

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*

Israel and the Occupied Territories

A speech given by Mirjana Spoljaric, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the international humanitarian conference for the people of Gaza held in Paris on 9 November

The suffering we have seen unfold in Gaza and Israel is intolerable: the tragic loss of many people and of so many children. The destruction of people's homes. The deep and recurrent traumas. The hostages still held captive and their families in anguish.

It is intolerable to think this catastrophic humanitarian situation has lasted for a month; it is unacceptable that it lasts any longer.

International humanitarian law is the most complete and practical tool at our disposal to ensure the protection of civilians and to pave the way for de-escalation.

I urge the international community to ensure its full implementation.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues

The immediate imperative is to save lives and preserve humanity. Rapid and sustained humanitarian access and supplies are desperately needed.

Critical services like health care, water, electricity and communications must be immediately restored in Gaza as a lifesaving priority.

In Gaza, the ICRC has more than 100 staff who remain working amid the violence. We have pre-positioned life-saving supplies, and recently through the Rafah crossing, we brought in medical supplies and a new team including surgical and weapon contamination experts.

But stocks are running out, and our surgeons now lack anaesthesia and even gauze to treat burn victims.

We are ready to rapidly scale given the vast needs, but we need to be able to regularly bring in large volumes of stocks and have the necessary access and safety guarantees.

The ICRC is working to support communities in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel, including through our partners, the *Palestine Red Crescent Society* (PRCS), the *Magen David Adom* (MDA), and other members of the Movement notably the *Egyptian Red Crescent* (ERC) to support their essential emergency services work.

Humanitarian workers in Gaza and Israel have showed incredible courage and dedication.



Mirjana Spoljaric, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross: "We are confronted with a catastrophic moral failing – one that the world must not tolerate." (picture apaimage)

Tragically, as we have heard, medics from the MDA and PRCS, as well as UN and other humanitarians, have been killed while working to help others. I pay tribute to them and call for the urgent protection of all civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and hospitals in line with international humanitarian law.

The role of a neutral intermediary has proven valuable to meet humanitarian needs. Through our dialogue with the parties the ICRC has offered practical assistance at critical moments.

On Monday, we accompanied ambulances transporting patients in need of urgent medical care from *Al Shifa* hospital in Gaza city to the Rafah border. As a trusted neutral actor, the ICRC also facilitated the two hostage release operations. We continue to call for the immediate release of hostages, and remain committed to facilitating any further release and to visit the hostages.

But:

Humanitarian aid must not become a fig leaf for failing to protect civilian lives.

The primary responsibility to protect victims of war rests on the parties to the conflict.

These protections must be extended to all civilians including those who remain in Gaza city. The north is unlikely to be completely emptied of its population and not all of its buildings can be considered military targets. It is urgent to start preparing for the return to the north for the hundreds of thousands of families displaced. Respecting IHL now will have a substantial and positive impact.

In the West Bank, the deadly violence against civilians continues to escalate: these people cannot be forgotten and their needs and protection must be addressed.

Without immediate restraint on both sides, we are heading for an even deeper humanitarian disaster, and perpetuating cycles of violence.

We cannot accept absolute hostility to the point of dehumanization of the other side.

World Health Organization Director-General calls for immediate ceasefire and unfettered humanitarian access

Session of the UN-Security Council on 10 November 2023

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), said he fully understands the anger, grief and fear of the Israeli people following the barbaric attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October, as well as that of the people of Gaza who have already suffered 16 years of blockade and are now enduring the destruction of their families and homes. “The situation on the ground is impossible to describe.” Hospital corridors crammed with the injured, the sick and the dying, morgues are overflowing and surgical procedures are being conducted without anaesthesia. Thousands of displaced people are sheltering at hospitals or crammed inside overcrowded schools, desperate for food and water. Seventy per cent of the more than 10,800 people have now been killed in Gaza are women and children, he said, adding: “On average, a child is killed every 10 minutes in Gaza.”

He noted that 1.5 million people are displaced and looking for shelter anywhere, but “nowhere and no one is safe”.

Overcrowding is increasing the risk diarrheal and respiratory diseases and skin infections. WHO is on the ground in Gaza alongside its partners to support health workers doing their best in unimaginable conditions. In addition to caring for 27,000 wounded people, many with life-threatening injuries, medical staff are trying to manage the regular health needs of more than 2 million people. More than 180 women give birth in Gaza every day, he said, adding that there are also 9,000 patients in Gaza on cancer therapy and 350,000 with diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

Since 7 October, WHO has verified more than 250 attacks on health-care facilities in Gaza and the West Bank, in addition to 25 attacks on health-care facilities in Israel, he said. Last week, WHO documented five attacks on five hospitals in one day. In the past 48 hours alone, four hospitals have been put out of action. Half of the Gaza Strip’s 36 hospitals and two thirds of its primary health-care centres are not functioning at all, while the oth-

ers are operating way beyond their capacities. “The health system is on its knees and yet somehow is continuing to deliver some life-saving care.” The best way to support those health workers and patients is to give them the tools they need – medicines, medical equipment and fuel for hospital generators, he said.

WHO was part of the first aid convoy to enter Gaza through the Rafah Crossing on 21 October and has since delivered 63 metric tons of specialist medical equipment and supplies, but this does not address the scale of needs, he said. Before 7 October, an average of 500 trucks a day crossed into Gaza with essential supplies, but since 21 October, only 650 trucks have entered. He called for unfettered access to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza, for Hamas to release hostages and for Israel to restore electricity, water and fuel supplies. He also called for a ceasefire and for both sides to abide by international humanitarian law.

Source: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15487.doc.htm> of 10. November 2023

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With each passing day the possibility of finding a way back to a dialogue and a political solution dwindles.

We must try not only to reduce human suffering, but also to preserve a minimal space in which to agree on something that is not achieved through military means, but through political discussions.

I urge States to use their influence to ensure IHL is fully respected and implemented.

The Geneva Conventions are practical:

- Killing civilians and ill-treatment are prohibited.
- The wounded and sick must be cared for, protected and respected.
- People detained must be treated humanely and with dignity.
- Hostage-taking is prohibited and hostages should be immediately released unharmed.
- Civilian infrastructure that people depend on to live – including electricity and water networks – must be spared.
- Irrespective of any military siege, the parties must ensure that civilians have

access to basic necessities, including medical care.

We are confronted with a catastrophic moral failing – one that the world must not tolerate.

I urge you to take concrete political steps to ensure a sustained humanitarian space, protect the special role of neutral actors such as the ICRC, provide adequate funding and to urge respect for the practical implementation of the laws of war.

Source: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-president-tells-paris-conference-gaza-immediate-imperative-is-to-save-lives> of 9 November 2023

Current Concerns

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Israel and the United Nations

by Karin Leukefeld, Bonn and Damascus

Israel has problems with the United Nations. When it comes to the country's conflict with Palestine, Israeli diplomats quickly become furious as they defy the world organisation and its member states. The ongoing bombardment of the population in Gaza – of densely populated residential areas, refugee camps, schools, hospitals, civilian infrastructure, and journalists and their families – shows that Israel is violating international law.

UN membership subject to conditions

“[...] that Israel is a peace-loving State and is able and willing to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter” (UNGA Resolution 273; see box).

Even during war, it is considered a crime to target civilian populations, to cut off their water, electricity, fuel, medical supplies, food, and communication links. While more and more countries recall their ambassadors from Israel, or, like Bolivia, break off diplomatic relations altogether, the German government in Berlin remains unconditionally loyal to Israel.

Foreign Minister *Baerbock* declared that Israel – like every state in the world – has a duty to protect its population and to defend itself against attacks. *Baerbock* described the people in the Jabaliya refugee camp – bombed by Israel twice within 24 hours – as “human shields” of the “terrorist organisation Hamas”. This not only reveals contempt for the victims of the bombings, it also shows that the German Foreign Minister doesn't know the history of the state of Israel and of Palestine.

The UN dividing Palestine

Before the end of the British Mandate (1920–1948), Palestine was divided under the UN Partition Plan (UN Resolution 181 II). The newly founded UN thus complied with a promise made by the British colonial power in 1917, when the British Foreign Secretary *Lord Balfour* committed the British Crown to supporting the Zionist national movement in establishing a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. The population living in Palestine rejected the idea. Protests and violence, which had already begun before the UN resolution, erupted as discussions of the partition plan proceeded.

This partition plan, adopted in November 1947 (UN Resolution 181 II), divided Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. Although more than two thirds of the approximately 1,900,000 inhabitants at the time were Muslim, Christian, and Druze Palestinians, with only one third comprising immigrant Jews, the indigenous Pal-

estinian population wasn't given a vote. A referendum was rejected.

The Jewish state was to comprise 56.47 per cent of Palestine, the Arab state 42.88 per cent. The city of Jerusalem, with 0.65 per cent, was to be placed under UN administration as a “corpus separatum”. All three parts were to be combined in an economic union. The port city of Jaffa belonged to the Arab state. At the time, the UN had 56 member states, of which 33 voted in favour, 13 against and ten abstained. All Arab states voted against.

The expulsion

Although the Zionists regarded the partition resolution as the founding document of their state, they launched military operations to expel the Palestinians immediately after the plan was passed in order to enlarge the territory granted to them. They attacked villages and either killed or expelled the population. 530 Palestinian villages were destroyed. At the turn of the year 1948/49, the Palestinians were left with only 22 per cent of the land that the UN partition plan had intended for them. East Jerusalem had been defended by the Jordanian Arab Legion against the Zionist militias. West Jerusalem, on the other hand, had been taken early on by the Zionist underground army *Haganah* and the Palestinian population had been expelled. Thus, the Zionists ignored the part of the UN partition plan according to which Jerusalem was to be placed under international administration as a “corpus separatum”.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed. The following day, on 15 May, Israel applied for membership to the

Resolution 273 of the UN General Assembly of 11 May 1949

Having received the report of the Security Council on the application of Israel for membership in the United Nations,

Noting that, in the judgment of the Security Council, Israel is a peace-loving State and is able and willing to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter,

Noting that the Security Council has recommended to the General Assembly that it admit Israel to membership in the United Nations,

Noting furthermore the declaration by the State of Israel that it “unreservedly accepts the obligations of the United Nations Charter and undertakes to honour them from the day when it becomes a member of the United Nations”,

Recalling its resolutions of 29 November 1947 and 11 December 1948 and taking note of the declarations and explanations made by the representative of the Government of Israel before the Ad Hoc Political Committee in respect of the implementation of the said resolutions,

The General Assembly,

Acting in discharge of its functions under Article 4 of the Charter and rule 125 of its rules of procedure,

1. *Decides* that Israel is a peace-loving State which accepts the obligations contained in the Charter and is able and willing to carry out those obligations;
2. *Decides* to admit Israel to membership in the United Nations.

