 (!), which is applicable international law²². This primarily concerns points 9, 11 and 12.

In this respect, Russia does not consider a meeting to be purposeful and thus obsolete. In *Lavrov's* words, "One gets the impression that this is also an attempt to create conditions for a radical revision of the Package of Measures in order to please Kiev, which has been refusing to comply with it in an official and public manner."

The failure of the German generals

Final remark with regard to the German generals, for which Lieutenant *General Brauss* quoted above stands pars pro toto. Since the war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, which was contrary to international law, it has been clear that the gold-braided Generals have surrendered their obligations under the German *Soldiers' Act* in Washington and sin against *Stauffenberg*²³ every year on 20 July in the Bendlerblock²⁴ [today the seat of the German Ministry of Defence] with unctuous words. The prospect of being retired with a decent pension is more unbearable for this group of people than the prospect of being shot was for the officer who tried to kill *Hitler* in 1944.

When will these functional elites, when will our politicians and scientists in the "think tanks" understand that German and European interests must be directed toward peaceful, orderly conditions on our Eurasian continent, instead of subordinating themselves to Anglo-American interests, which want to prevent just that? •

¹ <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article235313842/Nato-Generalsekretaer-Jens-Stoltenberg-Koennen-nicht-annehmen-dass-dies-nur-ein-Bluff-ist.htm>

² <https://internationalepolitik.de/de/user/24884/heinrich-brauss>

³ <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/6935350/National-Security-Archive-Doc-18-Memorandum-of.pdf>. Quote President *Bush*: "He [*Gorbachev*] was also very interested in how NATO might change its doctrine, and I read him Article 2 of the NATO Charter, which *Brian Mulroney* had brought to my attention, just to show him the political nature of NATO. I think it will be crucial that we take steps at the NATO summit to convince him [*Gorbachev*] that NATO is changing in a way that does not threaten Soviet security."

⁴ <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c900706a.htm>

⁵ <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/189558/21543d1184c1f627412a3426e86a97cd/charta-data.pdf>. <https://www.osce.org/files/fj/documents/0/6/39516.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html>

⁷ <http://jackmatlock.com/2014/04/nato-expansion-was-there-a-promise/>

⁸ http://www.nato-tribunal.de/blatter_wimmer.pdf

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_for_the_New_American_Century

¹⁰ <https://archive.org/details/RebuildingAmericas-Defenses/mode/2up>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ablIv9PXpI>; The graphic shown by *George Friedman* from the subsequent press conference was edited by the authors for clarity with the yellow statements, the graphic appears from minute 11:10.

¹² <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/estonia-azerbaijan-american-strategy-after-ukraine>

¹³ <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truman-Doktrin>

¹⁴ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340>

¹⁵ https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/is3004_pp007-044_lieberpress.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1172021-37533>. It was announced on 26 February by President *Zelinskyy*.

¹⁷ *Karl Feldmeyer, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 23 November 2002, p. 1 "Das Ende der alten NATO" (The end of the old NATO), quote: "Whatever else may be said about the behavior of the German government on the Iraq issue, the behavior of the German people on this issue has also made it clear that the opening of NATO to a policy of military intervention can create specific problems for Germany. They are based not only on the Basic Law's statement that the Federal Republic maintains armed forces 'for the purpose of defense', but on the imprint of national history. Two world wars have contributed to a very narrow interpretation of the term 'defense'. What may be considered 'preemptive intervention' elsewhere may turn out to be an attack in the eyes of the Germans – and that is forbidden by the UN Charter and the Basic Law. Even *Bismarck* refused to 'praevenire'. The Germans do not need to apologise for this attitude, certainly not to their allies who were once victims of German attacks." (translated by the author)

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy_Format

¹⁹ <https://kiew.diplo.de/ua-de/aktuelles/-/2496302>

²⁰ <https://bit.ly/3I7XTVU>

²¹ <https://www.bpb.de/201881/dokumentation-das-minsker-abkommen-vom-12-februar-2015>
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/05/minsk-conundrum-western-policy-and-russias-war-east-ukraine-0/minsk-2-agreement>

²² https://www.un.org/depts/german/sr/sr_14-15/sr2202.pdf; https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2202.pdf

²³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Claus-Graf-Schenk-von-Stauffenberg>

²⁴ <http://www.slowtravelberlin.com/widerstand-berlins-german-resistance-memorial/>

Current Concerns

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Putin poses the right question

From Gorbachev's "Common House Europe" to Russia as an enemy

by Gotthard Frick



Gotthard Frick
(picture ma)

It is true that Russia has recently been speaking in unequivocal terms. For example, it is heavily criticized for its march on the border with Ukraine and the incorporation of Crimea. However, Russia took over Crimea without bombing

or shooting. There were no civilian deaths and no cities destroyed.

We are not told why Russia is performing like this today. Even in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Gorbachev* dreamed of a "Common House Europe". But the West has rejected, with hurtful arrogance, the wish expressed by all Russian leaders, including Putin, to become part of Europe as an equal partner. In the "Breakfast with Frost BBC" interview on 3 March 2000, Putin said that one could even talk about "deeper integration into NATO, but only if Russia is perceived as an equal partner".

The Chinese media outraged the incorporation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and rightly denounced the West's hypocrisy. Without the approval of the UN Security Council, i. e., in violation of international law, the US/NATO waged a war against Serbia in 1999 with more than 28,000 rockets, bombs and uranium shells, with 2,500 dead, infrastructure and cities destroyed, among others to split off Kosovo. To this day, Western and also Swiss troops are stationed in Kosovo, which has since been "independent". Of course, there were no exclusions or sanctions against the 19 NATO members involved. But the West has ostracised Russia for the incorporation of Crimea, which was carried out with practically no deaths or destruction, and imposed sanctions and other punitive measures. This double standard has been sharply criticised by the Chinese press.

In a world in which everything should be done to build up permanent, non-violent cooperation among all powers and thus the constant struggle of the powers for the dominant supremacy, which has been seen as normal for thousands of years, and the resulting wars through equal partnership and peaceful cooperation. Instead, the West continues the traditional global power game. Unlike in the past, today, given the new weapons available, a major war would likely lead to the end of the modern world. The Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* recently warned against a

return to "a nightmare of a military confrontation". (*Basler Zeitung* of 3 December 2021, "The conflict over Ukraine")

Instead of dissolving NATO, which was founded in 1949 after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the associated – according to the Federal Council (SIPOL 2016) – "unprecedented decline" of the Russian armed forces, it was used to exploit three of its former states between 1999 and 2009, taking advantage of Russia's weakness at the time to accept six former members of the *Warsaw Pact* and four former members of Yugoslavia into the Western alliance, to establish militarily closer and closer to Russia's borders and to repeatedly hurt it in its place. In 2020, North Macedonia was accepted from the West. All unacceptable provocations of Russia.

In the 3 December edition of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" ("Putin demands security guarantees") the reader learns that Putin asked for binding security guarantees from NATO and wanted confirmation that the Western military advance eastwards towards the Russian border had now been completed and that his security interests along the border from the West would be safeguarded. The highest Russian leaders have pointed out earlier that they cannot accept the build-up of this Western threat on the border and, in the absence of an amicable arrangement, could take military action against it. NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg* immediately rejected *Putin's* request of 1 December 2021. NATO decides who to accept. As I said above, the West is continuing the traditional power game at full speed. It is directed not only against Russia, but also against China, which is rapidly pushing its way to the top in all important areas.

But without the development of a lasting, peaceful, partnership-based way of dealing with the great powers, there is now a likelihood of a major war, which in view of the most modern new weapons (space, cyber, chemical, nuclear and biological weapons, missiles of all types and ranges, drones) could lead to the end of the modern world. Of course, China and Russia would also have to be prepared to make concessions when building such a new way of dealing with the great powers. Finding a solution would not be easy and could take years but should be tried.

Ukraine declared itself independent on 24 August, 1991. The people agreed in December of the same year. In the above-mentioned NZZ article, as usual, the aggressive policy of the West, which led to today's behaviour in Russia, is not men-

tioned. The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" writes literally, euphemistically:

"In 2014 the Kremlin suffered a defeat in the revolution on the Maidan in Kiev and saw Ukraine taken over by the US and NATO."

The newspaper makes no mention of how the West, led by the USA, built up the opposition there with five billion US dollars after the independence of Ukraine and orchestrated the coup in 2013 with senior politicians and members of the US government on the ground. At the Russia-NATO meeting in April 2008, NATO announced that it would occasionally accept Ukraine and Georgia. Putin replied that if that happened, Eastern Ukraine and Crimea would split off.

The Deputy US Secretary of State *Victoria Nuland*, who was responsible for Ukraine, reported extensively on her visits to Ukraine at the time of the uprising, as did other Western participants. In her speech in Geneva on 13 December 2013 to the US Mission to International Organisations, she informed about the five billion dollars with which the US had built and financed 69 organisations and movements of the opposition across Ukraine. She talked about her trips to Kiev before and during the coup (for example from 5 December 2013), who she met there and what she had done. But also other US corporations, for example the NED (*National Endowment for Democracy*), one of the US government-financed parity foundations of US parliamentarians, which interferes, finances and supports in other countries around the world to "promote democracy" building the opposition in Ukraine. Billionaire *Soros* also confirmed after the coup that his foundation had "played a significant role in the events." (Incidentally, it was then that the US fleet began to convert the port of Ochakov in Ukraine for its warships.) In the years immediately before that, the then Vice President of the USA, *John Biden*, had been to Ukraine six times to consult with politicians. His son *Hunter Biden* was accepted into the board of directors of the local gas company *Burisma Holdings* for a monthly salary of USD 50,000.

Before the coup, the government of Ukraine wanted to conclude an association agreement with the EU, but at the same time also wanted to join the customs union created by Russia. Russia was still its main national trading partner. She had already signed a preliminary contract for this. But she hadn't counted on the EU. On

Russian troop deployment – reality or US political bubble?

by Ralph Bosshard

Officially, little has leaked out about the content of the video conference between US President Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Both sides released a rather meagre statement about it. What is clear is that, despite the hype in the Western press, other trouble spots besides Ukraine played a role. Vladimir Putin achieved an important goal: the USA was forced to talk to Russia at eye level. And Joe Biden used the opportunity to present himself as a democratic hardliner after the debacle in Kabul last August.¹

As late as mid-November, Ukrainian officials had denied that Russian troops were deployed in the border area.² At the time, the spokespersons for the president, the National Security Council and the Ukrainian chief of staff all expressed this view. On the contrary: It was said at the time that the reports of concentrations of Russian troops on the border were part of psychological warfare against Ukraine – whatever one may think of that.³

The majority of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border are those that have been permanently stationed in western Russia for years. An analysis of the terrain and capabilities of the troops involved shows that they are not capable of the offensive operations described by the West.

Background

In 2013, the Russian army re-established two divisions in Naro-Fominsk, west of Moscow, that had been disbanded in the wake of former Defence Minister *Anatoly Serdyukov's* reforms: the 2nd Motorised Rifle Division and the 4th Armoured Division.⁴ In 2016, the 3rd, 144th and 150th Motorised Rifle Divisions followed. All of these divisions are not actually new formations, but rather the consolidation of existing troops from other regions of Russia. The basis for this decision was the realisa-

tion that the “brigadisation” of the Russian army in the course of Serdyukov’s reforms had been a mistake. While the downsizing of the Russian divisions and their transformation into brigades may well have worked well in mountainous regions such as the Caucasus, for example, the elimination of a hierarchical level in the Russian military districts led to an unnecessarily high number of directly subordinated large units and made leadership more difficult.

The 144th Motorised Rifle Division has been stationed in Yelnya, about 80 km southwest of Smolensk, since its formation. The town is connected to the railway line to Smolensk and from there on to Minsk. From Smolensk, the Belarusian cities of Orsha and Vitebsk are about 100 and 120 km away respectively.

