

# 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*

## 1987 – Reflections for a common European home and global disarmament\*

by Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022)

I made my first trip abroad as General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee to France in October 1985. About a year earlier, in December 1984, I visited Britain at the head of a delegation of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Both those trips set me thinking about many things and, first of all, about the role and place of Europe in the world.

*Francois Mitterrand* expressed what seemed to me an important idea at that time. “Why not assume the possibility,” he said, “of gradual advance to a broader European policy?” A year later, in Moscow, he said: “It is necessary that Europe should really become the main protagonist of its own history once again so that it can play in full measure its role of a factor for equilibrium and stability in international affairs.” My thoughts went along the same track. [...]

### “Some in the West are trying to ‘exclude’ the Soviet Union from Europe”

Some in the West are trying to “exclude” the Soviet Union from Europe. Now and then, as if inadvertently, they equate “Europe” with “Western Europe.”

Such ploys, however, cannot change the geographic and historical realities. Russia’s trade, cultural and political links with other European nations and states have deep roots in history. We are Europeans. Old Russia was united with Europe by Christianity, and the millennium of its arrival in the land of our ancestors will be marked next year [1988]. The history of Russia is an organic part of the great European history. The Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Moldavians, Lithuanians, Letts, Estonians, Karels and other peoples of our country have all made a sizable contribution to the development of European civilization. So they rightly regard themselves as its lawful inheritors.

Our common European history is involved and instructive, great and tragic. It deserves to be studied and learned from.

Since long ago, wars have been major landmarks in Europe’s history. In the twentieth century, the continent has been the seat of two world wars – the most destructive and bloody ever known by mankind. Our people laid the greatest sacrifices at the altar of the liberation struggle against *Hitler’s* fascism. More than twenty million Soviet people died in that terrible war. [...]

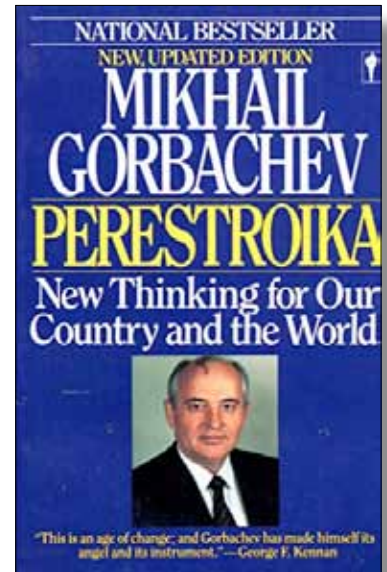
### “Europe is our common home”

Europe is our common home. This metaphor came to my mind in one of my discussions. Although seemingly I voiced it in passing, in my mind I had been looking for such a formula for a long time. It did not come to me all of a sudden but after much thought and, notably, after meetings with many European leaders.

[...] The continent has known more than its share of wars and tears. It has had enough. Scanning the panorama of this long-suffering land and pondering on the common roots of such a multi-form but essentially common European civilization, I felt with growing acuteness the artificiality and temporariness of the bloc-to-bloc confrontation and the archaic nature of the “iron curtain.” [...]

Europe is indeed a common home where geography and history have closely interwoven the destinies of dozens of countries and nations. Of course, each of them has its own problems, and each wants to live its own life, to follow its own traditions. Therefore, developing the metaphor, one may say: the home is common, that is true, but each family has its own apartment, and there are different entrances, too. But it is only together, collectively, and by following the sensible norms of coexistence that the Europeans can save their home, protect it against a conflagration and other calamities, make it better and safer, and maintain it in proper order.

Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals” is a cultural-historical entity united by the common heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, of the great philosophical and social teachings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These are pow-



erful magnets which help policy-makers in their search for ways to mutual understanding and cooperation at the level of interstate relations. [...]

I frankly admit that we are glad that the idea of a “common European home” finds understanding among prominent political and public figures of not only Eastern, but also Western Europe, including those whose political views are far removed from ours. Thus, Foreign Minister *Genscher* of Federal Germany has declared a readiness to “accept the concept of a common European home and to work together with the Soviet Union so as to make it a really common home.” Federal President *Richard von Weizsaecker*, Italian Foreign Minister *Giulio Andreotti*, and other leaders have spoken to me in the same vein. [...]

### “History compels us to treat each other properly”

History compels us to treat each other properly. Europe’s development is impossible without active cooperation by our two states. Solid relations between the FRG and the USSR would be of truly historic significance. While keeping their own identities, within their systems and their alliances, both states can

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\* Excerpts from: Gorbachev, Mikhail. *Perestroika. New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987

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play a major role in European and world development. The Soviet Union is interested in good security for the Federal Republic of Germany. If the FRG were unstable, there could be no hope of stability for Europe, and hence for the world. Conversely, stable relations between the FRG and the USSR would appreciably change the European situation for the better. [...]

In speaking with foreign leaders, I sometimes ask directly: "Do you believe that the Soviet Union intends to attack your country and Western Europe in general?" Almost all of them answer: "No,

we do not." But some of them immediately make a reservation, saying that the very fact of the USSR's immense military might creates a potential threat.

One can understand such reasoning. [...] It is high time to put an end to the lies about the Soviet Union's aggressiveness. Never, under any circumstances, will our country begin military operations against Western Europe unless we and our allies are attacked by NATO!

In the West they talk about inequalities and imbalances. That's right, there are imbalances and asymmetries in some kinds of armaments and armed forces on both sides in Europe, caused by historical, geographical and other factors. We stand for

eliminating the inequality existing in some areas, but not through a build-up by those who lag behind but through a reduction by those who are ahead.

In this field there are many specific issues awaiting solutions: reduction and eventual elimination of the tactical nuclear weapons, to be coupled with a drastic reduction of the armed forces and conventional weapons; withdrawal of offensive weapons from direct contact in order to rule out the possibility of a surprise attack; and a change in the entire pattern of armed forces with a view to imparting an exclusively defensive character to them. [...]

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## Mikhail Gorbachev 35 years ago – still relevant and forward-looking today

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

"I bow before a great statesman. Germany remains indebted to him in gratitude for his decisive contribution to German unity, in respect for his courage to open up towards democracy and to build bridges between East and West, and in memory of his great vision of a common and peaceful House of Europe." Thus, on 30 August 2022, the words of German President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* on the occasion of the death of *Mikhail Gorbachev*, the former General Secretary of the *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (CPSU) and President of the country. Steinmeier thus accounted for the high esteem in which Gorbachev is still being held in the memory of many Germans.

But it is very likely that the Federal President himself did not really mean what he said. For his further "words of condolence" were no longer an appreciation, but an instrumentalisation of Gorbachev's death for a slash against today's Russia: "Anyone who experienced him in recent years could feel how much he suffered from the fact that this dream was receding further and further into the distance. Today the dream lies in ruins, destroyed by Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine."

In reality, Gorbachev's vision of a "common European Home" – apart from a few episodes – was never taken up seriously and sustainably by the EU-European, by the German side. Contrary to what the words of the German President might lead one to believe, EU-Europe and Germany have contributed greatly over the past 30 years to the fact that Gorbachev's "dream" has not only been in ruins since February 2022. The subordination of EU-Europe and Germany to the United States and its plans for a unipolar world with US domination had destroyed this "dream" much earlier.

The text by Mikhail Gorbachev printed has been written 35 years ago. Today it seems like a document from a bygone era. Yet today, 35 years later, it is still

topical and forward-looking. It reminds us of what would have been possible from the Russian side for 35 years – if Europe, if Germany, had sought and found an independent path in world politics.

However, Gorbachev's text is not only important as a reminder of more than 30 years of failed EU-European and German foreign policy. This text also formulates Europe's central tasks for the time after the current war and the renewed division of the continent. *After ruins, there must also be reconstruction*. This applies above all to Europe's and Germany's relations with Russia. Gorbachev's words on this could also be spoken today. And the question really arises: Why does EU Europe, why does Germany cling more fanatically than ever to its self-destructive policy against Russia, to a policy of ever more radicalising confrontation and war-propaganda? A policy that is currently slamming all doors to peace in Europe.

The most recent example of this is the *German Bundestag's* "starvation" resolution of 30 November 2022. Not only because the German Bundestag, with a majority of CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP and *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, approved this resolution and interfered with the tasks of the sciences in a questionable way: Parliament has interpreted the starvation deaths of a few million people throughout the Soviet Union in the years 1931-1933 – for which the Soviet policy of the time was largely responsible – as a targeted genocide of Ukrainians. But, above all, because this resolution is once again explicitly directed against today's Russia, following the propaganda formula coming from the USA (*Anne Applebaum, Timothy Snyder* and others) to equate *Stalin* and today's Russian President *Putin*.

Where are the weighty voices from EU-Europe, from Germany, advocating an end of the war in Ukraine? And not with more and more escalation, not with more and more arms deliveries and direct participation in the war, not with

a war "to the last Ukrainian", but with the demand for serious peace negotiations that are supported by respect for the will and the suffering of the people affected in Ukraine and in Russia as well as the justified security interests of all states involved in the conflict!

There are some very few exceptions. One of them is the former Inspector General of the German Armed Forces and NATO General *Harald Kujat*. In recent months, he has repeatedly debunked NATO propaganda about the course of the war in Ukraine and called for serious peace negotiations, as he did again in an interview with the TV station *n-tv*<sup>1</sup> (see box on page 3).

The still formally valid *Charter of Paris* of November 1990 which all CSCE states, i.e., also EU-Europe, the Soviet Union and the USA, signed, states: "The era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended. We declare that henceforth our relations will be founded on respect and co-operation. [...] With the ending of the division of Europe, we will strive for a new quality in our security relations while fully respecting each other's freedom of choice in that respect. Security is indivisible and the security of every participating State is inseparably linked to that of all the others." This is more than just a "dream"; it is an obligation that will continue to apply in future. This duty includes the task of all of Europe – and that includes Russia – not to let the renewed division of Europe, which the USA has actively pursued at least since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s<sup>2</sup>, be the last word.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.n-tv.de/mediathek/videos/politik/Alte-Sowjet-Systeme-im-Einsatz-Haelt-Russland-strategisches-Potenzial-zurueck-article23748244.html> of 28 November 2022

<sup>2</sup> cf. the letter of the former Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSZE, *Willy Wimmer*, to Chancellor *Gerhard Schröder* of 2 May 2000; <https://www.perseus.ch/PDF-Dateien/bracher-wimmer.pdf>

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**Reduce armaments**

We believe that armaments should be reduced to the level of reasonable sufficiency, that is, a level necessary for strictly defensive purposes. It is time the two military alliances amended their strategic concepts to gear them more to the aims of defence. Every apartment in the "European home" has the right to protect itself against burglars, but it must do so without destroying its neighbours' property. [...]

