

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*

Switzerland is a constitutional state – you can't just take people's money away from them

Interview with National Councillor and FAC President Franz Grüter on the confiscation of Russian assets



Franz Grüter
(picture ma)

mw. As is well known, the Federal Council has taken over all EU sanctions against Russia since 28 February 2022 – regardless of Switzerland's sovereignty, rule of law and neutrality (see *Current Concerns* of 10 May 2022). One measure that is particularly questionable from the point of view of the rule of law is the adoption of a list from Brussels with more than 1,000 names of Russian individuals and companies whose assets were subsequently frozen – without them being given the opportunity to comment on it (right to be heard) or to take legal action against it, as guaranteed by the Federal Constitution (see box).

Today, the demands from abroad go a huge step further: the frozen Russian assets are to be confiscated by the Confederation and used for the reconstruction of Ukraine. National Councillor Franz Grüter, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N), recently warned against this in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung": "We must not suddenly abandon our principles of the rule of law".

Current Concerns: National Councillor Grüter, can you explain that?

Franz Grüter: Yes, Switzerland is a constitutional state. Actually, everyone is proud of that, regardless of political orientation. Property is guaranteed in the Federal Constitution [Article 26]. If we now suddenly start arbitrarily expropriating people, then that is a breach of the Federal Constitution. It has to be said so clearly.

The guarantee of property is deeply rooted in the Swiss population

If we confiscate the frozen Russian assets, then that is unconstitutional. If you want that, you have to amend the constitution accordingly and have it approved by the people. But I must also tell you that Switzerland, as a constitutional state, will have a problem if we start expropriating people solely on the basis of their nationality. The demand is not new, it was already raised immediately after 24 February, especially by the Polish Prime Minister, who said, in essence: "You must take away the money of all Russians, across the board." This would introduce a kind of clan liability. Someone would be arbitrarily expropriated simply on the basis of their nationality and not on the basis of a court ruling and a clean constitutional procedure. That definitely

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No expropriations for political expediency or diplomatic cowardice!

mw. Fortunately, there are also personalities in Swiss jurisprudence who insist on adherence to the principles of the rule of law as laid down in the Swiss Federal Constitution. One of them is Professor Dr Peter V. Kunz, Director of the *Institute for Commercial Law* at the University of Berne. In a recent newspaper commentary, he noted some important stakes of the Swiss rule of law and neutrality that our politicians have to respect vis-à-vis nationals of all states of the world. Peter V. Kunz complains that there is hardly any serious discussion of neutrality in the media and politics at the moment, although it has been "the real anchor of Swiss foreign policy for more than 200 years". The fact that Switzerland is adopting the wording of almost all the EU sanctions goes far beyond a "solidarity action". He is calling a spade a spade: "The sanction screws are to be tightened even further – at the request of the USA", and he warns: "But be careful! We should not treat the fundamental right of the guarantee of property lightly, even if pressure from abroad increases in the future." The author explains the big leap from blocking to confiscation of assets from the perspective of the rule

of law: in an asset freeze, funds are only temporarily blocked, whereas in a confiscation, property is permanently seized by the state. Therefore, confiscation of assets "may only take place in legal proceedings, with concrete and provable criminal charges and not through 'show trials on suspicion'. Those affected must be able to inspect files and defend themselves in court". This result "from a Swiss tradition that can be summed up in one word: The rule of law".

In clear words, the Bernese law professor rejects "expropriations without compensation for reasons of political expediency or diplomatic cowardice", and not only "against Russians, whom we like to place under a cheap general suspicion since the Ukraine war".

Unsuccessful attempt to interference on the part of the EU

Particularly noteworthy is an invitation to lunch in early December 2022 by the ambassador of the European Union to Switzerland, *Petros Mavromichalis*, of which Professor Kunz reports in the newspaper commentary: "He asked for an exchange of views on the Swiss sanctions against Russia because of the

Ukraine war. This honourable invitation came as something of a surprise to me, since I hold neither an official nor an unofficial function for Switzerland." The reason for this action becomes clearer when we learn that Peter V. Kunz had already criticised "the establishment of a Swiss task force ('eyewash') or the hunt for alleged oligarch money ('banana republic')" in several interviews in the spring of 2022, which brought him "sometimes fierce and mostly anonymous criticism". This stalwart voice had to be "turned around" according to the will of the EU thugs – however, the shot backfired.

A bravo for the Bernese law professor! By making the attempt to influence public, he takes the sting out of the omnipresent manipulation of opinion by the major Western powers. His example can be an incentive for each of us to demand the freedom of opinion enshrined in international law and the Federal Constitution.

Source: "Confiscation of Russian assets: We must not place Russians under cheap general suspicion". Guest commentary by Peter V. Kunz. In: "Aargauer Zeitung" of 11 January 2023

"Switzerland is a constitutional ..."

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does not work. Once again, the guarantee of property is deeply anchored in the constitution and also in the Swiss population.

It should also be anchored in the USA and the EU, right?

I don't know their constitutions in detail, but I am sure that the right to property and the guarantee of property are also enshrined in the constitutions of these states, so such an action would be illegal there too. And I very much hope that the rule of law will prevail in these countries as well.

The question is also whether the sanctioned Russians can legally defend themselves.

That is a good point. As far as I know, the sanctioned Russians in Switzerland have been denied legal assistance, they cannot even defend themselves through lawyers against the freezing of their assets. In my view, this is a very worrying state of affairs.

Switzerland must not give in to pressure from the USA and the EU

One must also consider the wider consequences. There are always sources of conflict in this world. If we now start with arbitrary expropriations, the Swiss constitutional state will become dilapidated. We must withstand this pressure.

According to a spokesperson for the Federal Office of Justice FOJ, the Federal Council has set up a working group with representatives of the departments involved to "examine what could be done with the frozen Russian funds in Switzerland". Do you know more details?

The working group you mentioned is looking into the question of what to do with the blocked 7.5 billion of the sanctioned persons. Here, too, I can only say: We are a constitutional state, so we need court decisions. You can't just take people's money away. The fact that the assets are blocked is not unproblematic in itself. The question remains as to what will happen to these funds afterwards. There have already been cases in Switzerland where money has been seized from foreign dictators. However, this has been decided by the courts. And these are absolutely exceptional cases that must be very well justified from a legal point of view. Blanket expropriations are a completely different category.

As already mentioned, even individual persons who are on the sanctions list cannot today have it checked in Switzerland whether the blocking of their funds is legal.

Yes, that is the case. The case that became public in detail [in *Die Weltwoche*] is that of *Andrei Melnichenko*, a fertiliser entrepreneur who has been living in Switzerland for many years. He is being denied legal assistance. I am very surprised that something like this is happening. I think Switzerland has to be careful not to give in to the pressure that comes mainly from the US and the EU – by the way, Melnichenko is not sanctioned in the US, only in the EU. We must not simply make moralistic decisions. The people on the sanctions list must be allowed court cases, they must be able to take legal action against it.

We must return to genuine neutrality

Back in April, FDFA head Ignazio Cassis told SRF News that Switzerland's action was "100 per cent compatible with the country's neutrality". How do you see that?

Basic Rights in the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation**Art. 26 Guarantee of ownership**

- 1 The right to own property is guaranteed.
- 2 The compulsory purchase of property and any restriction on ownership that is equivalent to compulsory purchase shall be compensated in full.

Art. 29 General procedural guarantees

- 1 Every person has the right to equal and fair treatment in judicial and administrative proceedings and to have their case decided within a reasonable time.
- 2 Each party to a case has the right to be heard.

The perception of whether Switzerland is neutral or not is very different. The US, the American president, has said, "Switzerland is no longer neutral." The headline of the "New York Times" at the end of February 2022 was: "Switzerland has abandoned neutrality." Throughout the Western press, Switzerland was virtually celebrated for giving up its neutrality. When Ukraine asked Switzerland if it was ready to take on the protecting power mandate, in other words a postman function between Ukraine and Russia, so to speak, Russia said: not with Switzerland, because it is no longer neutral.

It is only the Federal Council that keeps saying we are neutral. But we are only neutral if we are recognised as neutral. We must therefore return to a genuine neutrality that is also recognised by the international community of states.

National Councillor Grütter, thank you very much for the interview. •

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Freedom of expression – essential for free Citizens and a free society

by Ewald Wetekamp, Germany

It cannot be stressed too often that Germany as a democratic state does have certain responsibilities towards her citizens, in terms of duty to provide basic sustenance and protection, but also towards her neighbours and the world community. This is, among other aspects, what members of the German government have to confirm under oath. Just to spell out some of the most important duties: domestic and foreign security are included in this list as well as health care, schooling for all children, providing energy, water and food (nutritional sovereignty) and most importantly maintenance of the rule of law as defined by the constitution. The constitution in turn rests upon the human rights, as they were solemnly declared, and natural law. All of this has nothing to do with a societal structure “legitimised” by violent force.

Freedom of expression in the public sphere, as defined in article 5 of the constitution (*Basic Law*), is undoubtedly one of the most important privileges of the citizens. In this year’s issue number 1 of this journal, on 17 January 2023, the text of the constitution in its historical development has been described in detail. But since, as stated above, one cannot quote it too often, here is the phrasing once again: “Every person shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures and to inform himself without hindrance from generally accessible sources.” The Constituent Assembly of 1949 deemed freedom of information so important that they explicitly included it into the Constitution. Linked with freedom of expression in their essence are freedom of assembly (article 8) and freedom of faith and conscience (article 4). It is easy to comprehend that with restrictions of any of these freedoms the essence of democracy, the democracy as such is in danger and a transformation towards totalitarianism is looming or indeed under way already. The constitution therefore paints a picture of citizens willing and able to converse about the particulars of the common good as guaranteed by the democratic state in free responsibility. Should such conversations include statements which transcend the framework of the constitution these were not considered dangerous as such by the constitutional court since democratic convictions are strengthened that way.

