

Current Concerns

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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

A peace order respecting the right for a secure peace for all

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

In the past two weeks, we have seen new proposals towards a future peace order for Ukraine, its neighbour Russia and for Europe.¹ Indeed, we are faced with the task of formulating cornerstones of a peace order respecting the rights of people and peoples, the equality of states and the right of all people and peoples for a secure peace.

Such a peace order would be something new in the European history of the 20th and 21st centuries. Such a peace order has existed neither after the First nor the Second World War, nor after the end of the first

Cold War. The victors have always dictated – sometimes openly, as after the First and Second World Wars, sometimes with duplicity, as after the first Cold War. These supposed orders of peace – because they were not just – have always carried the seeds of new serious conflicts or even wars.

The focus on

24 February 2022 is missing the point

When considering the question of a future European peace order, focussing only on 24 February 2022, the day of the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine, is missing the point. Wars have long-term, “structur-

al” causes. The search for a future peace order must deal with these long-term causes, with the “structures” that endanger or prevent peace. Therefore, it is indispensable to know history and take it into account in the search for a lasting peace order. The war between Russia and Ukraine cannot be adequately assessed regarding the past 32 years of world history.

The problem of the war profiteers...

The biggest problem in the realisation of a peace order are the forces that must be called war profiteers, even of a Cold

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Blueprint for Peace in Ukraine

Neutrality & federalism as basis for peaceful co-existence at international and domestic levels – International security guarantees under P5+ arrangement

11 March 2022

Following up on the statement of 12 February 2015¹ on Ukraine peace talks in Minsk, the President of the International Progress Organization yesterday issued the following tentative outline of principles for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine:

In the present state of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, peaceful co-existence can only be restored, and sustained, on the basis of respect for *international law* and by way of *political compromise* between both parties. The former includes the non-use of force and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as affirmed by an overwhelming majority of United Nations member states in General Assembly resolution ES-11/1 of 2 March 2022, adopted under the provisions of the “Uniting for peace” resolution of 3 November 1950. The latter relates to previous understandings and agreements reached between the conflicting parties and to the consensus on a European security architecture since the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

The *indivisibility of security in Europe*, solemnly emphasized by the 1975 *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe* (CSCE) and reaffirmed in the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* (1990), should be the guiding principle for the way forward. The *Istanbul Document 1999* (“Charter for European Security”), adopted within the framework of the OSCE (*Organization for Security and*

Co-operation in Europe) and signed by both conflicting parties, similarly confirmed, in Article 8, the “*equal right to security*” of all European states and stipulated that States “will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States.”

Taking into account that Ukraine is a multi-ethnic state, with ethnic Russians forming the largest minority, the following measures appear conducive to a peaceful settlement:

- Full implementation of the *Minsk agreements* according to the “*Package of Measures*” agreed between both parties – in the framework of the “*Trilateral Contact Group*” including the OSCE – on 12 February 2015. This includes in particular the stipulation of Article 11 for constitutional reform in Ukraine to provide for *decentralization* and an *autonomous status* of Russian majority areas in the eastern region (Donetsk and Lugansk). The compromise (“*Südtirol-Paket*”) reached between Austria and Italy on autonomy of the province of South Tyrol, inhabited by a German-speaking majority, could serve as an example.
- A *popular referendum* under the auspices of the United Nations and/or the OSCE in the area of the Crimean peninsula on the final status of the territory.
- Adoption by the Ukrainian Parliament of a constitutional law on the *permanent neutrality of Ukraine* in connection with international guarantees of the coun-

try’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (similar to the arrangements in the cases of Austria, after World War II, and Switzerland, after the Napoleonic wars). As in the cases of Austria and Switzerland, Ukraine’s status should be one of *armed neutrality* so that the country will remain able to defend itself.

- Ukraine’s commitment to a *nuclear free status*, enshrined in the *Budapest Memorandum* of 5 December 1994, should – in tandem with a future commitment to permanent neutrality – be accompanied by credible security guarantees (not mere “*assurances*”), with precise implementation mechanisms, on the part of the international community. In that regard, the *Budapest Memorandum* should be superseded by a new international agreement between Ukraine and the permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5) + Turkey, as regional mediating power, to be ratified by all signatory states.
- *Withdrawal of all foreign troops* from Ukrainian territory must go in tandem with the *total lifting of unilateral sanctions* against Russia.

Hans Köchler,
Vienna, Austria, 10 March 2022

¹ *Statement by the President of the International Progress Organization on Ukraine peace talks in Minsk, 12 February 2015* (http://i-p-o.org/Koehler-UKRAINE-MINSK_Talks-Statement-12Feb2015.jpg)

"A peace order respecting ..."

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War – with material interests and/or power-political goals. An anti-human worldview is usually added to this. These forces stand in the way of a just peace. They foment discord, provoking cold and hot wars and ensuring their prolongation. Not infrequently, they point their finger at others, washing their hands of the matter, according to the principle: "Stop thief!" At their service are media trying to manipulate people, emotionalising, abusing compassion and preventing independent thinking. The last vestige of reputability is sacrificed to unbearable propaganda. What we are currently experiencing in this regard in our countries is unprecedented.²

And it is obvious that the current campaign is touching more than the relationship of European states with Russia. This is clearly visible in countries like Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. By means of a "shock strategy"³ the last bit of independence is to be eradicated. "Old Europe" (as former US Secretary of Defence and neoconservative Donald Rumsfeld disparagingly termed the European states that did not want to take part in the Iraq war in 2003) is to be gone forever. This does not bode well.

... and the role of the media

Stefan Zweig wrote about the role of the media shortly before the beginning of the First World War: "They were to beat the drums of hatred and beat them they did, until the ears of the unprejudiced hummed and their hearts quaked. In Germany, in France, in Italy, in Russia, and in Belgium, they all obediently served the war propaganda and thus the mass de-

lusion and mass hatred, instead of fighting against it." And Alfred Adler wrote in 1919 about the run-up to the First World War: "Newspapers and magazines, politicians and parties seek the favour of the ruling powers." It is no different today – but where will it lead?

War profiteers still exist today. The articles by Eberhard Hamer in *Current Concerns* No. 5 of 1 March 2022 and Michael Hudson in *Current Concerns* No. 6 of 15 March 2022 are about them. A peace order that does not fence in these forces will not last.

After the Second World War many people were wiser

After the end of the Second World War, many people agreed: the rampant capitalism of the pre-war years bore a major responsibility for the war. Therefore, even the Ahlen Programme of the CDU [Christian Democrats] of the British zone of February 1947 stated:

"The capitalist economic system has served neither the state's nor the German people's vital interests. After the terrible political, economic, and social collapse that resulted from criminal power politics, a new order is required, and it must be built from the ground up.

The content and goal of this new social and economic order can no longer be the capitalistic pursuit of power and profit; it must lie in the welfare of our people. A socialist economic order must provide the German people with an economic and social framework that accords with the rights and dignity of the individual, serves the intellectual and material development of our nation, and secures peace both at home and abroad."

These fundamental considerations could not be realised at the time. But today, opening a new public debate including these points of view would open more prospects for Europe than the enemy image of Russia taken to extremes.

Idealism and realism in the view of peace

There are many efforts to formulate foundations for a just peace. The Ecumenical Christian Churches, for example, have been working on such a concept for many years and in 2009 presented a comprehensive draft on the question of just peace.⁴ Such concepts are very valuable and contain important suggestions and guiding principles for all people striving for peace. But they also formulate very high demands, so that it is to be feared that – at least in the foreseeable future – they have little chance of being implemented in practice. However, steps in the right direction are possible.

The goal of just peace also requires a combination of idealism and realism, as Hans Köchler formulated it in his contribution to *Current Concerns* No. 2 of 7 February 2022 ("Power and World Order"). Idealistic and realistic at the same time can be a recourse to the fundamental documents of the United Nations and the *Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE). These documents are still valid legal bases signed by all parties. Prior to 24 February 2022, all parties involved have repeatedly referred to them. This also means that there are agreements in these documents that can still be a basis for negotiations now – if all sides are sincere.

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Otto Schily: Switzerland as a model solution for Ukraine

km. In a commentary for the German daily newspaper "Die Welt" of 10 March 2022, Otto Schily, founding member of the German Green Party, later SPD politician and Federal Minister of the Interior, condemned the invasion of Ukraine by Russian army units, but at the same time wrote that the war had "unfortunately a history of serious political failures". Diplomacy had been "a total failure". German foreign policy had also "failed all round. What has been done on the German side to defuse the Ukraine conflict? It was left to smoulder and was blind to the danger that it could develop into an explosive situation. Instead of looking for a viable solution, the Ukrainian leadership was driven into the illusion that Ukraine could one day become a member of NATO."

Now, however, "ideas for a Ukraine model that is acceptable to all sides and offers a positive perspective for the peaceful development of this region of the world" were the most important

help for Ukraine. The fundamental question here was: "How can Ukraine position itself in a form that corresponds to its own basic demand for a liberal-democratic social order in a sovereign state, but at the same time establishes a peaceful neighbourly relationship with Russia and other neighbouring states?" Otto Schily suggests that Ukraine should orientate itself on the Swiss constitution with "a view to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity": "Switzerland has understood in exemplary form how to develop a free society over centuries, with original democratic, predominantly decentralised decision-making procedures as well as mutual respect for different cultural and ethnic imprints, including the acceptance of multilingualism, which is taken for granted there." He adds: "Due to its situation, Switzerland has committed itself to military neutrality, without thereby abandoning its value-based political princi-

ples." The outlook: "For the European Union and Russia alike, a neutral Ukraine with a Swiss-style cantonal, multilingual state structure would be a good neighbourhood in the future with promising prospects for political and economic cooperation." And: "The Donbass could be granted comprehensive cantonal autonomy."

