

# Current Concerns

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

English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

## Niger and the “new world order”

### Africa for Africans

by Patrick Lawrence\*



Patrick Lawrence (picture ef)

How shall we understand the 26 July coup in Niger, in which military officers ousted Mohamed Bazoum, the nation’s Western-tilted president? It is the sixth putsch of this kind in or next to the Sahel in the past four years. Shall we write off this band across sub-Saharan Africa as coup country and trouble no more about it? The thought is implicit in a lot of the media coverage, but how often do our media dedicate themselves to enhancing our understanding of global events and how often to cultivating our ignorance of them?

#### Not an isolated event

Do not take this latest development in Africa as an isolated event, if I may offer a suggestion. Its significance lies in the larger context in which it has occurred – its global surround, so to say. The West is besieged by the accumulating coherence and influence of the non-West and its version of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our media cannot bear writing or broadcasting about this. Niger, in my read, has just declared itself part of this historic phenomenon. And mainstream media can’t bear mentioning this, either.

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West Africa and the states of the Sahel there. (graphic Ben Norton)

Those who deposed Bazoum are led by Abdourahamane Tchiani, former head of the Presidential Guard, and plainly nurse a deep resentment of the postcolonial presence of the French. There are also reports – in the media, those coming out of the think tanks – that Bazoum was about to give Tchiani the sack, and the events of late July were driven, mostly or primarily, by personal rivalries, resentments, or both.

Everyone has reported, one way or another and more or less well, on the animosities toward the French abroad among Nigeriens. Such sentiments are evident in many parts of Francophone Africa. The past is another country, Nigeriens, Malians, and others seem to say: This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not the 19<sup>th</sup>.

But history is only part of the story, and I would say not the largest part. We ought not make too much of either history or memory in this case: Those who led the coup are facing forward, not back. And to suggest the coup deposing Bazoum was a question of palace politics, whatever these may be, amounts to serving the salad as the main course. No, we have to think larger if we are to grasp the new reality taking shape in Niger and elsewhere in its neighbourhood.

#### Ready to enlist in the cause of the “new world order”

Tchiani and his supporters, who appear to be many in the military and on the streets of Niamey, the capital, have the West as it is now uppermost in their minds, in my read. If they are fed up with the French, they are at this point impudently clear that they equally want no more of what the US has had on offer for the past two decades and some: a klutzily, ineffective military presence and neoliberal economic orthodoxies. As in Mali and elsewhere in the region, Niger now looks set to lean in a distinctly non-Western direction.

Last month’s coup, in other words, reads to me like an announcement that Niger is ready to enlist in the cause of the “new world order” the Chinese have been talking about ever more publicly over the past couple of years – since, indeed, the Biden regime alienated Beijing within months of taking office in 2021. This puts the putsch taking down Bazoum in a larger context, where I think it should be.

This means the US will now find itself in increasing competition with China and Russia for influence across the African continent. Unless it alters course very majorly – and the policy cliques in Wash-

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#### Dear readers of Current Concerns

Due to operational reasons, the next issue of *Current Concerns* (No. 19/20, 2023) will be published on 26 September 2023.

**"Niger and the 'new world order'"**

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ington have no gift for altering course, if you have not noticed – America is almost certain to prove the loser in this rivalry, if that is what we have to call it. The US, and in this case the French, are simply ill-equipped. It is a question of technologies: Americans arrive in Africa with weapons, military assistance, and geopolitical interests; the Chinese and Russians arrive with interests of their own, yes, but also with economic aid, trade flows, and industrial development projects.

**Viable choices in their own interests**

For a long time Nigeriens had little choice but to accept forms of neo-colonialism as their inheritance, history's bequest. The mark of our time is that such nations now have viable choices, and they are at last able to make them in their own interests. As I was writing this commentary, *Chas Freeman*, the distinguished diplomat, recorded a webcast<sup>1</sup> in which he argued that West Asia – as we must learn to call the Middle East – is destined to define its own future now that US hegemony is a thing of the past. There's a lot of this around, let's say: Nigeriens have just announced that it is Africa for Africans from here on out.

**Colonial and postcolonial style**

All the old imperial powers had their different styles of colonisation. The Belgians were famously violent and ruthlessly exploitative, the British relied on traditional political structures – tribes, chiefs, sultanates, and so on – and governed by way of indirect rule, as it was called. The French recreated the metropole's administrative bureaucracy, ruled directly, and, as at home, made everyone speak French.

The same holds for postcolonial styles. The French have made messes in many of their former colonies because in essence they have not yet left behind the colonial consciousness. This point will be plain if we put Paris's relations with the Francophone nations next to the British Commonwealth. I would not say the latter is one, big, happy family, but you don't see the sort of calamities we have witnessed lately across the Sahel. There is an arrogance in social relations the French at times seem to insist upon. They still dominate the extractive industries and other spheres of the economy as if independence – Niger claimed its in 1960 – never occurred.

**Neither French nor American troops**

Neighbouring Mali expelled the French military contingent after successive coups in 2020 and 2021. Ten days after the 26 July coup, the new government in Niamey said it will nullify a range of

military agreements with Paris that covered the French military presence. "Without a change in France's posture, its 1,500 troops in Niger will thus need to depart," the *Brookings Institution* reported on 8 August, "significantly shrinking the West's military capacity in a part of the world with an intensifying, lethal, and churning terrorism threat."

This raises a question about the fate of the Pentagon's presence in Niger – roughly a thousand troops and a drone base northeast of Niamey from which it monitors suspected terrorist activity as far as North and West Africa. I have no read on this now. I imagine the back-channelling between Washington and Niamey is at this point nonstop, but the Nigerien coup's leaders give the impression they are no more enamoured of the American troops on Nigerien soil than they are of France's. There are reports that some Nigerien officers favour a turn from US to Russian military assistance, and specifically to the *Wagner* group, which is already active in Mali.

Neglect and failure have for decades defined the US profile in Niger and elsewhere in Africa. The radical imbalance between military and security assistance on one hand and investment and economic aid on the other has sent Nigeriens the very worst of messages: Americans are not interested in Niger or Nigeriens; they are interested in Niger only as a site for strategic competition.

*Howard French*, a former "New York Times" correspondent, put it very nicely in *Foreign Policy* recently:

*"Washington has mostly dawdled away the decades in Africa, switching around policy slogans every few years according to the tides of fashion but mostly sticking to two messages for Africans. The first: Don't look to us for any kind of check book help in terms of vitalising your economies. We wish you well as you pursue something called 'public-private partnerships', which usually mean very little of the former and not so much from the latter, either, unless the private businesses are involved in oil and gas.*

*The other well-worn theme is, of course, democracy. US policymakers profess to love it in Africa, but they've never shown much skill at figuring out how to promote it there – nor, as the Niger coup amply demonstrates, defend it when it comes under attack."*<sup>2</sup>

**Consequences of the US anti-terror campaigns**

Since the 11 September 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, the focus of

US aid to Niger has been almost exclusively on counterterrorism operations – its own and by way of training and advising the Nigerien military in the same cause. The Pentagon customarily advances Niger as a valuable outpost in its global "CT" campaigns, sending weapons, advisors, trainers and aid in the amount of \$500 million over the past decade. Indeed, at least five of those who conducted the Nigerien coup were trained and advised by the US military. As this suggests, the record of these operations is one of unintended consequences.

*Nick Turse*, an accomplished Africanist, explained all this in excellent detail during an interview with *Intercept* beginning of August.<sup>3</sup> In 2002–03 the State Department counted nine terrorist attacks in the whole of the Sahel – less than 1 percent of the global total. But the numbers have gone up almost every year since. Last year, in Niger and neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso there were 27,000 such attacks. More than 40 percent of terrorism casualties worldwide are now in the Sahel.

The obvious question is why. The answer goes to Niger's ethnic, social, religious and class divisions, in which Americans are not the slightest bit interested because they are not in the slightest interested in Nigeriens. For the past two decades, marginalised ethnic and Islamic minorities have been fertile ground for recruitment in terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda precisely because they have been marginalised. More advantaged social, ethnic and religious groups, dominant in government and the military, have consequently tended to treat all members of these marginal groups as terrorists. US advisers, inattentive to these divisions and animosities, have effectively trained the Nigerien military to run indiscriminate anti-terror operations.

The results are measured in the statistics just cited. Never mind *Brookings* and its cookie-cutter explanation of the Pentagon's presence. Its operations have backed badly and Nigerien democracy has greatly worsened.

**Open towards the new world order**

There have been pictures of Russian flags aloft as demonstrators in Niamey voiced their support of Bazoum's ouster, and there are reports that some Nigerien officers favour a turn from US to Russian military assistance, and specifically to the *Wagner* group, which is already active in Mali. These things are to be watched, but I see them as symbolic gestures in the broader context noted above. They are a measure of Nigeriens' impatience of Washington's widely detested "rules-based order" and a givenness to the new world order China and Russia promote as a 21<sup>st</sup> century alternative.

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# The South is organising itself step by step

by Guy Mettan\*



Guy Mettan  
(picture ma)

Among the countless summits of all kinds that characterise international life and follow each other at a hellish pace, there are some that should attract our attention. The first is the BRICS meeting taking place in South Africa at the end of the month. It will be significant both through the decisions that will be taken there and those that will not, especially in terms of possible enlargement (30 candidate countries!)

\* Guy Mettan is a journalist and member of the Grand Council of the Canton of Geneva, which he presided over in 2010. He worked for the "Journal de Genève", *Le Temps stratégique*, *Bilan*, "Le Nouveau Quotidien" and later as director and editor-in-chief of the "Tribune de Genève". In 1996, he founded the *Swiss Presseclub*, of which he was president and later director from 1998 to 2019.

and the financial system (new clearing and credit currency).

However, it is very likely that most of our media will be content, as usual, with superficial and pejorative reporting, with many anecdotal remarks about the "defeat" of Putin, who will only attend by video.