German Ex-Brigadier General Vad on the Ukraine war and the media conformity in Germany

ew. On 12 January 2023, *Emma* magazine, edited by *Alice Schwarzer*, published an interview with ex-brigadier general *Erich Vad*. The latter was military policy advisor to the German government from 2006 to 2013. Vad spoke out against arms deliveries to Ukraine early on. In the interview, he criticises the lack of military policy expertise in Germany, and above all, he points out the media censorship when it comes to the exclusion of military experts in public discourse:

“Military experts – who know what goes on among the intelligence services, what it looks like on the ground and what war really means – are largely excluded from the discourse. They don’t fit in with the media’s opinion-forming. To a large extent, we are witnessing a media conformity that I have never seen before in the Federal Republic of Germany. This is pure opinion-making. And not on behalf of the state, as is known from totalitarian regimes, but out of pure auto-authorisation.”

The constitutional court appreciates the responsible citizen

In a court ruling of 4 November 2009¹ the constitutional court reaches the following conclusion:

“Opinions aiming to fundamentally change the political system regardless of whether and how far they are implementable in the context of the system of the Basic Law are hence also protected by Article 5.1 of the Basic Law. The Basic Law trusts in the power of the free debate as the most effective weapon against the dissemination of totalitarian, inhumane ideologies.”

It continues:

“Within the free system of the Basic Law, it is primarily civil commitment in the free political debate, as well as state education and upbringing in schools according to Article 7 of the Basic Law which are entrusted with countering the dangers lying therein.”

And finally:

“Nor are citizens legally obliged to personally share the values on which the Constitution is based. The Basic Law is built on the expectation that citizens accept and realise the general values of the Constitution, but does not bring about loyalty to values by force.”

The Image of Man in the German Constitution

In other words, the German constitution trusts in the free competition of ideas, primarily it trusts the commitment of German citizens in free political discourse and moreover it expects that education and in-

struction in the state’s schooling system will contribute to the maintenance of democracy. Noteworthy though, this contribution of the education and instruction in the state’s schools must be informed by article 7 *Basic Law* and the respective articles in each regional constitution, but under no circumstances by ideological content of any party or lobbying organisation, which have gained such a strong influence on our legislative and executive branches. To recognise the devastating nature of this, influence a glance at our position in international education ranking polls will suffice, let alone at the big number of college and apprenticeship dropouts. This is the result of both failed education policies and educational science following wrong propositions. The resistance towards responsible education taking place in the school system keeps getting stronger.

The constitution is the foundation of our democracy. It is the task primarily of committed citizens to breathe life into it in free, unrestricted exchange of opinions in spoken word, in images and in writing. Censorship has no role here. In this sense, every citizen lends meaning to democracy. Freedom of expression is therefore indispensable; nobody is entitled to restrict or even cancel it even in the event of deleterious or “dangerous” utterances.

Quoting the constitutional court ruling of 2009 again:

“The intention of preventing statements with content that is damaging or dangerous in their conceptual consequence rescinds the principle of freedom of opinion itself and is illegitimate.”

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"Freedom of expression ..."

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**The political
"Non-Culture" in Germany**

Considering the current state of the political "culture" in Germany we have noticed an ever-increasing tendency towards a process that produces the concept of thought crimes, as unmistakable indicators of politically motivated censorship. These alleged crimes are supposed to be included in the criminal code; some already are. What else could it be, other than indicators of censorship, if criminal prosecution is threatened with demeaning language – even by the state – against so-called lateral thinkers, climate deniers, homophobes, Putin understanders, right extremists, LGBTQ+-critics, xenophobes, patriots, fatherland lovers, delegitimisers and many others? The state-owned media outlets contribute heavily to this state propaganda. Even a legal political party which has never had a court decision labelling it as non-democratic is used by state representatives and the media for stigmatisation, for mobbing and discriminating against non-streamlined opinions. *Inevitably this leads to the well-known phenomenon of self-censorship, since this practice of discrimination is a threat to everybody.*

However, behind all these different opinions there are always human beings. Questioning their right to participate in public discourse, mobbing and discriminating against them let alone destroy their livelihoods is against democratic standards but is utterly anti-democratic and totalitarian. This practice is intimidating for people with similar opinions and that is exactly what is intended. With the "Incitement of masses" (§ 130 *German Criminal Code*) being recycled to include legally ill-defined terms, so that it can be directed against almost any statement now, and §140 *Criminal Code*, which prohibits the glorification of a crime, being weaponised against personal opinions now one might argue that we are already in a state of enforced single-mindedness. When the minister for internal affairs tops all of this by threatening her own officers that she might reverse the burden of proof in the criminal code for public officials we have crossed the line towards an Orwellian surveillance state with enforced streamlined thinking. Responsible citizens are to be silenced and outspoken public officials are to be removed from service.

Reversed burden of proof

In the regional state of Berlin this has been official legal practice since 20 June 2022². All public officials there have to

actively prove their innocence in case somebody decides to accuse them of racism for-instance. Again: not the accuser needs to prove his point, but the accused. Just try to imagine for a moment what this means for any police officer, teacher or clerk in the city's administration. A reversal of the burden of proof turning all legal practice upside down, basically rendering all efforts futile for the officials to properly function in their position. Think of the disturbingly inactive police officers who were on duty in Berlin at New Year's Eve 2022/2023. The reversed burden of proof seemed to have had some consequences in this incident. Was that what was intended?

**Divide and conquer
by extreme polarisation**

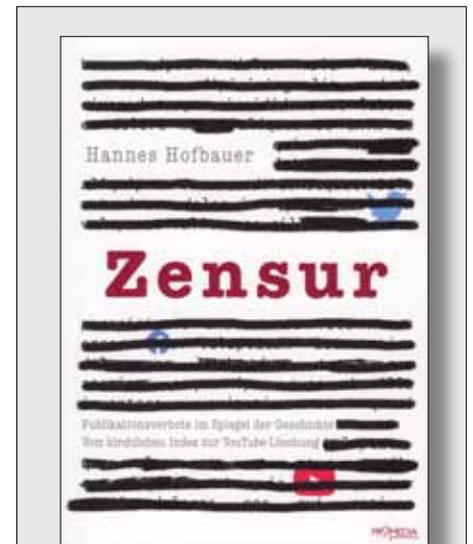
One cannot but ask the question: what is all of this supposed to be good for? After managing to compartmentalise public discourse in almost all societal-political aspects into black-and white fractions between whom no communication is even possible because all colours or greyish in-between standpoints have been wiped out of all media products, after making *fake news* and *hatespeech* punishable by the *Network Enforcement Act* (*Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz*), after all these measures now there seems to be no reliable rule of law any longer for law-abiding citizens. Article 5 Basic Law is all but annihilated. At a point when free expression of opinion is smeared as "delegitimation" of the political class and the government which the domestic intelligence service (*Verfassungsschutz*) should deal with, something fundamental has shifted in the concept of the state. Whether expressed opinions are still covered by art. 5 *Basic Law* should be up to the courts to decide, precisely because freedom of expression is such a valuable right. However, for some time now such decisions have no longer been made in court. Instead, legally non-defined labels such as *fake news* and *hatespeech* were invented and then acted upon as if they were court decisions. A formidable arrogation of justice! What should be tried in court is now handled by tech company algorithms which perform this "function". These companies "clean" the net and thereby assume competencies of the justice system. One can hardly think of anything more dangerous to the German state of law and liberal democracy. Were we not told until recently the worldwide web was an extra-legal sphere where tech companies could not interfere? Nowadays they drive their point about who rules the web home quite bluntly.

The tone gets rough

In the above-mentioned constitutional court decision of 2009, the judges rightly trust the responsible citizens in their practice to uphold democracy. But looking at the political practice of the current German federal government today, the political class seems to be afraid of the sovereign – the responsible citizens. In this case those responsible citizens should voice their concerns with even more determination! The constitution hasn't changed since 2009. Should the judges draw different conclusions from its text now, in times of polarisation and "Cancel Culture" as compared with 2009, then they should be advised to look up the proceedings of their former colleagues from 14 years ago. He who restricts or even abolishes free expression of opinion has laid his hand at the democratic state of Germany and threatens to destroy it. The tone gets rough and more totalitarian. And then what? •

¹ Federal Constitutional Court, Order of the First Senate of 4 November 2009 – 1 BvR 2150/08 – para. (1–110), online at: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/Shared-Docs/Entscheidungen/EN/2009/11/rs20091104_1bvr215008en.html

² To be read in the *State Anti-Discrimination Act of the Federal State of Berlin*, passed in the Senate on 11 June 2020, promulgated on 20 June 2020 in the Law and Ordinance Gazette for Berlin.



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"The historian *Hannes Hofbauer* goes back in history in order to understand current banning practices better. Modern censorship begins with the invention of printing in the middle of the 15th century. Until the 18th century, the bearers of the decreed truth pass step by step from the church to the state. In the 20th century, phases of freedom of expression alternate with the suppression of free speech.." (blurb)

“This war is about Germany”

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

On 7 January 2023, the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* published an interview with Emmanuel Todd, an internationally renowned French anthropologist, demographer and historian. The interview has the title quoted above. There is an internet address where German readers can also access the text: <https://weltwoche.ch/story/in-diesem-krieg-geht-es-um-deutschland/?postcomments>. The text is not free of charge, but I can highly recommend reading it.

Emmanuel Todd: “The West’s behaviour is a mystery to me.”

Let us start with a few extensive quotes from the interview, uncommented.