A future EU membership for Ukraine was ...rather unlikely". But even without EU membership, "the EU, Ukraine and Russia [...] could agree on a free trade area in a broader strategy".

At the end of his commentary, Otto Schily writes that it "certainly requires courage, a willingness to compromise and a renunciation of ultimate demands" to engage in the "peacemaking idea of a 'Swiss constitution'", but for the "closely related and deeply peace-loving peoples of Ukraine and Russia", "the Swiss model could open the way to a promising future".

A proposed solution to the Ukraine war

by Greg Mello*, Los Alamos Study Group, 7 March 2022

One of the most respected and best informed anti-nuclear war groups in the world is the Los Alamos Study Group. Founded at the end of the Cold War in Los Alamos, New Mexico, where the first nuclear bombs were designed and built, the LASG's aim of taking nuclear weapons out of foreign policy. It has won landmark environmental, civil rights and freedom of information lawsuits in the U.S., provided hundreds of top-level briefings, and played a crucial role in preventing the production of the core elements of plutonium warheads. As nuclear war threatens over Ukraine, the LASG has released this remarkable and urgent analysis of the risks and the solutions.

John Pilger

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, what was a regional conflict has become a global hybrid war with ever-greater stakes, not least the risk of nuclear war.

Perhaps the greatest danger lies in the difference of motives between parties, which is also the fundamental cause of this war: Russia seeks security, while the US and its NATO allies have been using Ukraine to deny that security — to “break Russia,” in Henry Kissinger’s 2015 phrase. The US does not want peace, unless it be the peace of a conquered Russia. That is why there is no obvious end to the escalations and counter-escalations. The US and NATO see opportunity in the war they have been trying so hard to provoke.

The tragedy is that few people seem to understand that at the root of the Ukraine crisis is a specific strategy known as the *Wolfowitz Doctrine*, named after *Paul Wolfowitz* who, as undersecretary of defense in the administration of George H. W. Bush, was one of the authors of a 1992

document that laid out a neo-conservative manifesto aimed at ensuring American dominance of world affairs following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“Our first objective,” stated the document, “is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival [to the United States], either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere. ... This is a dominant consideration underlying [a] regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.”

The Wolfowitz Doctrine triggered the post-Cold War use of NATO as an instrument of bloody aggression against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. It declared, in effect, that diplomacy was dead and that American power ruled by violence if necessary. A resurgent Russia led by *Vladimir Putin* was next, and on the horizon, a risen China.

The 2014 Washington-engineered coup in Ukraine that removed an elected leader who sought to reinforce his country’s relationship with neighboring Russia, was a product of the 1992 Doctrine and the extremism it represented. *Victoria Nuland*, a neo-conservative ideologue and President *Barack Obama*’s “point person” in Ukraine, has played the same role in President *Joe Biden*’s State Department.

The 1992 Doctrine is elaborated in an infamous *RAND study* on how to over-extend and, in Kissinger’s words, “break Russia.” This is US foreign policy today: a fact well understood by the Russian leadership who regard their country as effectively under siege by the United States.

The potential of American missiles pointed at Moscow from former Soviet satellite countries, together with NATO troop deployments, is the reality they see. A militarised and virulently anti-Russian Ukraine being used as a tool by the US,



Greg Mello (picture ma)

with an expressed wish for nuclear weapons, on the brink of invading Russian-sympathising provinces on the Russian border — all that was too much for Russia. What, do you suppose, the U.S. would do if such a situation arose in Mexico or Canada?

Since 2014, the *Los Alamos Study Group* has made it part of our business to understand the conflict in Ukraine and its significance for the world. In that year we held public meetings and teach-ins discussing it and since then have tried to examine developments as we could. In the Obama Administration, we took our concerns to the offices of the National Security Council — and were appalled by the lack of knowledge and understanding we found there.

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have taken positions on this conflict. In our view, most (not all) of their statements are superficial, and/or omit the causes of the invasion as Russia understands them, or are in lock-step with US and NATO propaganda.

The Study Group’s basic conclusions

- Understanding why Russia invaded is not condoning the invasion. Russia’s view is that of existential dangers to its very existence. The sincerity of that view is evident in the grave risks Russia is taking in this invasion which, again, we need neither justify nor condemn. Russia’s view has to be respected, whether or not we agree with it. Failure by the US and NATO over the course of decades to respect Russia’s position, and to provide a humane and reasonable provision for Russia’s security needs is the main if not the only material cause of the present conflict.
- Telling Russia what to do is the problem, not the solution. We in NATO countries and in the West more broadly, and in peace-oriented groups, should

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But it is also possible that Russia, after the experiences of the past 32 years, will freeze its relations with the West and the rest of Europe for the foreseeable future. Then those who want to lower a new Iron Curtain right through the middle of Europe, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea², can triumph — the Europe to the west of the new Iron Curtain will suffer the most. •

¹ cf. the articles by *Hans Köchler* and *Greg Mello* in this edition as well as the text by *Otto Schily* on pp. 1-4

² cf. the articles by *Patrick Lawrence* and *Eliane Perret* in this edition

³ cf. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine – The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 2008

⁴ *Statement on the Way of Just Peace*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-way-of-just-peace>

⁵ The neo-conservative Western protagonists of a new Iron Curtain had been quite outspoken in April 2000. *Willy Wimmer*, then Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and participant in a US conference one year after the start of the NATO war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, wrote an alarming letter to the then Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the time and summarised the essentials again in an article for *Current Concerns* no. 4 of 2 March 2020: “The American conference in Bratislava in the Slovak Republic in April 2000 made the American goal for Europe clear: Iron Curtain between the Baltic and the Black Sea, Russia can stay where it wants and break up or be broken up into smaller states.”

The Casualties of Empire

by Patrick Lawrence



(picture ma)

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the "International Herald Tribune", is a columnist, essayist, author and lecturer. His most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century*. Follow him on Twitter @thefloutist. His web site is Patrick Lawrence. Support his work via his Patreon site.

Diabolic methods of propaganda and perception management are at work now that have no precedent. This is war waged in a new way – against domestic populations as well as those declared as enemies.

The news reports come in daily from Moscow, Kiev and the Western capitals: how many dead since Russia began its intervention in Ukraine on 24 February how many injured, how many hungry or cold, how many displaced. We do not know the true count of casualties and the extent of the suffering and ought not pretend we do: This is the reality of war, each side having its version of unfolding events.

My inclination is to add the deaths in Ukraine these past two weeks to the 14,000 dead and the 1.5 million displaced since 2014, when the regime in Kiev began shelling its own citizens in the eastern provinces – this because the people of Donetsk and Lugansk rejected the US –

NATO enlargement – The flame of war

The first round of enlargement took place in 1999 and brought in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The second occurred in 2004; it included Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Moscow complained bitterly from the start. During NATO's 1995 bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs, for example, Russian President *Boris Yeltsin* said, "This is the first sign of what could happen when NATO comes right up to the Russian Federation's borders [...]. The flame of war could burst out across the whole of Europe."

From: John J. Mearsheimer "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault". In: Foreign Affairs, September/October 2014

cultivated coup that deposed their elected president. This simple math gives us a bet-
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- confine our imperatives and judgments to what we ourselves can do, in our own countries and in relation to NATO. It is imperative to bring peace to Ukraine as best we can and to not inflame or broaden this conflict further. Our words can kill, or heal.
- An end to the invasion and war in Ukraine can only be guaranteed if Russia's security is itself guaranteed. Security is largely indivisible. Security for one state requires security for others. This is a core principle of European security which Russia rightly insists upon. The US should honor that. The fundamental cause of the current conflict is the desire of the US to weaken or "break" Russia.
- Human rights, including the right of political self-determination, are pillars of Western values and institutions. The government of Ukraine has denied human rights and political self-determination to the peoples of the Donbass. Some 13,000 people have died during the eight years since the 2014 coup, according to the United Nations. The Ukrainian government has overtly genocidal policies toward Russian minorities. Since the 2014 US sponsored coup, the US and its European allies have used Ukraine to undermine Russian security.
- Nazi and neo-Nazi formations and ideologies in Ukraine present a clear danger to human rights and human life everywhere.
- Peace and nuclear disarmament organisations should be alarmed by NGO

support for US efforts to demonise and destabilise Russia.

What the Study Group wants

1. We want a negotiated peace at the earliest possible time. In our own countries, every effort should be made to achieve this. We do not see those efforts.
2. We want an end to further escalation and broadening of the conflict, which threatens the well-being and security of the whole world. None of our countries should be introducing or transporting arms or conducting military activities or providing training or support of any kind in Ukraine. Peace groups should oppose all such escalation. "Helping Ukraine" with military "aid" is just a way of getting more people killed in the service of long-term US aims to destroy the Russia.
3. Weapons should not be provided to civilian individuals, gangs, criminals, children, and "stay-behind," guerrilla, or Volkssturmgroups. This only inflicts needless suffering and damages prospects for peace now and in the long run. There is no honor or legitimacy in such tactics in the present circumstances.
4. All economic sanctions – which hurt ordinary citizens more than elites – should be lifted. Economic sanctions are weapons of mass destruction, with global effects.
5. We want measured, just, de jure de-nazification of the Ukrainian government and laws.
6. The independence of the Donbass region within pre-conflict administrative

boundaries should be accepted by all peace organisations and states.

