

Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,
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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

When will Europe finally wake up?

by Graham E. Fuller, British Columbia, Canada



Graham E. Fuller
(picture ma)

cm. Before his retirement, Graham E. Fuller was the Vice President of the “National Intelligence Council at CIA”, responsible for the intelligence assessment of the global situation. And he still observes the geopolitical situation very

closely as one of the most experienced experts. He has now published a short analysis of the war in Ukraine and Europe’s disastrous – not to say suicidal – policy.



The “world community” often invoked by the “West” is limited to the yellow marked states in the sanctions against Russia. (Graphic riazhaq.com/current-concerns)

The war in Ukraine has dragged on long enough now to reveal certain clear trajectories. First, two fundamental realities:

- *Putin* is to be condemned for launching this war – as is virtually any leader who launches any war. *Putin* can be termed a war criminal – in good company with *George W. Bush* who has killed vastly greater numbers than *Putin*.
- Secondary condemnation belongs to the US (NATO) in deliberately provoking a war with Russia by implacably pushing its hostile military organization, despite Moscow’s repeated notifications about crossing red lines, right up to the gates of Russia. This war did not have to be if Ukrainian neutrality, à la Finland and Austria, had been accepted. Instead, Washington has called for clear Russian defeat.

As the war grinds to a close, where will things go?

Contrary to Washington’s triumphalist pronouncements, Russia is winning the war, Ukraine has lost the war. Any longer-term damage to Russia is open to debate.

American sanctions against Russia have turned out to be far more devastating to Europe than to Russia. The global economy has slowed and many developing nations face serious food shortages and risk of broad starvation.

“Deep cracks in the European façade of so-called ‘NATO unity’”

There are already deep cracks in the European façade of so-called “NATO unity.” Western Europe will increasingly rue the day that it blindly followed the American

Pied Piper to war against Russia. Indeed, this is not a Ukrainian-Russian war but an American-Russian war fought by proxy to the last Ukrainian.

Contrary to optimistic declarations, NATO may in fact ultimately emerge weakened. Western Europeans will think long and hard about the wisdom and deep costs of provoking deeper long-term confrontations with Russia or other “competitors” of the US.

Europe will sooner or later return to the purchase of inexpensive Russian energy. Russia lies on the doorstep and a natural economic relationship with Russia will possess overwhelming logic in the end.

Europe already perceives the US as a declining power with an erratic and hyp-

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cc. History does not repeat itself. But we can learn from it to be careful with judgements based on snapshots. Today, for example, we know – unlike in 1914 – that powerful circles in Great Britain had prepared and conjured up the First World War decades earlier. This knowledge also sheds decisive light on the question of who was to blame for the war at the time.

Russian Foreign Minister *Sergey Lavrov* recently stated that NATO and the EU have long been gathering forces for a major war against Russia. The current situation reminds him of the time before 22 June 1941. These statements should be taken very seriously. Unfortunately, there is overwhelming evidence

that there have been deployment plans against Russia for a long time. This also includes NATO’s eastward expansion. Even the government of Ukraine did not develop its public war plans against Russia on its own, but – after agreements – relied on cooperation with NATO and the EU. Have people in Europe asked themselves what would have happened if this intervention had not taken place on 24 February? If one had in fact begun to nuclear arm Ukraine, in accordance with its loudly proclaimed desire, and it had realised its publicly announced intention with NATO assistance or as a NATO member, its publicly announced intention to take back Crimea – which had declared itself Russian territory in the 2014 refer-

endum – militarily? And then? One has to take all this into account if one wants to judge 24 February 2022 in the big picture. *Graham E. Fuller’s* contribution once again makes it clear how important it is to consider precisely these contexts. Only when these are known more precisely will it become clear whether *George W. Bush’s* war of aggression against Iraq, which was based on drastic constructs of lies, can be placed on the same level as the military intervention against Ukraine since 24 February of this year, for which *Putin* has been responsible. The question of war guilt also arises for a Europe that is betraying all its values and history and throwing overboard all the bitter lessons of centuries.

"When will Europe finally wake up?"

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ocritical foreign policy "vision" premised upon the desperate need to preserve "American leadership" in the world. America's willingness to go to war to this end is increasingly dangerous to others.

Washington has also made it clear that Europe must sign on to an "ideological" struggle against China as well in some kind of protean struggle of "democracy against authoritarianism". Yet, if anything this is a classic struggle for power across the globe. And Europe can even less afford to blunder into confrontation with China—a "threat" perceived primarily by Washington yet unconvincing to many European states and much of the world.

China's Belt and Road initiative is perhaps the most ambitious economic and geopolitical project in world history. It is already linking China with Europe by rail and sea. European exclusion from the Belt and Road project will cost it dearly. Note that the Belt and Road runs right through Russia. It is impossible for Europe to close its doors to Russia while maintaining access to this Eurasian mega project. Thus, a Europe that perceives the US already in decline has a little incentive to join the bandwagon against China. The end of the Ukraine war will bring serious reconsideration in Europe about the benefits of propping up Washington's desperate bid to maintain its global hegemony.

Europe will undergo increasing identity crisis in determining its future global role. Western Europeans will tire of subservience to the 75-year American domination of European foreign policy. Right now, NATO is European foreign policy and Europe remains inexplicably timid in asserting any independent voice. How long will that prevail?

We now see how massive US sanctions against Russia, including confiscation of Russian funds in western banks, is causing most of the world to reconsider the wis-

dom of banking entirely on the US dollar into the future. Diversification of international economic instruments is already in the cards and will only act to weaken Washington's once dominant economic position and its unilateral weaponisation of the dollar.

One of the most disturbing features of this US-Russian struggle in Ukraine has been the utter corruption of independent media. Indeed, Washington has won the information and propaganda war hands down, orchestrating all Western media to sing from the same hymnbook in characterizing the Ukraine war. The West has never before witnessed such a blanket imposition by one country's ideologically-driven geopolitical perspective at home. Nor, of course, is the Russian press to be trusted either. In the midst of a virulent anti-Russian propaganda barrage whose likes I have never seen during my Cold Warrior days; serious analysts must dig deep these days to gain some objective understanding of what is actually taking place in Ukraine.

Would that this American media dominance that denies nearly all alternative voices were merely a blip occasioned by Ukraine events. But European elites are perhaps slowly coming to the realization that they have been stampeded into this position of total "unanimity"; cracks are already beginning to appear in the façade of "EU and NATO unity." But the more dangerous implication is that as we head into future global crises, a genuine independent free press is largely disappearing, falling into the hands of corporate-dominated media close to policy circles, and now bolstered by electronic social media, all manipulating the narrative to its own ends. As we move into a predictably greater and more dangerous crises of instability through global warming, refugee flows, natural disasters, and likely new pandemics, rigorous state and corporate domination of the western media becomes very dangerous indeed to the fu-

ture of democracy. We no longer hear alternative voices on Ukraine today.

Russia is driven into the arms of China

Finally, Russia's geopolitical character has very likely now decisively tilted towards Eurasia. Russians have sought for centuries to be accepted within Europe but have been consistently held at arm's length. The West will not discuss a new strategic and security architecture. Ukraine has simply intensified this trend. Russian elites now no longer possess an alternative to accepting that its economic future lies in the Pacific where Vladivostok lies only one or two hours away by air from the vast economies of Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. China and Russia have now been decisively pushed ever more closely together specifically out of common concern to block unfettered US freedom of unilateral military and economic intervention around the world. That the US can split US-induced Russian and Chinese cooperation is a fantasy. Russia has scientific brilliance, abundant energy, rich rare minerals and metals, while global warming will increase the agricultural potential of Siberia. China has the capital, the markets, and the manpower to contribute to what becomes a natural partnership across Eurasia.

Sadly for Washington, nearly every single one of its expectations about this war are turning out to be incorrect. Indeed, the West may come to look back at this moment as the final argument against following Washington's quest for global dominance into ever newer and more dangerous and damaging confrontations with Eurasia. And most of the rest of the world – Latin America, India, the Middle East and Africa – find few national interests in this fundamentally American war against Russia.

Source: www.globalbridge.ch of 23 June 2022; the English original was published on *Graham E. Fuller's* website (<https://grahamefuller.com/some-hard-thoughts-about-post-ukraine> of 18 June 2022).

Current Concerns

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Why a “Ukraine Recovery Conference” in Lugano?

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) will hold a “Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC2022)” in Lugano on 4 and 5 July 2022 to discuss the “reconstruction” of Ukraine. Discussing reconstruction before peace has been established? These and other questions arise for the critical contemporary.

President of the Swiss Confederation and head of the FDFA *Ignazio Cassis* said in the *SRF Tagesschau* of 30 May that it would be a “very high-profile” conference. Ministers, prime ministers or presidents from 41 states and 19 international organisations have been invited. In Lugano, the “kick-off” for a reconstruction plan will take place: It is a matter of defining principles and the pace at which one wants to move forward, and so on and so forth. In fact, it is primarily about another fund-raising operation for the insatiable government in Kiev. *Ignazio Cassis*: “Those who will ‘pledge’ say: we support reconstruction.” An estimated 600 to 1000 billion dollars (!) are at stake, he said.

The following are some critical points.