They will be wrong once again. For this summit is by no means an isolated phenomenon, but the tree that covers a dense forest of South-South initiatives that completely escape us. Their proliferation indicates that the North does not set the agenda or the format of international meetings. The two slaps in the face just received by Emmanuel Macron, who would have liked to be invited to Johannesburg and to the recent summit of the Amazon countries (which took place in Belem at the beginning of August in the absence of France, although this country is primarily concerned with Guyana), are very revealing in this respect. Just like his surprising ejection from Niger and the subsequent negotiations between ECOWAS and the military junta that has taken power in Niamey.

Another important meeting will take place in Beijing in mid-October. This is the third forum of the Chinese *Belt and Road Initiative*. 150 countries are expected to attend, except for the Western countries, which are reluctant to participate out of subservience to the US, which is agitating against China. Italy, the only G-7 member that had joined the initiative, has announced its withdrawal. After a three-year absence due to COVID, China wants to return to the top of the international stage. It will be interesting to see who will be present and at what level, especially if the West boycotts the event. Everyone will be able to count their friends.

But the emancipation of the global South is not just an economic matter. Here and there, political aspirations are beginning to emerge. Two small but symbolic recent initiatives are proof of this. The first is the creation of an *African Political Alliance*, which held its first ministerial conference in Lomé last May at the initiative of Togo to "better represent  
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I am tempted to suggest we may witness a new scramble for Africa, but I won't. There will be no *Berlin Conference*, which, in 1884, began the first scramble and set the rules for European exploitation (and eventual colonisation) of the continent. The US, its allies, Russia, and China will compete similarly this time for the holy grails of this century's international politics – geopolitical influence and resources – but for the two non-Western nations here this is not about exploitation: It is about bringing an age of exploitation to a decisive end.

China is well along in its trade, investment, and development programs across Africa. Its reaction to the coup in Niamey has been strictly noninterventionist – precisely the stance Tchiani and his colleagues want outside powers to take. Beijing has said only that it hopes for a negotiated settlement of the nation's political impasse. As to Russia, it hosted its second summit of African leaders in St. Petersburg on the two days following the coup, coincidentally. And again, the emphasis was on trade, investment flows, and industrial cooperation. "During the discussions," the Russian readout noted, "the participants declared their commitment to jointly building a new, fairer multipolar architecture of the world order based on the sovereign equality of states and mutually beneficial cooperation."<sup>4</sup>

## Bazoum – moderniser and Westerniser

I draw a blank. I do not see how the US has situated itself to respond in any way effectively to these relatively new arrivals in Niger or anywhere else in Africa.

It is easy to understand Bazoum's ouster in this context. Given his gentle treatment while under house arrest, we can surmise he is not considered a grave enemy: He is simply not an agent of change. Bazoum is a committed moderniser and Westerniser who has forged various partnerships with the US and the Europeans. He is Niger's first Arab president and an Ouled Slimane Arab – a minority within a minority and one of a group traditionally sympathetic to the French presence. If Bazoum has not made Niger a client state of the West since taking office two years ago, he has certainly drifted in that direction. I read his economic policies – to which the coup leaders object – as something close to straight-line neoliberal.

## Resoluteness

Secretary of State *Blinken* and other Biden administration officials have reacted vigorously in Bazoum's defense, threatening to cut off all aid to the country unless he is restored to power. As a measure of the importance Washington attaches to Bazoum's rehabilitation, none other than *Victoria Nuland* flew to Niamey on 7 August for several hours of talks with some of Niger's military officials, though Tchiani and others leading the coup reportedly refused to see her. The State Department's acting No 2 got nowhere, even by her own

account, having warned again that all US aid to Niger hung in the balance.

"We don't want your money," the new government tweeted afterward. "Use it to fund a weight loss program for Victoria Nuland." I cite this discourteous public riposte for its subtext: In it we can read the new leadership's determination to reject the Western dominance of Niger's past.

I am reminded of a similar occasion in 1964, when *Sukarno*, fed up with the conditions the US attached to its assistance to Indonesia, famously said in a nationwide speech, "Go to hell with your foreign aid." Sukarno was a politics-in-command man – sovereignty, independence, and dignity his highest values. The sentiment in Niamey these past few weeks seems to me an echo of Sukarno's, reflecting the same priorities. Abdourahamane Tchiani and his colleagues wear uniforms, but they appear to think Washington's military-first policy toward Niger is the wrong technology. It is Niger for Nigeriens now. •

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t\\_Lw8InEt8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t_Lw8InEt8)

<sup>2</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/08/niger-coup-ecowas-nigeria-tinubu-regional-cooperation-multilateralism-statebuilding/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2023/08/02/intercepted-podcast-niger-coup-us-military-officer/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://summitafrica.ru/en/news/podvedeny-itogivtorogo-sammitya-i-ekonomicheskogo-i-gumanitarnogo-foruma-rossija-afrika>

# International Progress Organization condemns collective punishment of the people of Niger

## The International Progress Organization warns of military intervention in violation of the United Nations Charter and appeals to ECOWAS heads of state at Emergency Summit in Abuja\*, Nigeria

Vienna, Austria, 8 August 2023

In a statement issued today, the President of the *International Progress Organization*, Dr. Hans Köchler, called upon the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS) to desist from a policy of intimidation and interference concerning the political situation in the Republic of Niger. The threat of military intervention and the punitive sanctions imposed on Niger are in violation of the *United Nations Charter* and risk further destabilizing the already precarious security situation in the region. These measures and policies have no foundation in the Treaty of ECOWAS, which declares “non-aggression between Member States” as one of the Community’s “fundamental principles” (Article 4[d]), and advocates “peaceful settlement of disputes among Member States.”

In tandem with the withdrawal of financial support by France and the European Union, the massive economic and financial sanctions immediately imposed by ECOWAS and UEMOA (*West African Economic and Monetary Union*) are going to cause serious hardship to civilians. The embargo has already led to a significant surge in the prices of basic necessities. It amounts to a form of collective punishment and a violation of fundamental human rights of the citizens of Niger. The country’s Prime Minister under the government of President *Bazoum, Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou*, told *France24* that the sanctions would be “disastrous” for the people.

Considering that Community membership of four states – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger – is actually suspended, the other member states of ECOWAS should seek a pacific settlement in conformity with Chapter VI of the UN Charter instead of taking an entire people hostage in a regional dispute. Furthermore, in terms of international law, coercive economic measures can only be imposed by the UN Security Council as measure of collective security under Chapter VII of the Charter. Unilateral coercive measures, whether imposed by a single state or a group of states, are illegal.

Armed intervention in Niger, as threatened by some regional states, would not only be in violation of letter and spirit

of the ECOWAS Treaty, but also would constitute a grave breach of Article 2(4) of the *United Nations Charter* according to which all member states “shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.” Article 58 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993 (“Regional Security”) does not contain provisions justifying armed intervention on the territory of a member state. The option of establishing “peace-keeping forces” in Article 58(2)(f) cannot in any way be interpreted as justifying military action in a member state, in violation of that state’s sovereignty. Lessons should be learned from the disastrous effects of interventions in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone by the earlier ECOMOG (*Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group*). The very establishment of the Group by a “Standing Mediation Committee,” and the exercise of its mandate by way of deployment of de facto fighting units in civil war situations in member states, did neither conform with the constitutional requirements of ECOWAS nor with the Charter of the then OAU or the United Nations.

Referring to the joint communiqué of 31 July 2023 by the Transitional Governments of Mali and Burkina Faso, mentioning, under item 5, “the adoption of self-defense measures [in conformity with Article 51 of the UN Charter] in support of the armed forces and the people of Niger” in case of a military intervention in that country, the President of the I.P.O. warned of serious consequences of armed action by some member states in the name of ECOWAS – not only for the people of Niger, but for peace and stability in the region and the entire Africa. He appealed to the heads of state of those countries to pursue – in their forthcoming Emergency Summit in Abuja – the avenue of peaceful dialogue as set out in Chapters II and X of the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS.

Referring to the unilateral military intervention of NATO in Libya, in 2011, instigated by France, and in open defiance of the limits set by Security Council resolution 1973, the *International Progress Organization* warned of further destabilization in the Sahel region by another armed

expedition in violation of the UN Charter. The disintegration of Libya due to NATO intervention has been the root cause of the security vacuum and political instability in the wider region and beyond, including in Europe. As in the case of Niger today, it is up to each country to decide on policies and measures to safeguard its security and vital national interests, without external interference, whether from regional or global powers. “Waging war to keep the peace,” the deceptive motto of many ill-fated interventions in the history of international relations, must not be allowed to justify another act of blatant aggression. •

\* The *International Progress Organization* published the text reproduced here before the ECOWAS conference in Abuja. ECOWAS decided there on the continuation of sanctions, but did not take a concrete decision on military intervention. [ed.]

Source: *i-p-o.org* of 8 August 2023

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# How to fabricate lies in war

## “Berlin Group 21” presents investigations into the manipulated OPCW report about Douma

by Karin Leukefeld



Karin Leukefeld  
(picture ef)

High-ranking former UN officials and scientists who have been co-operating as “Berlin Group 21” since 2021, have submitted their investigations into the OPCW [i.e. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] report about an alleged attack with chemical weapons in Douma, Syria, in April 2018, to members of the European parliament. They found proof of manipulation, bias and censorship.

The investigation had been requested by Irish MEP’s Mick Wallace and Claire Daly, both members of the *Independents 4 Change* delegation. In the European Parliament they belong to the faction GUE/NGL The Left. An introductory note to the investigation states, its aim was to encourage independent analysis and discussion of this “serious controversy” in the EU parliament.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the OPCW member states and the OPCW administration should make an effort “... to resolve the current controversy [about the Douma report] in accordance with the CW [i.e.,

Chemical Weapons] Convention and the Charter of the United Nations”.

Founding members of the “Berlin Group 21” are Brazilian ambassador José Mauricio Bustani (first Director-General of the OPCW which was launched in 1997), Professor Richard Falk (Emeritus Professor of International law, Princeton University and UN Special Rapporteur about the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory), Dr h.c. Hans-C. von Sponeck (who has served in the UN for 32 years, as UN Assistant Secretary-General and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq among other positions), and Dr Piers Robinson (Co-Director Organisation for Propaganda Studies who has analysed the role of media in conflicts, foreign affairs and interventions as exemplified by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and by the conflict in Syria ).