7. The democratic decision of Crimea to rejoin Russia should be accepted by all peace organisations and states.
8. Peace groups should support a neutral, demilitarised (i.e. without heavy weapons or force projection capability) Ukraine, which is similar if not identical to the outcome sought by Russia.
9. Civilian areas must not be used as military staging or artillery bases. This is illegal, in fact. There is evidence that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are engaging in this odious practice.
10. Ukraine should not be allowed to join NATO. That was a capital demand of Russia and one that we should all support.
11. NATO should disband. The largest military alliance in the world, NATO consumes more resources than all the world's militaries combined, and has conducted multiple wars of aggression, in violation of the UN Charter and *Nuremberg principles*. NATO is also a nuclear weapons alliance.
12. The US and the five states that host US nuclear weapons should, jointly or individually, end nuclear hosting arrangements, as well as end the training of non-US pilots in nuclear weapons use and the prospective use of non-US dual-capable aircraft for nuclear missions.
13. Clearly, all of the above is urgent if the killing is to end, and there is to be a lasting peace in Europe. •

Source: <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/03/07/a-proposed-solution-to-the-ukraine-war/> of 7 March 2022

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ter idea of how many Ukrainians are worthy of our mourning.

As we mourn, it is time to consider the wider consequences of this conflict, for Ukrainians are not alone among its victims. Who else has suffered? What else has been damaged? This war is of a kind humanity has never before known. What are its costs?

Among paying-attention people it is increasingly plain that Washington's intent in provoking Moscow's intervention is, and probably has been from the first, to instigate a long-running conflict that bogs down Russian forces and leaves Ukrainians to wage an insurgency that cannot possibly succeed.

Is there another way to explain the many billions of dollars' worth of weapons and materiel the US and its European allies now pour into Ukraine? If the Ukrainians cannot win – a universally acknowledged reality – what is the purpose here?

Whether this strategy goes as Washington wants, or if Russian forces get their work done and withdraw to avoid a classic quagmire, remains to be seen. But as *Dave DeCamp* noted in *Antiwar.com* last Friday, there is no sign whatsoever that the *Biden* administration plans any further diplomatic contacts with the Kremlin.

The implication here should be evident. The US strategy effectively requires the destruction of Ukraine in the service of America's imperial ambitions. If this thought seems extreme, brief reference to the fates of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria will provide all the compelling context one may need.

Brzezinski's Plan in 1979

To an extent I find surprising given its calamitous consequences, *Zbigniew Brzezinski's* plan in 1979 to arm the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets remains the more or less unaltered template.

President *Jimmy Carter's* national security adviser saw nothing wrong with getting into bed with what became *Al-Qaeda*. Now it is the Nazis militias that infest Ukraine's National Guard that the US arms and trains.

If the record is anything to go by, this conflict could well destroy what remains of Ukraine as a nation. In the worst outcome, little will remain of its social fabric, its public spaces, its roads, bridges, schools, municipal institutions. This destruction has already begun.

Here is what I do not want Americans to miss: We are destroying ourselves and what hope we may have to restore ourselves to decency as we watch the regime governing us destroy another nation in our name. This destruction, too, has already begun.

"From Tuscany: Bridges of Peace instead of Flights of War"

ef. On 19 March, many people in Pisa and Rome protested against military support for Ukraine and the transport of weapons from *G. Galilei* airport in Pisa, Italy. Airport workers in Pisa had refused to load planes bound for Poland with goods disguised as "humanitarian aid" last week when they discovered that the transport was in fact arms and ammunition with the final destination Ukraine! Dockers from the nearby port of Livorno joined the protest.

The aircraft in question was a B-737 cargo plane owned by an airline authorised by NATO to transport war material. This was reported by the General *Paolo Figliuolo* of the *Comando Operativo di*

Vertice Interforze, COVI (Joint Operations Command, Italy) in the national press; he is dealing with the problem of arms trafficking. In response, the Italian trade union *Unione Sindacale di Base* (USB) called for a protest under the slogan "From Tuscany: Bridges of Peace instead of Flights of War."

"We strongly condemn this blatant deception, which cynically uses the guise of 'humanitarian aid' to further fuel the war in Ukraine."

The chairman of Tuscany airports, *Mario Carrai*, has since assured that there will be no more arms shipments through Pisa airport.

Source: <https://cooptv.wordpress.com>

Many people of many different ages have remarked in recent days that they cannot recall in their lifetimes a more pervasive, suffocating barrage of propaganda than what has engulfed us since the months that preceded Russia's intervention. In my case it has come to supersede the worst of what I remember from the Cold War decades.

"Cognitive Warfare"

In January 2021, NATO published the final draft of a lengthy study it called "Cognitive Warfare". Its intent is to explore the potential for manipulating minds – those of others, our own – beyond anything heretofore even attempted. "The brain will be the battlefield of the 21st century," the document asserts. "Humans are the contested domain. Cognitive warfare's objective is to make everyone a weapon."

In a subsection headed "The vulnerabilities of the human brain," the report has this to say:

"In particular, the brain:

is unable to distinct [sic] whether information is right or wrong;

is led to believe statements or messages it has already heard as true, even though these may be false;

accepts statements as true, if backed by evidence, with no regards to [sic] the authenticity of that evidence."

And this, which I find especially fiendish:

"At the political and strategic level, it would be wrong to underestimate the impact of emotions.... Emotions – hope, fear, humiliation – shape the world and international relations with the echo-chamber effect of social media."

No, we're not in Kansas anymore. Cognitive Warfare is a window onto diabolic methods of propaganda and perception management that have no precedent. This is war waged in a new way – against domestic populations as well as those declared as enemies.

And we have just had a taste of what it will be like as these techniques, well-grounded in cutting-edge science, are elaborated. Yet more disturbing to me than the cold prose of the report is the astonishing extent to which it proves out. Cognitive warfare, whether or not the NATO report is now the propagandists' handbook, works, and it is working now on most Americans.

This is what I mean when I say we, too, are the victims of this war.

Last week the conductor of the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, *Valery Gergiev*, was sacked for refusing to condemn *Vladimir Putin*. The same thing then happened to *Anna Netrebko*. The *Metropolitan Opera* in New York fired its star soprano for the same reason: She preferred to say nothing about the Russian president.

There is no bottom to this. Last Friday *Lindsey Graham*, the South Carolina Senator, openly called for Putin's assassination. *Michael McFaul*, briefly *Barack Obama's* ambassador to Russia and the king of nitwittery, asserts that all Russians who don't openly protest Russia's intervention in Ukraine are to be punished for it. In the idiotic file, the *International Federation of Felines* has barred imports of Russian cats.

Here is the entry on this list of preposterous assertions that got me out of my chair in a rage last Thursday: The *International Paralympic Committee* banned Russian and Belarusian athletes – why the Belarusians, for heaven's sake? – from the winter Paralympics that commenced the following day in Beijing. We're now down to persecuting people whose hearts and souls are abler than their limbs?

The committee made it plain it acted in response to international pressure. I wonder whose that might be.

What Has Become of Us

Look at what has become of us. Most Americans seem to approve of these

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When public opinion is steered by war propaganda

by Eliane Perret

“No earthly justification excuses the capitulation of reason to public opinion.” This is how *Romain Rolland* begins his novel *Clérambault*¹, in which he makes us empathise with the enthusiasm for war and the confusion in people’s minds at the beginning of the First World War. This war left behind millions of dead, destroyed cit-

ies and regions and people who, in great grief and hopelessness, had to summon up their last courage to turn again to the tasks of life and rebuild their existence and their country. First published in 1920, Romain Rolland’s work is up to this day an impressive literary document that is recommended reading for every contemporary.

“When war is declared, truth is the first casualty”

Even then, the question arose as to how one can remain lucid in times of war despite the media propaganda barrage and avoid collective hysteria. This question arises again today. For alert contemporaries, it is important to become aware of the mechanisms of concealment, deception and deliberate lies used by those whom one should trust, especially in such difficult times. As is so often the case, it is worth reflecting on previous insights and experiences. In 1928, *Arthur Ponsonby* (see box), an English politician, published the book “Falsehood in Wartime”², in which he present-

Arthur Ponsonby (1871–1946)

Lord *Arthur Ponsonby* was a British civil servant, politician and writer. He came from a distinguished English family. His father Sir *Henry* was Queen *Victoria*’s private secretary, he himself Queen *Victoria*’s page. After his studies, he entered the diplomatic service and subsequently took on various political posts.

He was one of those parliamentarians who opposed Britain’s entry into the First World War. Ponsonby was appointed to the House of Lords in 1931 and became Speaker of the House. He continued his commitment against the war until 1939, in the hope that his country could prevent another great war.

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things, or at least are unstirred to object. We have lost all sense of decency, of ordinary morality, of proportion. Can anyone listen to the din of the past couple of weeks without wondering if we have made of ourselves a nation of grotesques?

It is common to observe that in war the enemy is always dehumanised. We are now face to face with another reality: Those who dehumanise others dehumanise themselves more profoundly.

“Rational argument can be conducted with some prospect of success only so long as the emotionality of a given situation does not exceed a certain critical degree. If the affective temperature rises above this level, the possibility of reason’s having any effect ceases and its place is taken by slogans and chimerical wish fantasies. That is to say, a sort of collective possession results which rapidly develops into a psychic epidemic.”

That is a snippet from a book by *C. G. Jung*, *The Undiscovered Self*, that a friend just sent. When our feelings get the better of us, we can no longer think or talk usefully to one another: This is the Swiss psychoanalyst’s point in simple terms.

