

Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,
and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

The imaginary war

by Patrick Lawrence



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It began when the Biden regime and the press misrepresented Russian aims in Ukraine. All else has flowed from it.

What were the policy cliques, "the intelligence community" and the press that serves both going to do when the kind of war in Ukraine they talked incessantly about turned out to be imaginary, a Marvel Comics* war, a war with little grounding in reality? I have wondered about this since the Russian intervention began on 24 February. I knew the answer would be interesting when finally we had one.

Now we have one. Taking the government-supervised *New York Times* as a guide, the result is a variant of what we saw as the Russiagate fiasco came unglued: Those who manufacture orthodoxies as well as consent are slithering out the side door.

I could tell you I don't intend to single out the *Times* in this wild chicanery, except that I do. The once-but-no-longer newspaper of record continues to be singularly wicked in its deceptions

and deceptions as it imposes the official but imaginary version of the war on unsuspecting readers.

1945 and 2022

Demilitarisation and De-Nazification

As *Consortium News's* properly suspecting readers will recall, *Vladimir Putin* was clear when he told the world Russia's intentions as it began its intervention. These were two: Russian forces went into Ukraine to "demilitarise and de-Nazify" it, a pair of limited, defined objectives.

An astute reader of these commentaries pointed out in a recent comment thread that the Russian president had once again proven, whatever else one may think of him, a focused statesman with an excellent grasp of history. At the *Potsdam Conference* in July/August 1945, the victorious powers (*USSR, US, and UK*) declared their post-war purpose in Germany as "the four D's."

These were de-Nazification, demilitarisation, democratisation and decentralisation.

Let's give *David Thompson*, who brought this historical reference to my attention, a deserved by-line here:

"Putin's reiteration of the de-Nazification and demilitarisation principles established from the *Potsdam Conference* is not just some quaint tip of the hat to history. He was laying down a marker to the United States and the United Kingdom that the agreement reached at Potsdam in 1945 is still relevant and valid ..."

A just and stable order in Europe must serve the security interests of all sides

The Russian president, whose entire argument with the West is that a just and stable order in Europe must serve the security interests of all sides, was simply restating objectives the trans-Atlantic alliance had once signed on to accomplish. In other words, he was pointing out said alliance's gross hypocrisy as it arms the ideological descendants of German Nazis.

I dwell on this matter because the imaginary war began with the *Biden* regime's and the press's quite irresponsible misrepresentations of the Russian Federation's

aims in Ukraine. All else has flowed from it.

You remember: Russian forces were going to "conquer" the whole of the nation, wipe out the Kiev regime, install a puppet government and then drive on to Poland, the Baltic states, Transnistria and the rest of Moldova, and who could imagine what after that. De-Nazification, we can now read, is a phony Kremlin dodge.

Having lied outright on this score, the next edition of the comic went onto the market. Russia is failing to achieve its imaginary objectives. Low morale, desertions, poorly trained troops with not enough to eat, logistical failures, lousy artillery, inadequate ordnance, incompetent officers: The Russians were riding for a fall on Ukrainian soil.

The corollary here was the heroism, courage and battlefield grit of Ukrainian troops, not least, the *Azov* Battalion, who were not any longer neo-Nazis. Never mind the *Times*, *The Guardian*, the BBC and various other mainstream publications and broadcasters had earlier told us about these ideological fanatics. That was then, this is now.

Just made-up stories

The problem at this point was there were no battlefield successes to report. The defeats, indeed, had begun. In May, roughly when the *Azov* Battalion, heroic and democratic as it is, was forced to surrender in Mariupol, it was time for – this just had to be – Russian atrocities.

We had the theater and the maternity hospital in Mariupol, we had the infamous slaughter in Bucha, the Kiev suburb; various others have followed. Just what happened in these cases has never been established by credible, disinterested investigators; plentiful evidence that Ukrainian forces bear responsibility is dismissed out of hand. But who needs investigations and evidence when the brutal, criminal, indiscriminately ruthless Rrrussians, must be culpable if the imaginary war is to proceed?

My unchallenged favourites in this line come courtesy of *CNN*, which went long this spring on allegations – Ukrainian al-

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"The imaginary war"

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legations, of course – that Russian soldiers were raping young girls and young boys right down to months-old infants.¹

The network abruptly dropped this line of inquiry after the senior Ukrainian official disseminating these allegations² was removed from office because the charges are fabrications. A wise move on *CNN*'s part, I think: Propaganda does not have to be very subtle, as history shows, but it does have its limits.

Just after the atrocities' narrative had ripened, the Russians-are-stealing-Ukrainian-grain theme began. The *BBC* offered an especially wonderful account of this. Look at this video and text presentation³ and tell me it isn't the cutest thing you've ever seen, as many holes in it as my Irish grandma's lace curtains.

But at this point, problems. Russian forces, with their desertions, antiquated guns, and dumb generals, were taking one city after another in eastern Ukraine. These were not – the fly in the ointment – imaginary victories.

Out with the war-is-going-well theme and in with the brutal Russians' indiscriminate use of artillery. This was a "primitive strategy," the *Times* wanted us to know. In the awfulness of war, you simply don't shell an enemy position as a preliminary to taking it. Medieval.

Lately, there's another problem for the conjurers of imaginary war. This is the death toll. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission reported 10 May that the casualty count to date was in excess of 3,380 civilian fatalities, bumped up in June to 4,509, and 3,680 civilians injured. (And both sides shoot and kill in a war.)

Goddamn it, they exclaimed on Eighth Avenue. That is nowhere near enough in the imaginary war. Desperate for a gruesomely high death toll, the *Times*, on June 18, published "Death in Ukraine: A Special Report."⁴ What a read. There is nothing in it other than innuendo and weightless surmise. But the imaginary war must grind on.

The *Times*'s "special report" – dum-da-da-dum – rests on phrases such as "witness testimony and other evidence" and "the thousands believed killed." The evidence, to be noted, derives almost entirely from Ukrainian officials — as does an inordinate amount of what the *Times* publishes.

There is a great quotation: "People are killed indiscriminately or suddenly or without rhyme or reason." Wow. Is this damning or what?

But another problem. This observation comes from one *Richard Kohn*, who is emeritus at the University of North Caro-

lina. I hope the professor is having a good summer down in Chapel Hill.

In late June, Sievierodonetsk fell – or rose, depending on your point of view – and in short order so did Lysychansk and the whole of Luhansk province. Now come the 'fessing up stories', here and there. The Ukrainian forces are so discommodulated they are shooting one another, we read. They can't operate their radios and – an artful back flip here – they are running out of food and ammunition and morale. Untrained soldiers who signed up to patrol their neighbourhoods are deserting the front lines.

Holdouts

There are the holdouts. The *Times* reported last week that the Ukrainians, done for in Luhansk, are planning a counteroffensive in the south to reclaim lost territory. We all need our dreams, I suppose.

To the surprise of many, *Patrick Lang*, the ordinarily astute observer of military matters, published "Unable to even fix its own tanks, Russia's humiliation is now complete" on his *Turcopolier* last Friday.⁵ The retired colonel predicts the Russians are in for "a sudden reversal of fortunes." No, I'm not holding my breath.

Have you had enough of the imaginary war? I have. I read this junk daily as a professional obligation. Some of it I find amusing, but in the main it sickens when I think of what the American press has done to itself and to its readers.

For the record, it is hard to tell exactly what occurs on Ukraine's tragic fields of war. As noted previously in this space⁶, we have very little coverage from professional, properly disinterested correspondents. But I offer here my surmise, and it is nothing more.

This war has proceeded, more or less inexorably, in one direction: In the real war, the Ukrainians have been on a slow march to defeat from the first. They are too corrupt, too mesmerized by their fanatical Russophobia to organize an effective force or even to see straight.

This is not a grinding war of attrition, as we are supposed to think. It has proceeded slowly because Russian forces appear to be taking care to limit casualties – their own and among Ukrainian civilians. I put more faith in the UN's numbers than in that silly, nothing-in-it "special report" the *Times* just published.

I do not know why Russian forces approached the outskirts of Kiev from the north early in the conflict and then withdrew, but there is no indication they intended to take the capital. There were battles, but they were certainly not "beaten back." That is sheer nonsense.

I await proper investigations – admittedly unlikely – of the atrocities that have

certainly occurred but without, so far, any conclusive indication of culpability.

Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence, remarked recently Russia's objective remains to take most of Ukraine.⁷ In a speech⁸ at the end of June in Ashgabat, the Turkmenistan capital, Putin appeared notably at ease and asserted, "Everything is going according to plan. Nothing has changed." The objective, he said, remained "to liberate Donbass, to protect these people, and to create conditions that would guarantee the safety of Russia itself. That's it."

Putting these two statements side by side, there is vastly more evidence supporting Putin's than there is for Haines.

In the end, defeat

Intentionally or otherwise – and I often have the impression the *Times* does not grasp the implications of what it publishes – the paper put out a story Sunday headlined, "Ukraine and the Contest of Global Stamina."⁹ The outcome of this conflict, it reported, now depends on "whether the United States and its allies can maintain their military, political and financial commitments to holding off Russia."

