

Current Concerns

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Being no longer just an object of history Africa, the war in Ukraine and the omens of a new world order

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

On 16 and 17 June 2023, five African heads of state and government as well as senior diplomatic representatives from two other African countries – with harassment at the stopover in Warsaw – first visited Kiev to talk to Ukrainian President Zelensky, and then St. Petersburg to talk to Russian President Putin on the sidelines of the *St. Petersburg International Economic Forum*. The coverage of this trip and these talks in German-language media was – with exceptions – scant. In the commentaries on the African politicians' concerns, criticism predominated – not least because higher goals than those actually sought by the African leaders were alleged. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was criticised in various media reports for his country's good relations with Russia and was also accused of profiling. Once again, there was no lack of polemical sideswipes against the Russian president.

The efforts of the African politicians and diplomats were most appreciated by the Catholic press.¹ However, an advance commentary in the Berlin "Tagesspiegel" of 8 June deserved attention. It was entitled: "African peace initiative for Ukraine: A foretaste of the new world order", reading: "The peace initiative also deserves attention regardless of its outcome. For it demonstrates what has been ignored in this country much too long: For a while now, African states have been striving for increased international influence, self-confident and aware of their power. It is an expression of a comprehensive change in world politics. The countries of the South no longer want to be perceived merely as aid recipients or pawns of the big international players. They demand respect. For they know about their growing importance as trading partners or strategic allies. But for them, to get recognition and real ap-

preciation is still happening much too rarely in Germany and Europe." And further: "Politics here will have to adjust to the fact that Africa is gaining in importance – and wants to have a say when it comes to the international order, to the distribution of power in the world. And about war and peace. The current mediation efforts for Ukraine are only a foretaste of this."

But this is still an exception in the German-speaking mainstream.

The initiative of the African leaders and their trip to Kiev and St. Petersburg is the first attempt by African states to contribute to peace in a non-African conflict that has turned belligerent. From all that can be gleaned from the accessible articles and documents, the African leaders and diplomats have proceeded prudently, focusing first on establishing a direct thread of dialogue and listening to

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Peace Mission: better late than never

by Siyavuya Mzantsi*



Siyavuya Mzantsi
(picture ma)

The proverb "better late than never" finds true meaning from the recent peace mission undertaken by some African leaders in Ukraine and Russia.

While it took them months to get firsthand knowledge of the conflict, the leaders led by President Cyril Ramaphosa are

to be commended for making it their business to visit and hear both sides.

Put aside for one second the real politics that may have been at play in influencing the decision to finally visit, the impact of the conflict – especially in Africa – cannot be overstated.

It's hard arguing against those describing the peace mission as historic for the continent, which has been largely seen as a bystander in global issues.

It becomes disheartening that many, including in the media space, have sought to downplay the importance of this exercise.

Of course, the expectation could not have been that the leaders would be able to bring the conflict to an end immediately. That would have been wishful thinking. Even those countries before them tried and failed.

Instead, theirs was to establish from the two countries what could be done towards achieving peace.

Their draft framework document proposing a series of "confidence-building measures" stated clearly that the mission's objective was "to promote the importance

of peace and to encourage the parties to agree to a diplomacy-led process of negotiations".

If they had it their way, they would have been satisfied with seeing troops being pulled back, removal of tactical nuclear weapons from Belarus, suspension of implementation of an *International Criminal Court* arrest warrant targeting (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and sanctions relief.

What has become apparent from this visit is that no visit by any head of state will bring this conflict to an end unless the two countries themselves are ready to do so. When that happens, there will be no real winners.

While the efforts by Senegalese President Macky Sall and Ramaphosa, who headed the delegation including leaders from Zambia, the Comoros and Egypt's prime minister may have appeared to be in vain now, they should take pride in adding African voices in this global crisis. •

Source: <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/peace-mission-better-late-than-never-0d733e8d-fc4b-48f0-bf91-2cdaa37a388b> of 19 June 2023

* Siyavuya Mzantsi is a South African journalist and editor of the "Cape Times" newspaper. He received his first international journalism award in 2020 at the age of 26 (see <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/capetimes-editor-siyavuya-mzantsi-wins-big-at-in-ma-30-under-30-awards-a8824a32-e80f-4c4c-bee2-6776fbc903bc>).

"Being no longer ..."

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the Ukrainian and Russian interlocutors to get a direct picture of what both sides are putting forward. They have also contributed their own thoughts – but without big power or know-it-all attitude or claims to exclusive representation. There is talk of a "10-point plan", which, however, is not yet official.²

Of course, Africa also has its own interest in an end to the conflict. "This conflict is having a negative impact on Africa," the President of South Africa is quoted as saying. "The path to peace" is "very hard",

but it is important to end this conflict rather sooner than later, "by negotiations and diplomatic means".

The meeting in Kiev ended with a joint press conference. This, however, showed mainly that the Ukrainian president is currently not prepared to negotiate and is instead setting conditions that are unacceptable to Russia. Moreover, Zelensky stated that he did not understand what the African delegation's visit to Putin was supposed to achieve.

The Russian president has not made any public statements after the meeting with the African dialog partners. But there

is a statement by Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* and a detailed report by the Russian news agency *TASS*.

For a long time, I considered which voices were suitable to be documented here and decided on the report of the Russian news agency *TASS* (because of its comprehensiveness and in order to document the Russian position, which is largely ignored here in the West) and a commentary by a young journalist from South Africa. •

¹ cf. *kathpress.at* of 16 June 2023 and in advance *Vatican News* of 14 June 2023

² cf. the 10 points in *dailymaverick.co.za* of 18 June 2023

Key points of Vladimir Putin's meeting with African peace mission

Russia is ready to review any proposals from African states on the Ukrainian settlement, Russian President *Vladimir Putin* said, receiving the representatives of seven African states, who arrived to present their peace initiative on Ukraine. Earlier, the African delegation discussed the initiative with Ukrainian President *Vladimir Zelensky* in Kiev.

During the talks with Putin, South African President *Cyril Ramaphosa* presented the 10 main points of the peace plan, which include de-escalation of the conflict on both sides, diplomatic negotiations, ensuring sovereignty of states in accordance with the UN Charter, exchange of captives, post-war reconstruction and others. In response, Putin pointed out that Ukraine has withdrawn from the talks with Russia on its own initiative, although a peace agreement has been preliminarily signed in Istanbul. In addition, Russia was entitled to recognise the independence of DPR [Donetsk] and LPR [Luhansk] under the UN Charter, Putin noted.

The talks lasted for over 3 hours, and were subsequently commented upon by Russian Foreign Minister *Sergey Lavrov*.

Here are the key points from Putin's conversation with the African leaders.

Africa's balanced attitude

The African mission included President of Zambia *Hakainde Hichilema*, President of the Comoros *Azali Assoumani* (who also currently chairs the African Union), President of Senegal *Macky Sall*, President of South Africa *Cyril Ramaphosa*, Prime Minister of Egypt *Mostafa Madbouly* and Special Representatives of Presidents of the Republic of the Congo and Uganda *Florian Nsiba* and *Ruhakana Rugunda*.

In the beginning of the negotiations, Putin underscored that the comprehensive development of ties with African states is a priority of Russia's foreign policy.

"We consistently advocate further strengthening of the traditionally friendly relations with African states and the main



Heads of delegations of African states meet with representatives of the Russian state in St. Petersburg on 17 June 2023. (picture Pavel Bednyakov, RIA Novosti)

regional association – the African Union – based on principles of equality, mutual respect and non-intervention in internal affairs," Putin said.

He added that Russia is open to a constructive dialogue with everyone who desires peace based on principles of justice equity and consideration of legitimate interests of all sides, noting that Russia values the balanced attitude of African countries to the situation in Ukraine and their desire to settle the crisis.

The 10 peace plan points

"We have arrived to listen to you and, through you, to listen to the voice of the Russian people. We would like to motivate you to enter negotiations with Ukraine in order to end this complex problem," Azali Assoumani noted. Macky Sall underscored that Africa wants peace between Russia and Ukraine, which is only possible based on dialogue and compromise.

Meanwhile, Cyril Ramaphosa stated that the time has come to end the con-

flict in Ukraine. Noting that Africa would like to become a mediator in the search for peace, he presented the plan, which focuses on the 10 main points for its achievement. The plan calls to listen to the positions of both countries; to begin the de-escalation on both sides; to ensure the sovereignty of states and peoples in accordance with the UN Charter; to achieve guarantees of security for all countries; to ensure transportation of both countries' grain and fertiliser; humanitarian support to people affected by the war; settlement of the issue of exchange of prisoners and repatriation of children; post-war reconstruction and aid to the people affected by the war; closer cooperation with African states.

Russia's right to recognise Donbass

The Russian President reacted to the presented peace plan, providing explanations of Russia's position on some of them.

“We know what the war is about ...”

During a recent interview with a BBC reporter former South African minister of sport and current secretary-general of the African National Congress Fikile Mbalula said he welcomed good relations with Vladimir Putin, much to the reporter's dismay. When reminded that Putin is an accused war criminal, Mbalula pointed out that former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was responsible for millions of deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet he was not threatened with arrest.

BBC Reporter: Africa is a treaty member of the international criminal court. If Putin comes here in August as planned your government will be obliged to arrest him. As head of the ANC, do you believe your government should and indeed will arrest [him]?

Fikile Mbalula: If it was according to the ANC we will want President Putin to be here even tomorrow. [...]

You will welcome Vladimir Putin? Here, right now? A man who is being investigated for war crimes by the International Criminal Court?

We will welcome him to come here as part and person of BRICS. But we know that we are constrained by the ICC in terms of doing that. Putin is a head of state – do you think that a head of state can just be arrested anywhere? How many crimes have your country committed in Iraq? How many crimes have everyone else who so vocal today committed in Iraq and Afghanistan? Have you arrested them?