### The prelude

After the whistle had been blown from within the OPCW about their meddling with the original fact-finding results at a *Courage Foundation* panel in October 2019, media outlets such as *NachDenk-Seiten* have written about the controversial OPCW report on Douma time and again in recent years.<sup>2</sup>

Information about an alleged chemical weapons attack had been spread by the “White Helmets” on 7 April 2018. They distributed dramatic images and video clips from an underground hospital in Douma to the world via social media. International television stations and agencies immediately jumped on the story. The “White Helmets” claimed the Syrian army had dropped gas-filled cylinders from a helicopter over residential apartment buildings and killed at least 40 people. The “White Helmets” also distributed images of corpses in a cellar. The USA, Great Britain, Paris and Berlin endorsed the allegations of the “White Helmets”.

The Syrian army denied the claims and the Syrian government pleaded the OPCW to send a fact-finding mission (FFM). The UN security council agreed and the mission headed for Douma. However, when the OPCW inspectors were gathering in Beirut, preparing for their travel to Damascus, the USA, Great Britain and France bombed targets in Syria in the night of 14 April 2018, explicitly as a retaliation for Douma. This way the three permanent UN security council members and veto powers had already made it clear that they were not interested in the find-

cc. On 17 August, Fritz Edlinger had on his video channel (*International*) under the title “The ‘Douma case’: The truth must come to light!” a conversation with the long-time UN diplomat Hans von Sponeck about the events and manipulations in the context of Douma, which we would definitely like to recommend to our readers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0sZuuVvfYQ>

ings of this OPCW mission. The OPCW leadership, the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly kept silent.

Meanwhile the OPCW inspectors travelled to Damascus and began their work in Douma. They took soil samples, inspected the alleged sites of the attack and interviewed eye witnesses. They could not locate the corpses from the cellar in the “White Helmets” photographs. Their burial sites remain unknown. Back in The Hague, where the OPCW resides, they issued their interim report which has to be done within four weeks according to OPCW regulations. But then something strange happened. The team of Douma inspectors was dissolved and a new interim report started to circulate.

### “Gravest concern”

Under the headline “Grave concern about the ‘redacted’ Douma report”<sup>3</sup> one inspector of the OPCW Douma team approached his superiors in a letter on 22 June 2018. “I wish to express, as a member of the Fact-Finding Mission team that conducted the investigation into the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April, my gravest concern at the redacted version of the FFM report”, the letter says. This letter as well as other internal documents on the issue were leaked between 2019 and 2020 to the internet platform *WikiLeaks* and published. “As far as I know, this was authorised by the ODG”, which stands for the Office of the (OPCW) General Director. It goes on: “I was struck by how much it misrepresents the facts ...”, apparently no other member of the Douma team had the opportunity to even read the redacted report. “Many of the facts and observations outlined in a full version are inextricably interconnected and, by selectively omitting certain ones, an unintended bias has been introduced into the report, undermining its credibility. In other cases, some crucial facts that have remained in the redacted version have morphed into something quite different to what was in-

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Africa’s voice on the international stage” and to escape the all too onerous tutelage of France, the US or China. Ten countries were represented, which is not bad for a start.

The latest example is the founding of the *Association of Friends of the Charter of the United Nations* in March this year in New York and Geneva, which has 22 member countries and wants to return to the basics of the Charter, i.e., multilateralism, respect and equality of nation states, rejection of the “rules-based order” that wants to impose Western universalism instead of sovereign internationalism. China, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and about 15 other countries, considered by the North as the Bad Boys Club of the international community, now want to coordinate to make their own little music heard against the big orchestra of rich countries.

Who said international politics and economics were boring?

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### “How to fabricate lies in war”

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initially drafted. With your permission I would like to focus on some especially disturbing aspects of the redacted report.”

A summary of statements<sup>4</sup> follows, which the whistle-blower felt were especially important: “The statement ‘The team has sufficient evidence at this time to determine that chlorine, or another reactive chlorine-containing chemical, was likely released from cylinders’, is highly misleading and not supported by the facts. ... The original report has extensive sections regarding the placement of the cylinders at both locations ... These sections are essentially absent from the redacted report. I am requesting that the fact-finding report be released in its entirety as drafted.” Should the redacted version be published the author “kindly asked” to add his differing remarks according to paragraph 62 section II of the verification appendix of the chemical weapons convention.

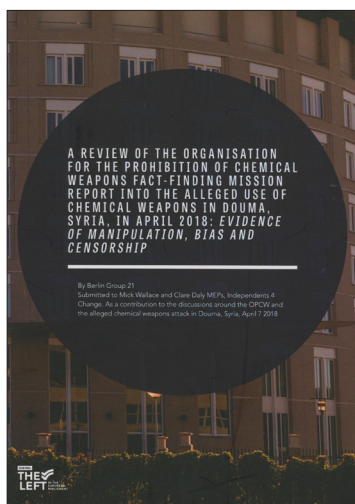
The letter led to several reactions but neither was the OPCW leadership willing to publish the original Douma report, nor to add the memorandum of the whistle-blower to the redacted report. *Ian Henderson* und *Brendan Whelan*, the two OPCW whistle-blower who went public since, were threatened, pressurised, insulted and defamed by the OPCW leadership.

The letter was just the starting point of a long controversy continuing to this day. Many more documents were leaked to *WikiLeaks* and published.<sup>5</sup>

The *Courage Foundation* organised a panel at which the public was informed about the differing viewpoints regarding the OPCW Douma report. The statement they had issued drew international public attention to the case and led to appeals to the OPCW General Director and OPCW member states to launch a new investigation. Without success.

### New investigation urgently needed

Now a new investigation was published and their authors justify their work with three important arguments: The families of the at least 40 people who did die in Douma have a right to know what caused the death of their relatives. The credibility of the OPCW and the trust of its member states in the organisation should be restored. Whistle-blowers who have been brave enough to point at maldevelopments have earned our respect and should be protected by the civil society. It was not just the OPCW who are to blame here – neither the UN general assembly nor the UN security council made any efforts to solve the controversy. The way the original report about an alleged chemical attack in Douma was handled and the subsequent – illegal, in terms of international law – bombing of targets in Syria by the



USA, UK and France jeopardised international peace and security as outlined in the UN charter.<sup>6</sup>

The “Berlin Group 21” (BG21) published their report in English. Their main conclusion was already expressed in the title: „A Review of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons *Fact-Finding Mission* Report into the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Douma, Syria, in April 2018 – Evidence of Manipulation, Bias and Censorship”.

This grave conclusion is backed-up by many documents, first-hand analyses from highly qualified expert sources. In addition, there are numerous internal messages from within the OPCW which were published by *WikiLeaks*.<sup>7</sup>

### The investigation

In section one a brief background summary illustrates what actually happened on 7 April 2018 in Douma and describes how the *Fact-Finding Mission* (FFM) of the OPCW came into being as well as which role the United Nations played in this process. Section two gives a chronological order of events around the allegations of chemical weapons being used in Douma and the FFM mission. It starts in April 2018 and covers the time to December 2019 and beyond. Section three summarises the four OPCW reports about the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma. This includes the original interim report by the FFM team who had been in Douma (June 2018), the redacted interim report (July 2018) and the FFM final report (March 2019). Finally, section four presents conclusions and some proposals for concrete measures “... in order to establish an accurate account of what happened in Douma as well as, more widely, to restore the credibility of the OPCW”.

### Proving manipulation, bias and censorship

In the annex the facts as presented by the four OPCW reports are listed in detail. *Annex 1* deals with the statements of toxicology and forensic pathology, the “unjustified elimination of the original toxicology conclusion” and the “failure to explore significant evidence indicating alternative cause of death”. *Annex 2* contains the witness testimonies, the ways where and how the witnesses had been interviewed and the “failure to resolve anomalous witness claims”. Moreover, erroneous assumptions about gas distribution are discussed. *Annex 3* covers the insufficient chemical analyses and the “failure to explore significant evidence indicating alternative explanation for findings”. *Annex 4* deals with ballistics. Its focus is on the strange and eye-catching position of two gas cylinders as well as the explanation for a hole in the roof which one of the cylinders allegedly had fallen through.

The investigation was distributed to all members of the European parliament, to the leadership of the *Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons* and its member states, the UN general secretary, the UN member states and to the UN security council. The German minister for foreign affairs received a copy, too. All recipients of the investigation are called upon “to resolve the current controversy in accordance with the *Chemical Weapons Convention* and the *Charter of the United Nations*.”

### “Deeply disturbing”

“This document should be deeply disturbing to anyone who believes that the UN should be promoting respect for international law as a means to reduce global violence”, as Professor *Theodore Postol* writes in his foreword to the investigation of the “Berlin Group 21”. Postol is a professor of physics and used to teach at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT). Should the possible corruption around the OPCW report not be thoroughly investigated, he warns that “... this will surely result in a seriously diminished future global reliance on both the Chemical Weapons Convention and international law.” He predicts: “The future legitimacy of the UN and OPCW as enforcers of international law will simply cease to exist, if this level of overtly unprofessional and amateurish analysis is allowed to stand without being corrected. This will then be an unfortunate legacy left to the world by those who are now claiming to be the guardians of the truth.”

<sup>1</sup> <https://berlingroup21.org/front-matter-and-introduction>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=55809>

<sup>3</sup> <https://berlingroup21.org/grave-concerns-emailjune-2018>

<sup>4</sup> [https://wikileaks.org/opcw-douma/document/actual\\_toxicology\\_meeting\\_redacted/actual\\_toxicology\\_meeting\\_redacted.pdf](https://wikileaks.org/opcw-douma/document/actual_toxicology_meeting_redacted/actual_toxicology_meeting_redacted.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://wikileaks.org/opcw-douma/document/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

<sup>7</sup> <https://wikileaks.org/opcw-douma/document/>

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# Switzerland's place in a world of change

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The world is in upheaval. It is impressive how people outside the Western bloc are standing up and calling out to their (in fact still) colonial powers: Now it's time to stop interventions that violate international law and exploitation that violates human rights! From now on, we ourselves will determine our country, our politics and our natural resources.