“All the newspapers are writing: The West is normal and Putin is insane. The Russians are bloodthirsty monsters. Demography says otherwise: Russia has become more stable and its society more civilised. What is happening in Russia is perfectly clear to me. I understand Putin’s thinking and actions and can explain it in three minutes. [...] The behaviour of the West is a complete mystery to me.” [Translation of all quotes by Current Concerns]

Todd is asked, “Who is responsible for the sabotage of Nord Stream?”

His answer: “The Americans, of course. But this is irrelevant. It is normal. The important question is: How can a society believe that it could have been the Russians? We are dealing with an inversion of possible reality. This is much worse. [...] My activity as an author began with the essay on the collapse of the Soviet Union. I want to conclude it with a work of reason on the Third World War. I refuse to accept the prevailing loss of reality which particularly Europeans are suffering from, and I want to try to understand it. [...] Europeans are mouthing off about peace and the spread of their humanist values without an army. They have lost their geopolitical thinking. Between the offensive strategy of the Americans and the defensive strategy of the Russians, Europeans are in a breath-taking state of mental confusion. This is especially true for Germany.”

“The expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe was not primarily directed against Russia, but against Germany”

“The financial crisis of 2008 made it clear that with its reunification Ger-



The historical caption says: “Admiral Aeymour gives the order during the retreat on Tientsin: ‘The Germans to the front!’. 22 June 1900.” (picture Wikimedia)

many became the leading power in Europe and thus also a rival to the USA. Until 1989, it was a political dwarf. Now Berlin showed its willingness to deal with the Russians. The fight against this rapprochement became a priority of American strategy. [...] The expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe was not primarily directed against Russia, but against Germany. Germany, which had entrusted its security to America, became a target for the Americans.”

“The West provoked Russia. The American political scientist John Mearsheimer has soberly noted that the cooperation of the British and Americans with [Ukraine’s army] effectively made Ukraine a NATO member. It was armed to attack Russia. Putin’s attack was a defensive invasion. He had announced this response and threatened war. [...] Mearsheimer argued that Ukraine was of existential importance to Russia. He thought Putin’s victory was a certainty. But he also thought that the USA would give up Ukraine. On this second point, he was wrong. This war is also existentially important for them: if Russia wins, the imperial system of the United States will collapse. Their debt is phenomenal. To maintain its prosperity, the US depends on the tribute of other countries.”

Todd is then asked, “But was Ukraine really planning an attack on Russia?”

His answer: “It was in preparation. Together with America, Great Brit-

ain and Poland, Ukraine wanted to recapture the Russian – really Russian! – territories in the Donbass. Including Crimea.”

Russia’s war in Ukraine is “a defensive war”

And what is the Russian strategy?

“Their strategy relies on the ‘longue durée’ of American decline. America is compensating for it with pressure on its old protégées. Control over Europe – especially Germany – and Japan has become its priority. Chirac, Schröder and Putin protested against its war in Iraq in a joint press conference. Since then, America has achieved what is called the ‘Gleichschaltung’ of Europe in German. The rest of the world, however, goes with Russia. When it was communist, it spread fear and terror. It was atheistic, imperialistic. Today, Russia stands for a conservative world view and defends the sovereignty of peoples and nations, all of which have a right to exist.”

Todd also gives an answer to the question of whether the war could have been avoided:

“Putin had demanded that the language be respected in the Russian-speaking regions. And he wanted Ukraine not to join NATO. [...] Germany and France are partly responsible. They were constantly in Kiev. Europe dreamed of expanding eastwards, into Ukraine. The Russian re-

“This war is about Germany”

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action was triggered by the military build-up, training and ‘advising’ of the Ukrainian army. If NATO had refrained from making Ukraine part of its military disposition, this war would not have happened. [...] Donetsk is a hundred kilometres from the Russian border. The distance to Washington is 8400 kilometres. The war is taking place on Russia’s border. That is another reason why it is a defensive war – a defensive war.”

“The West has lost its values and is in a spiral of self-destruction”

The war in Ukraine had become a world war. With what outcome?

“If Russia survives, keeps the Donbass and Crimea, if its economy continues to function and it can reorganise its trade relations with China and India, then America has lost the war. And consequently, it will lose its allies. That is why America and NATO will carry on. And that is why it is a world war that will last. Its main cause is the crisis of the West. [...] The West has lost its values and is in a spiral of self-destruction.”

Such an interview in the established German media would currently not be possible at present. For today’s official Germany, Emmanuel Todd’s statements would be “Russian propaganda” or “conspiracy ideology”. The country’s politicians and the mainstream media are not prepared to critically examine their entrenched positions. They like to play the role of the “good guys” in the fight against “evil”.

What is Germany’s “leadership role”?

On 13 February, an SPD politician, Michael Roth, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag, pleaded in *Deutschlandfunk* to “preserve freedom and democracy in Ukraine” by all means. However, he did not mention that opposition parties and media critical of the government are banned in Ukraine. Instead, he announced: “Make peace with more weapons.” Wherever they may end up? What- ever they are used against?

The German mainstream media are almost unanimous: Russia and its president alone are to blame for the war, and Germany must supply more weapons to Ukraine. This is how headlines like the following come about: “Have courage, Mr. Chancellor! You don’t have to be afraid of Russia” (*Focus*, 6 January 2023) The article reads: “Whatever Germany supplies to Ukraine to help it

– the Russians will not ‘escalate’ – not against Germany, not against Europe, not against NATO. And why? Because they can’t, they are too weak to do so, for which the course of the Ukraine war so far is the striking proof. There is no need to be afraid of these Russians.” The recommendation for German “leadership” is therefore: “The Chancellor could put himself at the head of a diplomatic movement with the aim of Europe supplying Ukraine with the equipment it needs. The Americans have explicitly encouraged the Germans to do so; now the Germans themselves just need to be courageous.”

The, the US is “encouraging” the Germans to go to war even more. Words can lie like that. In 1900, during the colonial war against the Chinese Boxers, British Admiral Seymour cried, “The Germans to the front.” Also, Nazi Germany’s war of extermination against the Soviet Union was very much to the liking of many in the “free West”.

A “moral line that the federal government should not have crossed”

However, the reaction of the Russian embassy in Germany on 6 January 2023 to the German plans for more and more arms deliveries is not quoted. That is why it is reproduced here:

“From our side, we emphasise once again that the deliveries of lethal and heavy weapons to the Kiev regime, which are being used not only against Russian military forces but also against the civilian population in the Donbass, represent the moral limit that the Federal Government should not have crossed. This is true in view of Germany’s historical responsibility towards our people for Nazi crimes during World War II. [...] With this decision by Berlin, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Federal Republic and the collective West are not interested in seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict. Their efforts have de facto turned Ukraine into a military training ground and instrumentalised the Ukrainian people to achieve the West’s geopolitical goals, prolonging hostilities and causing senseless casualties and destruction. Berlin’s decision to supply heavy weapons to the Kiev regime will seriously affect German-Russian relations.”

Once before in German history, Germans believed in an “Endsieg” (ultimate victory). They had fallen for the propaganda – and were bitterly mistaken. The price was high. Now, once again, everything that had distinguished German thinking after the Second World War is being

Declining confidence of Germans in their political institutions

km. According to a representative survey by the opinion research institute Forsa (4003 respondents in the period from 15 to 22 December 2022), Germans’ confidence in their political institutions has fallen in all areas and in some cases considerably compared to the previous year. The German Federal Government and the Federal Chancellor suffered the greatest loss of trust. Only 34% of those surveyed still trust the Federal Government, 22% less than in the previous year. The Federal Chancellor is trusted by only 33 % of those surveyed, which is even 24 % less than in the previous year. Germans trust the country’s political parties the least, namely only 17 % of those surveyed. This is 7% less than in the previous year. The EU comes second to last. 31% trust it. Here, too, it is 7% less than in the previous year. On behalf of the broadcasters RTL and ntv, *Forsa* has been asking Germans once a year for 15 years about their trust in their political institutions. For the year 2022, *RTL* and *ntv* spoke of a “drastic collapse in confidence”.

Source: <https://www.rtl.de/cms/rtl-ntv-trend-barometer-das-vertrauen-in-al-le-politischen-in-stitutionen-sinkt-dras-tisch-5023517.html> of 3 January 2023

thrown overboard. The preparations for this have been in progress for 30 years. At the time, critics spoke of “salami tactics” when German Defence Minister Volker Rühle (CDU) argued in the early 1990s for a new, militarised self-image of German foreign policy that could only be achieved in small steps. Now we see where official Germany intends to end up. The price will once again be high. •

¹ On 9 January 2023, *Ted Galen Carpenter* of the US *Cato Institute* published an insightful article on Ukraine in *The American Conservative* magazine. The title: “False democracy. Ukraine is not the bastion of freedom described by most Western media”.

² On 15 December a survey, commissioned by the trade union *Otto Brenner Foundation* – Maurer, Marcus/Haßler, Jörg/Jost, Pablo was published; “Die Qualität der Medienberichterstattung über den Ukraine-Krieg” [The Quality of Media Coverage on the Ukraine War]. It emphasised that the content-analytically for the period from 24 February to 31 May 2022 the contents 4,300 articles were analysed. The results: more than 90% of the media articles in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, “Bild-Zeitung”, *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit* and *ARD Tagesschau*, *ZDF heute* and *RTL Aktuell* declared Russia and its president to be guilty of the war and – in marked contrast to the German population – around 75% advocated military support for Ukraine. The media portrayed the German Foreign Minister *Baerbock* and the Ukrainian President *Zelensky* most positively, while the German Chancellor was criticised for his reluctance to supply weapons.

