

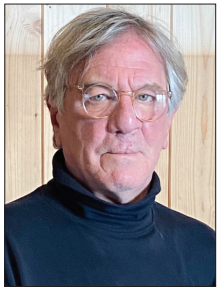
Current Concerns

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*

Force-marching the Europeans

by Patrick Lawrence*



Patrick Lawrence
(picture ef)

Zurich – Am I the only American to travel overseas and feel embarrassed by the conduct of the diplomats Washington sends abroad to speak for our republic? It is pretty strange to find yourself, an ordinary citizen, apologizing for the intrusive, cajoling, bullying, badgering and otherwise crude utterances of this or that ambassador in this or that nation. But such is the state of things as the late-phase imperium fields its elbows-out undiplomats – a term I borrow from the Swiss, who suffer one as we speak.

Scott Miller, the Biden regime's ambassador to Bern for a little more than a year, is indeed a doozy in this line. In his often-demonstrated view, he is in Switzerland to tell the Swiss what to do. At the moment, Miller is all over this nation for not signing on as a participant in Washington's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine – pressuring ministers, denigrating those who question the wisdom of the war, offending the Swiss in speeches and newspaper interviews. It is a one-man assault on Switzerland's long, long tradition of neutrality, waged in the manner of an imperial proconsul disciplining an errant province. Swiss commentators question why the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*, the FDFA, has not expelled this tone-deaf ignoramus.

We should pay attention to people such as Miller and what they get up to, even if they rarely make headlines in our corporate media. It is now nearly lost to



Paradeplatz in Zurich with a view of UBS and CS –
an Achilles heel of neutral Switzerland? (Picture keystone)

history, but Europeans were effectively force-marched – and occasionally bribed at leadership level – into following the Americans as they instigated and waged Cold War I. This is exactly what the State Department is doing once again. It behooves us to watch this process in real time so the realities of Cold War II are not so easily obscured.

Illegal diplomatic interventions

According to the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*, in effect since 1961, diplomats are barred from intervening in the internal affairs of host countries. The State Department lately displays as much concern for this UN-sponsored accord as it does for international law altogether: Little to none, you find when you watch these men and women at close range.

I do not know when these breaches of etiquette and indeed law started, but at this point illegal diplomatic interventions into the politics and policies of others are the US Foreign Service's anti-Convention convention. These coercions are key, let us not miss, to the Biden regime's concerted campaign to divide the world once again into confrontational

blocs and erase all traces of principled neutrality. The Finns have succumbed and just joined NATO. We can put the Swedes in the same file. Now it is the Swiss and their neutrality in international affairs who take the heat. This is the thing about the liberal imperialists: They cannot tolerate deviation from their illiberal orthodoxies. It was *George W. Bush* who famously told the world "You're either with us or with the terrorists." American liberals deployed as diplomats cannot get enough of the thought.

Decline of diplomacy: Andriy Melnyk

If you want to talk about the decline of diplomacy into crudely asserted demands that host countries conform to the wishes of other powers, you have to start with *Andriy Melnyk*, the blunt instrument representing Ukraine in Berlin until mid-2022, when even the *Zelensky* regime, never short of adolescently offensive behaviour, found him too much to take.¹ Melnyk thought nothing of calling German ministers "fucking assholes" if they questioned the wisdom of arming Ukraine, and openly celebrating *Stepan Bandera*, the Russo-phobic murderer of Jews, who allied with

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the Third Reich before and during World War II.

For sheer vulgarity Melnyk is nonpareil. I miss the guy, honestly. American diplomats effect a more polished veneer, but they are every bit Melnyk’s match if the metric is self-righteous presumption that what Washington wants others to do is what others should do.

Richard Grenell

You saw what was coming when *Mike Pompeo*, Trump’s secretary of state, named *Richard Grenell* ambassador to Berlin in 2018. Among Grenell’s choicer acts was to threaten German companies with sanctions – publicly, we’re talking about – if they participated in the *Nord Stream 2* pipeline project, which, as *Seymour Hersh* has thoroughly and persuasively reported, and whose reporting has not been substantively contradicted, the Biden regime destroyed in a covert operation last year. By then he had dressed down *Angela Merkel* for opening the Federal Republic’s door to Syrian refugees in 2015. His broader mission, Grenell declared, was to encourage rightist European leaders: *Sebastian Kurz*, the right-wing populist serving as Austria’s chancellor during Grenell’s time, was “a rock star” in the American ambassador’s book.

“Diplomacy of no diplomacy”

You can call this many things, but diplomacy is not among them. I call it a measure of Washington’s loss of interest in dialogue, negotiation, compromise – altogether an understanding of other countries and their interests. It is the diplomacy of no diplomacy, as I have remarked elsewhere. Diplomats are effectively the guardians of trust among nations: Proper statecraft requires they should be competent to talk even to, or most of all, adversaries. But the policy cliques in Washington now prove indifferent to trust, even among allies, in favour of supine obedience.

The world darkens in many ways. This collapse of traditional statecraft is a certain marker of our not-so-gradual descent into a barbarism that ought to worry all of us.

**Scott Miller’s
misconception about Switzerland ...**

We come to the case of Ambassador Miller, who arrived in Bern as the Biden regime’s appointee in January 2022.

With increasing alacrity in recent months, he has taken it upon himself to cajole Switzerland to drop its policy of neutrality and begin sending Swiss-made arms to Ukraine while lifting a ban on

other nations’ re-export of Swiss materiel to the Kyiv regime.

Give up historically grown neutrality?

It is a fool’s errand on the very face of it. I would say trying to persuade the Swiss to abandon their neutrality is the equivalent of telling Americans to put aside the Declaration of Independence, except that the neutrality principle goes much further back in Swiss history. The *Congress of Vienna* formally guaranteed neutral status for the *Confoederatio Helvetica*, the nation’s official name, when it fashioned a new European order in 1815. By then the Swiss had considered themselves neutral in international affairs since sometime in the late Middle Ages.

But who cares about all that? Who cares that the Swiss pride themselves on what they have accomplished by way of their neutral role in world affairs – not least but not only during and after World War II? Who cares that Switzerland, because it is formally neutral, has represented American interests in Cuba since 1961 and in Iran since the 1979 revolution? Who cares that Geneva is a city that survives, apart from the watches, on its dedication to mediation, the site of too many negotiations to count?

Not Ambassador Miller.

Arms exports?

Surely under orders from the *Blinken* State Department, Miller has been boisterously hammering the Swiss in speeches and public forums to lift their longstanding stipulation that countries purchasing Swiss-made arms cannot re-export them, along with its determination that it will not sell weaponry to countries at war. It is in part a measure of the Biden regime’s desperation that the Swiss, whose armaments industry’s exports come to all of 900 million USD yearly, is suddenly essential to saving Ukraine from defeat.

The Swiss are nothing like essential. The thought is ridiculous. The larger point, in my view, is far more insidious. It is to eliminate all thought of neutrality among nations in the (undeclared but obvious) name of the Biden regime’s intent to get everyone on side for a nice, long, profitable new Cold War.

Confiscation of Russian assets?

On his arrival, Miller was quick to berate Swiss officials who questioned the sense of the sanctions regime the U.S. and the European Union have imposed on Russia. The Swiss government, reluctantly and controversially, went along with the sanctions that followed the outbreak of hostilities last year, but Miller has been pressing Bern not merely to sequester more funds deposited by Russian oligarchs, but to confiscate them so that they can be sent

to Kyiv to finance the eventual reconstruction of Ukraine.

Confiscation of this kind is straight-out illegal – something that matters not at all to the U.S. but matters greatly to Switzerland. When two journalists from “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, the big Zurich daily, asked him about this in an interview a few weeks ago, Miller retreated into the cotton-wool language Americans routinely get from public figures. “This requires international dialogue,” Miller replied. “We assume we will find a way.”

In other words: We insist you breach international law, and worry not. We do it all the time.

When the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” correspondents pointed out that Swiss President *Alain Berset* had recently defended Swiss neutrality and called for early negotiations to end the war, Miller replied, “Anyone can call for negotiations.”

Nice. American diplomacy at its best. Or at its typical worst these days.

Hole in the donut?

It is a matter of record that Miller has imposed himself into ministerial deliberations on the sanctions and arms-sales questions, boasting at one point that senior FDFA officials “know what we expect.” But it was a remark Miller made during the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” interview that has landed Miller in seriously bad odour among the Swiss. “In a way, NATO is a donut,” he said with exquisite insensitivity, “and Switzerland is the hole in the middle.”

I loved the outrage that followed. He has called Switzerland “a nothing in the middle of a greasy American confection,” *Roger Köppel*, a populist member of the National Council, the lower house of the legislature, exclaimed. “Bern should have reprimanded him immediately.”

**Unacceptable
for the majority of the Swiss**

It should have but it didn’t. The only constituencies sympathetic to Miller’s obnoxious importunings are sectors of the business community who stand to profit were Switzerland to abandon its neutrality to please the Americans and the political factions allied with them. Miller will stay, but there is no way under the sun that the vast majority of Switzerland’s nine million people would accept so fundamental a change in policy – and, indeed, in national identity.

This leads me to a larger point. Miller can bang on all he likes about his commitment to democracy, but his conduct since arriving in Bern is measure enough that he doesn’t give a tinker’s damn about Swiss democracy—an impressive direct democracy—when it impedes Washington’s im-

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Germany in a state of emergency

German politics wants to teach others, but shows itself unwilling to learn

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Where to start? With the red-yellow-green German foreign policy, which pretends to be highly moral (“value-based”), but in fact violates many precepts of morality? With a political class constantly trying to lecture politicians in other countries – not only in faraway Brazil or China, but also its neighbours in Europe, including Switzerland – but itself seems to be completely unwilling to learn? With a very revealing interview in *Bild am Sonntag* of 23 April which once again shows that people in the east of the country probably think quite differently (with more realism?!) than in the West? With the reference to books that can stimulate one’s own reflection?

Or with the conclusion that Germany is in a kind of state of emergency – not only since 24 February 2022, but – oscillating – since its state formation in the 19th century. So that the good intentions and practical, also constitutional attempts since the end of the 18th century to create a free, constitutional, social and democratic, a rational, compassionate Germany aware of its history, which is involved in the community of nations on an equal base with other nations, have not been sustainably successful? And that a lot of perseverance is needed for all those who still love Germany?

An interview in *Bild am Sonntag*

What could be read in the *Bild am Sonntag* of 23 April?

The person interviewed was asked: “With few exceptions, new heating sys-

tems [in Germany] must be powered by at least 65 percent renewable energies from 2024. What do you think of the new law?”

He answered, “The law is made using a sledgehammer, and a lot of it is technically not feasible or cannot be implemented so fast. *The red-yellow-green coalition thus is putting the prosperity of millions of people in Germany at risk.* [...] Many citizens will simply not be able to afford the required retrofit of their little house or flat.” The energy turnaround will become “unaffordable for citizens” and politics will thus “lose a large part of the population. *People are turning away because they are getting scared.*”

The interviewee was asked if he was not exaggerating. His answer: “Not at all. *The red-yellow-green coalition are just cancelling the balance of economy, ecology, and social issues.* [...] The plans of this government led to *deindustrialisation* and to *revolt* among the population.” The Greens’ policy was “*ecological madness*”.

A planned-economy popular education approach

The interviewer mentioned that the Greens were doing quite well in elections. The answer: “Not in East Germany. *The Greens have lost the trust of the population.* [...] The economy is being stifled; many companies have postponed their investment decisions. There will be *massive relocations away from Germany.* We are cutting the branch that holds the prosper-

ity of our country.” He said the red-yellow-green government was pursuing “*a planned-economy popular-education approach*”. It was “not looking for a social consensus”. The task of a government, however, was to “keep the country together and not to divide it”.

No more diplomacy

The interviewee was also asked whether he believed in an end to the Ukraine war this year.

His answer: “That also depends on the commitment of Germany and Europe to diplomatic solutions. [...] Now the Foreign Minister does not see the time for negotiations but for *arms deliveries.* *That is something that disturbs many* – me included. Diplomacy is always a means to pacify conflicts. I think it is wrong that Germany has abandoned this position. And the number of people in Germany who also see it that way is increasing every day.” [all emphasis km]

The interviewee is not a regular participant in East German *Pegida* demonstrations, but the Minister-President of the Free State of Saxony, *Michael Kretschmer.*

Reminder to the SED leadership

For a government willing to learn, even considering only half of the statements of this East German minister-president as sensible should be reason enough to start thinking and correcting its course. But there is no question of that in Germany.

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perial pursuits. Do not tell me you are shocked, please: American diplomats no longer represent Americans abroad. They represent American elites to other nations’ elites.

Bern appointment bought?

Miller is 43 and arrived with his partner without one day’s experience in statecraft. Together they were and may remain major donors to the *Democratic Party*, giving the appearance that they bought the Bern appointment – a common practice since at least the *Reagan* years. Scott Miller is an example of the cost of such practices to our institutions in terms of competence.

War against neutrality – from Germany too

The war against neutrality – and effectively sovereignty and self-determination – goes on. Last week “*Le Temps*”, the leading Ge-

“Miller will stay, but there is no way under the sun that the vast majority of Switzerland’s nine million people would accept so fundamental a change in policy – and, indeed, in national identity.”

neva daily, reported that German Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* accosted Berset during the latter’s visit to Berlin with the demand that the Swiss “take uncomfortable but correct decisions” on neutrality, arms sales, and the Ukraine question. “We hope certain things will get done,” Scholz added with all the subtlety of... Scott Miller.

Certain things will not get done. The Americans are not going to win this one, no matter how many obsequious *Olaf Scholz*s prevail on the Swiss in their behalf. Berset wasted no time making this clear in Berlin.

I loved the response of *Benedict Neff*, a commentator at “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”,

after Miller’s hole-in-the-donut remark. Diplomats such as Miller “take a considerable risk,” he wrote. “When their public rebukes are too high-handed, they trigger irritated reactions. The undiplomats are therefore useful in prompting critical reflections on one’s policies and giving them a clearer direction.”

This is not as it always turns out with the Europeans – Scholz being proof enough of the point – but it is as it should be, and as one hopes it will come to be. •

¹ see: “The unquiet Ukrainian.”, Patrick Lawrence in *The Scrum* of 13 July 2022

Source: Original to *ScheerPost* of 25 April 2023

“Germany in a state of emergency”

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Understandably, this is reminding many East Germans of the final phase of GDR politics, of the obstinacy of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) leadership at that time.

