

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

“Let us say no to the wars, yes to peace, and yes to planetary survival”

Jeffrey Sachs’ speech to Religious Leaders at the
Pre-COP28 Faith Leaders Summit, Abu Dhabi, November 6, 2023

cc. Around three weeks before the 28th World Climate Change Conference (COP28), which will take place this year from 30 November to 12 December in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), more than 200 high-ranking representatives of various world religions – including representatives of Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhi – met in Abu Dhabi on 6 and 7 November together with personalities from indigenous population groups, scientists and politicians. The purpose of the conference was to prepare for the World Climate Conference. A comprehensive declaration on climate protection (“Abu Dhabi Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change for COP28”)¹ was adopted and signed by 28 representatives of religious communities, which goes far beyond technical issues and addresses fundamental questions. It states, for example: “We recognise the connections between climate change, migration, and conflict and the potential role for people of faith as ‘environmental peacebuilders,’ striving to forge pathways of compassion and mediation amid conflicts.”

One of the speakers at this conference was Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Jeffrey Sachs is well known to our readers as a renowned peace ambassador. And his speech of 6 November², which is documented below, is also primarily about peace - and the connection between a peace-oriented policy and the protection of the natural environment.

“We are faced with the greatest trial of humanity”



Jeffrey Sachs
(picture ma)

Your Holinesses, Eminences, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
we are faced with the greatest trial of humanity, to live peacefully and sustainably on a crowded and interconnected planet.



Group photo at the preparatory conference of the world’s religious leaders for the World Climate Conference in Abu Dhabi. (picture partner-religion-development.org)

We are currently failing that trial. The world is aflame in wars. Human-caused environmental devastation accelerates. The Earth is warmer now than it has been in 125,000 years.

I blame the politicians, especially of the rich and powerful states.

In these very days, just when we need the world’s leaders to pay attention to the climate crisis in advance of COP28, we are instead enmeshed in a devastating war in the Middle East.

The Israeli government has already killed 10,000 innocent civilians in Gaza and yet it rejects global calls for a cease fire. Israel is committing war crimes, besieging Gaza while bombing hospitals, ambulances, schools, and neighborhoods, and creating carnage.

The United States Government, for its part, vetoes the calls by the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly for a cease fire in Gaza, thereby prolonging Israel’s rampage. Moreover, even as the war in Gaza rages, the US continues its reckless attempt to push NATO enlargement to Ukraine, over Russia’s strenuous objections. The result is an ongoing proxy war between the US and Russia that is utterly destroying Ukraine.

The politicians of powerful nations, especially my own, have dragged us into wars that the people do not want, and have delayed action against climate change to

the point where climate change endangers our survival. Through their relentless corruption, the politicians have squandered the toil of billions of people.

Why do they do so? The answers are as ancient as they are relevant today.

The first sin is *arrogance*. Netanyahu believes that he and he alone can decide life and death in Gaza. He believes that he doesn’t need to negotiate with anybody, least of all the Palestinians. He completely misconstrues the path to true security for Israel, which runs through justice, not war.

The second sin is *greed*. Many of our wars are about the pursuit of lucre, yet the wars destroy vastly more wealth than could ever be garnered by conquest.

The third sin is *corruption*. The campaigns of US Congressmen are funded by the US war machine, that is, by giant corporations with hundreds of billions of dollars of arms contracts, for whom war is business, and for whom campaign contributions the way to encourage more wars.

The fourth sin is *heresy*. Politicians listen to false prophets who proclaim their nations to be the natural rulers over others. Who told President Biden that the US is the “indispensable” country? It is not. It is one country among 193 nations. It is a mere 4.1 per cent of the world’s population. The world does not need the US to

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“Let us say no to the wars ...”

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lead. The world needs the US to cooperate peacefully.

I have been involved in policy advising for more than 40 years. I can tell you the hard truth. The rich and powerful nations believe they can rule the world through deceit. The US has engaged in dozens of covert operations to overthrow governments of other countries, including 64 well-documented cases of covert regime change operations during 1947–1989 alone. In the past 20 years, the US has overthrown governments in Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, and Ukraine, just to name a few cases. Back in 2011, President *Barack Obama* ordered the CIA to overthrow *Bashar al-Assad*, leading to a prolonged war in Syria that has cost a half-million dead.