The war in Ukraine – review and outlook for 2023

by Scott Ritter

Given the duplicitous history of the Minsk Accords, it is unlikely Russia can be diplomatically dissuaded from its military offensive. As such, 2023 appears to be shaping up as a year of continued violent confrontation.

After almost a year of dramatic action, where initial Russian advances were met with impressive Ukrainian counteroffensives, the frontlines in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict have stabilized, with both sides engaged in bloody positional warfare, grinding each other down in a brutal attritional contest while awaiting the next major initiative from either side.

As the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine approaches, the fact that Ukraine has made it this far into the conflict represents both a moral and, to a lesser extent, a military victory.

From the chairman of the *U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff*¹ to the director of the C.I.A.², most senior military and intelligence officials in the West assessed in early 2022 that a major Russian military offensive against Ukraine would result in a rapid, decisive Russian victory.

The resilience and fortitude of the Ukrainian military surprised everyone, including the Russians, whose initial plan of action, inclusive of forces allocated to the task, proved inadequate to the tasks assigned. This perception of a Ukrainian victory, however, is misleading.³

The Death of Diplomacy

As the dust settles on the battlefield, a pattern has emerged regarding the strategic vision behind Russia's decision to invade Ukraine. While the mainstream Western narrative continues to paint the Russian action as a precipitous act of unprovoked aggression, a pattern of facts has emerged

which suggests that the Russian case for preemptive collective self-defense under Article 51⁴ of the United Nations Charter may have merit.

Recent admissions on the part of the officials responsible for the adoption of the Minsk Accords of both 2014 and 2015 (former Ukrainian President *Petro Poroshenko*,⁵ former French President *Francois Hollande*⁶ and former German Chancellor *Angela Merkel*⁷) show that the goal of the Minsk agreements for the promotion of a peaceful resolution to the post-2014 conflict in the Donbass between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists was a lie.

Instead, the Minsk Accords, according to this troika, were little more than a means to buy Ukraine time to build a military, with the assistance of NATO, capable of bringing the Donbass to heel and driving Russia out of Crimea.

Seen in this light, the establishment of a permanent training facility by the U.S. and NATO in western Ukraine⁸ – which between 2015 and 2022 trained some 30,000 Ukrainian troops to NATO standards for the sole purpose of confronting Russia in eastern Ukraine – takes on a whole new perspective.

The admitted duplicity of Ukraine, France and Germany contrasts with Russia's repeated insistence prior to its Feb. 24, 2022, decision to invade Ukraine that the Minsk Accords be implemented in full.

In 2008, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia *William Burns*, the current C.I.A. director,⁹ warned that any effort by NATO to bring Ukraine into its fold would be viewed by Russia as a threat to its national security and, if pursued, would provoke a Russian military intervention. That memo by Burns provides much-needed context to the Dec. 17, 2021, initiatives by Russia¹⁰ to create a new European security



Scott Ritter (picture ma)

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framework that would keep Ukraine out of NATO.

Simply put, the trajectory of Russian diplomacy was conflict avoidance. The same cannot be said of either Ukraine or its Western partners, who were pursuing a policy of NATO expansion linked to the resolution of the Donbass/Crimea crises through military means.

Game Changer, Not Game Winner

The reaction of the Russian government to the failure on the part of the Russian military to defeat Ukraine in the opening phases of the conflict provides important insight into the mindset of the Russian leadership regarding its goals and objectives.

Denied a decisive victory, the Russians seemed prepared to accept an outcome which limited Russian territorial gains to the Donbass and Crimea and an agreement by Ukraine not to join NATO. Indeed, Russia and Ukraine were on the cusp of formalizing an agreement along these lines in negotiations scheduled to take place in Istanbul in early April 2022.

This negotiation, however, was scuttled following the intervention of then British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson*,¹¹ who linked the continued provision of military assistance to Ukraine to the willingness of Ukraine to force a conclusion to the conflict on the battlefield, as opposed to negotiations. Johnson's intervention was motivated by an assessment on the part of NATO that the initial Russian military failures were indicative of Russian weakness.

“While the mainstream Western narrative continues to paint the Russian action as a precipitous act of unprovoked aggression, a pattern of facts has emerged which suggests that the Russian case for preemptive collective self-defense under Article 51⁴ of the United Nations Charter may have merit. [...] Simply put, the trajectory of Russian diplomacy was conflict avoidance. The same cannot be said of either Ukraine or its Western partners, who were pursuing a policy of NATO expansion linked to the resolution of the Donbass/Crimea crises through military means.”

"2023 Outlook for Ukraine"

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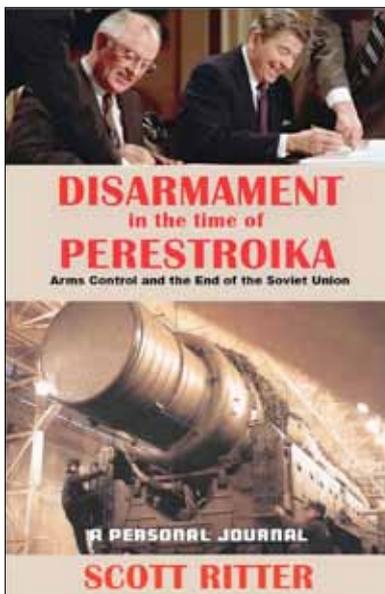
The mood in NATO, reflected in the public statements of NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg*¹² ("If [Russian President Vladimir] Putin wins, that is not only a big defeat for the Ukrainians, but it will be the defeat, and dangerous, for all of us") and U.S. Secretary of Defense *Lloyd Austin*¹³ ("We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine") was to use the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a proxy war designed to weaken Russia to the point that it would never again seek to undertake a Ukraine-like military adventure. [Coupled with an ill-fated economic war, it was also designed to bring down the Russian government, as President *Joe Biden* admitted last spring.]

This policy served as the impetus for the injection of what would amount to well over \$100 billion worth of assistance, including tens of billions of dollars of advanced military equipment, to Ukraine.

This massive infusion of aid was a game-changing event,¹⁴ allowing Ukraine to transition from a primarily defensive posture to one that saw a reconstituted Ukrainian military, trained, equipped and organized to NATO standards, launching large-scale counterattacks that succeeded in driving Russian forces from large swaths of Ukraine. It was not, however, a game winning strategy – far from it.

Military Math

The impressive Ukrainian military accomplishments that were facilitated through the provision of military aid by NATO came at a huge cost in lives and material. While the exact calculation of



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casualties suffered by either side is difficult to come by, there is widespread acknowledgement, even among the Ukrainian government, that Ukrainian losses have been heavy.¹⁵

With the battle-lines currently stabilized, the question of where the war goes from here comes down to basic military math – in short, a causal relationship between two basic equations revolving around burn rates (how quickly losses are sustained) versus replenishment rates (how quickly such losses can be replaced.) The calculus bodes ill for Ukraine.

Neither NATO nor the United States appear able to sustain the quantity of weapons that have been delivered to Ukraine, which enabled the successful fall counter-offensives against the Russians.

This equipment has largely been destroyed, and despite Ukraine's insistence on its need for more tanks, armored fighting vehicles, artillery and air defense, and while new military aid appears to be forthcoming,¹⁶ it will be late to the battle and in insufficient quantities to have a game-winning impact on the battlefield.

Likewise, the casualty rates sustained by Ukraine, which at times reach more than 1,000 men per day, far exceed its ability to mobilize and train replacements.

Russia, on the other hand, is in the process of finalizing a mobilization of more than 300,000 men who appear to be equipped with the most advanced weapons systems in the Russian arsenal.

When these forces arrive in full on the battlefield, sometime by the end of January, Ukraine will have no response. This harsh reality, when coupled with the annexation by Russia of more than 20 percent of Ukraine's territory and infrastructure damage approaching \$1 trillion, bodes ill for the future of Ukraine.

There is an old Russian saying, “A Russian harnesses slowly but rides fast.” This appears to be what is transpiring regarding the Russian-Ukraine conflict.

Both Ukraine and its Western partners are struggling to sustain the conflict they initiated when they rejected a possible peace settlement in April 2022. Rus-

sia, after starting off on its back feet, has largely regrouped, and appears poised to resume large-scale offensive operations which neither Ukraine nor its Western partners have an adequate answer for.

Moreover, given the duplicitous history of the Minsk Accords, it is unlikely Russia can be dissuaded from undertaking its military offensive through diplomacy. As such, 2023 appears to be shaping up as a year of continued violent confrontation leading to a decisive Russian military victory.