We can see the first signs of a new outlook on international affairs sprout-

ing in Western Europe. Certain changes are also taking place among ruling circles. Many socialist and social democratic parties of Western Europe are working out new attitudes to defence policy and security. They are led by seasoned politicians with a broad vision of the world's problems.

I have received the Consultative Council of the Socialist International led by *Kalevi Sorsa*, and have met *Willy Brandt*, *Egon Bahr*, *Filipe Gonzalez* and other social democratic leaders, and each time we noted that our views on the crucial issues of international security and disarmament were close or identical. [...]

Nevertheless, I think that Europe's contribution to the cause of peace and security could be much bigger. Many West European leaders lack the political will and, perhaps, opportunities. [...] It is regrettable that the governments of the NATO countries, including those who in words dissociate themselves from the dangerous extremes of American policy, eventually yield to pressure thereby assuming responsibility for the escalation in the arms race and in international tension.

**"Sometimes one has the impression that the independent policies of West European nations have been abducted"**

There is an old Greek myth about the abduction of *Europe*. This fairy-tale subject has suddenly become very topical today. It goes without saying that Europe as a geographical notion will stay in place. Sometimes, however, one has the impression that the independent policies of West European nations have been abducted, that they are being carried off across the ocean; that national interests are farmed out under the pretext of protecting security.

A serious threat is hovering over European culture too. The threat emanates from an onslaught of "mass culture" from across the Atlantic. [...]

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**What does the German peace commandment demand?**

Excerpts from an interview  
between TV channel *n-tv* and Harald Kujat\*

*n-tv*: Some experts raise the impression that Russia is in a weakened state. But now the defence minister of Estonia said that after nine months of war, the situation has not really changed at all for Russia and that their aerial fleet is nearly as large as before. What is your opinion about this?

*Harald Kujat*: I totally agree with that. Russia started this conflict with a huge potential, sure it has suffered some casualties, but what our so-called experts trying to tell us, saying that Russia has basically reached the end of the line – and Ukraine's victory is already celebrated each day –, all of that is nonsense, of course. Russia has an enormous potential at its disposal, and only used a certain portion of said potential in this war. One has to take that into consideration always, and furthermore Russia has vast personal resources it can activate, as well as enormous material capacities. [...]

*Do you really [think], that there is someone who actually wants to negotiate with Russia or someone who actually believes in the fact that the Russians would really stick to what they might have subscribed in those negotiations?*

We do have an example for Russia being open for negotiations, even to make concessions to Ukraine. These concessions even went so far that Russia was prepared to withdraw its presence in Ukraine to the level of 23 February [2022]. We now know that this tangible agreement, which was, incidentally, based on a proposal by the Ukrainian government, which Russia then reworked into a draft treaty, did not come about because the West, in the person of the then British Prime Minister Johnson, intervened here. May I add something to this: Especially the situation we are in now cries for getting back to the negotiation table for

both sides. Therefore, the United States would have to put pressure on Ukraine first to actually declare this willingness, and American general chief of staff General Miley called out a few days ago to use this current military situation, in which Ukraine cannot achieve further progress, ergo cannot win the war, to end this war altogether. [...]

[We] have to eventually get clear about where the limits of our [German] participation in this conflict are. Our constitution holds the commandment of peace in its preamble. Any partaking in a war of support of a war party must aim at a peaceful solution in the end. That is what our Basic Law dictates. This is why I demand of the German government to make our citizens aware of where our limits are in regards to what it supports and what it does not support [...]. How far shall we go? For example, when I hear them saying, we will support Ukraine as long as it is necessary. What does that actually mean? Somehow it sounds like we are handing over the decision about how long and to what amount we support Ukraine, to the Ukraine. A part of our state authority is being transferred to the Ukraine. This cannot be the goal of German politics, particularly not in conformity with the peace commandment of our Basic Law.

\* *Harald Kujat is a retired German Air Force General. He was chief inspector of the Bundeswehr from 2000 to 2002 and chairman of the NATO military committee from 2002 to 2005.*

Source: slightly linguistically edited transcript of the show broadcasted on 28.11.2022, <https://www.n-tv.de/mediathek/videos/politik/Alte-Sowjet-Systeme-im-Einsatz-Haelt-Russland-strategisches-Potenzial-zurueck-article23748244.html>

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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](mailto:CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch)

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# Germany's historical amnesia

by Rafael Poch, Barcelona\*

Not one single German politician attended *Gorbachev's* funeral in Moscow on 3 September. Gorbachev, the architect of the opening of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, had not even merited such a gesture. Attending the burial would have been a reminder that not so long ago, both countries negotiated on matters with great importance to the continent. They were also a sign of those parts of Russian society, which were collectively punished by the EU with sanctions, visa restrictions, cultural censorship and bans on visits for the actions of their government. This is final proof of Germany has renounced diplomacy. Former Chancellor

\* *Rafael Poch de Felii* was the foreign correspondent for the Spanish newspaper "La Vanguardia" from 1988 to 2002 in Moscow, from 2002 to 2008 in Peking and lastly in Berlin and Paris. He is the author of several books about political development in Russia, China and Germany.

*Angela Merkel*, the experienced administrator of events and hyped by the media as great stateswoman politician of Europe, used her "knee problem" as an excuse to not have to attend. The others did not even offer an apology. Truly an example of poverty and a national embarrassment. Without Gorbachev, we would possibly still be in the Bonn Republic, that Germany we very much loved, that we were happy there were even two of them, which one liked to mention. It is obvious that Germany and France could together lead the situation in Europe away from the dictates of the United States but the will to do so is lacking. *Macron* limits himself to helpless bluster. Such a highly respected "European" as *Wolfgang Schäuble*, the "Doctor Strangelove" of punishing Greece, suggests such far-fetched ideas as including Poland in the crumbling German-French command. The persistent efforts of *Ursula von der Leyen* and the foolish, bellicose

and arrogant Foreign Minister, *Anna-Lena Baerbock*, to deliver weapons and even more weapons to the Ukrainian regime in order to continue the war and therefore the suffering of the civilian population in the Ukraine, in Russia and even in Europe itself for all of eternity, require an appointment with a psychoanalyst. [...] Is there not, in the Russophobia in the German media and the political class after the reunification, not an echo of revenge of the conquered grandfathers in Stalingrad? How else is one able to explain the Germany's enthusiasm to damage its own interests and to subordinate to the plans of the United States – to deal a blow to China, its most important trade partner, by pushing war in the Ukraine? •

Source: <https://cxtt.es/es/20220901/Firmas/40818/Rafael-Poch-Gorbachov-Rusia-Ucrania-EstadosUnidos-Jarkov.htm> of 18 September 2022

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## "1987 – Reflections for ..."

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Indeed, one can only wonder that a deep, profoundly intelligent and inherently humane European culture is retreating to the background before the primitive revelry of violence and pornography and the flood of cheap feelings and low thoughts.

When we point to the importance of Europe's independent stance, we are frequently accused of a desire to set Western Europe and the United States at loggerheads. We never had, and do not have now, any such intention whatsoever. We are far from ignoring or belittling the historic ties that exist between Western Europe and the United States. It is preposterous to interpret the Soviet Union's European line as some expression of "an-

ti-Americanism." [...] True, we would not like to see anyone kick in the doors of the European home and take the head of the table at somebody else's apartment. But then, that is the concern of the owner of the apartment.

### "US foreign policy is based on at least two delusions"

As far as United States foreign policy is concerned, it is based on at least two delusions. The first is the belief that the economic system of the Soviet Union is about to crumble and that the USSR will not succeed in restructuring. The second is calculated on Western superiority in equipment and technology and, eventually, in the military field. These illusions nourish a policy geared toward exhausting socialism through the arms race,

so as to dictate terms later. Such is the scheme; it is naive. The USA still cherishes the hope of being the leading power of the entire world for all time: a vain hope, as many American scientists have already realised.

We want freedom to prevail throughout the world in the dawning 21<sup>st</sup> century. We want peaceful competition to develop between different social systems, and mutually beneficial cooperation, not confrontation and arms races, to determine relations between states. We want the people of every country to enjoy prosperity, happiness and contentment.

The way to achieve this is through a world free of nuclear weapons, a world free of violence. We have chosen this path, and we call on other countries and nations to do the same. •

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# Why Do Nations Erase the Past?

by Patrick Lawrence



(picture ma)

Patrick Lawrence is a writer, commentator, a longtime newspaper and magazine correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the "International Herald Tribune". He is a columnist, essayist, author and lecturer and writes often on Europe and Asia. Patrick Lawrence has published five books; his most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century*. His Twitter account @thefloutist has been permanently censored without explanation. His web site is [patricklawrence.us](http://patricklawrence.us). Support his work via his [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/patricklawrence) site.

A recent report by the German news agency DPA has had me thinking ever since about various small, inconsequential matters: war, nationalism, identity, history, memory. It seems the people who manage the German gravesites of those who fell fighting the German army during World War II propose to draw distinctions among the Red Army's dead buried in German cemeteries. They will no longer be designated simply "Soviet" or "Russian," as has been the practice until now. If a Red Army soldier came from Ukraine – which was a Soviet republic during World War II and for 46 years afterward – they will now be written into the record as "Ukrainian."<sup>1</sup>

"We're starting to differentiate," Christian Lübcke, who directs the Hamburg chapter of the German War Graves Commission, said in an interview the DPA published November 14.

## Imagined nationality

Let me try to get this straight. Red Army soldiers who fought the Third Reich as Soviet citizens are to be retroactively assigned an imagined nationality if they came from the *Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic*? How does that work?