But German politics, despite its massive deficits, still wants to lecture others. On 18 April, the German Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* tried it with the President of the Swiss Confederation, *Alain Berset*. At the beginning of the joint press conference he said, “Dear Alain, welcome to Berlin”. And: “Germany and Switzerland are not only very good neighbours and friends. Our countries are most closely connected [...]”

Chancellor Scholz calls for Swiss allegiance

But then the *spin*: “Our connection is also shown by how closely we coordi-

nate politically. We share many common values and positions. We stand up for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the rule-based international order [!] – globally. Standing up together for these values has become even more important since 24 February 2022, the day of the Russian attack on Ukraine. With its brutal actions, Russia threatens not only Ukraine, but the entire European security architecture.”

It was not to be expected that the German chancellor would have learned in the meantime that not much of this is true. Perhaps he would have read the recently published book, edited by *Hannes Hofbauer* and *Stefan Kraft*, “Kriegsfolgen. Wie der Kampf um die Ukraine die Welt verändert” (War consequences. How the fight for Ukraine is changing the world) (ISBN 978-3-85371-511-6), and taken it seriously. Then he might have come to different conclusions.

Again and again: arms deliveries

But Chancellor Scholz has other things in mind. He took up his speech about the “turn of the times” and now addressed the Swiss guest directly: The “turn of the times” demanded “a lot from us. Germany had to say goodbye to years of certainties and is now supplying weapons to a war zone so that Ukraine can defend itself against Russian aggression. [...] This war in Europe challenges us all to critically examine our self-image and sometimes to be prepared to make uncomfortable but correct decisions.” For this reason, it was “a good sign that Switzerland is supporting the [illegal!] EU sanctions against Russia”. But that was not enough. Germany itself was determined to support Ukraine “also with weapons, as long as necessary”. In this context, “any support from our friends, be it direct or indirect, is always welcome”. And then: “To be honest, we are always counting on it.” That was not a renewed threat with the cavalry, but it was clear enough.

Where are the media with a Swiss perspective?

What is disconcerting: Criticism of the German pressure on Switzerland was not only non-existent in Germany, but also almost non-existent in the Swiss media world. On the contrary: SRF’s news on 18 April had Switzerland’s ex-ambassador to Germany, *Tim Guldemann*, doubling down: Switzerland’s previous neutrality policy was no longer in keeping with the times and should be put to the test. Swiss Radio SRF itself commented on the same day almost like a German government spokeswoman: “The goodwill of the German government towards Bern has already suffered because Switzerland let the framework agreement with the EU fall through. The doors in Berlin for Switzerland’s concerns are probably not quite as wide open as they used to be. If Bern doesn’t manage to explain itself better, Berlin’s traditional ties with its neighbour to the south will be quite challenged.”

“Blick” wrote on 18 April: “Switzerland’s stance in the Ukraine war is straining relations with Germany. Especially on the issue of arms deliveries, the northern neighbour is starting to lose patience.”

The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” titled its editorial of 19 April: “Scholz spares Berset with criticism”. Nevertheless, the article repeated the massive criticism of Switzerland by German politicians. The *Weltwoche* commented on 20 April: “The NZZ has given away all trace elements of a Swiss view in its reporting from Berlin.”

Populism and peace

“As can be seen from this brief outline of *Zelensky’s* speeches, he presents the complex history of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a simple story of Armageddon – the final battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. What makes this mythical frame of reference for the Russian-Ukrainian war extremely problematic is that it ignores all the important factors that must be taken into account if serious talks are to take place: the coup on the Maidan, the uprising in the Donbass, the Minsk agreements, and so on and so forth. When all these facts are taken into account, the picture of the conflict appears much more complex, and it is the recognition of this high level of complexity that invites alternative visions of a peaceful solution. These visions should be embraced, not suppressed.

A peaceful solution is hard to find without the complexity of intellectual argumentation that populism lacks. Restoring intellectualism is not about restoring the Russian empire, as populism would have us believe. *Zelensky’s* one-dimensional and mythical account of the current catastrophe has little, if any, potential to bring about peace. By drawing firm dividing lines between the parties to the conflict, his simplistic portrayal excludes any possibility of a symbolic space necessary for communication. In order to create peace, this symbolic space must be restored – it is a necessary condition for negotiating differences and seeking compromise. The narrative of Armageddon must be abandoned because it does not include

political solutions – it is about fighting to the end. Simplistic judgments are literally deadly, and humanity must realise this now, lest it be too late.”

From: *Olga Baysha. Selenskijs autoritärer Populismus: Vom Frieden zum Krieg (Zelensky’s Authoritarian Populism: From Peace to War)*; in: *Hannes Hofbauer/Stefan Kraft (eds.). Kriegsfolgen. Wie der Kampf um die Ukraine die Welt verändert (Consequences of war. How the battle for Ukraine is changing the world)*. ProMedia Vienna 2023; pp. 111-121; ISBN 978-3-85371-511-6.

Olga Baysha was born an ethnic Ukrainian in Kharkiv in 1966 and is a professor of media and communications at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Prior to her studies, she worked as an editor at Ukrainian Television (1991-2008).



UN Human Rights Council calls for abolition of unilateral sanctions

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

With an overwhelming majority, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution (A/HRC/52/L.18) on “The negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights” on 3 April 2023. The resolution calls for the lifting of unilateral coercive measures in violation of international law. These are all sanctions without a UN Security Council decision.

According to the resolution, the Council “urges all States to stop adopting, maintaining, implementing or complying with unilateral coercive measures not in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States.” The Human Rights Council “requests the *Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights* to continue her work on identifying and proposing concrete measures to ensure the removal of unilateral coercive measures and to focus on the resources and compensation necessary to promote accountability and reparations for victims.” (UN Meeting summaries, 3 April 2023)

The resolution was initiated by Azerbaijan on behalf of the States Members of the UN that are members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Russian Federation presently not a member of the Human Rights Council.

The results of the vote or:

The West vs. the “rest of the world”

Of the 47 members of the Human Rights Council, 33 countries voted in favour of the resolution, 13 countries against, with one abstention:

In favour (33): Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cote d’Ivoire, Cuba, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Honduras, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Paraguay, Qatar, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

According to a study conducted by the Austrian opinion research institute INSA in early April 2023, 41 % of Austrians call for an end to EU sanctions against Russia. A striking number of young Austrians (16–29 years), namely 39 %, call for an end to anti-Russia sanctions.

Source: www.express.at of 7 April 2023

UN Human Rights Council – Resolution A/HRC/52/L.18 (Excerpts)

“The Human Rights Council,

- *Stressing* that unilateral coercive measures and legislation and secondary sanctions are contrary to international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law, the Charter and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States,
- *Deeply disturbed* by the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the right to life, the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and medical care, the right to freedom from hunger and the right to an adequate standard of living, food, education, work and housing, as well as the right to development and the right to a clean, health and sustainable environment,
- *Highlighting* the need for the Human Rights Council to take fully into account the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures, including that caused by the enactment and extraterritorial application of national laws and decisions that are not in conformity with the Charter and international law,
- *Highlighting* the need to monitor and report human rights violations associated with unilateral coercive measures, to promote accountability to deter future violations and to provide redress for victims,
- *Recalling* also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, according to which, inter alia, in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence and its fundamental rights,
- *Urges* all States to stop adopting, maintaining, implementing or complying with unilateral coercive

measures not in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States, in particular those of a coercive nature with extraterritorial effects, which create obstacles to trade relations among States, thus impeding the full realization of the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the right of individuals and peoples to development;

- *Strongly condemns* the continued unilateral application and enforcement by certain powers of such measures as tools of pressure, including political and economic pressure, against any country, particularly against least developed and developing countries, with a view to preventing these countries from exercising their right to decide, of their own free will, their own political, economic and social systems;
- *Invites* the Special Rapporteur to engage with scholars, researchers and others in the academic community to encourage research that is relevant to the mandate, including but not limited to the areas of law, economics, political science, social science, medicine and agriculture, and also through the establishment of a sanctions research platform;
- *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide the assistance necessary to the Special Rapporteur to fulfil her mandate effectively, in particular by placing adequate human and material resources at her disposal;”

Source: Res. A/HRC/52/L.18;
<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G23/059/34/PDF/G2305934.pdf?OpenElement>

Against (13): Belgium, Czechia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Romania, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States.

Abstentions (1): Mexico.

Ben Norton, investigative journalist and editor of *Geopolitical Economy Report*, writes: “According to a 2021 Treasury review, 9,421 parties were sanctioned by the US government at the end of that year, a staggering 933% increase since 2000.

More than one-third of the global population lives in countries that are suffering under sanctions.” (*geopoliticeconomy.com* of 6 April 2023)

In 2022 alone, the US Treasury Department’s *Office of Foreign Assets Control* (OFAC) issued 2,549 new designations (i.e., imposition of full blocking sanctions on individuals or entities). Of the 2,549 new designations last year, 1,772 alone were “Russia-program-specific”.

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A close partnership between China and Brazil

by Xulio Ríos*

The state visit of Brazilian president *Lula da Silva* in China has contributed to a close partnership which will both invigorate bilateral relations and intensify commitment and mutual assistance towards an increased influence on the world order. Both governments assume that no time should be wasted in order to promote their strategic reformation of the world order and take decisive steps towards multipolarity. [...]

Reinvigoration of bilateral relations

Relations between China and Brazil have grown rapidly during the first two decades of the 21st century. Although China prefers the current president *Lula* over his predecessor *Jair Bolsonaro*, even during the latter's term robust economic ties prevented an exacerbation of political controversies.

Unlike most other economies in the region and worldwide, Brazil can proudly present a positive balance with China mainly due to extensive exports of soy beans and minerals.

In 1993 Brazil as the first developing country agreed on a strategic partnership with China and became the first Latin American country to sign a comprehensive partnership with them in 2012. Today the Brazilian trade volume has reached 150 billion USD, more than any other in Latin America (in 2004 this was 4 billion USD).

In the year 2022 26,8% of all Brazilian exports went to China. For China, Brazil is the biggest trade partner and the most important target for investments in Latin America, for 14 years uninterrupted Beijing has been Brazil's biggest trade partner.

Worldwide, Brazil has been on the fourth position as a receiver of Chinese

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The presidents of Brazil and China usher in a new stage of intensive cooperation that is likely to have global political repercussions. (picture Ricardo Stuckert/Palacio do Planalto)

investments from 2005 to 2021. However, 76,4% of these investments were focused on the energy sector (electricity and oil and gas drilling) from 2007–2021, while only 5,5% regarded the manufacturing sector and 4,5% infrastructure.

Both sides co-operate actively in several areas such as oil and gas, electricity, agriculture, infrastructure and communication technologies, thereby promoting new growth in the digital economy, green development and technological innovation.

The challenge for both sides is the aim to develop qualitatively higher and more relevant economic ties rather than merely exchanging natural resources. Emphasis is to be put on key areas such as green industry and protection of the environment (Lula visited *Huawei* in Shanghai). Already today a 5G network based on *Huawei* technology is covering major parts of Brazil.

Three aspects are most noteworthy regarding this state visit. The first is a con-

tribution of China towards what is referred to as a re-industrialisation of the Brazilian economy by technology transfers in response to the so-called environmental and climate crises. In Lula's Planalto palace the catching term "Neo industrialisation" was coined for this. In this framework, no other country fulfils the financial, industrial and technological needs for a co-operation with Brazil better than China. Among the promising areas are electric vehicles, information technology, 5G, renewable energies, space navigation, biomedicine and semiconductor technology.

The second aspect is the social perspective, the fight against poverty. The United Nations, who had struck Brazil off their so-called world hunger map in 2014 when Lula and his *partido dos trabalhadores* had been in power before, now claim that during the term of *Jair Bolsonaro* 33 million Brazilians have fallen below the poverty line again and that 120 million Bra-

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"UN Human Rights Council ..."

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Actually, the adopted resolution is nothing extraordinary, because the approving states demand nothing more than compliance with international law. The *UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures*, *Alena Douhan*, has been tirelessly pointing out the devastating and deadly effects of sanctions in her reports and statements since she took up her function in March 2020. So have numerous international lawyers, scholars, journalists such as *Hans Köchler*, *Alfred de Zayas*,

Hans von Sponeck, *Hannes Hofbauer*, *Karin Leukefeld*, to name just a few. Again and again, they also have their say in *Current Concerns*.

There are already numerous resolutions calling for the abolition of sanctions: by the UN General Assembly, by the Human Rights Council and its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, as well as at the UN conferences of the 1990s, which also condemn sanctions that are contrary to international law. Their devastating effects have been known for a long time. It is all the more important to note that, in addition to

their abolition, all states are demanded not to comply with the unilateral sanctions and that the victims have a right to reparation.

There is an explicit emphasis that decrees which are based on the extraterritorial application of national legislation are against international law (greetings from "rules-based order"). Explicitly, sanctions must not be used as a means of political or economic pressure. The fact that *Alena Douhan* gets moral support for her difficult task concerning this resolution is a blessing for all sanction-harassed humans, peoples and countries. ●

"A close partnership ..."

continued from page 6

zilians live under conditions of nutritional uncertainty. Brazil is now supposed to benefit from Chinese expertise in societal engineering, especially programs to fight poverty.

The third point is the agreement to assist each other in reducing the dependence on the US dollar, by using the respective national currencies for investments. This political decision requires high efforts for its implementation. Recent data of the British "Financial Times" state that 84,3 % of world-wide trade transactions use the Dollar. However, the volume of Yuan-based transactions has more than doubled since February 2022 (when war in Ukraine began) from 2 to 4,5 %, due to China and Russia increasingly using the Chinese Yuan in their transactions.

At the moment the entry of Brazil into the "Belt and Road"-Initiative is still pending, but it is expected to occur sooner rather than later. So far 21 countries from the region have joined, with Argentina being the most recent one in 2022.

Multipolarity and World Order

The significance of Lula's visit to China (accompanied by 8 ministers and more than 200 business people) and of the warm welcome Xi Jinping demonstrated towards him was strengthened by the recent accession of former Brazilian president *Dilma Rousseff* to the chair position at the *New Development Bank* (NDB) of the BRICS states, who is well known in financial circles and will with her leadership certainly increase the potentials of this institution. The bank provides funding for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in the BRICS member states and other developing countries. Since its foundation the NDB has approved 98 projects with a total volume of 33,2 billion dollars.

The BRICS group had been founded in 2015 by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Together they account for about 40 % of the world's popula-

"No other country fulfils the financial, industrial and technological needs for a co-operation with Brazil better than China. Among the promising areas are electric vehicles, information technology, 5G, renewable energies, space navigation, biomedicine and semiconductor technology."

tion and 24 % of global GDP. The weight demonstrated by this acronym is one of the strengths of the axis Brasilia-Beijing which is, by both sides, meant to demonstrate their intention to influence world order politics and strengthen so-called emerging economies.