The other day *PBS Newshour* ran an interview with one *Artem Semenukhin*, in which the small-town mayor was lionised for standing up to Russian soldiers. In the background, as the ever-alert *Alan MacLeod* points out, was a portrait of *Stepan Bandera*, the savage Russophobe, anti-Semite, and leader of Ukrainian Nazis.

What did *PBS* do about this careless oversight? It blurred the *Bandera* portrait and broadcast the interview with its Ukrainian hero. American journalism at its zenith.

It strikes me as the perfect metaphor for what has happened to our reasoning

faculties — or, better put, what we have allowed to be done to them. Factual realities that lie beyond dispute, if inconvenient, are blurred out of the movie we think we’re watching.

It is the same with any genuine understanding of the Russian intervention. I have four words for what we need to read this crisis: history, chronology, context, and responsibility. Since none of these serves our cognitive warriors’ purpose, we are invited to blot them out. And once again: With dreadful fidelity to those actively manipulating our perceptions, we do so.

Context, the worst of us assert, is some idea those awful Russians came up with. We take no interest whatsoever in how the world may look from anyone else’s perspective. Who in hell, please tell me, thinks this is a good way to live?

I have rendered a pencil-sketch of a nation falling apart as it takes another one apart. A nation this far into one of Jung’s “collective possessions” cannot possibly do well. As is always the case (a thought that came to me as I studied the Japanese nationalists of the 1930s), the victimisers are victims, too.

If we are to find our way out of this funhouse, we will have to do one thing before any other: We will have to learn to speak in a clear, new language so that we can name things as they are instead of blurring them as *PBS* did that *Bandera* portrait.

And we must start with one word. Unless we can learn to call America an empire, we will stumble in the funhouse dark until it becomes so unfun we can no longer bear our own self-deceptions.

I see in here a virtue in this large, complicated moment. Between Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, which I count regrettable but necessary, and the joint statement

Putin made with Chinese President *Xi Jinping* on 4 February, we are all called upon either to recognise the United States for what it has become, an empire violently defending itself against history itself, or accept our fate among the victims of this empire.

Clarity: It is always a fine thing, whatever the difficulties it brings. •

Source: <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/03/08/patrick-lawrence-the-casualties-of-empire/> of 8 March 2022

Call for a campaign “Humanity against NATO”

A worldwide campaign, “Humanity against NATO” has been called for by intellectuals, well-known persons such as politicians from many Latin American countries as well as from Europe and the US.

The campaign calls for the maintenance of the *Minsk Agreement*, in order to reach a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict between NATO and Russia and expresses its solidarity with the families who have lost members in the fighting. It criticises “NATO’s pushy expansionism and the expansion of its military bases world-wide”. NATO has become “a threat to life, the sovereignty of the people and world peace”.

In addition, the employment of mercenaries and the supply of war material to the conflicting parties is criticised. This contributes to escalation and not towards the de-escalation of the current conflict.

The campaign also calls for the immediate end to all the unilateral coercive measures “which violate the international legal order and indiscriminately affect the population and undermine human rights”.

Source: @NomoreOtan

"When public opinion ..."

continued from page 6

ed his research on the methods of war propaganda in the First World War. He concluded that in war, truth reaches an inglorious low, which he summed up in the phrase: "When war is declared, truth is the first casualty". Ponsonby assumed that in times of peace it is helpful to find out what propaganda methods are used to try to mislead people to justify one's own actions. So too in war, because the "deception of whole peoples is not a matter to be taken lightly", he writes. In calm retrospect, the facts could be examined, and the truth brought to light, at least in retrospect. Often, however, this is precisely what is hindered by the warring parties, because the lies have had the desired effect in the meantime and uncovering them is undesirable. Many of the old war lies therefore survived for years.

Analogue: Letter opener, Decipherer, Forger

So even then, after the First World War, it was recognised that psychological factors are just as significant for warfare as military ones. People must be guided into going along with war plans. They are not so easily blinded and seduced, because it goes against their nature to fight and kill each other. That is why today it is a matter of course for every war ministry to have a department for war propaganda – admittedly with a somewhat more innocuous name.

Today the means of propaganda are very sophisticated. Ponsonby still reported "eavesdroppers, letter openers, decipherers, telephone tappers, spies, a wiretapping department, a forgery department, a criminal investigation department, a propaganda department, an intelligence department, a censorship department, a ministry of information, a press office" with which public opinion and mood were controlled.

Digital: Hard to check – uncanny speed

Today, digital media play a central role in propaganda. Specialists use a huge toolbox with which they can falsify, censor or switch messages so that a certain narrative (as they say today) prevails through constant repetition and gains a monopoly on opinion. The emotional charge of the content, with which people's sympathy is captured, has also become even more important. A brief moment of reflection is hardly possible anymore, because the lies are difficult to verify, yet are spread with uncanny speed.

In addition, the current concentration of media providers on a few globally networked agencies and corporations prevents a broad spectrum of opinions and does not do justice to the circumstances of the individual countries. Perhaps some of you still remember the Swiss radio station Beromünster, which was appreciated during and long after the Second World War for its neutral reporting with its own local correspondents. Today, correspondents from other, even warring (sic!) countries are often called in, which is problematic simply because of Switzerland's neutrality.

Developing a sensorium

That is why it is part of people's basic civic education today to know what methods are used to form opinions and what propaganda techniques they are exposed to. It would be a project for the experienced older generation to learn together with the adolescents how to recognise, for example, whether pictures and documents are manipulated or whether a *YouTube* or *TikTok* film depicts reality or falsifies it (these would, by the way, be meaningful contents of media lessons that would lead to real media competence). When such knowledgeable people then discover how they can be deceived in sophisticated and carefully orchestrated ways, they will be more vigilant and develop a sensorium for statements and pronouncements that are destined to be accepted as truth.

Basic principles of war propaganda

The methods of war propaganda described by *Arthur Ponsonby* were systematised and updated by the Belgian historian *Anne Morelli* as follows.¹ The reporting is guided by the following:

Rule 1: We don't want war; we are only defending ourselves.

Rule 2: Our adversary is solely responsible for this war.

Rule 3: Our adversary's leader is inherently evil and resembles the devil.

Rule 4: We are defending a noble cause, not our particular interests.

Rule 5: The enemy is purposefully committing atrocities; if we are making mistakes this happens without intention.

Rule 6: The enemy makes use of illegal weapons.

Rule 7: We suffer few losses, the enemy's losses are considerable.

Rule 8: Recognised intellectuals and artists support our cause.

Rule 9: Our cause is sacred.

Rule 10: Whoever casts doubt on our propaganda helps the enemy and is a traitor.

¹ *Morelli, Anne (2021). "Die Prinzipien der Kriegspropaganda." (The principles of war propaganda.) Verlag zu Klampen, Springe*

Additionally ...

A government that engages in controlling the opinion of its population through propaganda should be aware that it is disregarding the right to freedom of opinion and is gambling away the trust of the people. If it is a matter of justifying acts of war, this is even more serious. In doing so, it is failing in the task it has been given. ●

The following books accompanied me in my writing:

- ¹ Rolland, Romain. *Clérambault*. Reinbek near Hamburg
- ² Ponsonby, Arthur (1988). *Falsehood in Wartime*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1929. (Excerpts in: <https://archive.org/details/16FalsehoodInWartime>)

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Ukraine, it was all written in the RAND Corp. plan

by Manlio Dinucci



Manlio Dinucci
(picture ma)

cc. Manlio Dinucci analyses here a publication by a US think tank from April 2019. Russia will have read it – and certainly not adhered to it. It knows the strategy from years of experience – and has obviously changed its orientation. But the study also makes it clear that the US strategists don't give a damn about the well-being of the Ukrainians – they are pawns on the chessboard of American geopolitics. They are still needed – they are paying the bill for this madness, just like the rest of Europe, which so thoughtlessly allows itself to be harnessed to the US-NATO cart.

The United States Strategic Plan against Russia was drafted three years ago by the RAND Corporation (*il manifesto*, 21 May 2019 “Rand Corp: How to overthrow Russia”). Washington headquartered Rand Corporation is “a global research organisation that develops solutions to political challenges”: it has an army of 1,800 researchers, and other recruited specialists from 50 countries speaking 75 languages, they are distributed in offices and other locations in North America, Europe, Australia, and the Persian Gulf. Rand's US staff lives and works in over 25 countries.

The RAND Corporation, which defines itself as a “non-profit and a-partisan organisation”, is funded by the Pentagon, US Army and Air Force, National Security Agencies (CIA and others), Agencies of other countries, and powerful non-governmental organisations.

RAND Corp. boasts of having helped develop the strategy that allowed the United States to emerge victorious from the Cold War forcing the Soviet Union to consume its resources in a grueling military confrontation. The new plan designed in 2019 was inspired by this model: “Overextending and Unbalancing Russia”, which is forcing the opponent to extend excessively to unbalance, and take it down. These are the main lines of attack outlined in RAND's plan, on which the United States has actually moved in recent years.

First of all – the plan established – Russia must be attacked on the most vulnerable side, that of its economy heavily dependent on gas and oil export: for this purpose, trade and financial sanctions must be used, and at the same time, it must ensure that Europe decreases Russian natural gas import by replacing it with US liquefied natural gas.

In the ideological and informational field, it is necessary to encourage internal protests, and at the same time undermine the image of Russia on the outside.