You know the impact, but these standard views ...

You are making a lot of noise about Putin instead of working for peace between Ukraine and Russia and you failed to resolve the war. Where are the weapons of mass destruction? Tony Blair went to Iraq and claimed that there are weapons of mass destruction. Do they see an-

ybody standing against that in the United Kingdom and Britain? More than... millions of people have died in Iraq and Afghanistan and there are no weapons of mass destruction. We know what the war is about...

Mr Secretary General ...

... between Russia and Ukraine. We want peace. That's what is important. So that wealth can thrive. And organs and institutions of the world that institute World Peace must not be conspicuous by their silence in deciding decisively ...

[Distracting from the topic] We don't have much time left... I want to bring it back to domestic South African politics before we end.

** Former South African minister of sport and current secretary-general of the African National Congress*

Source: The Jimmy Dore Show <https://youtu.be/K8q0hja9o0> of 25 May 2023 (min. 1:15–3:17)

“Key points of Vladimir Putin's ...”

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He pointed out that Russia supported the people of Donbass after the “bloody coup” in Ukraine, and had been trying to settle the situation peacefully for a long time.

“It was the Kiev regime who started this war in 2014, and we were entitled to provide [people of Donbass – TASS] with aid, in accordance with the UN Charter Article 51, citing the clause regarding self-defense,” Putin underscored.

The preliminarily signed peace treaty

Putin pointed out that the Russian side has never rejected negotiations with Ukraine. It was Ukraine that declared its unwillingness, which was cemented by Zelensky's decree.

Putin also pointed out that the Ukrainian authorities have preliminarily signed the draft agreement with Moscow, prepared in March, 2022 in Istanbul; however, after Russian forces were withdrawn, Ukraine disregarded the document. The President presented the document, which includes 18 articles and appendixes, to the African leaders. The document included clauses on neutrality and guarantees of security.

“It also touches upon armed forces and other things. It was all written down – up to numbers of vehicles and personnel,” Putin disclosed.

Later, Kremlin Spokesman *Dmitry Peskov* told reporters that the African leaders were interested to learn about the draft agreement on Ukraine.

Relocation of children

The Russian authorities have relocated children from the conflict area legally and

never opposed their reconciliation with facilities, the head of state underscored.

“We were relocating them from the conflict area, saving their lives and health – this is what was happening. No one had any intention to separate any children from their parents. Entire orphanages were relocated totally legally, because orphanage heads were their legal representatives,” he said. Putin added that Russian authorities “have never opposed reconciliation of children with their families, if, of course, their relatives show up.”

Exchange of captives

The Russian president noted that Moscow cooperates with Kiev on exchange of POWs: “A lot is being done for that, both by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and our other partners and friends. And we are ready to support this process.”

Deception instead of grain deal

Putin called the fact that food does not go to African countries in need under the grain deal a deception: “These neo-colonial authorities – European, and, in essence, American ones – once again deceived the international community and African countries in need.”

According to Putin, about 31.7 million tons of agricultural products have already been exported from Ukrainian ports under the grain initiative, but only 3.1% of this volume went to developing countries.

The president stated that grain shipments from Ukraine do not solve the hunger problem.

“The crisis on the global food market is not at all a consequence of the special military operation in Ukraine; it started to emerge long before the situation in Ukraine. I emerged because Western states

– both the US and European states – engaged in economically unjustified emission in order to solve its problems, connected to the coronavirus pandemic,” Putin noted.

Understanding of true reasons

After the meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who was also present there, disclosed that the African peace initiative is not cemented on paper yet, but the African leaders displayed understanding of “true, deep reasons behind the current events” and comprehend that the exit from this situation lies in development of special specific actions on elimination of these reasons.

“First of all, [the African states] pointed out the well-known 12 points of the Chinese position, which was presented several months earlier, and they highlighted the parts [...] that are close to them and that stipulate that there must be no double standards, that all principles of the UN Charter [...] are respected and implemented, that no unilateral sanctions take place, that no one must try to ensure own security at the expense of security of others, that security remains indivisible on the global scale,” the Foreign Minister said, underscoring that Russia supports such principal approaches.

According to Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov, Putin and the African representatives are ready for further contacts, although not all clauses of the peace initiative correlate with Russia's position. •

¹ The Russian president is most likely referring here to a decree issued by the Ukrainian president at the beginning of October 2022, which prohibits Ukrainians from negotiating peace with Russia. (Editor's note)

Source: <https://tass.com/politics/1634521> of 18 June 2023

Letter to  the Editor

Brutal US Imperialism

Thank you for the insightful and empathetic review of the book "An Honourable Departure" by *Eric Vuillard* in *Current Concerns* No 13 of 20 June. *Silvia Nogradi* did an excellent job of portraying the dense atmosphere that the author manages to create through the montage of the individual scenes and the analysis of the characters of the personalities described. She has focused her review on the main aspect of the book, the Indochina war.

The book review inspired me to take the book, which I had read when it was published in 2022, off the shelf again. On the second reading, it became even more impressive, and I was struck by depictions that are definitely still of interest to readers interested in history. For example, the terrifying activities of the brothers *Allan* and *John Foster Dulles*, which spanned Indochina, Latin America, Africa and Europe and from whose effects many people still suffer today.

The starting point is the visit of John Foster Dulles, the American Secretary of State, to Paris on 21 April 1954; at a time, therefore, when the French army in Vietnam was approaching its demise. Dulles offers the completely stunned French Foreign Minister *Bidault*: "And if I gave you two?" [...] "Two what?" [...] "Two atomic bombs ..." (p. 94f) (to "save" Dien Bien Phu). *Bidault*, who has already experienced quite a lot in the Résistance, can hardly keep himself upright.

To understand the personalities, *Vuillard* now recounts their respective fami-

ly backgrounds. The Dulles brothers' connections: John Foster is the brother of CIA Director Allan Dulles, also the grandson and nephew of the 32nd and 42nd US Secretaries of State, after whom one of Washington's airports – "Washington-Dulles" – is named. *Bidault*, who is more of a social climber whose father was an insurance agent, has only small limited Catholic landowners in his baggage. But Dulles is a regular multinational, with not only lots of paper in his wake, but also numerous corpses.

With his brother, he overthrew Iranian Prime Minister *Mossadegh* because he had the idea of nationalising oil production in Iran. Allan Dulles made a million dollars loose so that the Anglo-Persian oil company would not miss out on the deal, which would also make any form of democratic reform in Iran impossible. Verbatim quote of the order for this action: "Target – Prime Minister *Mossadegh* and his government. Objectives – to effect by legal or almost-legal methods his overthrow and replacement by a pro-Western government under the authority of the Shah." (S. 96)

At the same time that he is in Paris, an operation is taking place in Guatemala under his responsibility to prevent President *Guzman's* land reform, as it threatens the interests of the American *United Fruit Company*, which is represented by one of the largest law firms: that of the Dulles brothers, who are also shareholders in the *United Fruit Company*. The coun-

try is handed over to a military junta, falls into a long period of violence with hundreds of thousands of deaths.

Seven years later, on 17 January 1961, Dulles is in Katanga, in the Congo. This is followed by a description of the assassination of *Patrice Lumumba*. The chapter is also distinguished by *Vuillard's* approach, so brilliantly described by *Silvia Nogradi*. Biographical aspects of *Lumumba's* personality, situation of the people in the cobalt and copper mines with all their inhumanity and environmental contamination.

And then the torture and murder of *Lumumba* and his companions according to a tried and tested pattern of the CIA. *Christopher Simpson* writes about this in his book "Blowback: America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War", (Collier Books, 1988): "The CIA team [...] was the same Directorate of Scientific Research that developed the novel poisons used in the assassination attempts on *Fidel Castro* and *Patrice Lumumba*." (p. 185)

Who can remember the Western propaganda against *Lumumba*? He was sold to us as the incarnate.

Eric Vuillard's book is a monument to him, a late tribute in historical and human perspective. He succeeds in depicting *Lumumba's* shooting (after brutal torture) in such a way that the abused man stands before us in all his dignity, with his just cause. (p. 97-103)

Rita Müller-Hill, Cologne

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How I lost faith in established media

by Helmut Scheben*



Helmut Scheben
(picture ma)

Mass media are often unreliable, but hardly anyone has time to check the news. If news reports later turn out to be false, they are usually already burned into the hard drive of collective memory as “historical truth”.

After the Gulf War of 1991, it was forbidden for the media in the US to show pictures of the coffins of American soldiers killed in combat. This prohibition was lifted only in February 2009. Filming dead or wounded US soldiers was also banned, and the ban was enforced with extreme severity, especially during the Iraq war, as cameramen reported. Once, when I was looking for such footage in the vast archives of Swiss television, I found a single sequence that lasted about three seconds. An American soldier was trying to climb out of a burning tank.

Three seconds out of thousands of videos that had been shot during this war. Three seconds that – as was clearly recognisable – were due to a mistake by an editor who had set an IN or OUT incorrectly, so that footage became visible that should have fallen victim to censorship. Scenes of defeat have not been shown since Vietnam. So there are no more defeats, because it is TV news compressed into two and a half minutes that makes history in our minds.

In his book *Liberty and the News*, the US journalist and media theorist Walter Lippmann stated in 1920:

“The news columns are common carriers. When those who control them arrogate to themselves the right to determine by their own consciences what shall be reported and for what purpose, democracy is unworkable.” (Lippmann. Liberty and the News. 1920. Reprint, Chicago: BN Publishing, 2007, p. 5.)