As reported by *Current Concerns*, the Latin American and Caribbean states did not allow themselves to be forced into a final declaration pre-formulated in Brussels at their summit with the EU, not even with the usual attempts at financial blackmail. On the other hand, the Russia-Africa summit was a complete success because President *Putin* met his guests on an equal footing, as should be the case in all relations between countries and cultures. In the meantime, hopeful signs of a new world order can be seen elsewhere.

From equal to equal with all peoples, that is also the tradition of Switzerland. In recent decades, many of our politicians and diplomats have unfortunately deviated from this path, which is in keeping with human nature and therefore successful. They have allowed themselves to be harnessed to the interests of major powers. It is time for us to return to the Swiss way and to support the current efforts for a fairer world based on the equality of all peoples as envisaged in the UN Charter.

## New developments in world affairs

Niger has become another African state (after Mali and Burkina Faso) to strike a liberation blow. It no longer wants to be "one of the poorest countries in the world", but wants to sell its great wealth (uranium) at world market prices instead of to French nuclear power plants at knock-down prices as before. Fortunately, none of the 14 other member states of the "Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)" seems to be willing to wage war for France's interests against the new government, instead choosing the path of dialogue and diplomacy. In doing so, they are pointing the finger of blame at the Western powers: The conflict in Niger is internal, which means that, according to the UN Charter, no other state has the right to intervene militarily without a decision by the UN Security Council. Have we already become so accustomed to NATO's medieval law of the jungle that other nations have to remind us what the law is?

The BRICS summit will take place from 22–24 August. [The article was written and published in *Zeit-Fragen* before the BRICS meeting; editor's note.] The alliance of the five giant states Bra-

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"Today, Switzerland has lost its credibility as a neutral state in many places, and its good offices are hardly in demand any more. This is a direct consequence of the lack of rootedness of some of our politicians in the Swiss model of state with neutrality at its core. In a world in upheaval, the Swiss contribution could be particularly helpful. The fact that Swiss history has largely been dropped from the curricula in our schools and is no longer taught at universities is a great misfortune and an underestimation of the importance of people's awareness of history for their personal development, for the future of their country and for looking beyond their own backyard."

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zil, Russia, India, China and South Africa invites to Johannesburg, 34 countries have accepted so far. The hegemon's attempts to divide the alliance have not only failed thoroughly, but an actual counter-movement is taking place. An impressive number of countries want to join the BRICS in order to intensify economic cooperation and reduce their dependence on the US dollar. Eleven countries have already made a formal application for membership, another 24 countries an informal one. The Swiss *Peter Hänseler*, who lives in Moscow, and his colleague *Denis Dobrin* have compiled facts and figures. Here is just a small excerpt: The inhabitants of the five BRICS countries make up 41% of the world population, with the eleven formal candidates for membership together 52%, and if you include the informal applicants: 67%. The remaining countries of the world are referred to in the diagrams as the "rest".<sup>1</sup>

## What we Swiss can learn from this

For us Swiss, it is a pleasure to witness how more and more states are joining forces to free themselves from their long-standing dependencies on the USA and various Western European states. Switzerland, its current politicians and diplomats would do well to become more self-confident as well and to take back its place as a neutral country linked to all peoples.

It is time for our politicians and mainstream media to stop staring at Washington and Brussels like hypnotised rabbits. Anyone who believed that by automatically adopting the US-EU sanctions against Russia – in violation of our neutrality and our rule of law – the Federal Council could reduce the pressure on our country

was thoroughly mistaken. Authoritarian great powers are not made more lenient by being subjected to them, but they mercilessly exploit the weakness shown and demand more and more. If the hegemon on the other side of the Atlantic had its way, Switzerland would have to confiscate all Russian assets in the country, based solely on the nationality of the owners – that is pure racism! Switzerland would then have to unlawfully expropriate the blocked funds and sink them into the corruption- and crime-ridden bottomless pit in Kiev.

So far, the Federal Council has proven resistant to such unconstitutional proposals. It is to be hoped that it will remain so. Because with its caving in to the adoption of unilateral sanctions, it has done serious damage to Swiss neutrality, which our forefathers had carefully built up over centuries. The same applies to Parliament's undignified dithering over the legal ban on the re-export of Swiss weapons by third countries to a warring party.

## Latest absurd attack from the USA against the Swiss rule of law

A Congressional committee in Washington recently asked the US State and Treasury Departments to "place three representatives of the allegedly corrupt Swiss judicial system on the US sanctions list, including former Attorney General *Michael Lauber*". The trigger is the US-American *Bill Browder*, who extracted billions from Russia in the *Yeltsin* era. He invested 25 million dollars in 1996, a few years later his investment company "Hermitage Capital" was worth 4.5 billion dollars! In 2007 it was liquidated by the Russian state.

continued on page 8

**"Switzerland's place ..."**

continued from page 7

It is clear that such an "investor" is not well disposed towards *Vladimir Putin*, who stopped the outflow of Russian state assets to Western profiteers at the time. Since 2011, Browder has been trying to gain access to allegedly laundered funds in Swiss bank accounts. In 2021, however, the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland closed the case and announced that it would return the disputed CHF 18 million to the account holders. Now the case is before the Swiss Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne for final assessment. And what does Browder do? Because the Swiss judiciary will not allow itself to be corrupted by him, he is actually slandering the Swiss rule of law before the "Helsinki Commission", a committee in Washington: "Switzerland is a country 'where the legal system does not work, where the criminal justice system does not work'. And when a justice system doesn't work, he continued, 'we have to fix it'. By 'we' he meant the USA."<sup>2</sup> This is going too far even for NZZ editor and transatlanticist *Georg Häsler*. With his question of what would happen if the Federal Court also rejected Browder's complaint, he takes the absurdity to the extreme: "Would the federal judges involved, as part of an allegedly dysfunctional judicial system, then also be threatened with a request to be put on the US sanctions list?"

That's what it's coming to! They would be wiser to scrutinise their own justice system, for example the case of *Julian Assange*, who has been tortured and threatened with extradition in the UK for years on the orders of the US, just because he published some inconvenient truths about US war crimes.

### Swiss contribution in the service of world peace

Today, Switzerland has lost its credibility as a neutral state in many places, and

its good offices are hardly in demand any more. This is a direct consequence of the lack of rootedness of some of our politicians in the Swiss model of state with neutrality at its core. In a world in upheaval, the Swiss contribution could be particularly helpful. The fact that Swiss history has largely been dropped from the curricula in our schools and is no longer taught at universities is a great misfortune and an underestimation of the importance of people's awareness of history for their personal development, for the future of their country and for looking beyond their own backyard. The education of the youth must be brought back to the centre: The preservation of the foundations of our state system is based on the direct democratic participation of the Swiss people and their interest in the fate of their communities, cantons and the federal government. This is only possible with a solid civic education in school and active role models in the parental home. The integration of the large foreign share of the population (around a quarter) and of newly naturalised citizens is also based, among other things, on a good understanding of the Swiss state model. The planned 2023 strategy to transform the Swiss army into a de facto NATO unit is admittedly also the result of pressure and flattery from abroad. But without the lack of historical awareness, especially among many young Swiss, the blunt rejection of Swiss neutrality as the basis of our army would not be possible.<sup>3</sup>

As a reminder to ourselves, a word from the great Swiss historian *Wolfgang von Wartburg*: "The prerequisite for the credibility of neutrality is its absolute *reliability* and the constant striving for *impartiality*. In this area Switzerland has a unique experience which it can put at the service of world peace."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Häsler, Peter; Dobrin, Denis. "BRICS – Series – Part 1. BRICS & Co. will change the world". <https://voicefromrussia.ch/>

<sup>2</sup> Gyr, Marcel and Häsler, Georg. "Nach dem Pressing aus Washington steht das Bundesgericht im Fall

Magnitski unter hohem Druck" (After the pressing from Washington, the Federal Court is under High Pressure in the Magnitski Case). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 14 August 2023

<sup>3</sup> The *Swiss Armed Forces Report 2023* will be dealt with in a forthcoming issue.

<sup>4</sup> von Wartburg, Wolfgang. *Die Neutralität der Schweiz und ihre Zukunft* (Switzerland's neutrality and its future), 1992 (excerpt).

Letter to  the Editor

## Swiss Latin Days

The problems in the suburbs of France, social inequality, have long been an ongoing issue. An article in *Current Concerns* No 17 from 15 August 2023 puts the role of the school in the foreground. Many thanks for doing this.

Public schools fail to give the young French people the tools for life, therefore they are defenceless against all those masterminds. The article shows in a moving way, how cordially an engaged teacher, in opposition to the authorities and school colleagues, is involved in educating these underprivileged children in a realistic way and gives them a perspective of success! And this of all things occurs in the Greek lessons! Why? "The old texts motivate us [...] to reflect." The quoted voices of the students are the impressive proof of this.

As reader, who herself had the pleasure of learning the ancient languages, I can confirm that I too have learned a great deal for life. The ability to analyse texts has opened up for example many different fields of voluntary employment.

In addition, even in Switzerland, in schools which like in France more and more useful ideas are included to provide an opposing voice: the private initiative of young people who are engaged for the maintenance of the Latin language – the "Swiss Latin days". It is worth looking at their website and recommending it to others.

Renate Dünki, Oberwangen TG

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# Human rights industry – plea against power politics with human rights

## Alfred de Zayas: *The Human Rights Industry: Reflections of a Veteran Human Rights Defender*

by Professor Dr Dr h.c. mult. Hans Köchler\*



*The Human Rights Industry* is the most comprehensive and honest assessment and critique to date of the performance of institutions the international community

has set up to monitor respect of those principles that underlie justice and the rule of law at the global level. Whether domestically or in relations between sovereign states, politics must conform to human dignity, and the authority of the state must only be used to *enforce* the law, but not to *subvert* it just for the sake of mere power. This is the rationale of all international instruments and institutions established under the Charter of the United Nations and particularly in response to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the organization's General Assembly in 1948.