This war-making and relentless deceit must stop.

We must heed *Isaiah*, to beat swords into ploughshares. With today’s technologies, our modern ploughshares and pruning hooks are powerful enough to end hunger worldwide, to feed all of humanity, and to protect the environment.

The war in Gaza must stop immediately, before Israel still commits more carnage, and lest we find ourselves in a regional war. Israel can find its true security through peace with Palestine, and only through peace with Palestine. When Palestine is secure in its own state, with its capital in East Jerusalem and with control over the Muslim Holy Sites, Israel too will find security and peace, and *Isaiah’s* vision will be realised.

The war in Ukraine can and will stop when the US finally stops trying to expand NATO to Ukraine, and instead engages directly with Russia on pressing issues of mutual security, including renewed diplomacy for nuclear disarmament.

Despite the sins of the rich and powerful, yet there is hope for peace, your Holinesses and Excellencies. Yes, there is hope. And you bring that hope.

World public opinion overwhelmingly demands peace. You, the world’s religious leaders, demand peace and pray for peace. The UN member states overwhelmingly demand peace, even though Israel and the United States have so far ignored the calls by the vast majority of UN member states for a ceasefire and for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

When the rest of the world is united for peace, as it is, the United States and Israel will have to listen and to heed the call by humanity.

In his world recent message in advance of COP28, *Laudate Deum*³, Pope *Francis* calls for a new multilateralism, so that the voices of all the world are heard, and so that the deceit of the powerful is constrained. As the Holy Father writes:

“Our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required [...]

All this presupposes the development of a new procedure for decision-making and legitimising those decisions, since the one put in place several decades ago is not sufficient nor does it appear effective. In this framework, there would necessarily be required spaces for conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution and supervision, and, in the end, a sort of increased ‘democratisation’ in the global context, so that the various situations can be expressed and included.”

Let us therefore here in Abu Dhabi call for a new and honest dialogue of the rich with the poor, the powerful with the powerless, and the large nations with the small. Let us say no to the wars, yes to peace, and yes to planetary survival.

Let the new dialogue start this very day today, here in this assembly of religious leaders, and in the halls of the United Nations, home of “We, the Peoples”⁴ and humanity’s best hope for a multilateral world and a sustainable planet.

Let us tell the world leaders, clearly and unambiguously, “You must do your job, to promote the common good. You must put aside your arrogance, greed, corruption, and heresies. Your current approach is not working, so you much change.”

Let us also be clear: there is no one indispensable country. There is only indispensable justice. And with justice, all countries are indispensable.

Thank you for this gathering. May we find the love and respect for our fellow humanity across the world that we so urgently need.

Editor’s notes:

- ¹ in the English original: <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/global-faith-leaders-summit-interfaith-statement-for-cop28/>
- ² in the English original: <https://www.newsmania.co.in/2023/11/17/jeffrey-sachs-speech-to-religious-leaders-at-the-pre-cop28-faith-leaders-summit-abu-dhabi-november-6-2023/>
- ³ Pope *Francis* published the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* in the run-up to the World Climate Conference.
- ⁴ The Charter of the United Nations begins with the sentence: “We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save future generations from the scourge of war [...]”

Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit: “Russia has never refused to negotiate peace with Ukraine”

Some of our colleagues here have mentioned that they are shocked by “Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine.” Indeed, military operations are always a tragedy for specific people, specific families, and the country as a whole. And we must certainly think about how to stop this tragedy.

Russia has never refused to negotiate peace with Ukraine. It is not Russia, but Ukraine that has publicly announced that it is withdrawing from the negotiation process. Moreover, the country’s leader signed an executive order prohibiting such negotiations with Russia.

I understand that this war and the loss of life are shocking and could not be otherwise. But what about the

bloody coup in Ukraine in 2014, which was followed by the Kiev regime’s war against its own people in Donbass? Did that not shock you? Are you not shocked by the extermination of civilians in Palestine and the Gaza Strip today? Is it not shocking that doctors have to operate on children – do abdominal surgeries – and use a scalpel on a child’s body without anaesthesia? Did it not shock you when the UN Secretary-General said that Gaza has turned into a huge children’s cemetery?