No one other than the *German wire service* and RT, the Russian equivalent of the BBC, appears to have covered the story. Maybe most media judged it of little con-



Soviet war gravesite in Hamburg-Ohlsdorf. Inscription: "Here, far from their homeland, rest 384 Soviet prisoners of war". (Picture wiki commons)

sequence. Or maybe a development such as this, discriminating among the bones of soldiers and prisoners of war 75 years dead on the basis of a distinction that did not exist until 1991, came over in most newsrooms as too preposterous, too embarrassing, to write about.

In explaining himself, Lübcke cited the war in Ukraine and a Russian civil society group, the *Immortal Regiment*, that honors the Red Army soldiers who died in the Great Patriotic War, as Russians call World War II. The Soviet Union's sacrifices as it defeated the Nazi regime – more than 20 million perished – are, of course, a big deal for Russians every Victory Day, May 9. But Lübcke objects that the *Immortal Regiment*, when honoring Soviet graves at one of Hamburg's cemeteries, exhibits "nationalistic and partly historical revisionist undertones" – a strange thought, as I will consider shortly.

## Falsified past – what for?

The numbers involved are not large. Red Army soldiers who died in battle or in Nazi POW camps come to roughly 1,400 out of 62,000 war dead in Hamburg's various cemeteries. Their graves were all marked Soviet or Russian when they were buried – properly enough, given that is what they were. I cannot quite tell from the German reporting what Lübcke now has in mind – whether he proposes to alter cemetery documents or to alter the documents and chisel new gravestones. But it is clear he intends to impose a falsified past on those Soviet fallen who came from the Ukrainian republic. He also wants to go national with his idea.

Preposterous, yes, and embarrassing, yes again. But this is why it is also extremely important to consider what causes an organisation dedicated to honoring war dead to think it is right to impose an ahistorical distinction between some sacrificed lives and other sacrificed lives when they fought side by side in the same army to defeat their common enemy. What sentiments, what political forces, what propaganda project, animate this stunningly disrespectful proposal? What ideological drive causes Christian Lübcke to pimp dead soldiers who, were they alive, would have no idea of the point he wishes to make?

## 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day

I recall posing similar questions back in June 2015, when *John Kerry* and other Allied leaders joined veterans from their armies on the Normandy beaches to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and the impending Nazi defeat. *Obama's* secretary of state thought nothing of speechifying grandly about the heroes of the war while pointedly excluding the Russians from the ceremonies. Kerry et al. had by then refused to attend the May 9 events in Moscow marking the same anniversary. Considering the very essential role and exceptional sacrifices the Red Army made to the Allied cause, this seemed to me a bottomlessly shameful thing to do.

All that was a year after the U.S.-cultivated coup in Ukraine, we should note – a year into Washington's strategy of using the regime it installed in Kyiv as the front edge of its campaign to threaten the Russian Federation up to its western frontier.

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### "Why Do Nations Erase the Past?"

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By then I had heard the old Soviet joke many times, as some readers may have. The future is set, Soviet citizens used to say. It is the past that is always uncertain. This was a reference to all the airbrushing of photographs, the rewriting of texts, and the corrupting of archives that went on during the Stalin years.

#### Inexcusable conduct of Western leaders and institutions

Taking my date from the exclusion of Russian veterans and officials from the Normandy ceremonies, we have watched these past seven years as the West has become more and more Soviet in its disrespect and abuse of the past. Since the Russian intervention in Ukraine last February, this kind of inexcusable conduct has been rampant – made all the worse as Western leaders and institutions indulge in it with no compunction, no conscience, and certainly no embarrassment. It is as if human history and the historian's discipline are deserving of no common respect and so are available as an instrument to revile others, or airbrush them out of the picture.

#### Hundreds of statues and monuments demolished in Latvia and Estonia

Last summer Latvia demolished the largest Soviet-era monument in Riga, the capital, commemorating the victory over Nazism – this as the Russian-speaking minority had to stand by and watch. Estonia soon followed suit, an exercise in its case involving hundreds of statues and other sorts of memorials. *Kaja Kallas*, the Estonian prime minister, explained it this way: "It is clear that Russian aggression in Ukraine has torn open wounds in our society that these communist monuments remind us of, and therefore their removal from public space is necessary to avoid additional tensions."<sup>2</sup>

I have no clue what Kallas meant with these remarks. They appear simply to reflect muddled thinking, or none. No clear thought, no clear language, I always say. So we have Christian Lübcke explaining that his obviously nationalist and historically revisionist desire to vandalise history by falsifying records and – again, I cannot tell – chiseling new gravestones is to be done in the name of opposing nationalism and historical revisionism. We have Kaja Kallas ripping wounds into the Latvian body politic in the name of salving wounds.

#### Nationalism, identity, history, and memory

To state the obvious, we have to look further than Christian Lübcke, Kaja Kallas,

and other such officials overseeing these projects to understand their point. And so I return to those stray thoughts I mentioned earlier, having to do with nationalism, identity, history, and memory.

*Ernest Renan*, the French historian, biblical scholar, philosopher, philologist, critic, and so on – people did a lot of different things before our civilization packed knowledge into silos – delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne<sup>3</sup> in 1882 that has come down to us and is still quoted from time to time. He called it "*Qu'est-ce que une nation?*" – "What Is a Nation?" Among its notable passages is this:

*"Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation [...] The essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things."*

Renan had particular reasons for advancing these surprisingly forthright thoughts. By the 1880s, France was busily making itself a modern nation. Its regional identities and dialects – Brittany and Breton, Alsace and Alcacien, Occitanie and Languedoc, and so on – were pre-modern impediments to the project. They had to be subdued and over time removed from the national discourse, as if they were undesirable statues.

I have always found Renan's thoughts on nationality disagreeable and diabolically true all at once. It leads us to the essential point of all the official erasures and disfigurements I have mentioned and the many more I have not. It is that histories are very often destroyed in the creation of nations and identities.

What was the point of all the old airbrushing and erasing of the Soviet Union, especially, but I gather not only, during the Stalin years? It was to construct a national story with very clean, easy-to-read lines having to do with an imaginary version of socialist harmony with which Soviet citizens could identify.

#### Fading out the true past – a project of the West

What were Kerry and the other Western leaders present in Normandy seven years ago – French, British, German, Polish, and so on – trying to accomplish? They proposed to give their peoples a version of World War II that was compelling, inspiring of national pride, and – greatly above all – devoid of the true past, the past wherein Russia and Russians were decisively present.

This is the West's shared project now, one that rests to an unfortunate extent on forgetting. I take some comfort from the voice of *Katharina Fegebank*, Hamburg's deputy mayor, who spoke on Volkstrauertag, Germany's day of national mourning, which fell this year on November 13:

"It is our task today and every day to think of these and millions of people who have fallen victim to war and violence. We stand together here to stand up for peace and freedom, against racism, anti-Semitism and exclusion."

Will the Katharina Fegebanks of our time prevail against the forgetting that is effectively being forced upon us, we of the West? This is our question, and I would rather not answer it just now.

In Ernest Renan's day, a Breton or a speaker of Languedoc was supposed to become no longer a Breton or an Occitanie but a Frenchman or Frenchwoman. This project, which was in some respects forced, was a very long one and was at times bitter and bitterly resisted. In 1975 a writer and actor named *Pierre-Jacques Hélias* published a very fine memoir about the Breton identity, *Le cheval d'orgueil*, in English *The Horse of Pride*. It is filled with affectionate sentiment for a world that had been but was, by then, no more. Hélias wrote as a Frenchman, in French: This was in its way the unwritten coda to his story, if I read the book correctly.

#### Insidious forgetting

The forgetting of our time is of a different order, it seems to me. It is much more insidious. The objective is to create a new consciousness, as it was in Renan's time, but in our 21<sup>st</sup> century case this is to be done by way of a radical narrowing of our minds, a radical impoverishment of thought in the name of a neoliberal hegemony, in this way a radical stripping away of possibilities, a radical confinement within the walls of another bifurcated world order wherein neither side can see over these walls into the other side. In this world, if we collectively accept it without resistance, the future will be set and the past always uncertain. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.zeit.de/news/2022-11/13/sojwetische-kriegsgraeber-volksbund-will-differenzieren>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/16/estonia-removes-soviet-era-tank-monument-amid-russia-tensions-narva>

<sup>3</sup> [http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf)

Source: <https://scheerpost.com/2022/11/25/patrick-lawrence-why-do-nations-erase-the-past/> of 25 November 2022; reprinted with friendly permission of the author

# Merkel reveals West's duplicity

## “War, it seems, was the only option Russia's opponents had ever considered”

by Scott Ritter



Scott Ritter  
(picture ma)

Scott Ritter is a former US Marine Corps intelligence officer whose career spans more than 20 years and includes stints in the former Soviet Union implementing arms control agreements, on US General *Norman Schwarzkopf's* staff during the Gulf War, and later as the UN's chief weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991–1998.

*Recent comments by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel shed light on the duplicitous game played by Germany, France, Ukraine and the United States in the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February.<sup>1</sup>*

While the so-called “collective west” (the US, NATO, the EU and the G7) continue to claim that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was an act of “unprovoked aggression,” the reality is far different: Russia had been duped into believing there was a diplomatic solution to the violence that had broken out in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine in the aftermath of the 2014 US-backed Maidan coup in Kiev.

Instead, Ukraine and its Western partners were simply buying time until NATO could build a Ukrainian military capable of capturing the Donbass in its entirety, as well as evicting Russia from Crimea.

In an interview last week with *Der Spiegel*<sup>2</sup>, Merkel alluded to the 1938 Mu-

### Angela Merkel: “The Minsk Agreement of 2014 was an attempt to buy time for Ukraine”

“The 2014 Minsk Agreement was an attempt to buy time for Ukraine. Ukraine used this time to become stronger, as you can see today. Ukraine in 2014-2015 and Ukraine today are not the same. As you saw from the battle for Debaltseve [railroad town in Donbass, Donetsk oblast, ed.] in early

2015, Putin could have easily overrun it then. And I doubt very much that the NATO countries could have done as much then as they are doing now to help Ukraine.”

*Interview with Angela Merkel in the “Zeit” of 7 December 2022  
(Translation Current Concerns)*

nich compromise. She compared the choices former British Prime Minister *Neville Chamberlain* had to make regarding Nazi Germany with her decision to oppose Ukrainian membership in NATO, when the issue was raised at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest.