These two cities gained great importance in the recent history of war. In the operational study for a campaign against the Soviet Union, which was later named after him, the then Colonel of the General Staff *Bernhard von Lossberg* concluded in 1940 that it would be difficult for the German Wehrmacht to quickly defeat the Red Army crucially if the latter were to retreat behind a line Daugava-Dnieper.⁵ Orsha and Vitebsk delimit an approximately 80 km wide gap between the upper reaches of these rivers. The rivers in eastern Belarus, regardless of water depth and flow velocity, can only be crossed away from existing bridges after extensive pioneering work. They are often lined by extensive forest or swamp areas, which necessitates the construction of access roads and solid abutments. Vitebsk and Orsha were also the first targets of Operation “Bagration”, which began on 22 June 1944 and resulted in one of the Red Army’s greatest successes in World War II. It led to the complete collapse of the German Army Group Center (Heeresgruppe Mitte) and is still considered the greatest defeat in German military history.⁶



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

In order not to become a frontline state in a new Cold War, the Republic of Belarus has so far rejected the permanent stationing of Russian troops on its territory. There are only two military facilities of the Russian armed forces in Belarus: the radar station of Hantsavichy and the long-wave transmitter Vileyka.⁷ The former is used for early detection of ballistic missiles approaching from the west and the latter for communication with submerged submarines. The transfer of reinforcements from Russia is of crucial importance for the military security of the Republic of Belarus in view of the numerical superiority of NATO troops in Poland and the Baltic States. Within the framework of the exercises “Zapad-17” and “Zapad-21”,

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“Putin poses the right question”

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25 February 2013, *José Manuel Barroso*, EU Commission President, issued an ultimatum to her: she had to choose the EU or Russia. Whereupon Ukraine decided to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU for the time being (which led to the start of the uprising).

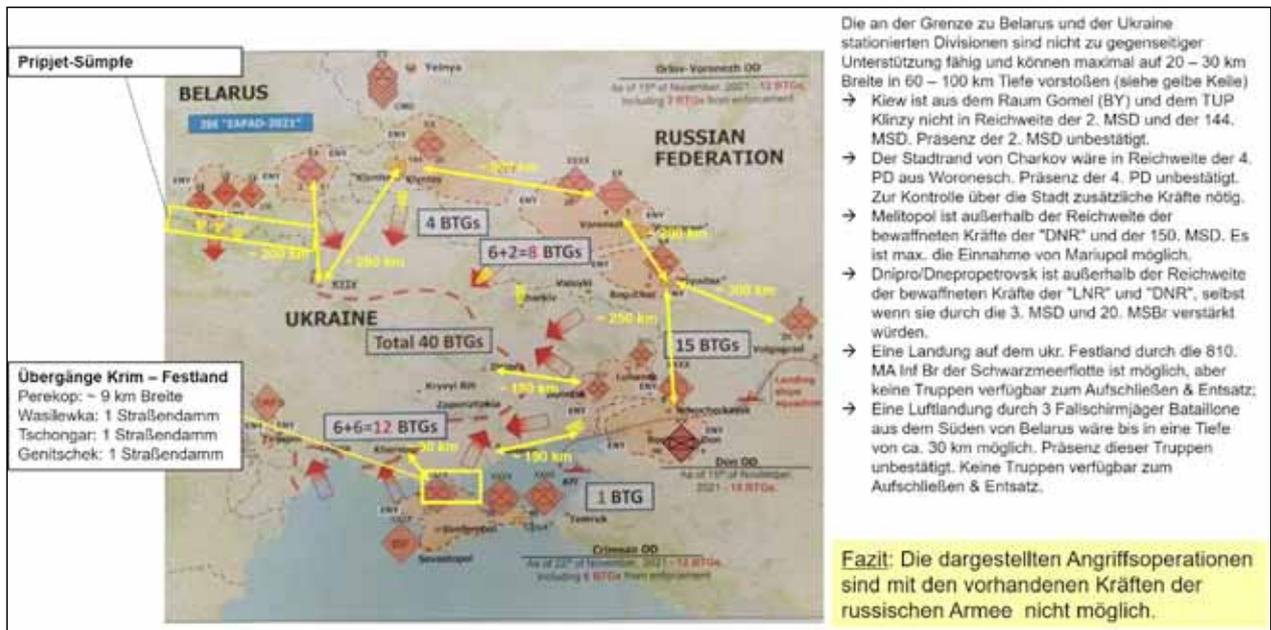
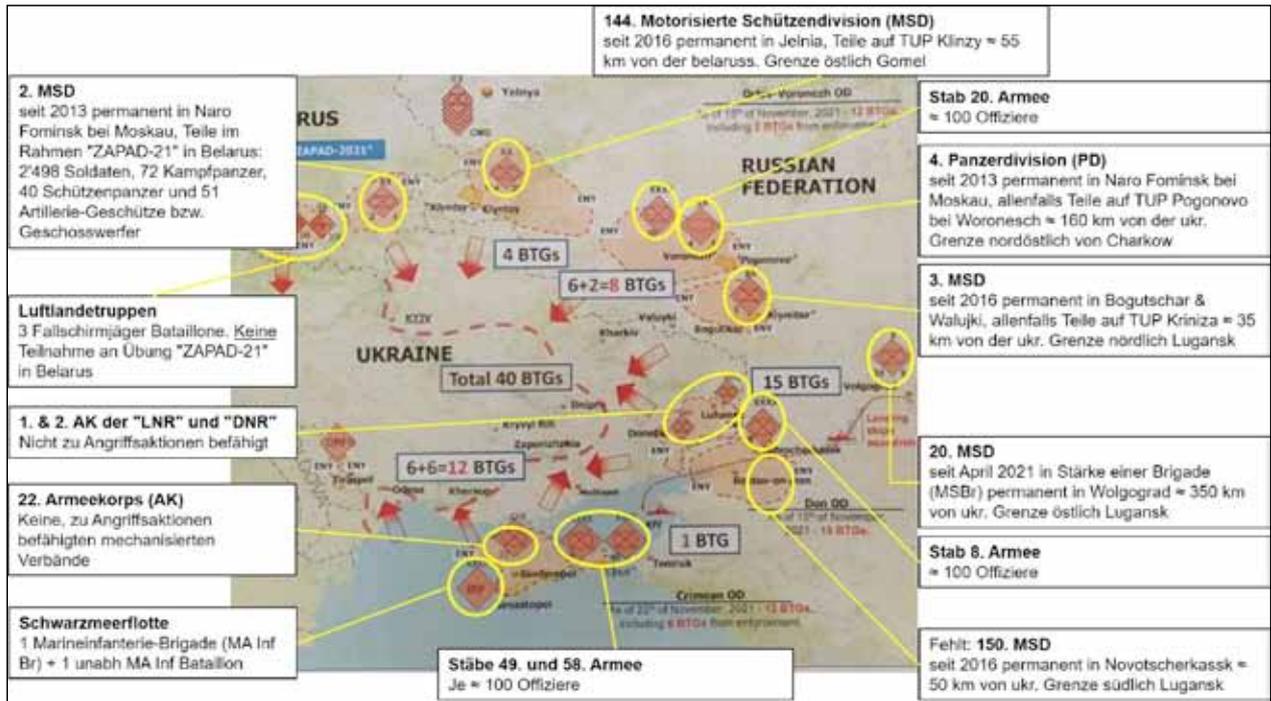
At the end of 2013, at the time of the coup, the powerful US Senator *John McCain*, chairman of the US Armed Forces Committee, was also in Kiev. He also met

the opposition, including the leaders of the far-right SVOBODA. On 15 December 2013, he gave a speech to the opposition on the Maidan in Kiev. He assured her: “America is on your side.” An outrage in a sovereign state! Besides him, Victoria Nuland, the EU’s foreign affairs representative, *Catherine Ashton*, and other European parliamentarians and politicians were repeatedly in Kiev at the time to support the coup.

Nuland agreed in a telephone conversation with the US ambassador in Kiev, *Geoffrey Pyatt*, which was bugged and published, that *Arseniy Yatsenyuk* would

have to become the new Prime Minister of Ukraine. On 27 February 2014, he did so, bypassing the constitutional procedure. Ukraine, which was so closely connected with Russia for so long, was to be brought to the Western camp. It was only on the same day that the coup was virtually over that Russian troops crossed the border with Crimea. Putin prevented Sevastopol, the important port of the Russian fleet, from coming under US control.

We cannot understand Russia’s behaviour without this (and other) historical background.



"The majority of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border are those that have been permanently stationed in western Russia for years. An analysis of the terrain and capabilities of the troops involved shows that they are not capable of the offensive operations described by the West."

"Russian troop deployment ..."

continued from page 8

however, massively fewer Russian troops were transferred to Belarus than had been planned in the event of war. According to Belarusian information, no Russian troops remained in Belarus after the conclusion of exercise "Zapad-21".⁸

What has been said about the Daugava and Dnieper also applies to the Pripjat in the border area between Belarus and Ukraine. The Pripjat marshes had already been recognised by Lossberg as an obstacle that does not allow a push of armoured units in a north-south direction. Even today, Ukraine is hardly threatened by an incursion of large armoured units, at least from this direction.

The 3rd and 150th Motorised Rifle Divisions are stationed closer to the Ukrainian border. The former is in Boguchar, south of Voronezh, and the latter in Novochoerkassk near Rostov-on-Don. Of the newly formed 20th Motorised Rifle Division, one brigade exists so far near Volgograd, 350 km from the Ukrainian border. Together with other support troops, the Russian formations mentioned above may well amount to a personnel strength of 75,000 to 100,000 men. In view of the fact that they are spread along a border of about 1500 km, there can be no question of a massive deployment. And one very important piece of information that would allow us to make a final assessment of the Russian force deployment is completely missing from the US

and Ukrainian documents: the locations of the support units of the missile troops, the artillery, the engineer troops, the NBC defence and generally of the air defence and airborne troops.

Few sources

The most important bases for the current hype are maps of the Ukrainian intelligence service and satellite images that US think tanks and journalists have obtained from commercial providers since mid-November.⁹ They always show the same troops on the well-known military training grounds of Pogonovo near Voronezh and Yelnia near Smolensk.

"Russian troop deployment ..."

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If one can trust the published footage, then the 144th Motorised Rifle Division, in particular, is still at its peacetime location and has neatly positioned its large equipment. If an invasion of Ukraine were planned, the large equipment would probably have been decentralised and carefully camouflaged in the numerous forests of the Smolensk region. As currently deployed, the Russian troops of the 144th MSD represent an ideal target for air strikes.

The Pogonovo military training ground has also been the scene of exercise activities by the Russian army in recent weeks, namely the 3rd Motorised Rifle Division. Compared to Boguchar, Pogonovo is further away from the Ukrainian border (about 150 km). Therefore, there is no question of moving troops closer to the border. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see satellite pictures from Naro-Fominsk, where two of the divisions are stationed that are supposedly involved in the alleged troop deployment.

The suspicion expressed by some media that the ongoing information campaign serves to prepare a Ukrainian offensive in the Donbas has so far not proven true: the situation on the contact line in eastern Ukraine is currently comparatively calm, as the daily reports of the *OSCE Special Monitoring Mission* show.¹⁰

Froth from Washington

There is no reason to see why the threat situation in Ukraine should have changed in comparison to the past. The designated Russian formations are not capable of the described offensive operations and cannot support each other. A Russian invasion of Ukraine thus remains unlikely. If the Russian army had really been planning an invasion of Ukraine since mid-November, Joe Biden's reaction would be far too late anyway, because Russian general staff officers are used to preparing defence and counter-attack operations within 10 to 14 days. The question therefore arises why the deployment of Russian units is being discussed now of all times.

With his threats to his counterpart Vladimir Putin, US President Joe Biden probably kicked an open door and prevented a Russian invasion, which was hardly planned at the present time. He was thus able to polish up his image, which had suffered some scratches after the debacle in Kabul in August. The paratrooper battalion that the British government wanted to send to assist the Ukrainian army can stay at home. That this will not be able to stop a Russian armoured division is also known in Kiev. With his pithy appearance and his threats, Biden has puffed himself up just before his democracy summit.¹¹ The Russian ambassador summed up Russia's at-

titude at the meeting of the *OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation* on 8 December in Vienna with an extremely undiplomatic remark: We now want to talk to the overlords, not to their vassals.

The buzz in the press about the Russian troops in the border area with Ukraine shows how propagandists on both sides take advantage of the inability of large sections of the media to critically examine the information they receive in order to spread dubious narratives. Western public opinion has traditionally been critical of information from Russian sources. Recent events show that they should also adopt this attitude with regard to information from Western capitals.