Switzerland and Ukraine invite – Russia is left out

The two foreign ministers *Ignazio Cassis* and *Dmytro Kuleba* invite. Russia is neither one of the inviting states nor is it on the guest list. This does not violate the principle of neutrality, according to the well-known phrase of the FDFA – even constant repetition does not make it any truer.

The usual Western “players” keep to themselves

According to the FDFA, the guest list is the same as at previous conferences. In Vilnius 2021, all the EU/NATO states took part (plus Switzerland, Israel, Japan and South Korea) as well as the most important organisations dominated by the USA and Brussels: IMF, World Bank, NATO, EBRD¹, EIB², OECD, UNDP³, the Council of Europe and the EU insti-

tutions EU Council, EU Commission and EU Parliament. The “rest of the world” will not be invited to Lugano, as before.

Reconstruction conference to replace reform conferences

Since 2017, so-called Ukraine reform conferences have been held in various Western cities (2017 in London, 2018 in Copenhagen, 2019 in Toronto and 2021 in Vilnius (there was no conference in 2020 because of COVID-19). According to the FDFA, “each conference will take stock of developments over the past year”. Ukraine would be able to explain the ongoing progress, international partners would reaffirm their support and the next reform steps would be discussed.

What progress was there to celebrate at these “high-level” conferences? For seven years, the assembled Western leaders and organisations have failed to demand that the Ukrainian government implement the 2014/2015 Minsk Agreements adopted by the UN Security Council (for example, the adoption of a constitution that gives equal rights to all ethnic groups in the country, the holding of equal and fair elections throughout the territory, and autonomous status for Donetsk and Luhansk). In particular, the German and French governments, which have co-signed the agreements, would have been obliged to do so for years. And now the reform of the un-

democratic and corrupt state of Ukraine is to be officially omitted, instead of which one speaks of “reconstruction” and squanders further billions of European taxpayers’ money!

Financing reconstruction before creating peace?

“Even if the end of the war is not yet foreseeable today, it is of central importance to start now with initial considerations on the reconstruction process [...]”, can be read on the aforementioned homepage of the FDFA.

Switzerland would truly have better things to do in this world full of wars than to pour its money down the drain – for an insider meeting where everyone will pledge money with a big ladle, one pats the other on the back, then you go on to the next event and the dying continues. •

¹ *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)*

² *European Investment Bank*

³ *UN Development Programme*

Sources:

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, FDFA. Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC2022) of 4 and 5 July 2022 in Lugano (<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/aktuell/dossiers/alle-dossiers/urc2022-lugano.html>)

Lipp, Reto. “Bundespräsident Cassis lädt zur Ukraine-Konferenz in Lugano” (Federal President Cassis invites to the Ukraine Conference in Lugano). *SRF News* of 30 May 2022

Mexico’s President renews demand for Julian Assange’s release

gl. The Mexican President *Andrés Manuel López Obrador*, refused to participate at the summit meeting of North and South America in Los Angeles because the US Government did not invite three countries it did not like. His decision had met with large support throughout Latin America and the Caribbean which is seen as a sign that US influence in the region is waning. *López Obrador* instead agreed to a bi-lateral meeting with President *Biden* in July in the White House.

At his morning press conference on 22 June, he announced that he would ask his American counterpart at that occasion, to release *Julian Assange* due to the disappointing decision by the British justice, to assent to his extradition. *Assange*, he said, is “the best journalist of our times”, who exposed the excesses of US interventionism. One must appeal to the freedom of ex-

pression. This is possible even if there is a hard core of groups who will oppose it. “Mexico opens its doors to *Assange!*” Regarding *Assange*, a video has been spread which shows the murder of journalists by US pilots in Iraq, one of the most serious cases the Australian made public in *WikiLeaks*. *López Obrador* asks the question: “The way this journalist was treated is a disgrace to the world. [...] And what about freedom? Should we still keep speaking about democracy? Should we speak further about the protection of human rights? About freedom of expression?”

He will discuss with *Biden* his proposal for a new kind of integration in the Americas, as well as the problems in other regions of the world. •

Source: <https://www.jornado.com.mx/notas/2022/06/22/politica/pedire-a-biden-la-liberacion-de-assange-amlo/>

System change

Due to a system change of the homepage of *Zeit-Fragen*, *Horizons et débats* and *Current Concerns* the articles are only accessible without the attachment “.html” in the link.

The Editors

The survivors or: In search of a future “Soft power” supersedes the weak state in Lebanon

by Karin Leukefeld, Beirut

The Lebanese are survivors. The little money they have left is counted and spent only on bare necessities: Rent, electricity from the generator, water, gas for cooking, petrol, mobile phone/internet and food. It becomes difficult when one needs medication or has to go to hospital.

Then people say that they are blessed if they have relatives abroad who can help financially. Those who have no relatives abroad count their days. Families move together to save money. You do not live any more, you survive, says one employee. But that is by conviction.

On the way to Burj Hammoud, an Armenian quarter in the east of Beirut, the road passes the harbour. “There were dead bodies everywhere here,” *Mohammad B.* (name known to the author) recalls the early evening of 4 August 2020, when a red ball of fire suddenly rose into the sky in front of him above the harbour. “I thought the Israeli had bombed the port,” he says. It would not have been the first time. B. was driving east on the Charles Helou expressway when something exploded in the harbour about a kilometre ahead of him, bringing traffic to a standstill.

Slowly, he drove on towards Burj Hammoud and saw a picture of devastation: “Cars had been thrown off the road, bodies were scattered around, in some cars the dead were sitting bent forward over the steering wheel.” There had been blood on the road, strangely de-

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(picture ef)

ef. Independent journalist *Karin Leukefeld* has been reporting from the Extended Middle East for daily and weekly journals as well as German state sponsored radio programmes since the year 2000. Since the

beginning of the war in 2011 she moves back and forth between Damascus, Beirut, other places in the Arab world and her hometown Bonn. She has published several books, such as “Syrien zwischen Schatten

und Licht – Geschichte und Geschichten von 1916–2016. Menschen erzählen von ihrem zerrissenen Land” (Syria Between Light and Shadow – History and Stories 1916–2016. People Narrate about their War-torn Country.) (2016, Rotpunkt edition Zurich); “Flächenbrand Syrien, Irak, die Arabische Welt und der Islamische Staat” (Surface Fire Syria, Iraq, the Arab World and the Islamic State.) (2015, 3rd edition 2017, PapyRossa edition, Cologne). Her new book will be released soon: “Im Auge des Orkans: Syrien, der Nahe Osten und die Entstehung einer neuen Weltordnung” (In the Eye of the Hurricane: Syria, the Middle East and the Rise of a New World Order).

Step by step, the German SPD is abandoning all principles of peace policy

km. One thing first: It is not true that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) abandoned its peace policy course only after 24 February 2022. Deviations from the peace policy course – which is actually a party principle – characterise the entire history of German social democracy: approval of the war credits in 1914, acceptance of German rearmament and NATO membership at the latest with the “Godesberg Programme” of 1959, active participation in the Kosovo war in 1999, which was contrary to international law, and the many speeches by prominent social democrats about “German responsibility” in recent years, to name just a few key words, have shown this.

Since 24 February 2022, this party course has been radicalised by the party leadership. The hopes that the German SPD – 50 years after *Willy Brandt* – could once again set new peace policy accents and make a contribution to ending the war in Ukraine have not been fulfilled. On the contrary, 22 June 2022 will go down as another date in the series of denials of formerly important party principles. Since then, the federal government and the chancellor have been openly boasting about their arms deliveries to Ukraine in a five-page communication and list.¹ On the same day, the chairman of the SPD, *Lars Klingbeil*, gives a keynote speech at the *Friedrich Ebert Foundation* – that is the

political foundation of the SPD – in which he takes up the talk of the “turning point”, breaks quite openly with previous SPD policy, speaks out in favour of a militarisation of politics and declares Germany to be the leading power in Europe (“Germany must pursue the claim of being a leading power”).² Just as a side note: *Klingbeil* introduced his speech with a quote from the Italian communist *Antonio Gramsci*.

With this course, the SPD is not alone in the German party landscape. *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, FDP, CDU and CSU – which together with the SPD occupy almost 85% of the seats in the German Federal Parliament – are in some cases even cruder bellicists.

The German population, on the other hand, sees it differently. On 15 June 2022, the *European Council on Foreign Relations* – with its transatlantic orientation – published the results of a survey of nine EU countries plus Great Britain. Their *newspeak* is already clear in the title: “Peace versus Justice: The coming European split over the war in Ukraine”.³ The study persuades a contradiction of “peace” and “justice”; for “just”, according to this study, are those who are in favour of any support for the Ukrainian government, including, of course, arms deliveries, until the final victory. In contrast, those who want to end the war in Ukraine as quickly as possible, even at

the cost of Ukrainian territorial cessions to Russia or the Russian sphere of influence, are supposed to be “peaceful”. Be that as it may, according to the survey, only 22% of respondents in all countries belong to the “Justice camp”, but 35% to the “Peace camp”. 43% of respondents are undecided or could not be assigned. The figures vary greatly in the countries surveyed. Respondents in Poland, the UK and Finland have the least “desire for peace” – the most “desire for peace” is in Italy (52%), Germany (49%) and Romania (42%). The openly “belligerent” are in a clear minority in these three countries: Italy only 16%, Germany only 19% and Romania only 23%. The Council is very concerned about this.