By holding off on NATO membership, and later by pushing for the Minsk accords, Merkel believed she was buying Ukraine time so that it could better resist a Russian attack, just as Chamberlain believed he was buying the UK and France time to gather their strength against *Hitler's* Germany.

The takeaway from this retrospection is astounding. Forget, for a moment, the fact that Merkel was comparing the threat posed by Hitler's Nazi regime to that of *Vladimir Putin's* Russia, and focus instead in on the fact that Merkel knew that inviting Ukraine into NATO would trigger a Russian military response.

Rather than reject this possibility altogether, Merkel instead pursued a policy designed to make Ukraine capable of withstanding such an attack.

War, it seems, was the only option Russia's opponents had ever considered.

#### Putin: Minsk was a mistake

Merkel's comments parallel those made in June by former Ukrainian President *Petro Poroshenko* to several western media outlets.<sup>3</sup> “Our goal,” Poroshenko declared, “was to, first, stop the threat, or at least

to delay the war – to secure eight years to restore economic growth and create powerful armed forces.” Poroshenko made it clear that Ukraine had not come to the negotiating table on the Minsk Accords in good faith.

This is a realisation that Putin has come to as well. In a recent meeting with Russian wives and mothers of Russian troops fighting in Ukraine, including a few widows of fallen soldiers, Putin acknowledged that it was a mistake to agree to the Minsk accords, and that the Donbass problem should have been resolved by force of arms at that time, especially given the mandate he had been handed by the Russian Duma regarding authorisation to use Russian military forces in “Ukraine,” not just Crimea.<sup>4</sup>

Putin's belated realisation should send shivers down the spine of all those in the West who operate on the misconception that there can now somehow be a negotiated settlement to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

None of Russia's diplomatic interlocutors have demonstrated a modicum of integrity when it comes to demonstrating any genuine commitment to a peaceful resolution to the ethnic violence which emanated from the bloody events of the Maidan in February 2014, which overthrew an OSCE-certified, democratically-elected Ukrainian president.

#### Response to resistance

When Russian speakers in Donbass resisted the coup and defended that democratic election, they declared independence from Ukraine. The response from the Kiev coup regime was to launch an eight-year vicious military attack against them that killed thousands of civilians. Putin waited eight years to recognise their independence and then launched a full-scale invasion of Donbass in February.

“*Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.* On reflection, Merkel was not wrong in citing Munich 1938 as an antecedent to the situation in Ukraine today. The only difference is this wasn't a case of noble Germans seeking to hold off the brutal Russians, but rather duplicitous Germans (and other Westerners) seeking to deceive gullible Russians.”

## War Logic “Fear that the war will end”

ds. “US weapons supplies running low,” headlined the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” on 30 November on page 3, reporting “shortages” in various weapons systems and the ammunition to go with them.

When it comes to Ukraine, one reads further, US President *Joe Biden* is always firm. American determination to prevent *Putin* from succeeding is also reflected in numbers, he said: The US Congress had already approved \$68 billion for Ukraine. Three quarters of this has already been used up or firmly budgeted. And recently, the White House had asked the parliament to make another 38 billion dollars available for Kiev.

With this help, Ukraine had been able to turn the tide on the “battlefields” in

the east and south. The delivery of howitzers and more than 800,000 artillery shells was one of the decisive factors for this success. Ukrainian forces were firing up to 7,000 artillery salvos a day, but now American stockpiles were dwindling.

There would also be shortages of multiple rocket launchers. However, these would first have to be manufactured, and it would take months or even years before they arrived at the front.

However, the arms manufacturers were reluctant to expand their production capacity too much. They lack long-term commitments for arms purchases from the government. “They are afraid that the war will end, the orders will stop coming

in and they will be left sitting on their expanded factories.”

\* \* \*

*In Ukraine, two nuclear powers are facing each other, Russia and the USA. There can be no victory on the battlefield. At some point, the weapons will have to fall silent.*

*In Russia and Ukraine, people are crying. They mourn for their lost children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents. Some have lost everything.*

*More weapons prolong the war and create more suffering. A ceasefire is needed, and it is needed now!*

## Hungary strives for peace

The civil movement *Forum for Peace* welcomes the Hungarian government’s stance in favor of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine. We believe that it is correct that at the NATO Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Bucharest, *Péter Szijjártó* did not indicate what needs to be done in terms of additional military and financial support to be provided to Kiev, but in the strategic dialogue with Russia. We also agree that Hungary continues to veto Ukraine’s accession to NATO. It is true that he is not doing this with reference to the peace of our country and Europe, but to the still unremedied violation of the ethnic rights of the Transcarpathian Hungarians. The Peace Forum believes that the rights of our Hungarian compatriots can be asserted if the main obstacle, the chauvinist leadership in Kyiv, is removed from

their path. As long as NATO supports Kyiv, our Hungarians cannot expect their lot to improve, but, on the contrary, our young people will be used as cannon fodder for the purposes of the ruling nation serving American interests. The Peace Forum believes that the key to the solution is the acceptance of Russia’s legitimate security guarantees of 15 December 2021. Moscow has made it clear that if the security of its borders is guaranteed, it will also guarantee the security of others in the framework of the European cooperation system based on the self-determination of peoples. As long as NATO, including Hungary, does not recognise the legitimate Russian demand, there will be no peace, and not only will the rights of the Hungarian minority be violated, but the peace of our country is not guaranteed.

*Association for the Rule of Law,  
Hungarian Anti-Fascist League,  
Labor Party,  
Hungarian Community for Peace,  
István Balog,  
Tibor Bognár,  
Zsolt Fehérvári,  
József Hajdú,  
Balázs Hetényi,  
Tamás Hirschler,  
Ferenc Kleinheincz,  
Gyöngyi Krajcsovics,  
József Zsolt Nagy,  
László Petráss,  
István Salga,  
Endre Simó,  
Gyula Thurmer*

*Source: Statement of the  
Hungarian Peace Forum,  
Budapest 1 December 2022*

### “Merkel Reveals West’s Duplicity”

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He had previously waited on the hope that the Minsk Accords, guaranteed by Germany and France and endorsed unanimously by the U.N. Security Council (including by the U.S.), would resolve the crisis by giving Donbass autonomy while remaining part of Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> But Kiev never implemented the accords and were not sufficiently pressured to do so by the West.

The detachment shown by the West, as every pillar of perceived legitimacy crumbled — from the OSCE observers (some of whom, according to Russia, were providing targeting intelligence about Russian separatist forces to the Ukrainian military)<sup>6</sup>; to the Normandy Format pairing of Germany and France, which was supposed to ensure that the Minsk Accords would

be implemented; to the United States, whose self-proclaimed “defensive” military assistance to Ukraine from 2015 to 2022 was little more than a wolf in sheep’s clothing — all underscored the harsh reality that there never was going to be a peaceful settlement of the issues underpinning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

### And there never will be

War, it seems, was the solution sought by the “collective West,” and war is the solution sought by Russia today.

*Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.*

On reflection, Merkel was not wrong in citing Munich 1938 as an antecedent to the situation in Ukraine today. The only difference is this wasn’t a case of noble Germans seeking to hold off the brutal Russians, but rather duplicitous Germans

(and other Westerners) seeking to deceive gullible Russians.

This will not end well for either Germany, Ukraine, or any of those who shrouded themselves with the cloak of diplomacy, all the while hiding from view the sword they held behind their backs. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/a-year-with-ex-chancellor-merkel-you-re-done-with-power-politics-a-f46149cb-6deb-45a8-887c-8aa37cc9b3c3>

<sup>2</sup> see above

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hornobservers.com/2022/06/17/minsk-deal-was-used-to-buy-time-ukraines-poroshenko/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69935>

<sup>5</sup> <https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11785.doc.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://tass.com/world/1442057>

Source: <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/12/05/scott-ritter-merkel-reveals-west-duplicity/> of 5 December 2022; reprinted with friendly permission of the author



# Federal Statistical Office reports record number of apprenticeship contract terminations – what is to be done?

by Marianne Wüthrich, long-time vocational school teacher

“Never before have so many young people broken off their apprenticeship” was a recent “Tages-Anzeiger” headline, and the article quoted alarmingly high figures: it was a question of 22.4 percent of apprentices who had started their training in 2017.<sup>1</sup> There is the small consolation that some of the contract terminations only relate to a change to another company or to another profession, with a new apprenticeship contract. But the extremely worrying fact remains that despite the good anchoring and high permeability of the dual system of educational education and training (VET) in Switzerland, almost a quarter of apprenticeship contracts are not carried through.

“What is going wrong in vocational education and training?” the authors ask. And we should add: “and what is to be done?”. Naturally, there are no simple or even eye-catching answers to this question. Without a doubt, it is often a combination of several causes that leads to an apprenticeship drop-out. The article mentions wrong choice of profession or apprenticeship, health reasons, poor performance of the apprentice as well as “dereliction of duty, conflicts and private environment”, or rarely bankruptcy/closure of the ap-

prenticeship company. These reasons for discontinuing an apprenticeship are nothing new, but the question arises as to why discontinuations are increasing today. And the follow-up question: How can we counteract this in a meaningful way, i. e., for the benefit of young people as well as society?

## Direct human approach instead of new job profiles

Youngsters belonging to the so-called Generation Z (born after 1996) “increasingly want a meaningful job. They don’t just want to be a cheap labour force.” This statement by the vice-director of *Pro Juventute* in the “Tages-Anzeiger” is quite astonishing to the experienced vocational school teacher. Forty years ago, most of my students wanted a meaningful job, and I have hardly ever seen a company where the master teachers did not do their best to make their apprentices enjoy their jobs and take pride in the increasingly demanding tasks they accomplished on their own in the course of their apprenticeship. When they talked about it at school, you could feel that the seeds were sown. Of course, some went through some minor or major rough patches in the course of their three or four years – but this was not un-

known to us in grammar school, either. And of course, also at that time there were unmotivated apprentices who did not perform as required. We will get to that later.