A few years ago, I could not have imagined that my morning walk to the mailbox to get the newspapers would be accompa-

“However, the real problems of most people, the war in Ukraine, the escalating conflict between the US and China, i.e., events and processes that are currently changing the lives of millions of taxpayers and will burden future generations (armament, inflation, energy policy, sanctions policy, the asylum system, etc.), are presented in our leading media with such a reduced perspective that it leaves me stunned. The denial of reality is occurring with a matter-of-factness bordering on rabid.”

nied by a quiet counterpoint of reluctance and boredom. I like to have paper in my hand with my morning coffee instead of looking at a screen. Reading, meanwhile, takes less and less time each year. This is partly because many topics no longer interest me -- for example, the eternal soap opera of British royals, the daily and obligatory LGBTQ issues, the *Me-Too* sensitivity of groupies at rock concerts, or parliamentary enquiries to find out why banks are going to the wall in the financial casino.

However, the real problems of most people, the war in Ukraine, the escalating conflict between the US and China, i.e., events and processes that are currently changing the lives of millions of taxpayers and will burden future generations (armament, inflation, energy policy, sanctions policy, the asylum system, etc.), are presented in our leading media with such a reduced perspective that it leaves me stunned. The denial of reality is occurring with a matter-of-factness bordering on rabid.

Out of 100 articles, there are not five from the perspective of the other warring party

I took the trouble, as an example, to check the Zurich “Tagesanzeiger”, to which I subscribe, for one-sidedness. From Russia’s attack in Ukraine in February 2022 to the end of the year, I looked at around one hundred articles that dealt directly with the Ukraine war. By the hundredth report, I was exhausted by the same thing over and over again. Almost all of them describe the suffering and heroism of western Ukraine in the Russian war of aggression and – in garish colours – Russia’s crimes.

Experts in weapons systems and geostrategy repeat incessantly why Russia must be defeated, and investigative journalists know nothing more than hunting

for any Russians whose assets could still be expropriated.

Out of a hundred articles, I did not find five that reported what was happening on the other side of the front. The suffering of the pro-Russian Ukrainians under the rocket attacks and artillery fire of the western Ukrainians is not worth a mention. The people themselves do not seem to exist there for our major media. They report exclusively from the perspective of NATO, i. e., from the perspective of an arms lobby that functions worldwide as a crowbar for the US as a controlling power.

The reports’ one-sidedness originates from the one-sidedness of the sources. Besides the inevitable British intelligence, the daily sources of our “notification” are: President Zelensky and his entourage in Kiev, as well as his friends in Brussels, London, and Washington, and their associated experts and NATO think tanks. The Russians appear mainly as criminals denying their crimes.

And when a dam bursts, primarily flooding Russian defence positions and a territory occupied by Russia, all the German talk shows, but also the *Swiss radio* magazine *Echo der Zeit*, immediately find experts who know that it was the Russians who destroyed the dam. Just as it is the Russians who are shelling themselves in the nuclear power plant they occupy. “Tis the times’ plague, when madmen lead the blind”, Shakespeare says in *King Lear*.

In the years leading up to the Russian attack, OECD observers recorded daily artillery detonations, and finally, just prior to the Russian intervention in February 2022, hundreds of explosions per day. Well more than ten thousand people died in the fighting in eastern Ukraine between 2014 and 2022.¹ So, this war did not start in February 2022.

Did our newspapers report on it? They swept it under the carpet. They only see

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* Helmut Scheben *1947 in Koblenz, Germany) studied Romance languages and literature in Mainz, Bonn, Salamanca and Lima. In 1980 he received his doctorate from the University of Bonn. From 1980 to 1985 he worked as a press agency reporter and correspondent for print media in Mexico and Central America. From 1986 he was editor of the weekly newspaper *WoZ* in Zurich, and from 1993 to 2012 editor and reporter for *Swiss television SRF*, including 16 years on the *Tagesschau*.

“How I lost faith ...”

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what they already know. That means: They always already know what they will see. So that’s what I can read in the newspapers every morning. And therefore what I no longer have to read because I already know what it is before I open the newspaper.

“Do not be deceived by those who are your own”

In autumn 1983, more than a million people demonstrated all over the Federal Republic of Germany against the deployment of nuclear bombs in Germany. In several countries that were members of NATO, a majority of people opposed further nuclear armament, because it was clear that the much-invoked “Mutual assured destruction” had long been guaranteed by the British and French A-bombs. During the debate in the Bundestag, opposition leader *Willy Brandt* said that his party, the Social Democrats, was being bombarded with letters of protest:

“These are Germans West and Germans East, these are Europeans and Americans, these are mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, workers and entrepreneurs, artists and soldiers, housewives, pensioners, and there are scientists and engineers of all academic degrees. I wonder who it is good for when the commitment and assembled expertise of these fellow citizens is swept into the trash with all the arrogance of power.”

The Free Democratic-Christian Democratic majority of the German parliament chose the trash bin for the voice of the people and decided to deploy medium-range nuclear missiles on German soil. Although these were abolished within the framework of a later disarmament agreement [INF-Treaty, 1987; editor’s note], US nuclear warheads are still stored at Büchel airbase in the Eifel region. German air force pilots train its use as part of so-called “nuclear sharing”². It is no military secret that Russia has always been and still is the main target.

In the same year, 1983, *Christa Wolf*, the East German novelist and essayist published the book *Kassandra*, a text about a seer who, before her death, reflects on the downfall of her homeland, *Troy*:

“You can know when war begins, but when does the pre-war begin? If there were rules, they’d have to be passed on. In clay, in stone, handed down. What would it say? There would, among other phrases: Do not be deceived by those who are your own.”

I was deceived by my own, but it took me a long time to realise it. The “*Süddeutsche Zeitung*”, the “*Frankfurter Rundschau*”, the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, *Der Spiegel*, and other papers – these were my leading media when I was learning journalism. The big media, both the licence-fee-financed ones and those of the private corporations, have failed miserably in all the wars I was able to observe. Their job would have been to question the actions of governments, but in many cases they have proved to be loudspeakers of government propaganda and warmongers in unjustified and senseless wars.

The Balkan wars opened Pandora’s box

My first big professional crisis, if I remember correctly, came during the Balkan wars. I couldn’t sleep at night when I realised that people were lying to beat the band. Tuzla was my key experience at the time. The city in Bosnia had been defined as a protection zone in 1993; *Blue Helmets* were stationed there. The Bosnian Muslim population was to be protected from Serbian attacks. The Serbian artillery, though, fired on the city, and these attacks were a daily news item on the radio for months. Western media brimmed over with indignation at the shelling of the “Safe Area”.

I was flabbergasted when in 1995 *Blue Helmet* soldiers told me: “The Serbs sometimes shoot in there, but the artillery in Tuzla also shoots out every night at the surrounding Serbian village”. Tuzla was supplied with weapons by the US in the dead of night. There were restricted military areas where UN units were denied access. The same government in Washington that outwardly played the role of the “honest broker” to achieve an end to the war, secretly organised so-called “black flights” to arm the Bosnian military. When a Norwegian *Blue Helmet* officer noticed and publicised this in 1995, he was ordered to remain silent and was transferred “for disciplinary reasons”. The British broadcaster *ITN/Channel 4* had made a report about the matter, which I adopted for a magazine of the *Swiss TV and Radio* programme *Switzerland 4*. My attempts to draw the attention of Swiss media to the revelations met with indifference. In Bosnia, as in Kosovo, NATO determined what could and could not be known. *Carla Del Ponte*, chief prosecutor in The Hague, later complained that she had beat her head against a stone wall with her request for inspection into NATO’s secret operations.

PR agencies provide the arguments for war and death

It was only much later that I learned that leading PR agencies in the US at the

time were feeding the press scare stories about Serbian concentration camps and Holocaust plans, which a gigantic media apparatus chased around the world in a matter of seconds. The political scientists *Jörg Becker* and *Mira Beham*, the Republic of Serbia’s ambassador to the OSCE and the UN, have found evidence of well more than a hundred such PR contracts in their study, *Operation Balkans: Advertising War and Death*, in US archives. The mission was to portray the Serbs as perpetrators and the others as victims. *James Harff*, head of the PR agency *Ruder Finn*, described his job as follows:

“Our craft is to spread news, to get it into circulation as quickly as possible. [...] Speed is crucial. Because we know very well that the first news is important. A demerit no longer has any effect.” (*Mira Beham: Kriegstrollern: Medien, Krieg und Politik. 1996. p. 172 ff*) (*War Drums. Media, War and Politics.*)

Harff showed a certain professional pride to Jacques Merlino, a deputy editor-in-chief of the French public national television channel *France 2*, when he candidly described how his agency “with a great bluff” did its job by getting three powerful US Jewish lobby organisations to warn of an impending holocaust in the Balkans in advertisements in The “*New York Times*”:

“With one gambit we were able to simplify it and present it as a story of the good guys and the bad guys. [...] And we won, because we chose the right target, the Jewish audience. Immediately there was a noticeable change in the use of language in the media, accompanied by the use of such terms that had a strong emotional charge, such as ethnic cleansing, concentration camps and so on, all evoking a comparison with Nazi Germany, gas chambers and Auschwitz. The emotional charge was so powerful that no one dared to contradict it.”

The German foreign minister, *Joschka Fischer*, consequently toured Europe with the slogan “Never again Auschwitz”, and German Defence Minister *Rudolf Scharping* told the people that he knew that the Serbs “play football with the cut-off heads of their enemies”. A photo that went around the world as proof of Serbian atrocities and as an argument for the NATO war of aggression showed a horribly emaciated man with a naked torso behind barbed wire. It was reminiscent of the photos of German extermination camps in 1945. The picture

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was – as was later proven – a fake. The refugee centre in question, Trnopolje, was not cordoned off by a barbed wire fence at the time, nor were there half-starved people.

Nothing has changed. The war generates the eternally same propaganda means. In 2022, a “writer from East Germany” living in Ukraine named Christoph Brumme wrote a regular “diary” in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung am Sonntag* in which he predicted, among other things, that the Russians would set up concentration camps in Ukraine and that Putin was a second Hitler. He, Putin, was probably seriously ill and would stage his suicide with a nuclear bomb. And so on in this vein.