How Russia leverages such a military victory into a sustainable political settlement that manifests itself in regional peace and security is yet to be seen. •

¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/gen-mark-milley-reportedly-warned-congress-that-a-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-could-cause-kyiv-to-fall-within-72-hours/ar-AATw5Zh>

² <https://theintercept.com/2022/10/05/russia-ukraine-putin-cia/>

³ <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/09/12/scott-ritter-why-russia-will-still-win-despite-ukraines-gains/>

⁴ <https://consortiumnews.com/2022/03/29/russia-ukraine-the-law-of-war-crime-of-aggression/>

⁵ <https://www.rt.com/russia/557307-poroshenko-comments-minsk-agreement/>

⁶ <https://www.rt.com/news/569201-hollande-merkel-minsk-ukraine/>

⁷ <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/merkel-minsk-agreement-attempted-to-give-ukraine-time>

⁸ <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2017/10/ukraine-us-trains-army-west-fight-east/141577/>

⁹ <https://libertarianinstitute.org/dont-tread-on-anyone/myet-nato/>

¹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/21/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/>

¹¹ <https://scheerpost.com/2022/09/01/report-russia-ukraine-tentatively-agreed-on-peace-deal-in-april/>

¹² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_208037.htm

¹³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10751233/We-want-Russia-weakened-Defense-Secretary-Lloyd-Austin-says.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.ustourofduty.org/blog/the-ritter-sitcheroo-imbroglio-part-two-big-arrow-war>

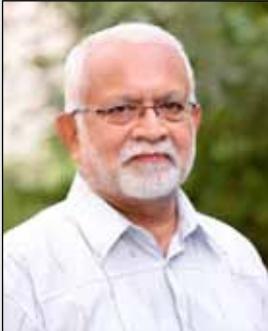
¹⁵ <https://www.eurasiareview.com/02122022-eu-commission-chief-in-hot-water-over-ukraine-war-loss-estimates/>

¹⁶ <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3260464/ukraine-troops-to-get-bradley-fighting-vehicles/>

Source: <https://consortiumnews.com/2023/01/11/scott-ritter-2023-outlook-for-ukraine/>; with friendly permission of the author

Biden stoops to conquer Brazil's Lula

by M. K. Bhadrakumar



M. K. Bhadrakumar
(picture ma)

M. K. Bhadrakumar worked as a career diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service for around three decades. Among other things, he was ambassador to the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan as well as South Korea, Sri Lanka, Germany and Turkey. His texts deal primarily with Indian foreign policy and events in the Middle East, Eurasia, Central Asia, South Asia and Pacific Asia. His blog is Indianpunchline.com

The tragicomic “insurrection” in Brasilia on Sunday was destined to meet a sudden death. The universal condemnation and, in particular, the brusqueness with which the *Biden* Administration distanced itself from the protestors, sealed their fate. Certainly, this revolt is no “colour revolution,” although it is difficult to make predictions about new protests in the country.

This is a cautionary tale for Latin America, as the “pink tide” is once again on the ascendance. As Brazil’s president *Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva* returned to power last week, left-leaning leaders are in control of six of the region’s seven largest economies. Nonetheless, the pendulum has been swinging wildly and Lula won by a wafer-thin margin.

“The region needs a new model of development”

Political polarisation is undermining democracy in Latin America, making it harder for many to respect compromise. Since the 1980’s, the global model of Keynesian policies gave way to the *Washington consensus* and the regional states took to borrowing in dollars and liberalising their capital accounts to attract foreign investors.

The genesis of the “pink tide” lies in these lost decades when the neoliberal turn in the region saw stagnation and widespread poverty, deepening social and economic divides in what was already the world’s most unequal region, emergence of a rentier class, coups and armed conflict. The region needs a new model of de-

velopment and more equitable, sustainable growth involving state-led industrialisation and regional integration.

The Latin American economies are no longer bound to the US and are today in a position to recast their partnerships. But it is naïveté to assume Washington is no longer the self-interested neighbour it used to be historically. Geology and geography are intertwined in the destiny of Latin America.

A “Guardian” editorial¹ recently noted that with Latin America accounting for 60% of the world’s lithium, the white gold of electric batteries, and the world’s largest oil reserves, the US carries a “big stick” – to borrow from *Teddy Roosevelt*’s famous phrase “speak softly, and carry a big stick” to describe the US foreign policy, in a 1901 speech.

“In terms of geopolitics, the US views Latin America as its sphere of influence”

However, as a researcher at the *Institute of Party History and Literature* of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, *Jin Chengwei* wrote in November, “In terms of geopolitics, the US views Latin America as its sphere of influence, and its influence on Latin America can be described as ubiquitous. In the 1980’s, it used Latin America as a ‘testing ground’ to promote neoliberalism. To be the alternative to neoliberalism was the driving force for the last round of wave of leftism in Latin America. They made significant achievements in promoting the integration process in Latin America and weakening the influence of the US, accumulating experience for resistance to US hegemony. The failure of neoliberalism and the negative consequences remain the fundamental motive for the formation of the current wave of leftism.”

Attempting to search for a non-Western way

No doubt, the crisis in US politics exposing the weaknesses of America’s liberal democracy spurred the Latin American countries to search for a non-western path. Also, the inefficient, insensitive response to Covid-19 exposed the flaws of the capitalist path of development. The *Sao Paulo Forum*² and the *World Social Forum*³ have provided a new platform.

In his two previous terms as president, Lula encouraged people to participate in politics, reconciled economic growth with an increase in social spending and public investment in critical sectors of the economy, introduced regulations for the domestic workforce, providing them with social assistance and higher wages, promoted so-

cial justice by expanding employment and proactively participated in the formulation of international rules.

«Lula’s challenge is the current divisions in left and right”

Lula’s biggest challenge today is the current divisions in Brazilian society between left and right and the confrontation between different social camps, apart from the need to push through reforms in a right-wing-majority Congress.

That said, he will lead the growing left-wing tide in Latin America toward a new peak, which will inevitably improve the international environment of leftist countries such as Cuba and Venezuela and enhance the autonomy of Latin American diplomacy. Lula wrote in the government plan:

“We advocate working toward the construction of a new global order committed to multilateralism, respect for the sovereignty of nations, peace, social inclusion and environmental sustainability, which takes into account the needs of developing countries.”

A fundamental change in the political landscape across the continent seems to be under way. Specifically, Lula’s first major foreign policy move⁴ – the decision to attend the Summit of Heads of State and Government of *Celac* in Buenos Aires on January 24 alongside the leaders of Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua – sends a message to Washington that it is going to be difficult to find a fulcrum for its “differentiation-cum-disintegration” strategy in Latin America.

Biden wants to use the unrest in Brazil to his advantage

Significantly, the tone of President Biden’s condemnation⁵ of the rioting in Brasilia was most aggressive. Three factors are at work here. First, the politician in Biden sees that the parallel with the January⁶ “Capitol riots” in the US works to his advantage as he gears up for the 2024 election. The riots in both Brazil and the US can be traced back to the *Conservative Political Action Conference*, the annual political conference attended by the world conservative activists and hosted by *American Conservative Union*. Clearly, whether Lula can contain the flames of the far right is not only crucial for Brazil and Latin America but also can be consequential for US politics.

The role of Brazilian agro-entrepreneurs

Second, Lula targeted agribusinessmen for the rioting. According to environmentalist groups, those carrying out defor-

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Germany's government – nothing but arrogance of power?

km. Germany is a parliamentary republic. The German parliament, i.e. the German Federal Parliament (German Bundestag), is the only government body on the federal level, onto whose composition the citizens have a direct influence through elections – even though the influence is less direct than that of the Swiss one for example, due to the nature of the German sort of right to vote.

Therefore, according to the constitution, the members of the German Federal Parliament are endowed with excellent political rights that extend from legislation to constant control of the government. An important tool of control are different kinds of queries that can be handed in by one or several members of parliament to

the government and which have to be answered within reasonable time.

For these written queries posed by individual members of parliament the guidelines of the German Federal Parliament have the following provision: “Each Member of the Bundestag has the right to address four written questions to the Federal Government per month. [...] The Federal Government responds to these questions within a week”.

At the beginning of January the representative of the AFD-fraction, *Petr Byston*, posed the following question to the Federal Government: “Which wars (international armed conflicts) since 1991 need to be qualified as illegal according to the judgement of international law by the Federal

Government and which state would have to be classified as an aggressor according to the judgement of the Federal Government?”

In addition, Byston referred to a statement made by the SPD town association Göttingen on 28 November 2022, in which the then ongoing waves of attack by the Turk army “on all Kurdish territories” are declared as “brutal and against international law”.

On 16 January 2023 the representative received the following written reply by a state secretary of the Federal Foreign Office:

“Dear Mr. representative, your question [here follows the question of the representative], I answer to your ques-

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“Zeitenwende” on tour – “satirical reality” – if only it wasn't so sad ...

gl. The “Zeitenwende” proclaimed by Chancellor *Olaf Scholz*, which is to up-arm Germany and finally! (finally, after more than 80 years, if one disregards the “smaller” war “excursions” since the mid-1990s) into a serious war leader again, still has to be brought home to the German people; for it is well known that a large majority of the population does not want to send weapons to Ukraine, but wants an end to the war as quickly as possible and in no case a war participation by Germany.

In addition to the massive media propaganda that hits every citizen on a daily, even hourly basis, this “Zeitenwende” is also to be brought into people's minds at major events in German cities. “In unusual places, with entertaining (sic!) and inter-

active formats and prominent guests”, the aim is to “get people talking”.

The *Munich Security Conference*, which, not exactly modest, describes itself as “the world's leading forum for foreign and security policy debates”, organises so-called “Townhall Events” at various locations. These events are sponsored by the *Press and Information Office* of the German Federal Government. They also receive “friendly support” by institutions such as the *Deutsche Atlantische Gesellschaft* (*German Atlantic Association*).

For example, the small town of Furth im Wald in the middle of the Bavarian Forest had the dubious honour of experiencing such a “Townhall Event”. Even though the interest was not overwhelm-

ing (of the 100 chairs, “some” even remained empty), the people who came were allowed to have the “Zeitenwende” explained to them by celebrities such as the chairman of the *Munich Security Conference*, *Christoph Heusgen*, as well as a CSU member of parliament and a historian of Eastern Europe. *Andriy Melnyk*, former Ukrainian ambassador and absolute agitator, was also hooked-up from Kiev.

The next stop of “Zeitenwende on Tour” will be Leipzig on 31 January. Whether the people of Leipzig will be enthusiastic about such a project remains to be seen.

Sources: <https://securityconference.org/zeitenwende/>; <https://www.hintergrund.de/globales/zeitenwende-on-tour-in-furth-im-wald/>

“Biden stoops to conquer ...”

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estation and illegal mining in the Amazon were behind the rioting, after Lula's 180-degree turn in environmental policy with the appointment of Ministers *Marina Silva* and *Sônia Guajajara*, a world-renowned environmentalist and an aboriginal activist, respectively.