On the other side China has already announced that they would prefer Latin America to be centralised under the leadership of Brazil. Lula might turn out to become a useful protagonist for these plans. The collective West, who always criticise the isolation of a restricted axis Moscow-Beijing might find it easier to accept such an extended version of the scenario.

A political solution for Ukraine

Lula and Xi issued a joint statement regarding the war in which they stressed three facts: 1. neither China nor Brazil are directly involved in the crisis nor do they feel any direct responsibility for its outbreak, they both recognise interests of the USA and NATO in this conflict as legitimate. 2. The road towards peace must be opened by a political solution. 3. The Situation is at present too immature for negotiations.

Lula stressed his position of critical neutrality towards Washington and strongly urged the USA to promote ways to negotiate rather than continue to pour oil into the fire. An appeal which should be addressed to the EU as well.

At the same time, he urged other countries to commit themselves to constructive roles towards a political solution. Both sides agreed to stay in contact regarding this issue.

On his way to Abu Dhabi Lula expressed his hope to forge a "political G20" group with China and other countries with the aim to stop the war. He told the public that he had communicated this planned initiative to US president *Joe Biden*, Bundeskanzler *Olaf Scholz*, French president *Emmanuel Macron* and the heads of state in Latin America.

Conclusion

After the first 100 days of the new Brazilian government Lula's state visit to China has contributed to an extended and more comprehensive co-operation. It also started a new era of bilateral co-operation regarding developmental policies but also general strategies. "We want to take the strategic partnership between our countries to a new level, increase trade volumes and together with China contribute towards a balanced geopolitical order", Lula said.

China and Brazil are the biggest emerging markets in the Eastern and Western hemispheres, the joint statement in Beijing reminded the world of this fact. Both countries confirmed their commitment to respect towards different political systems, developmental models, independence in foreign affairs, multilateralism and multipolarity.

China's hyperactive diplomacy stretches over five continents. It has become obvious that Brazil is in the top list of their targets. Lula on the other hand has ambitions to fulfil a role as geopolitical actor. There is a joint commitment for BRICS but also impulses towards *Celac*, *Merco-sur*, *Unasur* and co-operation within the G20. Brazil supports Beijing's hegemonial claims towards the republic of China (i. e. Taiwan) and South-East Asia in general, but also regarding international positions. Will Brazil be able to resist this growing pressure and remain independent in their diplomacy? Lula seems to be confident in his statements. Warnings abound already not to offend Western positions – referred to as hegemonial by some although more and more they might reflect a healthy plurality. •

"Lula stressed his position of critical neutrality towards Washington and strongly urged the USA to promote ways to negotiate rather than continue to pour oil into the fire. An appeal which should be addressed to the EU as well. At the same time, he urged other countries to commit themselves to constructive roles towards a political solution. Both sides agreed to stay in contact regarding this issue. On his way to Abu Dhabi Lula expressed his hope to forge a 'political G20' group with China and other countries with the aim to stop the war."

Source: <https://ctxt.es/es/20230401/Firmas/42709/china-brasil-hermanamiento-brics-xulio-rios.htm>

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Our army secured peace for Switzerland peace during the Second World War (Part 2)

by Gotthard Frick*



Gotthard Frick
(picture ma)

zf. Part 1 (*Current Concerns* No. 8 of 25 April 2023) describes the situation of Switzerland at the beginning of the Second World War and various plans of attack and passage as well as German and Allied generals' assessments of the Swiss army.

Long before *Hitler*, Germany had been Switzerland's most important trading partner. Switzerland had already invested 2.7 billion Swiss francs in Germany in the years before 1933. In this context, it is revealing that in 1940, the British government hoped that Switzerland would be prepared to make concessions to Germany, because only in that case Germany might be expected to allow Swiss exports to its British enemy. Thus, the British Foreign Office wrote to its ambassador in Bern on 22 September 1940: "[...] that the apparent readiness of Swiss military circles to resist will not be weakened by any measure on our part [...]. If Switzerland were to make concessions (to Germany), there would be the chance of preventing Switzerland from having to altogether stop supplying war material to Great Britain, at least for a while [...] and thirdly and most importantly: the loss of Switzerland as a centre for information, intelligence gathering and similar activities would entail serious consequences".

Under pressure from all sides – the difficult task of securing livelihood

After the fall of France until the arrival of US troops in Geneva on 7 September 1944, i.e., for about 4 years, Switzerland needed import and export permits ("Geleitscheine") from Germany for its exports

and imports and had to make concessions to Germany in return. But for its overseas trade, it also needed permits ("navicerts") from England.

From the beginning of the war, England allowed Switzerland to hold supply depots for only two (!) months. In order to enforce this, it accordingly blocked Swiss overseas trade with the help of its powerful fleet. It wanted to prevent Germany from taking over extensive supplies in the event of an occupation of Switzerland. Shortly afterwards, however, the British Prime Minister *Churchill* warned that Switzerland should not be cut off to such an extent that it would "turn from an unwilling trading partner with Germany into a willing one".

Swiss imports from Germany reached 25.3 % of Swiss foreign trade in 1938, 32.4 % in 1941 and 36.5 % in 1944; exports reached 18.5 % in 1938, 39.4 % in 1941 and fell to 25.5 % by 1944. Imports from Great Britain amounted to 6 % of Swiss foreign trade in 1938, exports to 11.2 %. By 1944 they had fallen to 0.1 % and 3 % respectively.

Thus, on 4 June 1940 – the Swiss borders were not yet completely under German control - the German Sonderstab für Handelskrieg und wirtschaftliche Kampfmaßnahmen (Special Staff for Trade War and Economic Combat Measures) wrote in a memorandum for Hitler: "The war equipment consignments from Switzerland to the enemy powers exceed the consignments for Germany many times over. The only effective means of pressure for Germany are the coke and coal supplies." He added that Switzerland's dependence on the Western powers was greater than that on Germany because of its imports from overseas.

Ready to fight for their way of life

Immediately after the outbreak of war, the famous US journalist *William L. Shirer* wrote in his "War Diary" from Berlin: "Switzerland has one tenth of its population under arms, more than any other people in the world. They are ready to fight for their way of life. [...] The Dutch will be easy prey for the Germans. Their army is miserable. (It surrendered only five days after the German attack.) Switzerland will be a tougher nut to crack, and I doubt if the Germans will try."

France had been building the Maginot Line since 1930. It was planning to occupy Switzerland in order to get ahead of Germany and Italy. Because of the Swiss army, however, a study of 20 June



ISBN 978-3-033-02948-4

Available at Zeit-Fragen Publishers

1937 came to the conclusion that the rearmament initiated (by Federal Councilor *Minger*) would "[...] renforcer considérablement la puissance militaire du pays ... sera vraiment une armée moderne sous tous les rapports (considerably strengthen the country's military power ... will be a truly modern army in every respect)". Therefore, any operation against Switzerland would be problematic.

The readiness of the civilian population to defend themselves

As part of the total mobilisation, the local and company resistance groups (Orts- und Betriebswehren) were soon created. They were Swiss citizens in their civilian clothes, recognisable by an armband with a Swiss cross, who were not or no longer enlisted in the army and who, with their personal weapons, prepared the defence of their places of residence, mainly against German air landings. Thus, all over the country, mostly on the outskirts of settlements, there were trenches for these local brigades, where their members could immediately take up position shortly after an alarm. There was no radar at that time. So a nationwide network of aerial observation and reporting service was set up, run by volunteer men and women, including young ones not enlisted in the military service. And finally, while still in their teens, the women and men had to do land service with farmers during their summer holidays (the author three times)

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* After studying Civilisation française, economics and business administration in Paris, *Gotthard Frick* worked for many years on major infrastructure projects in Switzerland and overseas. 1968–2004 he established and led a consulting, management and training firm with an affiliated English-language university of applied sciences, working worldwide for all development banks, UN organisations (ILO, WTO, UNDP), for the OECD, for various governments and private individuals in over 100 countries on all continents. He held the rank of Infantry battalion commander and has broad military background knowledge thanks to visits to foreign armies (Germany, Pakistan), NATO and US Air Force bases in Germany and Panama.

"Our army secured peace ..."

continued from page 8

as part of the battle for cultivation. This was very hard for young city dwellers, but we learned how food is produced.

Time and again: attack plans rejected, because the Swiss army was too strong

In February 1940, the Allied commander-in-chief, French General *Gamelin*, submitted his war plans to the government. He first pointed out the German options: an attack on France through Belgium or a frontal attack or "par une manoeuvre d'aile par la Suisse" (flank attack through Switzerland). However, he then ruled out the latter as a possibility for Germany because of our Swiss army, which he considered to be strong.

In the spring of 1940, Swiss airspace was violated several times by German fighter planes, especially in the Jura. In the air battles that followed, eleven German aircraft were shot down with three Swiss casualties. In addition to a few fatalities among the Swiss pilots, Lieutenant Colonel *Homberger*, who had been badly hit by bullet wounds to his lungs, back and pelvis, nevertheless managed to make an emergency landing in Biel with his aircraft. His patrol comrade, First lieutenant *Kuhn*, was attacked by four German *Messerschmitt* and managed to save himself by a daring flight through the *Taubenschlucht*, where no German pilot dared to follow him. In the second half of the war, Switzerland was often overflowed every night for months by large, low-humming Allied bomber groups. The heavy anti-aircraft guns fired at them in rapid cadence, but did not reach their altitude (yet kept us awake with their crashing noise, as we lay in the straw of the air-raid shelter in the *Bürgerliche Waisenhaus* (public orphanage) in Bern).

In the spring of 1940, shortly before the attack on France, Germany hermetically sealed its border with Switzerland along the Rhine and carried out extensive troop movements in the area that could be seen from Switzerland. In this way, it succeeded in creating the impression in our country and in France that an attack on France, carried out from Swiss territory, was imminent. France immediately moved two army corps from the north to the Swiss border and put them on high alert on 13 May 1940. This was exactly what the Wehrmacht wanted. The shift massively weakened the French army in the north, where the Wehrmacht then attacked (Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, northern France).

Until the French surrender of 22 June 1940, the Italian general staff considered it possible that Italy could be attacked by France via the Great St. Bernard and the Simplon into the Po Valley. As a preven-

tive measure against this eventuality, it wanted to occupy southern Switzerland.

People and government undoubtedly determined to defend neutrality

In a study of 16 September 1940, the British *Joint Chiefs of Staff* came to the conclusion that because of the spatial restrictions, the difficult terrain in the Jura, and the recent deployment of the Swiss army, bypassing the Maginot Line through Switzerland was not an option for Germany.

On 1 September 1942, the German General Staff issued a "Small Orientation Booklet Switzerland" for the "troops in the field". It states, among other things: "The Swiss militia system permits a complete registration of those eligible for military service at relatively low cost. It preserves the soldierly spirit that has always been strong in the Swiss people and allows the formation of a very strong and appropriately organised war army that is quickly deployable, considering the smallness of the country. The Swiss soldier is characterised by love of his homeland, toughness and reliability. He takes great care of his weapons, equipment, uniforms, horses and pack animals [...]. Yet despite a good period of training, frequent refresher courses and voluntary exercises, the level of training was insufficient at the beginning of the war. The principles of leadership were influenced by German and French ideas [...]. The determination of the government and the people to defend Swiss neutrality against any aggressor is so far beyond doubt".

On 7 December 1942, the US magazine *Time* published an article entitled: "Switzerland: small and tough! Man for man, Switzerland probably has the second-best army in Europe today." As the US Senate noted in its final report on World War II, the German Wehrmacht was the best from the beginning to the end of the war.

Germany's last attack plan against Switzerland was drawn up by the general of the tank forces *Franz Böhme* in the summer of 1943. There it is stated that, "although it might have been expected that the new military-political situation in Europe would lead to a complete change in Swiss policy in all areas, reports have shown only too clearly that at least in the domestic-political area a certain hardening has occurred. The visible consequence is the *réduit*. It is better to fight than to be completely absorbed in the concerns of the new Europe". The goal of a German attack was defined as follows:

"Rather, it is precisely the possession of the important north-south connections that is at stake. Only their unrestricted possession [...] together with their power

supplies means a clear military victory over Switzerland".

"The Swiss army has a great tradition. Its system of defence sets it apart from many others. The utilisation of the people's strength is a considerable one. If we estimate the strength of the army, we must reckon with about 550,000 men at the end of 1943. [...] Its armament characterises the army as a distinct infantry force. [...] The fortifications in the interior have been increased." The necessary weapons were actually available and sufficient. Their deployment had been tested.

Decisive and efficient: German and Allied judgements about the Swiss army and the Réduit

Böhme then mentions the lack of heavy combat equipment already mentioned in the other attack studies, but then adds: "But the estimate of the Swiss army combat value must not therefore be lowered too unhesitatingly. The fighting will of the Swiss soldier is a high one, and we will have to put it on a par with that of the Finns, for example." (Who, with a population of about 3 million, withstood the 1939/40 Soviet attack for almost four months). "A nation that has good gymnasts always has good soldiers. The Swiss people's love of their country is at the highest level imaginable." Despite the militia system, their shooting training is better than, for example, in the Austrian army, despite the 18-month service period there.

Then, talking of Switzerland's lack of war experience: "However, this circumstance is well outweighed by the fact that the Swiss will be fighting in familiar terrain." Nor should it be forgotten, he says, that the *Réduit* has brought about a great change. He comes to the following conclusion: "Swiss national defence commands an army that is an extremely formidable factor, if only because of its numerical strength. Defeating those fiercely defending troops in their high alpine *Réduit* will be a difficult task".

On 19 September 1943, things became very critical in Ticino, as Italy was on the verge of surrendering, whereupon the Wehrmacht also took up positions on our border there. 21,000 Italian soldiers and 8,000 Allied prisoners of war fled to Switzerland within days and had to be interned.

When the Allies got bogged down on the German front in France for two months in the autumn of 1944, they were given an ultimatum by *Stalin* at the conference in Moscow at the end of October 1944 to attack Germany from France through Switzerland. Churchill and the US representative *Harrison* immediately refused. But the US Gen-

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Ambassador Edward T. McMullen pays tribute to Swiss Neutrality

mw. In the rough wind blowing around us, caused by our mainstream media and a number of Swiss and foreign politicians, it is a blessing to read a praise of our neutrality penned by the former US Ambassador to Switzerland, *Edward T. McMullen Jr.*

“Quiet diplomacy in action” – the basis of Switzerland’s Good Offices

McMullen served as ambassador for Switzerland and Liechtenstein under the Trump administration from 2017 to 2021. With his impressive appeal titled “A praise of Swiss Neutrality: I want to give clarity to those outside Switzerland who question Swiss neutrality and seek to redefine it. Once again, the Swiss good offices proved invaluable.”, he set a counterpoint to today’s war bluster.