### Meticulously documented

The author of this richly sourced volume has made us aware of how important it is to understand the procedures and often hidden mechanisms by which these institutions exercise their mandate. He does so with utmost authenticity, having served in the United Nations for several decades and in different capacities, such as, from 2012 to 2018, as first UN *Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order*. In view of his first-hand experience and involvement with the human rights "industry," the focus of his investigation may aptly be described by *Juvenal's dictum*, as also quoted by the author, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (Who will guard the guards themselves?). The result of the author's query is a diagnosis without illusions, which will nonetheless help the reader to grasp some of the intricacies of international diplomacy at the intersection of law and power.

The book investigates the "human rights industry" in some of the major undertakings, both under UN auspices and outside that organization's institutional framework. The author gives a detailed assessment and analysis of the work and modus operandi of

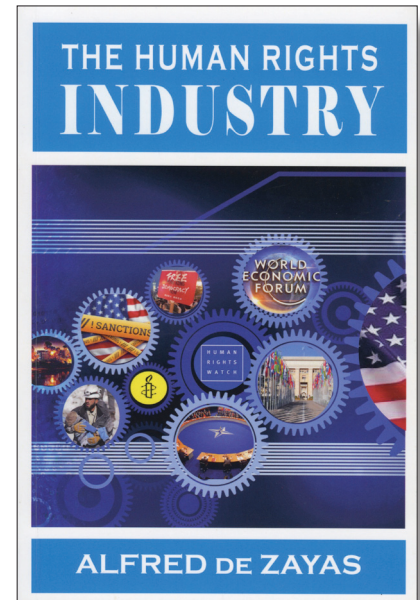
the United Nations Human Rights Council (until 2006, Commission on Human Rights) and the Office of the *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* (OHCHR). He also deals with the *International Criminal Court* (ICC) and, briefly, the *Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons* (OPCW), pointing to cases of political interference in the work of these two institutions that are vital in terms of the enforcement of international humanitarian law. He critically addresses the voting record of states in matters of human rights as well as the role of civil society – non-governmental organizations and the media – in their promotion. The work concludes with a wealth of specific recommendations, aimed at improving human rights monitoring and enforcement, but also at better defining human rights doctrine in the context of global power relations.

### "Priority of peace as a *conditio sine qua non*"

In conformity with the UN Charter's philosophy, the author emphasizes the priority of *peace as conditio sine qua non* for the realization of human rights. He strongly criticizes the watering down of the Human Rights Council's 2016 "Declaration on the Right to Peace" and draws our attention to that fact that the document – in spite of the text having been watered down to a degree that made the Declaration almost non-consequential – was rejected by all Western member states of the Council. This, in the author's assessment, raises the issue of credibility of those that see themselves as the principal defenders of human rights in today's global system.

### Imbalanced statements of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

In regard to peace, he also points to imbalanced statements by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, deploring what he calls "judgemental naming and shaming," without addressing the real issues. His frank assessment, on the basis of first-hand experience as human rights officer, makes him doubt the integrity of the office's approach. Commenting on a further statement of the Deputy High Commissioner on the Ukraine con-



Alfred de Zayas. *The Human Rights Industry: Reflections of a Veteran Human Rights Defender*; Atlanta, GA (USA): Clarity Press, 2023 xx + 329 pp., ISBN 978-1-949762-52-5

flict, he describes the Office's handling of the matter as an "exercise in the reaffirmation of Western prejudices." Deploring the UN practice of placing political appointees in senior posts, the author points to the "growing politicization" of the OHCHR and criticizes the selectivity of investigations initiated by the Office. He also states that there is abundant evidence that the OHCHR "yields to political pressures by governments and donors." In his assessment, "there is little doubt that in the hybrid war being waged by the US to maintain a unipolar world, the OHCHR has been assigned a supporting role" (p. 30). As regards the independence and integrity of human rights work, the author repeatedly emphasizes that the Office of the High Commissioner should not accept any "voluntary contributions."

### "Hostile takeover" of many human rights organizations

Evaluating the state of the human rights industry in its entirety, *de Zayas* diagnoses what he describes as "hostile takeover" continued on page 10

\* Hans Köchler President, *International Progress Organization* (I.P.O.).

**“Human rights industry ...”**

continued from page 9

ver” of many human rights organizations by governments, intelligence services and (hidden) corporate interests. He particularly alerts us about the penetration of the ICC, but also mainstream and social media by intelligence services. This all has contributed to the political instrumentalization and “weaponization” of human rights, which, in the present global constellation, has increasingly meant a binary approach of “good” versus “bad,” undermining efforts at dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

**“Saboteurs of human values”**

Particularly revealing, as regards the role of power politics in today’s global discourse on human rights and the rule of law, are the statistics given in Chapter 8 of the Book, “The Voting Record of States.” Whether the issue was the “right of peoples to peace” (UN General Assembly, 1984), the already mentioned “Declaration on the Right to Peace” (by the Human Rights Council), a resolution on the “Promotion of peace as a vital requirement for the full enjoyment of all human rights by all” (2022), or the repeated resolutions of the Human Rights Council on “The negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights”: Those states, especially from the West, who see themselves as vanguards of human rights enforcement either voted against or abstained. In the author’s analysis, however, these states are better described as “saboteurs of human values” or “vandals of human rights” (p. 252).

De Zayas’s no-frills description of the status quo of human rights in today’s international system serves a constructive purpose. He reminds the reader that one first has to identify the problems in order to be able to correct them. Describing his position as that of “survivalist humanism,” he addresses a “significant enforcement gap” in terms of human rights covenants and resolutions due to international power politics and the resulting practices of double standards.

**Specific recommendations**

On the basis of his decades-long involvement with the UN human rights apparatus, he presents a number of precise recommendations aimed at a more cred-

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“The wealth of analyses and critiques, in combination with specific proposals for reform, makes the ideas collected in this volume a genuine antidote to the self-righteousness of the “narrative managers” (so labeled by the author) who all too often have been distorting and manipulating the global human rights agenda for narrow political interests.”

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ible and efficient commitment of the international community to human rights and the rule of law. He identifies, inter alia, “world peace,” the transition from “military” to “human security” economies, the abandoning of the practice of unilateral coercive measures (which he considers as an element of hybrid war), the full recognition of the right of self-determination, and a *holistic* approach to human rights as priorities for global policy. On the basis of these criteria, the author draws a “plan of action” which includes, among other measures, ratification of core UN human rights treaties by all states, the adoption of an international treaty on corporate social responsibility, and the strengthening of regional and international human rights courts. As regards the operation of the UN Council on Human Rights, he introduces the idea of “preventive rapporteurships,” the establishment of procedures to prevent mobbing and *ad hominem* attacks against human rights officials and activists, and the adoption of a “Charter of Whistleblowers’ Rights.” He also suggests that the Council should put the right to self-determination as permanent item on its agenda, and that it should specifically address the dangers of war propaganda. As regards the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, measures need to be taken, in the author’s opinion, to completely avoid so-called “voluntary” funding and to end the practice of appointing former politicians as High Commissioners.

**Special responsibility of the UN-General Assembly**

In the author’s overall assessment, the General Assembly of the United Nations bears special responsibility for ensuring the credibility of global human rights policies. Member states should reject persistent attempts to divide the world into

“good” and “bad” countries. Furthermore, the Assembly should make better use of Article 96 of the UN Charter authorizing it to request advisory opinions from the *International Court of Justice*, and it should grant special status to representatives of indigenous peoples in the sessions of the Assembly. It should also consider appointing a Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on the right to self-determination. In the author’s opinion, the principle of territorial integrity is not absolute and must be interpreted in relation to the right of self-determination.

**The role of international civil society**

As regards the involvement of international civil society in the human rights work of the UN, it should be ensured that powerful countries do not exercise undue pressure to grant or block consultative status for non-governmental organisations. Also, academe and media must not give in to “cancel culture” or dogmatically enforce “political correctness.” They should be committed to give room to a plurality of views. Referring to the internet and social media, the author suggests, inter alia, that private-sector censorship and the manipulation of public opinion via search engine algorithms be penalized.

The wealth of analyses and critiques, in combination with specific proposals for reform, makes the ideas collected in this volume a genuine antidote to the self-righteousness of the “narrative managers” (so labeled by the author) who all too often have been distorting and manipulating the global human rights agenda for narrow political interests. The work is indeed a convincing plea to the international community to return to what de Zayas describes as the “spirituality” of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. •

(Subheads by the editor)

# Looking at Germany

## Constitutional patriotism as outlook?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Since 24 February 2022, at the latest, two basic lines of politics have become obvious in Germany. Their roots, however, go back much further. One line is the abandonment of a consensus of values, the basis of which was an enlightened Christian-humanist conception of man. Today, this line also includes the dismantling of the social and economic foundations of a social state promoting the general welfare. This denunciation is intended to give way to an ideologically dressed-up, but in fact self-destructive, complete submission to US requirements – and it is a breach of the constitution by the incumbents of state offices. The other line is the increasingly illiberal handling of fundamental criticism of this policy. The banner here is the accusation of “anti-constitutionality”, which has become a killer argument – this, too, is a breach of the constitution. Would it be not worthwhile to consider countering this pincer grip with a conciliatory constitutional patriotism that is aware of history and based on the citizen – a patriotism indispensably connected with the core of natural law – universal respect and the protection of human dignity?