¹ White House statement online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/07/readout-of-president-bidens-video-call-with-president-vladimir-putin-of-russia/>, the official Kremlin announcement, online at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67315>. Instructions for Russian diplomats: <https://tass.com/politics/1372995>

² Satellite images had already been presented at the time: cf. Christiana Triebert on Twitter <https://twitter.com/trbrtc/status/1455294700605300742> and Dara Massicot of the RAND Corporation <https://twitter.com/massdara/status/1462254401624711172?s=21>. The Ukrainian government's comment on this at Illia Ponomarenko. Russia's major invasion of Ukraine not imminent, experts say, in: *Kyiv Post* of 3 November 2021, online at <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/russias-larger-invasion-in-ukraine-currently-unlikely-experts-say.html>. Cf. Ukrinform: No imminent threat of massive offensive by Russia – NSDC Secretary, online at <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3357781-no-imminent-threat-of-massive-offensive-by-russia-nsdc-secretary.html>

³ see Volodymyr Havrylov. "The Russian military build-up around Ukraine: Routine, seasonal manoeuvres", in: *I12UA* of 11 November 2021, online at <https://i12.international/politics/the-russian-military-buildup-around-ukraine-routine-seasonal-maneuvres-66750.html> and *TNG* news: "Zelensky's office confirms no information about Russian troops on Ukraine's borders", in: *TNG* News of 7 November 2021, online at <https://thenewglory.com/zelenskys-office-did-not-confirm-data-on-russian-troops-near-ukraines-borders/>

⁴ Serdykov was in office from 2007–2012. See the official homepage of the Russian Ministry of Defence: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11735703@egNews

⁵ see Walter Warlimont. *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht*. Augsburg 1990, vol. 1, p. 150 f. Cf. also Ernst Klink: "Die militärische Konzeption des Krieges gegen die Sowjetunion". In: MGFA (ed.): *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. Stuttgart 1983, Vol. 4,

p. 230, and Percy Ernst Schramm (ed.): *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*. Bonn o. J., Vol. 1, 1st half-volume, p. 82

⁶ One overview among many of "Operation Bagration" is given by Gernot Kramper. "Operation Bagration – diese Offensive zerbrach das Rückgrat der deutschen Wehrmacht", in: *Stern* online at <https://www.stern.de/digital/technik/operation-bagration---diese-offensive-brachte-das-ende-der-wehrmacht-8769666.html>. For the scholarly review see: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 8: *Die Ostfront 1943/44. Der Krieg im Osten und an den Nebenfronten*. With contributions by Karl-Heinz Frieser, Klaus Schmieder, Klaus Schönherr [and others], edited by Karl-Heinz Frieser on behalf of the Military Historical Research Office, Munich 2007.

⁷ on Vileyka see <https://englishrussia.com/2007/08/07/above-woods-of-belarus/#more-1207>, on Hantsavichy <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/volga-70m6.htm>

⁸ On the Zapad-21 exercise, see the official information from the Belarusian Ministry of Defence at <https://www.mil.by/ru/news/137264/> and from the Russian Ministry of Defence at https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12378427@egNews (both in Russian). Cf. <https://cepa.org/russias-zapad-21-lessons-learned/>. According to information from the Belarusian Ministry of Defence, Russian troops of the 1st Armoured Army numbering 2,498 soldiers were in Belarus, with 72 battle tanks, 40 infantry fighting vehicles and 51 artillery guns or projectile launchers (MLRS).

⁹ These include those obtained from "Maxar" by the US journalist Mike Eckel, who works for *Radio Free Europe*. See https://twitter.com/mike_eckel/status/1467585097482358786?s=21. For Mike Eckel, see <https://www.rferl.org/author/mike-eckel/muwygo>. "Maxar" was formed after the merger of *Space Systems/Loral* and *DigitalGlobe* in 2017. DigitalGlobe supplied *Google Maps* with satellite images, among others. See <https://www.maxar.com/about> and <https://www.geospatialworld.net/news/mda-dg-combined-entity-to-be-rebranded-as-maxar-technologies/>

¹⁰ See Ekaterina Blinova. "Why Washington's 'Russian Invasion' Scare is Cover for Kiev's New Offensive Against Donbas", in *Sputnik* of 27 November 2021, online at <https://sputniknews.com/2021/11/27/why-washingtons-russian-invasion-scare-is-cover-for-kyivs-new-offensive-against-donbass-1091072603.html> and "Donetsk News Agency: Pushilin tells Slutskiy that situation in Donbass escalates", in: *DAN, Donetsk News Agency* of 6 December 2021, online at <https://dan-news.info/en/politics/pushilin-tells-slutskiy-that-situation-in-donbass-escalates/>. The SMM reports are published daily on the OSCE homepage: <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/reports>

¹¹ cf. Moritz Koch, Jens Münchrath, Torsten Riecke. "Biden lädt zum Demokratie-Gipfel ein – und spaltet damit die Welt" (Biden invites to democracy summit – and divides the world with it), in: *Handelsblatt* of 9 December 2021, online at <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/gipfeltreffen-biden-laedt-zum-demokratie-gipfel-ein-und-spaltet-damit-die-welt/27874244.html?ticket=ST-6011251-Uc3Jgy3YaCSGq31MoWg1-cas01.example.org>

Court ruling against Julian Assange – "Blatant Failure of the Rule of Law"

ef. On Friday 10 December (*Human Rights Day*), a London Court of Appeal (High Court) overturned the rejection of the US extradition request for Julian Assange. Once again, Julian Assange is expected to be extradited to the US, where he could face up to 175 years in prison. His fiancée, Stella Morris, responded immediately and announced that she would appeal. The "Frankfurter Rundschau" spoke of a "blatant failure of the rule of law" and commented "The court ruling is a disgrace. And not worthy of a state under the rule of law. [...]"

The judges have kowtowed to the United States, adopted their arguments and thus perpetuated the history of persecution and arbitrariness. Power is abused and human and civil rights are ignored in liberal democracies as well." According to the "Allgemeine Zeitung" from Mainz, people in certain circles are hoping for a signal from the new German foreign minister. For Annalena Baerbock, "who in the opposition had called for Assange's immediate release, the case could become a test for the promised 'values-based foreign policy'".

Respect for understandable safety interests would serve peace

NATO, Russia, and Ukraine in December 2021

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

For a few weeks now, the leading media and government politicians in the NATO states and in other Western countries – including Switzerland – have once again been trying to put Russia in the dock. Based on inaccurate information regarding Russian troops in the “vicinity” of Ukraine’s northern, eastern and southern borders – the article by *Ralph Bosshard* (page 8) explains what to make of this from the perspective of a security expert – these media and politicians speak of a Russian threat and intentions to attack Ukraine. Representative of these voices is the one by *Ulrich Speck*, editor of a “briefing” on German foreign policy, in the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 4 December, entitled “The revenge of the autocrats on the system of the West” and the preface: “It was mistaken to believe that dictatorships would die out after ‘1989’. The rulers in Moscow and Beijing are attacking the West more and more openly. The latter tried to ignore this for a long time. But this is no longer possible.” The article itself cites no evidence for its insinuations but ends with a clear recommendation: “The West therefore has no choice: it must engage in the struggle forced upon it, accept competition at all levels: political, economic, technological and on the global stage. The more resolutely the democracies accept this confrontation, the more they will find themselves in a position of strength, and the lower the price they will have to pay for it.”

The formula of conflict between democracies and autocracies

The narrative of these voices can be summarised as follows: The “autocratic” (evil) Russia behaves so aggressively towards the “democratic” (good) West because it believes that this is the only way it can maintain its “autocratic” (evil) power. But the “democratic” (good) West can no longer accept this. It must finally take up the fight against the bad guys before it is too late, and evil has won. The US president’s invitation to a “summit of democracies”, which, according to the headline of the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 10 December, are in a “fight for survival” against the “autocracies” of the world, fits exactly into this pattern. *This is war rhetoric.*

In his article (page 4), *Jochen Scholz* has pointed to facts that shed a different light on the recent history of the West’s relations with Russia. As far as Ukraine and Russia’s relations with this neighbouring country and with the NATO states are concerned, a

Video conversation between the Presidents of USA and Russia

km. On 7 December 2021, the President of the Russian Federation, *Vladimir Putin*, and the President of the United States of America, *Joe Biden*, spoke for around two hours on various issues of world politics and the bilateral relations between the two countries. Whether this conversation will help to ease the tension in Russian American relations, and particularly regarding Ukraine, cannot be said at the moment. Reading the public statement by the Russian Presidential Office of 7 December (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67315>) and the minutes of the US press briefing by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the same day ([https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/12/07/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-national-security-](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/12/07/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-december-7-2021/)

advisor-jake-sullivan-december-7-2021/), one can get the impression that both sides want to keep the doors open for further talks, but that no solution to the problems raised is yet in sight. Even the media reports after the conversation were not able to spot silver linings on the horizon. How serious the situation is, shows an appeal from Germany published on 5 December 2021. This appeal was done by high-ranking former German Bundeswehr officers, former German diplomats, scientists at the University of the Bundeswehr and those responsible in German peace research institutes: “Get out of the spiral of escalation! For a new beginning in relation to Russia.” (https://www.johannes-varwick.de/rauf/AUFRUF_Raus-aus-der-Eskalationsspirale_05122021-3.pdf)

few original quotes from the Russian perspective should first be included here to supplement *Jochen Scholz*’s remarks.

On 30 November 2021, Russian President *Vladimir Putin* was asked at an investors’ conference what the “red lines” were for Russia with regard to NATO and its activities in Ukraine and what the Russian troops in the “vicinity” of Ukraine were all about.

Russia and Ukraine – what did the Russian president say?

The Russian President replied: “Regarding the potential deployment of Russian troops in Ukraine, the rumour first appeared in early 2021, when we held the ‘Zapad 2021’ military exercises, but, as we know, nothing happened. The point at issue is not to deploy or not to deploy troops, to fight or not to fight. The point at issue is to develop relations aimed at fairer and more stable development based on respect for the security interests of all the participants in international affairs. If we work towards this sincerely, nobody will feel any threats. [...]”

Third, the Russian Federation also has certain apprehensions regarding the large-scale military exercises held near its border, including unscheduled ones, like the recent Black Sea drills during which strategic bombers, which are known to carry precision and possibly even nuclear weapons, made flights within 20 kilometres of our border. All this is posing a threat to us.

As for the red lines, they are largely hypothetical. Nevertheless, take a look

at what has been going on for the past 20 years: relations between Russia and the Western community [...] were nearly cloudless in the 1990s and early 2000s. Why did they need to enlarge NATO towards our border? What for? Who can answer this question? There is no reasonable answer; it does not exist.

Our relationship was almost idyllic, especially in the mid-1990s, when we nearly became allies. However, despite all our warnings, conversations and requests, the [bloc’s] infrastructure ultimately approached our border. The situation went as far as the deployment of BMD systems in Poland and Romania, and the launchers that have been stationed there, the Mk 41, can be used to launch *Tomahawk* missiles and other strike systems. This is creating a threat to us – this is an obvious fact.

What has happened in response to all our appeals and requests not to do this? You can see it now. As a result, we had to – I want to stress this – we had to reciprocate by launching the creation of hypersonic weapons. This was our response. But we were not the first to start all this – it all began when our partners withdrew from the ABM Treaty and later from the INF treaty.”¹

Red Lines ...

“You have asked about Ukraine and where the red lines run. They are, above all, the threats to us that can come from that territory. If the enlargement, the infrastructure continues to be enlarged [...] I will

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"Respect for understandable ..."

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repeat this once again that the issue concerns the possible deployment in the territory of Ukraine of strike systems with the flight time of 7–10 minutes to Moscow, or 5 minutes in the case of hypersonic systems. Just imagine that. [...] The flight time to Moscow is 5 minutes [for these systems]. [...] We would need to create similar systems to be used against those who are threatening us. [...] But we can do this already now, because we have held successful tests, and early next year we will put a new sea-launched hypersonic missile with a maximum speed of Mach 9 on combat duty. The flight time to those who issue orders will also be 5 minutes.

Where are we heading? Why are we doing this? The creation of such threats for us is the red line. I hope it will not come to this. I hope that common sense and responsibility for one's country and the international community will prevail after all."²

... and contractual security guarantees

A day later, on 1 December, the Russian president addressed 20 newly accredited ambassadors to Russia on the same matter. These statements should also be reproduced here in detail:

"At the same time, we express our concern not only over the fact that the international community is acting separately and cannot unite to address truly important problems, but also over how some of our partners are behaving towards our country, towards Russia, trying to restrain our development in every possible way, to exert sanctions pressure and, moreover, to escalate tensions near our borders.