Ambassador McMullen states: “A Switzerland poised to offer good offices as a neutral party while determined to negotiate for peace and freedom is a contribution to the international order that should be properly and historically understood and respected.” He recounts of his own experience, which touched him deeply: The Swiss ambassador and his staff in Tehran

succeeded, thanks to relentless efforts, in helping an US citizen who had been imprisoned there since 2016 to be released in December 2019. Edward McMullen spent months in Berne learning “about the compassion and professionalism” of the Swiss ambassadors.

On his arrival at Zurich airport the freed man told him “if it were not for the Swiss and their willingness to bring him books, western food, and hope for freedom, he could never have endured.”

Similar things were reported by others, McMullen said, “It must not be forgotten...”. McMullen had recalled the “quiet hum of diplomacy in action”, “The very essence of the good offices for which Switzerland has long been respected and admired.” He adds: “After a long history of success Switzerland’s Good Offices have once again proved invaluable.”

A task for Switzerland, “like no other nation is able to do”

After all the newspaper commentaries he had read recently, Ambassador McMullen wanted to “give clarity to those outside Switzerland who question Swiss neutrality

and seek to redefine it.” Not only for non-Swiss, it must unfortunately be added.

Its neutrality allowed Switzerland, “to play a role in international negotiations, peace and stability that no other nation is capable of offering,” said the ambassador. “During this debate about Switzerland’s future role in world affairs, it is incumbent upon the community of nations to look back and remember the important roles Switzerland has played in helping arrange the major diplomatic agreements and conversations that have prevented wars, rebuilt nations and presented Swiss fundamental peace policy with global trade partnerships and good offices”.

And especially for his compatriots: “Geneva has, over the past forty years, been the location of choice for US/Russian diplomatic meetings.”

Source: Edward T. McMullen Jr.: Swiss good offices prove invaluable – A praise of Swiss neutrality”. In: *Weltwoche* of 8 April 2023.

“Our army secured peace ...”

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eral Staff considered the option anyway. On 29 December 1944, it concluded that “the difficulties of the terrain and the acknowledged ability of the small but efficient Swiss forces to fight on their own soil would make such a project doubtful”. So, even the strongest armed force in the world at the time considered the success of an attack on Switzerland doubtful because of our army.

In the last months of the war, the French 1st Army under General *de Lattre de Tassigny* advanced from the Rhone Valley around Switzerland into the Tyrol as part of the Allied formations. Apparently, the French army had chosen this route of attack at the request of General *Guisan*, a friend of de Lattre, who wanted an end of German troops on the Swiss border as soon as possible. (Actually, the French wanted to advance on Ulm.) General de Lattre later commented: “I was sure of my flank in advance, knowing that the Swiss army, under an excellent leader and driven by patriotic pride, would resist any violation of its soil.”

In the last year of the war, our national defence included more than 500,000 soldiers, 300,000 auxiliaries (men and women), 530 war planes, 3,000 anti-tank guns and three times more automatic weapons than in 1939.

To survive in a difficult world, a nation must be committed to intangible values. These include love of country, militancy, coupled with the will to resist aggressors, alongside our fundamental values, such as independence, direct democracy, federalism and love of peace.

The author leaves it to the reader to decide whether Switzerland’s involvement in the Second World War was prevented by its army or not.

Sources:

For his book *Hitlers Krieg und die Selbstbehauptung Schweiz 1933–1945* (Hitler’s War and Switzerland’s Self-Assertion 1933–1945), published in 2011, the author conducted extensive research in the Federal Archives, Bern, but also, with the help of their embassies, in archives in the USA, Germany and other countries involved at the time. Thus, he often only received the extensive documents needed for the book on loan. The sources are mentioned in his book.

Current Concerns

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

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Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-
for all other countries.

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

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“Human Rights must be respected when conserving biodiversity”

Interview of Samuel Schlaefli with Mariam Mayet*, Director of the “African Centre for Biodiversity” (ACB)

The African continent is rich in flora and fauna, and unique ecosystems. It plays a key role in the conservation of global biodiversity. However, Mariam Mayet, Executive Director of the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), warns that indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers are being driven off their land in order to promote nature conservation. She calls for a fundamental rethink of the whole system.

Samuel Schlaefli: Ms Mayet, to what extent are the countries of Africa particularly dependent on conserving their biodiversity?

Mariam Mayet: There are still abundant intact ecosystems and landscapes on our continent; for example, wetlands with an incredible wealth of birds. But we are seeing a rapid decline in this biodiversity, mainly due to a neo-colonial development model and global capital flows. Many African economies are export-oriented and based on the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, coal and precious metals. These natural resources should be used to promote industrialisation and development. This is also what the *African Union’s Agenda 2063*, a kind of master plan for the continent’s future, envisions. Don’t get me wrong, we too want Africa to develop – but by making sustainable use of the continent’s biodiversity and in a way that primarily benefits the local people.

Often in the past, you have sharply criticised the multilateral negotiations for a new global biodiversity agreement. What is your greatest concern?

We have long since exceeded the planetary boundaries and are on the verge of ecological collapse. But there are no signs of the new framework taking due account of this urgency. I’ve taken part in numerous meetings, most recently in March 2022 as an observer at the negotiations in Geneva. It seemed to me that the indi-



African market with organic vegetables. (picture ©EOA Initiative)

vidual countries were there first and foremost to negotiate their own national interests and those of their industries, and not to agree a strong global framework for the planet and humanity. We must hold governments accountable in order to safeguard our existence and enable every one of us to live a meaningful life. This calls for imagination and an economy that is no longer geared towards growth. But instead of addressing the key drivers, countries are once again trying to find market-based solutions for the crisis, for example through “biodiversity offsets” to compensate for biodiversity loss. Climate change mitigation efforts have shown that offsets don’t work.

A key target of the new framework agreement aims to conserve 30% of the land and ocean area, including in Africa. Aren’t you satisfied with that?

The danger we see is that governments will now think: let’s protect the 30% so that we can continue to exploit the rest as usual. Moreover, that 30% could fall under the control of large nature conservation organisations that set up their own protected areas while in some cases maintaining links with the agricultural and fossil fuel industries. We fear that local communities could be displaced and prevented from meeting their basic needs under this pretext. Human rights must be respected when conserving biodiversity. In other words, it should not be permissible to designate a particular area as protected without the consent of the local and indigenous populations.

In this context, you criticise the tendency towards “fortress conservation”. Can you explain your concerns to us a little?

The “Ngorongoro Conservation Area” in Tanzania, a nature reserve bordering the Serengeti, is a good example of this. The Masai there are being displaced systematically from their ancestral land by the government. They brought the case before the East African Court of Justice to defend their rights, but the judges accepted the government’s reasoning. We are seeing similar developments in many places. Nature is being fenced in, while unsustainable tourism is promoted and biodiversity commercialised. This fortress conservation model has its roots in colonialism – and a long history in Africa.

Another criticism made by civil society organisations such as the ACB is that large corporations have attempted to rewrite the framework to further their own interests. Where exactly do you see such tendencies?

One indication was the pact made between “CropLife”, an association representing all the major agrochemical companies, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) at the 2021 Food Systems Summit. Multilateral organisations also tend to staff their secretariats with people close to the industry. And we can see that the biodiversity debate is generally being hijacked. There is a deliberate cover-up of the key drivers of environmental destruction, even though the UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy

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* Mariam Mayet is the founder and executive director of the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) in Johannesburg. Established in 2003, the organisation is committed to conserving biodiversity, and to food security and sovereignty on the African continent. ACB is part of the African CSOs Biodiversity Alliance (ACBA), an association of more than 80 African civil society organisations working towards a strong and fair agreement under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including through information events, position papers and lobbying of African governments. (For more information: www.acbio.org.za; www.africancba.org)

The “Asia Minor Catastrophe”

A Greek granddaughter’s search for clues

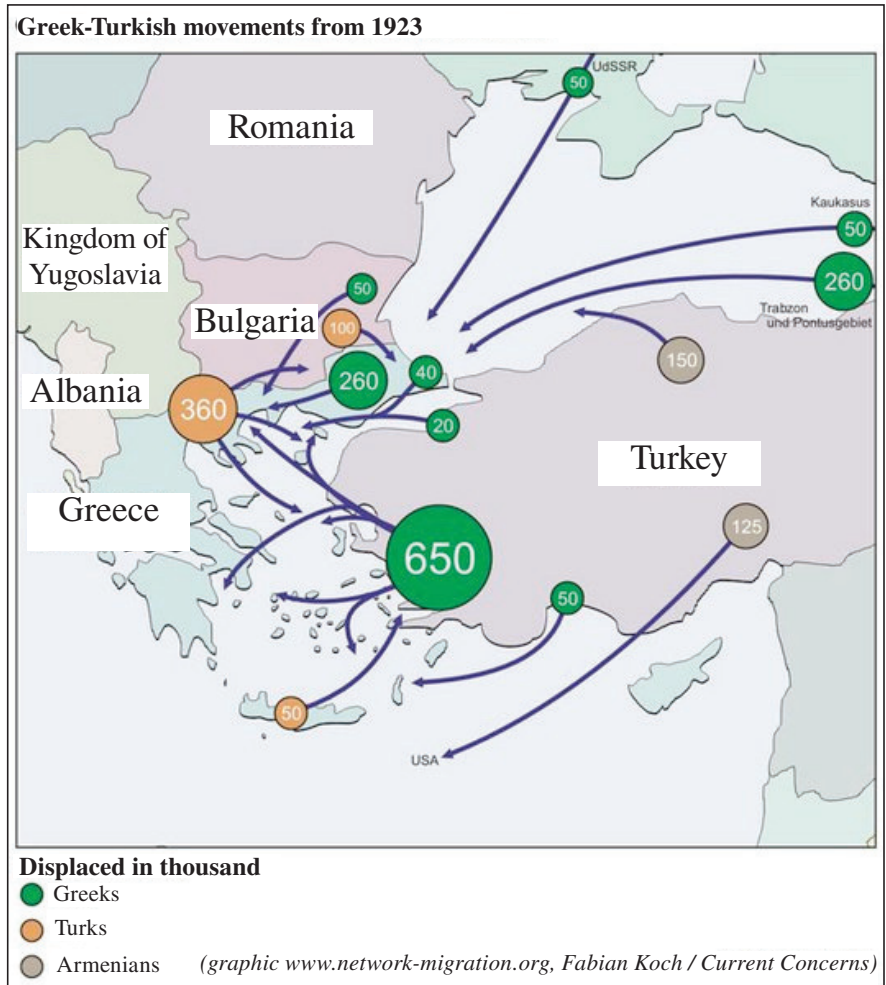
by Renate Dünki

Greece, for many a sunny holiday destination with hospitable people, has a fragile history that we are hardly aware of. A slim book* that has just been published with the subtitle “A Pontic Search for Traces” picks out a momentous period of time. Which traces are meant? In her memoir, the Greek author Maria Topali approaches the tragic fate of many “Greeks abroad” in the 1920s. The so-called Asia Minor Catastrophe is still a trauma for Greece today, and it continues to determine attitudes towards Turkey.

100 years ago, a “population exchange” was agreed in Lausanne, actually the final expulsion of all Greek Orthodox Christians from the former Ottoman Empire and, conversely, the “repatriation” of people of the Muslim faith, now Turks, to Kemal Atatürk’s newly created state entity. This was after thousands had already died in labour battalions, on extermination marches or through massacres. The goal was an ethnically homogeneous nation state freed from minorities – after long battles for territories in and around today’s Turkey, in which Balkan states and Greece were also involved. Ideas that still play a role today and can be instrumentalised for proxy wars.

Nation state without minorities

For centuries, Greeks, Armenians and Jews had lived more or less peacefully side by side in the Ottoman multi-ethnic



state. The religious minorities remained unmolested as long as they subordinated themselves to the Ottoman Empire.

The Pontians on the southern shore of the Black Sea were descendants of merchant
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“Human Rights must be respected ...”
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Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has long since provided scientific evidence of these. Take, for example, the large-scale use of highly toxic pesticides in agriculture or the excessive use of synthetic fertilisers. That’s why we have to transform agricultural production and the food system as quickly as possible.

What specific solutions could be enshrined in an international framework agreement?

The transformation towards a food system based on agroecology, with high diversity, natural inputs and long-term preservation of soil quality is one example. Systems like this deliver social, ecological and economic benefits to society. We’re not calling for such a transformation to happen overnight, but some of the building blocks could at least be put into place. Agroecology would also be an extremely effective strategy in

terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as in building the resilience of vulnerable groups. However, this would require a shift in the balance of power – away from a few large corporations towards many local, decentralised actors.

Have demands like this been addressed in the negotiations on a new biodiversity framework?

No, it has tended to be a case of “business as usual”, with the focus on the wrong solutions. Such as “genome editing” – genetic engineering methods that allegedly produce better seeds which are supposed to help plants cope better with climate change. Seed and agrochemical companies in particular are strongly pushing for more biotechnology, and major grain exporters like Brazil, Argentina, the USA and Canada support this approach. On the other hand, far too little attention is being paid to the important role smallholder farmers play in feeding the world.

The new biodiversity convention was negotiated by the political representatives of 196 countries. Did any of them actively support your demands?

Unfortunately, we didn’t receive a lot of support, not even from the African countries themselves. Bolivia was one of the few countries that stood out during the preparation of the framework agreement. It put forward a progressive proposal calling for the rights of nature to be recognised and enshrined in international environmental law, and for the negotiations to focus less on people. In doing so, it represented the worldview of indigenous groups, who often retain a much greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all life on earth. We could learn a lot from them when it comes to protecting biodiversity.

Source: One World No. 1/2023; issued by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; reprint with friendly permission of the editors

“The ‘Asia Minor Catastrophe’”

continued from page 12

Greeks who had settled there since about 800 BC. They were christianised in the Byzantine Empire and saw themselves as descendants of their own Christian Byzantine Empire of *Trebizond* (13th century to 1461), with their own ancient language (Ancient Greek, Turkish and other parts) and culture. After the Balkan Wars (1913), they were increasingly driven out of their settlements by the Turkish military, taken prisoner, their houses destroyed.

All survivors had to find accommodation and a livelihood in Greece in 1923. Refugee at that time meant: someone from Pontus or Asia Minor.

The resettled people now made up a quarter of the population of Greece – an extreme challenge. New settlements were built for them, often in northern Greece, and land was made available – not without great difficulties, as one can imagine.