Lula accused agribusiness and illegal mining mafias of financing this coup. Biden's climate programme and the tragic fate of the Amazon River are joined at the hips.

Trip to China ...

Third, Lula is expected to make official trips to China and the US in his first three months in office. There is no question that under China's “old friend” Lula, the economic and trade cooperation is set to deepen. The left-wing regimes usually “pull away” from the US and advocate a diversified and balanced diplomacy.

Actually, though, the deepening of China-Brazil relations follows the trend and has a strong internal driving force in terms of the complementarity between the two economies. The bilateral exchanges between China and Brazil have never been demarcated by ideology. Under *Bolsonaro*, China-Brazil trade still hit the record of about \$164 billion in 2021 despite the pandemic.

... and US counter-strategy

Nonetheless, the US will be concerned because Brazil is an international powerhouse and shares extensive common interests and responsibilities with China at a time when the left-wing wave highlights the weakening of US's global leadership and the massive erosion in Washington's control over Latin America. (Argentina has also sought BRICS membership.⁶)

Lula's victory will significantly advance the process of Latin American coop-

eration to explore a new alternative world order.⁷ Against this backdrop, Biden's best hope lies in encouraging Lula to pursue a moderate diplomatic line and adopt a strategy of balance between great powers. The US feels encouraged by Lula's previous two terms in office and his record of being a left-leaning moderate. •

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2022/dec/30/the-guardian-view-on-latin-americas-left-leaders-pink-tide-could-lift-all-boats>

² https://dbpedia.org/page/São_Paulo_Forum

³ <https://www.etcgroup.org/international-fora/social-movements-world-social-forum>

⁴ <https://en.mercopress.com/2023/01/06/alberto-fernandez-invited-biden-xi-jinping-over-to-celac-summit>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/09/joint-statement-by-president-joe-biden-and-president-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-following-call/>

⁶ <https://tass.com/politics/1472233>

⁷ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1283483.shtml>

Source: *Indian Punchline* of 12 January 2023

Beirut is closing down

Economic crisis and divided politicians put pressure on population

by Karin Leukefeld, Beirut

It is the middle of January and raining cats and dogs. The streets of Beirut are quickly turning into small streams flowing every which way and making it difficult for pedestrians to move forward. Snow is spreading over the mountain peaks like a white blanket, providing a pleasant coolness to nature, that has been parched by the summer sun. The weather in the Cedar State changes quickly, and so the more than 2600-metre-high, snow-covered *Sannine* mountain, barely 50 km from the Lebanese capital, may shine in the evening sun later in the day. But people do not have time for such natural events. The economic crisis and an ongoing political dispute are putting them under pressure.

Government dispute blocks oil imports

There is hardly any electricity, so often large parts of the country are in the dark. The oil needed to generate electricity is being rocked on tankers off the Lebanese coast. Meanwhile, the government is arguing over who is authorised to release money from the central bank to pay oil suppliers. The necessary amount is daily augmented by penalties of around 25,000 US dollars that the cedar state has to pay for as long as the oil cannot be pumped from the tankers.

The background to the dispute is the pending election of a new president who would have the relevant authority. According to Lebanon's confessional system, the presidency is due to a Maronite Christian. The members of parliament have so far not been able to agree on a candidate, and therefore Prime Minister *Najib Mikati*, who is – in compliance with the confessional system – a Sunni Muslim, is temporarily running the government. However, the (Christian Maronite) *Free Patriotic Movement* (FPM) are withholding their approval from him. Nor do they agree to a government meeting

"German government ..."

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tion as follows: The Federal Government only conducts assessments of international armed conflicts in the light of current events, as is the case with the illegal Russian war against the Ukraine. A retrospective assessment according to international law of all wars i.e. all international armed conflicts since 1991 carried out by the Federal Government does not exist. This would exceed the time provided for answering a written query and, furthermore, couldn't claim completeness." (translated by *Current Concerns*)



In 2020, the Lebanese were still angrily marching in front of their central bank, which had financed corrupt policies with their savings and was responsible for the economic crash. Three years later, in January 2023, the people lack the strength to protest. Everyday life demands all their strength to feed themselves and their families, especially their children. (picture Karin Leukefeld)

which Mikati wants to hold in order to persuade all ministers in office to agree to the disbursement of the money due to oil suppliers.

According to recent reports, Mikati has called for a meeting of the incumbent government next Wednesday to find a solution to the impasse. Last week, Mikati had reportedly conferred with parliament speaker *Nabih Berri* – in accord with the confessional constitution a Shiite Muslim – with his political adviser and an adviser to Hizbullah leader *Hassan Nasrallah*, and all had agreed that a cabinet meeting was needed. The Lebanese online newspaper "Nahar Net", citing "his circles", reported that Berri had said it was "unacceptable to paralyse a country and the affairs of its people just to benefit a particular political party." This refers to the *Free Patriotic Movement*.

Laughing third parties in this dispute are the private oil importers. They mostly own large and numerous generators with which they produce electricity and offer it where the government does nothing. These oil barons buy oil with their own foreign currency and then sell their electricity expensively to consumers.

Protests remain absent

The population does not protest against the political elites' haggling. Everyday

life demands all the people's strength – they have to feed themselves and their families, especially their children. Some men ride on small, battery-powered two-wheelers from one job to the other, others deliver goods of all kinds ordered by the few wealthy Lebanese, by hotels or businesses, in *TukTuks*, three-wheelers made in India that have the luxury of a roof.

The topic of the day in Beirut is the exchange rate between the US dollar and the euro. Families receive these currencies from their relatives abroad, provided they have relatives there who earn money. "God loves those who have relatives abroad", they say. Whereas a few months ago you received more Lebanese pounds for one US dollar than for one euro, the situation has now reversed itself. "You now get 48 for a US dollar and between 50 and 52 for a euro from a good, trustworthy middleman," explains Basma, the young receptionist at a middle-class hotel. "Others might give you 47 and 48." What is meant is 48,000 or 50,000 to 52,000 Lebanese pounds. Middlemen are officially authorised to exchange foreign currency in small booths and shops, and they take a sometimes-hefty commission from those who want to exchange euros or US dollars.

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"Beirut is closing down"

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Basma has only been in her job for a few weeks, but manages all its demands very confidently. Her predecessor *Heba* left Lebanon at the end of 2022 to start a new life in Canada with her future husband. Young people are leaving the country in droves to find work and a life of dignity in one of the Gulf States, in Africa or on another continent, far from home. The ongoing economic crisis that started with the banking crash in 2019 is destroying the middle class and all prospects of a good life and work for the younger generations.

Survival strategies

Those who have worked all their lives to build modest prosperity for themselves and their families in Lebanon are left empty-handed. A 68-year-old businessman, who does not want to make his real name public, spent his youth in the Lebanese civil war. Later, he built up a business that at least brought in enough for him to buy a good flat and put some money aside.

Now the man is no longer able to pay the utilities of his freehold condominium. He has to pay 800 US dollars a month for electricity, water, the lift and other utilities, which he can no longer afford. He does not get a pension and what he had set aside in his bank account has vanished into thin air with the 2019 banking crisis. The only way to survive is to rent out his own flat to someone who is better off and still has a good income. He himself has moved to a small flat in the house of friends. With the rent from his freehold flat, he can continue to pay the utilities as well as afford the new, lower rent. Getting ill is out of the question.



The legendary Hamra Café. For decades, well-known politicians, journalists and intellectuals met there to discuss with each other. (picture ma)

Power and energy

ap/kl. Last Wednesday, 18 January, the interim government of incumbent Prime Minister *Najib Mikati* released a credit line totalling 116 million US dollars to stabilise electricity supply in the country. 62 million US dollars are to pay costs and fees of oil tankers waiting off the coast to discharge their cargo. 54 million US dollars are earmarked for repairs and maintenance of the two ailing electricity plants *Zahrán* and *Deir Ammar*.

The state-owned electricity company (*Électricité du Liban*, EDL), founded in the 1990s, was gobbled up more than 40 billion US dollars over decades without stabilising the power supply and

carrying out necessary maintenance. The company is losing about 1.5 billion US dollars a year. The *World Bank* and the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) make the reorganisation of Lebanon's energy sector a precondition for the granting of loans. Currently, Lebanon is dependent on a contract with Iraq, which was signed in the summer of 2021. Iraq supplies heavy oil. Lebanon sells this oil to companies that process it so that it can be used in Lebanese power plants. In return, Lebanon supplies products and services, especially in the medical field.

(Translation Current Concerns)

Shops and restaurants are closing

Closed and empty shops characterise the image of Beirut in many neighbourhoods. Even in Hamra, for decades the cultural and political centre of the Lebanese capital, the lights are going out. Shops and restaurants are closing because they can no longer afford the costs and customers are staying away.

Before Christmas, the legendary *Hamra Café* was also hit. The numerous photos on its walls depicted well-known politicians, journalists and intellectuals in discussion with each other and debating at events there over the decades. Collections of books and magazines invited people to linger. Posters, photos of demonstrations in the 1960s gave an idea of what Beirut had once been like. Now the shutters are down, the doors remain closed.