As far as the young people of today are concerned, *Tages-Anzeiger* contributor *Dominik Balmer* is surely right: “It may indeed be that *Generation Z* sometimes lacks bite and ambition. But the economy has to cope with that. There is no other option: there are no other personnel.”<sup>2</sup> Those responsible for training in the industry associations are aware of this, since some of them are desperately seeking suitable apprentices. Some associations are revising their job descriptions so that it is clearer for young people (and their parents) what they can expect in everyday working life. *Reto Hehli* from the *Carrosserie Suisse* association (42.9 per cent of automobile painters drop out of their apprenticeship!), for example, reports that many beginners in the car workshop are “surprised when they have to remain standing for the majority of the day and, if need be, lift heavy doors or bonnets”. At the same time, the associations are trying to “modernise” the image of their professions. In order to appeal to the younger generation and at the same time do something for the environ-

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## Dual vocational training system as an important integration factor

mw. “The historically developed VET system in Switzerland [...] leads to an early introduction to the world of work already at the age of 15 or 16, it even helps young people with a school weakness or from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to develop manual skills outside of school, and it confronts young people with the competitive hardship of the labour market at an early age. [...] But for all the hardship [...], the result is higher labour market skills and a higher standard of quality and ‘state of the art’ (rules of the art) in every occupational sector.” (Rudolf H. Strahm. “Warum wir so reich” sind – Why we are so rich. Bern 2010, pp. 68/69)

At WorldSkills 2022, the Swiss national vocational team once again did extremely well, winning 19 medals in 34 disciplines (<https://www.swiss-skills.ch/de/news/16864/funfter-schweizer-wm-titel-an-den-worldskills-schweiz-ist-die-nr-1-in-europa>). As Rudolf H. Strahm explains, these successes are also due to the good Swiss VET system.

An example from everyday life: Recently, a carpenter and his apprentice carried out a repair in our household. The young man was really “chomping at the bit”, always ready to lend a hand when his apprentice master approached him. He was in his first year of apprenticeship, he told me

in response to my question, and you could feel how it strengthened him to be needed as a co-worker and at the same time to learn his trade, three days a week in the company, two in vocational school.

So, they still exist, these pleasing apprentices, they are even still in the majority today. And as Rudolf H. Strahm described it more than ten years ago, the dual VET system is needed today more than ever so that weaker students or those from families of different cultures and languages can be integrated - and also for the high-achievers who would rather “create something with their hands” than attend school: Thanks to the permeability of the Swiss education system, all paths remain open to them all.

### The vocational training system as important moment of social and national cohesion

“The vocational training system is a key factor in productivity and competitiveness. But it is also the most important factor in social integration, social and national cohesion and the prevention or at least limitation of poverty. [...] In an international comparison, Switzerland integrates a larger proportion of young people and adults into working life thanks to its vocational training system, and therefore has the lowest youth unemployment and the lowest

unemployment rate in general.” (Rudolf H. Strahm. “Warum wir so reich sind” – Why we are so rich. p. 43)

The dual VET system is based on cooperation between the cantons, which provide the vocational schools, and the companies which are willing to train apprentices. SMEs in particular (over 98% of companies), but also many large companies (at least those with a grounding in the country) perform this task. However, they depend on the cantons to provide appropriate schooling, as they have done since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The fact that most companies take it for granted to do their part in the vocational education of our youth is an effect of the direct-democratic Swiss model. They do this just as they do unpaid militia work in their community and in social and cultural institutions and associations.

One of my colleagues in vocational school employed 4-5 people in his agricultural machinery company and trained 2 apprentices. One day a week he taught vocational skills at our school. Like most master teachers, especially in the manual trades, he contributed significantly to the development of his apprentices into capable professionals – and he even discussed the next referendums with them during their breaks.

**"Federal Statistical Office reports ..."**

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ment, *Carrosserie Suisse*, for example, wants to create a new label called "Green Car Repair" under the motto "Repair instead of replace" ("Tages-Anzeiger" of 30 November 2022).

Will these efforts have the desired effect? Often, the direct approach through visible presentation, practical experience and human relationships is more effective than an original slogan. All Swiss pupils in the 8th/9th school year who are considering a vocational apprenticeship complete one or more trial sessions in various professions. They spend a few working days or even a whole week in an apprenticeship company and prove their school knowledge in tests; in that way they experience the requirements at first hand. The apprentice trainers and the apprentices the applicants get to know there are the right people to answer their questions and their doubts. In addition, they make their own comparisons with other trial jobs. For the trainer, too, trial sessions are the best way to get an idea of applicants: are they punctual and reliable, willing to be shown things and to memorise? Can they read, write and calculate correctly?

As far as physically demanding work is concerned, I was impressed anew every year how 15- or 16-year-old boys, who had usually had a leisurely time in their last year of school, began to develop into strong young men within a few months, for example working as electricians on a building site in all weathers. Only rarely did anyone complain; mostly they were proud of their achievements and of their increasing strength. If I asked one of them to carry a pile of books upstairs for me, he would say, "You think that's hard? It's so easy." Standing all day usually bothered them much less than sitting all day when at school.

And this is really out of the question for the young people of today? Maybe some of them do find it more difficult - but the path via practical exercise and human relationships is still the only viable one today.

**More prevention to avoid "increased psychological stress"?**

The *Pro Juventute* employee quoted above believes that many young people today are hit by a "multi-crisis" because they are affected by the climate crisis, the Corona pandemic and now the war in Ukraine. If young people felt better, he said, there would be fewer apprenticeship contract terminations. In view of the "increased psychological stress on children and young people", the cantons had a duty to ensure prevention.<sup>3</sup>

When one considers how many young people from all over the world sit in all our school classes, who (or whose parents)

have come from far more difficult life situations, from war and misery, to safe and prosperous Switzerland, where every child is allowed to go to school and every young person is allowed to complete an apprenticeship or secondary school – should we not be ashamed to talk about "increased psychological stress" just because for a few months, our children experienced distance education instead of face-to-face lessons and because we should all do our bit to reduce energy consumption? In other countries, many young people in lockdown did not even have a mobile phone, and it is absurd to set up the climate crisis as a reason for dropping out of teaching.

**Lack of educational foundations in primary school**

Poor school performance of apprentices is only briefly touched upon in the above-mentioned article, but it cannot be argued away: our apprenticeship companies need school leavers who, after nine years of schooling, have a reasonable command of reading, writing and arithmetic, who can hammer in a nail and draw a neat triangle (no rule of thumb estimates, but use of compass and ruler), who arrive at the workplace on time, greet customers properly and allow themselves to be guided by the apprentice master without permanent discussions.

Many business representatives had hoped for more "competent" apprentices through *Curriculum 21* and the associated paradigm shift. Although we critics made every effort to disabuse them, *Curriculum 21* slipped through, thanks to massive propaganda commissioned by the state but not committed to the truth. Due to the lack of structured instruction in primary school, many apprentices lack the solid academic foundations that are indispensable for an apprenticeship and for vocational school.

How many apprenticeship contracts are terminated because of poor academic and/or job performance remains obscure. But in my experience, a significant proportion of apprenticeship terminations are related to lack of achievement, including the drop in performance caused by drug addiction or excessive playing of games on the computer. In some professions, the barrage of mind-confusing "competencies" can also lead to dropouts. Finding an adequate solution in such cases is not easy and, in any case, only works if the young person goes along with it.

**"Wrong career choice" – contract termination or continuation?**

In case of difficulties arising from the person of the apprentice or his relationship to his apprentice master or in case of the young person wanting to change to another profession, the question arises for all persons involved: Where does it make

sense to encourage a young person to continue, and where would it rather strengthen him to leave? Ultimately, it is the young person's decision, yet it still takes empathy of those involved, and also their determination to regard a young person as strong and to have confidence in him to do what is necessary and possible.

In the more than three decades I taught at a vocational school, I had many students who would actually have preferred to learn another profession, but eventually, for various reasons, ended up with their present apprenticeship. Interestingly enough, most of them would become friends with their profession if they had a good environment in the company. I encouraged quite a few young men and women, who had been able to rebound after negative experiences in secondary school and who made good progress in their apprenticeship companies and at vocational school, to go on after completing their apprenticeship, either training in their desired profession they had formerly been unable to get an apprentice position for, or with some other advanced training. I am happy to say that quite a few of these young men and women did so and were successful. But I also remember an example where I helped a young person to look for another apprenticeship after his prolonged attempts to find the "connection" with his apprentice master, because this intrinsically upright young person was threatening to lose his courage and joy in his profession. The whole class helped in the search for a new job. Such a constellation is rather rare, but you have to have a feel for it. Only a few times have I seen an apprenticeship company go bankrupt. Lucky Switzerland! Most of these students also found shelter in a fellow student's apprenticeship company.

Let us do everything we can to keep the dual VET system alive, which is so beneficial to our youth and our social cohesion!

<sup>1</sup> Balmer, Dominik and Cornehl, Svenson. "Berufsbildung in der Schweiz. Noch nie haben so viele Junge ihre Lehre abgebrochen" (Vocational education and training in Switzerland. Never before have so many young people dropped out of their apprenticeship). In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 30 November 2022. Latest figures on the start of apprenticeships in 2017, educational trajectories until 31 December 2021: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bildung-wissenschaft/uebertritte-verlaeuft-bildungsbereich/sekundarstufe-II/aufloesungen.html> (in German; tables in the appendix).

<sup>2</sup> Balmer, Dominik. "Commentary on apprenticeship contract terminations. The record figures are a warning shot". In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 30 November 2022

<sup>3</sup> Balmer, Dominik and Cornehl, Svenson. "Berufsbildung in der Schweiz. Noch nie haben so viele Junge ihre Lehre abgebrochen" (Vocational education and training in Switzerland. Never before have so many young people dropped out of their apprenticeship). In: *Tages-Anzeiger* of 30 November 2022

## Swiss spirit – indispensable especially today (Part 2)

### The general who did everything not to humiliate the other side: Henri Dufour

by Peter Küpfer\*

In the first part of this recollection of the essence of the Swiss spirit (“Niklaus von Flüe prevents an imminent Civil War in the Early Confederation”, *Current Concerns* No 26 of 6 December 2022) attention was focused on one of the early internal pull tests which have repeatedly brought Switzerland to the brink of imminent division since its origins. This was one of the first (after that of the Old Zurich War), arisen from tensions between the peoples more rural in character and urban peoples, tensions always threatening the old Swiss confederacy, now fuelled by various, partly very real factors. Naturally, the internal crises in Switzerland arising from this tension took on very different forms depending on the historical environment at a time. The recurrent and rightly mentioned urban-rural antagonism – still existent today – cannot be compared directly with a late medieval conflict even if it has similar roots. But its destructive dimension is based on the same factors that even today threaten the unity of Switzerland under different conditions: mutual mistrust, that in turn creates hatred and rejection, the roots of all wars.