Can they possibly not understand down on Eighth Avenue that they have just described Ukraine as a basket-case client? Do they know they have just announced that the imaginary war they have waged these past four and some months is ending in defeat, given there is no one in Ukraine to win it? •

Source: <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/07/13/patrick-lawrence-the-imaginary-war/> of 13 July 2022

* *Marvel Comics* (actually Marvel Entertainment, LLC) is a US comic book publisher based in New York. Along with *DC Comics*, it is one of the world's largest publishers in this genre. (Editor's note)

¹ Three such specimens are here: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/22/europe/ukraine-sexual-violence-allegations-russia-cmd-intl/index.html>; <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/27/europe/ukraine-kherson-russia-rape-intl/index.html>; <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/09/europe/ukraine-russian-soldiers-brovary-rape-victims/index.html>

² <https://www.newsweek.com/lyudmila-denisova-ukraine-commissioner-human-rights-removed-russian-sexual-assault-claims-1711680>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/61790625>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/06/18/world/ukraine-russia-news-deaths>

⁵ <https://turcopolier.com/unable-to-even-fix-its-own-tanks-russias-humiliation-is-now-complete/#comment-207445>

⁶ <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/04/05/patrick-lawrence-the-us-bubble-of-pretend/>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61990495>

⁸ <https://www.rt.com/russia/558109-putin-ukraine-nato-goals/>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/09/us/politics/ukraine-strategy-biden.html>

Work actively for peace, also in war

When the trains rolled to the front in late July, early August 1914, many wagons were labelled. Along with a lot of war-mongering, it also read: “We’ll be home for Christmas.”

In the end, it was more than four years of war, more than 15 million dead soldiers and civilians, and a radically changed Europe and a different world. And barely 20 years later, a second world war with even much greater destruction, more than 60 million dead and a new era in history.

“Once you unleash war, literally anything can happen.” This statement by the renowned Australian publicist *John Pilger* (cf. article on page 4) is very thought-provoking – and leads us to ask: Who unleashed the war in Ukraine that everyone has been talking about since 24 February – but which started much earlier? When, how, and for what purpose was it unleashed? There are already some good answers to these two questions. In many articles, this newspaper has also tried to answer these questions. But there are also other questions. Questions pointing to the future. The most important of these is: How and when will this war end, and with what consequences? And following on from that: do we citizens have a chance to contribute to this end?

The flood of information and above all the flood of opinion and propaganda on the

war is enormous. As a citizen with heart and mind, one hopes for one thing above all else every day: for silver linings of peace on the horizon. And, indeed, there are always indications that the hope of an imminent end to the war could be justified. Only to be disappointed again the next day by new reports. Thus, on the one hand, we can also hear in our Western media that the displeasure about the disastrous effects of our own sanctions on the world economy and our own countries is growing from day to day, and voices are also being heard that resolutely deny the possibility of a military “solution” and plead for a negotiated solution – as soon as possible. At the same time, slogans of perseverance until “final victory” can be heard, and again and again the propaganda formula of the evilness of Russia and especially of the country’s President. It should be left open here whether this rollercoaster of emotions is created deliberately – for example, to discourage people from making their own commitment to peace.

It is realistic to assume that a comprehensive war machine – including everything that goes with it – has been set in motion on both sides of the front and that not only Russia and Ukraine but many states of the world are confronting each other on this front. The talk of a “world war” is not absurd. It is obvious that it is

not about good versus evil, freedom and democracy versus dictatorship and tyranny. It is equally unrealistic for citizens to take on to end this war in a big way tomorrow.

But this realisation does not mean discouragement. The courageous person asks two questions: What does and what does not contribute to peace? And then also: What can I do? What do I want to do?

What does not contribute to peace is: Falling for war propaganda. Falling for images of the enemy. Participating in the sharp division into good and evil. To beat the drums of war. Arrogance and denial of reality...

And what does contribute to peace? The classical cardinal virtues are timelessly valid: Courage, prudence, justice, and temperance. Modesty and no big words. Building bridges between people and between nations. Understanding and making things understandable. Searching for the truth. To be enlightened and to enlighten oneself. Educating the future generation to be more peaceable. Being fellow human beings in the here and now. Acknowledging and reflecting on one’s own strengths and weaknesses... And again and again pondering the questions: What does and what does not contribute to peace?

Karl-Jürgen Müller

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“Mainstream media is part of a propaganda war”

John Pilger on the lies of the West and the march against China

*ts. He is considered one of the last great journalists of our time, an inspiration to many young ones. John Pilger (*1939), Australian journalist, author and documentary filmmaker has dedicated his life to the pursuit of truth. He has spent his career working for the mainstream, covering nine wars. But he has never seen coverage “so utterly consumed by a tsunami of jingoism and of manipulative jingoism” as the Ukraine war. “And that’s why nothing should be trusted.” And: The Western propaganda against China should not be overlooked.*

He takes hostility in stride. “The great journalist *James Cameron* once said, “If they call you a ‘communist’, especially a ‘communist Jew’, then you know you’re doing something right, you’re succeeding.”” In the *South China Morning Post*, Pilger recently gave an interview recalling the role of propaganda in wars. He said that the Ukraine war was no different. “You must remember though that above all this is the war of propaganda. And I would think almost nothing one reads in the Western press about the invasion of Ukraine is to be trusted.” Scepticism is in place, he said, but he is not sure that readers and viewers in the US and Europe possess the skill of scepticism. “That is crucial now because nothing can be believed. Every day when I scan the media, I look at the source and it’s Ukrainian intelligence.”

The propaganda operation in Ukraine is “quite brilliant”, he said. “They’ve managed to invent a chemical warfare attack when there wasn’t one. They’ve managed to keep out of the Western media the fact that so much of Ukraine is infested, if not run by, but infested with true extremists, fascists, ‘neo-Nazis’ they are called.” According to him, the US are playing the leading role in Ukraine. But one should not forget that “the US doesn’t give a damn about Ukraine. Ukraine is simply a pawn in this.” The aim of the USA, their defence minister said literally and publicly, was to destroy the Russian Federation.

“That’s been known for a long time. That is probably the most dangerous project in the world today because the Russians are not going to allow that.”

Understanding the conflict means letting both sides have their say. Before February 24th of this year, there were 60,000 Ukrainian soldiers on the line of contact across the Donbas. “Now, Donbas, as far as the Russians are concerned, is the last stepping stone. [...] Everything in modern Russian history and in not-so-modern history tells us that the Russians will never tolerate this. That they regard this as a threat and they have a lot of their history to justify that. In any discussion of geopolitics, history has to be part of one’s analysis.” He said that it was sheer Western ignorance of Russia, but also of China, that we do not want to take their perspec-

tive into account. This account should in no way endorse or approve of *Putin’s* invasion, but it must be understood. Russia will not benefit from it, he said. “Once you unleash war, then literally anything can happen.”

As a mainstream journalist, he had covered nine wars, but never had he experienced such a “tsunami of jingoism and manipulative jingoism”. He always tells people to deconstruct all the news in front of the TV, to check it. If that is not possible, then the account should be discarded. Since he, like most people, does not have the time for that, there is only one thing to do: ignore them.

Because: there used to be spaces for journalists who were committed to the truth, even in London, in *Fleet Street*, the press district, however, these spaces are now closed. One may dislike social media, but “it does mean that we at least have a way to question what we see and hear and read in the mainstream media.” Because “mainstream media is part of a propaganda war. That’s not said or meant to be in any way agitprop and speaking against the craft gave me a home throughout all my career. But that’s the truth and we must be sceptical. We must be sceptical of absolutely everything.”

As an Australian, Pilger also observes the mood-mongering against China. It is a “soft war” that is already being waged against China. That’s what we live with day after day. It’s extremely dangerous.” Often there is biased reporting about China’s self-assertion in the South China Sea, but the fact is, and this is deliberately concealed, “that China is surrounded by some 40 US bases all the way up from Australia across the Pacific up into Asia, all the way to Korea and Japan and Okinawa. Floating bases all aimed at the industrial heartland of China.”

As for Australia’s independence from the US? “Australia follows the United States. Australian foreign policy, its military, its intelligence community, its media, much of its public intellectual life is integrated with the United States.” It is often an insult to call Australia the 51st state of the United States, he said. “But it is.” What the US covets, it usually gets.

Where are the journalists from Europe who follow the example of the upright fighter for truth from “down under”? •

Source: ‘This is a war of propaganda’: John Pilger on Ukraine and Assange | Talking Post with Yonden Lhatoo. 09.07.2022. *South China Morning Post*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9pEotvIW-s>

The end of independent investigative journalism

John Pilger on Assange’s extradition to the US

“If *Julian* is extradited to the United States, I think it will effectively end real independent investigative journalism,” *John Pilger* says. “Who will take that risk again if the United States and other countries, but if it’s in the United States mainly, can reach anywhere in the world? You take a journalist for writing something or revealing something it doesn’t approve of.” Censorship? Only on the others? Torture? Only with the others? For Pilger, there is no doubt: “if *Julian* goes to the United States and is effectively dropped in a penal hellhole, that will be the end of him, literally. He will die. Anything is better, of course, than going to the United States. But the torture, and it’s not a word I use idly, the torture he’s suffered has cost the man terribly.”

And what is his home country, Australia, doing for its citizen *Assange*? “One of the most egregious, outrageous aspects, if you will, of this case with *Julian* is that he’s an Australian citizen. But Australia has made no effort whatsoever to protect one of its own.” Yet *Assange* had committed no crime. “This is a journalist fighting for his life and for the right of real journalism to publish the truth about governments.”

The appeals of *Assange’s* father, but also those of Pilger, were not heard by Prime Minister *Anthony Albanese*. Pilger: “Does nationality mean nothing? Well, apparently it means nothing, because Australia has not only done nothing, it has colluded with the United States to keep *Julian* where he is.”