A Pontic search for traces

The author *Maria Topali* comes from a Pontic family, two-thirds of whose mem-

bers perished at that time. Her grandmother had survived the expulsion, her grandfather had escaped from a camp and been rescued. The majority of the men, women and small children lost their lives.

Through her nanny and grandfather, *Maria Topali* learned the archaic Pontic language and experienced the constant change between Modern Greek and Pontic. Her mother and the sister of which were the main sources of her knowledge of the family history and the fate of her relatives. Many survivors did not speak of the atrocities and horrors they endured, but the author persevered in asking questions about their origins and in her research.

Her account is characterised by the finest observations and recollections, by sensitivity, but also scientific accuracy. All statements are supported by credible sources; *Maria Topali* never allows herself to be seduced into one-sided judgements. She always includes the complex historical situation in the description of her roots and names atrocities and victims on both sides. And she does not limit herself to the actual catastrophe, but goes into the before and after.

She takes on this huge task of spreading out such a period of time, such a theme, in a way that is all her own and not always easily accessible. “Those who wait impatiently for extended stretches of narrative [...], astride a solid chassis of certainties, had better pause here. My story moves slowly, on frail legs, afflicted with doubts, missteps and setbacks. Again and again a detail catches my attention [...]”. Those who have this patience, however, experience a fascinating text that also illuminates the “social capital” of this family: the credo of the surviving women, who at that time could already all read and write and become employed, thus had “their own purse”. “Tough, tough women. The whole kind of people/breed is like that, with them you could recreate the whole world all over again.” (S. 59)

Active people

I was particularly attracted by the depictions of the beloved nanny, but also of

the grandfather. This Pontic grandfather, *Nikolakis*, was a trained teacher, but as a young man he had decided to learn the advanced European way of beekeeping – he became a beekeeper. He passed on his knowledge after the resettlement, travelling from village to village to make it known, and even as an 80-year-old man he still published his bee magazine. The mailing took place every month in the family home in Thessaloniki with the help of the relatives, after which it continued as a games evening (p. 65). The grandfather is an example of how enriching the reception of refugees was for bitterly poor, backward Greece at that time: the country owed many innovations in agriculture, industry or music to the reception of these brisk, capable people. The grandfather radiated humour and *joie de vivre*. Refugee also meant: one who builds an existence from nothing.

This multi-layered prose part of the search for traces is complemented by a second part with a selection of poems. For *Maria Topali* is very well known in Greece primarily as a poet. The poems with their power of association revolve around experiences of farewell and loss, love, memory and the passing on of cultural values in the family. They presuppose a certain knowledge of the Greek background on the part of the reader; footnotes facilitate understanding. The texts testify to the author’s impulse to approach her story from the inside.

The indispensable explanations of the *Asia Minor Catastrophe* by *Mirko Heinemann* shed light on this largely unknown chapter of Greek, but also Asia Minor history.

A not so easily accessible multi-faceted book. Whoever gets involved can take a look into an unknown world, from which many questions also arise for the present. •

* Topali, Maria. *Die Wurzeln lang ziehen. Eine pontische Spurensuche nach der Kleinasiatischen Katastrophe*. Edited by *Monika Lustig*. With a historical classification by *Mirko Heinemann*. Translated from the Greek by *Doris Wille* and *Birgit Hildebrand*. Karlsruhe 2023, *Edition Converso*, ISBN 978-3-949558-11-5



ISBN 978-3-949558-11-5

“Sixty Genders for Secondary School Students” What to say to that?

ds. If one follows the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, humans are “endowed with reason and conscience”. But sometimes you wonder: ...?

For example, in its issue of 15 April 2023, *Weltwoche* reports on three “theme days” at a secondary school in Zurich, where the students of the second grade were taught about “identity, love, sex and gender issues”. The fourteen-year-olds learned that the number of genders depends on how one defines gender. Biology, with its reproductive terms “male” and “female”, would see

this far too narrowly. It is about “gender in a social-cultural context, in short: gender”.

Among other things, the fourteen-year-olds were asked to answer the question why it is irrelevant today which gender a person has. They had to assign “various symbols” to the “various genders”. The symbols were “androgynous, agender, bigender, demiboy, demigender, asexual, gay, genderqueer, transgender, demigirl, neutrois, homosexual, lesbian, nonbinary, transgender, travesti and intergender”. Anyone who takes the trouble to count the

number of possible “genders” comes up with exactly sixty, writes *Weltwoche*.

Being curious, I ask *Google*: How many university chairs for “gender studies”, as it is correctly called, are there?

There are supposed to be 4.5 in Switzerland and over 200 [according to *Google*] in Germany.

And when asked about suitable teaching materials, *Google* reports: “About 92,000 results in 0.35 seconds”.

Yes, one wonders: ...? Or are these already signs of artificial dementia? •

Letter to  the Editor

“Reading books again!”

I am very happy about your honourable remembrance in *Current Concerns* No. 6 of 28 March of a great book author, *Peter Scholl-Latour*. He foresaw with great expertise the chaos that the “war on terror” was wreaking in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. A similarly cautionary book, “Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?” (The Future of Germany, partly translation) was written by *Karl Jaspers*, who last lived in Basel. He had reason to warn: The Basic Law is the rock on which the freedom of the Federal Republic is founded!

Mikhail Gorbachev, who was shamelessly betrayed by the West, also wrote books in which he wanted to explain his planned perestroika and glasnost. He sent one of his advisors to us “Easter marchers” in the St. Jakob Stadium in Basel to discuss with us. It was the time of the alleged rearmament with nuclear missiles against the Soviet Union.

Reading books can be an excellent educational tool if chosen correctly! I started with “Struwwelpeter”. There’s not only the thumb-sucker, but also *Nikolas*, who dips the racist bad guys in the inkwell. Just as progressive – which I only realised later – is *Wilhelm Busch*. He not only de-

scribed the “pious Helene”, but also a certain hypocrisy with “Pater Filizius”, which brought Wilhelm Busch into judicial confrontation with the Catholic Church.

This was followed by reading books such as “Der Fall Julian Assange” (The case of Julian Assange), which shows that even in the free West, critics can expect persecution and find little protection from high courts. Who are they afraid of? An interesting question.

Then there are *Erich Kästner* poetry books with “Stimmen aus dem Massengrab” (Voices from the Mass Grave), poetised before the Second World War. Or “Kennst Du das Land, wo die Kanonen blühen?” (Do you know the land where the cannons bloom?). Not to forget “Dann sag nein!” (Then say no!) by the deathly ill *Wolfgang Borchert* returning home from captivity. His prescient admonition from 1945 is easier said than followed. You can lose your job or your post. Today’s editors-in-chief know: “It is more beneficial to submit to power.” (*Kurt Tucholsky*). Our numerous politicians probably knew this too when, probably against their better judgement, they remorsefully affirmed: Yes, we were wrong when

we bet on cooperation with Russia! All it takes is a hint “from above”, and instead of naysayers we have the yes-men again. If one of them breaks away like former chancellor *Gerhard Schröder*, many demand exemplary punishment.

And where are the women who have made it to high positions in politics and who could be mothers, i.e. committed to peace? The Iron Lady *Margaret Thatcher* looked disappointing. It is the same with the Greens’ *Annalena Baerbock*. And *M. A. Strack-Zimmermann*, FDP, has the vision: “Russian tanks say: on to Berlin!” Has she lost her mind?! We are at the mercy of such warmongers! You Swiss citizens have carved out voting opportunities and are right to defend your model of democracy and the proven neutrality. Against enemies from outside and inside. In doing so, you are also helping us Germans.

There is also the slim “book” called *Current Concerns*, which is not subject to NATO language regulations and, like a lighthouse in the sea of lies, conveys hope of learning the truth. It is important.

Ernst Udo Kaufmann,
Müllheim-Markgräflerland (DE)

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“Tutti Fratelli” – humanity and neutrality

On the history and the tasks of the International Committee of the Red Cross

by Eliane Perret

“I’ll be right there,” *Simon* calls and pulls a small white cloth bag with a red cross out of his backpack. Since we did a mini first aid course with a Samaritan teacher, he is always equipped with plasters, disinfectant, gloves and an elastic bandage. Now *Dario* has cut himself on a paper and a drop of blood is smearing his worksheet. *Simon*’s plaster comes just in time. *Sina* and *Amira* look on with interest. The first aid course is part of a teaching unit on the founding history and work of the *International Committee of the Red Cross* ICRC. We used a great non-fiction picture book on the life of *Henry Dunant* was used for teaching¹ Obviously these subject lives on among the children. I think: “That’s good!”.

Flashback – June 1859

The Geneva businessman *Henry Dunant* travels to Algeria. To buy land for economic use for the clients of his bank he stays in the then French colony. Through his travels he follows the French Emperor *Napoleon III* to obtain permission from him to do business there. But in the meantime, the emperor moved on to northern Italy. A great battle is about to be fought: France and the Kingdom of Piedmont against Austria, which occupies large parts of Italy. It is the end of June; a gruesome slaughter rages all day and there are thousands of wounded and dead. *Dunant*, on his journey just nearby, is presented with a picture of horror. He can’t help it, he begins – even though he is a medical layman – to help the wounded. He tries to get bandages from the surrounding hospitals and to organise transport. The women who have rushed from the surrounding area help, and everyone gets help, regardless of which army they belong to. This is new; until now, the dead and wounded were simply left lying around after a battle or only their “own” soldiers were taken care of.

Back in Geneva, this misery will not let *Dunant* go, and he is stuck on the idea of how to help all victims of war, regardless of origin or social standing. The first thing he did was to write down his experiences. In 1862, he finished his book “A Remembrance of Solferino”² and was sent it to many influential people. It caused great consternation. *Dunant* now turns to the *Non-Profit Society* in Geneva. A working group was formed around him, the *Committee of Five*, which together considered how his idea could be realised. Only one year later, in 1863, the working group invites fourteen governments to an international conference This lays the foundation

for the establishment of the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC), for the benefit of all humanity, – an important milestone in the development of our country.

Switzerland as depository state

160 years have passed since then. Today, the ICRC is a private, independent Swiss institution based in Geneva. It acts as a neutral mediator in armed conflict situations, bringing protection and assistance to all victims without distinction and implementing aid programmes for the suffering civilian population. Its work is based on the seven Red Cross principles (see box), which are at the heart of its activities. It is supported by the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Its tasks also include making international humanitarian law and its rules known to the population and members of the armed forces. The ICRC is financed by funds from the States Parties to the Geneva Conventions, the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, supranational organisations (such as the *European Commission*) as well as from public and private sources. Switzerland provides hospitality to this important humanitarian organisation and is its depository state.

“Tutti Fratelli”

The help should go to all people in need, regardless of their nationality, religion, gender or race. That’s what *Simon* was still humming to himself, “Tutti Fratelli – we are all brothers”, when he put the plaster on *Dario*. The two are by no means friends and are always involved in quarrels. But in times of need, there is no question: they help each other, despite unresolved issues. Why? It is a deeply human need to be there for each other, to connect with fellow human beings and to have



“The red cross is the inversion of the Swiss cross as a sign of neutrality and is included in honour of the founding and host country and depository state, which is anchored in solid neutrality by international treaties.” Design project of an upper school class: Drawing reproduction of a poster by *Jean Courvoisier* 1921. (picture ma)

a meaning for them. This corresponds to the social nature of human beings. Only through cooperation and mutual help can humanity survive. Thus, the child is already socially predisposed at birth, and it is part of the task of its relationship persons in the family, school and society to bring these social-emotional competences, as they are called today, to blossom so that the child can build up a comprehensive relational ability. These components of psychological development have been proven today by carefully thought-out and well-validated studies in modern developmental psychology, especially in bonding research. The results are in line with the personal conception of man and cultural anthropology; they all describe man in his social relation. These are the psychological and anthropological foundations on which the ICRC carries out its valua-

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“Tutti Fratelli” ...

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ble work by providing equal support to all victims of war and hardship.

**The cross –
an internationally accepted sign**

Simon packed his little bag again and is leafing through the *Globi* book on first aid.³ “Dario had bad luck,” Simon notes, “paper can apparently cut like a knife. But luckily, it’s not as bad as *David’s* in gym class, that was bad luck.” Simon has memorised the instructions for sprains and other muscle and joint injuries: rest, ice, compression, elevation. He looks at me mischievously and you can see what’s on his mind: “I wonder if she’ll notice what else I know?” “Learning is a relational process,” I think and nod at him. “I like the red cross on the white fabric, you can see it well,” he finally says, “it’s like the Swiss cross, just reversed. All over the world, governments know that it is used to protect people. That’s what we were talking about.” He obviously grasped the background and the meaning of the internationally known sign, even if he doesn’t know its history in more detail. During the break, however, Amira comes to me. She fled to Switzerland from Afghanistan with her family. Her grandparents are still in her home country. She asks me: “you said that houses with the Red Cross on the roof have to be specially protected. Then why was the ICRC warehouse in Kabul bombed?”⁴ What should I have

told her? Also, when she told me that her cousin was now learning to walk with a prosthetic leg at the rehabilitation centre there. “He stepped on a mine while playing,” she added.

**A red cross on a white background –
sign of neutrality and humanity**

As early as 1863, at the founding meetings of the Red Cross, it was proposed that those providing aid – the medical services of the armies, military hospitals and field hospitals – should all bear the same sign. A year later, in 1864, the Swiss Federal Council convened a diplomatic conference in Geneva. There, it was agreed in an international convention that military health services should be considered neutral and protected so that they could provide the necessary help to the wounded without hindrance. The proposal of a uniform sign – a red cross on a white background – was accepted by all states and recorded in Article 7 of the *First Geneva Convention* in 1864. All participating countries, including Turkey, agreed. In 1876, however, on the occasion of the war between Tsarist Russia and Turkey, the then government of the Ottoman Empire informed the Swiss Federal Council (as the government of the depositary state) that from now on it would use a red crescent instead of the red cross because it was too similar to the cross of the Russian Orthodox Church and offended the sensibilities of Muslim soldiers.

It was not the time or the right moment to discuss this decision and the need for

a uniform emblem. The irregularity of the procedure and the coercion involved were criticised, but the provision of aid to the Turkish army in distress had priority, and no stone should be put in the way of helping people in need. It was not until 1906, in a later conference convened by the Federal Council, that possible amendments to the 1864 agreement were on the agenda. This included the question of the protective mark. It became clear in the discussion that no one attributed any religious significance to the red cross on a white background, but that it was classified as a symbol of neutrality and humanity. The General Report of the Preparatory Commission for the Assembly also noted that: “The red cross is the inversion of the Swiss cross as a sign of neutrality and is included in honour of the founding and host country and depositary state, which is anchored in solid neutrality by international treaties.” These historically proven connections must not be overlooked when the importance of Switzerland’s neutrality for the work of the ICRC is being relativised.