In the military field, efforts must be made to ensure that the European NATO countries increase their forces in an anti-Russia function. The US may have a high probability of success and high benefits with moderate risks by investing more in strategic bombers, and long-range attack missiles directed against Russia. Deploying in Europe new intermediate-range nuclear missiles aimed at Russia gives them a high probability of success, but also involves high risks. Calibrating each option to obtain the desired effect – RAND concluded – Russia will end up paying the highest price in comparison with the US, but the US and its allies will have to invest large resources subtracting them from other purposes.

As part of this strategy – the RAND Corporation plan envisaged in 2019 – “providing lethal aid to Ukraine would exploit Russia's greatest external vulnerability, but any increase in weapons and military advice provided by the US to Ukraine should be carefully calibrated to increase the costs for Russia without provoking a much wider conflict in which due to its proximity Russia would have significant advantages”.

It is precisely here – in what the Rand Corporation called “Russia's greatest external vulnerability”, exploitable by arming Ukraine in a “calibrated way to increase costs for Russia – without provoking a much wider conflict” – that the break has occurred. Squeezed in the political, economic, and military grip that the US and NATO were increasingly tightening, ignoring the repeated warnings and proposals for negotiations by Moscow, Russia reacted with its military operation that destroyed in Ukraine over 2,000 military structures built and controlled not by Kyiv rulers but by US-NATO commands.

The article that reported the RAND Corporation's plan three years ago ended with these words: “The plan envisaged options are in reality only variants of this war strategy, the price of which in terms of sacrifices and risks is paid by all of us”. We European people are paying for it now, and we will pay more and more dear if we continue to be expendable pawns in the US-NATO strategy.

* * *

On 8 March 2022, after having briefly published it online (<https://ilmanifesto.it/ucraina-era-tutto-scritto-nel-piano...>) the Manifesto made this article disappear overnight also from the print edition since I had refused to comply with the directive of the Ministry of Truth and asked to open a debate on the Ukrainian crisis. Thus, my long collaboration with this newspaper, in which I have published my column *The Art of War* for over ten years, ends.

Manlio Dinucci, Pisa, 10 March 2022

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The sanctions are directed also against Germany

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



Eberhard Hamer
(picture ma)

The NATO concept is still: “keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down!”

This principle also prevails in the sanctions against Russia. The USA is consistently acting according to its own advantage:

- It can only sell its fracking oil and gas if Europe no longer has the chance to get the cheaper Russian gas. For years it has therefore been operating against the *Nord Stream 2* pipeline, and US President *Biden* announced the economic end of this during German chancellor *Scholz*' last visit. Since then, the price of gas in Europe has doubled, and if American fracked gas can be sold, Europe will even be dependent on American supplies to cover its energy gap. The boycott of Russian gas thus serves primarily to make a market for the too expensive American gas.
- There is a reason why the USA is cutting off Russian gas delivery to Europe while remaining the second largest buyer of oil/gas from Russia, namely: “to raise the rival's costs.”

Nevertheless, it remains inexplicable why German politicians like *Baerbock*, *Röttgen* and the like are so fanatically fighting Germany's cheap gas purchases from Russia and are thus deliberately harming their own voters. The Atlantic-financed press is even jubilant about the German chancellor stopping *Nord Stream 2*, as if this were a German victory over Russia; in fact, we have not so much shot Russia in the foot as ourselves. It is no other than us who is losing cheap gas; it is our industry and our households.

The next few months will show the ensuing consequences: cheap energy is the basis of international competitiveness. We already have the highest wages and social costs in the world. If we now also have the highest energy prices, this will dramatically weaken Germany as a production location; first, energy-intensive industry will be ousted, then heating and electricity costs of every medium-sized company and every single household will be hit – in other words, prosperity will be reduced comprehensively.

A policy that not only allows this to happen, but even looks happily forward to it happening, is not a policy in the German interest, and harms us more than it helps.

- The next intended USA sanction against Russia concerns the world clearing system (SWIFT), which Russia is no longer to use, so that Russia may be “sidelined from international payments”.

This measure, too, will harm Germany more than the USA, because we have stronger financial and economic ties with Russia than the USA and will be existentially dependent on trade with Russia in the long term. Relying solely on the bankrupt and imploding world power USA as an economic partner is becoming increasingly dangerous. The Russian open market, which is also closer to us, could be much more conducive to further prosperity in Europe than a one-sided Atlantic orientation. But the motto is: “to keep the Russians out.” It would be dangerous for the USA if cooperation with Russia were to develop in the centre of Europe. This would endanger the sustaining American delusion of world power.

The fact that the USA wants to expel Russia from the SWIFT settlement system could lead to a Pyrrhic victory, be-

cause China has long since been developing a competing settlement system¹ and will be happy to accept the Russians into it. Then all other countries that trade with Russia and China will no longer have to settle via SWIFT but be able to use the Russian² and Chinese system, the dollar will lose its monopoly position and the Americans will lose the opportunity to continue to live lavishly in the dollar empire by printing dollars at the expense of the rest of the world. In this respect, these financial sanctions could become a turning point for the US economic and dollar domination of the world.

- The seizure of Russian assets in the world through US sanctions could also boomerang for the USA. It has a chronic trade deficit (about 650 billion dollars), which is difficult to cover with financial inflows. And the requirement for financial inflows from the world into the dollar and the USA is that people believe their money is safer in the USA than in other countries. Now the world's investors find that their money and assets in the USA and elsewhere in the world (like those of Germany after 1945) are suddenly blocked, confiscated or even gone, that in the dollar empire assets are apparently just as insecure as in other states or even more so, and that in the USA, politics count more than property rights. At the moment, only the Russians are affected, but perhaps soon also the Chinese and all those who want to continue trading with them? And this could soon also affect many Germans who have “secured” their assets wholly or partially in the USA. German assets all over the world have already been confiscated by the USA once after 1945. Why should a USA in acute financial distress not reach for foreign assets again, in order to survive? Apparently, foreign assets are now more at risk in the USA than elsewhere. The Russian oligarchs are now only the first to suffer this.

If one evaluates the sanctions, they are superficially harmful to Russia (“keep the Russians out”).

But they also strengthen the position of the USA in Europe (“keep the Americans in”), who can in this way boost its world energy monopoly (Europe buys expensive US fracked gas instead of cheap Russian energy) and shut down payment transactions between Europe and Russia (“keep the Germans down”).

The US empire is decisively strengthened – at least in Europe – by the Ukraine crisis: the US NATO demands and gets the backing

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Western sanctions policy finds little support worldwide

“The efforts of the transatlantic powers to isolate Russia as much as possible worldwide are meeting with broad resistance. India refuses the demand to join the sanctions policy, is working on an alternative payment system not dependent on SWIFT and the US dollar, and is planning to expand its oil imports from Russia. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are resisting the demand to greatly expand their oil production to enable a global oil embargo against Russia; British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson* returned home empty-handed yesterday after negotiations

on the Arabian Peninsula. Several South American states, including Argentina, Brazil and Chile, are pressuring Russia to at least allow Russian fertiliser exports; otherwise, they say, the global food supply is in danger. The states of Latin America and Africa are staying away from the sanctions policy, as are Turkey, almost all the states of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and China. The popular statement in the West that Russia is ‘isolated in the world’ is not true.”

<https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/8874> of 18 March 2022

Anyone who undermines neutrality, attacks the whole Swiss model of the state

To the delight of Washington and Brussels

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

With its total takeover of the EU economic sanctions against Russia, the Federal Council has disregarded the Swiss maxim of neutrality. In doing so, it may have appeased the EU top brass and US finance capital and pleased the Swiss EU turbos, but it has done serious damage to Switzerland's reputation. It is a pity that the Federal Council is not showing the same strength today as it did in May 2021 when it broke off negotiations with Brussels on the framework agreement. The automatic adoption of foreign sanctions does not fit the Swiss model either. Now the NATO and EU turbos at home and abroad see their chance and are trying to set in motion further softening of the Swiss model.

"The caesura of the Ukraine war is changing the European security architecture. At the moment, everything is in flux, and we have to adapt in this flux – with our strong principles, including neutrality." (President of the Confederation Ignazio Cassis in SRF News of 10 March 2022). And we citizens are supposed to watch as our "servants of the people" let neutrality – and a lot more: "everything is in flux!" – go down the drain?

Strange conception of neutrality of the Federal Council: Which master's voice?

On 3 March, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) reissued its brochure "Switzerland's Neutrality".¹ For ex-

"The sanctions are directed ..."
continued from page 9

of all European vassals, is revived as an organisation that has actually long been superfluous (*Macron*: "brain dead"), which means about 200 billion in sales for the American arms industry. And the European satellites have once again complied with the political directives from the USA for "joint punitive measures", whether voluntarily (*Johnson*) or under pressure (*Scholz*), although as a result, e.g., Germany suffers major economic disadvantages itself.

The author has shown in a study that during the last world war, South Africa became an industrialised country because it was largely cut off from its traditional economic relations. Therefore, the more the USA drives Russia and China out of the dollar empire, the stronger their self-sufficiency and own economic strength will become. The sanctions against Russia are therefore likely to become only a short-term and short-sighted success for

EEA accession for Switzerland?

mw. The fact that the EU sanctions against Russia were so easily adopted gives the Swiss EU turbos a forceful support on other issues as well. In June 2021, for example, the Green Liberal parliamentary group submitted a postulate to the National Council with the following wording: "The Federal Council is instructed to examine the option of Swiss membership in the European Economic Area (EEA) and to report on it."