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9pEotvIW-s>

On 1 August

Caring for Switzerland Reclaiming Sovereignty and Neutrality!

by Dr. iur. Marianne Wüthrich



The grison village of Juf (community of Avers) lies at 2126 m above sea level and is considered the highest year-round inhabited settlement in Switzerland and one of the highest in Europe. (picture Wikipedia)

“We live in uncertain times. The last few years have shown that even democracy cannot be taken for granted, even in places where it is considered to be well established. It is dependent on citizens respecting and protecting free speech, questioning simple rhetoric and taking verifiable facts seriously. [...] The situation becomes dangerous when the only truth we accept is what we want to hear. Democracy rests on a series of fundamental pillars. If just one of these key elements begins to crumble, the entire edifice is weakened.” (Walter Thurnherr, Swiss Federal Chancellor)¹

Federal Chancellor Thurnherr² here addresses fundamental elements of the direct democratic constitutional state that we should keep in mind – especially in times of severe crises – if we do not want to abandon the Swiss state model to gradual dissolution in the EU-NATO pie.

A brief overview of the last 30 years of Switzerland’s EU policy and the paramount importance of direct democracy

as a whole may perhaps lift up dispirited minds. As far as neutrality is concerned, our politicians and media are strongly advised to listen a little more to the people instead of confusing their minds. A follow-up survey conducted by the ETH Zurich in June 2022 showed that the vast majority of the Swiss remain committed to the principle of neutrality even in adverse times – albeit with individual puzzling contradictions that can only be understood as the result of a propaganda contrary to the truth.

Democracy depends on respecting and protecting free speech

We must never disregard this important reminder by the Swiss Federal Chancellor, even in difficult times. The current attempts by some Swiss politicians and media to integrate Switzerland more closely into NATO and the EU have, like all political processes, a history and are always brought into play when the geopolitical situation is apparently “favourable” for such proposals. It is precisely then that

it is of great importance for us citizens to also get to read and hear opinions outside the eternal mainstream and that a free discussion with our fellow citizens and with politicians remains possible. Chancellor Thurnherr probably wrote his preface to the brochure *The Swiss Confederation – a Brief Guide 2022* a few months before 24 February, but his statement “[t]he situation becomes dangerous when the only truth we accept is what we want to hear” is a highly topical reminder.

As far as Switzerland’s relationship with the EU is concerned, there is strikingly often talk of European “solidarity”, today. In view of the Ukraine crisis, it is said, “Europe” must “move closer together” and Switzerland must not “stand on the sidelines”. It’s all over town: Without the direct-democratic rights of the Swiss electorate, we would have become a member of the EU 30 years ago. We Swiss should have a little more courage to go our own way than our Federal Councillors are hav-

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"Caring for Switzerland"

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ing at the moment. Do we really have to copy every piece of paper from Brussels headquarters (or from even further west) into a Federal Council decree within 24 hours and obediently implement it? Without taking into account the foundations of our understanding of the state and without adhering to the binding constitutional and human rights foundations of our constitution? Where are we going with this?

Staying on the Swiss path in the midst of Europe

The Swiss way to exist as a sovereign country in the midst of the centralist EU construct and to come to an understanding with Brussels and the individual European countries is a high art, but it is possible. With the Free Trade Agreement of 1972 between the EFTA member states and the EEC, Switzerland had found a way for economic exchange that was suitable for democracy. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1990s, Swiss supporters of EU accession in politics, the media and the federal administration formed themselves in lockstep with Brussels. In a surprise coup, the Federal Council submitted its application for EU membership to Brussels in 1991 and wanted to integrate Switzerland quickly into the EEA as a first step. Thanks to direct democracy, this failed: On 6 December 1992, the Swiss people said "No" to the EEA. This effectively put EU accession off the table. Since then, however, the EU turbos have not moved away from their goal – they are free to do so. But those citizens who want to keep a democratic and, as far as possible, sovereign Switzerland often do not have an easy time when it comes to protecting the freedom of opinion. It is particularly worrying that the "simple rhetoric" that the Swiss Chancellor rightly advises us to question often comes from the federal administration or is at least actively supported by it with the use of taxpayers' money. For example, the claim that the Swiss economy would plummet as a result of a No to the EEA. As everyone knows, it was not true.

"Taking verifiable facts seriously"

If one wants to understand the history of Swiss relations with the European Union, one would do well to also consider this advice by Walter Thurnherr. The next steps taken by the Federal Council and Parliament after the sovereign's rejection of the EEA were the Bilateral Agreements I and II of the 2000s. Just a brief comment on this: The referendum against the Bilateral Agreements I was mainly held because of the feared effects of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons and the Agreement on Land Transport, which are

of great interest to the EU and its member states, but which have brought the absorption capacity of our small country to its limits and have de facto invalidated the article on the protection of the Alps in our Federal Constitution. The EU turbos (including the federal administration) defeated the referendum with factual claims and blatantly trivialising figures. For example, they assumed an average net immigration of 8,000 per year, whereas the actual immigration was up to ten times that amount. And they promised a maximum of 650,000 annual lorry journeys across the Alps, while they actually exceeded one million already in the first few years.

Prosperous cooperation between states and confederations of states is only possible from equal to equal

Be that as it may, the Bilateral Agreements I and II were accepted by the Swiss people in referendum votes or tacitly, we have come to terms with them and are prepared to continue to apply them and, if necessary, to update them in the interest of both sides. To this end, a bureaucratic monstrosity like the "institutional framework agreement" is completely unnecessary, because we Swiss are known to be flexible when something makes sense to us. That is why we are happy to provide financial support for meaningful projects in EU countries, for example in the area of vocational training. But we are allergic to any coercive mechanism and to any imposition of foreign law and its interpretation by foreign courts. All this contradicts the Swiss understanding of the state, according to which we citizens are accustomed to keeping the reins in our own hands.

Is that so difficult to understand? The fact that the EU commissioners cannot understand it just proves that the two systems are not compatible. And the "argument" of some Swiss politicians and media that Switzerland must subordinate itself to the EU because the latter is bigger provokes the reflex to recommend to these fellow citizens a remedial course in civics. For example, the fact that the cantons with a few tens of thousands of inhabitants (such as Uri or Glarus) have in many respects the same weight as the million-strong cantons of Zurich and Bern (majority of the cantons, Council of States) is in line with the Swiss understanding of democracy and federalism. We find similar examples in other countries around the globe. It is hard to see why the "Rule of Law" invented in Washington or the centralist EU set of rules should apply to peoples who have a different understanding of law and culture.

Neutrality is part of the DNA of the Swiss

Switzerland's neutrality was not invented by the Congress of Vienna of 1814/15,

but is part of the DNA of the Swiss, so to speak. Neutral arbitrators were already appointed according to the oldest letters of confederation, and without mediating personalities the Confederation would probably hardly have survived its numerous internal struggles as well as 300 years of religious division. Externally, the *Défensionale* of Wil of 1647 set an example after the Thirty Years' War: "No passage of foreign troops" was a central aspect.

The principle of neutrality is deeply rooted in the Swiss population. On 16 March 1986, more than 75 percent of the voters and all the cantons voted against Switzerland joining the UN. This was not because the Swiss did not want to make their humanitarian, economic and cultural contribution to the world community: Switzerland worked actively in all UN sub-organisations and paid many times more than the membership fee would have amounted to, and with international Geneva it also provided extensive infrastructure to the UN organisations. But the obligation of UN member states to take sanctions on the basis of a decision by the UN Security Council or even to undertake military missions is not compatible with Swiss neutrality – at least this was clear to the voters at the time.

Shaking the perpetual armed neutrality

"It is enough for a single essential element to start slipping to make the whole edifice totter." So warns Chancellor Thurnherr. This is particularly true of the principle of neutrality: it has been slipping from within and without since the 1990ies. We Swiss would do well to be vigilant so that our negligently shaken edifice can be put back on solid ground.

In 1994, the member states of the CSCE (later OSCE), including Switzerland, were invited by the North Atlantic Council, i.e., the heads of state and government of the NATO member states, to participate in the Partnership for Peace. Purpose of the PfP: "Operationally under the authority of the North Atlantic Council, the Partnership for Peace will forge new security relationships between the North Atlantic Alliance and its partners for peace. [...] The Partnership will expand and intensify political and military cooperation throughout Europe [...]", and so on.³ Incidentally, the "democratic states in the east of us" (!) were primarily addressed – as early as 1994!

Switzerland and other neutral states in Western Europe could also be included in the same process. On 30 October 1996, "Switzerland" declared in the "Bulletin on Swiss Security Policy 1996/97" that it had "taken note of NATO's invitation and de-

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"Caring for Switzerland"

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cided to participate in the Partnership for Peace".⁴

The explosive aspect of this: the "decision of Switzerland" was printed in a mere "presentation document" in a bulletin of the ETH, from which it was not even apparent who had made the decree in the name of Switzerland. This serious step away from neutrality was taken knowingly and willingly behind the backs of the people. In Switzerland's direct democracy, decisions of this magnitude are usually taken by the sovereign. The writer, – God knows – a Swiss voter who is active and interested, only learned a few years later, when collecting signatures for the referendum against Swiss military missions to "promote peace" abroad, that Switzerland was already largely linked to NATO through its participation in the Pfp.

The Swiss army's missions abroad were a concrete consequence of its participation in the Pfp and, of course, contradicted the principle of neutrality. For this reason, the corresponding amendment to the Military Act was hotly disputed, but was finally accepted by the Swiss people in the referendum of 10 June 2001. In order to appease the people, parliament had written into the bill: "Participation in combat operations to enforce peace is excluded." (Art. 66a para.2; emphasis *mw*) However, it later turned out that the distinction between "peace-promoting" and "peace-enforcing" actions in crisis areas was in the dark even for military experts ...

On 3 March 2002, the Swiss finally voted to join the UN with only 54.6 per cent in favour and 12 cantons against 11, and next year Switzerland will have a seat on the UN Security Council. The then head of the FDFA, Joseph Deiss, had declared before the vote that a seat in the Security Council was compatible with neu-

trality, which apparently did not convince a strong minority of voters.