Under the narrow canopy of the legendary meeting place of yesteryear, a woman is sitting cross-legged and staring motionless in front of her. Her baby is sleeping

on her lap, the woman's face is framed by a tight-fitting black headscarf. She seems too tired to hold out her empty hand to the few passers-by hurrying past her through the rain. And the café's guests, who had at least slipped her something from time to time, will never return. No one will ever again hear the religious formulas with which she encouraged people, and herself too, to give to her and her baby and be rewarded with praise from God in return. •

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“I am not a theorist, but I understand socialism quite differently” – in remembrance of Panaït Istrati

by Moritz Nestor

The first big rift in my youthful rose-tinted image of socialism in the then Soviet Union was created in the early 1970s by reading Panaït Istrati's Russia book “Auf falscher Bahn” (Vers l'autre flamme. Confessions pour vaincus. Paris: Rieder, 1929), which my esteemed psychological teacher Friedrich Liebling recommended to me at the time. Now Birgit Schmidt reminded me again of the life, work and revolt of that Romanian writer with her amiable little volume “Ich bin kein Theoretiker, aber ich verstehe den Sozialismus ganz anders” (I am not a theorist, but I understand socialism quite differently), published in 2019.

Panaït Istrati was born on 22 August 1884 in Braïla, Romania, and died on 16 April 1935 in Bucharest. One of the great Romanian writers. And the first foreign European leftist who, excited by the young Soviet Union, even plans to move to the paradise of the “new man”; but who is then shaken when he travels on his own through this beautiful country and, with an alert mind, looks behind the facades of the Potemkin villages presented by the party and suddenly sees what misery and hard-core dictatorship really prevail, hidden behind fine phrases.

Istrati is the first renowned foreign left-wing writer to return from the Soviet Union and not to publish jubilant stories in the West, but to dare to write the truth about the “red terror” of the Bolsheviks. He paid dearly for it. As a leftist true to the line, he was not allowed to criticise the Soviet Union. But with his courageous breaking of the silence imposed on the Western left, began the laborious, long and slow development that led to overcoming the mistakes of the Russian Revolution and Stalinism after the Second World War, above all with Mikhail Gorbachev and finally Vladimir Putin. In view of the current demonisation of Vladimir Putin and Russia in the Western media, which can

hardly be surpassed in terms of primitiveness, it should be noted here: Putin is Russian, he loves his country and, visible to everyone, he is not a Bolshevik. On the contrary. But he and with him the vast majority of Russians will not submit to the dictatorship of finance capital once again.

First trip to the Soviet Union

In 1927, Panaït Istrati travels to the Soviet Union together with his Bulgarian friend Christian Rakowski, where they are invited to the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution. Rakowski had just been recalled as USSR ambassador in Paris because he belonged to the Trotskyist Left Opposition. In the same year he is expelled from the CPSU and exiled, shot by the NKVD in 1941. In 1927, the Communist Party shows Istrati and Rakowski what they want them to see: the paradise of the “new man”.

Soon after arriving in the Soviet Union, Istrati meets Nikos Kazantzakis, the most famous Greek writer of the 20th century, author of “Alexis Zorbas” (1946). The two plan to move to the USSR together. Like all other European left-wing intellectuals who visit the Bolshevik “workers’ paradise” after the First World War, Istrati is initially uncritically enthusiastic and concludes his trip with a stay in Greece, where he praises the progressive achievements of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International in ardent propaganda speeches.

Completely disillusioned

A second journey, however, lasting over a year, begins in the winter of 1928, when Panaït Istrati, together with his partner, the Swiss singer Marie Louise Baud-Bovy and his friend Nikos Kazantzakis and his later wife Eleni Samios, again travel to and through the USSR on their own initiative and at their own expense in order to



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be independent. Istrati still glows for the USSR at the beginning. They get as far as the Arctic Ocean, from there to the Vltava, the Urals and south to the Caucasus. On this journey, Istrati becomes completely disillusioned.

Kazantzakis, too, is no longer enthusiastic about the Bolsheviks, but nevertheless remains favourable towards the country. Istrati, however, is deeply disappointed and devastated by what he has experienced. Unlike his friend Kazantzakis, he writes an indignant reckoning of the Bolshevik dictatorship, which appears in 1929 under the title “Vers l'autre flamme”. In it he now condemns the “ruthless exploitation of the workers by a bureaucracy willing to do anything to defend its privileges”.

Criticism of Stalin from a socialist point of view

Panaït Istrati is the first world-class writer “to publicly attack the Soviet Union and the CPSU, which had been under the influence of its general secretary Josef Stalin since 1922, from the point of view of a socialist”. Before Istrati's book, there had been “only favourable or even enthusiastic travel reports from Western intellectuals, which by no means came exclusively from organised communists or communist women”, but also, for example, from humanists such as the famous Nobel Prize



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Appeal for peace in Ukraine from Syria

ef. On 20 January 2023, the "Ukraine Support Meeting" took place in the German city of Ramstein at the US Army Base, which is "American ground" in Germany to this day. The pressure on Germany to send tanks to war is rising. US-affiliated Western media try to increase the pressure on a daily basis.

We are asking: To what end leads this war theatre, why even more bloodshed? If the West had the political will, the war would be over immediately and serious negotiations could be held. If it were wanted ...

Just before our editorial deadline, the following appeal reached us from Syria.

It was from Professor *George Jabbour**, who submitted this appeal with the following words:

"This brief yet obvious appeal can be signed by everyone. It is directed towards the meeting in Ramstein/Germany, where NATO, USA and the UN are coming together. 24 February 2023 marks the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, and this appeal is a whisper, a cry, a manifestation of the fact that we take part in the shaping of our world. Even if we are not asked about it, it is our right and our duty to do everything for peace."

Appeal for Peace in Ukraine from Syria

To the political leaders who are involved in the war in Ukraine:

One year is enough. Stop the fighting. Start negotiating. Everything is on the table.

* Prof. Dr. *George Jabbour*, Syria; Former Presidential Advisor; Professor of Political Science emeritus at the Universities of Aleppo, Damascus, Cairo, Khartoum; AUB Washington DC. He is the founder and first president of the *Syrian Society for the United Nations*.

World Economic Forum (WEF) and famine and armament

by *Heinrich Frei*

The *World Economic Forum* (WEF) took place in Davos once again from 16 to 20 January 2023. The slogan was "Cooperation in a divided world". Was famine, spreading in many regions of the world, part of the conversation at the WEF? *Jakob Kern* from the UN Global Nutrition Program has recently depicted the current situation. 350 million people are threatened by famine, that is 200 million more than three years ago. His organisation has 12 billion USD at its disposal in 2023, five years ago it had been 5 billion USD. But the Global Nutrition Program would need around 22 billion USD. Swit-

zerland pays 100 million USD annually into the budget of Global Famine help.

If one would compare these figures to the costs of the 36 F-35 US fighter jets which we want to acquire, it is not that much. According to the offer given in February 2021, these 36 jets would cost us 5,068 billion CHF, that is 141 million CHF a piece.

If one looks at the remaining global armament expenses, those 22 billion USD needed by the Global Nutrition Program are also very little in comparison. According to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* SIPRI, the global ar-

mament expenses led up to 2,113 billion USD in 2021. This sum was divided among the following states in percentage terms: United States of America 38 %, China 14 %, India 3.6 %, United Kingdom 3.2 %, Russia 3.1 %, France 2.7 % and Germany 2.7 %. The Global Nutrition Program would need 22 billion USD. That is 96 times less than the global armament expenses of 2021. Germany spent 56 billion USD for armament and military, that is 2,5 times the 22 billion dollars the Global Nutrition Program would require. •

"I am not a theorist, but ..."

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winner *Romain Rolland* and other well-known writers, as *Birgit Schmidt* reports.

Many turn away from Istrati

Immediately after the publication, all previous friends publicly distance themselves from Istrati, especially his previous mentor *Romain Rolland*, who had helped Panaït Istrati in deep human need. It must have been a particularly bitter experience that the very friend who saved one's life and who meticulously described such social-psychological processes under the psychological microscope in his "Clerambault" is nevertheless capable of these very same reactions. Likewise, Istrati's former communist friends, in particular the stalwart Stalinist intellectuals of the *French Communist Party*, turn away from him – above all *Henri Barbusse*, the author of "Under Fire". A smear campaign begins. Istrati is publicly slandered as a "fascist". On the other hand, he is appropriated by the Trotskyists to whom he stands otherwise aloof.

Istrati's Russia book appears as the first of three volumes, all published under his name. Two volumes are not written by him, but protect their true authors through

his name: Volume 2 "Soviets", is by *Victor Serge* (in German: „So geht es nicht. Die Sowjets von heute"), Volume 3, entitled "La Russie nue" (Russia naked, in German: Russland nackt, Zahlen beweisen) was written by *Boris Souvarine*, the author of that seminal 1935 biography of Stalin, who analyses the myths and reality of the Soviet coercive system as a "negation of socialism and communism". The shadows of annihilation by the Bolsheviks' "red terror" already hang over both Serge and Souvarine in 1928. Istrati protects them through his authorship.

Remembering him today

"I remember him with emotion," writes *Victor Serge*, with whom Istrati was a long-time friend, in his memoirs: "He was still young, skinny like the mountain people of the Balkans [...], immensely enthusiastic about living! [...] He wrote without having the slightest idea of grammar and style, but as a born poet who was seized with all his soul by a few simple things, adventure, friendship, revolt, flesh and blood. He was incapable of theoretical discussion and consequently immune to sophisticated pitfalls. One said to him in my presence: 'Panaït, you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. Our revolu-

tion ... etc.' He shouted: 'Good, I see the broken eggs. Where is your omelette?'" (*Victor Serge. Beruf: Revolutionär. 1901–1917–1941. Frankfurt/Main 1967, p. 13*) (*Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941. New York, New York Review of Books Classics 2012*).

Finally, Panaït Istrati returns to Romania, sick and broken, where he died in 1935 as a result of tuberculosis. Russia may remember him today as that wonderful writer who, as one of the first abroad, did not remain silent but began to overcome the tragic errors of the Russian Revolution. He did not live to see the late successes.