On 8 March, the National Council adopted this postulate with 112 votes in favour (given unanimously by the Social Democrats, Greens and Green Liberals plus partly by the Free Democrats and the Centre faction) against 69 nays and 6 abstentions (of the SVP and the other part of the Free Democrats and Centre faction).

Accession to the EEA was rejected by the people and the cantons on 6 December 1992. Even though today we are only dealing with a report by the Federal Council and there is no parliamentary decision with a subsequent referendum pending, it still provides ample food for thought that so many National Councillors are considering an EEA accession, which would integrate Switzerland into Brussels legislation and jurisdiction in much the same way as the recently failed Framework Agreement.

The Green Liberal *Roland Fischer* lamented the breakdown of the Federal Council's negotiations on the Framework Agreement and called for Switzerland's accession to the EEA so that there might be "a constructive participation in the European integration project, a project that not only involves economic integration but is also a peace and democracy project". If we want peace and democracy, had we not better stick to the Swiss model and tell our fellow human beings in other countries about it – that is if they are willing to listen?

As a counter-speaker, National Councillor *Roger Köppel* (Swiss People's Party, ZH), demanded that Switzerland "finally give the European Union an unmistakable message: We want excellent relations, we want the best economic exchange possible, but we are not prepared to submit to the institutions of the European Union. We cannot do it, it would be against our constitution. We are not responsible for this fact; the Swiss sovereign is ultimately responsible. We must have the strength to (tell?) the European Union the plain truth."

Source: Postulate 21.3678 Fischer Roland. "Integration of Switzerland into the European single market by joining the EEA". Minutes of the National Council debate of 8 March 2022

ample, on the subject of "Good Offices" it says: "Impartial Switzerland can build

the USA, but lead to long-term damage for Europe ("raise the rival's costs").

The two world wars should have taught us Germans that peace and prosperity will only stay secure in our country if we have no enemies and, above all, if we do not wantonly make enemies. Germany's central position in Europe demands balance and candour on all sides. If we allow ourselves to be dragged into foreign power struggles for the sake of insecure, corrupt systems (Ukraine) and to be driven to imposing sanctions is in any case not in Germany's interest, but we will only self-damagingly follow foreign directives ("keep the Russians out and the Germans down"). •

¹ CIPS (*Cross Border Interbank Payment System*)

² Russia has already established SPFS (*System for Transfer of Financial Messages*) as an alternative settlement system after the Crimean crisis and is eager to force the world's banks to be also represented in this competing settlement system. Russia's exclusion from SWIFT would therefore be a boost for alternative settlement systems and a permanent damage to SWIFT.

bridges where others are blocked, cooperate with diverse partners and develop its own initiatives." (Brochure, p. 14) One page further on, it talks about Ukraine: in 2014, Switzerland only adopted measures to prevent the circumvention of international sanctions against Russia via Swiss territory (p. 15). Thanks to this moderate approach, it was able to act as a mediator in the Ukraine war within the framework of the OSCE during its chairmanship year in 2014 (p. 12). So far, so good.

In February 2022, both Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* and Ukrainian President *Selensky* turned to Switzerland for mediation. This time, however, the Federal Council single-handedly obstructed the Good Offices by adopting "the EU sanctions against Russia, based on a comprehensive balancing of interests" on 28 February (p. 15). The deadly attacks and destruction against the population in the Donbass on the part of Ukraine (for eight years!) found no place in this "balancing of interests". The Federal Council issued its decree with a long list of new sanc-

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"Anyone who undermines ..."

continued from page 10

tions on the same day (!).² That's how fast it works when you simply copy the Swiss legal decrees from Brussels.

In any case, the Federal Council already sees us half in the EU in terms of security policy: "For Switzerland, the EU is a central partner, also in the area of peacebuilding and security policy. Switzerland decides on a case-by-case basis and after thorough examination where it wants to cooperate with the EU in the field of security. Likewise, it decides, based on a comprehensive weighing of interests, whether and how it wants to join the EU in economic sanctions. [...] In the vast majority of cases, Switzerland supports the EU's sanctions." (Brochure, p. 13) We are also pretty far into NATO. The principle: "As a neutral country, which may not favour any warring party in an international conflict, Switzerland cannot belong to NATO" is immediately cracked: "However, Switzerland has participated in the *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) since 1996." The Federal Council's phrase: "This participation is compatible with Switzerland's neutrality law and policy." (p. 13)

To the Federal Council and Parliament in the family tree: "Maintaining neutrality is undisputed"

The Swiss electorate was wisely never asked whether Switzerland should join the PfP. For even the Federal Council cannot ignore the fact that an overwhelming majority of us Swiss want to maintain neutrality. In its neutrality brochure, it reproduces the well-known graph from the ETH on its annual surveys. In response to the question "How do you think Switzerland can best safeguard its interests and at the same time contribute to security in the world?", around 95 % of respondents over the last ten years chose the answer: "Switzerland should maintain its neutrality." Less than 20 % ticked: "Switzerland should take a clear stand for one side or the other in military conflicts abroad." (Brochure, p. 10)

Journalists use the Ukraine war for rapprochement with NATO and the EU

Meanwhile, the Swiss daily press continues to crack down on neutrality. The Federal Council is asked to provide "ideas" in the addendum to the *Security Policy Report 21* on "what contribution Switzerland can make to the security of Europe". For example: "A central question concerns the *further development of military neutrality*. The Swiss Air Force could take over the air police service in the eastern Alpine region in the event of increased tensions for neighbouring military countries"³ (emphasis mw).

Wallstreet, London City, NATO, and Brussels are prevailing: Switzerland has broken with neutrality

mw. On 28 February the whole world heard that the Swiss government had abandoned neutrality. The trust that had been built up over centuries was shattered at a blow. It will take a lot of effort and goodwill to repair this serious damage. The US and UK media groups make no secret of the fact that something completely different is going on behind the scenes: Wall Street and the City of London will not object if the Swiss financial centre weakens itself...

- "The New York Times": "Switzerland will freeze Russian assets, including those of President *Vladimir Putin*, setting aside its long tradition of neutrality."
- *Bloomberg*: "Swiss Ditch Historic Neutrality to Enforce Russia Sanctions." *Bloomberg* remarks: "Earlier frustration with Switzerland stemmed from its decision to only block Swiss banks from opening new accounts for Russians sanctioned by the EU but not freeze existing ones."
- *Reuters Agency*: "Sharp deviation from the country's traditional neutrality"
- "Financial Times" (GB): "Swiss break neutrality tradition to match EU sanctions on Russia."
- "The Wallstreet Journal": "Switzerland Joins European Sanctions on Russian Assets" Wallstreet is glad about it because Switzerland, "a hub for conducting international business and storing private wealth, restricted its banks from entering new business with EU-blacklisted entities."

- Last but not least the EU-External Representative *Josep Borrell* on *Twitter*: "I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that Switzerland is taking over the EU sanctions against Putin and his supporters for invading Ukraine and freezing their assets."

In addition to the Swiss financial center, it is also about the united front of Europe (Switzerland included) in NATO (of course under US command):

- NBC News of 1 March: "Sweden, Switzerland unite with Europe in defense against Russia" - "Germany reversing its historic policy against sending weapons to conflict zones."
- *NBC* quotes the former US-ambassador in Russia, *Michael McFaul*, who is delighted about "the rebirth of a new Europe": "It's a historic shift. I think this will have major consequences moving forward for the future of Europe, for the future of the transatlantic alliance, for the future of NATO — just when all of those things were fraying."

This brings us to the slightly modified quote from the first NATO Secretary General, the British *Ismail Hastings*: ("to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down"): Keep the Russians out, the Americans up and floor whole Europe (including the former neutral states).

Source: *Torcasso, David. "Ukraine-Krieg. Die Reaktionen auf den Sanktionsentscheid der Schweiz" (Ukraine war. Responses to Switzerland's sanctions decision). Handelszeitung 1 March 2022, with links to original sources; https://www.handelszeitung.ch/politik/die-reaktionen-auf-den-sanktionsentscheid-der-schweiz*

But we citizens do not want to have the term "neutrality" verbalised in this way!

In another article, Switzerland's mediation within the framework of the OSCE in 2014 is dismissed as a veneer for profiteering: "Switzerland managed the balancing act of not upsetting either its Western partners or *Vladimir Putin* too much. It provided its good offices publicly effective – and did good business along the way." At the same time, the author urges Switzerland's rapid integration into the EU: "Moving closer together opens up new opportunities and shows that Switzerland has far more in common with the EU than separates it. For the time being, the Russian invasion puts differences over wage protection and the EU citizenship directive into perspective. For Switzerland, it becomes even more urgent to clarify its relationship with the EU, its most important partner."⁴ This "justification" cannot eliminate the serious objections of the trade unions and many other citizens to the Framework Agreement.

UN Security Council seat for Switzerland (unfortunately) waved through

The opponents' last attempt to stop the candidacy for the Security Council, which is contrary to neutrality, was waved through and rejected at high speed in the National Council on 10 March (125 votes to 56 with 8 abstentions) and in the Council of States on 14 March (26 votes to 11 with 4 abstentions). The candidacy is now certain, and Switzerland will most probably be elected by the UN General Assembly on 9 June as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2023 and 2024.