The category of “embedded journalists” had already emerged during the 1991 Gulf War, and there is hardly a term that better describes how this profession can degenerate into a kind of prostitution. The US journalist John R. MacArthur has shown in his study *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War* how media were kept on a short leash and how the public was deceived.

The symbiosis of the big media and their governments became completely self-evident after the attack of 9/11, which was defined as an attack by a hostile power and in this logic first Afghanistan, then Iraq were attacked. A “war on terror” was launched worldwide, and since one was cleaning up, as an adjunct “oppressed peoples were liberated” in Libya and Syria as well. The results can be seen in all these countries. The late Norman Cousins, the renowned science journalist and peace activist, had already identified and described the ideological mission of the US superpower before the Cold War ended: He titled his book, *The Pathology of Power* (W.W. Norton, 1987).

A fictional rape story in Libya

It is incomprehensible to me how journalists, who have been lied to so many times by governments, continue to spread the policy prescriptions from above as if they were the tablets of the Ten Commandments. In June 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in front of running cameras that she now had proof that Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi was using “systematic rape” as a strategy. At the time, civil war was raging in Libya.

The Libyan army tried to put down an uprising that escalated in the wake of the so-called “Arab Spring” since February 2011. The US and its NATO allies had been bombing the country since March 2011, according to the official argument to help the Libyan people oppressed by

Gaddafi and “enforce a no-fly zone”. A Libyan woman named *Eman-al Obeidi* was considered to be the living proof of the allegations of rape. The woman had gained access to the luxury hotel *Rixos Al Nasr* in Tripoli on 26 March 2011. Hotel staff and security guards tried to prevent her from contacting the journalists who were sitting there having breakfast. The woman screamed that she had been kidnapped and raped by Gaddafi’s militiamen at a checkpoint three days earlier.

The Libyan government spokesperson, *Musa Ibrahim*, later explained that Ms Obeidi had initially been thought to be alcoholic and mentally disturbed. Then it was established that her statements were credible. The case was in the hands of the judiciary. It was a case of ordinary criminality and not a political crime. Ms Obeidi was interviewed by *CNN* and numerous other media. She figured as proof of the wickedness of the Libyan head of state. It hardly seemed worth mentioning to major media that Libyan doctors had attended to the woman, had confirmed the rape, and that the Libyan police had arrested suspects shortly afterwards.

At an *Amnesty International* office in Zurich in 2011, I asked what was true about the allegations. I was told that Amnesty had been investigating in Libya for several months and had found no confirmation of the allegations of mass rape. The spokesperson of the Libyan organisation “Human Rights Solidarity Libya”, which was close to the insurgents, also told me on the phone: “We have no proof. The only concrete case is that of Ms Obeidi”.

Meanwhile, the crap had hit the fan and the story was rapidly proliferating in Western media. My *Google* search on Sunday, 20 July 2011, showed 21 million results. The chief prosecutor of the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague, *Luis Moreno Ocampo*, provided an exquisite lubricant for the media apparatus by saying that he indeed had “information” about mass rapes. When asked by a journalist what he thought of reports that Gaddafi was having Viagra imported so that his soldiers could rape, the chief prosecutor did not counter: “Leave me alone with such nonsense”. Instead, he said the perfidious sentence that evidence was still being collected: “Yes, we are still collecting evidence”.

The fantasy structure continued to proliferate for weeks. The Swiss newspaper “*Le Matin*” pushed the creative story-telling to the point of a photo illustration of a king-size bed complete with lamp and bedside table: allegedly a room in an underground bunker where, according to the paper, Gaddafi abused his female victims. I have not met a journalist during this time who said he was ashamed that he belonged to this industry by his choice of profession.

**“Atrocity Management”
is as old as war itself**

The demonisation of the enemy is a tried and tested instrument that is as old as war itself.

In his standard work *Bilder des Krieges, Krieg der Bilder* (Images of War, War of Images), the historian *Gerhard Paul* used more than 200 illustrations to show how modern visual media burned war into the collective memory as iconography. According to Paul, reality is lost to the same extent that images are perfected and standardised.

Crimes against children are always effective in the media. This goes from the Kuwaiti “nurse *Najirah*”, who told a human rights committee of the US Congress that she had seen Iraqi soldiers ripping out the tubes of incubator babies, which later turned out to be an invention of the PR agency *Hill & Knowlton*, to the human rights commissioner *Lyudmila Denisova* in Kiev, who lost her job in June 2022 because it had become clear that she had spread lies. These included the claim that she had evidence that Russian soldiers raped young children.

The portrayal of the enemy as a bestial monster seems to be an unavoidable stereotype of war propaganda. In the First World War, the story of German soldiers snatching a baby from a Belgian woman, chopping off its hands and then eating them was an enduring perennial in the French and British press.

When the enemy is a monster that embodies evil itself, wars are easier to justify. In more than forty years of journalistic work, I have found that major media usually disseminate such propaganda narratives uncritically and are only very late or never willing to admit their errors. The “*New York Times*”, which asked for forgiveness from its readers for the misinformation surrounding the Iraq war, is the only exception I know of. In nineteen years of working for *Swiss television SRF*, I have never heard of a programme apologising for false news. With the exception of the *Meteo* programme when the weather forecast was wrong.

In 2011, I brought to the attention of *Amnesty International* Switzerland that there were no television pictures of the destruction caused by the NATO air strikes in Libya. The Libyan government’s television studios had been reduced to rubble and ash in the first wave of attacks. The NATO command centre in Naples was thus able to prevent emotional images of victims pulled from the rubble from being shown on Western TV channels. The problem had gone unnoticed or ignored by major media.

The *Amnesty* spokesperson replied to me at the time that this one-sidedness of portrayal was also of great concern to

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them. In the evening, when I had finished my report for the *Tagesschau*, the daily current-affairs show on German-speaking Swiss public channel, with the editor at the editing suite, the head of the daytime news said during the approval process that this sentence of the *Amnesty* spokesperson had to be taken out of the report. When I asked why, he said: "Otherwise the viewers might think that Gaddafi is not so bad and that he is still in the right".

A new era of censorship has dawned

Corporate media and the licence-fee-financed broadcasters dominate the news market. They all claim to be the Fourth Estate, watching over the powerful, and that is what makes democracy possible. My experience is that they are much more believers in a kind of religious community that sees itself as the axis of good. Anyone who does not want to share their world view is hushed up, defamed or simply banned.

In this sense, governments and their pandering media work efficiently. The twenty-seven countries of the European Union have banned the Russian news channels *RT* and *Sputnik*. In Austria, for example, anyone who broadcasts or receives them pays a fine of up to 50,000 euros. This is how easy it is believed to be to enforce the unification of opinion. Protest or criticism from the major editorial offices of the Fourth Estate? Zero.

While Russian talk shows and Russian social media are discussing this war controversially with astonishing rigour, Western media are trying to impress upon us with obsessive assiduity that in Russia anyone who says anything against this war will be imprisoned. "Ten years in prison for thinking" reads the headline of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", as published 6 June 2023.

In Kiev, opposition media are simply banned. Is it necessary to report on this? Obviously not. This is then dealt with casually, almost as a digressive detour, in a few words: "Since the beginning of the war, Ukrainian broadcasters have been showing community programming" ("Tagesanzeiger", the Swiss national daily newspaper, 28 July 2022). Community programming? That sounds almost like community service.

There is a system of concealment. Nowhere is this more evident than in the silence our leading media keep about the rampant censorship of social media. A few weeks after the E.U. banned Russian channels, *Google* announced it would block all Russia-related media worldwide. As is so often the case with big tech, the pressure reportedly came from its own staff: "Google employees had urged *YouTube* to take additional punitive measures against Russian channels".

Millions of posts disappear from the platform. Investigative journalist *Glenn Greenwald*, who was involved in the Edward Snowden revelations, has pointed to this extreme censorship campaign and the billions of dollars involved on his *Substack* site (20 April 2022):

"It is unsurprising that Silicon Valley monopolies exercise their censorship power in full alignment with the foreign policy interests of the US Government. Many of the key tech monopolies – such as Google and Amazon – routinely seek and obtain highly lucrative contracts with the US security state, including both the CIA and NSA. Their top executives enjoy very close relationships with top Democratic Party officials. And Congressional Democrats have repeatedly hauled tech executives before their various Committees to explicitly threaten them with legal and regulatory reprisals if they do not censor more in accordance with the policy goals and political interests of that party."

Anyone who reads *The Twitter Files*, the release of which began last December, knows how the system works. A discreet intervention by the FBI can cause leading media to put politically sensitive issues on hold until the "danger", in the most prominent case to date an electoral defeat of candidate *Joe Biden*, has been averted.

What shocked me at the time, and still leaves me stunned today, is the witch hunt that is reflexively set in motion by a media mob when a few dare to swim against the tide and question published opinion. Mira Beham, the previously mentioned political scientist, told me that she had been banned from writing in the German newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung" because she dared to argue that the perpetrator-victim scheme would not get us anywhere in the Balkan conflicts and that the matter was more complex. Nowadays, a renowned journalist such as *Patrick Baab* loses his teaching assignment at the University of Kiel if he dares to report from the Donbass "from the wrong side of the front".

Orwell's dystopian vision of "Newspeak" and "truth ministries" is well on its way to becoming reality. We are indeed experiencing a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in this respect, even if the German chancellor meant something else when he used the term.

The term "lying press" does not suit the case

The media scientist *Uwe Krüger* has documented that most of the alpha leaders of established media are members of NATO- and US-supporting institutions. Of course, there is the factor of coercion and conform-

ity, such as the well-known fact that at *Axel Springer Verlag* ("Bild", "Die Welt") every employee has to agree to corporate statutes that demand support for the transatlantic alliance and solidarity with the US.