The metaphor "The eye does not see itself" comes from *Alfred Adler*, because seeing needs a trusted you who "opens one's eyes". *Friedrich Liebling* and Panaït Istrati were the two eyes that made me wonder about my limited image of Russian socialism. To what extent does the own image of Russia that many of us have of gained in our life history, *in honest and difficult conflicts*, today still lag somewhat behind the current state of the Russian Federation? – Are we burdened by a few wafts of mist that have become dear to us from earlier Western anti-communist, "liberal" or other cherished theories? •

How do we make the House of Europe fit for the future?

by Professor Dipl.-Ing. Dr Heinrich Wohlmeyer, Austria*



(picture ma)

cc. Heinrich Wohlmeyer was taken in by farmers after his father had died before being deported to a concentration camp, his parental home had been destroyed by bombs and his mother had become ill. He went to grammar school "on his own", studied law, international business law in the USA and England, and agriculture and food technology at the University of Soil Science in Vienna. Back in Austria, he volunteered as regional developer and industry manager for the Waldviertel and became director of the Austrian Agricultural Industry. After "talking himself apart", he went to university and taught resource economics and environmental management. In all these activities he realised that the hubs of unsustainable development are trade and financial policies that undermine regional economic cycles. "We need regional solutions for the best possible regional prosperity," he says.

I would like to start with a sentence by Jacques Delors, who said that we must follow paths along the spiritual basis in Europe in order for it to survive: "We must give Europe a soul again." Therefore, I begin simply in God's name, because we are currently in a confusing pluralism of opinions, coupled with the dictatorship of opinions of the rulers.

The German philosopher Norbert Bolz put it this way: "Our great problems do not result from a lack of knowledge, but from a lack of orientation. We are confused, but not ignorant."

When we approach the problem, we have to take a three-step, from orientating knowledge to target knowledge to practical knowledge. As far as orientating knowledge for redesigning the house of Europe is concerned, I think human biology gives us essential clues. In their book "Gehirn und Geist – Biologische

Erkenntnisse über Vorgeschichte, Wesen und Zukunft der Menschen" (Brain and Mind – Biological Insights into the Pre-history, Nature and Future of Humans), Nobel Prize winner Sir John C. Eccles and Swiss biologist Hans Zeier have conclusively shown that we are designed for small, manageable units. The philosopher and economist Leopold Kohr translated this into the demand to create social structures according to the measure of the human being.

History also shows that all great empires, despite perfect military design, broke down due to their remoteness from the citizens.

What therefore emerges as the target knowledge? It is intelligent decentralisation and networking instead of saving away the small units, as is currently happening. I am thinking here of saving away railways, schools, police stations, bank branches, etc. Eccles and Zeier put it briefly as follows: Renunciation of further unbundling of functions in agriculture and industry, which is only efficient in the short term, and restoration of decentralised, functionally interconnected, socially satisfying small societies with manageable power structures and communication networks. Preservation instead of destruction of local cultures.

In my book "Empörung in Europa" (Outrage in Europe), I proposed the future role of Europe in analogy to the role of the ancient Greeks, namely a standing up for Europe as the light of the world, federal, diverse, constitutional, tolerant, solidary, educated and above all respecting the dignity of the person and realising human rights.

Above all, Europe must find its way back to its inner compass, to its Christian-Greek-Jewish-Latin roots. The elites in power have even prevented a reference to Europe's Christian roots from being included in the preamble to the Treaties on the European Union and its functioning.

But where will the elites tie their value systems? To the changing manipulated opinions? I have always said that if morality depends on the opinion of large numbers, then the most efficient robber is the ideal in a gang of robbers.

We have to consider something else: Europe is an international role model with its legal and social systems, which are unique in the world. This also causes an influx of migrants, but they no longer share the social contract.

The European social and legal order is in fact secularised Christianity, we have

forgotten that. We therefore end up in the present disorientation in which we alternately propagate any European values.

What are the guiding principles that result from this orientating knowledge and practical knowledge? Instead of investing in weapons and interventions in a big-man way, we should maintain and further expand decentralised infrastructures. Money creation should be transferred back into national hands, because the currency is, so to speak, the tailor-made suit for the respective national economy. Instead of imposing the four freedoms (capital, goods, services, people) on the different national economies, we should devote ourselves to harmonising legal systems and social systems. The legal systems should be simplified close to the citizens and fulfil the three maxims recognisable, fulfillable, enforceable. Above all, the incorporation of Anglo-American special legal systems, which on the one hand are hardly readable and contain many uncertainties, should be prevented.

I now hold out to you the consolidated European treaties. These are 403 pages, which have already become more. They are hardly readable for normal citizens, innumerable references back and forth make it difficult to read. In other words, we have an incomprehensible legal order. If we now take things like the CETA agreement, which has over 600 pages, then we are once again taking in a superimposed special legal system that promotes legal uncertainty. In other words, we need a simplified, clear legal situation again.

As far as international trade is concerned, we must demand the destination principle. This means that you only have free access to the market if you can prove that your product or service was produced in compliance with comparable ecological and social standards as in the country of destination. This is feasible and controllable. When Austria was not yet in the EU, the EU controlled everything down to the small butchers and dairies and closed them down, and we accepted that quietly. But if we demand this internationally, we are immediately told that this is against sovereignty.

As far as agriculture is concerned, we should finally come back to the proposals of the IAASTD of 2008, the proposals "Agriculture at a Crossroads". These say that future food security must be based on small-scale, site-oriented, rather horticultural

* Lecture at the annual conference of the working group "Mut zur Ethik" ("Europe – what future do we want?") from 2–4 September 2022.

Sovereignty: Vigilance – Constancy – Firmness

by Nicole Duprat, France*

“Democracy is the government of the people exercising sovereignty without hindrance”

Charles de Gaulle

Thank you to *Charles de Gaulle* for having marked the history of France through its conception and understanding of human dignity, individual and collective freedom, cooperation between peoples. De Gaulle was quoted by many, recuperated by many too. But his beliefs were the opposite of political correctness. He was the first to foresee American hegemony and showed himself very hostile to the

* Lecture at the annual conference of the working group “Mut zur Ethik” (“Europe - which future do we want?”) from 2–4 September 2022

loss of sovereignty of the peoples, a possible prelude to American vassalisation.

But let us return to our subject of sovereignty. It is true that each people, in this great concert of humanity, has the right to its sovereignty as the basis of its existence, its space of freedom. But sovereignty cannot be limited to being only a word or an abstract principle. It requires fundamental attitudes.

Vigilance: the sovereignty of the people understood as the exercise of power by the people, that’s good. But at a time when opinions are manipulated by propaganda bodies that flood the networks with false information and targeted advertising, it is important to take a step back and reflect on the modalities of existence of this sovereignty.

Constancy: sovereignty requires constant effort. The sovereignty of a nation exists as long as there are free citizens, ready to defend it, to protect it, to vivify it. The people are made up of individuals, each representing a share of sovereignty.

Firmness: sovereignty has requirements and cannot be confused with any attempt at nationalism. It reinforces the principle of self-determination of peoples and non-interference in the internal affairs of a country.

Vigilance-constancy-firmness are necessary attitudes because sovereignty remains fragile, whether individual, popular or national.

Sovereignty is therefore never definitively acquired, but it is this fragility that fuels individual and national effort in all areas. •

“How do we make ...”

continued from page 15

tural farming – and on adapted structures in processing and marketing.

But I think *that we have to start above all with our youth. Our children must once again become proud of their European homeland, of its philosophers, state teachers, polyphonic music, poets, natural scientists and technicians and, last but not least, as I have already mentioned, the constitutionally democratic organisation of society.* If we do not do this, but merely teach “competences” in schools, this means training them to be well-behaved industrial soldiers and placing them in the prescribed competitive struggle. A student told me about this: “Professor, it is clear to us, we are being educated to be gladiators. The best gladiator survives, but the others don’t.” In other words, we have to fundamentally rethink here.

Now I would like to turn to geopolitics: I believe, and this was echoed throughout the conference: *We must say goodbye to vassalage, to the still-hegemon and its adepts, and form our own foreign policy, towards a policy of respect for international law and balanced non-alliance, as has already been emphasised today.* This will also enable us to play a neutral mediating role.

This means that in the current proxy war of the USA against Russia in Ukraine, we can help to achieve a breakthrough for the proposals that Professor *Hans Köchler* and I have persistently made within the framework of the *International Progress Organisation IPO*: namely, non-alignment vis-à-vis East and West, i.e., non-align-

ment, permanent neutrality, federal structure and recognition of the referendum in Crimea and, in case of mistrust, its repetition. The referendum in Crimea was at least as legitimate and good – if not better – than the one in Kosovo, but the latter was immediately recognised because it was in the “Western interest”.

I would like to add something else. The still-hegemon USA which, as *Scott Ritter* showed us yesterday, is in its death throes, and the embrace of a sinking nation is the most dangerous. It is therefore the order of the day to break away from it.

I would like to summarise: *We need a Europe of the diversity of fatherlands, as Charles de Gaulle called for – a “Swissisation” of the EU.* The former foreign correspondent of the “Frankfurter Allgemeine

Zeitung”, *Karl Peter Schwarz*, put it this way: “For Switzerland has shown how a diversity of languages and religions can sound together in one land.”

Therefore, your persistent plucking at “Mut zur Ethik” shall not end. If William Scott Ritter’s doomsday scenario should indeed come to pass, then the decentralised Swiss way is the way of survival. I experienced this myself at the end of the Second World War as a child. In the East, everything was destroyed, and we rebuilt the state from the bottom up, from the small units, and received support from above. With this conclusion, I believe that we need a Europe of decentralisation and a Europe that returns to its Christian roots, to the value system that gives orientation. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