49% of Germans are in favour of ending the war as soon as possible and only 19% are in favour of continuing the war – and this despite a propaganda campaign for the war that has been going on for months now. That is remarkable. But obviously most German parties are ignoring this, more and more also the German SPD. •

¹ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/krieg-in-der-ukraine/lieferungen-ukraine-2054514>

² <https://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel/sozialdemokratie-hat-chance-europa-praegen>

³ <https://ecfr.eu/publication/peace-versus-justice-the-coming-european-split-over-the-war-in-ukraine/>

"The survivors or: In search of a future"

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formed vehicles seemed to be attached or stuck to the most impossible places, the air had been dusty and red. When B. arrived at his sister's a little later, a warning was doing the rounds on social networks: "Everyone in Lebanon must stay indoors [...]. The flames indicate that the explosion is nitric acid based. Please all stay inside."

It was less than two years ago, and every time he drives along Charles Helou, he remembers that day, says B. "Here and here," he gesticulates, taking hand after hand off the wheel to point right and left. "Everything here was destroyed. This petrol station and here the corner house, and everywhere many corpses." Now, he says, many buildings have been rebuilt, without the state, "which we do not have anyway", and with great willpower. He admires his people's will to survive. The Lebanese have something special in them that enables them to get up again after the heaviest blows and carry on. "They just start again."

Everything destroyed in five seconds

"Survival gene" is what liquor store owner *Joseph D.* calls it, adding, "You can call me Joe, call-me-Joe." He built his shop on Armenian Street with *Mary*, his wife, he says. "Sometimes we spent the night here, we prepared our food here," the man says, putting his arm around his wife. "For 15 years we worked on it, and in five seconds everything was destroyed. Can you imagine that? In five seconds!"

The blast wave from the explosion on 4 August destroyed the large glass entrance door and hurled it back into the shop, *Mary D.* recalls the day. The bottles bursted, lamps fell from the ceiling, she herself had suffered many cuts. She shows a mobile phone picture that a neighbour had taken that day. People in summer clothes walk aimlessly across the street covered with debris, shards and pieces of metal. Water tanks and rubbish bins lie around, the tightly parked cars have disappeared under stones and dust. Then *Mary D.* can be seen in the video. She is wearing a red blouse and a black skirt and is desperately trying to dial a number on her mobile phone. Blood runs down her forehead, cuts can be seen on her bare arms. Her face is transfixed as she puts her mobile phone away. Then she looks lovingly at her husband and smiles cautiously: "Today I can laugh again, too, but I will never forget that day."

In search of a future

The Lebanese have no state to rely on. The existing state structures are weak,



The Beirut port after its destruction in 2020. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

society is divided. There are many reasons for this, says *Marie Debs* of the *Lebanese Communist Party*. Old friends also call her "La Pasionaria", in memory of the Spanish politician *Dolores Ibárruri*, who made history as a communist member of the Spanish parliament and with her lifelong commitment.

Marie Debs is not a member of the Lebanese parliament, she is active "on the street" for women's rights and for people to reorganise themselves politically in parties or trade unions. There will only be a change in Lebanon with a new constitution and the end of the confessional system, she says. In the Central Committee of the Lebanese CP, *Debs* is responsible for coordinating more than 30 left parties from 11 Arab states. "Only if we organise and coordinate can we repel the Western attack on our region, on our self-determination and our resources," she is convinced, citing the struggle for control of gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean as an example. "If Lebanon can decide about its resources, we can also rebuild the country."

Today, she says, foreign countries have more influence on political events than Lebanese trade unions, organisations and parties. The reasons for the weak state are, on the one hand, the country's colonial past, the civil war and the fact that intended reforms such as the abolition of the confessional political system and the reconstruction of a productive economy after the end of the civil war (1990) were never implemented.

To this day, Lebanon is dependent on remittances from abroad. The money payments from international institutions, states and communities of states bene-

fit the traditional elites from influential family clans, who conversely – as politicians in the confessional political system – represent the interests of the donors in Lebanon.

All those who do not belong to these elites – by far the majority of Lebanese, regardless of their confessional affiliation – have been seeking their fortune all over the world since the 19th century. Back then, Lebanon was part of Syria, which in turn was a province of the Ottoman Empire. To this day, families work to send their children abroad to build a professional future for themselves. But the Lebanese are attached to their homeland; every year, those living abroad transfer a lot of money to their families. In 1987, private remittances from abroad amounted to 65 % of the gross domestic product. In 2009, these remittances still accounted for 22 % of the gross domestic product. In the meantime, these money flows have largely dried up for the people due to the bank closures in Lebanon, because of the financial crisis and extensive US financial sanctions, especially against Shiite Muslim businessmen.

"Soft power" replaces weak government

The vacuum created by the weakness of the government is being filled by foreign foundations as well as governmental and private non-governmental and development organisations. Aid, children's and democracy programmes are being promoted, media are being financed, and in the last parliamentary elections candidates "for change" were supported –

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Armenian Street “NGOs Welcome” – business with aid ... (picture Karin Leukefeld)

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rectly and indirectly. This kind of foreign interference in Lebanon is not new, says Marie Debs.

According to Debs, it is important to help people affected by need and poverty, but the foreign government and private aid organisations make people dependent on themselves. They are an instrument of foreign policy, especially of the USA and Europe, and their allies. Since 2011 and the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, one could observe how foreign civil society organisations, foundations and media were spreading Western ideas of reform as “soft power”. Young people are being lured abroad with invitations to seminars and hope for a professional future in a foreign organisation. This influence prevents young people from organising themselves politically in Lebanon and standing up for the interests of their country.

Aid offers with ulterior motives

The rubble after the port explosion in August 2020 had not yet been cleared, the dead, injured and disappeared had not yet been counted, when the “soft power” from abroad built a tent city on Armenian Street. It was not that shelters were built for those who had become homeless, but rather that aid organisations set up tents,

ambulances or simply tables and chairs and offered their help.

There was a “Joint Christian Committee for Social Services in Lebanon”, the organisation “Aid Lebanon Now” promoting “change to bring the people forward”, “Rapid Response” had come from Switzerland, and the Turkish “Insan Association Defending Human Rights” also had a stand. Columns of USAID aid workers marched through Armenian Street wearing goggles and hard hats, armed with masks, wheelbarrows, shovels and brooms. Clearly visible on the front and back of their yellow waistcoats was a logo proclaiming “USAID from the American people.”

In mid-May (2022), *David Schenker*, former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at the US Department of State, explained in a video conference statement at the *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* how fear and distress, disappointment and anger about the absent government are exploited by foreign actors. Mass demonstrations against the economic and financial crisis in 2019 were used to intervene politically with numerous measures. Media were supported, the founding of new civil society groups was financially secured. The aim was to strengthen civil society against *Hezbollah*, that is why economic offers were made in areas inhabited by Shiites. He personally had dinner with

Shiite businessmen and met with “Shiite journalists” reporting on Hezbollah’s “corruption and repression”. The aim was “work for pushing back” Hezbollah’s influence in Lebanon “on all fronts”, Schenker said. One had to “go after [this group] in Lebanon supporting people who are willing to stand up to them...”.

Always have a plan B

Which non-governmental organisation helped them repair the shop, he no longer remembers, says Joseph D., the liquor dealer on Armenian Street. He says he was glad that workmen and materials were paid for, that the glass door in the entrance area, the shelves, the ceiling and the floor could be repaired. To bring in new goods, he had borrowed money from family members. “Our shelves are well stocked again; we hope for the summer and for foreign guests. The Lebanese do not have money to spend on alcohol.”

He really does not know how the Lebanese managed to survive, says Joseph D. “For sure God helps us! But all Lebanese have a special gene, the survival gene,” he says smilingly. “We always have a plan B. When we get up in the morning and leave the house, we have a plan B. We never know what the day will bring for us. What shall we do? After all, we were born here in Lebanon, this is our life.”

Bachelet's Mission to China and the double standards of the UN Human Rights Council

by Professor Dr iur. et phil. Alfred de Zayas*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)

From 22 to 26 May High Commissioner *Michelle Bachelet* conducted a successful mission to China in order to further strengthen cooperation with OHCHR, human rights experts and mechanisms. As stipulated in her mandate, she offered advisory services and technical assistance with a view to advancing the transparent implementation of China's human rights obligations.

Pursuant to her terms of reference, Bachelet was guided by "the principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, in the spirit of constructive international dialogue and cooperation." On 28 May at Guangzhou Bachelet made a comprehensive and nuanced end-of-mission statement, reflecting her commitment "to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and domestic jurisdiction of States". She thanked the Chinese authorities for their cooperation and acknowledged the progress achieved by China in bringing millions of Chinese out of poverty and gradually improving the enjoyment of human rights throughout the country and supporting the implementation of the right to development in the world. She also expressed concern about a number of outstanding issues and established a working group to follow up.