Swiss voters stand strong on neutrality

In June, the ETH carried out a follow-up survey to the "Security 2022" study, because after the survey in January one wanted to determine "possible effects of the war in Ukraine in the Swiss electorate's opinion on foreign, security and defence policy".⁵

Fortunately, the vast majority of respondents clearly stuck to neutrality - the Federal Council's de facto renunciation of the neutrality policy and the months-long disinformation campaign by the authorities and the media had surprisingly little effect. The record high approval of 97% (!) for the statement "Switzerland should maintain its neutrality" from January was indeed not reached in June, but the 89% achieved (p. 30) is also a very high value. It is purely a case of mood-mongering when the Federal Council - and with it all the mainstream media - comment that the war is leading to "a more critical view of Swiss neutrality".⁶ Absolutely contrary to the facts is the Federal Council's assertion: "At the same time, security policy cooperation with Nato or the EU is becoming more popular." In fact, there is no significant difference in the approval of joining Nato, which has been weak for decades (January 26%, June 27%). The fact that a good half of respondents think Switzerland should "move closer to Nato" (p. 24) is of little significance in view of the very open wording.

On the subject of "sanctions against Russia", on the other hand, the confusion of minds caused by disinformation is abundantly clear: over 70% think that sanctions are compatible with neutrality! And only 36% are of the opinion that Switzerland can no longer offer its Good Offices as a result of its sanctions against Russia. (p. 39) Although this result corre-

sponds to the Federal Council's mantra-like repetitions, it is certainly not the truth.

There is a reason why many Swiss cling to the alleged compatibility with neutrality of the Russia sanctions, which violate the constitution and international law, (which makes the Federal Council's misleading even more outrageous): Absolute favourites of the Swiss voters surveyed are still Good Offices and mediation in conflicts: 91% approval (95% in January) to "Thanks to neutrality, Switzerland can mediate in conflicts and provide Good Offices internationally" (p. 32) and even an increase from 75% to 78% to "Switzerland should mediate more in conflicts" (p. 20).

It is about time that we citizens protest loudly against the fact that our government is undermining neutrality and thus gambling away Switzerland's credibility! In any case, there is still hope in Switzerland's direct democracy. •

¹ Introduction to *The Swiss Confederation – a Brief Guide 2022* (excerpt). Published by the Swiss Federal Chancellery

² The Swiss Federal Chancellor is the Chief of Staff of the Federal Council with an advisory vote and the right to make proposals; he is often referred to as the "eighth Federal Councillor".

³ "Partnership for Peace. Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of heads of state and government at NATO headquarters in Brussels" of 10/11 January 1994. Invitation

⁴ <https://www.pfp.admin.ch/de/dokumentation-grundlagendokumente-.html>

⁵ Tresch, Tibor Szvircsev; De Rosa, Stefano; Ferst, Thomas; Rohr, Patric; Robert, Jacques. "Nachbefragung der Studie 'Sicherheit 2022' auf Grund des Krieges in der Ukraine." Militärakademie (MILAK) an der ETH Zürich. Bericht vom 14. Juli 2022 (Follow-up survey of the "Security 2022" study due to the war in Ukraine. Military Academy (MILAK) at ETH Zurich. Report of 14 July 2022)

⁶ "Nachbefragung 'Sicherheit 2022': Kritischere Betrachtung der Neutralität, grösserer Pessimismus und stärkere Befürwortung der Armee infolge des Krieges in der Ukraine". *press release of the Federal Council of 14/07/2022* (Follow-up survey "Security 2022": more critical view of neutrality, greater pessimism and stronger support for the armed forces due to the war in Ukraine. Federal Council media release of 14 July 2022)

For a secure future in freedom

by National Councillor Franz Grüter, President of the Foreign Policy Committee



Franz Grüter
(picture ma)

On 1 August we celebrate the birthday of Switzerland. More than 730 years ago, a unique project of success began in the middle of Europe. Today we can say that in no other country do citizens enjoy as much freedom, self-de-

termination, security and prosperity as in Switzerland.

The founding stone was laid by the *Federal Charter* of 1291, in which the valleys of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden swore to stand by each other in the face of the “malice of the age”. At that time, the threat came from outside, from foreign tax bailiffs and foreign judges.

Today, the malice of the age lurks inside: Many no longer know that our prosperity and our freedom are anything but self-evident. All the more reason for us to remember this protective alliance and the foundations of Switzerland on 1 August.

For a strong army

Today, the state does everything possible and impossible. In parliament, one could sometimes think that there is nothing more important to do than to install gender-neutral toilets.

Yet the majority in parliament has allowed the foundation of internal and external security to fall into disrepair over the years: the army. Without security there is no freedom. Without freedom, there is no self-determination. This is dramatically demonstrated by the war in Ukraine.

In July, my wife and I travelled through Scandinavia in a camper van. We were particularly impressed by Finland: how seriously this small country with 5.5 million inhabitants takes the protection of its population. In case of war, the Finns can put up to 520,000 men under arms in a short time to defend the country’s independence.

My conclusion is that we must consistently adhere to Switzerland’s model of success. This means remaining neutral and being able to protect our country and our people independently. Unfortunately, both of these are at great risk.

In the military, I learned an important leadership principle: In crises, one should never make hasty decisions that have a long-term effect. Such decisions usually turn out to be wrong afterwards. Unfortunately, this was also the case with the abandonment of neutrality. Under pressure

from abroad, the Federal Council took decisions that went against the interests of our country.

For credible neutrality

Switzerland’s history also teaches us this: we absolutely must return to armed neutrality. This means that our army, which has been denigrated for decades and which has been broken through destructive saving, must be made defensible again so that it can protect the country and its people. Only in this way can we continue to be safe and free in the future, “as the fathers were”. The message of the Federal Charter of 1291 still applies to Switzerland today.

The fact that Switzerland is doing so well and that it has survived two world wars unscathed, among other things, is due in large part to our perpetual armed neutrality. But even this pillar of our state and of Switzerland as a model of success is shaking. Not only the left, but also many bourgeois politicians suddenly want to throw neutrality overboard. The presidents of the Centre and the FDP even want to supply weapons and ammunition to Ukraine – to a belligerent state!

Switzerland has also no business in the UN Security Council, where the major powers decide on war and peace. We must stop this rapid sell-out of neutrality. Otherwise, Switzerland will lose all credibility as a neutral mediator and will no longer be able to use its *Good Offices*. In the past, it made with it an important contribution to stability and peace in the world. Or to put it another way: If every country lived up to Switzerland’s neutrality, there would be no war in the world.

For a secure energy supply

There is a dark red alert for the energy supply: there could be a power shortage as early as this winter. Companies have been informed that their electricity could simply be cut off. We will sit in our homes and feel cold. The economy will grind to a halt. Our interconnected digital world will collapse if we run out of electricity.

Such a scenario would have been unthinkable just a short time ago. Now it threatens to become reality. The SVP’s warnings to this effect were thrown to the wind by the Federal Council and the other parties. In 2017, we warned of too little electricity and exploding energy prices with a “cold shower” poster. We were laughed at then – now no one is laughing any more.

The self-inflicted crisis is a state failure of the first order: A wealthy industrialised country like Switzerland is not ca-

pable of ensuring enough energy for the population and the economy? That sounds like a bad joke.

The centre-left’s day dream policy is to blame for that. The Energy Strategy 2050 has failed miserably. Technology bans – nuclear energy, bans on combustion engines – are harmful and inhibit progress and development. Wind and solar power cannot replace the missing capacities. Especially not in winter, when we need a lot of energy. Only 5 per cent of our electricity comes from wind and sun – yet the SP, the Greens and the Centre want to shut down the nuclear power plants that reliably supply a third of Switzerland’s electricity.

A secure energy supply is a top priority. The Federal Council must do everything it can to avert the threat of blackouts. The population and businesses depend on a secure and affordable energy supply. There must be an end to the suicidal experiments of left-green and soft-bourgeois politics! That is why the SVP is calling for the appointment of an “electricity general” to work out the full options for a secure energy supply.

Our successful model is in danger

The Federal Council is also running in the wrong direction in agricultural policy. Instead of strengthening productional agriculture and increasing the degree of self-sufficiency in the current global crisis, it has just decided that 3.5 per cent of arable land should be “ecologised”. That is 10,000 hectares less grain. With that we could produce bread for a million people in Switzerland!

We must also change course in agricultural policy. The production of domestic food must be increased and the dependence on imports from abroad must be reduced.

The Swiss model of success is in danger! Our freedom, our independence, our internal and external security, our neutrality, our energy and food supply, our prosperity, our free enterprise, our pension provision – all this is acutely endangered. We urgently need to take counter-measures.

What our ancestors built up over generations can be destroyed in a flash. The time of ideological experiments in prosperity is over. Realism and reason are called for. To ensure that our children’s children also have a secure future in freedom, Switzerland needs a renewal of the defensive alliance. Let us stand together for a secure future in freedom. •

The position of Switzerland in Europe

Can Switzerland find its way?

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

Great Britain recently left the EU and concluded a comprehensive free trade and co-operation agreement with Brussels. Switzerland, in turn, broke off the protracted negotiations on a framework agreement with the EU, as this included the adoption of EU law, subordination to its jurisdiction and more, which would certainly have been rejected in a referendum. This begs the question of what to do next. Taking a look at our common history with Great Britain can provide an answer. Current now, as it was then, is the latent interference of the USA in the affairs of us Europeans. – In the database of Swiss diplomatic documents (*dodis*), events are well documented, even up to quite recent times.¹

In the mid-fifties, the project of the European Economic Community (EEC) was under discussion. Jean Monnet – strongly allied with the USA – was one of the main initiators. The guiding idea was to unite the European countries in an “ever closer union” – that is, with a political superstructure that we see realised today in the EU. Jean Monnet often spoke of a future “United States of Europe”. At the same time, however, there was also talk of another project. Europeans might come together as sovereign states and work together in a free trade area.