President *Cassis*' assertion before the National Council that "membership is compatible with neutrality" does not become any truer through frequent repetition. The way Switzerland is behaving today in the Ukraine war, *Cassis* said, "is what we would have done in the Security Council". So much the worse! In doing so, it would "break with the centuries-old tradition of Swiss neutrality"

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Neutral Switzerland has quite different options than the adoption of foreign sanctions

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

Was it really wise for neutral Switzerland to adopt the EU's sanctions, which are unusual in their extent, on a 1:1 basis and thus participate in the economic war against Russia? Switzerland is on Russia's list of hostile states – this after both warring parties had previously requested Switzerland and asked for mediation. Today they are negotiating on the border with Belarus (quite improvised) and in Turkey – and not in Geneva. With its current policy, Switzerland has recklessly abandoned the tried and tested path of neutrality.

In the following lines, I will use a concrete example to show how neutral Switzerland successfully used the Good Offices in an equally difficult and dangerous war situation, thereby strengthening its position in the international community. No one said that Switzerland wanted to use neutrality only to enforce its own selfish interests. This feat was achieved in the Algerian War, which ended in a genuine and lasting peace after eight years with Switzerland's help in Evian.

Algerian War (1954–1962)

Algeria was the largest and oldest French colony formally considered part of France. More than one million French settlers had settled here. In 1954, the war of independence began. The *Algerian Front de Libération Nationale* FLN was supported from Tunisia and Morocco, both of which had already become independent. France had about half a million soldiers permanently in wartime action in Algeria – similar to the USA in Vietnam a few years later. By 1962, a total of about 1.7 million army personnel were fighting there – in addition to the professional military and the Foreign Legion also many conscripts. This great war was controversial – especially in France itself.

In December 1958, General *Charles de Gaulle* was elected Prime Minister for the second time and President of the Republic in 1959 because he wanted to end the war and release Algeria into independence. On 8 January 1961, de Gaulle called a referendum. 75 percent of those who voted in France supported his policy. However, with the vote the goal was

not yet achieved. Only a few days later, on 20 January, the opposition founded the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS) in Madrid, which included many French settlers who had trouble imagining that one day they would no longer wake up in the French department of Algérie, but in independent Algeria. Senior officers in the French army also sympathised with the OAS. The OAS included an underground organisation that carried out attacks to disrupt the peace process. On 21 April 1961, the OAS led a coup in Algiers involving four generals of the French army who opposed Algerian independence and de Gaulle's peace policy. Indeed, the coup failed, but the situation remained highly dangerous. Genuine peace negotiations were hardly possible.

Hope in Switzerland's Good Offices

De Gaulle and the FLN turned to Switzerland in this difficult situation with the request to help with its Good Offices. The first step was to organise direct face-to-face talks. The talks took place – in view

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"Anyone who undermines ..."

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and "lose credibility in the area of 'good offices'", countered Council of States Member and SVP party president *Marco Chiesa* (TI). After all, there were also some FDP and centre politicians in both councils who voted against membership or abstained.

"Without trust, one cannot pursue a credible neutrality policy"

In today's heated mood, few dare to back Switzerland's perpetual armed neutrality.

Paul Widmer, long-time Swiss ambassador and lecturer at the HSG, begins by pointing out the two sides of Swiss neutrality in a newspaper commentary: "The Federal Council must absolutely comply with the law of neutrality. This means that it may not support any party militarily. Thus, Switzerland would never be allowed to supply weapons directly to Ukraine, as Sweden does." (Sweden also calls itself "neutral", but it is a member state of the EU and therefore committed to its security policy). "In neutrality policy, on the other hand, the Federal Council is freer," Paul Widmer continues, but warns against being carried away by pressure from the street or the spirit of the times into an "impulsive neutrality". For only a neutral Switzerland can "serve

peace with good offices and mediation. [...] Without trust, one cannot pursue a credible policy of neutrality". Widmer's conclusion: "In the long run, a country like Switzerland can usually achieve more with humanitarian commitment and political restraint."⁵

His word in the ear of the Federal Council! Russia has already given Switzerland a taste of its own medicine for abandoning its policy of neutrality. In a tweet on 7 March, the Russian government adopted a list of countries hostile to Russia. This includes Switzerland [Швейцария] (*RIA Novosti @rian.ru, Russia*). What a disgrace!

"The worse things get worldwide, the more important neutrality is"

As usual, former Federal Councillor *Christoph Blocher* speaks plainly – a boon in today's situation. In a newspaper interview he says: "As a neutral state, Switzerland must not allow itself to be carried away into taking sides. [...] By participating in the sanctions, Switzerland is now at war. Yet everything should be done now to end this terrible war as quickly as possible. As a neutral country, Switzerland could have made a special contribution. But Switzerland has now carelessly squandered this opportunity."⁶

The fact that the Federal Council and parliamentary majority buckled under pressure from inside and outside the country was "not an act of peace and not leadership. The worse things get in the world, the more important neutrality is. Non-interference is not just self-protection; it is what makes the Good Offices possible."

Christoph Blocher is planning a popular initiative to strengthen the principle of neutrality in the Federal Constitution. Economic sanctions should thus no longer be possible? •

¹ https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/de/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/neutralitaet-schweiz_DE.pdf

² "Ordinance on Measures in Connection with the Situation in Ukraine" (946.231.176.72) of 27 August 2014 (as of 28 February 2022).

³ Häslar, Georg. "Security policy needs scenarios, not party-political compromise". In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 9 March 2022.

⁴ Gafafer, Tobias. "Putin's War in Ukraine is a Wake-up Call for Switzerland". In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 10 March 2022

⁵ Widmer, Paul. "Neutral is not with the heart, but with the mind". Guest commentary in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 9 March 2022.

⁶ Neuhaus, Christina. "Christoph Blocher: 'The worse things get in the world, the more important neutrality is!'" Interview in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 7 March 2022

⁷ "Sanctions against Russia. Blocher announces popular initiative on Swiss neutrality". In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 11 March 2022 (SDA/sep)

"Neutral Switzerland ..."

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of the dangerous situation under the utmost secrecy. Today, the reports on them can be viewed with all the details at *dodis.ch* (dodis.ch/9709 and [/10392](https://dodis.ch/10392); [/110413](https://dodis.ch/110413) and [/10389](https://dodis.ch/10389); [/10307](https://dodis.ch/10307) and [/398](https://dodis.ch/398). *Dodis.ch* is the information portal of the Federal Archives).

The fifty-page report by Minister *Olivier Long* is particularly noteworthy: two employees of the Political Department of the Confederation (now the Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA), *Olivier Long* and *Gianrico Bucher*, had prepared and organised the meetings with the utmost discretion. For the time being, the adversaries were to meet in an unofficial, private setting in Lucerne. De Gaulle appointed *Georges Pompidou* (later President of the Republic), a close confidant, to lead the negotiations. The talks took place at the *Hotel Schweizerhof*. Algerians and French met after the morning meal, spent the whole day together and discussed until deep into the night. Long and Bucher sat in the next room and made sure that nothing conspicuous leaked out that could cause the OAS using force to disrupt the ongoing peace negotiations. However, Long and Bucher considered the situation so dangerous that they moved the talks to Neuchâtel after a few days.

After the second round of talks, the concept for the official peace negotiations was fixed: they were to take place in Evian – on the French side of Lake Geneva. The first phase of negotiations – which was also still secret – was about a ceasefire. The official peace negotiations were only to begin when the weapons in Algeria were silent. Only then were the media to be involved – a highly demanding undertaking.

General Staff Preparation for the Peace Negotiation

A lot was at stake, and everything had to work. For understandable reasons, the Algerian negotiating delegation did not want to live on French soil. They were accommodated on the Swiss side of the lake and brought across Lake Geneva every day by military helicopters or, in bad weather, by speedboats. But even on the Swiss side, the Algerians did not feel safe. The army deployed a battalion of soldiers to protect them. The Algerians furthermore changed their place of residence every day, also to be protected from the media. The costs of this large-scale operation, which was organised on a general staff basis, were borne entirely by the Swiss Confederation. The Evian

Conference was a success and ended with the Evian Peace Agreement. Algeria was released into independence. Bucher and Long wrote a report for the attention of the Department (which can be read today at *dodis.ch*). In retrospect, it became clear that the extremely cautious and highly professional work of the two employees of the Political Department was appropriate to the situation.

Success of the Good Offices

Switzerland's neutral stance had helped to end one of the most brutal wars of modern times, and it had made genuine peace possible. This would not have been possible without maintaining strict neutrality. The quick conclusion of peace removed the ground politically from the illegal OAS, so that it was possible to reduce tensions even in divided France. However, not quite – only weeks after the peace agreement, assassins' bullets pierced Charles de Gaulle's limousine, narrowly missing him.

Effects of the Peace of Evian on Switzerland

Only weeks later, President *Friedrich Traugott Wahlen* received an invitation from the Elysée. General De Gaulle thanked Switzerland for its beneficial services – Wahlen took the opportunity to present the French President with the main problem that was preoccupying him and the entire Federal Council at the time. The USA was urging Switzerland to conclude an association treaty with the EEC, which would also integrate the country institutionally into the EEC – very similar to the failed framework treaty. In this way, Europe could speak with one voice, the Americans argued. De Gaulle addressed Switzerland's concerns. His words are well known today because Wahlen wrote a transcript of the speech, which can be accessed today at dodis.ch/30270:

Wahlen: "Another reason that prevents us from joining the European Community [...] is the constitutional problems. In our referendum democracy, we cannot cede powers to another Community which are reserved for the people, who are the sovereign in the full sense of the word." De Gaulle replied: "France understands your desire for a form of understanding with the European Community which will not be easy to find. But you may rest assured that no difficulties will be placed in your way by France."