On 10 June 2022 a number of UN rapporteurs issued an unprecedented press release indirectly criticising the High Commissioner for not being more forthcoming on allegations of genocide in Xinjiang and urging China "to address specific and systematic human rights violations", enable a "credible" international investigation and "grant unhindered access to independent experts". Such a statement is highly unusual and raises the question whether the rapporteurs were acting in conformity with their code of conduct that commits them to "impartiality and even-handedness" (Art. 8).

In past sessions UN rapporteurs have been called to order for exceeding their

mandates and failing to observe article 6 of the code which requires them to "seek to establish the facts, based on objective, reliable information emanating from relevant credible sources and to take into account in a comprehensive and timely manner, in particular information provided by the State concerned." China has provided such information, which some rapporteurs evidently ignored when drafting their statement of 10 June.

As a former *Independent Expert on International Order* (2012–18), I do not recall any comparable statement being issued concerning gross and systematic violations of human rights in countries such as the United States, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, etc. Such blatant double-standards undermine the authority and credibility of the rapporteurs.

On 13 June, the 50th session of the HR Council opened with Bachelet's unexpected announcement that she would not seek a second term. In the Council room and in the internet some ngo's engaged in a mobbing action against Bachelet, which is clearly contrary to the conduct required of ngo's in order to enjoy consultative status. It is time for the HR Council to formalize a code of conduct for ngo's and ensure that it is enforced. Indeed, some ngo's have issued defamatory statements that would justify stripping them of their status.

On 14 June sixty-nine States joined in a statement to the Council opposing interference in China's internal affairs. The statement was read by the representative from Cuba, recalling the clear language of article 2(7) of the UN Charter, stipulating that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state."

Also on 14 June China's Permanent Representative *Chen Xu* stated that multilateral human rights mechanisms should serve as a platform for cooperation and dialogue, rather than a venue for division and confrontation. He regretted that in recent years "the Human Rights Council has become increasingly politicized and confrontational, and disinformation has become rampant."

Discussions at the Council once again demonstrate that some States, ngo's and even some UN rapporteurs do not understand the mandate of the Council or the HC's functions under GA Resolution 48/141. The HC's vocation is not "nam-

ing and shaming", nor does she undertake country visits for propaganda purposes or to advance the geopolitical agendas of certain countries. Bachelet has always taken a result-oriented approach so as to ensure progress where it matters – not in the media, but in the actual enjoyment of human rights by real people, including in China.

As a former UN Independent Expert, I too decry the growing politicization of United Nations institutions and the "weaponization" of human rights to demonise geopolitical rivals and pursue agendas incompatible with the letter and spirit of the UN Charter.

Notwithstanding the vulgar instrumentalization of human rights by some States, ngo's and rapporteurs, it is important to reaffirm that Bachelet's mission to China was a successful exercise in the best traditions of the United Nations, consistent with the guiding principles and purposes of the UN – notably peace, human rights and development. •



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"In this collection of essays, former UN *Independent Expert on International Order*, Professor *Alfred de Zayas*, takes mainstream disinformation, fake news, censorship and self-censorship head-on. Stressing the importance of access to information and to a genuinely pluralistic spectrum of views as indispensable to every functioning democracy, *de Zayas* provides an insightful counter-narrative, shedding light on the key issues facing humanity today." (Blurb)

* Professor *Alfred de Zayas*, US and Swiss national, was *UN Independent Expert on International Order* 2012–18 and is author of 11 books including "Building a Just World Order" <https://www.claritypress.com/product/building-a-just-world-order/>

More than Justice or Serbian déjà vu

by Luca Brankovitch, Belarus

25 May was another anniversary of the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It was declared that the purpose of this judicial body was to contribute to ending impunity and help pave the way for reconciliation. Unfortunately, in fact, the Tribunal became a reflection of the hypocrisy of international justice in the hands of Western states. Much has already been said about the selective sentencing of Serbs. Today, however, we can see that the attention of the adherents of such justice has focused on another Slavic country.

Since the intensification of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine, a number of Western politicians representing mainly the EU and NATO countries have almost immediately issued calls for holding Belarus and its leadership to account. At the same time, the leaders of the Belarusian protests of 2020 being actively lobbied on various EU platforms quickly picked up this thesis. The clichés “aggressor state”, “war criminal” or “accomplice to the crimes against humanity” have become common parlance for the opponents of the official Minsk. However, do such statements have a rational-legal basis, or are we witnessing another selective pursuit of justice?

Looking ahead, we note that the subsequent expert assessments turned out to be more restrained regarding the practical implementation of such initiatives.

Only persons can be held criminally liable

Starting with the thesis on the responsibility of Belarus as a state it is important to emphasise that a state cannot be held responsible for committing a “war crime”, “crime against humanity” or “genocide”. These types of offenses are criminalised individually, that is, only a person who took part in the commission of such atrocities can be held criminally liable. States have an international obligation to undertake to prevent and punish these crimes. However, with regard to the context of the events in Ukraine, obviously, Belarus has no jurisdictional abilities to prevent alleged offenses. Consequently, statements like “Belarus is complicit in committing genocide” spread by certain politicians and the media are nothing more than a journalistic mistake or deliberate political insinuation.

Even if we assume the possible involvement of Belarus, as alleged, in the commission of an act of aggression, based on the thesis of providing its territory for Russia to carry out military operations

against Ukraine, the following should be taken into account.

At the heart of the current judicial mechanisms for establishing the responsibility of states, there is the basic principle of the consent of the state itself to have the issue of its responsibility examined by a specific court. Such consent may be expressed directly to a court or on the basis of a treaty. There are no provisions in the universal treaties providing for the submission to any court of disputes related to the commission of the crime of aggression imputed to Belarus.

What was it like in 2003?

Thus, there are simply no international judicial mechanisms that potentially have the ability to conduct processes to hold Belarus accountable as a state.

At the same time, one may ask: have there been precedents similar to the current context in Ukraine before, and what were the consequences? In 2003, a coalition of states led by the United States and Great Britain carried out a military invasion of Iraq. The majority of the world’s States, international organisations and world leaders, such as the head of the United Nations at that time, *Kofi Annan*, openly declared that the aggression against Baghdad was contrary to international law. However, the members of the coalition did not suffer any serious consequences. Simultaneously, such countries as Kuwait or Italy were generally deprived of any international censure for providing their territories as a springboard for aggression.

Double standards once again

In this regard, any statements about Belarus as an aggressor state and attempts to bring Minsk to international responsibility will be a clear manifestation of the policy of double standards and selective approaches in the pursuit of “international justice”.

Now let’s try to deal with the statements on the international persecution of Belarusian high-ranking officials. Firstly, let’s pay attention to the fact that the Belarusian army does not participate in any hostilities on the territory of Ukraine. In particular, a group of experts within the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, in its report dated 13 April “On Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Committed in Ukraine since 24 February 2022”, concluded that Belarus is not a party to the armed conflict to the date of writing of this report. Hence, it is impossible to as-

sert that certain representatives of the Belarusian leadership could even potentially participate in the alleged crimes, namely, give orders, exercise control and have the intent to commit them. The mentioned actions are integral elements of the standards for the establishment of individual criminal responsibility enshrined in international criminal law.

Belarus has not recognised ICC

Moreover, to date, the *International Criminal Court* is the only universal international judicial mechanism competent to try cases involving the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. However, Belarus, like, for example, the United States, China, Turkey, Russia, enjoys its inalienable sovereign right and does not recognise the jurisdiction of this Court. Theoretically, the UN Security Council has the ability to submit a particular situation to the Court, but any of its permanent members can block such a decision by using their veto.

Therefore, it should be concluded that there are also no international criminal justice mechanisms competent to prosecute Belarusian high-ranking officials.

Judiciary as an instrument of warfare?

Some experts draw attention to the initiative of *Gordon Brown*, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, which declared aim is to eliminate the legal gap in the possibility of prosecuting high-ranking Russian officials, mainly for the crime of aggression. One can ask the question why Mr. Brown did not take similar initiatives in relation to his predecessor *Tony Blair*, who made the decision on the invasion of British troops in Iraq in 2003, but let’s leave it rhetorical. Let’s pay attention to the fact that some politicians saw the possibility of expanding this initiative in relation to the leadership of Belarus. Currently, an international group of lawyers and politicians, led by a former British Prime Minister, is working on the creation of a hybrid judicial mechanism, following the example of the ad hoc tribunals for Lebanon, Sierra Leone and Cambodia. The peculiarity of such tribunals is that they were established by resolutions of the UN Security Council, and their applicable law was the norms of the domestic criminal law of the respective states.

Since attempts to create such a tribunal for Ukraine through the UN Security Council do not have any prospects, this working group considers the establishment of such a mechanism by adopting a relevant resolution of the UN Gener-

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The international situation calls for a firmer stance on the part of Switzerland

Adapting to the warmongering NATO is not a viable policy

by Marco Polli*

Surrounded by the great powers of the 20th Century, Switzerland, a very small country in the middle of Europe, obtained international recognition of its neutrality at the *Congress of Vienna* in 1815. Faced with the risk of military intervention by states that had reverted to the ancien régime and were sympathetic to the looming secession of the conservative *Swiss Sonderbund*, the *Swiss Tagsatzung* (Federal Diet of Switzerland) ended this secession in 1847/48 with a brief but decisive armed operation. This took

* Marco Polli, author, publicist and theatre practitioner, resident in Geneva, emeritus professor of German, French and philosophy at the renowned Geneva grammar schools *Collège Voltaire* and *Collège Calvin*, has dealt intensively with cultural, linguistic and political issues and published on them. As part of his language policy activities, the author chaired the preparatory commission "Lebendige Sprachen" (Living Languages) of the *Verein Schweizerischer Gymnasiallehrerinnen und Gymnasiallehrer* (Association of Swiss Grammar School Teachers) and campaigned against the reformulation of the language article in the Swiss Federal Constitution, which privileged English as an introductory foreign language in primary school at the expense of the Swiss national languages.