US opposition to the liberal path

The liberal path found friends in many countries – but not in the US government. Swiss Minister *Albert Weitnauer* (State Secretary of the Federal Council) reported on talks in the OEEC, the *Organisation for European Economic Cooperation*

(founded in connection with the *Marshall Plan*). In this body, the USA had vetoed a free trade area (*dodis.ch/15113*).

Switzerland’s situation – the founding of EFTA

It was clear to the Federal Council that Switzerland would not be able to participate in an EEC aiming for an “ever closer union” with a corresponding political superstructure. *Hans Schaffner*, delegate for trade agreements, became active on behalf of the Federal Council. In 1957 he invited interested parties from various countries sceptical about the EEC concept to Geneva. They came from Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Austria and Great Britain. It was here in Geneva that the concept of EFTA was conceived, the *European Free Trade Association*, which was then founded in 1960. EFTA planned to further expand free trade cooperation, also with the EEC countries (*dodis.ch/3017*).

Massive interference by the US government

On 14 July 1961, a US Secretary of State visited Federal Councillor *Friedrich Traugott Wahlen* and *Hans Schaffner*, who had meanwhile also been elected Federal Councillor, and informed them of the following: The presidents of the USA and Great Britain had met. The USA would never tolerate an economic treaty between the EEC and EFTA, but expected the NATO countries within EFTA to join the EEC as soon as possible – first and foremost Great Britain, then also Denmark, Norway and Portugal. Subsequently the three neutral countries, Switzerland, Austria and Sweden, were to

start negotiations with Brussels and individually conclude association treaties with the EEC that would support the political aims of the EEC. – This was outrageous, as many a person in the Federal Palace stated (*dodis.ch/30116*).

Wahlen explains the Swiss model

In the autumn of 1962, the Council of Ministers in Brussels invited the Federal Council to a hearing. President *Wahlen* was given the opportunity to explain Switzerland’s principles and to report on its preparatory work. The Federal Council had convened several working groups to work out Switzerland’s position on the various economic issues. Central to this was the presentation by *Jean Rudolph von Salis*, who explained the significance and the implications of neutrality, federalism and direct democracy in an overall context (*dodis.ch/34186*, pp. 36-50).

The text of the speech prepared by *Wahlen* and approved by the Federal Council as a whole is now available (*dodis.ch/30371*). In the first part, *Wahlen* provided detailed information on Switzerland, its economy and its state structure. Among his remarks was the following impressive passage:

“[...] In the agreement to be reached with the Community, Switzerland must however preserve its neutrality, which is the protection of its independence, as well as its domestic structure of federalism and its direct democracy. Direct democracy, federalism and neutrality have shaped the political face of Switzerland.

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Letter to  the Editor

What future for Switzerland?

We condemn any warlike action to resolve the conflict, from the East as well as from the West! “Join in the European suicide or remain neutral?” With this question, the German-language broadcaster *Russia Today* (RT) warned Switzerland against passing on Swiss ammunition for German tanks to Ukraine. In this way, the Federal Council would not decide on an arms export, but on the future of Switzerland. If you consider that the RT online portal is blocked in EU countries but can be accessed in Switzerland, you wonder what image EU citizens have of Russia as an economic powerhouse, on which not only Europe’s gas supply depends, but

also that of Grain. As a neutral country with direct democracy, we should definitely assume our responsibility for peace mediation! *Russia Today* qualifies that Switzerland’s neutrality was never perfect – nevertheless, neutrality in the First and Second World Wars and in the Cold War “always was useful as a bridge to a ‘post-war’”. Doesn’t this statement correspond to a request for Switzerland’s help in resolving the conflict between Ukraine and Russia? NATO boss *Stoltenberg* said on the Ukraine war: Peace is possible, the only question is how much territory and independence Ukraine is willing to cede for it. Since we, as a neutral country, are

not obliged to support EU economic sanctions, we should resume our trade relations with Russia in favour of our national supply. We know that our country’s technology, thermal energy and food industry supply depends largely on Russian natural gas and wheat. For us citizens, the question arises as to how we could support our parliamentarians and business leaders in resuming trade relations and peace activities with Russia!

*Matthias Elmiger and Gertrud Pfändler,
Ebnat-Kappel*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"The position of Switzerland ..."

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They have grown out of its polymorphism and have given it a political stability which, as it would seem to us, has had a favourable effect on its relations with third countries."

Objection by President Charles de Gaulle

There was, however, one European leader who watched the US activities with growing displeasure: French President *Charles de Gaulle* vetoed Britain's planned entry into the EEC. If Britain joined the EEC, the USA would dominate political events in Europe even further than it already did, he correctly objected. France would become less important.

De Gaulle's veto brought a breathing pause. Negotiations were put on hold. US pressure on Switzerland to conclude a political association treaty with the EEC was abated. EFTA recovered. It still consisted of the same founding members, including Great Britain. As planned, they completed tariff dismantling in step with the EEC in the 1960s – so that in 1971 the step towards a joint free trade agreement was no longer a big one.

1972 Free Trade Agreement – link with Europe

On 22 July 1972, the Free Trade Agreement between the EEC and the EFTA countries was signed. President *Brugger* (head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs) gave a speech at the signing ceremony in the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels in the very first sentence of which he pointed out the importance of its state policy foundations for Switzerland (dodis.ch/36209).

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

On 4 December 1972, the referendum was held. 72 per cent of the voters and all cantons clearly said yes to the treaty.

Great Britain and Switzerland go their separate ways

Switzerland's 1972 Free Trade Agreement was further developed, with over 100 additional treaties supplementing it over the years. It laid the foundation for a long and successful bilateral path. Today, goods worth more than CHF 1 billion cross the border between Switzerland and the EU every day.

At the same time, on 1 January 1973, Great Britain joined the EEC – in line with the USA. – After a variety of experiences, the British left again on 31 January 2020 after 47 years – after a referendum (2016) and after a heated political debate. Almost all media in Europe spread a gloomy picture of Britain's future "outside Europe" and painted its economic decline to come in black colours. Things turned out differently.

EU Free Trade Agreement with Great Britain – on an equal footing

The UK signed a trade and cooperation agreement with the EU² on 30 December 2020, which finally came into force on 21 May 2021. This includes a comprehensive free trade agreement of over 2000 pages, which regulates economic cooperation with the EU in detail. The agreement does not only cover trade in goods and services. Other areas in the



ISBN 978-3-909234-24-0

interest of both parties are included. A Joint Partnership Council ensures that the agreement is properly applied and interpreted. The arbitration procedure is regulated clearly. – Anyone who still has the gloomy pre-Brexit forecasts of the future in their head is amazed at this careful, tailor-made treaty that regulates free cooperation between the EU and the UK. All the points of contention that prevented the conclusion of the EU's framework agreement with Switzerland, such as the adoption of laws, subordination to the EU Court of Justice, the free movement of persons with the Union Citizens Directive, are not included in this agreement. So this is possible. One gets the impression that the British have achieved something they already strove for in 1960 when they founded EFTA together with Switzerland.

We Swiss have as much reason to carry our heads high as the British have

Both countries, Switzerland and the UK, have concluded a detailed free trade and cooperation agreement with the EU. The framework agreement, which would have tied Switzerland strongly to the EU politically, has proved to be a dead end from the beginning. Continuing and updating the Swiss Free Trade Agreement (and possibly the Bilaterals) is therefore the logical next step.

The UK is paving the way. If the Swiss negotiators in Brussels get stuck at any point, they can consult the British treaty. The EU cannot actually deny the Swiss what it has granted the British. Switzerland is in a good negotiating position anyway: it is a very good customer of the EU countries and provides the important north-south connection at very favourable conditions. It will certainly ensure success if Swiss negotiators present themselves with this attitude and, like previous negotiators, take the principles of statehood to heart. – We will remember this on 1 August.

Dubious role played by USA

Conclusion: The USA with its dominant role has significantly shaped and steered European events since the Second World War. In the 1950s, they prevented a free trade area within the OEEC, then quite decidedly demanded the dissolution of EFTA and urged its members to join the EEC or sign an association treaty. That was pretty "strong stuff".

It was also perceived as such in Bern. In a document classified as strictly confidential, *Paul Jolles*, head of the so-called Integration Office in the Federal Administration, on 23 July 1963 reported to the Federal Council on a conversation with the head of the *Policy Planning Board of the American State Department* as follows: "My interlocutor unreservedly holds the well-known American view that nation-statehood in Europe is historically obsolete and that political unification seems inevitable if Europe is to continue to play a role in world politics." Jolles' message to Federal Councillors *Wahlen* and *Schaffner* ended with the following personal remark: "The conversation left me with the impression that the State Department *braintrust* has lost touch with reality when it comes to Europe." (dodis.ch/30356)

The USA was obviously pursuing geopolitical goals: The European countries were to form a unified bloc in the EEC and Nato – against the Soviet Union. Switzerland was also put under massive pressure. De Gaulle's "drum beat" saved EFTA and

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What kind of Switzerland do we want – reflection is necessary!