Russian President Vladimir Putin via video in his speech to the G20 meeting in India on 22 November 2022;

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72790>
of 22 November 2023

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Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

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Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-
for the following countries:

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

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

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

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“War begins within the minds of men” – as does peace

by Peter K upfer

This newspaper has repeatedly highlighted the artificially fuelled and media-amplified new “readiness for war” in EU Europe, noting that it not only tests our cognitive abilities but also dulls our sensitivity. This trend is particularly evident in the German-speaking regions. In my youth, the recent statement made in NATO command centres that “Germany must learn to fight wars again” would have provoked unanimous public outcry. However, in the EU model country Germany, the politically indifferent Switzerland, and the now less vigilant Austria, there has been no noticeable opposition. On the contrary, the belligerent message from Germany to the world was recently reaffirmed by the current German Minister of Defence in even stronger terms: Germany must become “war-ready” again.¹

Brief reflection period

This was different in the past. Growing up as children still under the impact of the horrors of World War II, we learned much about it at the lunch table and later in school. It was widely accepted that war, as a means of resolving international conflicts, had proven to be hopelessly outdated and ineffective throughout history. Wars turn nations into enemies. During the Cold War, this understanding was largely lost. Today, it is evident that the roots of World War II can be traced back to the “Peace Treaty” of Versailles at the end of World War I in 1918. If the true intent behind a peace agreement is the permanent weakening of the opponent, the prospects for lasting peace are bleak. This was evident 15 years later when *Hitler* seized power in Germany and rapidly set the country on its World War II program. Afterward, the new rival for the emerging global power, the United States, was Russia, and it remained so even as the Cold War (only cold in Europe, hot in countless conflicts worldwide, from Vietnam to Afghanistan) gave way to the U.S. campaign against changing “rogue states.” Today, China is the target for the ongoing and unbroken U.S. claims to world dominance. What will this mean for the precarious state of world peace? A radical shift in thinking is the only solution to this perilous game, where the threat of nuclear destruction is ever-present. Such a shift is championed by courageous researchers, forward-thinking politicians, and, encouragingly, governments from other powerful nations.

Never Again War!

This newspaper previously highlighted that the UN, three years after the end of

“This also mentions the healing powers on the other side of the spectrum, which are also of a psychological nature: instead of arrogance, modesty; instead of envy and greed, joy in one’s own, decently acquired possessions and satisfaction that others are also allowed to possess; instead of war-mongering and striving for dominance, peaceful exchange of acquired goods and knowledge – in a word: co-operation. The inherent evolutionary characteristic of cooperation in humans has survived previous catastrophes. It must and can also guide us in the face of today’s disasters.”

World War II, founded UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) out of the recognition that wars and war readiness primarily stem from the mental dimension.

The preamble to UNESCO’s charter reads: “The governments of the States Parties to this Constitution on behalf of their peoples declare: That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed”; and further on it says: “that the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races[...].”²

The main goal of UNESCO is to support the “defence of peace” through targeted measures, particularly focusing on the younger generation and *schools worldwide*. A school system that fosters peaceful attitudes is seen as an invaluable contribution to global peace.

The capability for peace is an indispensable educational goal for elementary school

Eliane Perret, an experienced psychologist, educator, and school director, emphasises the importance of instilling a mindset against violence and war in children and adolescents. She argues that the social nature of children aligns with this goal and underscores the duty and opportunity for a humanistic elementary school education system in a democracy, especially for parents and teachers. Perret illustrates, through examples, that education towards a capability for peace is both an obligation

and a chance for the younger generation. Children and adolescents are realists, and fostering a capacity for critical thinking about life’s questions, tailored to their age, is crucial. This, as Perret stresses, requires close emotional contact between responsible teachers and students, a key element that was part of discarded educational plans labelled as “temper development.” This approach involved singing, memorising poems, nature excursions, and, most importantly, ongoing class conversations facilitated by trained teachers. To find out how this can work out in the current situation, the recently published book “How I talk to children about war and other disasters”³ by Eliane Perret and *R udiger Maas* is a literal treasure chest.