"More than Justice or Serbian déjà vu"

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Assembly as the main option. However, a simple reading of the UN Charter shows that the UN General Assembly has no such powers. It is the moment when many Serbs may have an acute sense of déjà vu. The *International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* was also created without the expressly provided corresponding powers of the UN Security Council. Is there any doubt that such experiments will lead to the destruction of the existing system of international law, and possibly the world order? But, perhaps, the well-known saying "Let justice be done, though the world perish" is the engine of the process for the authors of this initiative.

Responsible states must not be ignored

In addition, the difference between the crime of aggression and other serious crimes is that finding someone guilty of committing it would directly establish the fact that an act of aggression was committed by the state represented by the accused, which will inevitably affect the rights and obligations of this state. In this regard, according to the most authoritative experts in the field of international criminal law, in order to establish the responsibility of a high-ranking official for the

"My country has made four fundamental decisions in terms of civilisation: Neutrality, peacefulness as the basis of its foreign policy, independence and conflict resolution through negotiations. I am against letting these proven principles be taken away from us by means of one-sided warmongering media campaigns."

place under scrupulous observance of maximum damage limitation on the strict orders of the Confederate commander-in-chief, General *Dufour*, who had declared: "We will have to live on agreeably with the defeated." Subsequently, within ten months, the victors created their direct democracy, unique in Europe, with a subtly balanced distribution of power (with built-in protection for minorities), the unity of the country while preserving its diversity, comprehensive decision-making powers for its citizens¹, and fundamental equality for its four linguistic and cultural communities as its cornerstones.

commission of a crime of aggression, the consent of his state for such a trial is necessary. Otherwise, the so-called *Monetary Gold Principle** established by the International Court of Justice would be violated. According to this principle, the court cannot "rule without the consent of a third party if the "very subject-matter" of the case would affect the legal interests of that third party". Summing up, it can be noted that the most difficult political and military developments in the world tend to be accompanied by slogans, the sonority of which is given by words that evoke bright negative associations in society, such as "genocide", "war criminal", "aggression".

This review of the "justice" playing out is evidence that methods, accompanied by labeling and creating the image of an "enemy of mankind", are more often motivated by political aspirations, rather than have a real legal basis. It is not a delusion to assume that the authors of such methods want something more than justice. •

* The *International Court of Justice* (ICJ) can only resolve a dispute between two states with the consent of the parties. On this basis, in its leading decision in the 1954 *Monetary Gold case*, the ICJ stated that it cannot decide even if the parties have consented but the case centrally involves a third state that has not consented and is not a party to the litigation. (Editor's note after www.pollux-fid.de)

For 174 years, this has guaranteed us civil peace at home and peace with our neighbours abroad.

My country has made four fundamental decisions in terms of civilisation: Neutrality, peacefulness as the basis of its foreign policy, independence and conflict resolution through negotiations. I am against letting these proven principles be taken away from us by means of one-sided warmongering media campaigns. Public debate is essential for democracy, but it has its conditions: general respect for the free expression of opinions, recognition of the diversity of these opinions as well as of their sources, recognition of the weight of facts and adherence to the rules of a civilised style of debate. *Ernst Bollinger*, a specialist in the Swiss press, was already concerned about its negative development in the 1970s.² He noted that since the end of 1950, no fewer than 350 opinion periodicals of the post-war years had already ceased to exist. These had covered a very broad political spectrum and thus enabled voters to form a solidly supported opinion.

As far as the events in Ukraine are concerned, for eight years now our media have mainly been disseminating, almost in unison, the information originating from the relevant NATO services. These demonise a Russia characterised by a degrading and caricature-like image of its president.

The weight of history

To understand what is happening in Ukraine, one has to go back to the post-Cold War period when the USSR was liquidated and both sides committed themselves to creating a more peaceful world.

On 31 July 1991, Presidents *Gorbachev* and *Bush* senior signed the START I (*Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*) agreement in which both countries pledged to reduce

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their strategic nuclear arsenal and respect the post-war status quo. Immediately after the conclusion of this agreement, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia and the United States met and took note of its results: Russia's decision to guarantee the former satellite states of the USSR their independence as well as its demand to guarantee, as a pledge of peace, that NATO would renounce any expansion towards the proximity of Russia's borders.

In an interview with *Sud-Radio* on 1 March 2022, the then Foreign Minister *Roland Dumas*, representing France, recalled the modalities of the meeting. He also confirmed that it had been Ukraine that had taken steps to join the European Union (EU) with its military ties to NATO. It can be assumed that it did not take such a step of its own accord.

A spurious strategy

Objectively speaking, Ukraine, Russia and Europe could but have benefited from a good understanding guaranteeing peace and prosperity from West to East in Northern Europe. This is all the more true since the West is largely dependent on Russia for its gas and oil supplies. So, who had an interest in severing the chains linking the East to the West of Europe?

Barely in office, elected president with an uncertain and controversial majority, *Joe Biden* let himself be carried away into calling *Putin* a "killer". This blatant breach of the tacit peace between the two great powers was made in view of geopolitical considerations based on the opposition to opening up Europe to the East. This included opposition to European access to a huge market and its resources reinforced by the *Nord Stream 2* pipeline, as well as to the planning of the 4000 km *Druzhba* oil pipeline (*Druzhba* means friendship!), which was to connect Germany directly with Russia all the way to Siberia. The US government had tried everything to stop Chancellor *Merkel* from getting involved – without success.

Which Europe are we talking about?

Implementing the lessons of the Second World War, *de Gaulle* had envisaged a Europe of nations from the Atlantic to the Urals, its natural dimension, which included two great powers which had overcome Nazism, Great Britain and Russia. It was a matter of merging what united them while retaining national prerogatives, as symbolised by the United States with its 50 stars in its banner, and also Switzerland with its cantons and communes. He had no sympathy for communism, but as

"Judging by its consequences, the war in Ukraine is a real disaster for the majority of Europeans, who have already been buffeted by the pandemic crisis and are now facing an explosion in commodity prices. Europe desperately needed peace to be able to use all its resources for the recovery. [...] But] the heads of state and government [...] they opted for war instead of recovery."

a visionary, he relied on a peacetime dynamic that would lead to shared prosperity, which was essential for the establishment of democracy.

It is indeed a strange picture, a European Union that allowed Russia to be amputated off it, out of loyalty to the USA, which was making every effort to exclude Russia, and under pressure from Great Britain, which has since left this Union. *De Gaulle* described this Union as a "contraption". In a stroke of genius, *Jacques Delors* said about it in 1985, "No one can fall in love with a large market." Its peoples have never identified with the EU: In May and June 2005, the citizens of France and the Netherlands were called upon to decide in a referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, which would lay down the EU's guidelines; this was clearly rejected by 54.7% and 61.6% nays respectively. The *European Commission* then decided that it would prefer in future to do without the verdict of the peoples in whose name it acts.

**A tree is judged by its fruit,
a policy by its consequences**

Judging by its consequences, the war in Ukraine is a real disaster for the majority of Europeans, who have already been buffeted by the pandemic crisis and are now facing an explosion in commodity prices. Europe desperately needed peace to be able to use all its resources for the recovery that is indispensable for economic and political requirements, as well as for the gradual reunification of their divided populations. But on the contrary, the heads of state and government played the brave heroes and wasted 450 million euros to supply Ukraine with "lethal weapons" (sic). In plain language: they opted for war instead of recovery.

NATO had been built up and equipped with nuclear weapons against the USSR, which dissolved on 25 December 1991. Since NATO could not be abolished (although this would certainly have been consistent and even according to its own logic!), it was agreed, in an effort to calm the situation, not to extend its sphere of action to Russia's borders. That was a per-

fectly reasonable and respectable compromise. It is therefore difficult to understand the EU leaders' strategy, which contradicts this consensus and at least lacks insight. By blindly following Uncle Sam, they fail to see that Europe is being targeted to the same extent as Russia.

Contrary to the beliefs of uninformed ideologues, those political scientists, anthropologists and other specialists who have studied Russian reality agree that *Vladimir Putin* has not only restored the economy ruined under *Yeltsin*, but has also gone extremely far in banking on peace with Europe and the USA. In contrast to the divided Europe, Russia, due to the size of its territory and rich mineral resources, has resources that give it a relative self-sufficiency; and it is doubtful whether the sanctions can bring Russia to its knees. Instead, they have strengthened the hitherto minority Slavophile far right, which seeks to reclaim lost territories and is ready to take on the EU, forcing the Russian government to reorient its strategy and forge other alliances.