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

Due to the restrictions during the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families spent their holidays in Switzerland. Good thing! For the children, it was a chance to get to know the diverse, sometimes hidden beauty of our country. And perhaps they were even lucky enough to have parents or grandparents passing on to them their knowledge of the history, geography and biology of the respective locations – after all, these should still be able to fall back on the corresponding, professionally sound school lessons. For example, when a family on their way to Ticino chose the St. Bernardino route, got off the motorway in Avers and made a stop-over in the Roffla Gorge. This is what the children's author *Margret Rettich* did more than fifty years ago and then decided to write a picture book about the history of this place, as can be seen from an exchange of letters between the publisher at the time and the *Gubser-Pitschen* family.

A break steeped in history

The publisher writes: “The artist and author, Ms Margret Rettich, was told the content of this fate and its events herself at your place, in your Hotel Roffla Gorge. When considering the presentation and realisation of such a book, Ms Rettich and we agreed that we should not publish this story anonymously, set somewhere in the Alps, but with the correct names and place names. This picture book should not be a fairy tale book, but a book that tells and shows a real destiny to today's and future children, so that they cannot only admire it in a book, but also feel inspired together with their parents to visit the Hotel Roffla Gorge themselves and marvel at the waterfall.”¹

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Waterfall in the Roffla Gorge. (picture Hotel Rofflaschlucht)

“The position of Switzerland ...”

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its idea of a free way of cooperation in Europe – at least for the time being.

The United States' “style” described above can also be observed today. The USA is interfering in Europe's politics in a similar way. They launched a “blitzkrieg” against Russia with massive economic sanctions and demanded that European countries rally behind them as a unified bloc. This blitzkrieg has largely failed. But it is the European countries in particular that are getting into difficulties because of these sanctions. – Unfortunately, there is no Charles de Gaulle in sight today.

Like de Gaulle, the Swiss negotiators of yesteryear wanted a Europe of sovereign states whose policies would “coax the European fire to burn”, as *Albert Weitnauer* once put it (dodis.ch/30358). One example: In 2014, Switzerland chaired the Vienna-based OSCE, the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe*. As Swiss intelligence officer Jacques Baud reports today, the Swiss delegation proposed at the time that Ukraine should organise itself federally and that its regions should have extensive autonomy, similar to the cantons in Switzerland. As a neutral, multilingual country, it could have maintained good relations with both the West and the East. This idea found its way into the two Minsk agreements that France

and Germany negotiated together with Russia. – Today, unfortunately, these agreements are history, as others set the agenda. •

¹ The online database “Dodis” contains thousands of digitised documents on Switzerland's international relations since 1848, mainly from the Swiss Federal Archives. Fascinating are, among others, minutes of internal discussions of the Federal Council with members of the governments of other states or reports on what was happening in the Federal Parliament, which was not reported at the time. These documents were strictly confidential at the time and are now – thanks to *dodis* – publicly accessible. – This research work began as early as 1972 and has been online since 1997.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/relations-non-eu-countries/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-trade-and-cooperation-agreement_en

“What kind of Switzerland ...”

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A life in peace and social security

The story is indeed a wonderful opportunity to talk with the children about the worries and hardships that moved the people of our country in the 19th century to leave their homeland and take an arduous journey to try their luck in a distant, unknown country – and also to reflect on the situation in which we live in our country today – with a sense of gratitude for all that our ancestors did so that we can live together in peace and social security.

In foreign armies ...

This was not the case 150 years ago. Many people set out at that time to build a new existence in a foreign country. This was not a new phenomenon, because people had already emigrated from our country in previous centuries. At first, they were recruited for foreign military service, which is attested from the 13th century onwards. Today it is hard to imagine that in the 16th century about a third of the men over 16 years of age were once in foreign military service, and in the following century it was still almost a quarter of the male population who sought to escape poverty in this way. It was not until the middle of the 19th century that military service for for-

eign powers was banned. Have you heard of this at school?

... or as sought-after experts

But also young people from patrician families or the wealthy bourgeoisie went abroad to universities from the 14th and 15th centuries onwards in order to educate themselves there. Descendants of noble families, clergymen, commercial, financial and building experts were among the emigrants for various reasons; they were sought-after professionals, and their paths led to Russia, Germany, Austria, France and Italy. From the middle of the 19th century, emigration to North and South America also increased, and this is where the arc closes to the story of the waterfall.² Like the *Christian Pitschen-Melchior* family from the Roffla Gorge, many other families also moved away from their homeland of necessity at the end of the 19th century. In their case to New York, where a hard life awaited them. A more optimistic outlook for the future led the family back to Switzerland.

The Tambora volcano – crop failure – unemployment

In most families it was existential need that caused people to leave Switzerland. In three great waves of emigration, they were drawn not only to Russia but also to North America. When the

Tambora volcano erupted in Indonesia in 1815, the huge mass of ash is said to have absorbed part of the sunlight even in Switzerland, so that 1816 went down in history as the “year without a summer”. This led to crop failures, which were followed by inflation, hunger and hardship, and in 1816 and 1817 also to a first major accumulation of emigration by poor sections of the population.

Again, it was crop failures that triggered a second great wave of emigration at the beginning of the 1850s. Craftsmen, tradesmen and farmers, especially from rural areas, moved away. Finally, there was a last great wave of emigration towards the end of the 19th century, in which many Swiss families sought their fortune overseas, as falling world market prices ruined many farmers. In addition, although Switzerland’s industrialisation in the textile sector was already well advanced, our country was flooded with cheap textiles after the lifting of an economic blockade imposed by France against England. Many jobs, especially home and manual labour, were lost. Economic warfare at that time too?³

Strainful crossing – difficult living conditions

Anyone who was at least 21 years old or had a family could buy a piece of land in the USA for a symbolic price, which became his property after five years of cultivation. Not everyone was lucky, since in the first half of the 19th century there were hardly any legal regulations in Switzerland to which emigration agencies had to adhere. Individual recruiters or agencies lured people with false promises. It was not uncommon for them to profit the most and plunge the emigrants into misery. The crossing in the steerage of a large ship alone was exhausting, and many did not survive. Nor were the emigrants welcomed with open arms in their land of dreams, or were they abused in the process of settlement to displace the indigent population. Often, they had to take on the heaviest, poorly paid work, as described in the “Story of the Waterfall”, or the promised land was almost impossible to cultivate. It is true that today there is Nova Friburgo in Brazil. Or Berne in the US state of Indiana, where Mennonites from the Jura community of Moutier had cleared wilderness and swampland and fought against bears, wolves and diseases. The Swiss settled in the Zürichtal in Crimea and were later deported under Stalin and the place was renamed Zolotoe Pole (Golden Field).⁴ Many emigrants returned to Switzerland disappointed, like the *Pitschen-Melchior* family to the Roffla Gorge. A better future awaited them here, for Switzerland was visibly develop-

Nach Amerika.

Zu günstigsten Bedingungen unter Begleitung zum Seehafen befördern wir jede Woche größere Gesellschaften m. den neuesten Doppelschrauben-Schnelldampfern. Auszahlungen nach Amerika franko ins Haus gegen Originalquittung an den Einzahler.

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(H 7128 J)

Ad of the emigration agency Zwilchenbart in the Nidwalden farmer’s calendar around 1900. (picture Record Office Basel-Landschaft)

"What kind of Switzerland"

continued from page 12

ing into a welfare state in which people could live together in peace. Many of our ancestors contributed to this.

Children should learn all this from their parents and grandparents – and they must do so – so that they can appreciate their culture and become rooted in it.

Laying the foundations of peaceful coexistence

As in many places in the world, numerous responsible people in this country also gave thought and applied their energies to create a common life with equal rights.⁵ They compiled the problems to be solved, drew on previous experience and used new research findings from different branches of science – always with the aim of creating the foundations for peaceful coexistence in our country with its four languages, areas and cultures, urban and rural areas and different religions enabling the people to assume their duties in it. Findings from social sciences, especially personalist psychology, contributed to lay a sense of responsibility and bonding with fellow human beings and their country. The family is of the utmost significance, because it is the most important place where cultural values and norms are exemplified, passed on and also developed from generation to generation.⁶ But educational institutions also have an important

role to play in this. The school curricula have been designed accordingly. This includes giving children and young people an insight into the history and culture of the country in which they live, and this is where schools are particularly challenged.

We want to be free ...

This was the title of a school history teaching book by *Franz Meyer*. It was used for many years to introduce children to the history of our country. The title referred to a claim by the Rütli oath: "We want to be free as our fathers were ...", an important educational goal to which we must lead and educate our next generation (however – is it listed in the internationalist Curriculum 21?). But this claim for freedom cannot be without responsibility for the community, as *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi* had already pointed out. He therefore demanded that democracy must educate its citizens intellectually and morally in order to train them to be capable of freedom. He thus drew attention to the importance of education and upbringing for our living together in dignity and freedom.⁷

Integrity and democratic conviction

Especially Switzerland, with its direct democracy, is particularly challenged here. In particular, decision-makers elected to office by their fellow citizens need human maturity in order to fulfil their duties with responsibility. They must shape their lives

and work on the basis of ethical values, must not lack integrity and democratic conviction, and must not be driven by the need for power and recognition and the greed for money. This requires a rooting in their own culture and history, otherwise they should rather keep their hands-off public tasks. The availability of such personalities begins with the upbringing and education of the next generation in the family, at school and in society.

What kind of Switzerland do we want?

In recent weeks, it has been frightening to see how our government representatives have stripped Swiss neutrality of its ground and substance. With cheap arguments breathed into them by spin-doctors, they want to denigrate this basic element of our democracy to the Swiss population. The question of the "capacity to govern", as Pestalozzi called it, may well be asked here. What are parents and grandparents supposed to say later when they tell their children the story of the Pitschen-Melchior family who came back to Switzerland and were able to build a future here in peace and social justice? Should they say: "Once upon a time there was...?" •

What do you tell your children at Christmas?

by Annemarie Buchholz-Kaiser

Do we tell our children at Christmas that there used to be democracies? Countries where people were free, where they could decide on their laws, where every citizen and every inhabitant had inherent dignity, where there were human rights and everyone had a right to their own thinking, to their own opinion, a free opinion, a right to their own religion and tradition, to legal procedures that were bound by proof?