Nevertheless, one should be careful with the term of abuse "lying press". The matter is infinitely more complicated. For one thing, as far as news formats are concerned, there is a system based on foreshortening and excessive speed. The philosopher *Paul Virilio* spoke of an "industry of forgetting" that incessantly fills up with new news what was just reported. A news apparatus that produces highly chopped-up fragments of events cannot provide context and background, even if well-meaning journalists wanted to do so.

And they want it. I have hardly met any media people in my whole life who wanted to falsify or report dishonestly. People don't lie, they are mostly convinced of what they say and write.

In their entire personal history, in their education and in their social contacts, they are shaped and integrated into the worldview of their environment. There is this "huge chunk of truth" that the Israeli historian *Shlomo Sand* has called "implanted memory":

"We are all born into a universe of discourse fields shaped by the ideological power struggles of previous generations. Even before the historian can acquire the tools for critical questioning, all the history, politics and Bible lessons at school, the national holidays, commemorative days, public ceremonies, street names, memorials, television series and other spheres of memory shape his imaginary world. There is a huge chunk of 'truth' in his head that he cannot simply bypass (Shlomo Sand: The Invention of the Jewish People. Propyläen, 2010 p. 40. Translated from the German by Current Concerns)."

The problem of an industry that is supposed to serve the daily search for truth under the name of journalism is familiar to every conjurer and prestidigitator: Perception is not determined by actual events, but by expectations. By "a huge chunk of truth".

¹ The OSCE counted 14,000 dead in the 2014–2022 period, 80 pct of them Eastern Ukrainians (editor's note)

² Nuclear sharing is a concept in NATO's policy of nuclear deterrence, which allows member countries without nuclear weapons of their own to participate in the planning for the use of nuclear weapons by NATO. (editor's note)

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Americanised Europe – a reoffender

by Rafael Poch-de-Feliu*

The war in Ukraine is escalating towards a possible third world war. And this in times of the Anthropocene, of man-made global change that requires a new mentality and intense international integration and cooperation between the great powers to be reversed. We are facing the greatest folly in history, and historically it is a scandal that in Europe, a continent that is a reoffender in this respect, there is still no sign of a popular movement for peace.

Public spirit instead of madness – where is the peace movement?

It should exist. A broad movement that would make it clear, beyond the differences of opinion about responsibilities in this conflict between great powers and intervening countries, that the enemy is war. At the same time, European institutions, regardless of their neoliberal and oligarchic orientation, should remember the public spirit expressed by President *Kennedy* in June 1963, exactly 60 years ago, in the heart of the empire:

“In defending our own vital interests, the nuclear powers must above all avoid such confrontations as would leave an adversary with the choice of either withdrawing humiliated or waging nuclear war. Such a course in the nuclear age would only be evidence of the bankruptcy of our policies or of a collective death wish for the world.”

Instead, it is now no longer the traumatised Baltic states, the mad Poles and the Eastern Europeans in general – with the exception of Hungary – who are the transmission belts of the United States on the continent, but it is the Germans and the French, the northerners, the Belgians and, behind them, the Mediterranean countries who continue to add fuel to this senseless fire. This is not just a “political change” that can be remedied with a new election, but something much more profound. It makes it necessary to question and thor-

“The ‘gringo’ mentality with its imperialist wars sold as struggles for freedom and human rights, against dictatorship, autocracy and even for gender equality (Afghanistan, Iran) has taken hold in Europe. The infantilism of the Hollywood script with a happy ending, moralising Manicheism and journalism that names the bad guys have replaced rational questions about resources and interests, about history, trends of domination and geography that could still be heard amidst the general din in the 1960s.”

oughly review everything that has happened in Europe over the last 30 years.

Clarification is needed: what has happened in Europe in the last 30 years?

This examination must of course include the blind disorientation of the entire “right-wing left”, which supports the supply of arms to Ukraine. That this is the official position of *Yolanda Díaz*¹ may be a marginal note in the European context – given the allegiance of our foreign policy to Brussels – but it is not in Germany, a country that plays a central role in determining the path to be taken. There, the foreign policy line is not set by the timid Chancellor *Scholz*, but by the unspeakable Green Minister *Annalena Baerbock*, who is in favour of “ruining” a nuclear power. And at the level of NATO and its subordinate European Union, it is the Balts and the Poles who carry the most weight when it comes to deliberations and decisions.

European civilisation gave way to the dominance of a US gringo-mentality

What has happened in the last 30 years to bring Europe as a whole to this point? The question remains open, but we should realise that what we knew 60 years ago, at the time of *Kennedy*’s statement, as “European civilisation” – of which American culture was a kind of branch – is now subordinate to “American civilisation”. After decades of “cultural” penetration, it has imposed a new mentality on the old continent, to the extent that it is more dominant and influential than ever before. It is a curious fact that the “cultural” dominance of the United States in Europe has increased enormously, while at the same time the weight of the US itself has decreased in the world.

The “gringo” mentality with its imperialist wars sold as struggles for freedom and human rights, against dictatorship, autocracy and even for gender equality (Af-

ghanistan, Iran) has taken hold in Europe. The infantilism of the Hollywood script with a happy ending, moralising Manicheism and journalism that names the bad guys have replaced rational questions about resources and interests, about history, trends of domination and geography that could still be heard amidst the general din in the 1960s.

A sort of privatisation of the state

The x-ray of this European malaise is complex, but in recent decades, the neo-conservative ideas of the United States that guide Western foreign policy have been adopted in NGOs, media and think tanks that have the gringo stamp engraved in their respective DNA. In general, then, what is evident is not too much but rather too little state, the consequence of a kind of privatisation of states and governments. The result is disempowered authorities and governments that are even more dependent on private economic oligarchies and less able to defend “public” interests, all the more so because they have always been determined by the privileges of those from above.

Nato enlargement: provocation to maintain US hegemony in Europe

The war in Ukraine is the result, on the one hand, of 30 years of NATO provocation and NATO expansion, with the aim, above all, of maintaining the political-military hegemony of the USA in Europe after the end of the Cold War, and, on the other hand, of the illusory desire of the Russian elite to be integrated on an equal footing into Western-dominated capitalism – which they called “civilisation” in the Moscow of the 1990s. The war is developing, as already said, into a kind of third world war. The possibility of direct military intervention by NATO forces and greater Chinese involvement, with possi-

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ble expansion into East Asia, is increasing. It is important to recall the process in order to understand what is coming.

The Kiev government could count on the full support of NATO’s ears and eyes on the ground from the beginning, its military trained and funded by it for 8 years. From February 2022, the assistance took the form of supplying “defensive weapons” to stop “unprovoked Russian aggression”, which was indeed a real, but certainly provoked and induced, attack. To go further would be to “risk a third world war”, President *Biden* said in March. The failure of the initial soft Russian invasion, which the Kremlin described as a “Special Military Operation” aimed at collapsing the Ukrainian regime, led to greater Western intervention in the face of Russia’s apparent weakness and opened the door to the gradual delivery of heavy equipment, tanks, artillery, ammunition, air defence systems, old Soviet-designed aircraft from Eastern countries and, finally, the announced and not-so-old F-16 aircraft.

More than provocation

The economic sanctions against Moscow, which in the words of the grotesque Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* or the French Finance Minister *Bruno Leclerc* constituted a veritable “declaration of war”; the assassinations of people in Russian cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg or Nizhny Novgorod in the best “terrorist” tradition of NATO or against “collaborators”, i. e., pro-Russian Ukrainians, in the occupied territories of Ukraine;

the military incursions into Russian territory by ultra-mercenaries financed by the West with the aim of sparking a civil war in Russia; the attacks on two Russian strategic air bases and even on the Kremlin, all of which would not have been possible without the cooperation or control of Western powers. The tens of billions in arms and financial aid to the Ukrainian state – all of this has proved insufficient to prevent a military defeat of Ukraine, as the failure, at least for the time being, of the delayed Ukrainian counter-offensive shows.

In July 2022, President *Zelensky* announced the goal of an “army of one million men”. It became 700,000 and today it is 400,000. The rest have fled, deserted or been destroyed, while Russia has reorganised – with varying degrees of success – and built up clear numerical, artillery and air superiority while its war industry is in full swing.

Western warmongering – to what end?

With hundreds of Western advisers and soldiers fighting in the ranks of the Ukrainian army, including several thousand Poles, and amid images of German *Leopard* tanks and American *Bradley* tanks burning on the battlefield and reports of *Patriot* defence systems being knocked out by Russian fire, a possible failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive could become another escalating step on the road to crushing Russia: “The possibility of Poland getting even more involved at the national level and the Baltic states following suit, including with troops on the ground,” former NATO secretary-general *Anders Rasmussen*, who speaks of

a “coalition of the willing”, said in June. Should this new phase also fail, the logic of escalation dictates direct and official military intervention by NATO troops, as suggested by the “Air Defender 23” manoeuvre, the largest in NATO history, which recreates such a war from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

The West’s increased military pressure on Russia will not only increase Russia’s own military actions, with the possibility of an extension of the occupation to the Romanian border, which would completely deprive Ukraine of access to the sea. This, if conditions are favourable and the current Kremlin incumbents continue to hold out. At the same time, there could also be greater military-industrial engagement by China with Russia, while a second front in East Asia is being prepared. The spiralling tide of warmongering will continue. •

¹ *Yolanda Díaz* is the Spanish Minister of Labour and Social Economy and the left’s hopeful for the parliamentary elections on 23 July 2023.

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175 Years of the Swiss Federal Constitution

The Confederation's policy of concordance

On the prehistory of the Swiss Confederation

by Dr phil. René Roca, *Forschungsinstitut direkte Demokratie* (www.fidd.ch)

The Swiss Confederation has had a constitution since 1848. Yet the history of this legal document, which is still in force today, dates back much further. It would be almost impossible to imagine the federal state in its current form without this historical prelude.