Our relationship with Europe

Switzerland maintains multifaceted relations with all European countries, from the Atlantic to the Urals.³ So far, however, no direct dispute between Russia and Switzerland has come to light that would justify sanctions, especially since our country has an economic interest in maintaining good relations with Russia. The same cannot be said of the European Union, which has allowed itself unacceptable interference in our domestic politics, combined with sanctions that penalise our scientific exchanges in the name of its notion of freedom of movement. In this area, Switzerland is more cautious than some of its neighbours and, through a series of referendums, has arrived at a balanced immigration policy that takes into account its capacity to accept foreigners under good conditions.⁴ Similarly, we have not sought to join the EU, in order to preserve our democratic prerogatives, and yet Switzerland has remained one partner among many. For all these reasons and more, it

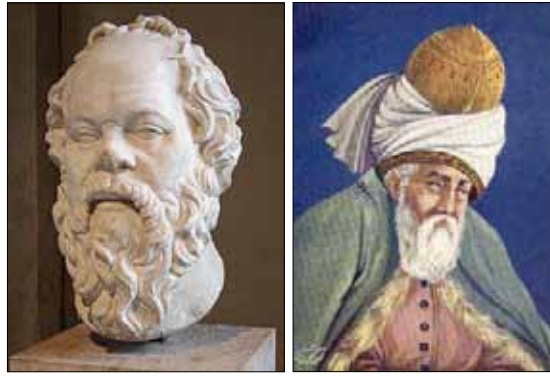
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Ancient wisdom — still relevant today?

ts. As long as there have been human beings, people have been talking to each other. But often also about each other, mostly in the absence of the one who is being talked about. From time immemorial, gossip and malicious talk have been the order of the day, gossip and malicious talk. Hand on heart, who has never ever done this?

Even in ancient Greece, the cradle of our European culture, but also in other cultures, such as ancient Persia, wise men took up this all too human vice and made suggestions on how human relations could be improved with little effort.

One was the famous Athenian philosopher *Socrates*, and another *Rumi*, scholar and one of the most important Persian poets of the Middle Ages. Rumi recommended the following, certainly use-



Socrates and Rumi (pictures ma)

ful today: before a person speaks, they should let their words pass through three gates. At the first gate, they should ask the question, “Is it true?” At the second gate: “Is it necessary?” At the third gate, “Is it kind?”

Socrates does not speak of three gates, but of three sieves, through which one has to filter the utterances. The sieve of truth, the sieve of goodness and the sieve of necessity. To the third sieve Socrates says, “Is it necessary to tell me what you’re so excited about?” To his counterpart’s reply that it was not really necessary, Socrates is supposed to have said with a smile, “Well, if the story you’re about to tell me is neither true, good or necessary,

just forget it and don’t bother me with it.”

Couldn’t a lot of discord be avoided, in friendships, in families, at the workplace, but also between peoples, countries and cultures, if we humans took this wisdom to heart again and again? •

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did not make sense for Switzerland to adopt the EU sanctions.

For world peace and recovery in Switzerland

A democratic country cannot be guided by a fervour based on emotional outbursts and demonisation, but only by rational arguments allowing for exchanges, with respect for the mandates of the people and our elected representatives, our laws and our Constitution. The time necessary for making good decisions must be allowed for. Immediately, these must be geared towards two directions.

First, very broad sections of the population – workers, small traders, the unemployed, pensioners – have slipped into precarious economic circumstances or even poverty as a result of the pandemic crisis, as they are faced with rising prices for basic foodstuffs. They must be able to benefit from our federal solidarity. In this particular situation, our country must strengthen the bonds between its citizens by mobilising them on the basis of a comprehensive economic recovery plan.

On the other hand, thanks to its neutrality and active diplomacy, “little” Switzerland has managed to be recognised on all continents as a place of peace suitable for negotiations. As the founder of the *Red Cross*, it hosts the UN, the WHO and other prestigious institutions of global dimension, all of which also contribute to its prosperity. With regard to the war in Ukraine, Switzerland would have held all the aces well-matched to its particular situation.

In 2014–2015, the then Federal Councilor *Didier Burkhalter*, as the OSCE chairperson, led the negotiations with the leaders

of Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia that resulted in the *Minsk Agreement (Minsk I)*. A second agreement, *Minsk II*, was supposed to enter into force on 15 February 2015, but remained ineffective. Switzerland should have raised its voice the very next day to call on the warring parties to comply with the agreement. It was a major omission that it did not do so. And it is a major political mistake that it imposed unilateral sanctions seven years later.

Unless working towards a world war or towards the completely illusory annihilation of Russia, one could have assumed that, some day or the other, negotiations would take place. The fact that the first conference after the failure of Minsk I and II is taking place in Ankara and under the auspices of *Erdogan* is a strong signal which should jolt us awake. For this conference could and should have taken place in Geneva, the seat of the United Nations, in the heart of Europe. In the frenzy of their own fantasies, the EU leaders and adulators have not even realised that they have taken themselves out of the game, and probably for a long time. With a similar blindness, the Swiss Federal Council, by going along with their sanctions, sold out our pre-eminent position on the international stage for a lentil dish, with unforeseeable long-term consequences. Can this ever be made good?

Conclusion and outlook

The least our authorities can do is to immediately renounce any sanctions against whomever or whatever. This is the first step towards re-establishing a Swiss diplomacy that is open to all sides. Strengthened by such a re-pacification of our international relations, which is more in keeping with our country’s foreign policy vocation than “solidarity” with only one side, they might then employ themselves

domestically by trying to alleviate the plight of those sections of the Swiss population which were hard hit by the pandemic crisis.

Solidarity with war victims is a noble sentiment. Very many people in Switzerland have taken part in actions to take in Ukrainian refugees, in the good faith that they are thus acting in the spirit of humanity. However, truly humanitarian measures can and must never be instrumentalised for party-political propaganda punishing one of the conflict parties, as this will after all also be called upon to participate in negotiations (if indeed these take place). Negotiations can only lead to peace, if all parties are involved. The political forces that persuade well-meaning people to commit to this kind of one-sided “international solidarity” must admit to themselves that they are thereby abusing these people’s belief to be working for a worthy cause. Sanctions maintain a state of tension instead of alleviating it, they do not contribute to peace but to making the prospects of peace even more distant. This increases the number of victims with each passing day. •

¹ Between 1848 and 2021, a total of 654 bills were submitted to the Swiss electorate for a popular vote.

² Ernst Bollinger (1934–2011), *La presse suisse: structure et diversité*, Herbert Lang, 1976; *La Presse suisse: les faits et les opinions*, Payot, 1986. Bollinger was a recognised specialist and head of the information service of the Canton of Geneva from 1987–1993.

³ As an admirer of *Charles de Gaulle*, *Vladimir Putin* extended his formula to a Europe “from Lisbon to Vladivostok”.

⁴ The large influx of refugees who could not be integrated was the cause of serious domestic unrest in France (see: *Les territoires perdus de la République*; Emmanuel Brenner, éd., 2002 *Mille et une nuits*). This is also confirmed by the rejection of the *European Constitutional Treaty* by French and Dutch voters.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Struggling for freedom, people will always find a way

Hannes Hofbauer is criticising censorship motivated by power politics in past and present

by Karl-Jürgen Müller



Hannes Hofbauer is a Viennese journalist and publisher. He studied economic and social history. Books like "Feindbild Russland. Geschichte einer Dämonisierung" (Enemy image Russia. History of a Demonisation) (2016), "Kritik der Migration. Wer profitiert und wer verliert" (Criticism of Migration. Who Profits and Who Loses) (2018) or "Europa. Ein Nachruf" (Europe. An Obituary) (2020), have shown him to be a politically motivated author, avoiding all pigeonholing. He is an independent thinker trenchantly criticising social conditions as well as economic and political power structures. This also applies to his new book, published in spring 2022, "Zensur. Publikationsverbote im Spiegel der Geschichte. Vom kirchlichen Index zur YouTube-Löschung" [Censorship. Publication Bans in History. From the Ecclesiastical Index to YouTube Deletion].*

Hannes Hofbauer states the starting point of his reflections and his interpretative framework right at the beginning of the book: "Compensating for the loss of confidence with coercive measures is one of the oldest techniques of rule, used by church leaders and monarchs in the past as well as by governments and leading media houses today. They all respond to the loss of a customary hegemony of discourse by banning publications. Affected are positions questioning the prevailing narrative which also have the potential for widespread dissemination. This is precisely our current situation. The return of censorship is rooted in the economic weakness of the transatlantic region. In its decline, the establishment is struggling for its *raison d'être*." (Translation of all quotes by *Current Concerns*)

600 years of censorship history

Since questions of power not only determine our present, Hannes Hofbauer approaches his analysis historically – with a focus on Europe and especially the German-speaking countries. The first half of the book is dedicated to this view of history. It begins with the period of early book printing in the middle of the 15th century – not only a time of completely new possibilities for the dissemination of the human word, but also a time of fundamental social and political upheavals. The censor here was mainly the Church.