United Nations. The application was not dealt with by the UN Security Council. On the very same day, 15 May, the Arab states declared war on Israel. On 20 May, the UN General Assembly appointed the Swedish diplomat *Count Folke Bernadotte* as UN mediator for Palestine. *Bernadotte* succeeded in negotiating a ceasefire and he laid the foundations for the UN relief organisation for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. He criticised the “ethnic cleansing” of the Palestinians and the fact that “Israel claimed all of Jerusalem for itself”, which contradicted the UN partition plan. On 17 September 1948, UN special mediator *Bernadotte* was assassinated by the *Stern Group*, a Zionist militia. *Yitzhak Shamir*, who later became Israeli Prime Minister, was also a member of the *Stern Group*. The UN Security Council condemned *Bernadotte's* assassination. On 11 December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194, which defined the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees (if feasible) as well as compensation for their losses. On 17 December that same year, a second Israeli application for membership to the United Nations was rejected by the UN Security Council.

After parliamentary elections in 1949, Israel applied for membership to the United Nations for the third time. On 4 March 1949, the UN Security Council voted in favour of membership with Resolution 69. Great Britain had objections. It had abstained from the vote arguing that Israel wasn't abiding by UN principles and didn't accept the UN partition plan. The UN General Assembly approved Israel's

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membership on 11 May 1949, however it formulated conditions. Thereafter, Israel was accepted as a member of the United Nations on condition that Israel accept, and implement, Resolutions 181 II and 194, the UN Partition Plan and the right of return of the Palestinians (if feasible) as well as their reparations. Since then, Israel has ignored more than 200 resolutions of the UN General Assembly alone.

In 1967, after the Six-Day War, another important United Nations resolution was passed, this time by the UN Security Council. This was Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967, which stated that the “conquest of land by war is inadmissible” and that Israeli troops must withdraw from the occupied territories (1967). This involved East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights, which Israel had occupied in the Six-Day War (June 1967). By that time, Israel had already begun to colonise the occupied territories, in particular through the illegal construction of settlements. Israel was thus violating international law and the 4th Geneva Convention.

At the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2023, Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* stepped up to the lectern with a map to demonstrate that Israel and Saudi Arabia – then in a political rapprochement supported by the USA – were on the verge of an agreement. On the map of the region that Netanyahu held up, Israel encompassed the entire territory of Palestine, without showing the Palestinian West Bank, Gaza, or East Jerusalem, the intended capital of a state of Palestine. The Palestinian territories that were to have formed a Palestinian state had been erased.

The attack by the Qassam Brigades

Israel responded to the attack by the Qassam Brigades from the Gaza Strip on areas in southern Israel on 7 October 2023 with unprecedented violence against the Palestinians, initially in the Gaza Strip and now also in the occupied West Bank. Calls in the UN Security Council and the General Assembly for a ceasefire and aid for the civilian population have been met with threats and accusations by Israeli diplomats. UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* was insulted and asked to resign when he pointed out at a UN Security Council meeting (24 October 2023) that the 7 October attack had not emerged out of a vacuum. For more than 56 years, the Palestinians have been living under an oppressive Israeli occupation and have been denied their own state. No party in an armed conflict is above international humanitarian law, said Guterres, referring

“UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* was insulted and asked to resign when he pointed out at a UN Security Council meeting (24 October 2023) that the 7 October attack had not emerged out of a vacuum. For more than 56 years, the Palestinians have been living under an oppressive Israeli occupation and have been denied their own state. No party in an armed conflict is above international humanitarian law, said Guterres, referring to the clear violations of humanitarian law that can be observed in Gaza.”

to the clear violations of humanitarian law that can be observed in Gaza.

The USA has put a stop to several draft resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire on the grounds that they did not recognise Israel’s “right of defence” and the condemnation of Hamas as a “terrorist organisation”. During those political battles in the UN Security Council, more than 8,700 people were killed (as of 2 November) by the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, including more than 3,600 children.

On 27 October, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution of Arab states by 121:14:44 votes calling for an “immediate, permanent and sustainable humanitarian ceasefire” between Israeli forces and Hamas fighters in Gaza. In addition, “continuous, sufficient and unhindered” supplies to the civilian population trapped in Gaza must be ensured.

Israel and the United Nations

Israel refused to abide by the UN resolution. Instead, on the same day it was passed, Israel intensified its aerial, artillery, and naval bombardment of the Palestinian coastal strip. The supply of water, medicine and fuel has been interrupted. Communications in Gaza have been cut, neither telephones nor internet connections are working.

On 30 October, Israeli UN Ambassador *Gilad Erdan* appeared with a yellow Star of David on his suit jacket. “Never again” was written on it. The symbolic gesture was meant to invoke German fascism and the extermination of Jews during WWII by religious, ethnic and societal groups as well as by political opponents. Erdan claimed to be wearing the star “as his grandparents and the grandparents of millions of Jews” once wore it. He intends to continue wearing it until the United Nations condemns the atrocities committed by Hamas and demands the immediate release of the Israeli hostages.

The action was criticised by the chairman of the *Yad Vashem memorial*, *Dani*

Dayan, who said that wearing the star was a “disgrace (shame) for the victims of the Holocaust and for Israel”. The yellow star symbolises the helplessness of the Jewish people, according to Dayan, whereas today, Israel has an independent state and a strong army. “We are the masters of our own destiny,” Dayan said. “Today we will pin a blue and white flag on our lapels, not a yellow star.”

Numerous UN diplomats, UN organisations, and institutions have issued appeals calling for a stop to Israel’s violation of international law. While it is not explicitly stated, the appeals are directed at those governments – such as the USA and Germany – that arm and support Israel, politically and in the media, and – like the USA – prevent the UN Security Council from unanimously and immediately calling for a ceasefire. On 14 October, *Francesca Albanese*, the UN Special Representative for Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied by Israel since 1967, declared that “under the guise of war [...] Israel is trying once again and in the name of self-defence to justify what would amount to ethnic cleansing”.

As a reminder: On 11 May 1949, Israel was accepted as a member of the United Nations on the condition that it accepts and implements Resolutions 181 II (the UN Partition Plan) and 194 (the UN Partition Plan and the right of return of the Palestinians (if feasible) and their reparations). To this day, Israel has *never* considered it “feasible” for the Palestinians to return. On the contrary, Israel has done everything in its power to appropriate the land of Palestine. The USA has always held a protective hand over Israel even as Palestinians are expelled, arrested, and killed. In October 2023, high-ranking Israeli politicians and personalities labelled the Palestinian people as “human animals”.

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Sharing land and peace from the river to the sea.”

Remarks by His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Cairo Summit for Peace



King Abdullah II of Jordan (picture screenshot)

Egypt, Cairo, 21 October 2023

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Prayers and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad,

My brother, Your Excellency President Abdel Fattah El Sisi,

Your Majesties, Highnesses, Excellencies,

Peace, God’s mercy and blessings be upon you.

My thanks to His Excellency the President for convening this meeting during these difficult times, so we can work urgently together to stop this humanitarian disaster pushing our entire region into the abyss.

Allow me to speak in English to our friends from Europe and the world who join us here today. My message is to them.

My friends,

Peace, God’s mercy and blessings be upon you.

This is how Muslims and Arabs greet others: with a wish for the other to be blessed with peace and the mercy of God.

Our religion came with a message of peace. The *Pact of Omar*, issued at the gates of Jerusalem almost 15 centuries ago, more than a thousand years before the *Geneva Conventions*, ordered Muslim soldiers not to kill a child, a woman or an old person, not to destroy a tree, not to harm a priest, not to destroy a church.

Those are the rules of engagement that Muslims must accept and abide by, as should all those who believe in our common humanity. All civilian lives matter!

My Friends,

I am outraged and grieved by those acts of violence waged against innocent civilians in Gaza, in the West Bank, and Israel.

The relentless bombing campaign underway in Gaza as we speak is cruel and unconscionable – on every level.

It is collective punishment of a besieged and helpless people.

electricity, and basic necessities would be condemned. Accountability would be enforced, immediately, unequivocally.

And it has been done before – recently, in another conflict.

But not in Gaza. It’s been two weeks since Israel put in place the complete siege of the Gaza Strip. And still, for the most part, global silence.

Yet the message the Arab world is hearing is loud and clear: Palestinian lives matter less than Israeli ones. Our lives matter less than other lives. The application of international law is optional. And human rights have boundaries – they stop at borders, they stop at races, and they stop at religions.

That is a very, very dangerous message, as the consequences of continued international apathy and inaction will be catastrophic – on us all.

My friends,

We cannot let raw emotions dictate the moment; our priorities today are clear and urgent:

First: An immediate end to the war on Gaza, the protection of civilians, and the adoption of a unified position that indiscriminately condemns the targeting of all civilians, in line with our shared values and international law, which loses all value if it is implemented selectively.

Second: The sustained and uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid, fuel, food, and medicines to the Gaza Strip.

Third: The unequivocal rejection of the forced displacement or internal displacement of the Palestinians. This is a war crime according to international law, and a red line for all of us.

This conflict, my friends, did not start two weeks ago, and it will not stop if we continue down this blood-soaked path. We know all too well that it will only lead to more of the same – a zero-sum game of death and destruction, of hatred and hopelessness played on repeat.

Today, Israel is literally starving civilians in Gaza, but for decades, Palestini-

ans have been starved of hope, of freedom, and a future.