This seemed to end the debate about the sign; generally the uniformity of the Red Cross sign for all countries united in the treaty was still recognised. The exception of the red crescent and the red lion (Persia, de facto no longer in use since the Second World War) applied only to those countries that were granted it because they did

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The seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross

They form the core of the Red Cross Movement and have existed in their current form since 1965. In 1986, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement incorporated them into its statutes. Since then, they have been binding for all members of the international movement worldwide. They put our values into words and are an expression of our commitment to vulnerable people.

Humanity

“The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples. Impartiality

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class

or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain. More than 14 million volunteers worldwide offer their knowledge, skills and experience to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. They are commit-

ted to helping their fellow human beings in need – empathetically, inspiredly and motivatedly. Voluntariness never means amateurism. Whether full-time, part-time or voluntary: our work is always of professional quality and supported by personal commitment. [translated from the German]

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all National Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/fundamental-principles-red-cross-and-red-crescent>

<https://www.redcross.ch/de/unser-engagement/wie-wir-arbeiten/die-sieben-rotkreuz-grundsätze>

(A part of the text was translated from the German version)



Kriegsgefangenenlager Ilag VIII 16853 - W		Datum 15/10/41
Camp des prisonniers de guerre		Date
Name <u>ROMILLY</u>	Vorname <u>GILES</u>	
Nom	Prénom	
Dienstgrad u. Truppenteil <u>British Civilian Internee</u>		
Grade et Unité		
Geburtsdatum <u>19/9/16</u>	Geburtsort <u>London</u>	
Date de naissance	lieu de naissance	
Letzter Wohnort <u>Ilag XIII, Deutschland Previously Royal Hotel, Norway</u>		
Dernier domicile		
Adresse meiner Angehörigen <u>15 Primlico Road - London - SW1</u>		
Adresse de ma famille <u>Huntington Park, Kingston, Herefordshire</u>		
Unverwundet - leicht verwundet - in deutsche Kriegsgefangenschaft geraten - Non blessé - légèrement blessé - prisonnier de guerre en Allemagne - befincé mich wohl. en b. e santé.		
(Nichtzutreffendes ist zu streichen) Rayez les indications non conformes)		<u>Giles Romilly</u> Signature

The search for missing relatives has been one of the ICRC's tasks since the First World War. Here is a picture of the work in the International Central Office for Prisoners of War (1914-1923). The card index boxes are now part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva. (picture WikimediaCommons)

Index card of Giles Romilly, nephew of Winston Churchill, informing his family that he was a German prisoner of war at the "Ilag VIII" camp in Tost, which was in operation from March 1941 to June 1942. (picture WikimediaCommons)

"Tutti Fratelli' ..."

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not want to exclude them from the humanitarian treaty body. This decision later also proved to be correct because the ICRC is the only international association whose aim is to alleviate war suffering.

"I don't understand that"

The arguments about the protective sign were not a topic of instruction for children in the middle school class of Sina, Simon, Amira and Dario. In addition to basic first aid skills, the focus was on developing human compassion and mutual aid. When the class put their first aid bag together and printed it with the red cross, it was clear to them that they had to make themselves recognisable through a uniform sign.

But the further development of the ICRC as well as the uniform emblem had to overcome some hurdles. The strict neutrality clauses and the equal treatment of all concerned was a hurdle that did not suit all interests. For example, under the Treaty of Versailles, the victorious powers of the First World War founded the "League of Red Cross Societies", an umbrella organisation into which only full members of the League of Nations were to be admitted. An unnecessary competing organisation to the existing Geneva Treaty and the national Red Cross societies coordinated by it.

"I don't understand that," Sina would have said, her heart in the right place and always having a clear idea of right and wrong, "just because they won the war, they can't just turn everything upside down and decide who gets help and who doesn't. And why did it need another organisation in the first place?" Sina would also certainly not have understood why a

discussion arose in the 1929 conference about recognising several signs of protection to work out an agreement on the application of the Geneva Convention for the protection of civilians which was therefore inadequate in the soon to be unleashed Second World War. This task should have been taken on by the League of Red Cross Societies, but it was and remained incapable of acting and ultimately had to content itself with the role of procurer of goods. However, there was at least fruitful cooperation with the ICRC during the Second World War and the first period afterwards.

An ICRC without red cross on a white background?

Even after the Second World War, the discussion about distinctive signs did not rest, and there was even a proposal to replace all previous signs – including the red cross – with a new uniform sign, namely a cube, a proposal that was surprisingly reintroduced fifty years later at the turn of the millennium by the USA and Israel. If Simon had heard this, he would surely have gone ballistic: "That's incredible! Wasn't the aim of the Red Cross when it was founded to help all people in need? These discussions only distracted from that." In fact, valuable energies were tied up on a side track instead of being able to tackle the urgent tasks facing humanity after the war. The red cross on a white background had become familiar in all corners of the world through the years of the Second World War and was associated with neutrality and the hope of protection and help in times of great need. But as said, these conflicts were not a topic in Simon's class. However, upper school students might be interested in dealing with the topic (and possibly with the minutes of these meetings). Curriculum 21 would

provide the opportunity for this, as the Red Cross is also listed under the somewhat skimpy description "Students will be able to analyse selected phenomena in 20th and 21st century history and explain their relevance for today". A drawing project on the diverse posters from around the world would also be possible (see illustration on p. 15). And surely, they would also be interested in the following area of responsibility of the ICRC: the search for missing people.

"Where is my son? Is he still alive?"

Unfortunately, most of the people who could tell us about the great tasks the ICRC had taken on during both World Wars are deceased by now. The search for missing persons, for example. "My son, our father, my husband – where are they? Are they still alive?" One has turned to the ICRC in Geneva with urgent questions like these since the beginning of the First World War. About ten volunteers worked on this task prior to the war, these numbers increased dramatically in the following years. Ever more letters came in with which relatives were looking for their loved ones. By the end of 1914, about 1,200 persons were involved in these tasks. At the peak of the war, 30,000 letters arrived daily to the aid organisation. During the four years of war between 1914 and 1918, seven million file cards were produced. They were file cards with handwritten information about prisoners of war, about the deported, the wounded and missing soldiers. Traces of the fates of 2.5 million prisoners of war in total. The search for them was ambitious, taking into account that one had to scan through handwritten files and compare them with

“Tutti Fratelli’ ...”

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lists of prisoners to hopefully be able to give an answer to the whereabouts of the missing to their relatives. In the following wars this work continued, the number of file cards which had turned into a file system grew to 39 million cards. In 1940, 40,000 French soldiers were missing in action. Requests in Germany and France were fruitless at first. With a careful search, 30,000 of them were found.⁵ Since 1988, this impressive file system is exhibited at the *International Red Cross and Red Crescent Moon Museum* in Geneva. Since 2014 it is available online.

These days, the ICRC is still active in over 60 countries, helping missing persons and their families. Impressive numbers prove this: 1,000 children were reunited with their families in 2015; 3,650 families in 21 countries who are searching for their relatives received psychological and psychosocial support; 479,000 family members got into contact with their families again through free phone calls; 25,700 inmates have been visited and individually looked after; humanitarian forensic services were provided in 53 countries worldwide; 19 countries have been supported in developing national laws and measures regarding missing persons and their families.⁶

The work continues

Recently, the ICRC was able to announce yet another successful return action as well. Between 14 and 16 of April 2023, 900 inmates, who had been incarcerated during the Yemen conflict, were released from prison. It was the result of meetings which were moderated by the ICRC, together with the Bureau of the Special Envoy of the General Secretary of Yemen. They were concluded on 20 March 2023

in Bern (Switzerland). If we listen to Mohammad, one of the happy returnees, we can get a glimpse of what it meant for those people: “I have been in jail for six years. I cannot wait to return to Yemen, my home, and to see my family again as soon as possible. I miss my mother the most, and I can’t wait to see my father and my siblings again.”⁷

I am sure that our children and teenagers can really relate to these topics. It is in our nature to be moved by the fates of other people. Simon, Amira, Dario and Sina already taken their first step.

Political strategy instead of assistance?

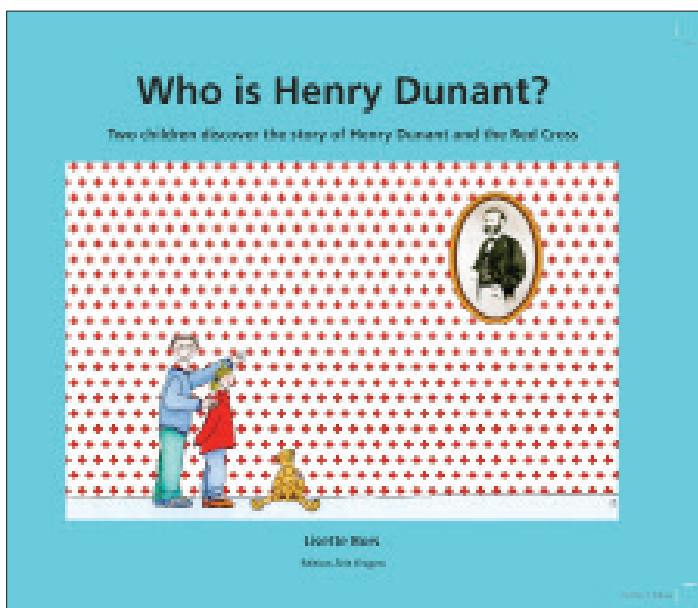
As I read the newspaper the next day, I started contemplating. “*The International Committee of the Red Cross* may have a 500 to 700 million Swiss Francs deficit by the end of this year. That is equivalent to a quarter of the annual budget”, ICRC general director *Robert Mardini* stated in his interview with the newspaper “*Le Temps*”.⁸ If this trend would turn out to be true, the ICRC would have to lower its sights. Offices would have to be closed, employees fired and, support would end in places which are hard to reach. But it is in those places where the help of the ICRC is needed the most. Reasons for this? Most of the money comes from the governments of the signing countries. They provided about 82 percent of the budget on average in the last five years, Mardini said. The ICRC only accepts money from donors who respect the ICRC’s independence and impartiality. But the contributions of the signing countries are voluntary. In other words, the willingness or refusal to further support the ICRC financially could be manipulated by political strategies to put pressure on the ICRC or to weaken the organisation and Switzerland as a depository state as well.

Humankind as reference point for the state and the international community

What kind of commentary is to be expected from Sina and Amira if they listened to *Peter Maurer*, who recently retired from presidency of the ICRC and stated the following regarding the war events in Ukraine:

“Even after the Minsk Agreement, many people have been killed on the front line. Nobody cared about it. Our operation in Eastern Ukraine was one of the least financed. Now, it is the largest ICRC mission in history.”⁹ Financial support according to political agenda? That stands in diametric opposition to the basic principle – the neutrality commandment of the aid organisation. I can hear the outrage of the two girls: “Why don’t they help all the people equally, are there people who are worth more than the others?”

Wouldn’t it be time to think about what *Cornelio Sommaruga*, former ICRC president, said regarding the Kosovo conflict: “We have to put the human being and the respect towards his dignity back into the centre of political discussion and into the centre of political decision, because the reference point and purpose of both state and international community is always the human being [...]”¹⁰ Humanity and neutrality are therefore a vital requirement for the workings of the ICRC as well as Switzerland as the depository state of this aid organization.



Publisher Zeit-Fragen. ISBN 978-3-909234-10-3

¹ Bors, Lisette. (2010). *Who is Henry Dunant? Two children discover the history of Henry Dunant and the Red Cross*. Zurich 2010, publisher Zeit-Fragen. ISBN 978-3-909234-10-3.

The book is also available in French, Italian, German and Spanish.

² Dunant, Henry. *Eine Erinnerung an Solferino*. (A Memory of Solferino.) Berlin, 2010: *Omnium*. ISBN 978-3-942378-76-5 (out of print)

³ Alves, Katja. *Erste Hilfe mit Globi. Ein Sachbuch für Kinder*. (First Aid with Globi. A non-fiction book for children.) Zurich 2020: *Globi-Verlag* ISBN 978-3-85703-309-4

⁴ ICRC warehouse in Kabul bombed again. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 27 October 2001

⁵ see Rings, Werner. *Advokaten des Feindes. Das Abenteuer der politischen Neutralität*. (Advocates of the Enemy. The adventure of political neutrality.) Zurich 1966: *Ex Libris*, p. 28ff.

⁶ see: <https://www.icrc.org/de/document/vermisstenpersonen-und-das-humanitaere-voelkerrecht> (accessed at 15 April 2023)

⁷ see <https://www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/2051/yemen-saudi-arabia-scenes-of-overwhelming-joy-as-nearly-900-detainees-return-home-in-three-day-release-operation/0/KQelrkoaJY> (accessed at 15 April 2023)

⁸ see <https://www.zentralplus.ch/news/ikrk-befuerchtet-zu-wenig-finanzmittel-2525882/> (accessed at 15 April 2023)

⁹ Maurer, Peter. Der Endloskrieg ist eine historische Tatsache. (The endless war is a historical fact.) In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 12 April 2023

¹⁰ From the lecture by *Cornelio Sommaruga*, President of the ICRC from 1987–1999, entitled “Das internationale humanitäre Recht an der Schwelle des dritten Jahrtausends – Bilanz und Perspektiven” (International Humanitarian Law on the Threshold of the Third Millennium – Review and Prospects), delivered in Geneva on 30 October 1999.

Reflection on a human education in times of cultural erosion

Interview with a great contemporary humanist

bk. The edition of *Current Concerns* dated 28 March 2023 introduced a remarkable new book on 'modern propaganda'. The author of "Developing resilience against propaganda" by Eliane Perret, in addition to informing readers about the methods of manipulation, calls on us to recognize our ability and responsibility as citizens and to confront all disdainful efforts to control opinion. He writes of the necessity to be courageous enough to "confront others and oneself", these being the core empowering virtues. To sharpen one's own thinking and to be prepared for critical dialogue – this means to become un citoyen – the author refers to classical literature. It contains the entire treasure trove of insights, values, attitudes, and other philosophical on which the achievements such as freedom, equality, tolerance, peace, and democracy are based – and all of which had to be fought for in the course of centuries.

In another contribution to *Current Concerns* (No 6, 28 March 2023), Karl-Jürgen Müller suggested books by Peter Scholl-Latour, the renowned German-French journalist and expert on Islam and Arabic studies, as an antidote to the infiltrating poison of deeply frightening militaristic, and at the same time racist, agitation.