By the way, the threat on our western border is really growing, and we have mentioned it many times. It is enough to see how close NATO military infrastructure has moved to Russia's borders. This is more than serious for us.

In this situation, we are taking appropriate military-technical measures. But, I repeat, we are not threatening anyone and it is at the very least irresponsible to accuse us of this, given the real state of affairs. This would mean laying the blame at the wrong door, as the Russian saying goes.

In my speech at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs I already stressed that the priority facing Russian diplomacy at this juncture is to try to ensure that Russia is granted reliable and long-term security guarantees.

While engaging in dialogue with the United States and its allies, we will insist on the elaboration of concrete agreements that would rule out any further eastward expansion of NATO and the deployment of weapons systems posing a threat to us in close proximity to Russia's territory.

We suggest that substantive talks on this topic should be started.

I would like to note in particular that we need precisely legal, juridical guarantees, because our Western colleagues have failed to deliver on verbal commitments they made. Specifically, everyone is aware of the assurances they gave verbally that NATO would not expand to the east. But they did absolutely the opposite in reality. In effect, Russia's legitimate security concerns were ignored and they continue to be ignored in the same manner even now.

We are not demanding any special terms for ourselves. We understand that any agreements must take into account the interests of both Russia and all other states in the Euro-Atlantic region. A calm and stable situation should be ensured for everyone and is needed by all without exception.

That said, I would like to stress that Russia is interested precisely in constructive collaboration and in equitable international cooperation, and this remains the central tenet of Russian foreign policy. I hope that you will convey this signal to the leaders of your states."³

No indications yet that the NATO states will relent

I think it is necessary to quote the Russian President in such detail. It gives us a better understanding of what moves Russia.

So far, however, there are no signs that those responsible in the NATO states have paused or even have relented. On the contrary, the verbal attacks on Russia have become even sharper and more spiteful after the Russian president's statements. US President *Jo Biden* reacted on 3 December, a few days before the video conference between the two presidents agreed for 7 December, (see box p. 11) – by saying that he did not accept red lines from anyone, but later spoke of his own "red lines" and threatened the toughest sanctions and further armament of Ukraine.

In parallel, NATO has been arming itself against Russia for some time: with plans for the stationing of US hypersonic missiles in Germany,⁴ with the relocation of heavy military equipment from Great Britain to Germany,⁵ with a heating up of the war atmosphere in Ukraine by representatives of NATO states⁶.

The dead end of western politics of violence

After their "victory" in the first Cold War after 1991, the powers in the USA, in the other NATO states and in the West as a whole, believed that they could impose their view of things and their interests worldwide, that they could dominate the world in their own way. They have done so with wars against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1999), against Afghani-

stan (from 2001), Iraq (from 2003), Libya (from 2011) and Syria (from 2011), with support for armed uprisings and so-called "colour" revolutions in Russia (on the side of Chechen fighters), in China (on the side of violent Uyghurs), in Syria (also on the side of IS), in Ukraine (on the side of also violent Maidan fighters) and in some other countries with domestic problems as well as with a multitude of sanctions, entire regions have been affected and the world has not been made better by this, but has created discord and insecurity.

The powers that be in the USA, in the other NATO states and in the West as a whole are driving into a dead end. And the deeper they drive into this dead end, the more difficult it is for them to make the indispensable return to international law and respect for the equal rights of all the states of this world. So, it is not only a question of material interests, but also of political psychology whether a timely change of course will be possible. What is needed above all is a determined will to change course – also on the part of the citizens.

For the natural longing for peace of all people, only that would be a blessing.

In 2014 Brzezinski showed understanding for the fact that Russia feels threatened

One last thing: Jochen Scholz mentions the US security advisor and strategic thinker *Zbigniew Brzezinski*. In his book "The Grand Chessboard", published in English in 1997, in the conviction at that time of the self-evidence of US world supremacy, still wrote how important Ukraine was for the US "bridgehead" into the Eurasian region and why a Ukraine oriented towards the West was so important to block Russian great power plans once and for all. 17 years later, and in view of a changing world, in an article for the "Washington Post" on 3 March 2014⁷, shortly after the coup d'état in Ukraine, he again rolled out heavy artillery against Russia, but also wrote: "*The West should reassure Russia that it is not seeking to draw Ukraine into NATO or to turn it against Russia.*" [emphasis km] •

¹ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67241>

² *ibid.*

³ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67250>

⁴ <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/dark-eagle-dieusa-planen-die-stationierung-von-atomaren-hyperschallraketen-in-deutschland/>

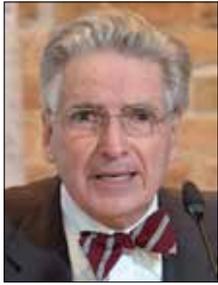
⁵ <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/grossbritannien-bringt-hunderte-panzer-und-anderes-kriegsgeraetnach-deutschland/>

⁶ https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/kriegsvorbereitungen-des-westens-wird-die-ukraine-in-einenkrieg-mit-russland-getrieben/?doing_wp_cron=1638634829.3217101097106933593750 und https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2021/die-eskulationsspiraleder-letzten-vier-tage/?doing_wp_cron=1638628890.4104421138763427734375

⁷ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. "What is to be done? Putin's aggression in Ukraine needs a response". In: *Washington Post* of 3 March 2014

UN should convene an inclusive summit for democracy

by Alfred de Zayas*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)

No one will deny that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.

With the cooperation of all member states, the United Nations can advance domestic and international democracy so as to achieve the universal aspirations of peace and justice, in good faith and larger freedom. It is time for the UN to take the lead in convening a truly inclusive summit for democracy, a conference that would, pursuant to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, ensure the equitable participation of all state members of the UN, observer states, indigenous populations, people living under occupation, non-self-governing people, and civil society.

Biden's "democracy summit" cannot serve peace and justice

U.S. President *Joe Biden's* initiative to invite only some countries and regions and not others to his private "summit for democracy" constitutes a return to obsolete cold war paradigms and reflects retrogression in modern conceptions of multilateralism. It is obvious that such a conference cannot serve peace and justice, because it excludes billions of human beings. Far from being an exercise in democracy, the U.S. summit artificially divides the world into two camps – those countries which the U.S. unilaterally considers "democratic" and those that are labelled undemocratic. Is this not classical imperial narcissism? The U.S. is setting a bad example and all parties that participate in the scheme are complicit in undermining democracy.

If we observe how the U.S. State Department uses the term "democracy," it becomes apparent that it does not correspond to the right of self-determination of peoples, nor does it respect the diversity of approaches that characterises the real world, the UN Charter and the UNESCO Constitution.

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The U.S. arbitrarily redefines the term "democracy" and makes it coterminous with the neo-liberal economic model, i.e., with capitalism. But in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, unanimously adopted by the General Assembly, the world agreed "that while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy, that it does not belong to any country or region (Resolution 60/1)."

Biden's limited grasp of the idea of democracy does not seem to allow for the genuine meaning of democracy: People power, government by and for the people – and not by an oligarchy. Biden seems to think that the trappings of "representative" democracy are sufficient. But do senators and congresspeople actually represent the electorate, or do they respond to powerful lobbies, including the pharmaceutical industry and the military-industrial-financial complex?

Biden would be well advised to look behind the veil and ask the ontological questions whether and to what extent the electorate has access to all the information needed to shape political judgment, whether it is consulted on the issues, whether the voters have real choices, or only the opportunity of voting for candidates who are not interested in their problems?

A large number of invitees to Biden's self-serving party are countries with a serious "disconnect" between the government and the governed. True enough, many of these countries and regions conduct pro-forma elections every two or four years, but the people have very little influence on the designation of candidates, who are frequently imposed by party machines or by rigged "primaries."

What is the state of democracy in the participating countries?

In order to assess the reality of democracy in those participating at Biden's Summit, I dare suggest the following questions:

Do the citizens want world peace, or are they prepared to risk another world war by continuing to provoke other states?

Do the citizens want cooperation with all nations – or do they prefer confrontation?

Do the citizens approve the waste of trillions of dollars in extravagant military budgets, or would they prefer tax revenue being used for healthcare, education, infrastructure?

Do the citizens approve the ongoing use of drones and depleted uranium weapons that kill tens of thousands of civilians?

Do the citizens approve the continued persecution of *Julian Assange* and *Edward Snowden* while NATO soldiers and officials enjoy impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Do the citizens approve the imposition of unilateral coercive measures on Cuba, Syria, Venezuela, when it is known that these sanctions have already killed tens of thousands of innocent people?

Do the citizens approve government legislation establishing and protecting tax havens?

We know that – given the choice – a majority of citizens would never approve of such inhumanities. Precisely for that reason they are never consulted. We know from experience that the will of the people was pushed aside by "democratic" leaders in Italy, Spain and UK, who ignored the voice of the millions demonstrating in Rome, Milan, Madrid, Barcelona, London and Manchester against the illegal US-led aggression on Iraq in 2003.

We also know that the essence of democracy is public participation, which necessitates a plurality of information sources, and not a homologated media landscape that merely echoes government and corporate views.

In numerous Western "democratic" countries, the media are largely in private hands – too few hands. Often media are controlled by conglomerates responsive to corporations and advertisers who determine the content of news and other programmes, frequently disseminating fake news or suppressing crucial information necessary for democratic discourse.

Indeed, the media blackout on important issues constitutes a grave obstacle to democracy, since absent sufficient information and without free and pluralistic media, democracy is dysfunctional and the political process, including elections, becomes a mere formality – not an expression of the will of the people.

The United Nations Secretary General *Antonio Guterres* and the UN General Assembly have a responsibility to name a spade a spade and to call the Biden "summit" incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Outcome Document of the 2005 UN World Summit.

Source: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-12-01/UN-should-convene-an-inclusive-summit-for-democracy-15BEU1xd16/index.html> of 1 December 2021

EU and China policy, GM-moratorium – and once again the Covid-19 Act

Exciting news from Berne

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

In the current winter session of the Swiss parliament, a number of things have already been discussed and decided that should be of interest, not only to our readers in Switzerland. In the budget debate, the National Council rejected the proposal of its Foreign Affairs Committee to increase cohesion payments to the EU, thus backing the Federal Council's EU policy. The same committees' attempt to introduce a compulsory "human rights dialogue" with China was adopted by the National Council but stopped by the Council of States. The extension of the moratorium on genetic engineering for agricultural products was in principle approved in both chambers for a further four years, but with an attempt at softening that will still have to be clarified. The Covid-19 Act is being revised again already in this session (as in every previous one since the spring of 2020), with most of its provisions limited until the end of 2022. On this topic, it is also necessary to look back at the referendum of 28 November on the thus far valid version of the Covid-19 Act.

The 2022 budget was approved by the Council of States in just three hours on 30 November and by the (larger and more talkative) National Council in an extraordinarily short eight hours with only a few amendments on 1 December; the settlement of the remaining disagreements is on the agenda for the second and third week of the session. The many expenditure items to deal with the Corona crisis reduced the parliament's leeway, and Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer, head of the Finance Department, urged austerity.

National Council says no to doubling of the cohesion billion

Although austerity is the order of the day, the National Council's Foreign Affairs Committee came up with a plan to "round up" the cohesion funds to the EU approved by both chambers of parliament in September from around CHF 1 billion to CHF 2 billion. The same National Councillors who had, disappointed and mortified, complained about the arrogance and ingratitude of the EU grandees after their recent visit to Brussels (see *Current Concerns* No. 27 of 7 December 2021), now actually wanted to convince their Councillor-colleagues that it might be possible to propitiate the gentlemen in Brussels by stumping up even more money. To this end, the Commission majority put for-

ward the following proposal for the Federal Council to use as a decoy, so to speak, in Brussels:

Art. 8a (new) [...].