A look at a few current figures shows that the social state promoting the general welfare is also endangered today. On 28 July, the Federal Statistical Office reported that the German gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2023, adjusted for inflation, dropped by 0.6 per cent compared to the same quarter of the previous year. The loss of monetary value (inflation), according to the same office on 8 August, amounted to 6.5 per cent compared to June of the previous year. On 30 June, the Federal Employment Agency reported that the number of registered unemployed had increased by 19,000 people compared to June last year. On 2 August, *Statista.com* reported: 3.9 million of the people living in Germany – many more than the official unemployment figures – received the so-called Bürgergeld on average from January to July 2023, over 200,000 more than the average of the previous year. Until the end of 2022, this minimum state benefit was called unemployment benefit II (“Hartz IV”). On 14 August, the German debt clock reported a public debt of the federal, state and local governments of 2.55 trillion euros (that is more than 30,000 euro per capita), a record value that is still growing. At the end of 2022, it was 2.38 trillion euros. And on 11 August, the Federal Statistical Office reported 23.8 per cent more regular insolvencies (companies filing for bankruptcy) for July 2023 than in July of the previous year.

These dry figures, it is easy to forget, are linked to many human fates.

### “The sick man of Europe again”

Unlike the German Chancellor, who glossed over the country’s economic situation in the ZDF Summer Talk on 13 August, Moritz Küpper, President of the employers’ association *Gesammetall* – responsible for the metal and electrical industry, which is particularly important for the country – stated in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* on 9 August: “It is a very, very difficult situation in Germany. We will slide into recession in the second half of the year. Germany is no longer competitive. We are indeed the sick man of Europe again.” He cited the poor framework conditions as the reason: “It’s the framework conditions. Framework conditions must be right for industry to be successful. Of course, this includes affordable energy prices. We are at the absolute top here with 20 cents per kilowatt hour. No country in the world has higher energy prices than Germany. We have endless bureaucracy. We have high taxes. We have high dues. We are behind in digitalisation. We have problems with education. Every year, 50,000 young people leave school without a diploma.”

Since 24 February 2022, the German government has been blaming Russia and its president for these inadequate “framework conditions”. But this does not stand up to scrutiny. Michael Lüders, for example, in his book “Moral über alles? Warum sich Werte und nationale Interessen selten vertragen” (Morals above all? Why values and national interests seldom get along), published a few weeks ago, ex-

plained quite precisely why this justification is unconvincing and that the German government has unnecessarily plunged the country into a serious energy, economic and financial crisis and into a highly risky proxy war against Russia. All this serving the US interests and their claim to power, but ideologically charged in a special Green-German way and justified with a morality of double standards.

### Who are the enemies of the constitution?

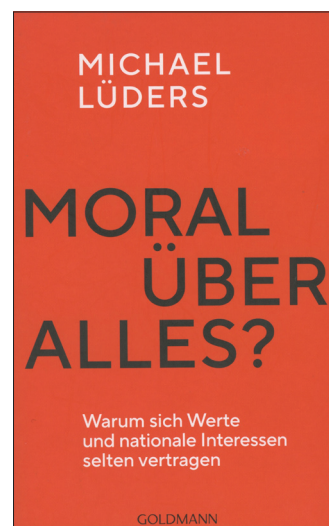
On 10 August, German President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* gave a lengthy speech commemorating the preparatory constitutional conference for the West German Basic Law (Grundgesetz) in Herrenchiemsee, which began 75 years ago. Almost at the end of the speech, he also made the “enemies of the constitution” a topic 1: “Our Grundgesetz can tolerate hard and tough confrontation. But the constitution cannot integrate enemies of the constitution – and we must not ignore the danger they pose. [...] Clear, decisive, combative opposition by the democratic parties is, for example, always called for and required when agitators in public meetings [...] denigrate our democracy as a ‘system’, ‘unjust regime’ or ‘dictatorship’, discredit democratic institutions and make them look contemptible.”

It is interesting to see whom the Federal President calls “enemies of the constitution”: People who, when looking at today’s political Germany, speak of a “system”, an “unjust regime” or even a “dictatorship”. Certainly, one can argue about the accuracy of this choice of words, but in terms of constitutional law, these formulations have nothing to do with “unconstitutionality” – only this term exists in the German Grundgesetz, the term “enemy of the constitution” does not appear at all. Decisive for the concept of unconstitutionality and possible consequences thereof are the provisions of the Grundgesetz on political parties (article 21). In its paragraphs 2 and 4, article 21 states: “Parties whose goals or the behaviour of their supporters are aimed at impairing or eliminating the liberal democratic basic order or at endangering the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany are unconstitutional. [...] The Federal Constitutional Court shall decide on the question of unconstitutionality pursuant to paragraph 2 [...]”

### The liberal democratic basic order

In the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Constitution-

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**“Looking at Germany”**

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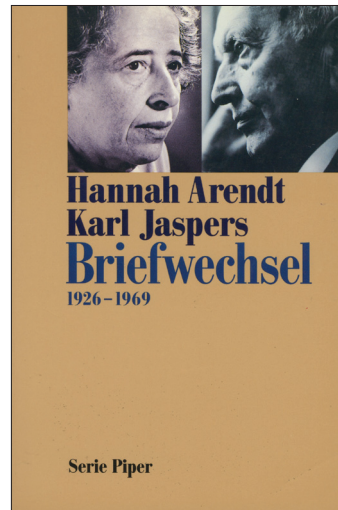
al Court has ruled four times on the banning of a party and in doing so has also attempted to define the term “liberal democratic basic order”, which is not clarified in the constitution itself. The most compact was the 1952 judgement banning the Socialist Reich Party:

*“Liberal democratic basic order in the sense of Art. 21 II GG (Constitution) is an order which, to the exclusion of any rule of force and arbitrariness, constitutes a rule of law based on the self-determination of the people according to the will of the respective majority and on freedom and equality. The fundamental principles of this order shall include at least: respect for the human rights concretised in the Basic Law, above all the right of the personality to life and free development, the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers, the accountability of the government, the lawfulness of the administration, the independence of the courts, the multi-party principle and equal opportunities for all political parties with the right to form and exercise an opposition in accordance with the constitution.”*

That sounds very different from what the German President classified as anti-constitutional on 10 August. And it is very likely that among those who speak of a “system”, an “unjust regime” or even a “dictatorship” with regard to today’s Germany, there are also people who justifiably ask themselves to what extent Germany’s office-holders in the past decades have not contributed significantly to the fact that for today’s Germany, with good arguments, there is no talk of “self-determination of the people”, of “sovereignty of the people”, of “separation of powers” and “independence of the courts”, of “equal opportunities for all political parties”, of “the right to form and exercise an opposition in accordance with the constitution”, of “respect for the human rights concretised in the Basic Law”. If, on the other hand, one follows the diction of the current Federal President, personalities such as *Hannah Arendt* and *Karl Jaspers* – for example, on the basis of their correspondence published in 1993 – would probably be “enemies of the constitution”.

**Constitutional patriotism**

Constitutionally based opposition to the real existing power politics in the Federal Republic of Germany has a notable tradition. Karl Jaspers already referred to the West German Constitution in his much-discussed 1966 paper “Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?” (Where is the Federal Republic heading?) The very first sentenc-



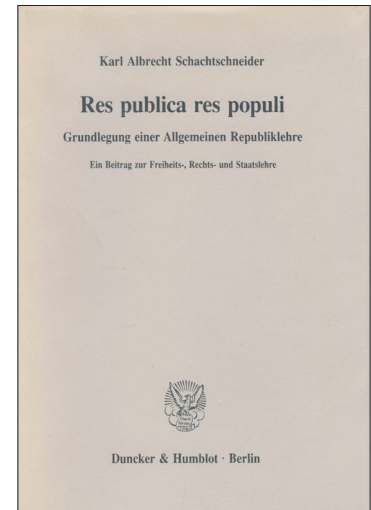
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es of his preface show that he was not interested in criticism for criticism’s sake, but in improving the situation:

*“A friend said that this book was one of the sharpest attacks on the Federal Republic by a German. I do not think this is correct. The existence of the Federal Republic is our good luck as a chance for a new German state. Criticism is levelled at paths the Federal Republic is taking today. Not negation is the intention, but a help, however tiny, through reflection. Therefore, in the third piece of this writing, a fundamentally different domestic and foreign policy is outlined compared to the present one.”*

The philosopher Karl Jaspers was followed by teachers of constitutional law such as *Martin Kriele* or *Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider* with his fundamental work published in 1994, “Res publica res populi. Grundlegung einer Allgemeinen Rechtslehre. Ein Beitrag zur Freiheits-, Rechts- und Staatslehre” (Res publica res populi. Foundations of a General Theory of Law. A Contribution to the Doctrine of Liberty, Law and State).



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**Dolf Sternberger**

“Constitutional patriotism” is a term coined by the German political scientist and journalist *Dolf Sternberger*.<sup>2</sup> He was a contemporary of Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt and was in lively exchange with both. Sternberger lived from 1907 to 1989 and was a contemporary witness of the German catastrophes in the 20th century. During the Second World War he was banned from working as a journalist. After the war, from October 1945, together with Karl Jaspers, *Alfred Weber* and *Werner Kraus*, he published the journal “Die Wandlung”, a voice for the intellectual reconstruction of Germany. Sternberger turned against Machiavellianism in politics and appealed to *Aristotle*’s ethically based theory of the state. In clear dissociation from *Carl Schmitt* and his concept that the core of politics is the distinction between friend and foe, he postulated:

*“The subject matter and aim of politics is peace. We have to, and wish to, seek to comprehend the political as the domain of endeavours to establish peace, to preserve peace, to guarantee, to protect and certainly also to defend peace. Or, to put it otherwise: peace is the political category per se. Or expressed yet differently: peace is the ground and characteristic, and the norm of the political, all this at once.”*

In 2020, one of the most important political academies in Germany, the *Academy for Political Education Tutzing*, published a paper entitled “Verfassungspatriotismus – Zum 50. Geburtstag einer Wortschöpfung” (Constitutional patriotism – On the 50th birthday of a neologism)<sup>3</sup>. The following remarks are based on this publication. Immediately after the war, Sternberger was of the opinion that an emotional attachment of the Germans to their coming new state would be of great importance and that the rational reference of authorities and politicians to

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# The end of global ownership and trust

by Professor Dr Eberhard Hamer, Mittelstandsinstitut Niedersachsen e.V.