Other Disasters ...

Natural disasters, much like wars, have always been present. However, their impact often becomes more dramatic when occurring in tandem with wars. Recently, there has been an increase in rockfalls, mudslides, and floods, alternating with periods of severe drought, often attributed to global warming. The consequences are particularly severe in less developed countries. In the non-Western world, which is more heavily affected, voices are rising, speaking of injustice or introducing the concept of climate justice. Countries that were once colonies and did not stand on an equal footing with the Western economy perceive it as a double burden. In addition to their often-high levels of debt, they now also have to compensate for significant disadvantages, often linked to the historical overexploitation of their resources. One could legitimately speak of a war here, a global economic war.

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“War begins within ...”

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Global warming, decarbonisation, zero growth in greenhouse gases, climate neutrality, and the attainment or non-attainment of ambitious “global climate” goals will soon share international headlines with war-related news. From November 30 to December 12, 2023, the 28th UN Climate Change Conference, COP28, will convene in Dubai, UAE. Preceding this conference, a summit of top religious dignitaries (faith leaders) from around the world took place for the first time. Their appeal to humanity, as quoted in the introduction to *Jeffrey Sachs’* address (see this issue of *Current Concerns*, page 1), urged addressing climate change and its consequences in peace and through collaboration.

The Secretariat of the UN Climate Change Conference is located in Berlin. In the lead-up to the Dubai conference, the Federal Foreign Office of the German Federal Government organised a briefing to prepare for the conference. However, this was not in the spirit of world peace and cooperation but rather of green dogmatism. In her statement on this occasion, *Annalena Baerbock* (*The Greens*) insisted on the Paris goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions “to net zero by 2050.”⁴

Labelling “the culprit” is not a contribution to the climate issue

Baerbock knows who should be seen as the biggest climate sinners and should therefore be asked to pay for the global energy transition according to her recipes at the upcoming COP28. It is hardly surprising that they see *China* and the *Gulf states* (one of which will be the host) as the main culprits. As Baerbock literally said, “historically speaking, they are among the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases”. She added: “Anyone who wants to take geostrategic responsibility must also take global responsibility for climate policy.” And dig deep into their pockets.

This means that the current German leadership has already taken a strong stance in advance. The main culprits are named who now have to fill the climate pot. This means that the green side, here too from a Western perspective, is continuing to cause controversy and strife, something that is diametrically opposed to the recommendations of the aforementioned pre-conference of religious leaders around the world. Bickering and finger-pointing solve nothing, neither in this world problem nor in the problem of martyred world peace. Know-it-all behaviour is of no help whatsoever to the peoples most affected by environmental disasters on this plagued planet. There, too, forces are at work that promote war and inhibit peace. They are fuelled by the spirit of arrogance. Jeffrey Sachs cites it as the main problem of our

torn world. As an attitude and world view, it is a heavy legacy of European colonialism. This divided the peoples of the world into two parts: Elites and masses. Here, too, the guiding principle was racist: there are born rulers and born servants. In contrast, the UN Charter says: All human beings are born equal in rights. Why? Because they are human beings.

And speaking of “geostrategic responsibility” and historically gaping climate sins (see above): Has anyone actually attempted to extrapolate the ecological as well as the human, industrial and social damage caused by the numerous armed interventions by the USA since 1945 – most of them in flagrant violation of international law, especially the wars of aggression against Yugoslavia, Sudan, Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq, to name just the more recent ones? Where, think the fighters for clean air and decarbonisation, who are partly responsible for the devastation, including ecological devastation, in at least three cases (Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan), where do they think the pollutants have gone everywhere and where are they still going? And then even ammunition with depleted uranium, carcinogenic, with monstrous consequences (see the interview with Prof *Srdan Aleksić* in this issue). Incidentally, this is also being used again in Ukraine.