It is a war crime. Yet, the deeper the crisis cuts of cruelty, the less the world seems to care.

Anywhere else, attacking civilian infrastructure and deliberately starving an entire population of food, water,

It is a war crime. Yet, the deeper the crisis cuts of cruelty, the less the world seems to care.

Because when the bombs stop falling, Israel is never held accountable, the injustices of occupation continue and the world walks away, until the next round of violence. The bloodshed we are witnessing today is the price of that, of failing to make tangible progress towards a political horizon that brings peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Israeli leadership must realise that there is no military solution to its security concerns, that it cannot continue to sideline the five million Palestinians living under its occupation, denied of their legitimate rights, and that Palestinians lives are no less valuable than Israeli lives.

The Israeli leadership must realise, once and for all, that a state can never thrive if it is built on the foundations of injustice.

Over the past 15 years, we have seen how the dreams of a two-state solution and the hopes of an entire generation have turned into despair. This has been the policy of hardline Israeli leadership – to focus solely on security over peace and create new illegal realities on the ground that render an autonomous Palestinian state unviable. In the process, it has empowered extremists on both sides.

But we must not – we cannot – write off this conflict as too far gone, for the sake of both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Our collective and unified message to the Israeli people should be: We want a future of peace and security for you and for the Palestinians, where your children and Palestinian children should no longer live in fear.

It is our duty as the international community to do whatever it takes to restart a meaningful political process that can take us to a just and sustainable peace on the basis of the two-state solution.

The only path to a safe and secure future for the people of the Middle East and the entire world – for the Jewish people, for Christians, for Muslims alike – starts with the belief that every human life is of equal value and it ends with two states, Palestine and Israel, sharing land and peace from the river to the sea.

The time to act is now.

Thank you.

Thank you all.

Peace, God’s mercy and blessings be upon you. •

“The global ecosystem requires a neutral Switzerland”

Interview with Scott Ritter on the occasion of the 30th “Mut zur Ethik” conference from 1–3 September 2023, Part 1



Scott Ritter
(picture evo)

Current Concerns: Scott Ritter, you have been to Switzerland once but that was a long time ago. Now you have come back. What are your impressions and what were your impressions of the “Mut zur Ethik” conference that you just attended here in Switzerland and what were your impressions when visiting Switzerland on your previous trip?

Scott Ritter: The last time I was in Switzerland was 30 years ago, more than 30 years ago. So, a lot of time has gone by. But when I landed, I was struck with a sense of familiarity because the Switzerland I remember was always a very clean, orderly country, a beautiful country, lovely vistas, well organised – that’s what greeted me here. It wasn’t until this conference and in particular, this issue of Swiss neutrality was raised and I realised that the Switzerland of today is a far different place than the Switzerland that I arrived 30 years ago. And then talking with people too, it’s interesting how you can see something and not understand what’s going on underneath it. And so, had I simply driven through Switzerland, I wouldn’t understand the reality that’s taking place in Switzerland today. The societal angst over education, over the role of democracy, especially Switzerland’s unique form of direct democracy. And then, of course, the issue of neutrality. I think anybody who follows the news knows that Switzerland is going through a crisis right now of its neutrality status.

But for foreigners, like Americans, we just read the news. We don’t attach human feelings to that. And again, if you’re ignorant of how Switzerland works, you read about the direct democracy and you assume that Swiss government officials are acting based upon the will of the people. Then you find out that the will of people is not even being consulted. That the Swiss government is taking steps to do things that run counter to that which defines Switzerland.

Even 30 years ago, when I entered Switzerland, I knew I was entering a special place, a different place. It wasn’t part of NATO. It was a neutral nation. And I made that assumption landing here today just out of habit, because I didn’t associate the news that I was reading about the transformation of Swiss neutrality. I didn’t associate that to reality.

Understanding neutrality as an American from a Swiss perspective

But this conference forced me to confront this issue and see it through Swiss eyes. That was perhaps the most important thing: to understand it from a Swiss perspective and in doing so, reflect on what that means to me as an American. And just learning about the US ambassador Scott Miller and his inappropriate comments and attitude towards Switzerland. I’m very proud to be an American. And I’m very protective of America’s imperative to fix itself, to deal with its own problems. So therefore, I get angry when Americans try to tell other people what to do about their lives. Because I would get angry if somebody tried to tell me what to do with my life. I know there’s problems. I know they need to be fixed. I will come up with a solution. Thank you very much.

confronted by the courage of other people’s convictions, and that challenges you to ask yourself, “am I doing enough? Am I being courageous based upon my convictions?” So, this was a really interesting couple of days.

Working together for the common cause of humanity

What have you taken from the conference, what was most important for you? I’ve taken a lot from it, but the main thing I took from it is the absolute necessity for everybody to work together towards the common cause of promoting humanity and that the Switzerland, the small European country with a history of neutrality, I think. Just like we protect things in the world, you know, we talk about the extinction of species, and what a tragedy it is for the world as animals go into extinct and the need to preserve them. Not just for

“Switzerland is forgetting its history. And when you forget your history, you become nobody. Because Switzerland, frankly speaking, if they lose their neutrality, they’ll just become a clone of Europe. They become a little Germany, a little France, a Little Italy. They’ll become a little nothing. Right now, Switzerland is a great nation because it stands for something great. But if you take that away, what does Switzerland stand for? Alps, Yodelling ...?”

It’s the arrogance and the hubris of an American ambassador trying to dictate a solution to the Swiss people through their government, a compliant government. But I didn’t know that the Swiss government was so detached from the people. That’s a news flash to me.

Understanding “Mut zur Ethik”

And then listening to the passion and the intelligence of the presentations at this conference. I have to say I have to compliment you. I mean, I’m giving away too much about me sometimes, but I didn’t know what “Mut zur Ethik” means and I mean even if I looked up the words, I wouldn’t have known what it really meant. But by coming here and listening to you talk about it and emphasize it, you know, the courage of your convictions. And that came to life in this conference.

It was an interesting, fascinating thing to watch. Then as a human being, you get

the sake of preserving a single species, but preserving all species. Because an ecosystem requires everything to work together in harmony, and the global ecosystem requires a neutral Switzerland. If we allow Swiss neutrality to go extinct, we destroy the global ecosystem. It becomes unbalanced.

And I think I’m leaving this conference more dedicated now than ever because I’ve been educated, I’ve been empowered with knowledge to fight for Swiss direct democracy. Because I’m fighting for American democracy. I’m fighting for humanity. I’m fighting for the preservation of the world, and I wouldn’t have had that perspective had I not attended this.

“Neutrality is perhaps the most courageous thing in the world”

What does the neutrality of Switzerland mean to you? How do you perceive neutrality from a perspective of someone

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What to do in times of war?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

German politics is still on a war footing. German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius has recently publicly said: “We must become fit for war again”. All the more reason for us to take an active stand for peace. A new book by political scientist and journalist Patrick Baab, “Auf beiden Seiten der Front” (On both sides of the front), makes an important contribution to this.

On 3 November, Tom J. Wellbrock, journalist and co-editor of the German blog *neulandrebellen*, wrote¹ that, in times of war, internal and external pressure to assume a position on one or the other side of a conflict increases enormously: When there are only “good guys” and “bad guys”, everyone is supposed to side, and of course wants to side, with the good guys – even if he or she is uninformed and not able to make a judgement.

This is one reason neutral states – Switzerland, Austria and Ireland are examples – have a particularly difficult time in times of war, even though they are particularly important in such times as long as there remains the will to minimise the extent of

destruction and casualties. Without neutral nations, there are fewer and fewer voices that can help find negotiated solutions. Instead, there is a threat of total war, which can end only with complete exhaustion and the unconditional surrender of one side or the other.

This was Europe’s de facto experience in the First World War and its very evident experience in World War II. The extent and consequences of these disasters are well-known. Or are they well-known but already forgotten?

There may be wars that cannot be meaningfully ended without the unconditional surrender of one side. Certainly, this was the case in the Second World War. But even in that case the question remains as to what would have been possible if Germany’s opponents had not powerfully supported *Hitler* many years earlier, if they had resolutely supported the German internal resistance and then conducted real peace negotiations with it.

The price of war

The price of war to the bitter end is always particularly high.



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One thing is also certain: Anyone setting one’s own claim to power as absolute
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“The global ecosystem ...”

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who has travelled and worked around the world?

To answer this question, I have to be very honest about my ignorance in the fact that what I knew about Swiss neutrality and what I know about Swiss neutrality still is very limited, so I need to be honest about that.

Well, Switzerland is a neutral country, so I guess it’s not just about Switzerland. It’s about the concept of neutrality in general. Early on in my development as an adult I viewed the world in black and white, good versus evil and so a neutral person to me was somebody who refuses to take a stand but they don’t stand for anything. That was my perception. But as I entered adulthood and became confronted with the reality of life, we shall say, in realizing that life isn’t black and white, that life’s very grey and many, many shades of grey. What I realized is that through experience and through meeting people, that neutrality was perhaps the most courageous thing in the world. That it’s easy to allow yourself to be captured by one point of view or another point of view, and it’s easy to justify it as US versus THEM, good versus evil, however you want to do it. But at the end of the day, the product of that is very destructive, very destructive. And when you see the destruction that is brought by

this, you realize that it doesn’t matter if you’re good or bad or whatever perception you had going into the conflict. The conflict just kills people. That’s all it does. It kills people and destroys. And that’s the evil, because both sides think they’re on the right side: “You know, I’m right”. “I’m right”. They come together. The evil that is produced by that conflict results in dead people. And neutrality is designed to prevent that evil. Neutrality is designed to keep these two sides from coming together. The neutrality is an intervention of reason, the intervention of humanity.

“Neutrality is the global safe zone”

Unfortunately, we mostly see it in a post conflict environment where the neutral parties come in afterwards to help clean up the mess, to separate the two, to bring families together to bring assistance to people and it’s seen as a force of good. But when you reflect on neutrality – especially the way that the Swiss do – they’re trying to prevent conflicts. This is the most important thing of all, and that’s been part of my growth. I guess, as an adult, as a human, is to recognize that the cowards are the people that don’t know how to be neutral.