Reading these two articles, I was reminded of the words and attitude of the Italian professor of literature and philosopher Nuccio Ordine, who I and my partner met in 2016 at the University of Cosenza in Calabria; we met again in 2017 in Tricase, in the extreme south of Apulia, on



Nuccio Ordine
(picture screenshot)

the occasion of a literary competition at which Ordine was invited to speak. I had heard about Ordine a few months before our 2016 visit a on the Swiss French-language

Beat Kissling: I would like to start with the question of how you, as a university professor, arrived at your point of view in your famous book.

Nuccio Ordine: There are two problems. I am a professor of literature. I have been asking myself how in my lectures to give space to the teaching of literature, i.e., classical literature. Because, as I said to the boys this morning, the majority of literature nowadays is taught through text-

radio (in the Canton of Jura). His bestselling book, *On the Usefulness of the Useless*, was translated into more than 20 languages within a few years (in English as *The Usefulness of the Useless*, Paul Dry Books, Philadelphia, 2017) and has everywhere met with an enthusiastic response.

Ordine made his reputation as a scholar, notably as a Renaissance specialist, after studying and later teaching at Harvard, Yale, and at various English and German universities. He is among the world's leading experts on Giordano Bruno, the 16th century astronomer, philosopher, theologian, and poet.

Ordine's book "The usefulness of the useless" exposed him to a broad public. It contains a splendid plea for the above-mentioned intellectual wealth developed in the history of ideas, which he tries to make accessible to young people with great commitment. Ordine brings the voices of poets and philosophers from two millennia to life – from Aristotle and Ovid via Dante, Petrarch and Shakespeare to Ionesco, Heidegger, and David Foster Wallace. The classics are no longer part of the core curriculum in schools, with far-reaching consequences for the broadening of intellectual horizons and the ethical education of young people.

"What the hell is water?"

To make the reader aware of the meaning and the essence of this spiritual tradition and its importance for contemporary education, Ordine quotes a small anecdote he got from Wallace, who died in 2008. He once told it to college graduates:

Two young fish are swimming side by side, when they meet an older fish who asks them what the water is like today. The young fish swim on with a doubtful look, until suddenly one of them asks the other one, "What the hell is water?"

For Nuccio Ordine, the explanation of this parable is crystal clear: "We have no awareness of the fact that literature and humanities, culture, and education, represent the amniotic fluid in which our

ideas of democracy, freedom, and justice, of secularism, equality, the right to criticism, tolerance, solidarity, and the common good can develop powerfully." It is very worthwhile to read "The usefulness of the useless" in peace and to talk about it, especially as the reader almost inevitably develops feelings of wonder, admiration, and respect in view of what humanity, i.e., many courageous, selfless personalities, has achieved – in spite of the often-violent power elites – in terms of spiritual freedom, humane perspective and, as a result, social progress in the name of their fellow human beings. The curriculum at our secondary schools has largely abandoned the reading of these original texts. According to Ordine's critical view of the development of the educational system in Europe, it is the utilitarian-technocratic trend, especially since the Bologna- [agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications] and PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] reforms and the democracy-crippling of the New Public Management [the effort to make the public service more "businesslike" and to improve its efficiency by using private sector management models.] have pushed schools and universities ever further in the direction of market conformity, a trend that Ordine very clearly sees as responsible for our current cultural erosion.

"The university allows you to become better humans"

On 6 May 2017, Ordine spoke at the aforementioned literary congress in Tricase before about 100 young students, addressing them in a way that is not common for a university professor. The young people hung on his every word. In the afternoon, I had the opportunity to conduct an interview with Ordine. In it he provided a deeper insight into his thinking and his commitment as a humanist; he also made it clear why it is important to read "the classics".

books or anthologies. But that is not how to stimulate the interest of students.

The decisive factor is the person who mediates, the professor. A good professor of literature cannot teach literature without reading the classics. It's as if you could teach music without listening to the concerts. You can't teach art without showing the pictures. So, one must always start from the primary text. Once you have the students' interest in this

way, one can derive the different ways of dealing with the subject: the philological or philosophical discourse, the historical-philosophical discourse, the historical, the history of literature. But one must start from the original text. Because to attract the attention of the students, to encourage and challenge them to the point they feel a love for a text, you need the original text.

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"Reflection on a human education ..."

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On the other hand, the problem is that in the ministry, in the government, the question on how to arouse the enthusiasm of the students is not asked.

The questions they ask themselves are bureaucratic ones – for example, how many students can pass an exam. It is about statistics, how to deal with teaching, how to reduce teaching to numbers or data, which has nothing to do with the basic fundamental pedagogical mission.

Starting from the conviction that the university is not just a place where you go to get a diploma, but to become better as a human being, I began to search for a number of quotations from classical literature that show students that you have to study for the love of knowledge itself and not because knowledge is a means to earn money. This is the right way to find a good job later on, of their own accord, because they have "improved" professionally and have become humanly "better".

Many professors do not come to such insights or conclusions. Are there special reasons that make it understandable how you acquired this awareness?

The experience I have had year after year at the university, as an advisor to the department, doctoral advisor, or any other advisor, was horrible. We attended these meetings only with the spirit of bureaucrats. So it was the spirit that was used to advertise for jobs, to solve technical problems, to distribute resources.

Among us professors there were no discussions about our own research, about different views on education. Nobody was interested to discuss these things among ourselves. The ministry itself was not interested either. So everything became a kind of search for profit, preoccupation with bureaucratic questions, with standards. I felt isolated.

**"To give something
back to the community
what I myself received as a child"**

I remember you saying last time we met ... you said that you didn't have many colleagues with whom you could speak openly ...

Yes, I share that joy with very few. But my motivation to work with young people stems from the need to respond to a necessity. It's about giving back to the community something that I received myself when I was small. That is the reason I feel so connected to *Albert Camus'* letter [letter of gratitude to his childhood

teacher after winning the Nobel Prize, 19 November 1937]. That's why I cried when I read the *The First Man*. Because despite the distance and the difference – the Algeria of *The First Man* was not Calabria when I was a child – there is something that makes it possible to connect the two texts and the two life experiences. It is about the fact that education, school, and university can change a person's life.

Today, no one thinks that education, specifically school and university, should have the goal of changing the lives of students. It seems, as if the ultimate goal must be to graduate, to sell diplomas to the clients who buy them. Based on this I began to think about how I could at least convince my students.

There are two levels in the discourse. There is the level of one's own personal practice. On the other hand, there is the level of political struggle that can be waged on a larger scale. I don't think I have much strength to fight on a larger scale.

The success of my book has shown that I am not alone in my view. I never imagined that in Italy I would sell 80,000 copies. That is extraordinary for an essay; it is astonishing in view of the crisis of the publishers. Or 50,000 in Spain or 45,000 in France.

But apart from that, I think that you have to start with small revolutions and not with the big revolutions. A metaphor for the small revolutions is the hummingbird that brings a little sip of rosewater to put out the fire – a story from my childhood. I have always published and interfered in the bureaucratic life of the university. Of course, I can afford it because I have a status that makes it difficult for a rector or anyone else to attack me. There's a respect, a space that I've been able to create for myself through my reputation [and] my scholarly work. Yes, of course, reputation is a protection. Otherwise, I could easily have been attacked, from the left and from the right. My idea is that everyone has to start to launch small revolutions.

You speak of politics as a "big theatre", the actors on stage are ignoramuses. You did not withhold this from the students this morning, even with your questions: What are they actually doing? What kind of decisions are being made? You have an extremely clear and concise political point of view.

I make a big distinction between small p politics and big P policy. Small p politics is the politics that has no relevance what-

soever. This is the politics of the small trade, the ground in the worst sense, which is what the politicians are doing just now. But everything we do at the cultural and political level has a capital P. The moment we teach the students, when we educate the people, the primary goal is to form people, to give rise to citizens.

This means educating men and women who are able to react in daily life with a free critical thinking, who can contradict, who can develop a way of thinking that allows them to say "no". That is the problem. Education today tends more and more to produce "battery chickens", i.e., conformists who all say exactly the same thing, who all do the same thing. The aim of education in schools and universities should be to produce heretics. And when I say "heretics", I mean this in the etymological sense of the word, i.e., people who are able to choose. Heresy is the imposition of a choice. It is not easy to choose, because to choose one must have knowledge, be able to develop a judgement, a critical judgement. So, first of all you have to know what you're talking about, to develop a decision from this. Many people prefer to shift the decision to others: They will follow, as sheep follow the leader.

**Working for humanity:
the task of school and science**

But the central idea of culture, of knowledge, of the scientific knowledge of any discipline, teaches you to do things for others. If you listen to the great men of science, if you read a book about utopia, for example, one of the first books on the utopias of science, *Francis Bacon's* "New Atlantis", this becomes clear: the sages who are enclosed within the temple, what do they do? They work for humanity. There are no secrets. The motto: What you have to do must not be in your personal interest, but in the universal interest, in the sense of humanity. This is the principle of Bacon, which has become a principle and has inspired the sciences.

The aim of teaching should be, above all, to understand when wrong values dominate. There are many of these, e.g., the idea that the dignity of someone is shown by the bank account. That is not true. Human dignity is about the great values that one can experience during life. Every discipline must teach students to know and understand their subject, but beyond that the discipline must also enable them to understand life in general. This is true for the humanities and also in all other fields of science.

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"Reflection on a human education ..."

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For many centuries, people have been convinced that the Earth was at the centre of the universe and that the sun revolved around the earth. The *Bible* says, "Sun, stand still!" And the Church said *Copernicus* was wrong. This is so because the statement of Copernicus is against the statement of God. This is an enormous stupidity. If you want to study nature, you don't have to read the holy books. The holy books are books about morality for people who want to believe. I cannot find scientific answers in the *Qur'an* or the *Bible*.

Your ethical stance can certainly not have emerged only at the university. This must lie further back, probably in childhood ... Can you tell us something about where you derive this from?

That was the reason I said earlier that it was a necessity for me to respond to a gratitude towards the teachers I had. I was born into a family in a small village in Calabria, to a simple family as far as the intellectual level is concerned. My father and my mother had both attended schools up to middle school. I was born in a house without a single book in a village with no bookshop, no library, nothing. How is such a miracle possible? It was possible because I had teachers who were very good. This was the case at all levels, during every stage of schooling, in different ways. Some one way, some another. I had some very admirable ones who were convinced of what they were doing. "If I am what I am," as *Albert Camus* says, "it is because I have had the chance to meet a teacher".

You once told me that you had a teacher who enabled you to buy your own books even though you were penniless.

That's another thing. When I was in grammar school, I had a teacher who encouraged me create my own library. I couldn't buy all those books: *Petrarcha*, *Boccaccio*, *Dante*, *Eliot*, *Rilke*. At that time there was a book sale you could pay month by month. But I was still a minor. I was 15 years old. My family couldn't afford to buy me one. A publishing house at that time had representatives visiting all the villages. One of them came to the grammar school, and the teacher took over the guarantee for me, because I was still a minor, and that's how I began to set up my first library. I paid a ridiculous sum. This was the case month after month, and so I had all the books.

How did you begin to take an interest in Petrarch and the others – this at the age of 15?

Because the teacher started to read these books with me. We read these books together. In grammar school, for one thing. In the morning I was at school, in the afternoon ... with this teacher. I spent the whole afternoon at this teacher's house. We left school together and spent the whole afternoon discussing literature, cinema, theatre. We were a group of two or three colleagues and me. So, this teacher at the grammar school became very important. And afterwards, at the university, I also found excellent teachers. I was able to attend the university because the university had just been founded in Calabria. I enrolled in 1973. If it hadn't been for the university in Calabria I might not have gone to university. At that time, the university provided that students with the best results in the examinations didn't have to pay anything. I did not have to pay anything. I didn't have to pay any rent, I didn't have to pay for food, it was free. I always got the maximum in the exam results.

"A life in which you only think about yourself ... is a lost life"

A thesis on my part: In order for a young person to have such a sensitivity for human values as you have described, one must have already experienced something in the family. Maybe not with a lot of justification, in-depth ... But the parents must have exemplified or represented values such as justice, honesty, charity, etc., I imagine.

You are right in the sense that you have explained this. I have learned something that one rarely learns at school: It is simplicity. That I learned in my family.

What exactly do you mean?

I will explain it to you. Simplicity means to be happy without possessing anything. That you can be happy, for example, about the pâtes that mother made at home – it's something very good in taste. Or you have spent a day playing in the street with your colleagues, or because you have produced something – a game – that allowed four or five people to spend a fun afternoon together.

These are always social occasions!

Exactly. It is not something that you can have on your own. And that's why you understand: A life during which you only think of yourself is a lost life, because it is not true, it is false. You need the others; you cannot live alone. That's

the image of *John Donne*: People are not islands; they are a united continent. If a person disappears, it is a piece of the continent that disappears, it is a part of me that I lose. The people who cross the Mediterranean and who go down by boat, that is a part of me. Or imagine: In New York, if you have an accident, an ambulance comes from the hospital. The first thing they ask you is if you have insurance. If you don't, they leave you to die in the street. I think a world that works like that is a terrible world. Terrible – horrible! You can't live in a world that just lets a person die because he or she doesn't have any money to pay for the hospital.

Simplicity and the internal richness of wisdom

Your family must have been a very open family?

I wouldn't say that only about my family. It is the context of the small village. I think the others have learned this, too. And after that I had this attitude. ... It helped me, for example, to understand the great teachers I met in my life, the real, great masters. They were humble, they were simple people who did not consider themselves great, wise people. But in reality, they were. There is this beautiful metaphor used by *Erasmus* and others, which comes from *Plato's* table. When *Plato* was asked to speak about *Socrates*, *Alcibiades* said that *Socrates* resembled a *Silenus*. What is that?

The *Seleni* were Greek statues. Outwardly they appeared as divine hybrid beings, as a kind of horse and human at the same time. So they were very hybrid, erotic and rather ridiculous. But if you opened the statue, you would find the hidden divinity in there. This means: The external never corresponds to reality. To look at *Socrates*, he appeared to be an insignificant man. But when you open *Socrates*, you find a treasure. And vice-versa: With people who pretend to be great, wise people, you find emptiness inside if you open them.

This means that the appearance blinds us and leads us astray. Unlike people who speak in the manner of great professors, the great personalities I have known were very humble people. So they did not act as if they were great, wise men. They were always simple people. This is what I meant when I talk about simplicity. Simplicity means that you are who you are. Being who you are without acting when you speak, to keep your humanity at all

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"Reflection on a human education ..."

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times. Success can unsettle people's humanity.