Today’s contribution, similar to the first one but closer to our time, again emphasises the simultaneously active positive forces that can alleviate and remedy the fateful mistrust. Those positive forces can soothe and remedy mistrust – in times of crises easily kindled in human beings –



Portrait of Guillaume Henri Dufour. Oil on wood, by his daughter Anne Octavie L'Hardy-Dufour, 1840. (Private collection; Bibliotheque de Genève, Archives A. & G. Zimmermann) (picture *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*)

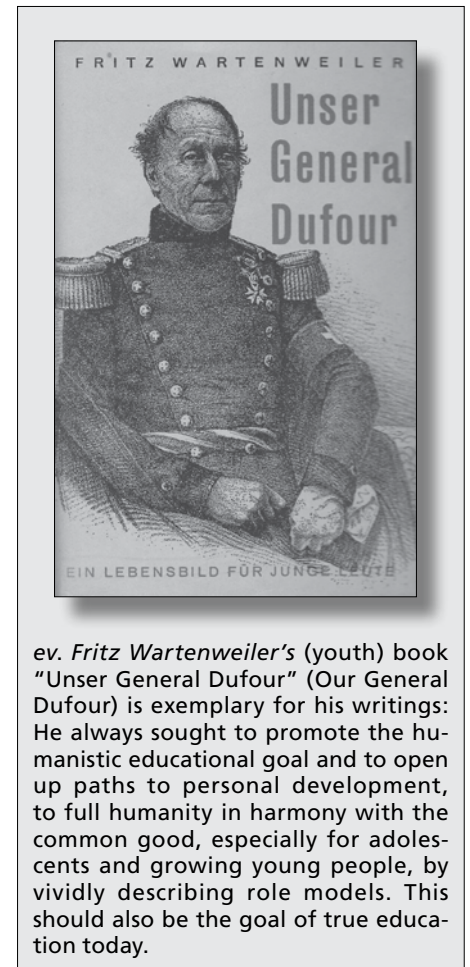
and thus prevent a crisis and discord. The awareness of “unity in diversity” can give fresh impetus to democracy as is shown by the overall course of Swiss history – characterizing it as a success story. It is based on the respect for the other opinion, a respect stemming in deeper layers than the stirred-up sentiments that guide day-to-day politics. This was also so in bygone days. The following example from Swiss history dedicated to the Swiss General *Henri Dufour* illustrates this clearly. The highest mountain, 4634 metres above sea level, in the high alpine border area of the Mont Blanc massif does not bear its name “Dufourspitze” accidentally.

General Henri Dufour’s deed that led to this honour has, however, been forgotten by many of today’s Swiss. No wonder: the school subject of Swiss history is treated as if our youth should be ashamed of it. I know of no other European country where one’s own history is treated so unlovingly, even self-destructively, as it happened here for some time, in a heartland of Europe, in our Switzerland. Before this belittling of Swiss history, ignited by certain circles (including many who call themselves “Kulturschaffende” or cultural workers aka intellectuals), even non-Swiss people were convinced that Switzerland deserved to bear the honorary title “cradle of democracy”. Those were hardly all whitewashers who were out of touch with reality.

Today, the traditional historiography, also illuminating the achievements of one’s own national history and not only its mistakes (which country does not know them?) is discounted as a megalomaniac, narcissistic national myth or as a “narrative” (fashionable word for arbitrarily pieced together story), based obviously on more political backgrounds than on serious historical analyses. It is all the more appropriate to assure oneself of the qualities of our country’s own development. As everywhere in the world, where solidity is created and can be sustained, it is linked to the work of outstanding people who had in mind the good of the whole, not just their personal or partisan profit.

Also at the beginning of the early 19th century, fateful times for Switzerland, the aforementioned constant in Swiss history, the conflict between the more traditional views anchored in the countryside and the “progressive” views of a liberal urban class that saw itself as an elite can be seen.

It is therefore a most remarkable circumstance that the constitution of modern Switzerland of 1848 came about only one year after one of the most dangerous



ev. Fritz Wartenweiler’s (youth) book “Unser General Dufour” (Our General Dufour) is exemplary for his writings: He always sought to promote the humanistic educational goal and to open up paths to personal development, to full humanity in harmony with the common good, especially for adolescents and growing young people, by vividly describing role models. This should also be the goal of true education today.

tests for the emerging modern Switzerland, the so-called “Sonderbundskrieg” (Sonderbund equals “separate alliance”) within the Confederation. It was a genuine civil war, where Swiss stood against Swiss, even if it was fortunately limited in terms of its human casualties and destruction. This was due first and foremost to the civil courage and far-sightedness of the military leader of the federal troops, General Guillaume Henri Dufour (1787-1875).

#### Fatal History

We will briefly recall the starting point and the course of the Swiss Sonderbund War of 1847. In the forties of the 19th century, the religious-confessional tensions once again intensified in our country, too; due to the aggressive policy of the “Freisinnige” (liberals), there was even a radicalisation on various issues. In this process, the political was mixed with the religious. The liberals sought to transform the Swiss confederation into a modern federal state according to the model of the American Declaration of Independence. Not only did this liberal concept include

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federalism and parliamentary democracy, but also the strict separation of church and state, as well as compulsory, secular elementary schools. In addition, liberal-radical spirits provocatively demanded the closure of the monasteries and the banning of the Jesuits. While Zurich appointed *David Ludwig Strauss*, who in his controversial pamphlet "Life of Jesus" had "presented a radically worldly understanding of the Son of God" (Stadler, p. 223), as theologian in the newly founded university, on 24 October 1844, the Lucerne parliament appointed seven Jesuits as teachers in the theological faculty and in the seminary. This was a provocation to the liberal youth, including the young *Gottfried Keller* at the time. Like many other radical youths of Zurich, the later novelist of realism and state secretary of the canton of Zurich decided to take part in an armed campaign of volunteers against the "Lucerne reactionaries" at the end of March/early April 1845, which, however, was without result even before any fighting took place and ended ignominiously for the "liberal" volunteers (there were such skirmishes of volunteers also on the conservative side) (Stadler p. 227f.)

Secular and liberal circles, especially economic ones, hoped for a turning point in time, in particular for the abolition of existing trade barriers in a Switzerland "modernised" in its head and limbs. At that time, a journey through Switzerland was interrupted by many toll stations where separate weights, currencies and taxes applied; a new railroad was not allowed to cross bordering cantonal territories; a letter from Romanshorn to Geneva was sent "with advantage via Germany and France" in those days, because Switzerland had its own rules and taxes for each cantonal territory (Wartenweiler, Fritz. *Führende Schweizer in schweren Krisenzeiten*. Zurich 1930, p. 57).

Once again, before the military escalation, a rural-conservative Switzerland and an urban-innovative class opposed each other more and more irreconcilably. When the stand-off that had been going on for years suddenly resulted in the "liberal-radicals" gaining the upper hand in the Tagsatzung (Federal Diet) (due to a political change in the young canton of St. Gallen), the latter seized their opportunity. The pretext for the military deployment of the Confederation was provided by clumsy international military agreements and alliances of the Sonderbund with the monarchies surrounding Switzerland all

of which were watching Switzerland suspiciously, and all of which were struggling with unrest and radical democratic uprisings in these revolutionary times. In many other European countries, the exponents of this radical democratic uprisings wanted precisely what had been in place in Switzerland since 1815 and what now was taking on more self-confident forms: the federal democratic republic as a new federation (a federal state instead of a confederation of states).

When, in the summer of 1847, the Tagsatzung with its new liberal majority enforced the expulsion of the Jesuits and aimed at the revision of the Swiss constitution in the direction of a federal state, the envoys of the "Schutzvereinigung" (as the Sonderbund called itself, consisting of the mainly Catholic Central Swiss cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden and Nidwalden, Zug, Lucerne, with Fribourg and Valais) in consequence left the meeting place Bern under protest. The rupture and with it the inevitable war was decided. Both parties were arming themselves.

**There was more at stake than a victory**

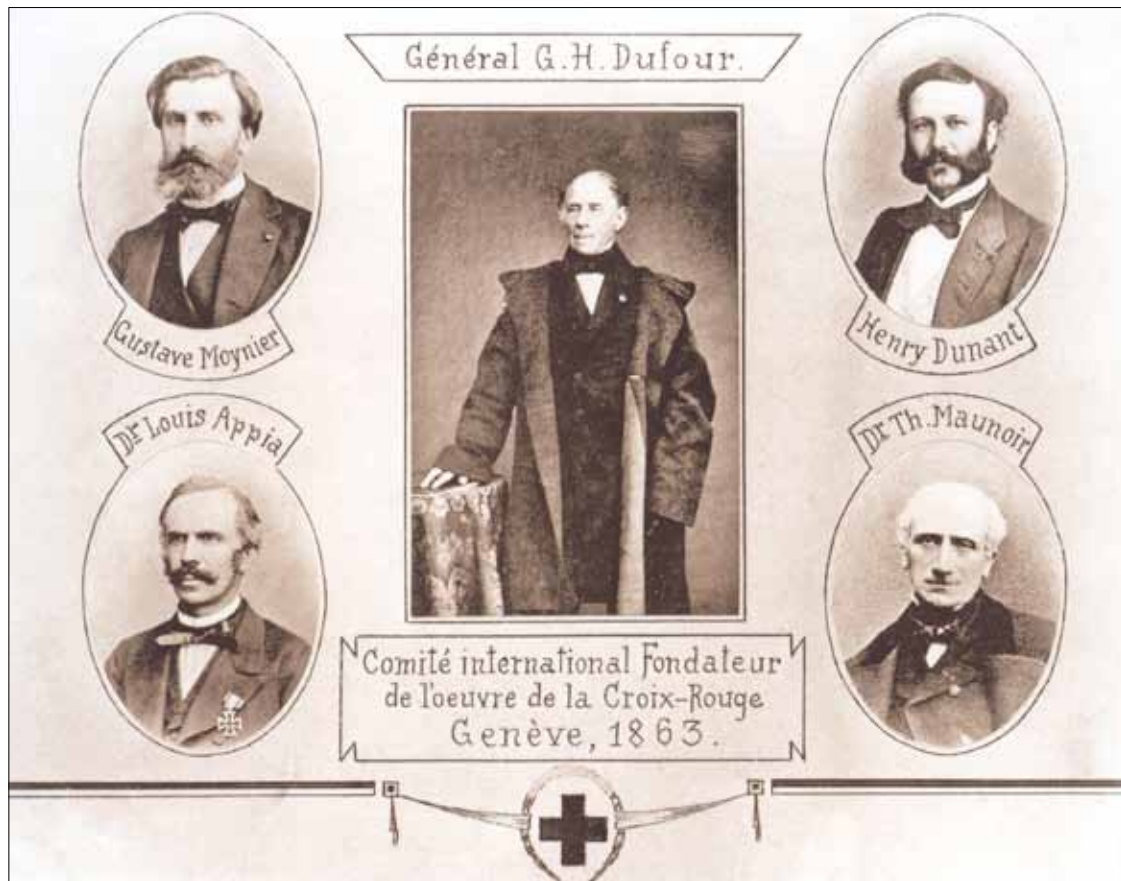
On 21 October 1847, the majority of the Assembly elected Guillaume Henri Dufour (1787-1875), a Geneva citizen and