The cowards are the people that take a strong stand, because that’s the easiest path. It’s the path of least resistance. The true courageous person is the one who is

able to step away from the singularity of that path and be open to considering the point of view of the other. But that’s a very difficult thing to do, given the prejudices. So sometimes you need a neutral ground to do this.

You need neutrality. Neutrality is the global safe zone that allows people to come together and work through issues to avoid conflict. And so, you know, that’s what I appreciate. I have to be shocked because I thought that’s what the Swiss believed in too. And when I came here and found out that Switzerland was deviating from that posture, I just have to be frank, I think that your government is one of the most cowardly governments imaginable. That they’ve taken the path of least resistance, that they forgot what Switzerland stood for.

Switzerland is forgetting its history. And when you forget your history, you become nobody. Because Switzerland, frankly speaking, if they lose their neutrality, they’ll just become a clone of the EU. They become a little Germany, a little France, a little Italy. They’ll become a little nothing. Right now, Switzerland is a great nation because it stands for something great. But if you take that away, what does Switzerland stand for? Alps, Yodelling ...?

Scott Ritter, thank You for this interview.●

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lute, without questioning any of one's own positions, is not capable of negotiating and is doggedly seeking a severe defeat, the capitulation of the "enemy". It is now considered proven, for example, that although Russia was prepared to negotiate a solution with Ukraine in March–April 2022, the U.S. and British governments were determined to continue the war.² In principle, nothing has changed in this constellation to date. The current situation in the Middle East is similar: The vast majority of the world's states calls for a ceasefire and a negotiated solution, while Israel and its closest allies have (so far) rejected this.

Patrik Baab: On both sides of the front

What a protracted war means for the people affected has been described time and again. At the beginning of October, *Patrik Baab*, a German political scientist and journalist, published a book that contains a great deal of very important information that is being concealed in the Western mainstream. I do not agree with all political judgements in *On both sides of the front: My travels in Ukraine*, but I can still highly recommend reading it.

Patrik Baab had already visited Ukraine, the western and eastern provinces, before the start of the Russian intervention on 24 February 2022; he visited again in the late summer and autumn of 2022. In his book, he not only recounts many conversations with people from western and eastern Ukraine as well as from Russia; he also puts these conversations into an historical and political context. This gives the reader an enlightening but also harrowing picture of the very long prehistory of 24 February 2022, of the war within Ukrainian since spring 2014, which has often been covered up in the West, and of the course of the war and its consequences since 24 February 2022. The back of the book reads: Patrik Baab tells "the story behind the headlines and the propaganda: from the Maidan coup in 2014 to the civil war in the Donbass to the proxy war between Russia and NATO. The book reveals the political interests and the geo-strategic conflict that is really at stake. It is a poker game on the brink of nuclear war in the centre of Europe – a dance on the volcano." Baab also addresses – directly, forthrightly, in detail – the economic interests fuelling the war.

Patrik Baab is German, and his life was made difficult in his country³ – because he followed his journalistic principle: *audiatur et altera pars* – also listen to the other side! But Germany is a party to the Ukraine war, and its politicians and media

demand that Germans position themselves clearly: on the side of German warfare.

What Germany's involvement in the war means for Russia

Baab reminds us what this actually means. On page 169, for example, he writes about the targeted shelling of the civilian population in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk:

*"Day and night, a rumble rolls through the streets, interrupted again and again by a dark burst. These are the impacts of French and German 155 mm artillery shells, US 777 howitzers and the HIMARS missiles that Ukrainian troops are firing at the civilian population. [...] Living in the Donbass – since March 2014 that means dying in the Donbass."** (emphasis mine)

One page further he writes:

"I am writing this because many people in Germany do not want to know. Otherwise, they would not finally be able to hate the Russians again and still be among the decent ones. They must learn that for the people here they are once again sitting sullied among the nations. German weapons once again on the fields of blood of the former German war of extermination. They would rather listen to the lies of the governments at the turn of the century that an unprovoked war of aggression began on 24 February 2022, as if out of the blue."

And this, a stark conclusion, from page 207:

"German tanks will roll against Russia again. Eighty years after the victory of the Red Army in the Battle of Stalingrad, this is the greatest possible trauma for every Russian without exception: a whiff of Hitler! After all the wars of aggression by NATO and the eastward expansion of Washington's vassal alliance, Moscow sees this as the final proof that the West does not want peace."

Yes, German politics, the German media, and the German 'elites' have become alien also to me. With a few exceptions, they have allowed themselves to be harnessed to the cause of war, even pushing it forward on a massive scale, even wanting to be at the forefront of the movement: a radical break with the German reason of state in the decades after the Second World War ("Never again war!") – albeit one that has been emerging step by step (the 'piecemeal strategy') over the past 30 years.

"We must become fit for war": Is this all Germany has to offer?

Now the German Defence Minister *Pistorius* has publicly said about his country: "We must become fit for war."⁴ War participation with masses of weapons for warring countries alone (officially a no-go for Germany, at least a few years ago), with military guidance and war training for foreign troops, is not enough. The *Bundeswehrverband*, the official association of German soldiers, was delighted with this "provocation" – and is calling for more speed.⁵

And Pistorius was more specific. There is an "aggressor" in Europe: Russia. And Germany must be able to wage a "defensive war" against it. This is the rhetoric of the Cold War. Even worse: Pistorius knows very well that so far Russia has had no plans to attack Germany. However, Germany has been a party to the war against Russia since 24 February 2022 as part of its "Zeitenwende". Its turning point).

More reason to take an active stand for peace – now and today – for a just peace, for an end to mutual killing and all the destruction. This is the 'positioning' now required.

At the end of his book, Patrik Baab writes:

"After our arrival in Berlin at around four in the morning, I return the 1928 Guide to the Soviet Union to the bookcase. Sándor Radó's dream of a Europe of people and nations is over. But dreams cannot die. They live on in another time."

I can tie in with that. But then he also writes:

"Sergey and I have a few more double shots of whisky. They don't help us either. They only bring back thoughts of the years of peace in Europe that we would never see again."

I very much hope that Europe will take a different path. •

¹ <https://de.rt.com/meinung/185738-distanzieren-und-positionieren-innerer-frieden/> of 3 November 2023.

² cf. Funke, Hajo; Kujat, Harald. "Wie eine aussichtsreiche Friedensregelung des Ukraine-Krieges verhindert wurde. Der Westen wollte stattdessen den Krieg fortsetzen" (How a promising peaceful settlement of the Ukraine war was prevented. The West preferred to continue the war); <https://www.zeitgeschehen-im-fokus.ch/de/home-ausgabe-10.html> of 26 October 2023.

³ *Patrik Baab* describes and comments on these matters in a separate chapter, "Nordwärts: Im Propaganda-Krieg" (Northbound: In the propaganda war), pp. 223ff.

⁴ cf. <https://bilder.deutschlandfunk.de/95/84/2c/8c/95842c8c-3280-4d54-ad43-e253ab538b4f/interview-pistorius-231031-100.pdf> of 31 October 2023

⁵ cf. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/artikel248319128/Bundeswehr-Verband-lobt-Provokation-von-Boris-Pistorius-und-fordert-mehr-Tempo.html> of 2 November 2023.

* Translation of all Quotes by *Current Concerns*.

Switzerland-EU negotiations – familiar content in new packaging

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

Before the parliamentary elections in October, there was no word on the status of the tug-of-war between Bern and Brussels. On 8 November, the Federal Council announced that it had concluded its internal talks with the cantons and the social partners as well as the exploratory talks with the EU Commission. The *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* (FDFA) will now prepare the draft for a negotiating mandate. In terms of content, the Federal Council is keeping a very low profile; formally, the whole thing should be structured somewhat differently to the framework agreement that failed in May 2021.¹

However, the trade unions – who had been involved in the planning phase – already gave away internal details at their media conference on 6 November. They have a lot to find fault with in the Federal Council's dossier. By way of their criticism, they are making a helpful contribution to informing the population in an unvarnished manner.

“Package approach” or “institutional framework agreement” – all the same difference

The Federal Council is still far from fulfilling its constitutional mandate, namely to represent the interests of the Swiss population. Instead, it is expecting us to accept a practically unchanged new version of the failed institutional framework agreement in a new guise.

With the “package approach”, the institutional rules of the EU system, which would apply to all existing and future bilateral agreements between Bern and Brussels, are no longer contained in a central agreement. Instead, the basic rules of EU law would be discreetly incorporated into each individual existing or future agreement (in each package).

Brussels has insisted on the following well-known basic rules for ten years now, because they are part of the EU system: Switzerland's obligation to adopt the EU's current and future legal developments, Switzerland's de facto subordination to the jurisdiction of the EU *Court of Justice* (“*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”: “For the EU, that is like a holy relic”) and adoption of the EU ban on state aid (in plain English, liberalisation/privatisation of the Swiss public service). So it makes no difference to us whether this thing is to be called a “framework agreement” or a “package approach”. In this sense, the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” states: “Nothing has changed in central elements compared to the failed framework agreement.”² What is and remains essential for us citizens is that the Swiss state model

does not fit in with the undemocratic and bureaucratic EU system.

- According to the Federal Council's press release, the overall package (Bilaterals III) would include the five existing market access agreements of Bilaterals I (free movement of persons, land transport, air transport, agriculture and mutual recognition of production standards), each supplemented by the rules of EU law.
- But on the other hand, a whole series of new agreements would be added: “electricity, food safety and health, participation in EU programmes (in particular *Horizon Europe*), the resumption of regulatory dialogue in the financial sector and the establishment of a structured political dialogue.” (Federal Council press release dated 8 November 2023) These new agreements would withdraw further extensive areas of life from Swiss law and subject them to the jurisdiction of the EU Court of Justice – what exactly they should contain and what they would bring us is as yet unclear.

- The Federal Council mentions Switzerland's “regular contribution to cohesion within the EU”, which Brussels expects, in a subordinate clause. Personally, I have nothing against this as long as we have a say in the amount and purpose of the payments (e.g., for the promotion of vocational training). It is one of the tasks of neutral Switzerland to assist other countries in word and deed where they need it. In any case, we would prefer this to having our freedom and sovereignty restricted by the superpower EU.