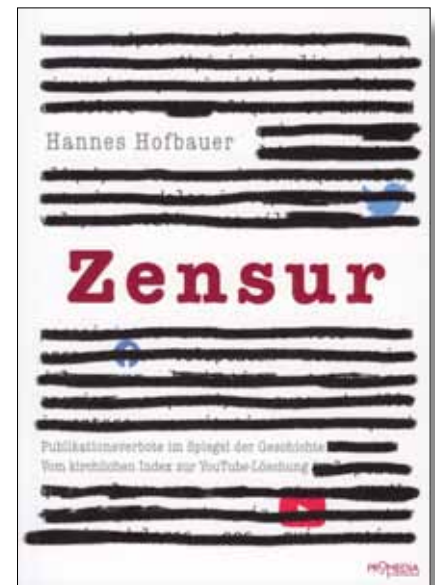
The next 100 pages are dealing with censorship measures from the 16th to the 20th century, always vividly documented and presented in an easily understandable manner. The reader learns, for example, that with the beginning of the 16th century, state authorities increasingly took censorship measures. The emperor and the pope now worked hand in hand, and even the post office issued transport bans on "objectionable and recalcitrant printed matter". While in the 17th century one could "publish largely undisturbed", this changed in the 18th century – even if it was still easy at that time to avoid the censorship measures of the sovereigns who had set the tone in terms of power politics since the Thirty Years' War: The publication of a book was transferred to another, more liberal German state. The Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century also saw censorship measures. Censorship became an "instrument of enlightenment or counter-enlightenment promoted by the authorities". With the French Revolution, the princes of the other European states felt that their position of power was under extreme threat. The censorship measures were correspondingly harsh. However, this did not prevent the political and military "revolutionary" and conqueror *Napoleon* from using no less brutal force against dissenting opinions in his domain.

From the Carlsbad Decrees to the Socialist Law

Napoleon's final defeat in 1815 was followed in the German-speaking countries by Biedermeier and Vormärz in the German Confederation, a period of severe censorship ("Carlsbad Decrees" of 1819) and harassment of dissenters to which renowned literary figures also fell victim. The hopes of many for more freedom through the revolution of 1848/49 were crushed with its failure. The target group of the censorship measures were now primarily politically left-wing forces and socially critical writers. The "Law against the Publicly Dangerous Aspirations of Social Democracy" passed by the German Reichstag on 21 October 1878 stood out.

The 20th century

In the Weimar Republic, the constitution explicitly granted freedom of expression, but Hannes Hofbauer also speaks of censorship measures for the years after the First World War, which were primarily directed against "immorality and fornication" – not least be-



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cause of the fear of sexual permissiveness spilling over in the early years of the Communist Soviet Union – but also, in the final phase of the Republic, against anti-war literature such as the works of *Erich Maria Remarque*. It is widely known that National Socialist rule was a time of the harshest censorship. Additionally, this period was also a high time of censorship's twin sister, state propaganda.

After the end of the Second World War, the occupying powers in Germany and Austria first determined what could be published. The constitutions adopted from 1949 onwards for West Germany, East Germany and Austria explicitly reaffirmed freedom of expression, and the West German Basic Law even states: "There is no censorship". But even for the five decades after the war, Hannes Hofbauer notes de facto censorship measures in the German-speaking countries, not only in the area of literary and journalistic portrayals of sexual practices considered objectionable, but also against "enemies of the state" (in West and East).

Are there limits to freedom of expression?

Here and there one might object that the author focuses too much on restrictions on freedom of expression governed by power politics and interests. Could there also be legitimate reasons for such restrictions? After all, a threat to freedom – in the sense of the development of the personality in accordance with human social nature – and

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From the Carlsbad Decrees 1819 ... to the Network Enforcement Act 2017. (Bilder Staatsarchiv Sachsen/Screenshot)

"Struggling for freedom ..."

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the common good can not only originate from state power politics, but also from private actors. One may think of the protection of the youth, the right to personal honour, defence against violent political or religious extremism or, more generally, of the "rights of others", the "constitutional order" and the "moral law" – as formulated, for example, in the German Basic Law.

However: Those thinking along these lines should be honest and look more closely to see whether it is really about the cause or merely about justifying pure power politics and economic interests. The second part of Hofbauer's book, "Censorship in the Digital Age", shows that today, in post-1990 Europe, it is more about such justifications.

Neoliberalism,

digitalisation and geopolitical shifts

Hannes Hofbauer also introduces this second part of the book with a compact political-economic analysis of the overall situation. He writes: "The new 21st century reflects in its censorship policy the decades-long triumph of economic liberalism, which has given non-state actors, so-called global players, a wealth of power that was previously unthinkable. In the 1990s, the unchecked power of capital strengthened the economic primacy over political processes, which is also reflected in censorship. The technical development of the digitalisation of more and more areas of work and life played into the hands of monopoly-like media

corporations the sovereignty of defining freedom of opinion and freedom of the press, which they know how to use for their own ends – with the support of the state or the EU supranational state."

With the global geopolitical shifts of the past 20 years, however, it is also true today: "It is precisely the knowledge of geopolitical and economic decline that is reflected in the question of how to deal with freedom of expression. The consolidation of the Eurasian space, perceived as a threat in Washington, Brussels, and Berlin, has long since had a cultural and discursive impact. The discourse of values of the former political 'West', incited by missionary zeal, is becoming increasingly implausible in the face of changing power relations on a global scale. [...] In order to stop this loss, Brussels has particularly set out to provide the EU-European peoples with initially concealed and later increasingly openly formulated truth decrees, so that the historical, political, and cultural reading of the self-representation dominates the discursive terrain with as few alternatives as possible."

Waves of censorship since 2008

Hannes Hofbauer locates the first "infringement of freedom of expression in the 21st century" on 28 November 2008 with an EU framework decision which, superficially, was supposed to be directed "against xenophobia and racism". In fact, it was about something else: the EU wanted to gain sovereignty over the definition of what would be considered "genocide", "crimes against humanity"

or "war crimes" in the future and to prevent any controversial discussion about concrete events. At the time, this mainly concerned the events in the former Yugoslavia. And it was about putting a taboo on the public debate about the justification of the actions of the NATO states, which were against international law.

The second wave of censorship in the 21st century followed the failed summit in Vilnius on 29 November 2013, which was supposed to seal the EU's Eastern Partnership with six Eastern European states, but failed due to the opposition of the then Ukrainian President *Yanukovich*. The result was the EU- and US-supported demonstrations and acts of violence on the Maidan in Kiev and the EU-US narrative of the "democratic revolution" – which, however, was very vividly refuted by Russian media. Now these Russian media became the target of the EU and its member states. Under the pretext of taking action against "fake news" and "hate speech", there was a concerted action in the following years by the EU, nation-state agencies, especially in Germany, and globally operating US corporations in the area of the internet and other electronic communication networks. Hannes Hofbauer goes into detail about these events.

Here are just a few keywords: the EU's "East StratCom Task Force" of March 2015 with the claim to want to define what the historical and political "truth" should be and put Russia's public relations on one level with the propaganda of the IS; the German "Network Enforcement Act"

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"Struggling for freedom ..."

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of October 2017, which obliges networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* with the threat of heavy fines to eliminate "fake news" and "hate speech" – without control by the rule of law and in the arbitrary hands of the media corporations. The *German State Media Treaty* of 7 November 2020, which obliges specially established authorities of the State Media Authorities to examine the digital publication world for "true" news and to warn and then also ban internet sites in case of detected infringement. Finally, the "fact-checkers" sprouting from the ground, especially in the public media, who presume to be able to decide what is true and what is untrue.

As a conclusion to these developments, Hannes Hofbauer writes: "Several steps are still necessary before a Ministry of Truth, as it is known from the novel '1984' by *George Orwell*, can be established – and there would still be a lot of social resistance to overcome. But the political elite in many EU countries is working doggedly in this direction."

Two examples are used in the book to illuminate this in depth.

"The fight against the Russian enemy broadcasting station"

Hofbauer's first example is his dealings with Russian media, especially *RT DE* (RT German). RT is the abbreviation for *Russia Today*. This German-language channel, financed by the Russian state, was prevented by all means from going on the air as a television channel in Europe. The crude justification: The station spreads nothing but Russian propaganda. Hannes Hofbauer wrote his book before 24 February 2022. If he had had a little more time, he should have expanded this chapter. Now it is no longer just RT's TV channel that is affected, but RT's entire internet programme (and *Sputnik's* too) are banned throughout EU Europe – and those who nevertheless want to ensure dissemination are even said to be liable to prosecution. Sanctions are threatening anyone who questions the US-NATO-EU narrative about the war in Ukraine.

Dealing with opponents of state corona measures

Hofbauer's second example is the state and media treatment of those who were

opponents of the state's measures against the COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years.

He closely links these measures and the action against their opponents with the economic interests of the pharmaceutical industry and uses the example of *Ken Jebsen* to illustrate how a German journalist who worked for many years at a state broadcaster (at *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg RBB*), was forced to leave the station because of criticism of Israel's policies, set up his own internet portal, *KenFM*, and had a great deal of success with it, had sticks thrown between his legs in every respect after he criticised the state's Corona measures. The result was that his internet portal was no longer able to broadcast and he was cut off from all funding, so he finally decided to leave Germany.

Indeed, the state and media treatment of those who were opponents of the state's Corona measures was not worthy of a liberal democracy in countries like Germany and Austria.