University professors generally belong to the category of the knowledgeable, the elaborate, who, according to Machiavelli, differ from the mass of "simple" dependents. The question is what changes in culture and society when a society develops in an inhumane direction. I find it very interesting how you analyse the change in thinking, in the way of living ...

Power has always had a very conflictual relationship with knowledge. If you want to keep power, you have to be elite. And usually, it is an elite that knows, that has education. If you don't know how to read and write you don't know anything; it's difficult to hold power. This elite has always thought the easiest thing is to keep people in ignorance. Then it's easy to manipulate them. You can tell them stories, that ... That's what happens from time to time on the internet. They say that on the internet you find truth, it contains information. That is not true. On the internet, lies are there day after day.

Of course, there is also the possibility of spreading a *contrevérité* via the internet. I'll give you an example: when the revolts in Libya, in Tunisia, in Egypt took place, the internet was the source or medium, by which the insurgent population could communicate with each other.

The internet is a tool. You can use it like all things: for better or for worse. Wanting to gain knowledge about the internet is a problem. Because, as I have often explained, the internet is made for the people who already know, not for the people who don't know. The problem with the internet is to be able to distinguish between valuable information and ignorance or disinformation. That is a big problem today. A young person who knows nothing about *Giordano Bruno* and will study Bruno on the web, will find 90 per cent of entries are completely demented. This is made by people who waffle about anything. Anyone can write something there. You don't have to study at Oxford to write about *Giordano Bruno* on the internet. If I write an article for an encyclopaedia, there's a scientific committee that reviews the content. I always advise my students: Read a good book, read Bruno, get to know him, and only then consult the internet and profit from it.

That's actually a problem, because many students tend to look up material very quickly on the internet to find material when they have to write a paper.

They copy-paste. They do it uncritically, without critical reflexion, just to fill the pages. That's why I say I'm not against it,

but in school it is better to "detoxify" the students. Because already at home they spend hours and hours in front of the computer, in front of an *iPhone*, in front of *Facebook* and games. So it's better if they do something at school that has nothing to do with it.

The privilege of having a school, a teacher for whom no sacrifice is too great

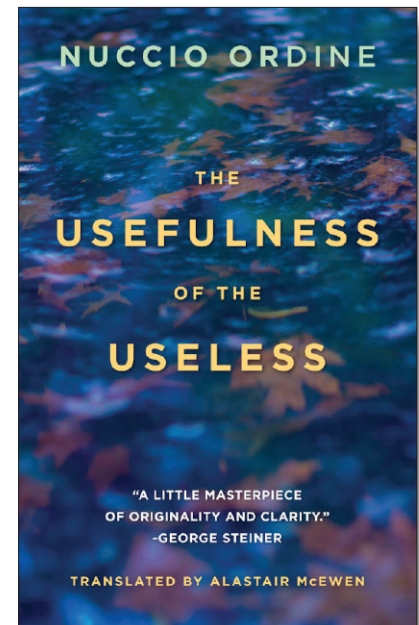
In connection with the inestimable importance of school for our children and young people, I am reminded of the film "On the way to school", in which children from the age of 8 to 12 are shown on their demanding, sometimes dangerous school route. They take on enormous difficulties as a matter of course, because they want to go to school.

Yes, that's because it's a great privilege for them to have a school, a teacher, for whom no sacrifice is too great. Our children have a bus to take them to school. Everything is given, everything is free, which is a big mistake. I believe that in education you have to grasp the idea that knowledge is not a gift that is dropped into your lap. Knowledge is a conquest. I have learned to read and write in my life – a completely different perspective from my parents who could neither read nor write properly. You understand that reading and writing can change your life. And that's why you do it, because you know it will change your life, not to get a diploma. This is the opportunity. This, what you're about to do, will change your life completely. Today, students have no idea, no imagination, they come, there are lecture halls, the professors and computers, everything is given. They lack the effort to conquer all that. Professors would have the task of showing students that they have to accept the challenge of learning, i.e., that they have to make an effort.

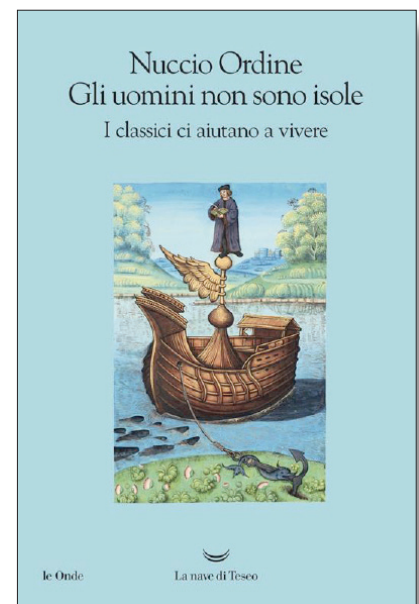
There is a beautiful passage on this in Rilke. On the question of what one needs to be a good poet, Rilke says that a good poet must, above all, be able to wait and have patience. It is slowness that allows things to emerge or grow, not the fast. But Rilke also adds: One must always seek life, the most difficult path, because it is the difficult path that better shapes us. The simply achieved does not shape us.

There is also a very beautiful passage by *Wittgenstein* on this subject. He says: "I am not proud of the things I have learned. I am proud of the sacrifice I had to make to learn something. And it this effort that gives me the right of the word today, the right to speak."

Thank you very much for the enriching conversation!



ISBN 978-1-58988-116-7



ISBN 978-8893446716



ISBN 9788893440264

The Alhambra in Andalusia – a pearl of Moorish architecture and Islamic art

by Diana and Winfried Pogorzelski

Along with the mosque of Cordoba, the Alhambra is the most important building of Moorish architecture and Islamic art. The era stands for religious freedom, understanding between different cultures and flourishing of science. The name “Alhambra” is usually translated as “red fortress”, a reference to the reddish colour of the walls and towers. Attached to the complex is a summer palace and country estate with gardens, colonnades and fountains, the so-called “Palacio de Generalife”. Listed as a World Heritage Site in 1984, the city castle in Granada, with its magnificent rooms and picturesque courtyards, has been attracting a veritable flood of visitors for years.

Moorish reigned Spain – historical overview

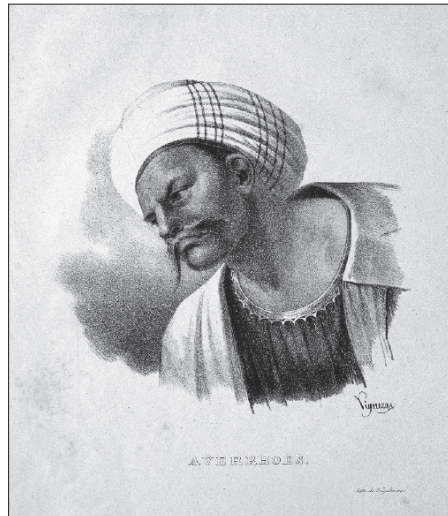
Between 711 and 1492, part of the Iberian Peninsula was under Muslim-Moorish rule, called “al-Andalus” in Arabic. The early period of Arab rule was mostly characterised by tolerance towards the different religions: Christians, Jews and Muslims lived together peacefully. Arab scholars transmitted Greek



The fountain in the Court of the Lions.
(pictures © Winfried Pogorzelski)

«For, are there not in this garden wonders that God has made incomparable in their beauty, and a sculpture of pearls with a transparently light, the borders of which are trimmed with seed pearl? Melted silver flows through the pearls, to which it resembles in its pure dawn beauty. Apparently, water and marble seem to be one, without letting us know which of them is flowing. Don't you see how the water spills on the basin, but its spouts hide it immediately? It is a lover whose eyelids are brimming over with tears, tears that it hides from fear of a betrayer. »

From: Ibn Zamrak (1333–1393, Arab statesman and courtyard poet of Granada at the Fountain of the Lions



Averroes (Lithography by P. R. Vigneron, 1825) (picture Wikimedia.Commons)

science and philosophy, e. g., *Plato* and *Aristotle*, which had been translated from Greek into Arabic in medieval Baghdad, but also Arabic writings on astronomy, mathematics and Islamic religion. The Muslims were highly respected for their scholarship. The Moorish cities were veritable “hives of poets, scholars, jurists, doctors and scientists”, as the cultural publicist *Will Durant* wrote. The eminent Andalusian philosopher and Muslim scholar, jurist, physician and Arabic writer *Averroes*, for example, wrote a medical encyclopaedia and commentaries on Aristotle's work.

There were numerous primary schools for boys and girls, and the Moorish ruler *Hakam II* (915–976) established 27 more schools to educate the poor. Higher schools were founded in Granada, Toledo, Seville, Murcia, Almeria, Valencia and Cadiz. Higher education was provided by independent teachers who gave lectures in mosques. The University of Cordoba was second in reputation only to the universities of



Ornamented round arches
and stalactite coves.

Baghdad and Cairo. Muslim Spain had seventy libraries. The libraries of Cordoba and Toledo were famous for their collections of advanced knowledge of Islam and the West.

In 1492, during the Reconquista, the last Emir *Abul Hasan* of Cordoba had to surrender: After a long siege, he surrendered to the Spanish royal couple *Ferdinand* and *Isabella*, which meant an end to Moorish rule on the Iberian Peninsula. Anyone who refrained from converting to Christianity had to leave the country. Many Moors – including Jews – fled to Morocco.

Medieval fortified upper city of the Nasrid dynasty

The importance of Islam for art and architecture is evident in the impressive Alhambra, which was designed by Christian and Muslim artists. The Nasrid dynasty, founded there in 1238, built the complex in the 13th and 14th centuries. Their rulers were patrons of the arts and of the natural sciences and humanities. The dimensions of the palace complex are impressive: the fortified city castle is 740 m long and up to 220m wide. The so-called Alkazaba is the entrance area, enclosed by thick walls, equipped with massive towers, battlements and moats. The walls are made of a special clay of high strength. Double walls, winding passages, portcullis, etc. made the complex almost unsailable.

The old royal palace with Court of the Myrtles, Hall of the Ambassadors and Court of the Lions

The interior of the complex is divided into four areas: the core of the Alhambra with the Mexuar administration wing, the Comares Palace (residence of the prince) consisting of several buildings, the Court of the Myrtles as the reception area and the Leones Palace with the Court of the Lions as the centre.

Elements of Andalusian architecture are horseshoe arches, colonnades and courtyards with fountains. Characteristic of the artistic design of the Alhambra are slender high columns with richly decorated capitals. Everywhere, stucco work, ceramics and ornately carved wood adorn the walls, arches and ceilings with arabesques and vegetal motifs. Decorative elements are often religious sayings and poems written in Arabic calligraphy. Wherever the eye looks: tasteful ornamentation.

continued on page 24

"The Alhambra in Andalusia ..."

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tation and soaring interiors that create the impression of looking up into the firmament.

Particularly remarkable in the Comares Palace is the court of the Myrtles with its water basin. Due to a regular inflow, the water surface is completely smooth, so that the façade and columns are reflected in it. The place, with its atmosphere that immediately catches the eye, is reminiscent of paradise, which the Koran describes as a "flower garden through which the streams flow".

The adjoining Hall of the Ambassadors is decorated with magnificent stuccowork and an elaborate cedar-wood ceiling. Light enters the room from far above through stained glass windows. An inscription on the capital of an alcove, which reads: "Speak few words and you will go in peace." (p. 89) indicates the official character of the room.

The Court of the Lions owes its name to twelve water-spouting lion sculptures appearing to support a large dodecagonal water basin in the centre of the courtyard. The fountain, created around 1050, made of Andalusian marble, is one of the most important examples of Muslim sculpture. The rim of the fountain is adorned with a poem in Arabic script dedicated to water as the source of all life. The courtyard was the centre of the sultan's private residence surrounded by the rooms for the women.

The Generalife – Summer Palace with Gardens

The Sultan's summer palace is surrounded by flower and vegetable gardens and



The court of the Lions.



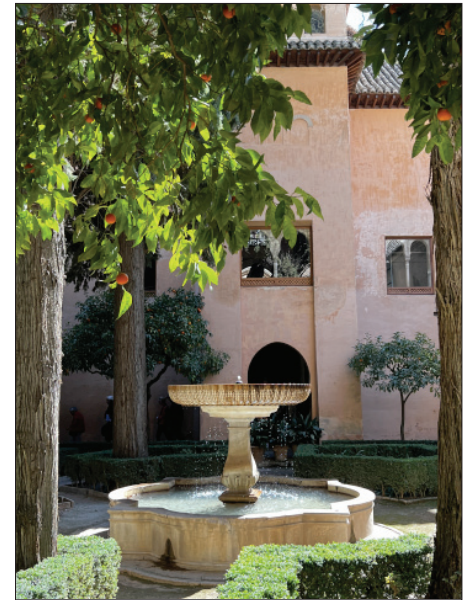
"Patio de la Acequia" in Generalife.

lies on the upper side of the palace complex. Here it was possible to relax while standing in the immediate vicinity of the seat of government. The magnificent complex is a well-preserved example of a medieval Spanish-Muslim garden in Andalusia; it consists of the *Patio de la Acequia* (Courtyard of the Water Canal) with a long rectangular water basin, framed by flower beds, fountains, colonnades and pavilions, and the *Jardín de la Sultana* (Garden of the Sultana). Seclusion, silence and design are intended to create the impression of an anticipated paradise. The palace and the terraced gardens have a charming, unforgettable effect on the viewer.

Water supply system and vegetation

Constant supply of water was the essential basis for life in the palace and for the maintenance of the fountains and the ornamental, fruit and vegetable gardens. The water was taken through an irrigation ditch from the River Darro six kilometres upstream, led to the Generalife and the Alhambra and was then collected in water depots. With a bucket wheel and branched irrigation ditches, it was possible to irrigate a larger area. The water reached the Alhambra via an aqueduct. Residual water and waste water were fed back into the river. The Moors also used an effective irrigation system for agriculture, the principle of which is still used in the region today.

To this day, a wide variety of flowers and plants such as gerbera, marigold, wisteria, winter hydrangea, snowball, climbing rose, sea lavender, rosemary, trumpet honeysuckle, tulip, persimmon and paradise trees, magnolia, horse chest-



*"Patio de Lindaraja" with
marble fountain and orange-trees*

nut and others thrive here alongside orange, bitter orange, pomegranate and other fruit trees.

The Alhambra inspired numerous writers. It's an impressive example of the splendour of Islamic culture in Moorish Spain, which can be a model for peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment of Islam, Christianity and Judaism (or other religions and cultures). Peaceful coexistence and the prosperity of an epoch can be achieved where cultures neither separate themselves from each other nor fight each other, but engage in a lively exchange. •

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