The Federal Council's press release does not mention the EU Citizens Directive, which Federal Councillor *Ignazio Cassis* described as a “red line” when he took over as head of the FDFA a few years ago. According to the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, Switzerland “wants to avoid two things in particular here: immigration into social welfare and unconstitutional restrictions on deportations”.³ According to the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, these goals have been “achieved according to information from Bern”. But let us see that in black and white first!

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Michael Ambühl: Overall package is expected to facilitate swallowing bitter pills!

mw. The main difference between the ominous new “package approach” and the failed framework agreement was recently explained by former FDFA negotiator for the Bilaterals II, *Michael Ambühl*, on *SRF radio*: “Now we have an agreement that not only regulates institutional issues none of which are really in our interests and all of which would only mean concessions by Switzerland to the EU” (emphasis *mw*).

“Now there is a Bilateral III package [...], in which there is a better balance between give and take. For example, it is possible to negotiate positive agreements for Switzerland, such as an electricity agreement, also in the food sector, in the health sector, where we can help shape things. Then the overall package can more easily include the odd bitter pill or two, which may be easier to swallow.”

- Dynamic assumption of rights: “This is a tricky issue in terms of democratic policy, but we will probably have to give in here.” Says Michael Ambühl. (Do we have to, indeed?) It is easier to achieve a derogation with regard to certain issues in individual agreements, such as wage protection or the *Citizens' Rights Directive*. Michael Ambühl mentions a whole series of such exemptions that he believes he can obtain in Brussels. Do the EU bodies see this the same way?

- Dispute settlement procedure (not mentioned in the Federal Council's press

release): “If one party does not want to give in, the other [...] could impose compensatory measures [...], for example a fine. This measure must be ‘proportionate’.” An “independent body” is needed to determine what is proportionate. Ambühl believes it should be possible to “find a solution to the satisfaction of both sides”. Interviewer's question: “Is this one of the bitter pills that Switzerland has to swallow, that it has to accept the ECJ?” Michael Ambühl: “It is important to the EU that there is not just any independent court, for example a court of arbitration. Because the ECJ has a monopoly on interpreting EU law. A solution will certainly be found here that does not infringe on the Court of Justice's monopoly on interpretation.” It will be interesting to see out of which hat we will conjure up an “independent body” that does not infringe on the ECJ's monopoly.

On a positive note, Michael Ambühl recommends not allowing the EU to pressure us into a timetable and points out that Switzerland is an “problem-free partner” for Brussels, reliable, without large debts and without corruption.

Source: *Karasek, David*. “Michael Ambühl: Wieso soll es jetzt klappen?” (Michael Ambühl: Why should it work now?). *Radio SRF Tagesgespräch* (daily talk) of 9 November 2023

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**It is our Federal Councillors
duty to explain the Swiss state model
to their colleagues**

Instead of explaining to their colleagues in our neighbouring countries and elsewhere why the two systems do not fit together, our federal councillors allow the Brussels bureaucrats to inconspicuously package their rules into the individual treaties. Treaties, *nota bene*, some of which we do not even need because they are not in our interests, or which we would like to help shape as equal partners. We sometimes hear that Switzerland cannot expect to be treated as an equal partner by the EU because the EU is much bigger and more populous, and this opinion is not only expressed by some EU politicians themselves far removed from democracy, but also, surprisingly, by some Swiss citizens – what a peculiar argument! The Swiss cantons, for example, enjoy rights which are absolutely equal, even though their populations are extremely different in size. Explaining the basics of Swiss democracy to EU politicians would be a more urgent task for our politicians and diplomats than constantly travelling back and forth between Bern and Brussels to catch up on the latest command.

**Wage protection and public service
instead of a liberalisation programme**

With this apt title, the *Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB)* addresses not only employees but also a large section of the population. In his press release, Chief Economist *Daniel Lampart* summarises: “In the talks [with Brussels], the Federal Administration in charge of the exploratory talks has agreed to a reduction in wage protection and a liberalisation of the electricity market for small customers as well as market access for *Flixbus* and other providers in cross-border passenger transport.”⁴

– *Wage protection*: The SGB points out that Switzerland has the highest wages in Europe and yet one of the most open labour markets, to which far more workers are posted than vice versa from Switzerland to the EU. Wage dumping and temporary work that is difficult to monitor have increased: “*Around a fifth of companies get caught in wage inspections*” (emphasis *mw*). This is because Switzerland has “by far the most wage inspections in Europe”, says *Lampart*, and these are not left to the state, they are executed by the social partners (employers and employees together). If Switzerland were to adopt EU law on wage protection, this would inevitably mean a weakening of today’s well-functioning wage protection.

Vania Alleva, President of the trade union *Unia*, reports on an example that

“The Swiss electorate and parliament have repeatedly made it clear that Switzerland wants to retain the existing public transport system. The people do not want conditions like those in Germany. They therefore reject the liberalisation of public transport as demanded by parts of the EU Commission. They do not want a reduction in the public service.” (Matthias Hartwich, President of the Transport Workers’ Union (SEV))

“got caught in the wage inspections”: around 90 workers from Poland, Latvia and Lithuania were employed by a Dutch contractor on a construction site in the Basel region, earning an average of just nine francs an hour instead of around 27 francs – some of them as little as five francs an hour. *Vania Alleva* comments: “The impending social upheaval is unacceptable for the workers in this country and for us trade unions. And the political damage of such a dam break would be immense.”⁵

– *Public service*: *Adrian Wüthrich*, President of the independent employee umbrella organisation *Travail.Suisse*, is clearly opposed to the liberalisation of the electricity market in connection with an electricity agreement. He reminds the Federal Council that in Switzerland, the voters have the say: “The Federal Council must not make any commitment to open up the electricity market for private households as part of the negotiations without separately waiting for the domestic discussions and referendum votes on this.”⁶

Let us here insert the Federal Council’s press release of 8 November in its own words: “So, the public service, for example, will not be affected by the negotiations.” A bold claim! It is a good thing that the Swiss trade unions speak plainly.

**“Swiss public transport
must not fall into bad EU ways”**

All trade union representatives at the media conference also clearly rejected the EU’s demand to open up passenger transport to private companies. *Adrian Wüthrich*: “Opening up passenger transport to private companies represents a paradigm shift and a threat to the Swiss public transport system.” *Matthias Hartwich*, President of the *Transport Workers’ Union (SEV)*: “Switzerland’s public transport system is a success story. [...] This well-functioning and good system is the envy of our neighbours [...]. People and goods reach their destinations reliably, punctually and in an environmentally friendly way.” *Hartwich* warns: “The liberalisation that has been forced on the rail sector in parts of Europe has generally led to poorer services, worse working conditions for employees, unpunctuality and unreliability. We want reliable railways in Switzerland in the future, too – for peo-

ple and goods. This is necessary in order to transfer traffic from road to rail; the opposite is happening in the EU.”⁷

Hartwich reminds us that in Switzerland, public transport is part of the public service: “The Swiss electorate and parliament have repeatedly made it clear that Switzerland wants to retain the existing public transport system. The people do not want conditions like those in Germany. They therefore reject the liberalisation of public transport as demanded by parts of the EU Commission. They do not want a reduction in the public service.”

The trade unionists’ conclusion

“An agreement with the EU with a simultaneous weakening of wage protection, as well as a liberalisation in rail transport and in electricity supply is doomed to failure from the outset.” (*Adrian Wüthrich*)

“Destroying the functioning Swiss public transport system in order to reach an agreement with the EU Commission is out of the question for the SEV.” (*Matthias Hartwich*)

“The Federal Councillors must correct these flaws and represent the interests of the Swiss people in their negotiations with the EU. The Federal Council must safeguard wage protection and the public service in these negotiations.” (*Christian Lampart*) •

¹ “Der Bundesrat beschliesst, ein Verhandlungsmandat mit der Europäischen Union (EU) zu erarbeiten” (The Federal Council decides to draw up a negotiating mandate with the European Union (EU)). Federal Council *press release* of 8 November 2023

² *Schöchli, Hansueli*. “Schweiz/EU. In Kernpunkten bleibt Brüssel hart” (Switzerland/EU. Brussels remains firm on key points). *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 8 November 2023

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *Lampart, Daniel*. *Media conference* on 6 November 2023. (SGB-Position zum Verhandlungsmandat mit der EU-Kommission) (SGB position on the negotiating mandate with the EU Commission)

⁵ *Alleva, Vania*. *Unia Central Secretariat*. “Stand Europa-Dossier: Lohnschutz nicht gesichert” (Status of the European dossier: wage protection not secured). *Point de Presse* of 6 November 2023

⁶ *Wüthrich, Adrian*. *Media conference* on 6 November 2023 “Europapolitik: Lagebeurteilung und Forderungen der Gewerkschaften. Nur ein echt verhandeltes und ausgewogenes Vertragspaket hat vor dem Volk eine Chance.” (European policy: assessment of the situation and trade union demands. Only a genuinely negotiated and balanced treaty package has a chance before the people)

⁷ *Hartwich, M.* “Öffentlicher Verkehr der Schweiz darf nicht unter die Räder der EU kommen” (Swiss public transport must not fall victim to the EU). Address at the *media conference* on 6 November 2023

The Westminster Declaration

International Manifest for the freedom of speech

We write as journalists, artists, authors, activists, technologists, and academics to warn of increasing international censorship that threatens to erode centuries-old democratic norms.

Coming from the left, right, and centre, we are united by our commitment to universal human rights and freedom of speech, and we are all deeply concerned about attempts to label protected speech as “misinformation”, “disinformation”, and other ill-defined terms.

This abuse of these terms has resulted in the censorship of ordinary people, journalists, and dissidents in countries all over the world.

Such interference with the right to free speech suppresses valid discussion about matters of urgent public interest, and undermines the foundational principles of representative democracy.

Across the globe, government actors, social media companies, universities, and NGOs are increasingly working to monitor citizens and rob them of their voices. These large-scale coordinated efforts are sometimes referred to as the “Censorship-Industrial Complex”.