1 The approved framework credit of CHF 1046.9 million shall be increased by CHF 953.1 million if the association agreements between Switzerland and the European Union for participation in the current EU programmes Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, ITER, Euratom and Erasmus+ can be signed by 30 June 2022.¹

In justifying the motion, Roland Fischer (GLP, LU) properly read the riot act to the Federal Council: he said that the Federal Council had "irresponsibly" broken off the negotiations on the Framework Agreement, and that the Green-Liberal Group was "shocked by the Federal Council's obvious inability to act in European policy" and, with the second billion, wanted to "give it an instrument" for the negotiations. Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer left no doubt about the unsuitability and undesirability of this instrument: with such a "quick shot", Switzerland would only embarrass itself in Brussels and "certainly not get access to Horizon". He moved for the motion to be rejected.

The National Council did so with 93 nays and 84 ayes. With its vote of "No", the National Council took a stand. Against the majority of its Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC-N), it backed the Federal Council and supported its EU policy. As the proposal has thus already failed in the first chamber, it will not reach the Council of States.

Promotion of human rights by means of interference in the affairs of another state?

Another failed FAC-N proposal is the motion "Promotion of human rights in China" (Motion 21.3965). According to this, the Federal Council should ensure that human rights be "consistently addressed in all bilateral and multilateral meetings and talks with China at all hierarchical levels". The Swiss embassy and consulates in China are to increase their human rights staff and support Chinese "actors" in their commitment to human rights. Swiss companies and institutions are to be encouraged by means of an "advisory service" to "maintain human rights conformity" in their activities in China.

This massive intervention in the internal affairs of another state (and in the personal freedom of the Swiss who are "to be advised"!) was approved by the National Council on 14 September 2021 by 106 votes to 81 after a brief discussion. Only National Councillor Hans-Peter Portmann (FDP, ZH) noted in the debate that "very strong China-bashing" was already noticeable in the APK (of which he is a member). The liberal banker explained: "We will not be able to do without China, and we would do well not to forget this. We should try to make a step forward with China in a fruitful way, also on human rights and international law issues." Of course, business interests are at play in this consideration, yet an approach towards equivalence can be sensed here.

Fortunately, such problematic decisions can be corrected in the Swiss state system. This is what the Council of States did on 8 December. It followed its own Foreign Affairs Committee, which had, by 6 votes to 4, recommended the motion to be rejected. By 29 votes to 11, the Council of States massively rejected this proposal to teach China human rights, come hell or high water. This settled the matter. Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis had pointed out that Switzerland is already in dialogue with China at many levels on the subject of human rights and also exchanges experiences with Swiss companies in China, but: "Here, too, it is always important to remain in a bilateral relationship. 'It takes two to tango.'"²

On the duty of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, we give the floor to international law expert Professor Dr Hans Köchler: "The general obligation of states to conduct their relations in a peaceful manner implies mutual respect and non-interference in their internal affairs. This also follows from the principle of sovereign equality of states, which includes the right of every state to conduct its affairs according to its own traditions and on the basis of its specific conditions and priorities.

In view of these universal norms, proclaimed by the United Nations as its guiding purposes and principles, the enjoyment of human rights cannot, and must not, be subordinated to the conduct of power politics."³

It is true that the small state of Switzerland does not pursue power politics, but many Swiss, including some members

"EU and China policy ..."

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of parliament, unfortunately allow themselves to be impressed by the crumbling superpower on the other side of the Atlantic, which is fighting to the death against the emerging powers of China and Russia – and not for reasons of human rights! The so-called *summit for democracy*, which the US government is currently staging, is going down the same road. Switzerland – despite the exclusion of all unpopular states by Washington! – wants to take part and send President *Guy Parmelin*. I wonder if our commitment to perpetual neutrality has been “forgotten” in Bern.

Extension of the GM moratorium for agriculture

In Switzerland, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) may only be cultivated for research purposes. On 27 November 2005, over 55 percent of the voters and all cantons approved the federal popular initiative “For food from GMO-free agriculture” (moratorium for five years). Since then, Parliament has extended the moratorium three times in accordance with the will of the people, for the last time until December 2021. On 23 September 2021, the National Council extended the moratorium until the end of 2025 with 144 votes in favour, 27 against and 19 abstentions. The Green Liberal *Martin Bäumle* proposed to break the ban: according to the new Art. 37a para. 2 of the “Federal Law on Genetic Engineering in Non-Human Areas”, “genetically modified organisms to which no transgenic genetic material has been inserted” might be used under certain conditions “for agricultural, horticultural or forestry purposes”. The majority of the National Council, however, rejected the mixing of research and agricultural cultivation and was in favour of extending the moratorium without exceptions.⁴

In the winter session, the Council of States also approved the extension of the moratorium until the end of 2025. Unfortunately, however, it approved the above-mentioned exemption by an extremely narrow decision (21 yes to 21 no, with a casting vote by the president).⁵ So it would seem that in this way, genetic engineering may enter Switzerland’s production agriculture through a back door.

Maya Graf (Greens, BL), member of the Council of States and organic farmer, who was one of the successful initiators of the moratorium on genetic engineering in 2005, commented in detail on the negative consequences of such a derogation: using various examples from research, she pointed out that important data from release trials of genetically modified organisms were still missing, and that there were also unresolved patent issues.

The new exemption provision would be “a quick fix” that would serve neither agriculture nor consumers, nor plant research and breeding. *Maya Graf* asked her colleagues in the Council to vote for the moratorium without the new exemption clause and instead to continue to allocate funds for organic and biological plant breeding: “We are all agreed on one thing: we must have robust, site-appropriate plants for agriculture and for the future of Switzerland’s food.”

The Basel-Landschaft councillor was supported by Federal Councillor *Simone Sommaruga*, who also pointed out the many unanswered questions in the field of genetic engineering and warned: “Ultimately, it is always about the modification of the genome, which can then also have these unintended effects with potentially undesirable consequences, not only for ecology, for nature, but also for the health of humans, animals and the environment. These risks are simply still too little known.” *Sommaruga* added that the coexistence with non-genetically modified plants was also unclear in the small-scale Swiss agriculture. And particularly alarming: “Genetically modified insects, bacteria or viruses without foreign genetic material that can be used for pest control would also no longer be affected by the moratorium. [...] All these genetically modified organisms could therefore be approved for agricultural, forestry and horticultural production. Genetically modified viruses in use in Swiss agriculture: you decide on this today if you agree with the Commission majority.”

In view of these facts, it is surprising that half of the members of the Council of States want to open this Pandora’s box. The issue now goes back to the National Council, which will hopefully stick to its clear rejection of genetically modified organisms in Swiss agriculture in spring 2022. According to the secretary of the committee with the primary responsibility, the federal administration will not approve any experimental projects until the law has been adjusted.

Covid-19 Act: referendum and new parliamentary resolutions

On 28 November, Swiss voters clearly approved the Covid-19 Act for the second time at the ballot box. The referendum campaign had been fought with no holds barred. Particularly on the side of the opponents, slogans had been circulating that sort quite ill with Switzerland, where citizens are called upon to help shape politics responsibly – for example, “We will not be divided!” “No compulsory vaccination!” The result of the vote shows: Common sense prevailed and we, the Swiss citizens, did not allow ourselves to be divided. The

Covid-19 Act was accepted by 62 percent of the voters, and this across the country: there was neither a “Rösti divide” (French-speaking Switzerland/German-speaking Switzerland) nor an urban-rural divide. Only in two cantons was the law rejected by a majority.

On the other hand, we have to “handle” the 38 percent who voted nay “with care”, says political scientist Professor *Wolf Linder* in the “Echo der Zeit”.⁶ It is normal that the voting campaign is somewhat excessive now and then. “What was completely new, however, was that opponents of the new draft were now proceeding to cast doubt on the entire voting procedure, i.e. the referendum, direct democracy.” *Linder* added that among many people today “trust in the political system is lacking”.

How can this trust be restored? Through a better information policy of the authorities, according to *Wolf Linder*, and precisely through a “careful treatment of those defeated”: “Direct democracy is, after all, something wonderful, it settles a conflict in that the result of the vote is a final result that no one doubts. But at the same time it is difficult for the defeated to come to terms with it. But it has actually always been a characteristic [of Swiss politics] that the losers have accepted the result, yet the winners have tried to come to terms with the losers”

In the winter session, the National Council and the Council of States are now once again working on adapting the Covid-19 Act to the current requirements of the increasingly severe pandemic. In doing so, they are striving to “handle the population with care”, i.e. they are trying to meet as many needs as possible”. The Council of States extended the urgent federal law until the end of 2022 on 1 December, the National Council did so on the following day. The motion to extend it only until the end of June was clearly rejected in both chambers; in the National Council, even the SVP joined the majority, in view of the voting result of 28 November and the current fierce course of the pandemic.

Both Councils decided – partly against more restrictive proposals of the Federal Council – on the payment of income replacement if a job cannot be performed due to Corona measures, the extension of compensation in the case of unemployment and short-time work as well as contributions to the sports and cultural sector. The Council of States also extended the article on political rights: In order to facilitate the collection of signatures for referendums and popular initiatives, these can also be submitted without certification by the communes next year; certification will

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Explicit consent model versus presumed consent model – what is it actually about?

Referendum on the amendment of the Transplantation Act

by Ursula and Walter Knirsch*, board Hippocratic Society Switzerland

Transplantation medicine has become an indispensable part of modern medicine. Thanks to it, seriously ill people today may have the chance to live on with a donated organ. People who have received an organ donation are aware of the unique character of this gift to their lives. On 1 October 2021, the Transplantation Act was fundamentally revised by the Swiss Parliament. How did this come about? What has changed?

Since 2013, various measures have been taken in Switzerland with the action plan “More organs for transplants” to increase the willingness of the population to donate.¹ Until now, the extended consent regulation was still valid in Switzerland. The person concerned decides during lifetime or the next relatives decide on the possibility of organ donation in accordance with the presumed will.

Once the Federal Council and Parliament had repeatedly rejected the presumed consent model, the popular initiative “Promote organ donation – save lives”, launched by a subgroup of an international non-profit organisation, *Junior Chamber International Riviera JCI*, was submitted in March 2019. It essentially involved a constitutional amendment to Article No. 119a by means of the addition of paragraph 4: “The donation of organs, tissues and cells of a deceased person for the purpose of transplantation shall be based on the principle of presumed consent, unless the person concerned expressed his or her refusal during his or her lifetime.” The

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be obtained by the Federal Chancellery after the collection deadline. The National Council also decided, among other things, “that the Confederation should again assume the costs of Corona tests” (the abolition of free tests in November had led to fierce protests), and it improved data protection in contact tracing.⁷

Despite the pandemic, Switzerland is not in a bad financial position, thanks to the debt brake and the reserves built up in previous years, and parliament will be doing well to budget the necessary health policy and economic support measures for next year as well. In this way, our politi-

**Referendum:
For a trustworthy Transplantation Medicine**

Organ donation is a gift and must remain voluntary, therefore: No to organ donation without explicit consent!

At the end of the autumn session 2021 of the Swiss Parliament a fundamental amendment of the Transplantation Act in the sense of an “extended opting-out solution” was adopted. In future, it would be allowed in principle to remove organs of all people at the end of their life, unless they expressly objected to organ donation during their lifetime or their relatives do not do so at the time of death.

A non-party committee of physicians, nurses, theologians, lawyers, and ethicists have filed a referendum against this law. The board of the Hippocratic Society Switzerland supports this referendum. About such a paradigm shift, through which the state no longer would protect physical integrity in every case, the citizens must be able to decide!

Further information, arguments and signature forms can be found at: <https://organspende-only-with-consent.ch/>

initiative committee has now conditionally withdrawn the initiative in October in favour of the indirect counter-proposal, i.e., the withdrawal only applies if the counter-proposal becomes legally valid. We could have voted on the constitutional initiative, but the indirect counter-proposal is subject to an optional referendum. For this reason, a cross-party committee “No organ donation without explicit consent” has launched the referendum. In order for the referendum become successful, 50,000 certified signatures are needed by 20 January 2022.

Why does it matter whether the Transplantation Act contains the explicit consent model or the presumed consent model?

The new extended explicit consent model introduced in the revised Transplantation Act removes the voluntary nature of organ donation as it was previously valid. The voluntary nature of organ donation is documented with an organ donor card.

If there is no organ donor card or otherwise documented will to donate organs, up to now the relatives of a dying potential organ donor have been asked about the donor's presumed will and can consent to organ removal after brain death or death after cardiac arrest. The revised Transplantation Act would now ask whether the next relatives of the dying person are aware of any objection.

What's the difference between explicit consent and presumed consent?