Switzerland had won a friend on this important issue, who was to pave the ground for the forthcoming free trade agreement with the European Commu-

nity. In the following years, Switzerland (and the other EFTA countries) reduced their tariffs in step with the EEC, thus preparing the ground for the envisaged free trade treaty, which was to lead to a kind of free trade area between the countries of the EEC and EFTA. After the negotiations were successfully concluded, the treaty was signed in Brussels on 22 July 1972. The then President of the Confederation, Brugger, gave a speech on the occasion of the signing. He began with the words:

"The Agreement between Switzerland and the European Communities, which I have the honour to sign today on behalf of the Federal Council, represents a decisive step in our traditional endeavour to cooperate in the integration of our continent, insofar as we are able to do so while respecting direct democracy, parliamentary powers and neutral foreign policy." (dodis.ch/36209)

De Gaulle had politically paved the way for the free trade treaty, which the negotiating delegation in Brussels drew up – as Switzerland had wished without a political superstructure, i.e. without institutional integration. On 3 December 1972, the Swiss people with 72 percent of the votes and all cantons approved the treaty. A "European issue" was never again to achieve such a high level of approval. The treaty was a success, and in the following decades it was repeatedly adapted with over 100 additional treaties. It is still valid today and has contributed significantly to the prosperity that not only we Swiss enjoy today. In a few months – on 22 July – it will be the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of the treaty. It will be interesting to see how the Swiss government honours the Free Trade Agreement. In my view, it is one of the most important economic treaties or the most important economic treaty in the history of the modern Swiss Confederation.

And today?

Neutrality is more than a special feature of Switzerland. It is a state policy doctrine (*Edgar Bonjour*) that permeates all politics. With its current policy, our national government has by far not fully realised the potential of the Good Services. It has wasted a unique opportunity to contribute – possibly – to world peace. In a very special situation, it could have taken on a task for which no one else is better equipped. The world needs a neutral Switzerland! •

For the background with further details, cf. Wüthrich, Werner. *Wirtschaft und direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz. Geschichte der freiheitlich-demokratischen Wirtschaftsverfassung der Schweiz* (Economy and Direct Democracy in Switzerland. History of the liberal-democratic economic constitution of Switzerland), Zurich 2020; pp. 293-317

The forgotten ones in the “House of Light”

by Karin Leukefeld, Damascus

In the Beit Nour retirement home in the old city of Damascus, old men spend their twilight years. Almost all of them are alone. Their children have left Syria in search of work. Others do not want to or cannot take care of their fathers.

The new year begins with gifts. For the men of the *Beit Nour* in the old city of Damascus, the gifts come with a small delegation of the Sisters of the *Salesian Order*. The *Beit Nour*, which means *The House of Light*, is a home for the elderly run by Sisters of the *Mother Theresa Order*. The nuns come from all over the world to serve the poor and vulnerable in Syria. Four sisters at *Beit Nour* are assisted by three helpers to care for the 26 men who live in the home. Two women prepare meals in the house’s kitchen. In *Dweila*, another district of Damascus, the sisters run another house for single elderly women, the *Beit Hubi*, the *House of Love*. They do not like to be in the public eye. Photos and tape recordings are not welcome. To the objection that the public should know how important their help is, one of the sisters replies: “Our work is for God, that’s enough”.

It is a different story when the Sisters of the *Salesian Order* visit the *Beit Nour* in January to deliver gifts. The delegation is led by Sister *Carol Tahan*, who is from Aleppo. She runs the *Italian Hospital*, which was founded by the Salesians in Damascus in 1913. Before the war, the *Ospedale Italiano* was one of the most prestigious hospitals in Damascus. But since 2011, many doctors, medical technicians, therapists and nurses have left the country, and the clinic can almost only be maintained with donations.

Donations, which are used to help the poor

At Christmas, thanks to these donations, it was possible to give away a Christmas bonus of 100,000 Syrian pounds to each of the hospital’s employees. “Some donate for the continued operation and medical equipment that the hospital needs. Others help so that we can help the poor.” There is *Bernhard* from Germany, for example, who has been collecting money for years with his association near Munich and passing it on to them. “This year we were able to buy a second-hand CT X-ray machine for computer photographs, which are always urgently needed. We were also able to distribute these warm jumpers to the elderly from the donations. We paid part of the money to a textile company that sewed the jumpers, which we then give away here at *Beit*



Sister Carol Tahan distributes jumpers to residents at Beit Nour. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

Nour and the other homes.” The workers received a good wage of 15,000 Syrian pounds per jumper, the equivalent of about 4.60 euros, he said. “Because they were able to sew many jumpers, they also earned well,” says Sister Carol. “So, the donations help on both sides, the workers and the elderly. And we thank them for their support.”

The *Beit Nour* is an old Damascene house and is tucked away in one of the many narrow streets of the old city. The high courtyard is closed with a roof, creating a hall that serves as a lounge for the men. The plants climbing up, the walls are decorated for Christmas. “Merry Christmas” is written on a garland in which red cardboard poinsettias are stuck. The letters are cut out of red and green glossy paper and glow in the sunlight streaming through the windows on the top floor.

Three large piles of warm jumpers

The *Salesian Sisters* have put up three large piles of warm jumpers on a table that is set up like a table with presents in front of the manger. About twenty men look expectantly at Sister Carol, who gives a short speech. At the end of her New Year’s greetings, one of the men beats his drum. Immediately, the other men fall into the rhythm, clapping their hands. From a back corner of the large room, a man slowly emerges and moves to the rhythm, dancing. Sister Carol, who is also beating her hands together to the drum, joins the dancing man and together they spin

around the room for a few steps. Then Sister Carol calls out that it is now time to distribute the gifts and the men return to their places.

The *Salesian Sisters* take two or three jumpers each in blue, grey, white and brown for the men to choose from. The jumpers are stopped to check the size, then they move on to the next one. At the very end, the dancer also receives his jumper. As good as he is at dancing, he still cannot coordinate the movements of his arms. The *Salesian Sisters* help him to try it on, and finally he stands in the circle of fellow residents in his new jumper and smiles proudly. Applause erupts, but that is too much attention for the man. Quickly and without looking further into the circle, he retreats to a room off to the side and closes the door.

Loneliness is the worst

While the other men continue to sing and dance with the support of the drum, Sister Carol Tahan finds time for a short conversation. Some of the old men are bedridden and cannot take part in the small celebration, says the resolute woman, who wears the grey costume of a senior *Salesian Sister*. They had brought so many jumpers so that some could be chosen for them too. In addition, the men should have the opportunity to exchange their jumpers if they turned out too small or too big. In the next few days, she will also visit the women at *Beit Hubi* in *Dweila* to hand over gifts.

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Sister Carol dances to the drum with a resident. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

"The forgotten ones ..."

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Another home for the elderly is the *Beit Saadi*, where she will also bring jumpers. "There are 170 elderly men living there," she explains. Some, she says, were diplomats, professors, engineers or respected doctors. "In their rooms they have photos of their lives, of their families and children."

Loneliness is the worst thing for the elderly because they no longer have a family in Syria. Spouses have died, the children are abroad somewhere. Sister Carol knows the story of most of the men at Beit Nour. "Over there on the bench sits *Gabriel*, he is 75 years old. He came to us in the convent one day because he had lost his daughter with whom he was staying. He didn't know what to do. We helped him to set up a small business. We bought him a trolley with which he could sell sweets, biscuits and little things for children near the schools and earn a modest living. But when the war started, he had to stop working and then he was taken in here, at Beit Nour." The men's religious affiliation doesn't matter, she says. "No one is asked about it, everyone is welcome."

"Eleven terrible years gone by"

The next day, everyday life has returned to the Beit Nour. In the mornings and afternoons, the men sit together and there is time for conversation. Some play *tawla* (backgammon), a popular board game, others leaf through books or talk.

The drummer from the day before sits next to *Abu Majd*, who agrees to talk. He does not want his name to be mentioned in public. In his "former life", *Abu Majd* was the owner of some of the best restaurants in the Syrian capital. "I had a restaurant in Abu Rummaneh, Sanabel in Al Qusour, Vendome in Mezzeh, I had a Chinese restaurant and another in the old city of Damascus. The Al Waha restaurant was on the way to Harasta, it was demolished because a road was being built there. One restaurant specialised in potato dishes." The 60-year-old's voice is getting quieter and quieter, he seems heavy hearted.

When asked how he lost his restaurants, he barely audibly answers this "difficult question". In 2011, he says, there were problems with various companies. He had entered into a relationship with a larger company, but it had taken all his restaurants. After that, he had no work, lost all his money, his wife left him and he fell ill. A priest helped him to get into the

Beit Nour. His family neither supported him nor visited him. Two sons are in the United Arab Emirates looking for work. Only his eldest daughter had visited him, but she had also left the country.

Life in Beit Nour is good, says *Abu Majd*. He spends his days with his "friends". He reads a lot when he is in his room, which he shares with two others. The books at Beit Nour are "exclusively religious", he also reads his own books on history, politics and novels. He has lived in very good circumstances all his life, he says. But "now eleven terrible years have passed, and I don't believe in a better future". At Beit Nour, he says, he learned a lot about religion and found a new family: "We stick together and help each other."

Religious songs play in the background, men push their chairs into a circle, others retreat to their rooms. An elegantly dressed Damascene woman has come and taken a seat in the circle of chairs. She reads from a slender book, now and then the men respond in chorus. The Sister of the Mother Theresa Order indicates that it is time (for the visitor) to leave. On the way out, one of the men calls out, "Happy New Year. Come again!" Almost imperceptibly, *Abu Majd* nods his head in farewell.