For Switzerland, the period from 1798 to 1848, i. e., from the Helvetic Republic to the emergence of the federal state, was marked by political upheavals, culminating in the Sonderbund War of 1847. Like the two opposing alliances of 1832 that preceded it – the Siebnerkonkordat grouping of liberal cantons and Sarnerbund union of conservative cantons – the Sonderbund, a defensive alliance formed in 1845, contravened the Federal Treaty of 1815. However, its foundation is understandable in light of the flagrant breaches of the law such as the dissolution of the monasteries in 1841 and the two occasions on which armed radicals marched on the city of Lucerne in 1844/45, not to mention the Diet's failure to act. The Sonderbund (and its stance on the Jesuit issue, for example) played into the hands of certain liberal-radicals who believed that Switzerland could not be transformed without recourse to violence. They therefore waged a propaganda campaign that pushed the conflict ever closer to civil war. For their part, the Sonderbund's supporters managed to isolate themselves by accentuating the conflict's confessional aspects to such an extent that the Protestant conservatives and others who had sympathised with the Sonderbund's political concerns now turned their backs on it or remained neutral.

The Sonderbund's actions remained doomed to failure: the majority of inhabitants in the alliance's cantons were opposed to an offensive campaign being waged beyond cantonal borders, its military leadership was inadequate and there was a lack of coordinated agreement between its members. It is crucial to examine the events leading up to the Sonderbund, and not least the decisive role they played in the emergence of the later federal state. However, this aspect is not usually given sufficient weight. Swiss historian *Oskar Vasella* (1904–1966) explored the period in which the federal state was established in a number of publications, highlighting the role played by the Catholic conservatives. He contends that it is precisely when assessing Catholic conservatism that “greater freedom in histori-



Detail from the commemorative sheet published on the occasion of the introduction of the Federal Constitution of 12 September 1848. Lithograph by C. Studer, Winterthur, printed by J. J. Ulrich, Zurich. Helvetia, enthroned in the centre, is crowned by a Confederate with a laurel wreath and holds the new Federal Constitution. On both sides, instead of the usual allegories, citizens in uniform (militia army) and in civilian clothes are depicted, embodying the sovereign. (picture ZB Zurich)

cal thinking” is needed in order to gain a more truthful picture of the history leading up to the formation of the federal state. In this respect, we will begin by looking at two important historical developments in Switzerland in greater detail: Switzerland's neutrality and the cooperative principle, both of which were constitutive elements of the “policy of concordance”. We will then consider the attempts to revise the Confederation's Federal Treaty during the Regeneration period, before finally discussing the founding fathers' efforts to form a federal state, which were heavily influenced by the will to integrate.

Policy of concordance

There is a vibrant tradition of seeking concordance, or balance, throughout Swiss history, dating back to long before the establishment of the federal state. In this context, it is worth taking a look at the history of Swiss neutrality. Neutrality developed gradually as the Swiss Confederation grew in size from 1291 onwards, with domestic and foreign policy considerations consistently playing an important role. When, for example, Basel joined the confederation of cantons in 1501, this new member was obliged to pledge to “sit still”, in other words remain neutral, and mediate in the event of conflicts between the other cantons. This requirement, designed to achieve peaceful coexistence and constructive interaction, was based on the experience of the *Acht Alten Orte*, the eight

“Old Cantons”. “Sitting still” and mediating, domestic policy measures intended to ensure peaceful coexistence, became more and more important in relation to foreign policy over time, ultimately leading to the first official declaration of neutrality by the Federal Diet in 1674. However, the Confederation remained entangled in numerous alliances, leading to disaccord and power-political interests that repeatedly got in the way of peaceful development. Neither was the mercenary system conducive to a foreign policy based on trust. Nevertheless, Switzerland's declared neutrality increasingly brought about the desired unity, and this multilingual country divided along denominational lines was able to develop relatively independently following its formal recognition by the international community as a sovereign state in the Peace of Westphalia (1648). The Confederation subsequently managed to stay outside the European wars of faith, conquest and succession in the early modern era. The concept of armed neutrality began to take shape during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), when the *Defensionale of Wil* (1647) created the first set of Confederation-wide military regulations. Switzerland developed its own arbitration procedures for peaceful dispute resolution. Initially intended as domestic policy measures, they later also gave rise to protecting power mandates on behalf of other countries.

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It is not possible to discuss the policy of concordance without likewise mentioning Switzerland's cooperative tradition. Numerous areas of society in the Confederation at that time were organised in a wide variety of cooperative forms. Frequent reference was made to the three "selves" – self-help, self-responsibility and self-determination. Many of the problems in the conflicts that kept recurring could normally be resolved peacefully within a cooperative setting, thus strengthening the *bonum commune*. Vasella places particular emphasis here on the Federal Diet, which played an important role in holding the country together in the early modern period: "The establishment and nature of the Federal Diet [are] characteristic of the cooperative spirit and the belief in concordance. [...] It played a decisive role in strengthening the belief in concordance. [...] Its negotiations reflect the constant struggle to reconcile many different interests. It fostered the sense of sharing a common bond like no other institution before it." Following the difficult periods of the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803) and the Mediation (1803–1815), which had nevertheless also generated significant momentum, Switzerland was once more able to develop more independently and to integrate the tradition of concordance, agreement and balance in its policies to a greater extent. It is possible to describe the cantons as "laboratories of liberty" as early as the Restoration period (1815–1830). In due course, this too contributed to the development of democracy at the communal and cantonal level. These processes led to more direct democracy, but they also helped many valuable experiences to be gained and prevented disagreements from degenerating into political violence.

Attempts to revise the Federal Treaty, and the Sonderbund War

At the start of the Regeneration (1830–1848), liberal-radical movements established themselves in eleven cantons in 1830/31 and, in a peaceful revolutionary act, adopted new cantonal constitutions. These constitutions were imbued with the principle of popular sovereignty, the division of power between the political institutions, and a democratic principle that guaranteed regular elections. In addition, the liberal-radical faction was soon pushing for the Federal Treaty to be revised in the spirit of the new cantonal constitutions, based partly on an appeal made by *Kasimir Pfyffer*, an eminent citizen of Lucerne. However, revising the Federal Treaty faced a high political hurdle. As the document did not contain any provisions concerning its own revision, a heated debate erupted in the Diet as to wheth-

er a unanimous vote or a simple majority was required to change it.

The Canton of Thurgau submitted the official petition for revision to the Diet in 1831. The majority of the Diet, specifically 13½ cantons out of 22, agreed in 1832 that such a revision should go ahead. It entrusted a commission chaired by *Galus Jakob Baumgartner* (1797–1869) with the task of drawing up the revised constitution. The draft that emerged and was submitted in 1832 is often referred to as the "Rossi Plan" after Geneva's envoy to the Diet and the commission's rapporteur *Pellegrino Rossi* (1787–1848), or simply as the *Bundesurkunde*, a "deed of federation". The draft comprised 120 articles providing for various fundamental rights and a modern state in federal form. The Federal Diet was to be transformed into a parliament, and there were plans to create a Federal Council with five members, presided over by a Landammann as head of state of the Confederation. Among the economic measures, the free movement of persons and goods was to apply in Switzerland and a single currency was to be introduced. The draft was no doubt too ambitious overall, as considerable changes were made to it when the Diet met in May 1833. Following its approval by ten cantons, Rossi's draft was rejected in a popular referendum in Lucerne, the presiding canton that was also a candidate to become the seat of federal government, in July 1833, thus effectively scuppering the project. The opponents of the Rossi Plan, mainly Catholic and Protestant conservatives, and federalists, had won the day with their insistence that any amendment to the Federal Treaty would require unanimity. A second attempt at revision in 1833–1835 also met with failure. It must be noted that the Rossi Plan as a whole, along with three other non-official draft constitutions, represents an important milestone in the Swiss Confederation's constitutional history. However, although a start had been made, progress was far too slow for the liberal-radicals, who therefore continued to push the revolution forward, even if this meant violating the law on occasion and eventually led to retaliatory measures by the conservatives and to the Sonderbund war.

In the estimation of US historian *Joachim Remak*, the actual Sonderbund War was not really a civil war, but merely a "quarrel between fellow Swiss", especially when compared with the American Civil War. While the role played by *General Dufour* was undeniably important, it should not be exaggerated unnecessarily. Based on past experiences, the mood of the population and the quest for balance and agreement were of greater consequence. It was this mood that the Diet aimed to accommodate in a procla-

mation made shortly before the first acts of war took place. Its words were addressed specifically to the people of the Sonderbund cantons: "The Federal Diet does not seek to oppress members of the Confederation, to destroy cantonal sovereignty, to violently overthrow existing federal institutions, to form a unity government, to violate your rights and freedoms, to threaten your religion." The policy of concordance was consolidated at the end of the short Sonderbund War when the new Federal Constitution was drawn up. Consequently, this process and the subsequent introduction of the Federal Constitution was no "Zero Hour" as argued by *Rolf Holenstein* in his book *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour). That aside, the private protocols and secret reports featured in the book make it a treasure trove of history in relation to the emergence of the Swiss federal state, and one which closes a number of gaps in the research. What is important, however, is the view that the Federal Constitution as a whole and the federal state are the result of a *longue durée*, or an extended period of development. In this context, Vasella states that "the spirit of wanting to understand one another, the determination to get along" has been significant in Swiss history. He goes on to say: "It took a long historical process to achieve [this] ethical basis."