Will we tell them next year that peace used to be a great concern for people, that they worked for it with all their strength and conviction? That they

thought about how to help the poorer countries of the world? That there were once voices for peace and social justice? That there was once a Switzerland in which several language regions, several mentalities, several religions had, thanks to direct democracy, developed a model of peaceful coexistence, a filigree work of democratic design from the bottom up, which would also offer a way out for crisis and war regions of the world? Do we tell them all this in the imperfect tense? Or are we doing something else first?

Source: *Zeit-Fragen* of 21 December 2001

¹ The picture book was first published in 1974 and has been reprinted again and again since then, most recently in 2015. Rettich, Margret. *The Waterfall*. The Children's Bookshop. 2022.

² cf. Head-König, Anne-Lise. "Emigration." In: Historical Dictionary of Switzerland (HSL). Version of 15.10.2007. <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007988/2007-10-15/>, retrieved on 13 July 2022.

³ cf. Altweg, Jonas; Tieber, Sandro. *Migration. Schweizer Amerikawanderung des 19. Jahrhunderts. Vertiefung: Not und Armut in der Ostschweiz*. (Migration. Swiss migration to America in the 19th century. In-depth study: Hardship and poverty in Eastern Switzerland.) www.sozialgeschichte.ch/themen/schweizer-amerikawanderung-des-19-jahrhunderts, retrieved on 16 July 2022.

⁴ Koci, Petra. "Switzerland elsewhere". <https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/en/2019/04/swiss-emigrants/>

⁵ cf. Wüthrich, Werner. *Geschichte der freiheitlich-demokratischen Wirtschaftsverfassung der Schweiz*. (History of the liberal-democratic economic constitution of Switzerland.) Publisher Zeit-Fragen 2020.

⁶ cf. Buchholz-Kaiser, Annemarie. "The Importance of the Transmission of Values in the Family for the Dignity and Value of Human Life". In: *Current Concerns*, December-January 1999/2000.

⁷ cf. Brühlmeier, Arthur. "Pestalozzi's Anschauungen über Wesen und Funktion des Staates" (Pestalozzi's views on the nature and function of the state.) www.heinrich-pestalozzi.de/grundgedanken/staat, retrieved on 17 July 2022.

On the uniqueness of the human being “The Godlike” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

by Winfried Pogorzelski

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: The Godlike

Noble be man,
Helpful and good!
For that alone
Distinguisheth him
From all the beings
Unto us known.

Hail to the beings,
Unknown and glorious,
Whom we forebode!
From his example
Learn we to know them!

For unfeeling
Nature is ever:
On bad and on good
The sun alike shineth;
And on the wicked,
As on the best,
The moon and stars gleam.

Tempest and torrent,
Thunder and hail,
Roar on their path,
Seizing the while,
As they haste onward,
One after another.

Even so, fortune
Gropes 'mid the throng
Innocent boyhood's
Curly head seizing,
Seizing the hoary
Head of the sinner.

After laws mighty,
Brazen, eternal,
Must all we mortals
Finish the circuit
Of our existence.

Man, and man only
Can do the impossible;
He 'tis distinguisheth,
Chooseth and judgeth;
He to the moment
Endurance can lend.

He and he only
The good can reward,
The bad can he punish,
Can heal and can save;
All that wanders and strays
Can usefully blend.

And we pay homage
To the immortals
As though they were men,
And did in the great,
What the best, in the small,
Does or might do.

Be the man that is noble,
Both helpful and good.
Unweariedly forming
The right and the useful,
A type of those beings
Our mind hath foreshadow'd!

The first two well-known verses of this hymn already make high demands on us humans when we are urged to be noble, helpful and good. The justification follows promptly: the abilities mentioned would distinguish us humans from all other known beings. Despite the lack of certainty as to whether gods exist and what their nature may be, man should live and work in such a way that one can assume the existence of gods, the second stanza continues: “Ihnen gleiche der Mensch” (Let man resemble them.)

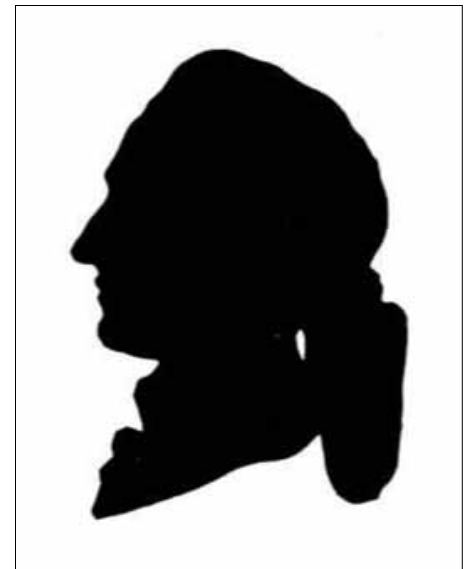
A series of arguments follows. The view of nature underpins the unique position of man: it knows no empathy, behaves completely the same towards everyone: For unfeeling/ Nature is ever: On bad and on good “The sun alike shineth/ And on the wicked/ As on the best/ The moon and stars gleam.” We are all exposed without distinction to nature’s misfortunes, such as storms and thunderstorms. Like nature, luck in the sense of fate does not choose its victims or its lucky children. For it neither judges nor rewards. But like a man struck with blindness, “Even so, fortune Gropes/mid the throng Innocent boyhood’s / Curly head seizing/ Seizing the hoary Head” of the sinner. Thus, completely independent of the reputation of the one it catches.

In contrast to nature and fate, the human being in its special position is able

to do the seemingly “impossible”: it can differentiate, allow itself to make a judgement; moreover, the human being has a certain freedom of choice. He also has the gift of being creative through art: He to the moment “Endurance can lend”. Poetry, music and visual art capture what the artist was thinking about when he created his work.

What results from this for human existence is a considerable amount of responsibility: “He and he only / The good can reward/ The bad can he punish/ Can heal and can save”; those are responsible tasks that man has to face with his abilities. And he is in a position to pursue science for the good of man and the world: “All that wanders and strays (he)/ Can usefully blend.”

We humans imagine the gods as idealised human beings. Consequently, we can now speak of the “noble man”; whereas at the beginning in the subjunctive (“Noble be man”) there was still talk of man having the task of being noble, it is now certain: Be the man that is noble/Both helpful and good. The noble man shall be helpful and good, and as such he alone has the task under heaven of always achieving what is just and useful, so that he can be a model in the sense of a “role model” of the still only “imagined beings” – namely the gods. In the divine, which remains vague, the human being, who is always striving for morality, is reflected.



*Goethe in Weimar –around 1780.
(picture <https://schattenriss.jimdofree.com/j/privacy>)*

Except for the sixth stanza, which is about man as a natural being being subject to the laws of nature (“After laws mighty, Brazen, eternal”), all the other stanzas have six verses (lines); from the seventh onwards, the results of the train of thought follow. The poet dispenses

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"On the uniqueness of ..."

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with a regular verse meter, i.e., a regular sequence of unaccented and accented syllables. The sentence structures are also plain: Substantive clauses with enumerations ("Tempest and torrent/ Thunder and hail/ Can heal and can save/ All that wanders and strays"), sparingly used adjectives and adverbs, sometimes a subordinate clause, some appeals and repeated words underline the poem's message. These formal peculiarities lend the poem the sustained, solemn keynote of a hymn.

The epoch for which reflective poetry of this kind is characteristic and towards which *Goethe* is moving is the *Weimar Classicism*. It begins with the friendship and artistic collaboration between *Goethe* and *Friedrich Schiller* (from 1794) and ends with *Schiller's* death (1805). The representatives of the epoch basically share the goals of the French Revolution, but reject any use of violence and instead focus on evolutionary development. In involvement with the history, literature and art of ancient Greece, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, there is a growing conviction that education can produce people who reconcile duty and inclination and are committed to the general moral law; *Schiller* coined the term "beautiful soul".

Goethe wrote the poem as early as 1783. Eight years earlier he had come to Weimar at the request of the Hereditary Prince of Saxe-Weimar *Carl August* and the Duchess Mother *Anna Amalia*; he left behind the years of "Sturm und Drang" (*) and the "cult of genius" and turned to the study of antiquity and history. From the beginning, however, he was also involved in numerous duties of the administration of the small state: He was re-

sponsible for mining and was chairman of two permanent commissions, the road construction commission and the war commission, important functions in the troubled times. He increasingly develops self-discipline, a sense of duty and responsibility, also under the influence of *Charlotte von Stein*, court lady of *Anna Amalia* and close friend of *Goethe*, and of the theologian *Johann Gottfried Herder*. *Goethe* had met and come to appreciate him in Strasbourg; at his request, *Herder* came to Weimar and took on important offices there, such as those of general superintendent and the first preacher at the city church of *Peter and Paul*. The poet owed valuable inspiration to him. Above all, *Herder's* basic conviction about the nature of man appealed to him, as he later wrote down in his "Letters for the Promotion of Humanity" (1793-1797): "Humanity is the character of our race, but it is only innate to us in dispositions and must actually be trained".