This complex often operates through direct government policies. Authorities in India¹ and Turkey² have seized the power to remove political content from social media. The legislature in Germany³ and the Supreme Court in Brazil⁴ are criminalising political speech. In other countries, measures such as Ireland’s “Hate Speech” Bill⁵, Scotland’s “Hate Crime” Act⁶, the UK’s Online Safety Bill⁷, and Australia’s “Misinformation” Bill⁸ threaten to severely restrict expression and create a chilling effect.

But the Censorship Industrial Complex operates through more subtle methods. These include visibility filtering, labelling, and manipulation of search engine results. Through *deplatforming* and *flagging*, social media censors have already silenced lawful opinions on topics of national and geopolitical importance. They have done so with the full support of “disinformation experts” and “fact-checkers” in the mainstream media, who have abandoned the journalistic values of debate and intellectual inquiry.

As the *Twitter Files* revealed, tech companies often perform censorial “content moderation” in coordination with government agencies and civil society. Soon, the European Union’s Digital Services Act will formalise this relationship by giving platform data to “vetted researchers” from NGOs and academia, relegating our speech rights to the discretion of these unelected and unaccountable entities.

Freedom of speech in international declarations and treaties

Article 19 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights of 1950

“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the

protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966

“1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.”

Some politicians and NGOs⁹ are even aiming to target end-to-end encrypted messaging apps like *WhatsApp*, *Signal*, and *Telegram*.¹⁰ If end-to-end encryption is broken, we will have no remaining avenues for authentic private conversations in the digital sphere.

Although foreign disinformation between states is a real issue, agencies designed to combat these threats, such as the *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency* in the United States, are increasingly being turned inward against the public. Under the guise of preventing harm and protecting truth, speech is being treated as a permitted activity rather than an inalienable right.

We recognise that words can sometimes cause offence, but we reject the idea that hurt feelings and discomfort, even if acute, are grounds for censorship. Open discourse is the central pillar of a free society, and is essential for holding governments accountable, empowering vulnerable groups, and reducing the risk of tyranny.

Speech protections are not just for views we agree with; we must strenuously protect speech for the views that we

most strongly oppose. Only in the public square can these views be heard and properly challenged.

What’s more, time and time again, unpopular opinions and ideas have eventually become conventional wisdom. By labelling certain political or scientific positions as “misinformation” or “malinformation”, our societies risk getting stuck in false paradigms that will rob humanity of hard-earned knowledge and obliterate the possibility of gaining new knowledge. Free speech is our best defence against disinformation.

The attack on speech is not just about distorted rules and regulations – it is a crisis of humanity itself. Every equality and justice campaign in history has relied on an open forum to voice dissent. In countless examples, including the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement, social progress has depended on freedom of expression.

We do not want our children to grow up in a world where they live in fear of speaking their minds. We want them to grow up in a world where their ideas can be expressed, explored and debated openly – a

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"The Westminster Declaration"

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world that the founders of our democracies envisioned when they enshrined free speech into our laws and constitutions.

The US First Amendment is a strong example of how the right to freedom of speech, of the press, and of conscience can be firmly protected under the law. One need not agree with the U.S. on every issue to acknowledge that this is a vital "first liberty" from which all other liberties follow. It is only through free speech that we can denounce violations of our rights and fight for new freedoms.

There also exists a clear and robust international protection for free speech. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR)¹¹ was drafted in 1948 in response to atrocities committed during World War II. Article 19 of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." While there may be a need for governments to regulate some aspects of social media, such as age limits, these regulations should never infringe on the human right to freedom of expression.

As is made clear by Article 19, the corollary of the right to free speech is the

right to information. In a democracy, no one has a monopoly over what is considered to be true. Rather, truth must be discovered through dialogue and debate – and we cannot discover truth without allowing for the possibility of error.

Censorship in the name of "preserving democracy" inverts what should be a bottom-up system of representation into a top-down system of ideological control. This censorship is ultimately counter-productive: it sows mistrust, encourages radicalisation, and de-legitimises the democratic process.

In the course of human history, attacks on free speech have been a precursor to attacks on all other liberties. Regimes that eroded free speech have always inevitably weakened and damaged other core democratic structures. In the same fashion, the elites that push for censorship today are also undermining democracy. What has changed though, is the broad scale and technological tools through which censorship can be enacted.

– We believe that free speech is essential for ensuring our safety from state abuses of power – abuses that have historically posed a far greater threat than the words of lone individuals or even organised groups. For the sake of human welfare and flourishing, we make the following three calls to action.

- We call on governments and international organisations to fulfil their responsibilities to the people and to uphold Article 19 of the UDHR.
- We call on tech corporations to undertake to protect the digital public square as defined in Article 19 of the UDHR and refrain from politically motivated censorship, the censorship of dissenting voices, and censorship of political opinion.
- And finally, we call on the general public to join us in the fight to preserve the people's democratic rights. Legislative changes are not enough. We must also build an atmosphere of free speech from the ground up by rejecting the climate of intolerance that encourages self-censorship and that creates unnecessary personal strife for many. Instead of fear and dogmatism, we must embrace inquiry and debate.

We stand for your right to ask questions. Heated arguments, even those that may cause distress, are far better than no arguments at all.

Censorship robs us of the richness of life itself. Free speech is the foundation for creating a life of meaning and a thriving humanity - through art, poetry, drama, story, philosophy, song, and more.

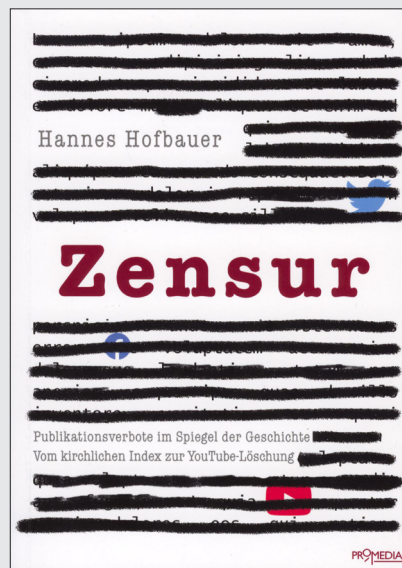
continued on page 13

A counter-public can be hindered with bans, but not be suffocated

Quotes from the book "Zensur" (Censorship) by Hannes Hofbauer*

"Compensating for the loss of trust with coercive measures is one of the oldest techniques of rule, used by church leaders and monarchs in the past as well as by governments and leading media houses today. They all respond to the loss of a customary hegemony of discourse by banning publications. Affected are positions questioning the prevailing narrative which also have the potential for widespread dissemination. This is precisely our current situation. The return of censorship is rooted in the economic weakness of the transatlantic region. In its decline, the establishment is struggling for its *raison d'être*. The more successfully a counter-public can be created, the more aggressively it is countered by Brussels or Berlin. State truth watchdogs and Californian media monopolies have developed a new, joint practice of deleting and blocking content, for which they pass the buck to each other; we are experiencing the censorship practices of the post-industrial, digital-cybernetic age." (From the foreword)

"It is precisely the realisation of the geopolitical and economic decline that is reflected in the question of how to deal with free speech. The consolidation of the Eurasian region, which is perceived as a threat in Washington, Brussels and



Berlin, has long since had an impact on culture and discourse. The value discourse of the former political 'West', fuelled by missionary zeal, is becoming increasingly implausible in the face of changing power relations on a global scale. [...] In order to halt this loss, Brussels in particular has set out to provide the EU-European peoples with truth de-

crees, initially concealed and later increasingly openly formulated, so that the historical, political and cultural interpretation of the self-portrayal dominates the discursive terrain with as few alternatives as possible." (p. 123)

"Censorship and publication bans, as drastic as they are in hindering the necessary social discourse and as much as they damage it – which is their intention – are only a sign of weakness once a certain point is reached. Of course, there is no recipe for when this point is reached. It will inevitably have to be found between the measures of the censors and the activities of the censored." (p. 237)

"And so, the concluding message of this book, which has observed publication bans throughout the centuries, is that a counter-public to the imperial discourse can be hindered by bans, but not be suffocated." (p. 241)

(Translation Current Concerns)

* Hofbauer, Hannes. *Zensur. Publikationsverbote im Spiegel der Geschichte. Vom kirchlichen Index zur YouTube-Löschung. (Censorship. Publication bans as reflected in history. From the ecclesiastical index to YouTube censorship.) Promedia-Verlag Vienna 2022, ISBN 978-3-85371-497-3*

"The Westminster Declaration"

continued from page 12

This declaration was the result of an initial meeting of free speech champions from around the world who met in Westminster, London, at the end of June 2023. As signatories of this statement, we have fundamental political and ideological disagreements. However, it is only by coming together that we will defeat the encroaching forces of censorship so that we can maintain our ability to openly debate and challenge one another. It is in the spirit of difference and debate that we sign the Westminster Declaration.