While the explicit “opt-in” consent model considers the dying person to be unimpeachable by the state, the presumed consent model puts him or her in the hands of the state. Consequently, there is a state-imposed disposability for organ removal. This implies a kind of “obligation to donate organs”, which can only be avoided by objecting. In other

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cians have done their part to strengthen social peace. But the willingness of the entire population to overcome the crisis by joining forces is needed. It was a joy to see how mutual help blossomed in the spring of 2020, especially among young people. Even if the pandemic has already lasted longer than we would have wished, it is still possible today to give priority to consideration for our fellow human beings. In the process, our own desires and covetousness may fade a little. •

¹ 21.041 *Budget 2022: Switzerland's participation in the enlargement of the European Union 2019–2024*. Motion of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N) of 22 November 2021.

² 21.3965 *Motion FAC-N. Promotion of human rights in China*

³ Prof Dr Dr h.c. mult. Köchler, Hans. “Human Rights and Peaceful Co-existence among States: Universality – Diversity – Dialogue”. In: *Current Concerns* of 4 May 2021

⁴ 21.049. *Genetic Engineering Act*. Amendment. Debate in the National Council on 23 September 2021 (SDA report).

⁵ *Council of States exempts genome editing from GM moratorium*. Debate in the Council of States on 2 December 2021 (SDA news item).

⁶ Scheidegger, Christina. Covid-19 Act: “I have never seen such mistrust”. Interview with Prof. Wolf Linder, political scientist emeritus at the University of Bern. *Radio SRF, Echo der Zeit* of 29 November 2021

⁷ “National Council and Council of States discuss amendments to COVID 19 Act”. Debate in the Council of States. *SDA message* of 1 December 2021; debate in the National Council. *SDA message* of 2 December 2021

"Extended consent regulation ..."

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words, the difference between the explicit consent model and the presumed consent model is nothing less than a paradigm shift. Thus, the state intervenes in the physical integrity of its citizens in a new way. The dignity of the human being is infringed. This is not compatible with fundamental and personal rights contradicting the right to physical and mental integrity and to self-determination as laid down in article 10 para 2 of the Federal Constitution.

Is there a right to organs, is there an obligation to donate organs?

In our media it is often mentioned that people on waiting lists for organs die for lack of organs donated to them. This line of argument forgets that seriously ill people do not die from a "lack of organs", but, unfortunately, from the consequences of their serious illness. At the same time, the term organ shortage suggests that there is a right for an organ and a certain obligation to donate as a possible organ donor. At this point, we should focus on the main idea of any donation. The term donation implies voluntariness and has the character of a gift. Accordingly, there can't be any obligation to donate organs. Since the body of a person

belongs only to that person, a potential recipient can't claim the organs of that person. He or she can only accept what has been donated out of altruistic motives. Besides, in Switzerland it applies that the doctors involved in the processes of organ removal and transplantation must be independent of one another and may not be put under pressure, with this also meaning that organ donation may not be directly related to a need.²

We should assume that nobody would accept another person's organ unless it was donated out of voluntary motives.

How can transplantation medicine be supported?

Transplant medicine is one of the great achievements of medicine. In principle, it deserves to be supported. Transplantation medicine is based on the trust of a potential donor in the guarantee provided by the state that his life, his death and his donated organs will be treated with dignity. Transplantation medicine is based on voluntariness, on the explicit consent of the donor during his or her lifetime or on the presumed consent expressed by his or her relatives after the best possible medical treatment has been completed. Transplantation medicine might also be supported according to proposals of the *National Advisory Com-*

mission on Biomedical Ethics (NCE) advocating a "third way" with a so-called declaration model. According to this, people should be regularly asked to consider the question of organ donation and to indicate whether they are willing to donate or not.³ The NCE rejects the presumed consent model.

Solidarity and altruism are not enhanced by the state taking over and obliging us. Moreover, this would be a burden to the relationship of trust between doctor and patient, the basis of our medical practice. Instead, what is needed is a well-informed population educated in transplantation medicine, and their questions and concerns on this subject taken seriously in an honest way. This is the only way to support trustworthy transplantation medicine.

These complex aspects of transplantation medicine must be discussed, and the new act should therefore be voted on by the people. •

¹ <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/strategie-und-politik/politische-auftraege-und-aktionsplaene/aktionsplan-transplantationsmedizin.html>

² Medical-ethical guidelines "Determination of Death with Regard to Organ Transplantation and Preparations for Organ Removal", SAMW 2019

³ https://www.nek-cne.admin.ch/inhalte/Themen/Stellungnahmen/NEK-Stellungnahme_Organ-spende_DE.pdf (statement)

"Indirect counter proposal" bypasses the mandatory referendum

mw. According to the Federal Constitution, Swiss voters can demand an amendment to the Federal Constitution with 100,000 valid signatures collected within a period of 18 months (FC Art. 139 para.1). The people and the cantons decide on this in a referendum (mandatory referendum, BV Art. 139 para. 5 and Art. 140 para. 1 a.). If the Federal Assembly draws up a counter proposal to the initiative at constitutional level, then the citizens vote on both at the same time (BV Art. 139 para. 5 and Art. 139b).

At least, that is how it is provided for in the Federal Constitution. However, parliament can circumvent the mandatory referendum by adopting a so-called "indirect counter proposal" in the form of a law to persuade the initiators to withdraw their initiative. In order for citizens to be able to vote on the law, they must launch an optional referendum, this means submitting 50,000 signatures within 100 days of publication.

In the past, the Federal Assembly occasionally used the trick of the "indirect counter-proposal", but in recent decades it has done so more frequently. This was also the case with the popular initiative "Promote organ donation – save lives". In fact, the amendment to the Transplantation Act adopted by the National Council and the Council of States (Art. 8a and 8b) corresponds in substance to the withdrawn popular initiative: If there is no explicit objection from a person to the removal of their organs (or part of their organs), their consent to organ donation is legally presumed, unless their next of kin can credibly demonstrate the deceased's will to the contrary. This is a serious encroachment on the fundamental rights of the individual. Nevertheless, there will only be a referendum if we manage to deliver enough signatures in time.

The parliament's grip on the indirect counter proposal is a significant encroachment on the political rights of cit-

izens and diminishes the trust between the population and the authorities – which is indispensable in direct democracy. After all, collecting 50,000 valid signatures (which is in fact about 60,000) is not a child's play. In addition, this circumvents the requirement of the double majority (majority of the people and of the cantons) for constitutional amendments (which is disliked by some politicians), thanks to which a majority of the smaller cantons can overrule the majority of votes of the more populous cantons. And in concrete terms: We citizens do not get the two proposals (initiative text and counter proposal) openly and honestly placed side by side in the voting booklet. Is it not desirable that we can compare them exactly and then perhaps come across the fact that both say about the same thing?

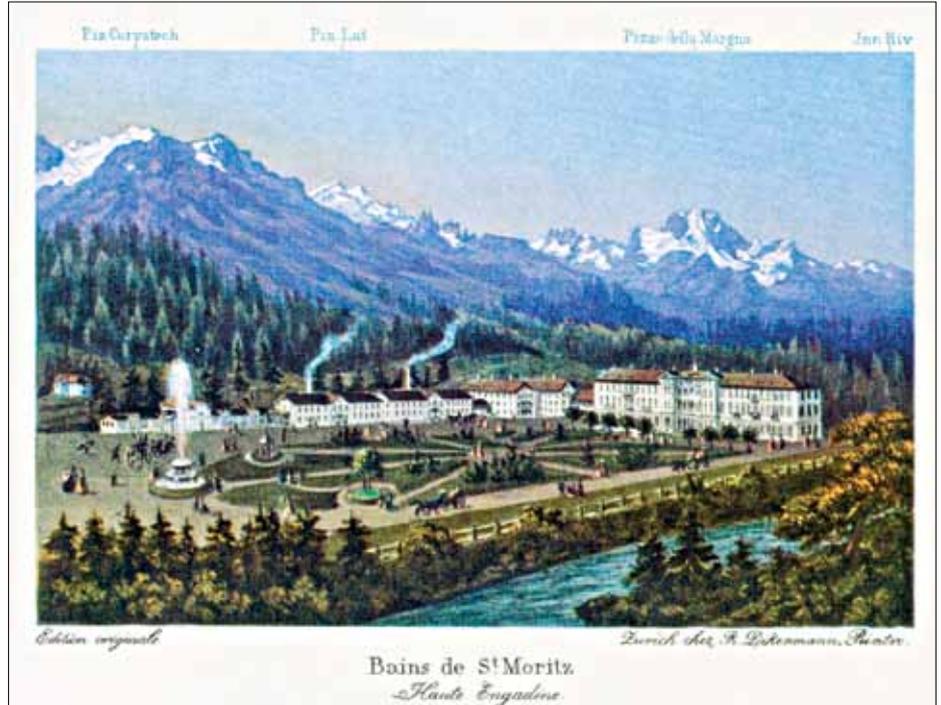
Not a brilliant democratic achievement by our "servants of the people" in the Federal Parliament.

St. Moritz in the Engadin – its gifts of nature, its people, its potential

On the standard work “Health Myth St. Moritz.
Sour water – mountain sun – mountain climate” by Heini Hofmann

by Winfried Pogorzelski

With his comprehensive, scientifically sound and magnificently illustrated standard work “Health Myth St. Moritz”, the Swiss science publicist Heini Hofmann (born 1938) has presented an impressive documentation about the famous spa, winter and mountain sports resort in the Engadin.¹ The author has a broad-ranging career. As a working student, he was a journalist, photo and radio reporter, then a veterinarian at the Basel Zoo, at the Swiss and Austrian National Circus and director of the Rapperswil Children’s Zoo. Since reaching retirement age, he has been working as a publicist. Robert Eberhard, long-time president of the Dr. Oscar Bernhard Foundation St. Moritz and doctor in charge of the Medical Therapy Centre Heilbad St. Moritz, explains the title “Health Myth St. Moritz” in the foreword: Health and healing has always been known from this place, as a fountain tapping was already built in the Bronze Age in the 15th century BC for the later so named Mauritius fountain with its iron-rich and acidulous water.² With the founding of the first hotel in 1856, the Kulm Hotel, the rise to one of the most popular holiday resorts ever began. To this day, the attraction of the place and the region is unbroken: “This is where the rich, the beautiful and the famous meet, where winter sports enthusiasts, summer visitors and nature lovers bustle” (p. 63). How this came about and what the prospects are for the region are impressively described in this great work.



St. Moritz Bad in the late 19th century: Spa building and spa house with park and fountain. (p. 117, all pictures in the article are taken from the book by Heini Hofmann, “Gesundheits-Mythos St. Moritz”).

In his prologue (p. 13ff.), the author speaks of the raw materials with which the place is richly blessed; however, he does not mean mineral resources such as rocks, ores or crude oil, but the bracing climate, the pure air, the mountain sun, the healing springs and the Alpine moor.

All this is at the feet of the people, they just have to bend down and pick it up. The use of these gifts has a chequered history, which he tells on the following pages.

In eleven chapters, the author works out the exception and historical significance of St. Moritz and the Engadin for naturopathy, tourism and as the venue for a whole range of sports. He knows how to convey his immense knowledge with great attention to detail and entertaining clarity. The reader can delve into this alpine wonderland and can only marvel, while at the same time being well informed and enlightened about complex relationships.

Nature trilogy heeling spring, sun and bracing climate

Heini Hofmann is very concerned about the current situation and the future of the place and the region. It is about nothing less than sounding out possible perspectives and envisaging their implementation, taking into account climate change and demographic development; this requires an overall concept: “As the water castle of Europe and at the same time the highest situated bracing climate health region, the Engadin is pre-

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Heini Hofmann was born in 1938 in Uetendorf near Thun, worked as a journalist, radio and photo reporter during his secondary school years and veterinary studies (residing on the Bern Minster Tower).

After a stay in South America (with expeditions in Mato Grosso and Tierra del Fuego), he trained as a zoo veterinarian and animal gardener. He then worked as a veterinarian at the Basel Zoological Garden, then in food hygiene. He was then a veterinarian for the Swiss National Circus and director of the Rapperswil Children’s Zoo and its dolphinarium, as well as a consultant for the Austrian National Circus.