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Major crises can only be overcome through cooperation

The world is also divided on the climate issue due to the premature ideologisation of the debate. Here, too, there is a tendency to quickly adopt a position and apportion blame. Like the question of world food, world health, and world peace, the question of how people treat their overused planet is also a question for the global community. Without keeping an eye on the big picture, every endeavour is doomed to failure. The world cannot be saved as long as a country sees no other solution than the downfall of “its” enemy. Even in the past, empires were a spawn of megalomania. Today, in view of the threat of a nuclear strike, the military quest for world power is galloping madness in purely military terms.

The deeper background to every current global problem, including global warming, is clearly illustrated by Jeffrey Sachs’ intervention at the aforementioned pre-COP28 conference in Abu Dhabi. He also sees the danger of war in our souls, driven by the negative impulses of arrogance, envy, greed, and the inability to recognise false prophets (warmongers) and to focus on the truth. But this also mentions the healing powers on the other side of the spectrum, which are also of a psychological nature: instead of arrogance, modesty; instead of envy and greed, joy in one’s own, decently acquired possessions and satisfaction that others are also allowed to possess; instead of warmongering and striving for dominance, peaceful exchange of acquired goods and knowledge – in a word: co-operation. The inherent evolutionary characteristic of cooperation in humans has survived previous catastrophes. It must and can also guide us in the face of today’s disasters. •

¹ cf. Müller, Karl-Jürgen. “What to do in times of war”, in: *Current Concerns* No. 24 of 14 November 2023

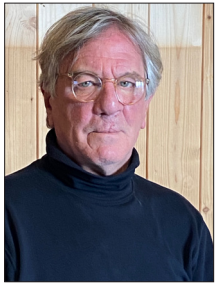
² cf. Eliane, Perret. “War is not a necessary evil of humanity”, in: *Current Concerns* No. 22 of 17 October 2023

³ Perret, Eliane and Maas, Rüdiger. *How I talk with children about war and other disasters*; ISBN 978-3-96890-115-2

⁴ Federal Republic of Germany, Federal Foreign Office: *Speech by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at the opening of the briefing on COP 28 “Global Energy Transition Now”*; www.auswaertiges-amt.de, accessed 20 November 2023

The banality of propaganda

by Patrick Lawrence*



Patrick Lawrence
(pictur ef)

The annals of the awful art – Hitler’s, Mussolini’s, Japan’s and America’s during World War II – show that it does not have to be sophisticated. The Israeli president’s display of “Mein Kampf” just proved that again.

I watched a video clip on 12 November of *Isaac Herzog* that takes all cakes in the way of silliness that also manages to be pernicious. In it the Israeli president holds a copy of *Mein Kampf*, translated into Arabic.

The video was made one day after an immense demonstration in London in behalf of a ceasefire in Gaza and the freeing of Palestinians from Israel’s long, violent repression. Here is part of what Herzog had to say:

“I want to show you something exclusive. This is Adolf Hitler’s book, ‘Mein Kampf’. It’s the book that led to the Holocaust, and the book that led to World War II. This is the book that led [...] to the worst atrocity of humankind, which the British fought against.

This book was found just a few days ago in northern Gaza, in a children’s living room which was turned into a military operations base of Hamas, on the body of one of the terrorists and murderers of Hamas, and he even makes notes, he marked, and learned again and again of Hitler’s ideology of killing the Jews, of burning the Jews, of slaughtering the Jews.

This is the real war we are at. So all those who demonstrated yesterday – I am not saying all of them support Hitler. But all I’m saying is by omitting to understand what Hamas ideology is all about they are basically supporting this ideology.”

You can view a one-minute, 22-second version of this video clip here [<https://twitter.com/dialectichiphop/status/1723709746916589868>], or a longer, BBC version here [<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-67396773>]. In both, we watch the Israeli head of state play the Holocaust card, the Hitler card, the Jewish victim card and the Hamas-as-murdering-burning-slaughtering-monsters card all at once.

I cannot identify the television network that showed the shorter version of Herzog, and I am astonished that the BBC took it seriously enough to broadcast it, but this is the Beeb these days – always on for the trans-Atlantic cause.