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## On the biography of Guillaume Henri Dufour

### A scientifically and humanistically educated officer and active contributor to the Republic of Geneva (Swiss canton since 1815)

- Born on 15 September 1787 in Constance as the son of the Geneva watchmaker *Bénédict Dufour*.  
Spends his childhood from the age of two in Geneva, where the family settles down again after a politically motivated exile. College, then studies humanities and physics at the Geneva Académie.
- 1807–1809 further studies at the Ecole Polytechnique Paris.
- 1809–1810 military science studies with focus on genius work in Metz.
- From 1811–1817 service as officer in the general staff of the French army, until 1815 under *Napoleon Bonaparte*.
- 1817–1850 Cantonal engineer in Geneva. Opposed the demolition of Geneva's city fortifications because he wanted to preserve the fortress of Geneva as a south-western border protection for Switzerland. In addition to building bridges, he designed the waterfront promenade in the quays.  
At the same time, Dufour taught mathematics, geometry, surveying and hydraulics at the Académie.
- From 1817 integration as a captain in the newly created Swiss army.
- 1819 Co-founder of the military school in Thun, which still exists today, taught the génie department there and became headmaster.  
*Louis Bonaparte*, the future Emperor *Napoleon III*, was one of his students and the two were linked by a lifelong friendship. Author of military science writings, especially on fortress construction and military tactics.
- 1827 Promotion to Swiss Colonel, then joined the Swiss General Staff. His task there was to organise the defence of Switzerland in the event of an attack.
- 1832 Promoted to Swiss Chief of General Staff (with the rank of "Oberst-quartiermeister").
- In 1843, he led a mission in that capacity to calm the escalating confrontations between radicals and conservatives. Directed the triangulation work and then elaborated the first reliable national map of Switzerland at the scale of 1:100 000 (the "Dufour Map", later named after him) until its completion in 1864.
- In 1847, Dufour was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate troops with the rank of General against the Sonderbund by the Legislative Assembly. He identified the federal troops with a brassard with the white cross in a red field (the troops still wore cantonal uniforms at that time, although they were similar), the emblem that formed the official federal flag from 1848.
- 1856 Federal Commander-in-Chief in the deployment of troops to defend Neuchâtel against the threatened Prussian intervention.
- In 1863, co-founder of the *International Committee of the Red Cross*, which he supported until the end of his life. The proposal to design the Red Cross flag as a quasi-inversion of the Swiss flag (red cross in the white field) came from him.  
In addition to these military duties, Dufour was also politically active, as a deputy of Geneva in the Legislative Assembly, as a member of the Geneva Constitutional Council, as a delegate in the municipal and then cantonal parliament, and finally as a member of the Council of States for the Canton of Geneva.
- Dufour died in Geneva on 14 July 1875 at the age of 87. His most expressive portrait is by his daughter *Anne Octavie L'Hardy-Dufour* (oil on canvas, 1840), a distinguished artist and portraitist.



The “committee of the five”. (picture ICRC)

### “Swiss spirit – indispensable ...”

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soldier, as General of the Swiss Confederation. This humanist-minded and educated contemporary, who originally wanted to become a doctor, was at that time already a well-known and merited personality. He served as a specialist in logistics and general staff officer under *Napoleon*, was later cantonal architect in Geneva, pioneering cartographer, operator and publisher of the first reliable map of Switzerland named after him, lecturer and then director of the first central school for Swiss officers in Thun (it still exists today), finally quartermaster general of the Swiss army (equivalent to a present-day chief of general staff). The choice of this modest, rather conservative officer left a nasty taste in the mouths of some liberal hotheads. Behind it, however, was a far-sighted federal concept that exactly matched the character of this merited military leader. (see box Biography Dufour)

His campaign was short, decisive and purposeful. Even the strategy corresponded to the will of the general, who did everything to ensure that the campaign, which could not be avoided, took place quickly and with the greatest possible sparing of the enemy.

“On 4 November, the military operations began. [...] Dufour [...] first deployed his troops against isolated Fribourg, which surrendered as early as 14 November. Then he turned the mass of the

army against the heartland of the Sonderbund, Central Switzerland. From Freiamt, the advance was made to Lucerne. After a fierce battle near Gisikon [on 23 November 1847], the Sonderbund’s defences collapsed. Lucerne was occupied by the federal troops. The other original cantons then gave up the fight, and finally also Valais on 29 November. The war lasted twenty-five days; there were only a few fatalities.” (Cattani, in: *Great Swiss and Swiss Women*, p. 284)

Dufour’s campaign against the Sonderbund had thus lasted less than a month. In accordance with his slogan, the military objectives were fully achieved with a low number of human casualties and war-motivated destruction with the unconditional surrender of the Sonderbund and its dissolution. The most important thing for Dufour: the greatest possible protection not only of the civilian population, but also of the enemy troops, who were not to be treated with hatred before the battle, nor with revenge and humiliation after the victory, but rather with an honest invitation to join in the construction of a modern Switzerland, albeit as defeated, but still respected. Especially today, when even Swiss in the highest political, economic and media positions eagerly call for hatred against a country and its leadership (but not, as Dufour and the circles that entrusted him with his difficult office did: for moderation and reason), this difference cannot be emphasised enough.

Dufour was *not concerned with destroying the enemy*, but first and foremost with signalling to him, albeit with the *ultima ratio* (military intervention), *that he had gone too far*. For him, the very way his troops did this must be proof that modern Switzerland was serious about encouraging the militarily defeated to participate in the reconstruction and rebuilding of a Switzerland that had matured as a result of this conflict. “His goal was to reunite the divided fatherland in a swift campaign without much bloodshed and to reconcile the feuding parties. The layout and conduct of the military operations were ultimately determined by political considerations. *By conducting the battle with the greatest possible sparing of the enemy, the preparation of the coming understanding already began during the war*”. (Cattani, p. 284 emphasis P.K.)

### An epochal achievement

This is the unique, the epochal achievement of this commander-in-chief.

In the already quoted publication about outstanding Swiss, the popular educator *Fritz Wartenweiler* puts the Swiss general before our eyes in unusually vivid formulations. It will be possible for anyone who starts from the historical facts to agree with his concluding appreciation:

“This war could have grown into an incalculable catastrophe. A collapse would not have just occurred if the

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Sonderbund had won, but also if another man had taken over the command of the Swiss troops and had not led the battalions of the majority cantons with that certain superiority that Dufour had achieved. This danger was extraordinarily near.” (Wartenweiler, p. 59)

The following concluding excerpts from Dufour’s daily appeals to his officers and soldiers (his so-called “daily orders”, quoted in detail by Wartenweiler) make his merits particularly clear. Would not the farsightedness contained therein also befit many a present-day commander-in-chief, not only one of Swiss troops?

At the beginning of the campaign, on November 4 in 1847, Dufour gave the following operative instructions to his officers:

“The utmost must be done to avoid purposeless conflicts. The federal troops are to be urged in the strongest possible terms to behave with moderation and not to allow themselves to be carried away into abusive treatment [...] At all costs the violation of the Catholic Church and religious institutions is to be prevented. [...]

If an enemy force is repulsed, its wounded are to be cared for as one’s own and treated with all consideration due to the misfortune. [...] The prisoners are to be disarmed. However, no harm may be done to them, nor may they be insulted in any way. [...] After the battle, the excitement of the soldiers is to be restrained, the

defeated are to be looked after”. (Wartenweiler, p. 62)

And in the first daily order at the beginning of the operation, on November 4, 1847, the general addressed his troops with the following grave, genuinely forward-looking words:

“Soldiers! You must emerge from this battle not only victorious, but free of reproach; it must be possible to say of you: You have fought bravely where it was necessary, but you have shown yourselves humane and magnanimous. I therefore place under your protection the children, the women, the old men and the servants of religion. Whoever lays a hand on a defenceless person dishonours himself and desecrates his flag...” (Wartenweiler, p. 63)

General Dufour was not able to resolve the sharp antagonisms and tensions between conservatives and radicals that continued to exist even after the victory of the federal troops over the dissidents. They were deep and lasted for decades, especially in Switzerland. But he softened them and, through his behaviour, was an example to all those who sought the proportional representation system in the election to the National Council. This procedure was only introduced into the constitution in 1919, after the serious crisis of the national strike of 1918 (see Part 3 of this article), and it helped to create the institutional conditions for the waves to calm down, also with regard to the particularly sharp contrasts on the so-

cial question at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is not surprising that General Dufour, almost twenty-five years later, also supported the foundation of the Swiss and International Committee of the Red Cross on the basis of this attitude. When *Henry Dunant*, also a Genevan, shaken and stirred by the horrors of the Italian war, founded and built up the International and Swiss Committee of the Red Cross, the already aged former Swiss General supported this construction and took an active and representative part in it. •

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Very worthwhile as a supplement to the dominant view of this period of Swiss history, which is characterised by radical liberalism: Roca, René. “Die Bedeutung des Katholizismus und der Katholisch-Konservativen für die Entwicklung einer demokratischen Kultur in der Schweiz”. (The significance of Catholicism and the Catholic conservatives for the development of a democratic culture in Switzerland). In: *Katholizismus und moderne Schweiz*. (Catholicism and modern Switzerland), Basel 2016



Contemporary depiction of the decisive skirmish at Gisikon on 23 November 1847, which led to the mutually recognised break-off of the engagement one day later and thus to the end of the Swiss intervention under Dufour’s command. (picture Troxler, Walter, ed. “So gestochen wie geschossen. Luzern und der Sonderbundskrieg in alten Darstellungen” (As stabbed as shot. Lucerne and the Sonderbund War in Old Depictions). Eschenbach (self-published) 2022, ISBN 978-3-033-09580-9, p. 88).