In a sweeping manner, these citizens were given strongly pejorative attributes such as "conspiracy theorists" or "right-wing", the SPD chairperson spoke of "covidiot", the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution (domestic intelligence agency) even invented a new form of anti-constitutionalism, namely the "delegitimisation of the state". There was almost no serious discussion on the matter. Hannes Hofbauer takes up all this and more.

Hannes Hofbauer could have added that there were (and are) also quite objective reasons for governmental COVID-19 measures and that not every proponent of these measures was (and is) motivated by power or interest politics. And that the concerns that there could be an "infodemic" alongside the pandemic, i.e., a confusion of opinions that would make it more difficult to combat the pandemic, were not entirely unjustified either.

Counter-publicity cannot be stifled in the long run

It is good that Hannes Hofbauer repeatedly makes clear in between and then especially in a short concluding chapter entitled "Censorship measures are always circumvented" that censorship measures motivated by power politics are not sus-

tainable. The pure power politics of an actually weakened power system is indeed a highly dangerous frontal attack on freedom and the common good, and many victims have to be mourned. But the human being striving for freedom always seeks and finds new ways. Therefore, the last sentence from the book is also quoted here: "And so the concluding message of this book, which observed publication bans through the centuries, is that counter-publicity to ruling discourse can be hindered with bans, but not stifled."

My rating for the book: commendable – and Hannes Hofbauer would certainly add that the following also applies here: Have the courage to use your own reason!

* Hofbauer, Hannes. *Zensur. Publikationsverbote im Spiegel der Geschichte. Vom kirchlichen Index zur YouTube-Löschung*. Promedia-Verlag Wien 2022, ISBN 978-3-85371-497-3

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Southern bees are very industrious!

The maquis – a year-round eldorado of natural bee plants

by Heini Hofmann

Stereotypes divide the work ethic into a North-South divide – from workaholic to siesta artist. Do such nuances also exist in animals? We wanted to know and put it to the test. The result is astonishing!

We chose the miniature farm animal that is said to be extremely hard-working – the honeybee, our embodiment of industriousness. “The bee is a very hard-working creature,” say the British. We compared the bees in our latitude with those in southern Sardinia, from a beekeeper in southern Sardinia we discovered that there is – due to nature – a reciprocal south-north divide in the industriousness of the bee.

Two working worlds

In Central and Northern Europe, honeybees are busy workers under royal supervision. During the warm season where they collect nectar and pollen. In the other half of the year, when cold or even snow make this impossible, our bee colonies, huddle closely together in the form of a cluster and go rest for the winter (not hibernation) for months.

Their southern counterparts can only dream of this; because here, natural bee plants bloom all year round. Snow is (almost always) a foreign word. This means that they work for twelve months straight, without days off or even siesta – a supra-animal performance. Even human workaholics can't keep up.

Together with his wife *Fiorella Di Luca*, beekeeper *Luigi Deiana* runs a self-established apiary in the province of Sarrabus in south-eastern Sardinia, on the banks of the river Uri, north-west of San Vito, in the midst of typical *macchia* (French: *maquis*), a low, evergreen shrub formation of Mediterranean hills close to the coast. He came across beekeeping by chance when he worked as a machinist and technical draughtsman in Germany and saw a beekeeping film on television. That was his key experience.

From the grassroots

Back in Sardinia, he bought a piece of *Macchia* land and worked as a day labourer to realise his dream of becoming a professional beekeeper – through self-study and “learning by doing”.

He started with four bee colonies – and failed at first. But his will to persevere was great. and he was able to establish 20 colonies. In 1982, with the support of the region, he acquired 50 more – and from then on he was a dyed in the wool professional beekeeper.



South Sardinia's evergreen, low scrub formation (Macchia) is an ideal bee pasture. (Picture Fiorella Di Luca)

While there are four bee breeds in Switzerland (the dark landrace *Mellifica*, the grey bee *Carnica*, the southern *Ligustica* and the Eurasian *Caucasica*), there is only one breed in Sardinia, the Mediterranean *Ligustica* with the typical yellow abdominal rings, which is the most represented breed in the world today.

In Sardinia (as in Switzerland) the Dadant housing system is common, with free-standing, side-by-side individual boxes, which can be extended as desired depending on the growth of the colonies. After the lid has been removed, work is accessed from above and not from behind, as is the case with the German-Swiss system, where the boxes are permanently installed in the apiary.

All-year-round natural bee plants

While in our latitudes the honey harvest happens only once a year, in southern climes something is always in bloom and the honey harvest is spread throughout the entire year, – from January to December. And important to note is that these are only wild plants. The traditional mixed honey of different flowers is the main crop in spring (end of April/beginning of May).

Over the span of a year, the single-flower honeys come into play – in spring from asphodel (lily plant) to lavender (crested lavender) and citrus blossoms to rosemary. In summer there is eucalyptus honey and mixed honey from blackberry, thistle,

mullein and prickly pear. In autumn there is a special honey from the carob tree and in winter (December/January, but not always) the so-called bitter honey from the strawberry tree.

In order to make the best use of these seasonal and local sources of honey, the beekeeper moves his Dadant hives to the region where most natural bee plants bloom – just as our migratory beekeepers do with mobile apiaries in various mountainous cantons.

Five times more honey

The bees' liquid raw material to produce blossom honey is the sugary blossom sap nectar, a secretion of the nectarines, the honey glands of the blossoms, which the bees transport in the honey stomach. (Forest honey from honeydew, produced by aphids, does not exist in the low-growing Sardinian *maquis*). Pollen, on the other hand, i.e. pollen that serves as food for the brood”.

While in Switzerland around ten kilos of honey per bee colony per year is the norm (with large fluctuations depending on the weather), beekeepers can harvest around five times as much honey in the Sardinian *maquis* with its year-round abundance of flowers.

Sardinian honey is considered particularly delicate because the *maquis* is an ideal bee pasture. Honey, almonds and nuts are the basic ingredients of many

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Luigi Deiana, after work: beekeeping in the wild Macchia – an emotionally powerful experience. (Picture Fiorella Di Luca)

"Southern bees are very industrious!"

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Sardinian sweets. Honey is also an incomparable source of energy, since it has five times as many calories as milk, three times as many as meat and twice as many as eggs.

Problems in Paradise

In short, the conditions in the flower-rich Sardinian Macchia landscape would be paradisiacal for the bees and for the beekeeper with his manageable family business (today a good 80 people). But there is a problem: at the beginning of the eighties of the last century, *varroasis* (a mite disease of honeybees) was detected for the first time in Sardinia, which had been brought to Europe from the Urals at the beginning of the seventies.

Varroa mites would never have made it to Sardinia on their own if they had not been introduced by large-scale beekeepers from the Italian mainland who came to the island as migratory beekeepers with contaminated colonies. But how can one treat a sick bee colony that does not take a winter break like ours, when there is a variety of hives all year round and thus uninterrupted collecting activity and brood care?

Varroa control is not possible during brood activity. There is only one trick that helps (unfortunately necessary, but not very pleasant): one is forced to lock up the queen for some time in summer so that she does not lay any more eggs and so there is no capped brood for a few days, which

then makes oxalic acid treatment possible in this time window. Another complication for beekeepers in the south is the beautiful but unfortunately voracious bee-eater (see box).

In harmony with nature

You can sense beekeeper Luigi Deiana's great affinity with nature; his workplace

is the wild, deserted Macchia landscape. He knows that he must not place his beehives in shady places and that he must work calmly with his Ligustica bees, because they are gentle by nature, not aggressive and hard-working. "Bad bees", he is convinced, "are also a question of the beekeeper and his handling of these miniature creatures."

How he handles the gifts of nature with care is also shown by the fact that when he sells his natural products, he does not speak of his customers, but of his friends. His principle is direct sales in his own small business, where his wife Fiorella processes the products, and sells the products at the village markets (where we, too, made our first acquaintance with him in Villasimius).

He also sells by mail order, mainly to the Italian mainland. But here, too,

there is a small, likeable difference: he does not sell his bee products by the bucket to wholesalers, as large beekeepers do, but in small containers to his trusted customers. His greatest wish is that his children will one day continue what he has built up. It was not only the southern bees that impressed us – their beekeeper did too.

Problem Bee-eater

HH. It is one of the most colourful birds in the world and feeds mainly on bees, wasps and bumblebees – the maroon and blue-green coloured bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) with a yellow throat. Typical features are the long, pointed and slightly downward curved bill, the long arrow wings and the short legs (clearly visible in the picture). It preys on insects in swallow-like flight. Bee-eaters are social birds and usually breed in colonies. They migrate to Sardinia from their wintering grounds in Africa in mid-April and return in mid-September.



(picture Fiorella Di Luca)

They are a real problem for beekeepers, and because they are protected, they cannot be controlled. Stomach examinations of dead bee-eaters revealed the remains of up to thirty bees. Beekeeper Luigi Deiana speaks from experience: "When the birds appear, fear spreads in the bee colonies, the workers hardly dare to fly out. Queens are par-

ticularly at risk because they fly more slowly due to their size. But a queen less colony is doomed."

In Switzerland, however, the bee-eater is not a threat to beekeeping (for the time being). The first brood occurred in 1991, but it was not until 2017 that the number of breeding pairs exceeded one hundred. However, this trend is likely to increase as the climate warms.