How remarkably flimsy propaganda is in most cases, I thought after watching Herzog and taking my notes. This is true in many, many cases in the annals of the awful art – Hitler’s, Mussolini’s, Japan’s and America’s during World War II. As you look at it now, none of it is very sophisticated for the simple reason it does not have to be.

Propaganda is about forceful impact, subtlety the last thing on the propagandist’s mind. The banal will always do. The Japanese during the Pacific war were “Japs” or “Nips,” and in the plentitude of American propaganda images they had buck teeth and pencil mustaches and wore round glasses over their evil Asiatic eyes.

After watching the Herzog video, I went in search of footage from London [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izcARmpvVOU>] the previous day. There have been many demonstrations against Israel’s savage military campaign in Gaza since hostilities erupted 7 October, and may there be many more, but London 11 November looks like the biggest to date.

“Free Gaza,” “Ceasefire Now,” “Not in Our Names” – these were among the things shouted and scribbled on placards as the protest wound slowly through Central London from Hyde Park to the U.S. Embassy several miles away. The police estimated the number of protesters at 300,000. From the footage – all I have to go by – I would put it nearer half a million.

If you watch enough propaganda, contemporary or historical, you find that it does not matter even if the scripts and images betray the crudity and indignity of those producing the propaganda. The intent is solely to capture the thoughts and feelings of the unthinking majority however this needs to be done.

Israeli propaganda department is desperate

But this project is more difficult now, in the age of digital media and an increas-

ingly influential independent press. So it seems to me. People can see more and see it more clearly and immediately now, providing they choose to look. And more and more people are so choosing.

If the idiotic Herzog clip told us anything, it is that the Israeli propaganda department is in a desperate state, having already lost the public-relations war as the Israeli Defense Forces dig the hole deeper by the day.

After watching the Herzog video and then the London footage, I thought of a memorable passage in *Hannah Arendt’s* “The Origins of Totalitarianism”:

“In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow.”

Arendt was looking back to the Reich and Stalin’s Soviet Union when she wrote her celebrated 1951 treatise. But the thought seems never to have been thereafter far from her mind.

In a conversation with a French, free-speech activist not long before her death in 1975, Arendt had yet blunter words as to what eventually comes of circumstances such as ours. “If everybody always lies to you,” she said to *Roger Errera*, “the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer.”

Half a century before Herzog made his video and demonstrators filled the streets of London, Arendt called 11 November perfectly.

It is a fine thing that fewer and fewer people are taken in by the psyops and propaganda blitzes of the national security state, the corporate media, and ruthless – indeed Hitleresque, I shall say it – regimes such as Israel’s.

But to live in a world in which one believes nothing of what is said is its own kind of misery. It is effectively a surrender of all public discourse and public space altogether to the malign, the indecent, the inhumane, the degraded and degrading. The truth, and along with it logical thinking and plain decency, become “alternative.”

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"The banality of propaganda"

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Is there a way to build beyond our de-based circumstances? Or are we to wander indefinitely in a state of negativity, of not believing, of alienation from our own politics?

The reclamation of language

My answer is yes to the first question, no to the second: There is always a way to build a different future – this as a matter of general principle. In this case the project must begin with the reclamation of language. Rejecting the official language of those in power, as so many people now do, is a start. We must then learn again to speak the language that is not spoken, the language wherein truth resides.

In large part because of how I have spent my professional years, I am especially sensitive to the power of language as it is used in the cause either of clarity and understanding or of obfuscation and ignorance.

The language of institutions, the language of power, is made of obscuring euphemisms – "global leadership," "collateral damage," "regime change," "the intelligence community," "the rules-based order," and so on through the bureaucratic lexicon – and of bold falsifications such as Isaac Herzog offered us last Sunday.

Orwell described how the language of ideologues and bureaucratic mandarins devastates our ability to think clearly – precisely its purpose – in "Politics and the English Language." Since he published his essay in *Horizon* in April 1946, the problem as we have it is seven decades' worth of worse.

This use of language has disarmed language itself, depriving it of its assertive power such that speech or writing outside the orthodoxy can be dismissed as a site of serious discourse. Language is rendered impotent as a medium of creative thought or as a prompt to new, imaginative action.