# Primary school – place of education for direct democracy and culture

## A task that has not yet been solved

by Dr Eliane Perret, curative teacher and psychologist

A few years ago, *Mario*, a young man originally from Sicily, said: “In Switzerland, people have much more to say than in our country”, after we had talked in history class about the Swiss political system and the possibilities of co-determination. He thus summed up what distinguishes Switzerland’s direct democracy with its federal structure and subsidiary division of tasks: *the co-responsibility of all citizens as the basis of equal coexistence within the framework of our constitutional state*. This includes the right to respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of belief, universal voting rights, legal security and equality under the law, as well as the right to education.<sup>1</sup>

I silently wondered whether all parliamentarians elected by the people still carry this with them as a guideline for their actions. Mario’s statement about direct democracy made me realise once again that primary schools and myself as a teacher have the important task of giving children an understanding of the political system and the country they live in, because it was created in small steps by previous generations. Mario and also the other children, I was sure, would leave school with an educational backpack rich in the tools of responsible citizenship. This includes not only the secure handling of cultural techniques such as reading, writing and arithmetic, but also the human education that is necessary for our direct democracy to remain alive and functioning: it needs active citizens who can responsibly exercise their rights and duties.

### A task to be accomplished

In recent years, it has been all too easy to forget how much work responsible, honest and far-sighted people have done to create in our country a primary school based on a democratic constitution – with educational content adapted to the realities of our country. It seems all the more important to me today to remember this, as the achievements of democracy and popular education and the associated task of primary schools are only marginally part of the training content of teacher training colleges and primary school curricula,



*The task of primary school is to broaden children’s horizons so that they can identify with their country and culture and later make decisions with the necessary vision as active, responsible citizens for the common good. (picture keystone)*

which are oriented towards a globalised curriculum (see below). This is a serious process, because it undermines coexistence in our direct democracy. Remediating this situation is a long overdue task. Who wants to – historically carefully documented material would be available in abundance!<sup>2</sup>

### Direct democracy is not folklore

What seems self-evident to us today is the result of almost two hundred years of efforts to make regular school attendance and thus the acquisition of education accessible to all children. The realisation that a person cannot develop according to his or her nature without education was a result of humanism and the Enlightenment. The importance of education for all was therefore recognised early on as the cornerstone of a democratic state. The founders of the democratic constitution of Switzerland focused their attention on the establishment of a primary school for all, regardless of gender, religion and social class; as a model for living together in our country. Democracy and direct democracy in particular, according to their still valid assumption (!), presupposes a certain level of education, combined with rootedness in one’s own culture and values. Only in this way can current issues be grasped in their scope,

thought through in a larger context and discussed in peace, so that well-founded answers and approaches to solutions result. And this is the task of our primary schools, because people educated in this way are able to exercise their political rights and participate in political events.

What previous generations have left us as a “gift” (and a task!) must not increasingly degenerate into folklore today, which is determined by money, power and manipulation and where people ultimately turn away from political life in resignation because “those up there do what they want anyway”. Perhaps also because they have experienced that current and former (educational) politicians try to control the will of the people with armies of PR experts and spin-doctors?

### Building on the personalist concept of man (Menschenbild)

The development of our primary schools was closely linked to political and social developments.<sup>3</sup> A look back at its almost two-hundred-year history shows that educational goals were linked to the further expansion of democracy. In addition, there were scientifically substantiated findings from pedagogy and psychology, which were constantly incorporated in order to correct any undesirable develop-

### "Primary school – place of education ..."

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ments. Thus, the primary schools – contrary to alternative propaganda slogans – always had its finger on the pulse of the times, before a reform cascade began without objective necessity, which was supposed to give our primary schools a new orientation. Prior to that, the orientation towards humanistic and social science knowledge was fundamental for this long period of positive development, in connection with a personalist concept of man, according to which man is a relational being, equipped with a social nature and capable of reason and ethics. (Findings which, by the way, have been confirmed by new, well-supported research in developmental psychology and should urgently be incorporated into the training concepts of prospective teachers!<sup>4</sup>) From this perspective, a child's personality development begins in its first hours of life with the establishment of trusting relationships and emotional anchoring in its family environment. In a continuous process, the foundations for an inner value system are laid. This development work should be continued at school – as stated in the educational articles of various cantons – and supplemented where necessary. In this way, children can grow up secure in their personality, capable of shaping their lives in a self-determined way, mastering stressful life situations, willingly getting involved and taking responsibility for the common good, as is part of direct democracy.

#### Paradigm shift soft-footed

The personal view of the child and the methodological concepts based on it were taught and practised in the training centres for future teachers until the 1980s. With such a didactic, pedagogical and psychological training, the future professionals received a tool for shaping their everyday pedagogical work. It formed the foundation for the fulfilment of the school's educational mission, which deserves its name and includes emotional and intellectual foundations for living together in a democracy.

In the years to come, there was a paradigm shift from a personalist view of man to a biologicistic, mechanistic view that denies a holistic approach and is currently dominated by neuroscientific trends. This has been accompanied by the devaluation of previous foundations of pedagogy that do not follow current fashion trends.

#### Ideological aberrations

This development was embedded in social processes that put the nation-states and thus also Switzerland and its perpetual armed neutrality in the crosshairs. It received support from the cultural scene,

which was caught up in the '68 movement and did not hesitate to question the legitimacy of the Swiss direct-democratic system and Switzerland as an independent nation with the slogan "700 years are enough" at the World's Fair in 1991. In their negation of Switzerland, they obviously had no inhibitions about joining forces with neoliberal big business, which wants to let its money flow without limits ... and also seeks Switzerland's financial reserves to do so.

These social aberrations (they cannot be illuminated in detail here) and concepts naturally also had an effect on the training content of the newly founded teacher training colleges, because many lecturers had arrived there and at the universities on their "march through the institutions" or had made a detour across the big pond.

The reforms at our school that began more than thirty years ago happened against this ideological background, against the will of the vast majority of teachers and against the will of parents. Pro memoria: Until the nineties of the last century – before the wave of reforms – Swiss schools had always been attested a very high quality in international comparison. Have you forgotten already? The primary schools were said to be well anchored in the democratic system of our country. Have you forgotten? The new curricula that have been created since then, on the other hand, are shaped by the political objectives described above, not only methodologically but also in terms of content. Thus, the subject "Swiss History" has meanwhile lost its independence and leads a wallflower existence. According to the requirements of *Curriculum 21*, children in the middle school are no longer concerned with learning about the history of our country (or host country) and identifying with its values, but should become "competent" "...to distinguish history and stories from each other"<sup>5</sup> (*Curriculum 21*) and thereby "explain the intentions of legends and myths (e.g. the legend of *William Tell*)" or "critically reflect on the use of legends and myths in the present day and recognise their use in political discussions". Doesn't that seem very cool and unemotional? How can the desire to proudly stand up for the interests of one's own country arise?

#### Back to Mario

"In Switzerland, people can have a much greater say than at home," Mario had said. Yes, if we preserve what has been achieved over generations and pass it on to the next generation. If we ourselves appreciate the fine set of rules of democracy, which lays the foundations for an equal coexistence of people who can ac-

tively shape the fate of our country "from below". A unique model worldwide! For this, we need educated youth. They must not be cheated out of their education by false theories and ideologies that declare insight into the history of our culture to be an arbitrary narrative. For there is no such thing as globally interchangeable educational content (even if that would be lucrative for the education corporations), but it must be adapted to the circumstances and needs of the respective country – in our case, to the political culture of direct democracy. The intentions that led to the founding of the primary schools are therefore still relevant. Like every previous generation, we have to rethink this and decide how our education system should be structured. This includes embracing democracy as a way of life.

What else should we say to Mario? •

- <sup>1</sup> cf. Verein zur Förderung der Psychologischen Menschenkenntnis VPM (Association for the Promotion of the Psychological Knowledge of Man) (ed.). (1995). *Erziehung zum mündigen Mitbürger. Die Bedeutung der Schule für die Demokratie.* (Education to become a mature citizen. The importance of school for democracy). Zurich, Verlag Menschenkenntnis. p. 9
- <sup>2</sup> For example: Erziehungsrat des Kantons Zürich. (ed.). (1933). *Volksschule und Lehrerbildung 1832–1932. Festschrift zur Jahrhundertfeier.* Zurich: Verlag der Erziehungsdirektion or also: *Ta-gungsbände Forschungsinstitut direkte Demokratie.* René Roca. [www.fidd.ch](http://www.fidd.ch)
- <sup>3</sup> VPM (ed.). (1995). *Erziehung zum mündigen Mitbürger. Die Bedeutung der Schule für die Demokratie.* (Education to become a responsible citizen. The importance of schools for democracy). Zurich, Verlag Menschenkenntnis
- <sup>4</sup> cf. Kissling, Beat. (2022). *Sind Inklusion und Integration in der Schule gescheitert? Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung.* (Have inclusion and integration in school failed? A critical examination). Bern: Hogrefe. S. 109–162
- <sup>5</sup> *Curriculum Volksschule des Kantons Zürich, NMG 9.4.*; <https://zh.lehrplan.ch/index.php?code=a/611/9/014>



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