Matt Taibbi, Journalist, USA; **Michael Shellenberger**, Public, USA; **Jonathan Haidt**, Social Psychologist, NYU, USA; **John McWhorter**, Linguist, Columbia, Author, USA; **Steven Pinker**, Psychologist, Harvard, USA; **Julian Assange**, Editor, Founder of Wikileaks, Australia; **Tim Robbins**, Actor, Filmmaker, USA; **Nadine Strossen**, Professor of Law, NYLS, USA; **Glenn Loury**, Economist, USA; **Richard Dawkins**, Biologist, UK; **John Cleese**, Comedian, Acrobat, UK; **Slavoj Žižek**, Philosopher, Author, Slovenia; **Jeffrey Sachs**, Columbia University, USA; **Oliver Stone**, Filmmaker, USA; **Edward Snowden**, Whistleblower, USA; **Greg Lukianoff**, President and CEO Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, USA; **Stella Assange**, Campaigner, UK; **Glenn Greenwald**, Journalist, USA; **Claire Fox**, Founder of the Academy of Ideas, UK; **Dr. Jordan B. Peterson**, Psychologist, Author, Canada; **Bari Weiss**, Journalist, USA; **Peter Hitchens**, Author, Journalist, UK; **Niall Ferguson**, Historian, Stanford, UK; **Matt Ridley**, Journalist, Author, UK; **Melissa Chen**, Journalist, Spectator, Singapore/USA; **Yanis Varoufakis**, Economist, Greece; **Peter Boghossian**, Philosopher, Founding Faculty Fellow, University of Austin, USA; **Michael Shermer**, Science Writer, USA; **Alan Sokal**, Professor of Mathematics, UCL, UK; **Sunetra Gupta**, Professor of Theoretical Epidemiology, Oxford, UK; **Jay Bhattacharya**, Professor, Stanford, USA; **Martin Kuldorff**, Professor of Medicine (on leave), Harvard, USA; **Aaron Kheiriati**, Psychiatrist, Author, USA; **Chris Hedges**, Journalist, Author, USA; **Lee Fang**, Independent Journalist, USA; **Alex Gutentag**, Journalist, USA; **Iain McGilchrist**, Psychiatrist, Philosopher, UK; **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, Human Rights Activist, Author, Netherlands; **Konstantin Kisin**, Author, UK; **Leighton Woodhouse**, Public, USA; **Andrew Lowenthal**, liber-net, Australia; **Aaron Mate**, Journalist, USA; **Izabella Kaminska**, Journalist, The Blind Spot, UK; **Nina Power**, Writer, UK; **Kmele Foster**, Journalist, Media Entrepreneur, USA; **Toby Young**, Journalist, Free Speech Union, UK; **Winston Marshall**, Journalist, The Spectator, UK; **Jacob Siegel**, Tablet, USA/Israel; **Ulrike Guerot**, Founder of European Democracy Lab, Germany; **Heather E. Heying**, Evolutionary Biologist, USA; **Bret Weinstein**, Evolutionary Biologist, USA; **Martina Pastorelli**, Independent Journalist, Italy; **Leandro Narloch**, Independent Journalist, Brazil; **Ana Henkel**, Independent Journalist, Brazil; **Mia Ashton**, Journalist, Canada; **Micha Narberhaus**, The Protopia Lab, Spain/Germany; **Alex Sheridan**, Free Speech Ireland; **Ben Scallan**, Gript Media, Ireland; **Thomas Fazi**, Independent Journalist, Italy; **Jean F. Queralt**, Technologist, Founder @The IO Foundation, Malaysia/Spain; **Phil Shaw**, Campaigner, Operation People, New Zealand; **Jeremy Hildreth**, Independent, UK; **Craig Snider**, Independent, USA; **Eve Kay**, TV Producer, UK; **Helen Joyce**, Journalist, UK; **Dietrich Brüggemann**, Filmmaker, Germany; **Adam B. Coleman**, Founder of Wrong Speak Publishing, USA; **Helen Pluckrose**, Au-

thor, UK; **Michael Nayna**, Filmmaker, Australia; **Paul Rossi**, Educator, Vertex Partnership Academics, USA; **Juan Carlos Girauta**, Politician, Spain; **Andrew Neish**, KC, UK; **Steven Berkoff**, Actor, Playright, UK; **Patrik Hughes**, Artist, UK; **Adam Creighton**, Journalist, Australia; **Julia Hartley-Brewer**, Journalist, UK; **Robert Cibis**, Filmmaker, Germany; **Piers Robinson**, Organization for Propaganda Studies, UK; **Dirk Pohlmann**, Journalist, Germany; **Mathias Bröckers**, Author, Journalist, Germany; **Kira Phillips**, Documentary Filmmaker, UK; **Diane Atkinson**, Historian, Biographer, UK; **Eric Kaufmann**, Professor of Politics, Birkbeck, University of Buckingham, Canada; **Laura Dodsworth**, Journalist and Author, UK; **Nellie Bowles**, Journalist, USA; **Andrew Tettenborn**, Professor of Law, Swansea University, UK; **Julius Grower**, Fellow, St. Hugh's College, UK; **Nick Dixon**, Comedian, UK; **Dominic Frisby**, Comedian, UK; **James Orr**, Associate Professor, University of Cambridge, UK; **Brendan O'Neill**, Journalist, UK; **Jan Jekielek**, Journalist, Canada; **Andrew Roberts**, Historian, UK; **Robert Tombs**, Historian, UK; **Ben Schwarz**, Journalist, USA; **Xavier Azalbert**, Investigative Scientific Journalist, France; **Doug Stokes**, International Relations Professor, University of Exeter, UK; **James Allan**, Professor of Law, University of Queensland, UK; **David McGrogan**, Professor of Law, Northumbria University, UK; **Jacob Mchangama**, Author, Denmark; **Nigel Biggar**, Chairman, Free Speech Union, UK; **David Goodhart**, Journalist, Author, UK; **Catherine Austin Fitts**, The Solari Report, Netherlands; **Matt Goodwin**, Politics Professor, University of Kent, UK; **Alan Miller**, Together Association, UK; **Catherine Liu**, Cultural Theorist, Author, USA; **Stefan Millius**, Journalist, Switzerland; **Philip Hamburger**, Professor of Law, Columbia, USA; **Rueben Kirkham**, Co-Director, Free Speech Union of Australia, Australia; **Jeffrey Tucker**, Author, USA; **Sarah Gon**, Director, Free Speech Union, South Africa; **Dara Macdonald**, Co-Director, Free Speech Union, Australia; **Jonathan Ayling**, Chief Executive, Free Speech Union, New Zealand; **David Zweig**, Journalist, Author, USA; **Juan Soto Ivars**, Author, Spain; **Colin Wright**, Evolutionary Biologist, USA; **Gad Saad**, Professor, Evolutionary Behavioral Scientist, Author, Canada; **Robert W. Malone**, MD, MS, USA; **Jill Glasspool-Malone**, PhD., USA; **Jordi Pigem**, Philosopher, Author, Spain; **Holly Lawford-Smith**, Associate Professor in Political Philosophy, University of Melbourne, Australia; **Michele Santoro**, Journalist, TV Host, Presenter, Italy; **Dr James Smith**, Podcaster, Literature Scholar, RHUL, UK; **Francis Foster**, Comedian, UK; **Coleman Hughes**, Writer, Podcaster, USA; **Marco Bassani**, Political Theorist, Historian, Milan University, Italy; **Isabella Loiodice**, Professor of Comparative Public Law, University of Bari, Italy; **Luca Ricolfi**, Professor, Sociologist, Turin University, Italy; **Marcello Foa**, Journalist, Former President of Rai, Italy; **Andrea Zhok**, Philosopher, University of Milan, Italy; **Paolo Cesaretti**, Professor of Byzantine Civilization, University of Bergamo, Italy; **Alberto Contri**, Mass Media Expert, Italy; **Carlo Lottieri**, Philosopher, University of Verona, Italy; **Alessandro Di Battista**, Political Activist, Writer, Italy; **Paola Mastrocola**, Writer, Italy; **Carlo Freccero**, Television Author, Media Expert, Italy; **Giorgio Bianchi**, Independent Journalist, Italy; **Nello Preterossi**, Professor, University of Salerno, Scientific Director of the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies, Italy; **Efrat Fenigson**, Journalist, Podcaster, Israel; **Eli Vieira**, Journalist, Genetic Biologist, Brazil; **Stephen Moore**, Author and Analyst, Canada

Source: <https://westminsterdeclaration.org/> of October 2023

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Current Concerns

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Letter to the Editor

The secret files must be irrevocably deleted

A small, reputable Swiss newspaper (*Zeit-Fragen / Current Concerns / Horizons et débats*), which in contrast to our monotonous mainstream media landscape publishes differentiated and well-researched articles, interviews and reports, is being spied on by the *Nachrichtendienst des Bundes* (NDB) (Swiss Federal Intelligence Service, FIS) and suspected of being a quasi-Russian infiltrated newspaper, allegedly in order to exert political influence.

The reason for this grotesque suspicion is an interview with an American former Marine colonel and UN weapons inspector, *Scott Ritter*, because he emphasised and supported Swiss neutrality. It becomes superfluous indeed to deny such unfounded and grotesque accusations on an argumentative level.

In addition to this scandalous violation of freedom of the press, we find it extremely worrying that the FIS quotes support for Swiss neutrality, which would have been of crucial importance in the catastrophic Ukraine conflict, as a reason for spying.

If the FIS apparently even classifies our armed neutrality, which has actually

proven itself many times in the past, as a problem in this serious international conflict, then we must assume that the Federal Council, and in particular the head of the FIS, Mrs *Viola Amherd*, also no longer considers neutrality to be politically opportune. It may well be that Mrs Amherd wants to curry favour with Mr *Wolfgang Schäuble*, the former leader of the German CDU parliamentary group, who insinuates that a neutral stance in the Ukraine conflict is reprehensible.

In doing so, however, Mrs Amherd and the FIS are blatantly violating Swiss constitutional law. In addition, the FIS can be accused of further constitutional violations with this spying, because it wants to suppress the freedom of expression and information in Art. 16 and the freedom of the media in Art. 17, enshrined in the Swiss Federal Constitution.

In our opinion, these are serious and blatant violations of existing federal law on the part of the FIS, which we do not simply accept. We still have best memories of the *Fichenskandal* (Secret files scandal) at the end of the 1980s.* We do not assume that the FIS wants to con-

jure up another files (Fichen) scandal. We therefore demand the FIS to irrevocably delete these files and draw consequences from these constitutional offences. Otherwise, the public should be informed about such scandals.

Dr med. Daniel Güntert, Wattwil (SG)

* The *Fichenaffäre* or Secret files scandal shook public opinion in Switzerland in 1989. That year, it was revealed that the Swiss federal authorities, as well as the cantonal police forces, had put in place a system of mass surveillance of the population.

Following allegations that within the *Federal Department of Justice and Police* (EJPD), the *Bundespolizei* (BUPO, now *Swiss Federal Police*) charged with domestic intelligence was illegally keeping secret files on both Swiss citizens and foreigners, a special parliamentary commission (PUK EJPD) was established. It gave its report in November 1989, demonstrating that the BUPO had kept more than 900,000 files in secret archives. Files targeted Eastern European nationals, but also Swiss citizens, organizations, firms, and various political groups, mostly on the left.