He then worked as a popular lecturer, sought-after freelance science publicist and successful author: his bestselling book “Animals on the Swiss Farm” was honoured with the “Swiss Veterinary Prize” and the press awards “Pet Brehm” and “Animal Book of the Year”, “Switzerland’s most successful animal book”. His book was characterised as a “timeless standard document for school and family, fascinating, realistic and entertainingly written”. Heini Hofmann was also the initiator of various projects in the area of building bridges between agriculture and the agglomeration population (including the farm animal zoo at the Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg).

He spent most of his military service as a veterinary colonel in the Grisons (Bündnerland) – hence his affinity with the land of 150 valleys and the Engadin in particular. He lives in Rapperswil-Jona.

"St. Moritz in the Engadin ..."

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destined for new sustainable tourism perspectives!" (p. 15) But there is no overall concept that gives the healing springs the prominent place they deserve. They had led to the fabulous rise of the place and should be combined with the revival of the spa tradition and the conscious use of the bracing climate and mountain sun. Because of the increasingly health-conscious people are getting older and are trying to do something for their well-being, including preventive measures.

Oscar Bernhard (1861–1939) – Promoter of alpine medicine in the Engadin

A personality of outstanding importance for the development of the region was the doctor *Oscar Bernhard*. The foundation, which bears his name, is the publisher of this non-fiction book in which Heini Hofmann dedicates two chapters to this impressive personality. Because of his eventful biography and his manifold, beneficial work in the region – he was a mountain guide and rescuer, scholar of nature and conservationist, hunter, patron of the arts, numismatist – and pioneer in the development and application of sunlight therapy or heliotherapy.

Oscar Bernhard was the son of a pharmacist, an expert of healing herbs who had made a name for himself by cultivating and processing musk milfoil into tea, wine, liqueur, bitters and cream. He was a co-founder of the Samedan District Hospital (Upper Engadin) and worked as a doctor and surgeon in a region where medical care for the people was still in its infancy. The need for doctors and hos-



The classic mud baths. (p. 195)

pitals increased at a time when mountain sports were on the rise. Bernhard's particular attention was given to mountain rescue, for which he developed practicable methods that were widely disseminated, first by instructional boards and then by a brochure. Oscar Bernhard's most prominent patient was probably his friend *Giovanni Segantini* (1858–1899), the painter of symbolic realism from northern Italy, with whom he went on mountain tours and hunting. After Segantini, who was only 41 years old, fell seriously ill and was dying, he stayed with him. A few years later, Bernhard founded the Segantini Museum in St. Moritz.

In 1912, he founded the *Private Clinic Dr Bernhard* in St. Moritz village, which soon gained an excellent reputation. As the place had long since become a sought-after destination for celebrities from all over the

world, the house was soon able to adorn itself with appropriate names: The King of Greece, the Prince Consort of Holland, the Norwegian polar explorer *Fridtjof Nansen* and the Russian ballet dancer *Vaslav Nijinsky*, among others, stayed here.

Giovanni Segantini's son *Gottardo* paid tribute to Oscar Bernhard after his death with moving words. He had "loved" the Engadin "humbly and devoutly. [...] All his actions as a tireless and helpful doctor, all his thinking and experimentation as a successful scientist [...] came from this great love. The son of Engadin lived and fought for his valley and the reputation of his deeds and his successes have become the glory of his country." (p. 311)

Fresh-air reclining cures and sun therapy

In the 19th century, as a result of the industrial age, tuberculosis developed into a pandemic, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of people falling ill in Switzerland alone at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. A milestone in the fight against the disease was the discovery of the tubercle bacillus by *Robert Koch* (1882). The Silesian doctor *Hermann Brehmer* developed the fresh-air reclining cure against pulmonary tuberculosis in sanatoriums specially designed for this purpose. These successes did not go unnoticed in Switzerland either: the country doctor *Alexander Spengler* in Davos made a start, and subsequently Arosa, Leysin and Montana developed into pulmonary health resorts.

"The sun is the universal medicine from the apothecary in the heavens", said the German poet *August von Kotzebue* (1761–1819), beautifully illustrating the fact that people have always known about the healing effects of the sun and have sought to use it for medicinal purposes – even in ancient times. And if a landscape was predestined to use the beneficial effects of our central star, then it was the high alpine Engadin.

First in France at the end of the 18th century and especially in the 19th century, then also in Germany and Switzerland, light or sun therapy began to be used, mainly on an empirical basis, then gradually also on a scientific basis. Air and sunlight baths helped especially children and adolescents to recover from skin and lymph node diseases, which can favour the development of tuberculosis, and from general states of weakness.

The breakthrough of "sunlight treatment" or heliotherapy

This type of therapy received pioneering impetus from Oscar Bernhard, who was particularly concerned with curing tuberculosis of the bones and joints, the so-called



Dr Oscar Bernhard on a doctor's visit: Child patients undergoing sunlight treatment. (p. 335)

"St. Moritz in the Engadin ..."

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"surgical tuberculosis". A flash of inspiration gave him a bold idea: Bündnerfleisch (meat produced in the canton of Grisons), a speciality from Grisons, was originally created by exposing raw, salted beef to tanning and fresh air, thus drying and preserving it. Why not use the same method to dry and heal wounds? "I decided," Bernhard wrote, "to try the antiseptic and drying effect of sun and air on living tissue as well. [...] Already after the first hour and a half of irradiation, a clear improvement was observed, and the wound presented a completely different appearance. The granulations [here: formation of tissue on healing wounds] became visibly more normal and vigorous, and the enormous wound skinned over under this treatment." (p. 331)

Subsequently, writes Heini Hofmann, a fair competition developed among experts, especially between Oscar Bernhard and *Auguste Rollier* from Vaud, who adopted Bernhard's technique without simply imitating him. In contrast to Bernhard, who had started on a small scale in the private clinic he founded in the Engadin and was met with scepticism, Rollier received great support in his canton. Bernhard did not grudge him his success, and he was always aware that his colleague was the inventor of heliotherapy. However, both were exposed to hostility from colleagues.

Bernhard also worked as a medical officer and military doctor in military hospitals in Germany, England and France during the First World War. In the German town Bad Dürkheim in the Black Forest he set up a sun clinic himself. He also promoted the spread of helio- and high-altitude climate therapy through lectures, articles in specialist journals and book publications. He received numerous awards at home and abroad for his services. However, with the



First Winter Olympics in St. Moritz 1928. (p. 189)

breakthrough of chemotherapy (tuberculostatics) and the resulting practicable outpatient treatment, heliotherapy in specially established clinics had had its day.

The healing power of the mountains and the water

From the healing power of the sun now to mountain air and healing springs, which after a long prehistory in the middle of the 19th century made St. Moritz a world health resort. The author refers to the novel "Heidi", written by the doctor's daughter and writer *Johanna Spyri*. There, the sick girl Klara from Frankfurt a. M. learns to walk again in the Alps so that she can do without her wheelchair. Many plants, animals (e.g., ibex, marmot, bearded vulture), rocks and salts from the mountains have always been ascribed a special power as the milk and whey of the cows. The beneficial health effects of mountain air and water were also recognised and used early on.

The first spring tapping was built in 1411 BC, to be precise, where the Mauritius Spring with its acidic and ferruginous water still bubbles up today, the highest medicinal spring at 1774 m above sea level. This spring has had a long and



"Cresta Run" – an early form of the sport of skeleton, in which one runs head first down a curving ice track on a flat sledge, developed in St. Moritz, from where one travelled to the Cresta district in neighbouring Celerina. (p. 143)

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"St. Moritz in the Engadin ..."

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eventful history during which it was forgotten and not used for a long time. The Swiss father of healing springs and spa science, *Theophrastus Paracelsus* (1493–1541), became acquainted with the special benefits of the spring water on one of his journeys, which also took him to the Engadin, and reported on it. But a lot of time was to pass before the first breakthrough in its use was achieved ...

The author tells us about floods and earthquakes in the 16th century and about the second flourishing of the region in the 17th century, when the first members of the nobility and prominent people from Zurich already came to the area; travel reports from the 18th century, such as those by the Zurich doctor and naturalist *Johann Jacob Scheuchzer* (1672–1733), bear witness to the growing importance of the region and its healing waters. But the history of the St. Moritz healing spring, Hofmann says, reads like "a nightmare in which after every brief ray of hope a black hole opens up again". (p. 94) A period of various disputes between driving forces and those who opposed the development of the place into a health resort with hotel accommodation and a spa house followed until the 19th century. A constantly controversial topic was the handling of the heal-

ing water springs; for example, people did not build proper taps for a long time out of fear that they could impair the quality of the water or out of the superstition that they could awaken evil spirits ...²

In 1831, a first public limited company, the Heilquellengesellschaft (spa association) was founded, which built a quite comfortable spa house; quarters for spa guests, on the other hand, were still a long time coming until 1853, when the "great liberating blow" (p. 97) came. A second joint-stock company with more capital was founded, which was provided with building materials by the commune and was exempted from taxation. In return, the company paid a rent and made the spring water available to the residents at half price – all in all, an expression of a "fundamental change of attitude on the part of the people of St. Moritz regarding their spring". (p. 99)

The second half of the 19th century saw another event, at first glance harmless. A bet between hotel and tourism pioneer *Johannes Padrutt* and his spa guests from England, made at the Kulm Hotel at the end of the summer season in 1869: he invited them to come in winter and enjoy the St. Moritz winter sun. If they didn't like it, he would pay all their travel expenses. The Englishmen came in winter. They were more than enthusiastic and came again and again together with more

and more winter sports enthusiasts ... Legend has it that Johannes Padrutt has been considered the inventor of the winter season ever since. (p. 322)³

"Rise to world spa – Thanks to water"

What follows is a real boom in the history of St. Moritz, turning it into a veritable world health resort, even to a "Versailles of the Alps": The healing springs are captured and bubbling, prestigious buildings such as walking halls and halls to drink, a shopping street with sales outlets and cafés, promenades, spa buildings, a new kurhaus and generous parks with a three-storey fountain are built. In the open round pavilion in the centre of the spa park, the "shell", spa concerts are given in fine weather. (Photo p. 122) Guests arrive by horse-drawn carriages from Chur over the Julier Pass, followed by horse-drawn carriages on which their luggage piles up in large suitcases.

The happiness does not last long, as the author states once again: The expiry of a lease agreement between the commune and the Heilquellengesellschaft brings the next crisis. The contract is interpreted differently, a back and forth, a haggling is the result to the detriment of the preservation of the infrastructure. Finally, a court of arbitration decides that the commune of St. Moritz is to be awarded a large part of the entire facilities – namely the spring, the spa building and the kurhaus; the new kurhaus, the kurpark and further surrounding land go to a public limited company.

What follows is a boom that is reflected in the overall renovation of the spa with mineral baths and light baths as well as steam baths, the increase in the number of bathing cells, the installation of a powerful heating system, etc., which represents a real push towards modernisation: it finally turns the former mountain farming village into a world-famous spa resort. The Belle Epoque hotel palaces with their luxurious furnishings, which meet the needs of the aristocracy and the upper middle classes, spring up like mushrooms. More and more railways are built, such as the first cable railway in the Engadin from Punt Muragl to the sunny terrace of Muottas Muragl, then railway lines such as the Bernina Railway (from 1910) between St. Moritz and Tirano (Veltlin), which is a Unesco World Heritage Site, and the connection to the Rhaetian Railway, which from then on linked St. Moritz with Chur.