In 1786 *Goethe* left for Rome in a hurry. He had increasingly found life at court and the duties associated with it confining and not very conducive to his literary work. In the Eternal City he continued his studies of nature and devoted himself to antiquity and the Renaissance. After his return to Weimar in 1788, he was relieved of his numerous administrative duties and instead took over the supervision of the Weimar theatre, which subsequently occupied him completely alongside his work as a poet. •

* a literary and artistic movement in Germany in the late 18th century, influenced by *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and characterised by the expression of emotional unrest and a rejection of neoclassical literary norms. (editor's note)

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Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box 247 CH-9602 Bazenhaid

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

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

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“Russia – people and places in an almost unknown country”

by Gisela Liebe



The idea for this extraordinary book came from *Heino Wiese*, who, as an entrepreneur and political advisor, has long-standing economic and personal ties to Russia. In 2013, he sent two teams, each consisting of a young journalist and a photographer, on a journey through the largest country on earth. They were to interview Russian people there in the most diverse regions and present them in their everyday lives and their respective living situations. The team with *Jessica Schober* and *Olga Matweewa* travelled through Russia's west from Kalinin-grad via Smolensk, Sochi, Moscow, Volgograd and St. Petersburg to Kazan. *Vlada Kolosova* and *Evgeny Makarov* set off on a journey through Siberia, starting from Ekaterinburg, the city with over a million inhabitants that is closest to the Urals and thus to the border between Asia and Europe, via Novosibirsk to Magadan and Vladivostok, both around 10,000 km from Moscow. In a total of 30 places, they met a wide variety of people, often spontaneously and by chance, and listened to their stories. The result is a diverse kaleidoscope of people living in their cities and landscapes. The reader thus gains an insight into Russia's great ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. From the caretaker of *Yeltsin's* dacha to miners, artists, scientists, bath attendants and politicians to the conductor on the *Trans-Siberian Railway*, the reader gets to know a total of 42 people. The vivid texts are accompanied by numerous photos of people and places that awaken the almost irresistible desire to visit this great country and get to know its inhabitants personally.

Choirmaster in Transbaikalia

The book begins with a choir leader in a village of 700 inhabitants in Transbaikalia (5,665 km from Moscow), where a religious community of so-called Old Believ-

Book dedication by Heino Wiese

I dedicate this book to my father *Otto Wiese*, who had to march into the war with Russia in 1941 at the age of 18, who spent almost three years as a prisoner of war in the forests of Nizhny Tagil sharpening the axes of the tree-cutters, who returned home at the age of 24, seriously ill and emaciated to 38 kg, who visited Moscow and Leningrad in 1985 and returned enthusiastic, and who taught me that Russia is beautiful and the Russians are warm and kind people.



The Oka and Volga rivers meet in Nizhny Novgorod. (picture in the book on page 78)

ers has been living since the 17th century. They were banished by Tsarina *Catherine the Great* and have been living their cultural and religious traditions ever since. Their famous polyphonic chants are now part of the *UNESCO* World Cultural Heritage. Today they live with the internet, but still in wooden houses without sewage systems. The book ends with Volgograd, the former Stalingrad, where the memory of the horrors of the Second World War is kept alive by the so-called “search granny”, 73-year-old *Dea Wrazowa*. She collects all the information, memories and documents about the war period. “You have to know the history of the place where you live, your little homeland,” says *Wrazowa*. Her 91-year-old comrade *Zinaida Petrovna Stepykina* is also reconciliatory towards Germany, the former enemy of the war: “I have no grudge against the Germans,” she says. “We realised back then that not all Germans are fascists, that there are different people.”

Chess and Buddhism in Kalmykia

Elista (1,261 km from Moscow) is the capital of Kalmykia, a southern Russian province near the border with Georgia. The national sport in Kalmykia is chess, which every child learns from an early age. The best are allowed to train at the chess academy for four hours a day. The head of the

chess academy, *Alexander Abashinov*, is proud of the fact that three Russian champions and three European champions have come from Kalmykia during his tenure. One grandmaster once played on 30 boards simultaneously. Elista is also home to the Churul, the temple of the Buddhist community. *Telo Tulku Rinpoche* is the spiritual leader of the 160,000 Buddhists in Kalmykia. Born in the USA, he was sent to a Buddhist monastery in India at the age of seven by his parents, who were of Mongolian origin. “I was there for 13 years. When I was 21, I accompanied the *Dalai Lama* on his first trip to Kalmykia. He asked me to stay. That's how I got to know my roots.” Kalmykia is not only the oldest Buddhist region in Russia, but even in all of Europe. “In the early nineties, there was nothing left of Buddhism here, no monastery, no temple, not a single monk. But someone was urgently needed who could take over the reintroduction of the religion. I was asked to do that. I knew I couldn't assume much familiarity with the population, but it surprised me how many prayers and rituals the older generation had still preserved.” Since then, around 30 temples have been built in Kalmykia.

Many of the people featured have several professions. *Anton Kuklin* from Vlad-

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“Russia – People and Places ...”

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ivostok (9,127 km from Moscow, but only 150 km from the Chinese border) trained as a sailor, studied engineering in the fish industry, celebrated great successes as a kickboxer and, after many detours in life, now works for a bank.

Permafrost in Yakutsk

In Yakutsk (8,352 km and a six-and-a-half-hour flight from Moscow), the average winter temperature is minus 42 degrees. The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), whose capital is Yakutsk, is as big as India but has only one million inhabitants. The entire Republic of Yakutia lies on permafrost soil, which only thaws to a depth of two to three metres in summer. *Viktor Schepelev*, 71, is deputy director of the *Permafrost Institute* in Yakutsk, the only institute in the world that studies permafrost soils. Sixty-five per cent of Russia’s land area is permanently frozen, sometimes up to a kilometre deep. In the institute’s laboratory twelve metres below ground, the temperature is a constant minus six degrees. *Viktor Schepelev* is concerned about man’s treatment of nature and comments on the huge untapped mineral resources in Siberia. “In my opinion, Siberia should be left alone. The North and the Arctic are cleaning factories of our Earth. We must not break the world filters. Instead, we should think about using the natural resource of our region: the cold. For example, we could use the energy of crystallisation – energy that is released during freezing. The permafrost is also an archive of world history: well-preserved mammoth carcasses and other pre-historic animals can be found here. Permafrost is also a natural deep freezer. You could dig cellars here and store food in them for centuries. Let me tell you: Frost is a wonderful preservative. Look at me! I’m 71, I haven’t been on holiday for twelve years and I feel like I’m thirty.”

Research and dacha

The Tyumen region (2,120 km from Moscow) is considered the Saudi Arabia of Russia – 64% of Russia’s oil and 93% of its natural gas reserves are stored here. Here in the city of Tyumen, 31-year-old *Ekaterina Matyushkina* works as an endocrinologist in an institution for old people and does research on geriatric diabetes. Her 65-year-old mother looks after her little daughter while she works. “Without them, it would be hard to combine child and career, or child and studies – which many still do here. Without grandmas and grandpas, it wouldn’t work like that. And this feeling of being needed keeps you young. According to the motto: I mustn’t



On the banks of Lake Baikal. (picture in the book on page 62)

get sick, I have the dacha, I have the little ones.”

“Learning from those you love”

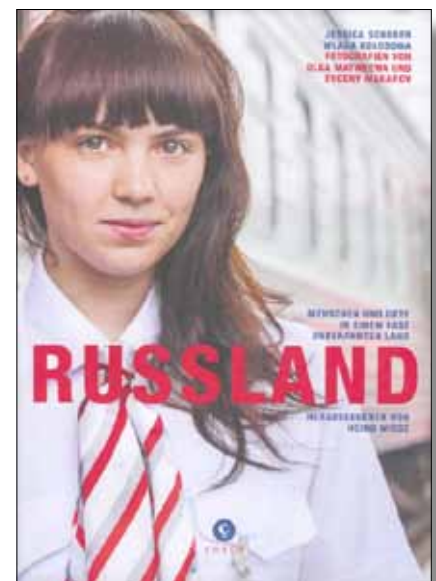
In the small town of Shchyokino, 210 km from Moscow, *Vlada Kolosova* visits her former teacher *Nadezhda Khryachkova*, at whose dining table she spent many evenings as a pupil. Her pedagogical conviction: “I believe that you can only learn from those you love”. Her former pupil *Vlada Kolosova* remembers that she loved her teacher dearly and that she brought her grandmother’s pierogis, her worries and even street cats home to her. The teacher’s doors were open at all times of the day. “Perhaps it is a Russian tradition to be a round-the-clock teacher. Many of our writers also saw themselves as teachers,” says *Khryachkova*, referring to *Dostoevsky* and *Tolstoy*.

The Mufti of Tatarstan

Kazan, a city of millions on the Volga (808 km from Moscow), is the Muslim centre of Russia. 52% of the population living here are Tatars, who speak Tatar as well as Russian. When Kazan celebrated its 1000th birthday in 2005, the large *Kul Sharif mosque* was also inaugurated. In the 1990s, there were only 20 mosques in the autonomous republic of Tatarstan, whereas today there are around 1500. The Mufti of Tatarstan, 28-year-old *Kamil Hazrat Samigullin*, explains that in Soviet times Muslim scholars were deported to Siberia and many believers prayed secretly in the direction of Mecca. The rebirth of Islam came in the nineties; meanwhile, 60% of the 3.7 million Tatars profess Islam. Russian Orthodoxy is in the minority here. Girls are allowed to

wear headscarves at school, which is forbidden in some regions of Russia. Regarding the coexistence of the religions, the Mufti explains: “The rabbi, the patriarch and I are directly connected. Many things run in parallel, for example, we have our own print shop, the Christians have their own. In private life, however, many Tatars and Russians, Muslims and Christians are friends. At school, the children, regardless of denomination, learn about the common history of the religion.”

Russia belongs to Europe and, with its cultural diversity, its history and its lovely people, it is a country with which we are connected and which we should get to know better instead of alienating ourselves even further.



ISBN 978-3-7374-0709-0