The scandal led to the reorganisation of the BUPO, which since 1992 has been observed by a delegation of a Parliamentary Commission. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

Free speech no longer guaranteed

The media's task would be to report in a neutral, carefully researched and analysed manner and to provide space for the diversity of opinions. Unfortunately, this type of journalism is rarely encountered any more. Instead, a politically acceptable standardised mishmash is disseminated in order to bring readers into line in the sense of "constant dripping wears away the stone". If this is not complied with, the person who dares to do so is defamed. This is what happened

to a small, extremely reputable, independent Swiss newspaper – Mr *Mörgeli* has described this in articles in *Weltwoche*. A highly explosive, scandalous incident. The newspaper in question is to be penalised for providing space for voices that stand up for neutrality. The newspaper is apparently being used as an example to show that difficulties are to be expected if this is done publicly. The *Swiss Federal Intelligence Service* (FIS) and thus its head, Federal Coun-

cillor *Amherd*, are involved. What is going on here is unconstitutional and amounts to a scandal. It is embarrassing to have to remind you at this point of Article 16 on freedom of expression and information and Article 17 on freedom of the media in the Swiss Federal Constitution. I demand that you, Mrs Amherd, correct this offence so that this cannot happen again.

Dr med. Silvia Güntert, Bazenhaid (SG)

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

An appeal for today’s world

by Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative educator

Living in peace is a deeply rooted desire of all people. All the more urgently we are to create social conditions in which it is possible to live together in dignity and freedom today. We are all called upon – each in our own field of responsibility – to make our contribution, otherwise this goal will remain an empty demand. Our decision-makers, elected and appointed by the people, bear a special responsibility. They must be fellow human beings who are orientated in their actions towards the good of all and must not allow themselves to be seduced by conscious or unconscious egotistical claims to power.

However, in Switzerland in particular, with its unique direct democratic system, all people have a responsibility to make it possible for people to live together as equals. This requires mature personalities who look beyond their own horizons to the world and are willing to recognise and tackle the tasks that lie ahead. In this context, our elementary school is of particular¹ importance, as it is – with the support and supplementation of the family – an indispensable training ground for developing the skills of democratic participation in small, age-appropriate steps. Being in a relationship with and with the guidance of their teachers, children and young people can build up a healthy sense of mutual appreciation and respect among each other and develop genuine compassion for suffering fellow human beings. This includes a spontaneous revulsion towards injustice, combined with the desire to contribute to social conditions in which the dignity of all people is not only respected, but lived in mutual give and take. The educational content of our schools should specifically take account of this goal.

Today’s curricula: Only meagre formulations

But is this still the case? After 30 years of school reforms? If we look in the curricula that are currently binding for German-speaking Switzerland, we find the terms “democracy” and “human rights” in the competence area “Understanding and committing to democracy and human rights”² A vague formulated description of a so called competence shows what is meant by this is: “Pupils can explain the development, significance and threat to human rights or competences”³ or in the equally vague competence level: “... can explain children’s and human rights”. And now? Teachers standing in practice are aware of the complexity of such topics

and that a merely intellectual discussion and clarification of terms is never enough, but a deep going emotional learning process is necessary. This is a demanding but enriching task for teachers, who fortunately (contrary to their training) do not see themselves as learning-coaches but fulfil their task based on a personal view of human nature and to this purpose use the wide range of subjects in an individual and creative way.

“We could actually all be friends ...”

Learning to observe precisely, for example, is part of a technically sound and promising drawing lesson. We tested this and each child traced the outline of its hand on a blank sheet. When the sketches were laid out on the floor in a helter-skelter, each child had to find its own hand or be able to recognise that of another child.⁴ It is easy to imagine that this was a challenging task. For although the children were of different genders and ages, had different skin colours, and were different sizes, their hands looked very similar and could only be distinguished by minor characteristics. This gave rise to the rather philosophical question of why this was so difficult. Children like to think about such questions, they feel that they are taken seriously and that they are important.

They soon came up with various hypotheses, which they discussed among each other. Along the way, they practised listening to each other calmly, pausing for a moment and adding the reflections of the other children to their own ones (soberly referred to as “generic skills” in the curriculum). In the end, they agreed that people are very similar in many ways and cannot be categorised as superior or inferior. “We could actually all be friends,” said one pupil thoughtfully else often being involved in arguments. Wasn’t that what was written in the first article of the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* put into simple words?

After the horrors of the Second World War

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

This statement in Article 1 echoes the preamble to the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, followed by Article 2, which prohibits discrimina-

tion: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. Furthermore, no distinction may be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”⁵

When *Eleanor Roosevelt*, Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, proclaimed the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* at three o’clock in the morning on 10 December 1948, a document had been created after the horrors of the Second World War that was intended to make peaceful coexistence possible worldwide. It was drafted in a two-year discussion process by eight thoughtful and responsible men and women from Australia, Chile, China, France, Lebanon, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States and was subsequently adopted by the then 58 member states of the United Nations General Assembly with no votes against and eight abstentions. It has since been translated into more than 200 languages.

A globally valid catalogue of values

Even though the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* has no binding status under international law, it was the first time in history that it set out which rights should apply equally to all people. A common ideal to be achieved by all peoples and nations was created, which was to pave the way for people all over the world to live in dignity and freedom, a condition for lasting peace. The right to life, liberty and security, the prohibition of slavery and torture, freedom of thought and belief, the right to freedom of expression, education, labour, health, and well-being were derived from this, to name just a few of the more differentiated paragraphs. Many of these were later incorporated into national constitutions or have since become binding international law for all states. This legacy, based on the bitter experiences of a global war, unambiguously states that no one has the right to use force to determine social coexistence or is authorised to restrict, curtail, or disregard the rights conferred by nature to all human beings. To emphasise this demand, the United Nations founded the UN High Commission-

continued on page 16

“All human beings are born ...”

continued from page 15

er for Human Rights in 1993. Its purpose is to promote and enforce human rights at national and international level.

The more sobering it is to reflect on world events in the decades that followed, because unfortunately we are a long way from recognising the validity of these rights all over the world. The so-called post-war period is characterised by armed conflicts worldwide; were there only 26 days without war in September 1945.

**Making the efforts
for a global peace palpable**

Of course, in this drawing lesson and the following school lessons, we were unable to go into such depth about the principles of peaceful and dignified coexistence set out in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. But the children heard about these endeavours for global peace, they were made palpable for them. This could be built on later, because treating people with dignity is not something that can be taken for granted and put on the wish list. It must be established, strengthened, promoted, constantly renewed, and carried forward in the course of living together – an important field of work in which psychology and education would have a lot to say, based on natural law and a personal conception of man.

Perhaps as Eleanor Roosevelt answered the question: “Where do human rights begin?” – “In the small places, close to home. So close and so small that these places cannot be found on any map of the world. And yet these places are the world of the individual: The neighbourhood where he lives, the school or university he attends, the factory, the farm, or the office where he works. These are the places where every man, woman, and child seek equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal dignity without discrimination. As long as these rights do not apply there, they are not relevant anywhere else. If the citizens concerned do not take action themselves to protect these rights in their personal environment, we will look in vain for progress in the wider world.”⁵ However, responsibility cannot lie solely with individuals, as the protection of human dignity must also be enshrined in the constitutions of countries and in international conventions and taken seriously. Switzerland, with its direct democracy, therefor offers the best conditions.

**What do we tell
the children at Christmas?**

But here, too, we need to be vigilant and take care, because the efforts to remove our country from its neutrality and involve it in the war front are loud and brazen. We need a strong counterweight to withstand



After the Second World War, Swiss photographer Werner Bischof travelled to various European countries and documented the immense destruction left behind by the war. In the far north, he met an old Swedish Sami in a wooden hut, who returned his greeting with the words: “So, so, you come from Switzerland, the land of peace.” (Picture Magazine Du, No. 6, June 1949)

the attempts at blackmailing pressure and to put a stop to the sophisticated spin-doctoring of opinion. If we do not do this, we will be faced with our children and young people, as *Annemarie Buchholz-Kaiser*, psychologist and historian, warned emphatically more than twenty years ago: “Will we tell our children next Christmas that there used to be democracies? Countries, where people were free, where they could decide on their laws, where every citizen and every inhabitant had inherent dignity, where there were human rights and everyone had the right to their own thoughts, their own opinions, a free opinion, a right to their own religion and tradition, to legal proceedings that were bound by evidence? Will we tell them next year that – in the past – people were very concerned about peace, that they fought for it with all their strength and conviction? That they thought about how to help the poorer countries of the world? That there were once voices in favour of peace and social justice? That there was once a Switzerland in which several language regions, several mentalities, several religions had developed a model of peaceful coexistence thanks to direct democracy, a filigree

work of democratic organisation from the bottom up, which would also offer a way out for crisis and war regions of the world? Do we tell them all this in the imperfect? Or do we do something else first?”⁶

I would rather tell them how a Swedish Sami had greeted the well-known Swiss photographer Werner Bischof: “So, so, you come from Switzerland, the land of peace.”⁷

¹ In Switzerland elementary school is called “Volksschule” which includes the first six years of primary school and three years of secondary school.

² Area of competence RGZ 8. www.zh.lehrplan21.ch, retrieved 6 November 2023

³ Similar tasks can also be found in the book “Wie ich mit Kindern über Kriege und andere Katastrophen spreche» (How I talk to children about wars and other disasters) by *Eliane Perret* and *Rüdiger Maas*.

⁴ <https://unric.org/de/allgemeine-erklarung-menschenrechte/>

⁵ https://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/menschenrechte/geschichte_der_menschenrechte/pwiedieallgemeineerklarungdermenschenrechte100.html; accessed on 6 November 2023

⁶ *Buchholz-Kaiser, Annemarie*. “Was erzählen Sie nächstes Jahr zu Weihnachten Ihren Kindern?” (What will you tell your children on Christmas next year?) In: *Current Concerns* from 21 December 2001

⁷ Caption in the magazine “Du”, No. 6, June 1949