This brilliant development came to an abrupt end with the First World War: the "high life in the world spa resort of St. Moritz collapsed like a house of cards [...]. The loyal guests of many years, especially those from the former ruling and princely families, stayed away. Emperors,

"Engiadina – Terra sana"

wp. Heini Hofmann ends his song of praise about St. Moritz and the Engadine with a selection of well-known personalities from literature, art, music and science who expressed their enthusiasm for this "magical landscape of power" (p. 435), including the poets *Nikolaus Lenau*, *Conrad Ferdinand Meyer*, *Rainer Maria Rilke*, *Thomas Mann*, *Hermann Hesse*, the philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche*, the painters *Ferdinand Hodler* and *Giovanni Segantini*, the composers, musicians and conductors *Richard Wagner*, *Richard Strauss*, *Otto Klemperer*, *Wilhelm Kempff*, *Clara Haskil*, *Herbert von Karajan*, *Dinu Lipati* and *Claudio Abbado* and the scientists *Paracelsus*, *Albrecht von Haller*, *Heinrich Zschokke*, *Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen* and *Albert Heim*. Here is a small selection of particularly poetic, sometimes pathetic eulogies of this swathe of land:

"Farben, wie sie nur der reine Himmel der Hochalpen geben kann." (Colours such as only the pure sky of the high Alps can give.) (Heinrich Zschokke)

"Für ernste Wand'rer liess die Urwelt liegen in diesem Tal versteinert ihre Träume." (For serious wanderers, the primeval world left their dreams petrified in this valley.) (Nikolaus Lenau)

„Hier ist es so schön und still und so kühl, dass man die Rätsel des Daseins

vergisst." (Here it is so beautiful and quiet and so cool that one forgets the riddles of existence. (Conrad Ferdinand Meyer)

"An manchen Morgen, während ich minutenlang diese Berge betrachte, noch bevor ich zum Pinsel greife, fühle ich mich gedrängt, mich vor ihnen niederzuwerfen als vor lauter unter dem Himmel aufgerichteten Altären." "Ich will Eure Berge malen, Engadiner, dass die ganze Welt von ihrer Schönheit spricht." (Some mornings, while I gaze for minutes at these mountains, even before I reach for my brush, I feel impelled to prostrate myself before them as before altars erected under the sky. I want to paint your mountains, people of Engadine, so that the whole world will speak of their beauty.) (Giovanni Segantini)

"O Himmel über mir, du Reiner! Du Lichtabgrund! Dich schauend, schaudere ich vor göttlichen Begierden." (O heaven above me, you pure one! Thou abyss of light! Beholding thee, I shudder with divine desires.) (Friedrich Nietzsche)

"Wir sind hier restlos begeistert und schlürfen die Luft der Genssen wie französischen Champagner." (We are completely enthralled here and sip the air of the chamois like French champagne.) (Richard Strauss)

"St. Moritz in the Engadin ..."

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kings and princesses, who had just been real phenomena in the multicultural guest gallery, once again became abstract fairy-tale figures. [...] During the war and in the years that followed, the baths in St. Moritz were only running on a low flame. [...] A great emptiness yawned in the cosmopolitan village." (p. 154)

**Champagne in a glass
instead of medicinal water
in the bath and Winter Olympics**

In the brief heyday of the twenties, actors and activities change: Now people from show business, fashion designers, artists, automobile and aircraft pioneers, business bosses, bankers, war profiteers and the nouveau riche come together. Parties, celebrations and sport are now the order of the day – bathing culture falls by the wayside. The first automobiles appear since the canton admits motor vehicles on its territory. So-called half-track vehicles cause a particular stir: these were stately posh cars with special skis under the steerable front wheels and caterpillar drive at the rear, which made the journey over the Julier Pass much easier and appear now in front of the hotels. The automobile manufacturer *André Citroën* himself had introduced the first prototypes.

This period also saw the first Winter Olympics in 1928 (at that time only with competitions in the Nordic disciplines) with 492 athletes from 25 nations. In 1948 the place was given the honour once again.

The Wall Street crash of October 1929 does not bode well: During the 1930s, bookings are sparse, they cannot stop the decline of tourism, even though personalities with resounding names such as *Coco Chanel*, *Charlie Chaplin*, *Marlene Dietrich* and *Enrico Caruso* stay in St. Moritz. A



White Turf on the frozen lake of St. Moritz. (p. 419)

number of committed spa doctors, in collaboration with circles concerned with the preservation of the healing springs, ensure that St. Moritz also survives as a spa resort.

**After 1945 until today:
Revival as a health resort**

After the Second World War, at first mainly refugees and American soldiers come to the Engadin, but only temporarily to recover from the hardships of the war. There are various attempts to revive St. Moritz as a health resort: One plans and then also realises the renovation of the spa (1952 and 1976), raises awareness at universities (institutes for physical therapy) and increasingly cooperates with them, addresses the Federal Spa Commission and the Swiss Hotel Trust Company. Thanks to own research, one is able to offer tailor-made balneological as well as altitudinal and bioclimatic spa programmes,

which attracts international attention and leads to patients being sent to St. Moritz. The range was expanded (offers for children, the elderly, athletes), since over time other places in Switzerland had followed suit with similar projects, which led to a certain market saturation.

In the following decades, it was still a matter of holding one's own on the market; this requires continuous renovations, maintenance work and new buildings to maintain the bathing facilities, the hotels and the parks. Different concepts have been competing with each other: while some have chosen modern tourism to appeal to a young, sports-loving public, others prefer to continue, maintain and expand the spa tradition with increased cooperation with human medicine. Should luxury-class wellness and fitness temples be operated where people could indulge in health care, anti-ageing and bathing pleasure, or should the spa tradition, which had made the rise of St. Moritz possible in the first place, be continued above all and permanently modernised through cooperation with universities and clinics? The author pays special attention to ownership (land and ground, buildings) and the role of various companies and investors (GmbH, AG, Holding), which played and still play an important role during the eventful history of this place.

The last crisis dates from the beginning of this century, at the end of which the acting spa doctor *Robert Eberhard* and a dedicated physiotherapist named *Britta Ahlden* – both of whom are still in office today – put their heart and soul into their work. St. Moritz seems to be on quite a good path: For the time being, the Heilbad Medical Therapy Centre can be continued together with the Heilbad operation and in 2023/24 the new building of the *Gut Clin-*



Rowing training on Lake Silvaplana. (S. 420)

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“St. Moritz in the Engadin ...”

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ic is to be opened on the Heilbad grounds. It is just a pity that there is no reference or link to the spa or to the importance of St. Moritz Bad as a spa on the St. Moritz Dorf website.

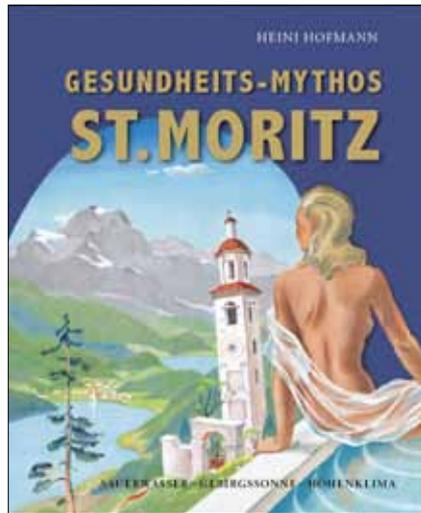
The Engadin high-altitudinal climate: a fountain of health and ideal for high-altitudinal training

In addition to the optimal use of the springs for health cures, the author is very concerned to explain the unique quality and beneficial effect of the climate and to emphasise the resulting opportunities for sports training. Here, too, he speaks of missed opportunities and understands his book as an appeal to do everything possible, at least from now on, to assign the region to its specific purpose in this respect as well.

The characteristics of the climate in the high alpine dry valley can be outlined as follows: It is quite fresh in the mornings and evenings, pleasantly warm over lunchtime, there is less fog and clouds than elsewhere, humidity and rain are less, but the sunlight is stronger; the winds in winter are weak, the summer is pleasant because it is never too hot, there is snow for six months – all in all a health-promoting, gentle stimulating climate.

An interesting phenomenon was first discovered in racehorses: when they were trained in the Engadin before competitions, they performed remarkably well. The crucial thing was that they also performed well in the lowlands, which was proof that they had been trained properly.

Science is taking a closer look at the phenomenon. In humans, the same effect is subsequently observed, because in order to maintain or optimise the oxygen supply at altitude, the body produces more red blood cells. There is an economisation of cardiovascular behaviour, an improvement in blood sugar and blood fat metabolism and a decrease in thrombosis-promoting substances (p. 418) – a kind of “nature doping”, in other words. (p. 422) This fits with the observation that runners who have trained at high altitudes, such as in Kenya or Ethiopia, perform excellently. High-altitude training is particularly effective for athletes with high endurance performance such as runners, cross-country runners, cyclists, swimmers and rowers. Here, too, the author regrets that the opportunity was missed to turn St. Moritz into the real Magglingen (a town in the Bernese Seeland, home of the Federal Office of Sport and the Swiss Federal Institute of Sport Magglingen), exactly the same lapse as with the use of the healing springs: “Just as in II Bernhard’s time they did not want to dress up the emerg-



The front cover picture was designed by Jon Duri Gross based on a poster by Hugo Laubi: *St. Moritz Les Bains*, 1943, for the resort of St. Moritz. The book has the ISBN 978-3-9524789-0-3

ing noble health resort with a sanatorium image, now they feared that only athletes in gym shorts and tracksuits would then run around in the jet-set destination, which might disturb the rest of the clientele.” (p. 420)

In any case, countless people have benefited and will continue to benefit from the Engadin’s beneficial conditions for sporting activity. From bobsleighbing and skeleton, cross-country and alpine skiing to sports on frozen lakes, the White Turf, a horse race (unique in the world), polo and ice sailing, from swimming and surfing to rowing and canoeing, from paragliding and cycling to mountaineering and climbing – the possibilities for practising sports are almost endless and are part of the region’s very big plus.

“Location is mission” – an appeal

The author concludes his work by once again pointing out his main concern: it is simply to avoid that the potential of St. Moritz and the Engadin continues to be underutilised and that Swiss tourism continues to lose market share – a development that is already underway, whereby the location and the region with its unique qualities play an important role. Heliotherapy disappeared into oblivion again, and the spa almost met the same fate. The famous acidulous water spring is “sunk in a dungeon and locked away where no one can see it, whereas emperors and kings used to make pilgrimages to it. It’s like Paris putting its Eiffel Tower in a box and letting it rust in the basement of the Pantheon.” (p. 444) The current discussion about the climate offers a chance, the author concludes, to bring climatic therapy back into the discussion and to give it the place it deserves, after modern appara-

tus medicine has been in the foreground for many years. The advantages of staying and taking a cure in a mountain region with its health-promoting high-altitude climate are obvious and should be given the place they deserve in modern tourism – and above all, of course, in St. Moritz and the Engadin.

The author gets specific when he proposes the creation of an overall concept for a “triptych of spa culture” (p. 449), comprising a spa, sports centre (with indoor pool) and spa hotel. The health spa should stand out as a “medical centre of excellence under medical direction, as opposed to a profane temple of wellness” (ibid.) and ideally “resume the balneological-climatological research initiated by Oscar Bernhard” (ibid.). In this way, St. Moritz could even establish itself as an “opinion leader of alpine climatology” (ibid.).

As a reader – especially one who knows neither tourism science nor climatology, neither medicine nor spa medicine – one misses summaries of the content at the beginning or at the end of the chapters, which make the respective red thread easily recognisable. Nevertheless, one can only wish the author and his work that it will find many readers and realisers.

“Health Myth St. Moritz” is a captivating and moving work that lays out before us a vast wealth of fascinating facts, stories and developments from antiquity to the present day that will not let you go so quickly. The author has spared no effort and no trouble to help the place and the region to the place they deserve with this basic work that meets scientific requirements – with the aim that they will also be preserved, with all their advantages and their beneficial potential, for future generations. In addition, the magnificent illustrations of the work make looking at the book a great experience in itself. ●

¹ Hofmann, Heini. *Gesundheits-Mythos St. Moritz, Sauerwasser – Gebirgssonne – Höhenklima*. (Health myth St. Moritz. Sour water – mountain sun – mountain climate.) 3rd revised edition 2017. St. Moritz 2011 (first edition), 456 pages, Publisher: Dr. Oscar Bernhard-Stiftung, St. Moritz. Publishing House: Gammeter Media AG, St. Moritz. ISBN 978-3-9524789-0-3

² The tapping of the St. Moritz fountain – the oldest wooden building in Europe, <https://www.zeitfragen.ch/en/archives/2016/no-15-12-july-2016/the-tapping-of-the-st-moritz-fountain-the-oldest-wooden-building-in-europe.html>

³ cf. also: Hofmann, Heini. “In the beginning there was a bet. The beginnings of winter sports”, in: *Current Concerns* No. 7, 30 March 2021, <https://www.zeitfragen.ch/en/archives/2021/no-7-30-march-2021/in-the-beginning-there-was-a-bet.html>

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The new Klinik Gut is being built in St. Moritz Bad, <https://grheute.ch/2021/06/23/die-neue-klinik-gut-entsteht-in-st-moritz-bad/>