The genius of the Federal Constitution

The Federal Constitution of 1848 was the first to be adopted by the citizens of Switzerland entitled to vote at that time. The commission set up by the Diet to revise the Federal Treaty consisted of 23 members of the individual cantonal governments (including liberal-radical members from the former Sonderbund cantons), who were pragmatically minded, willing to compromise and placed little value on theoretical concepts. In a chapter devoted to the part played by the intellectuals, Holenstein impressively highlights the ideas and references from intellectual history that were fundamental to the fathers of the constitution. Just five days after the commission sat for the first time in February 1848, revolution broke out in Paris. It quickly spread to Europe's authoritarian monarchies, which only a few weeks earlier had been threatening to intervene should the Federal Treaty be amended. This development significantly weakened the external anti-liberal forces. The 23-strong commission seized the opportunity presented to it. Forgoing further improvements to the old Federal Treaty, it created the Federal Constitution in 51 days. The subsequent formation of the federal state should be seen as a genuine revolution. As previously mentioned, the Federal Treaty did not contain any provisions

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regarding its own revision and therefore required all the parties, i.e., the cantons, to be in agreement on its amendment. The fathers of the constitution swept all this aside by issuing transitional provisions that created new legal foundations. These formed the basis for all the steps that followed, including the cantonal referendums and the subsequent decision by the Diet. Unanimity was no longer required. The Diet thus approved the new constitution in June 1848. Referendums were held in the cantons in July and August, with 15½ in favour and 6½ against. All the cantons of central Switzerland, plus Ticino and Valais said "No". Uri, Obwalden and Nidwalden also rejected the proposal at their Landsgemeinde cantonal assemblies. Lucerne said "Yes", although that was due to a special procedure in which abstentions were counted as votes in favour. The former Sonderbund canton of Fribourg also voted in favour by virtue of a decision of the cantonal parliament. None of these events can exactly be described as a good omen for the new Federal Constitution, and hence for concordance and the integration of the losing side. However, it must be stressed that the defeated Catholic conservative camp was not opposed to the project per se and that most of the opposing cantons accepted the majority principle through gritted teeth and agreed to be bound by the Constitution, not least because some of their concerns had been incorporated into it. On 12 September 1848, the Diet thus declared the Federal Constitution adopted and in force as the basic law of the Confederation.

In the second half of the 19th century, this made Switzerland an island of democratic republicanism in a sea of European monarchies. The Federal Constitution can certainly be seen as a synthesis of exist-

ing knowledge and experience considering that the Swiss had already been adhering to the principle of concordance for quite some time, as shown by the history of neutrality and the cooperative approach.

Integrating the losers

For a long time following the formation of the federal state, history tended to be written in a way that attributed all of the state's achievements, including the subsequent development of its direct democratic instruments, to the liberal-radical victors of the Sonderbund War. Yet, despite the Sonderbund's defeat, some of its demands did find their way into the draft of the new Federal Constitution of 1848. The victorious majority took account of the concerns of those it had defeated. As mentioned above, the proclamation issued to the inhabitants of the Sonderbund cantons by the Diet prior to the first acts of war had already pointed in this direction. The victors paid particular attention to the wish for cantonal sovereignty, a desire that was also expressed by moderate liberals. Neither must the ban on the Jesuits be allowed to conceal the clear federalist accents set by the federal state in giving the cantons power over the schools and churches, setting up the Council of States and introducing the requirement that a majority of the cantons must vote in favour of a proposal for it to be accepted. The Federal Constitution enshrined the principle of nationhood while allowing the cantons to retain their sovereignty. The Confederation and its member states fulfilled their mandate by means of bilateral cooperation based on subsidiarity. Thus, the Sonderbund indirectly helped to make a centralist solution more difficult and to prevent further revolutionary upheavals as called for by the radicals.

For the past 175 years, Switzerland has always had a democratic constitution. The legal document that underpins the federal state has a direct and indirect impact on day-to-day life. And because daily life has been constantly changing since 1848, the Federal Constitution has also been adapted to move with the times. To mark the 175th anniversary, the National Museum Zurich is exploring the history of the Swiss Federal Constitution, with a particular focus on fundamental rights. Visitors can take a playful look at the interplay between political rights, obligations and personal freedoms.

The fact that certain historiographical insights can also find their way into politics was demonstrated by President *Alain Berset* in his New Year's speech for the anniversary year 2023, in which he impressively pointed out important points in the history of the creation of the Federal Constitution of 1848:

"[...] I am standing here in the Swiss National Museum in Zurich. Here – just as in Prangins and Schwyz, the two other locations of the National Museum – we can see the challenges we faced as a country and how we tackled them: We have given greater weight to what unites us than to what divides us. And in this way, we have strengthened our cohesion. As we did back in 1848. After the Sonderbund War, the victorious cantons did not simply write a new constitution and impose it on the Catholic cantons. They worked together with them – and created a sovereign state that was on a par with the powers of Europe.

This constitution of 1848 was a decisive step for Switzerland. And we celebrate the 175th birthday of our Swiss Confederation with pride. We owe our life of security and prosperity to this constitution. We owe our culture of dialogue to it. It was followed by other important steps. I am thinking in particular of the introduction of the initiative and the referendum – the basis of our direct democracy.

It is these institutions and values that we are still committed to today. [...]"

Thus, in the anniversary year of the Federal Constitution, the President of the Confederation, too, emphasises the importance of the Confederation's policy of concordance and the significance of this ethical foundation, especially in times of crisis.

The text is an extended version that appeared on the National Museum blog. (blog.nationalmuseum.ch)

(Translation National Museum/Current Concerns)

175 Years Swiss Federal Constitution

Historical and socio-psychological foundations

The Research Institute for Direct Democracy (FiDD) and the Institute for Personal Human Sciences and Social Issues (IPHG) invite you to a public conference in the context of the 175th anniversary of the Swiss Federal Constitution.

The conference will examine the historical and socio-psychological foundations of the Federal Constitution of 1848.

This interdisciplinary approach is particularly important today in order to find adequate answers to contemporary issues and actively to promote peace.

From a historical perspective the central significance of the permanent armed neutrality and the cooperative principle for the creation of the Feder-

al Constitution shall be emphasised and appreciated.

Social psychology emphasises – according to this process – the personal conception of man, which is the central basis for the elaboration of the federal constitution. The aim was in human coexistence to serve the common good (*bonum commune*) and thus to ensure the peaceful cooperation of the quadrilingual, multicultural and multireligious federal state, which also protects the minorities in the country.

Date: Saturday, 7 October 2023, 9am to 12pm and 2.30pm to 5pm.

Venue: Institut für Personale Humanwissenschaften und Gesellschaftsfragen, Fischingerstrasse 66, 8370 Sirmach

Why Austria Should Remain Neutral

Neutrality does not automatically provide protection – but abandoning it doesn't either

by Gabriele Matzner*



Gabriele Matzner
(picture Wikipedia)

Once again, the time has come apparently to question Austria's neutrality, as *Franz Cede* recently did in a guest commentary regarding the Russian attack on Ukraine. Certainly, this belligerent violation of international law is to be condemned. Considering the developments of the past decades, what foundations does it unsettle? Since the end of the Cold War, a new nonchalance in dealing with international law and the prohibition of violence could be observed. The supposedly stable post-war system actually came to an end with the so-called "victory" of the West, the transatlantic community.

A series of costly, mostly illegal, and ultimately lost wars with millions of casualties can be attributed to this community which under US hegemony for a time assumed the role of the world's policemen. In the past 30 years or more, it seemed that international law, the UN, and other international organizations had become "outdated models". Even before this war, a large part of humanity did not feel truly secure. The sense of vulnerability and helplessness in the face of various crises and dangers has been on the rise for some time now.

Another argument, namely the need for a stable political-military unity and determination of the West, which a neutral country should not stand aside from, does not correspond to reality. Besides pursuing common interests and paths, everyone also pursues their own nuanced interests. The EU's foreign, security, and defence policy is not carved in stone; it is fluid and requires coordination. Neutrality in this regard is not an obstacle; the redesign of the constitution allows us some leeway to exercise the "Irish Clause".

For Cede, neutrality preferred by a stable majority of the population is not part of Austria's identity. That may be so, but war fatigue is in the genes: Austria has not won a war since the Battle of Belgrade in 1717, over 300 years ago, and twice proceeded

"Austria could contribute to a rethinking that considers the multipolar constellation and breathe new life into its neutrality. [...] Its goals and means were assisting in conflict resolution, dispute settlement, free exchange of ideas, mediation, de-escalation, promoting the development of international law and human rights, facilitating encounters and negotiations, humanitarian aid, and much more."

into catastrophes as the younger sibling on the side of a more powerful neighbour. The notion of being secure as part of a military alliance may therefore encounter a quasi-acquired herd immunity. It is also historically refuted. The population may still remember that Austria enjoyed high international esteem due to its neutrality and was able to be useful time and again, for example, in easing tensions between East and West and in the fields of international law and humanitarianism.

As much progress as integration

There is also an argument saying that we—as an EU member—are not anymore neutral, especially in EU foreign, security, and defence policy. Only a "modest remainder" of the original neutrality lingers (the people were promised something else at the time of accession). Instead, the principle of solidarity and a form of (including military) assistance obligation in the event of an attack take precedence over neutrality within the EU. If such an obligation exists, it naturally applies to Austria as well, even if it remains neutral. The fact that there is no absolute security and that neutrality itself cannot provide such protection is not a new insight that should call the status of neutrality into question.

So, what would the abolition of perpetual neutrality bring? Why should Austria join NATO, which seems to be the only logical motive for burying the "rests of neutrality"? Even for NATO members military assistance is not automatically guaranteed. Moreover, due to its geographical location, it seems unlikely that Russia (as apparently assumed) would invade Austria, as NATO members Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary lie in between.

How sensible would it be to bury neutrality precisely in times of distress? Did Switzerland give up its neutrality when a much more brutal and criminal war was raging all around, triggered by an immediate and much more threatening neighbour? And what can military alliances (and armament) do against the major threats to humani-

ty, foremost among them climate change? Neutrality should be considered as a great civilizational progress and should be developed, just like integration. Instead of preparing for a funeral, we should discuss how we can make it (again) credible, without self-aggrandizement but with self-confidence.