Eberhard Hamer  
(picture ma)

The USA and NATO have imposed total sanctions on Russia in order to destroy its economy and to end the economic traffic of NATO countries with Russia.

These sanctions do not only affect German companies prohibited from doing further business in their branches in Russia. Many German corporations have had to close their branches in Russia – whether they will ever reopen depends on the duration of the sanctions, so it is likely to be doubtful.

Like us Germans, however, the rest of Europe is also practically forbidden to do business with Russia. In this way, the whole of Europe is to be cut off from Russia in accordance with the founding principle of NATO, “To keep the Russians out”. Economically, an iron curtain has been drawn and we have started not only a cold war, but a hot economic war.

This is shown above all by the financial boycotts and the gas and oil boycotts against Russia.

The exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT settlement system and the prohibition of all banks from still having business relations with Russian banks is unique in economic history, but had to be expected for a long time, since Russia started a competing settlement system to SWIFT with China, namely CIPS. The Russians apparently saw the boycott coming and sold most of their dollars. The Chinese are now in the process of getting rid of their dollars as well, but they can only do so to a limited extent, because massive dollar ditching would lead to a collapse of the dollar exchange rate and thus devalue Chinese assets as well.

Besides China and Russia, more than 20 countries have already joined the new CIPS settlement system, so what the US intended as a fiscal death blow to the rouble and to Russia could boomerang, if the world favours a second, gold-based settlement system and opts out of the fiat money dollar, which is no longer backed by value. This could lead to the end not only of dollar settlement, but also of the dollar imperium. The US has so far been able to pay for everything in the world with its freshly printed money that has no cover at all and to increase its prosperity in exchange for “fiat money”. If this were no longer possible, if the countries of the world no longer accepted worthless dollars, the USA would no longer be able to

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“The basis of business and investment abroad was namely the trust that assets invested abroad and company investments made there would remain with the investor in the long term. If companies and investors now have to reckon with the US example of arbitrary expropriation of ‘enemy assets’ being followed by its satellites, this will be the end of all confidence in international investment.”

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buy all the world’s goods with them, to pay for 900 billion dollars in military expenditure and to cover its financial deficits. In this respect, the financial boycott against Russia and a counter-reaction by the world could result in the collapse of the dollar empire.

This in turn means for the German economy that investments in dollars lose their security, become unsafe. If the people of the world reckon with the crash of the dollar, which has been hollowed out because it has been increased without restraint, they will flee from the dollar. And if the dollar crashes, other currencies – yuan, euro, etc. – will be sought in its place, not only as units of account but also as new investment currencies.

## Economic war of the USA against Russia

The US gas and oil war against Russia had already begun before the Ukraine war. US President *Trump* did everything possible to stop the *Nord Stream 2* gas pipeline because the USA wanted to get rid of its environmentally harmful and twice as expensive fracking gas in Europe. The USA therefore furiously fought the cheaper Russian competition. Together with the EU and the Greens they have now finally torpedoed Russian gas and oil supplies to Germany, even though Germany lately relied on Russian gas for more than half of its energy consumption. “Better be cold than buy Russian gas,” advised German Foreign Minister *Baerbock* (not applying to herself, but to us). Since Europe’s USA ordered gas freeze against Russia took effect, people have had to pay luxury prices for heat, and for companies, energy prices are also rising so sharply that energy costs alone are dragging more and more companies into the red, that hundreds of thousands of companies are having to give up and lay off their workers; they no longer pay taxes and social security contributions and the recession that has already begun is gaining additional downturn momentum.

All this is now being justified with Russian war-mongering malice, although it started years before. People in Europe are now programmed by US propaganda with such hatred “against *Putin*” and against Russia that they accept their own economic damage wreaked by the Ukraine policy and its conductors – and will do so until they themselves feel the consequences first hand.

## Expropriations detrimental to Russia

Hardly mentioned in the mainstream press is the fact that in their war against Russia, the USA and the EU are also confiscating the assets of Russian citizens and even tracing them all over the world wherever their secret services can track them down. This applies not only to tangible assets and companies, but also to financial assets. It also unfortunately effected not only by the USA, but even by its NATO satellites, which also have to participate in these worldwide expropriations under pressure from the USA.

This global wave of expropriation against Russia and Russians, started by the USA, not only destroys confidence in worldwide investments and capital investments, but also torpedoes globalisation in general.

The basis of business and investment abroad was namely the trust that assets invested abroad and company investments made there would remain with the investor in the long term. If companies and investors now have to reckon with the US example of arbitrary expropriation of “enemy assets” being followed by its satellites, this will be the end of all confidence in international investment.

But if world trade collapses due to a loss of confidence, if export surpluses as well as exporting countries collapse – above all Germany –, we will lose not only our foreign investments, but also the returns on these foreign investments as well as our export surpluses. In a few years we

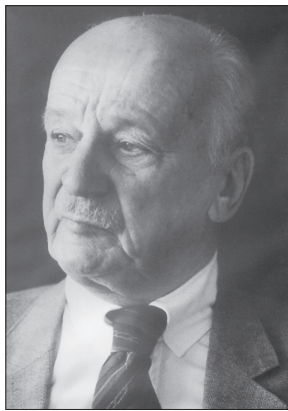
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**"Looking at Germany"**

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the constitution and laws alone would not be sufficient for social cohesion and living together. On the other hand, the years 1933-1945 had made it abundantly clear where a purely emotional attachment to a state entity and above all to the person of its "leader" ("Führer"), which eliminated reason, could lead. Sternberger therefore pleaded for a combination of emotionally fulfilled love of the fatherland and a democratic republic guided by reason. As early as 1947, he quoted in the journal *Die Wandlung* (The Transformation): "There is no fatherland in despotism." And in 1959, under the title "Das Vaterland" ("The Fatherland"), he wrote: "The fatherland is the 'republic,' which we create for ourselves. The fatherland is the constitution, to which we give life." Sternberger decisively rejected an ethnically based nationalism after the excesses under National Socialism; for him, Switzerland as a nation of the will was a model.

He used the term "constitutional patriotism" for the first time in 1970 in an article for the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", but initially without a major echo. This only changed in 1979 with another article in the same newspaper and with his speech at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Academy* in Tutzing in 1982.



Dolf Sternberger (1907–1989)  
(picture ma)

Consent, Sternberger said in his speech at the time, which was summarised in the Academy's publication, "cannot come to the state order simply on the basis of a historically grown community of fate and experience. Rather, *only the common exercise of rights of freedom and participation can create a real sense of identity*. A modern community like the Federal Republic of Germany is primarily held together by the rational will of its citizens to belong and to participate". (emphasis km) For Sternberger, it was about the essence of the modern constitutional state; he too spoke of the "liberal democratic basic order" and its features that were central to him: "representative body and civic electorates, a controlled government, statutory administration, independent jurisdiction, open recruitment of leadership elites, change of office according to agreed rules of the game, public information and discussion, resistance and opposition, social pluralism and, finally, civic freedom secured by the state's monopoly on the use of force".

**Constitutional patriotism today**

In the Historikerstreit (Historians' dispute) of the 1980s, the term "constitutional patriotism" came under fire. *Jürgen Habermas* used the term as a fighting tool against those who disagreed with the idea that German identity should only be regarded as a westernised Federal Republic identity and that German history before 1933 should only be regarded as a long road to National Socialism. Dolf Sternberger was not entirely innocent of this development. His resolute disassociation from National Socialism led him to view with great scepticism an overly emotional attachment of citizens to their state. In addition, he also strongly dissociated himself from German history before 1933 – although the history of the German freedom, constitutional and national movement certainly offered potential for identification. Also problematic from

today's perspective: Sternberger's rather great trust in the federal German party oligarchy and the federal German state institutions.

Critics such as the recently deceased writer *Martin Walser* or constitutional lawyers such as *Rupert Scholz* or *Wolfgang Isensee* referred to such points. Isensee spoke of an "abstraction" that was too "thin" and not suitable to explain "why a nation should stick together in good and bad days".

Indeed, a country whose citizens no longer see themselves as a "historically evolved community of destiny and experience" develops too little inner binding force. Seeing oneself as part of a "community of destiny and experience" does not mean absolving one's own history and present. However: Would it not do all people living in Germany good to encounter the entire history and present of the country – including that of the former German Democratic Republic – without arrogance and know-it-all attitude?

And to reconcile with the country's tradition in West and East, which means: to understand and not to exclude oneself and to put one's own responsibility for one's own life and coexistence of all people in the country in the centre. And last but not least: to recognise and openly name all the things that are worth building on constructively. There is also a rich treasure for Germany.

- <sup>1</sup> On 31 July, *Roger Köppel*, chief editor of the Swiss *Weltwoche*, clarified how far the public extremism debate in Germany has removed from constitutional standards: <https://weltwoche.ch/daily/parteitag-gereifte-afd-fordert-direkte-demokratie-eine-eu-der-vaterlaender-und-eine-migrationsfestung-europa-rechtsextremismus-wie-deutsche-behoerden-den-begriff-umdeuten-immer-mehr-deutsche-fuer/> cf. Sternberger, Dolf. *Verfassungspatriotismus, Dolf Sternberger Schriften* (Constitutional Patriotism, Dolf Sternberger Publications), Vol. X, Insel Verlag 1990
- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.apb-tutzing.de/download/publikationen/kurzanalysen/Akademie-Kurzanalyse\\_2020\\_01\\_Web.pdf](https://www.apb-tutzing.de/download/publikationen/kurzanalysen/Akademie-Kurzanalyse_2020_01_Web.pdf)

**"The end of global ownership ..."**

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could have export deficits instead, in any case the prosperity based on exports so far (about one third) will collapse when globalisation dissolves.

**Risk of the abolished property guarantee**

The *Mittelstandsinstitut* has therefore warned export-heavy companies to stop relying on this strength in the long term and to factor in growing difficulties of globalisation. This applies, for example, to cheap imports from China and other countries, which we may no longer be able to pay for in the long term, it also applies to ownership of foreign investments, which,

according to the American model, will in future be at the mercy of states, without protection; and above all it applies to investment income (profits) from subsidiary companies and fixed investments abroad.