The preposterous, insulting use of "anti-Semitism" that now besets us is a case in point. The obvious intent is to impose a vast silence to obscure the crimes of apartheid Israel.

The task before us is one of restoration. It is to take language back, to renew its life, to wrest it from the deadening influence of institutions, bureaucracies, and corporate media – these having deformed language into an instrument for the enforcement of conformity. This is why every shout and placard heard or seen in London or many other cities these days is important, an act of significance and worth.

Clear language is an instrument – unadorned, written and spoken plainly, colloquial in the best sense of this term but per-

fectly capable of subtlety and complexity. It is the language of history, not myth.

This language is spoken not in the cause of empire but always in the human cause. "Free Palestine," "From the river to the sea": These are two-word and six-word examples of the language I describe.

This is the language necessary to confront power rather than accommodate it. It is language that presumes the utility of intelligence and critical thought. It is meant for the posing of many worthy questions. It is unreservedly dedicated to enlarging what is sayable in hostile response to "the great unsayable," as I call it.

By way of this language a more vibrant, fulfilling public discourse awaits us. By way of this language the Isaac Herzogs, *Antony Blinkens* and *Ursula von der Leyens* who pollute our public space can be reduced to what they are – liars and propagandists. The power of the language I describe will deprive the language they speak of all power.

Let us speak it, let us write it, let us scribble it on walls and sheets of cardboard. Let us know it as the most powerful tool available to those who refuse the silence Isaac Herzog sought to impose upon all those Londoners last weekend. •

Portions of this piece are adapted from my new book, *Journalists and Their Shadows*, available from *Clarity Press* or via *Amazon*.

First published: Special to *Consortium News* on 14 November 2023

"We urge integrity in Western media coverage of Israel's atrocities against Palestinians"

A statement by more than 1500 Journalists* (Excerpts)

[...] We are writing to urge an end to violence against journalists in Gaza and to call on Western newsroom leaders to be clear-eyed in coverage of Israel's repeated atrocities against Palestinians. [...]

Israel has blocked foreign press entry, heavily restricted telecommunications and bombed press offices. [...] Taken with a decades-long pattern of lethally targeting journalists, Israel's actions show wide scale suppression of speech. [...]

We stand with our colleagues in Gaza and herald their brave efforts at reporting in the midst of carnage and destruction. Without them, many of the horrors on the ground would remain invisible.

We also hold Western newsrooms accountable for dehumanising rhetoric that has served to justify ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. [...] More than 500 journalists signed an open letter in 2021 outlining concerns that US media outlets ignore Israel's oppression of Palestinians. Yet the call for fair coverage has gone unanswered.

Newsrooms have instead undermined Palestinian, Arab and Muslim perspectives, dismissing them as unreliable and have invoked inflammatory language that reinforces Islamophobic and racist tropes. They have printed misinformation spread by Israeli officials and failed to scrutinise indiscriminate killing of civilians in Gaza – committed with the support of the US government.

Since the 7 October attack by Hamas, in which more than 1,200 Israelis, including four journalists, were killed and some 240 others captured, these issues have compounded. News coverage has positioned the attack as the starting point of the conflict without offering necessary historical context – that Gaza is a de facto prison of refugees from historic Palestine, that Israel's occupation is illegal under international law, and that Palestinians are bombarded and massacred regularly by the Israeli government.

UN experts have warned they are "convinced that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide," yet Western outlets remain hesitant to quote

genocide experts and accurately describe the existential threat unfolding in Gaza.

This is our job: to hold power to account. Otherwise we risk becoming accessories to genocide.

We are renewing the call for journalists to tell the full truth without fear or favor. To use precise terms that are well-defined by international human rights organisations, including "apartheid," "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide." To recognise that contorting our words to hide evidence of war crimes or Israel's oppression of Palestinians is journalistic malpractice and an abdication of moral clarity.

**Writers of the letter are a group of US-based reporters at both local and national newsrooms. More than 1500 current and former journalists have now signed the letter.*

More than 30 journalists have since asked to have their signatures removed, fearing reprisal from their employers.