Is the West not becoming increasingly isolated?

One should consider the so-called Western community of values as an outdated model. Its power has been eroding for some time now. In addition to the usual suspects, Russia and China, an increasing number of countries in the Global South are emancipating themselves from Western hegemony and are forming new groupings and institutions. Frustration and lack of understanding about Western politics are growing, with only around 40 out of 193 UN member states participating in the sanctions policy against Russia. Attempts to promote talks and negotiations that could potentially lead to a ceasefire and peace in Ukraine do not originate from Austria, but from non-aligned countries in the Global South.

Is the West not becoming increasingly isolated? Wouldn't it be time for reflection and a bridging of the gap with the larger "rest" of the multipolar world, instead of positioning (initially verbal and economic) weapons against China? Austria could contribute to a rethinking that considers the multipolar constellation and breathe new life into its neutrality. We have had decades of practice with a constructive and active foreign policy. Its goals and means were assisting in conflict resolution, dispute settlement, free exchange of ideas, mediation, de-escalation, promoting the development of international law and human rights, facilitating encounters and negotiations, humanitarian aid, and much more. Resurrection is possible – and meaningful. •

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(Translation *Curent Concerns*)

* *Gabriele Matzner* served as a foreign policy advisor to Chancellor *Bruno Kreisky*, Deputy Head of the International Law Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consul General in Berlin, Deputy Director of the *Diplomatic Academy Vienna*, as well as Ambassador to Slovakia, Tunisia, and Great Britain. She has authored numerous publications on international topics.

“Born in the 19th century. Stories of Five Women from Val Poschiavo”

A book from Silva Semadeni

by Eliane Perret

Switzerland is a diverse country, geographically geographic, linguistic and also with its geo historical conditions. The Val Poschiavo, an Italian-speaking southern valley of the canton of Grison, has its own eventful history. Whoever travels by the *Bernina railroad* through this beautiful valley to Tirano in Italy, may interrupt the journey in Poschiavo to take a closer look at this place. He might be astonished by the houses, which are remarkably large for houses in a mountain valley and might wonder why this is so. These palazzi form a street of stately villas on the former southern outskirts of Poschiavo. They belonged to returned Poschiavers who, especially in the second half of the 19th century, had moved to numerous European countries, but also to Russia, Australia, North and South America, where they worked successfully as confectioners and cafetiers. As far as the financial situation permitted, they had these magnificent houses, where they could spend their retirement. The book by *Silva Semadeni* “Born in the 19th century. Stories of Five Women from Val Poschiavo” goes in search of traces of this time.

In the beginning there was a picture

The book was inspired by a photograph, probably of the year 1884, showing five women. They come from Val Poschiavo and belong to three generations. The picture first hung in the living room of Silva Semadeni’s great-grandmother, then in the room of her grandmother *Lilia*, and today it adorns the hallway of the author in Chur. Who were these people portrayed? What was the world like in which they lived and how were their lives shaped? These questions aroused the author’s interest and she searched for traces of them. It took a lot of



The house of the family of Tomaso and Angelina Olgiati-Lardelli in Poschiavo, today the community centre. (©iStoria Poschiavo)

research work for Silva Semadeni because she did not want to lose herself in assumptions or write a historical novel, but rather explore the lives of the women with the help of verified facts. Direct sources were few. But from photos, letters, information from newspapers and official documents in church archives and registers in Switzerland and abroad, a multitude of small mosaic stones were gathered, with which the gaps could be filled at least partially.

It is about *Orsola Lardelli-Lardelli* (1816–1890), she is the oldest of the women. Her daughter *Angelina Olgiati-Lardelli* (1840–1890), in turn, is the mother of *Leonita Jochim-Olgiati* (1860–1936), also pictured are *Eugenia Semadeni-Olgiati* (1863–1929) and finally *Angelina Pozzi-Olgiati* (1869–1956), the author’s great-grandmother. The five women belonged to the rather privileged confectioner dynasties who emigrated from various valleys of Grison and thanks to their specialised trades, they were able to run cafés and confectioneries in cities from Poland to Portugal for more than 150 years.

A bygone world

In the first part of the book, the author describes the historical and economic environment of her protagonists. In the first half of the 19th century, the Val Poschiavo experienced very difficult times. A famine (1816-1817) and devastating

floods (1834) had a very burdening effect on the life of the people. In the second half of the 19th century, an important economic and political development began and opened up more positive life perspectives. In the years 1825 and 1830 the first schools were opened. They were confessionally segregated, which was according to the then firmly anchored confessional boundaries in the population. It was also during this time that the Bernina Road was built (1845-1862), which opened up new possibilities for the previously remote valley. In 1887 the households received drinking water, and in 1891 the village was connected to electricity. It was this social environment bearing great changes, in which the five women grew up (the three younger ones also experienced the developments of the first half of the 20th century). Decisive for their conduct of life were, however, the experiences determined by the emigration movements in the 19th century. In contrast to other parts of Switzerland, in Val Poschiavo it was not necessarily poverty that motivated the people to leave, but their affiliation to the reformed minority. However, throughout their lives they remained connected with the Val Poschiavo and spent shorter or longer periods of time or even the autumn of their life in their homeland.



Before Giovan Giacomo Lardelli-Lardelli opened his own café, he worked for ten years at the Café Suizo of Matossi Cia.

(©Silva Semadeni)

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Five women – five life paths

The author traces the lives of the five women as she was able to discover them from the sources she found. They cannot be illuminated in more detail here, but a few references to the eldest of those depicted should arouse curiosity. The year 1816, when Orsola Lardelli-Lardelli, the oldest of the five women, saw the light of day, went down in history as the “year without a summer” with an associated famine (caused by the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora). Her father had returned from Denmark shortly before, where he ran a confectionery in Copenhagen. He was then tragically killed in an accident in his home country. What a stroke of fate in the lives of the young family!

A few years later, their path led them back to Copenhagen. There Orsola later married her cousin, who was also from the Val Poschiavo (which was quite common). He had followed in his father’s footsteps as a confectioner far from home. Financially, he did not have a skilful hand and had to close his pastry shop. The family returned home for the time being, before



Orsola Lardelli-Lardelli (1816–1890) emigrated with her mother Barbara to Copenhagen as a child and later lived with her husband Giovan Giacomo in Pamplona/Spain. (©Silva Semadeni)

of emigrants, and from then on the family could spend their stays at home in pleasant surroundings. But the family met a difficult fate in another way, for eight of their eleven children died. Hard to imagine today! Among the surviving children were Leonita, Eugenia and Angelina (the author’s great-grandmother). Silva Semadeni also dedicates a separate chapter to each of them, tracing their lives in the settings in Spain and in the Val Poschiavo.

The secret of the photography is out

Thanks to intensive research, the author was able to get closer to the lives of the five women. At least partially, because this undertaking turned out to be much more complex than originally suspected. The women are the focus of the book, as they courageously emigrated to foreign countries and had to adapt to new linguistic, social and economic conditions in Copenhagen, Pamplona or Vigo (in Galicia on the Spanish Atlantic coast). However, the author always includes the family and social environment. These are important additions that make a richer and more comprehensive picture possible and give substance to the book.

From the chronicle of events, the circumstances of the five women and their families can be traced. This makes it an important document of the times, especially because of the many photos enriching the book, as well as the general remarks on social developments, technical inventions or accompanying economic circumstances that shaped the times. Unlocking the inner motivations of the people described opens up a wide field for readers. This makes the reading even more interesting, even if it requires a certain perseverance to be able to assign the many similar or even identical first and family names. The meticulously compiled family trees of the various families are an important support for this.

An era comes to an end

At the end of the 19th century, this era in the history of Switzerland, especially in Val Poschiavo, came to an end. For the reader, the book opens up a deeper insight into the socio-historical developments that took place in a similar way in other valleys of the Canton of Grison. Anyone interested in such contexts and who enjoys a beautifully designed book will enjoy reading “Geboren im 19. Jahrhundert. Geschichten von fünf Puschlaver Frauen” (Born in the 19th century. Stories of five Puschlav women) by Silva Semadeni. •

Semadeni, Silva. *Geboren im 19. Jahrhundert. Geschichten von fünf Puschlaver Frauen* (Born in the 19th century. Stories of five Puschlav women). Ennedo/ Chur: Somedia Buchverlag 2023. ISBN 978-3-907095-64-5



the husband and father moved on to Pamplona in Spain. Before him, other Poschiavens had already moved south, so there was a *Café Suizo* in Pamplona (and other places). Another speciality were the *bollos suizo*, rolls with a sugar crust, which were served for breakfast or as a snack and are still popular today.

Orsola’s husband ran a café in this small town at the foot of the Pyrenees. Sometime later, his wife Orsola and their children followed him. Here began a new challenge for the family in an environment that was challenging simply because of the two languages, Basque and Castilian. Unfortu-

In the register of Pamplona’s businessmen, she was listed as a “cafetera”, the operator of a café. To keep in touch with her homeland, she took week-long journeys on foot, in carriages or wagons, by ship and later by the first railways.

Pamplona, however, remained an important centre of her life until she returned to her birthplace Poschiavo years later to spend her retirement there. Traces of her daughter Angelina also led to Poschiavo, as her husband had a mansion built there. It is one of the palazzi mentioned at the beginning. He had thus reached the most sought-after destination

nately, the head of the family soon died. His young wife and three adolescent children were left behind. Fortunately, she already had a wealth of life experience, having emigrated as a child, and was familiar with the different cultures of northern and southern Europe. She spoke Italian and the Val Poschiavo dialect, understood Danish, German and a little Spanish and Basque.