If the world divides into two blocs, the US-NATO on the one hand and Russia/China on the other, disputes over each other's assets will also become more heated and ruthless and countries will carry out the same kind of expropriations that the USA and the EU have now introduced against Russia.

**No more foreign investments**

Then the world champion exporter will have to pay a heavy price for having allowed itself to be driven into a foreign

economic war that harms Germany more than all the other countries in the world, over which we have practically no influence, in which both warring parties, the USA and Russia, are fighting against German interests and which, with its long-term consequences – as described above – harms Germany's global standing in industry and our prosperity based on this more than other countries.

It is not the Ukraine war itself, but the world trade war launched against it also in form of our own sanctions, that is destroying globalisation and the prosperity for all based on it, and will – like every war – spread blow against blow and with growing hatred, bringing only global harm instead of any benefit.

# UNESCO: “No screen can ever replace the humanity of a teacher”

## On the Education Report 2023

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and remedial teacher

The new school year has begun. Our schools are equipped with many new devices, and some school communities proudly report that their pupils are now equipped with tablets. The necessary credits had been generously promised, after all, it was about the future of our children, who had to be prepared for a world shaped by digitalisation. It is often praised that distance teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic made it clear that technological solutions in education were a very appropriate tool and should be seen as an inevitable form of progress. Also, distance learning had finally broken through the mistrust and technophobia of many teachers. The favourable moment was therefore used to obtain the necessary finances to provide digital devices for all school levels.

These euphoric voices are rightly met with scepticism, and critical voices are increasingly being heard that question in whose service this development is and whether it actually improves children’s educational opportunities.

### A tool on whose terms?

Some time ago, UNESCO published its comprehensive Education Report 2023 entitled “Technology in Education – a tool on whose terms?”<sup>1</sup>. UNESCO plays an important role in the education policies of its member countries, coordinating and monitoring how they implement the agreed goals. The current education goal of the *Education 2030 Agenda* is: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”<sup>2</sup> It is part of the sustainable development goals adopted by the UN in 2015 and is to be achieved by 2030.

### “No screen can ever replace the humanity of a teacher”

In her foreword, *Audrey Azoulay*, the Director General of UNESCO, addresses three widespread promises associated with the technologisation of schools that would raise false expectations.<sup>3</sup> “Firstly, there is the promise of personalized learning. Very often, this powerful hope leads us to forget the fundamental social and human dimension that lies at the heart of education. It is worth reiterating the obvious: no screen can ever replace the humanity of a teacher. As underlined in the UNESCO ‘Futures of Education’ report, published in 2021, the relationship between teachers and technology must be one of complementarity – never of substitutability.”



*The basis of a successful learning process is the interpersonal relationship. (picture caro)*

In other words, Azoulay emphasises the indispensable importance of the teacher personality and the relationship for the learning process and relegates the digital devices that are widely used today to the place where they belong, namely as an additional and possible tool with which teaching can at best be didactically and methodologically expanded.

### Evidence for real added value of digital technology is missing

The second misguided expectation she cites is the claim that digital technology will make education more accessible. This is not the case, she says, as “[...] the reality is that digital divides still exist, to the point of actually increasing educational inequalities – which is the second paradox that this report highlights. During the pandemic, almost a third of pupils did not have effective access to distance learning – unsurprisingly, since only 40% of primary schools worldwide currently have Internet access. Even if connectivity was universal, it would still be necessary to demonstrate, from a pedagogical point of view, that digital technology offers real added value in terms of effective learning, especially at a time when we are all becoming aware of the risks of excessive screen time.”

### Commercial and private interests, lack of data protection

“The last paradox, and by no means the least,” Azoulay continues, “is that, de-

spite the desire to make education a global common good, the role of commercial and private interests in education continues to grow, with all the ambiguities that entails: to date, only one in seven countries legally guarantees the privacy of educational data.”

As a compass for each country’s education strategies, the Education Report therefore makes two strong recommendations: First, to systematically prioritise student welfare over all other considerations – especially commercial ones – and second, to ensure that technology is seen as a means and not an end.

### Homework for decision-makers

UNESCO therefore calls on the respective governments to clarify whether the use of educational technology is at all suitable for the national and local context. The risk that digitalisation favours the already privileged and further excludes others, thus further increasing inequality in learning, must also be ruled out. Governments are warned not to be tempted by the overwhelming range of products and platforms in the education sector to make decisions without sufficient evidence of benefits and costs (only about 25% of the total costs are necessary for the initial investment, the remaining 75% are follow-up costs, for example for technical support, which are generally not named). Furthermore, the

**“UNESCO: ‘No screen can ...’”**

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countries would always have to check whether the digital technology actually brought sustainable benefits and was not guided by narrow economic considerations and particular interests.<sup>4</sup>

**Good, unbiased insights are scarce**

These core statements derive from a multi-faceted and differentiated report that incorporates the current state of research and previous experience. The advantages and disadvantages of digital technology in the education sector are weighed against each other. Schools are being called upon to set and abide by rules that everyone must abide by and to clarify what role new technologies should play in learning and how they can be used responsibly. Aware, as the report points out, that good, unbiased insights into the impact of educational technology are scarce – much of the research comes from those trying to sell their products.

**Develop a critical awareness**

Pupils must be empowered, says the report, to confront the opportunities and risks associated with technology and develop a critical awareness of how to live with and without technology. This clears their view of the changes in the world and the associated challenges.

So the report is not a rejection of information technology in educational institutions. However, it is a rejection of the current business models of the current providers – with the aim, as *Ralf Lankau*, Professor of Media Design and Media Theory at the Offenburg University of Applied Sciences, says, “[...] the use of information technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to meet the needs of and for the benefit of learners instead of the particular interests of the IT industry and individual media providers”.<sup>5</sup>

**Toads on the sofa**

What the UNESCO Education Report addresses has already been taken into account in some countries when creating and evaluating educational programs. For example, Sweden has submitted its proposal for a national digitization strategy for the school system 2023–27 to the *Karolinska Institute*, one of the largest and most respected medical universities in Europe, for comment. The opinion of the team of scientists from different disciplines played a major role in the Swedish government reversing its decision to make digital devices compulsory in pre-schools and primary schools. The Liberal Party’s website states the following:

“It is clear that screens have major disadvantages for small children. They hinder learning and language development. Too much screen time can lead to trouble concentrating and crowd out physical activity. We know that human interaction is crucial for learning in the early years of life. Screens simply have no place in preschools.” (*Lotta Edholm*, Education Minister of Sweden)

“Sweden is in a school crisis and the screen experiment in pre-schools has gone too far; this is where the foundations for the school should be laid. Kids in pre-school look at toads on the sofa instead of toads in the pond.” And further: “It is clear that screens have major disadvantages for small children. They hinder learning and language development. Too much screen time can lead to trouble concentrating and crowd out physical activity. We know that human interaction is crucial for learning in the early years of life. Screens simply have no place in preschools,” says Education Minister *Lotta Edholm*.<sup>6</sup>

**Other countries are doing it**

But not only Sweden, but also other countries have come to their senses and re-considered their digital guidelines in the education sector. A high school in Sydney, Australia introduced stricter regulations on the use of mobile phones. Pupils were now required to store their cell phones during the day in a bag which, once closed, could not be opened again without picking a lock. What is important is that the school’s decision was supported by the teachers and most of the parents.

Just two months later, the school’s principal reported that they had noticed a marked decrease (90%) in behavioural problems and an increase in physical activity and conversations between students since the policy was implemented. It is clear that mobile phones in the classroom interfere with children’s learning and concentration, and have a negative impact on students’ mental health and well-being.<sup>7</sup>

This school did what is already customary in various other schools and countries. Already in 2015 and 2018, France introduced a ban on mobile phones in class, which was extended in 2018 to internet-enabled devices such as tablets and smartwatches and applies to all premises and during school activities in and outside school buildings.

In China, at the beginning of 2021, the Ministry of Education limited the time

when digital devices are used as teaching aids to 30% of teaching time. From 2024 on, the Netherlands will also be among those countries that will ban the use of mobile phones or other private digital devices in schools. Every fourth country worldwide now bans private devices in schools, with a view to the children and young people who should (and are allowed to!) concentrate on their lessons again and communicate with each other.

**What is to be done?**

These experiences should give our educational politicians, but also parents and teachers, the decisive impetus to follow suit and free themselves from current errors. There is no need for further educational experiments in educational policy, but rather an open and honest dialogue that is based on independent, scientific findings, honestly evaluates experiences, and is guided by the needs of the child. Wouldn’t that then be a real reason for school communities to be proud? •

<sup>1</sup> Global Education Monitoring Report 2023. *Technology in Education – a tool on whose terms?* Paris: UNESCO. (Detailed report with 418 pages). <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en>; retrieved 10 August 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Swiss UNESCO Commission. *Education Agenda 2030. Framework for Action. German abridged version*, p. 2; <https://www.unesco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Bildungsagenda-2030.pdf>; retrieved on 14 August 2023

<sup>3</sup> op. cit. p. vii, from which the following two quotations are also taken.

<sup>4</sup> World Education Report (short version, English, 35 pages), p. 25f.; <https://www.unesco.de/publikationen#row-10250>; retrieved 10 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Lankau, Ralf. *UNESCO report calls for more educational justice*. [www.diagnose-funk.org](http://www.diagnose-funk.org) > download.php?field=filename&id=1658&class=News Download, retrieved 13 August 2023.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Liberal Party Sweden. *Dags för skärmfri förskola* [Time for a screen-free preschool]. <https://www.liberalerna.se/nyheter/dags-for-skarmfri-forskola>; retrieved 12 August 2023

<sup>7</sup> cf. A Sydney high school banned mobile phones. It had dramatic results. In: *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7 August 2022; <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/a-sydney-high-school-banned-mobile-phones-it-had-dramatic-results-20220803-p5b6zf.html#Echobox=1659829516>; retrieved 12 August 2023