Source: <https://www.protect-journalists.com/>

Germany, Israel and Palestine – a contribution to the discussion

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

The images of 7 October and Israel's war against the Gaza Strip have once again raised the question of how Germany wants to shape its relations with Israel and Palestine. There are two opposing positions: One is practised and justified by the incumbent German government. It is an almost unconditional support for Israel's policy, justified above all by Germany's special responsibility for Israel after the murder of millions of European Jews by National Socialist Germany. The keyword here is that Israel's security was a German reason of state (according to *Angela Merkel* in the Knesset in 2008). The other position also ties in with German responsibility after 1945, placing the German *Basic Law* at the centre as a lesson from the Nazi crimes and the foundation of future German policy: the obligation to respect and protect human dignity and human rights; democracy, separation of powers and the rule of law; the obligation to peace and the general rules of international law. This guiding principle should not be abandoned in German reactions to Israel's policies either. This position can also refer to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted in 1948, which explicitly states in its preamble that "the denial and disregard of human rights have led to acts of barbarism which have deeply wounded the conscience of mankind" – a clear reference to the Nazi crimes.

The German-Turkish summit in Berlin on 17 November demonstrated what German policy looks like when it follows its supposed *raison d'état*. While, at the joint press conference¹, Turkish President *Erdoğan* criticised Israeli policy and Western policy towards Israel, German Chancellor *Scholz* invoked the aforementioned *raison d'état* while ignoring the victims of the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip and limiting himself to rather abstract, non-binding wordings in this regard.

Chancellor *Scholz* said verbatim:

"On 7 October, Hamas attacked Israel in a barbaric manner. The Federal Government condemns this act of terrorism by Hamas in the strongest possible terms. [...] Anyone who knows Germany knows that our solidarity with Israel is non-negotiable. It is enshrined in international law that Israel has the right to defend itself". At the same time, we say: All lives are equally precious. We are also saddened by the suffering of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. [...] Let me be very clear: Israel's right to exist is irrevocable for us. And let me be equally clear: There is no room for anti-Semitism in our coun-

"Well-understood duties of friendship also derive from our special responsibility for Israel. Genuine friendship does not prove itself in the tacit acceptance or even support of misbehaviour. Rather, it shows itself in the courage to stop a friend, if necessary, when he is about to make mistakes; otherwise, one is a convenient and therefore unreliable friend." (*Peter Vonnahme*, until his retirement judge at the Bavarian Administrative Court)

try, regardless of whether it is politically or religiously motivated, whether it stems from the right or the left, and whether it has developed here for centuries or is brought to Germany from the outside." He then added: "At the same time, I oppose all those who now want to deny all five million Muslims in Germany their place in our country. I oppose such attempts just as resolutely."

President *Erdoğan* stated:

"I will speak clearly and frankly here too, because October 7 is described as the beginning. The process after October 7 is never discussed. As of now, 13 thousand Palestinian children, women and elderly people have unfortunately been killed. In addition to this, there is almost no Gaza left anymore; the whole place has been leveled to the ground. They keep talking about Hamas. Can Hamas' weaponry and power be compared to Israel's weaponry and power? Does Israel currently have nuclear weapons? Yes, it does, but if you ask Israel, they will not admit it because they use lies very well. Also, there is talk of financial support being provided. Well, is such financial support given to Hamas? Is there such a thing? – Of course not. Even the support that Palestine should be receiving is not being provided.

In this emergency, the following is perhaps also very important: places of worship, houses of prayer are being bombed, churches are being bombed, hospitals are also being bombed. The bombing of hospitals, the killing of children: There is none of this in the *Torah*. You can't do it. According to the *Declaration of Human Rights*, you can't do it either. But as we see here, how are these children being shot, how are they being killed in hospitals? Are we going to stand with our hands and arms tied in the face of this? Are we not going to raise our voice against this? If we stand here with our hands, arms and

tongues tied, we will not be able to answer for it before history. He then said: "There is talk of an exchange of hostages. We are in. But when you say hostages, what is the number of hostages in Israel? On the other side, what is the number of hostages held by Hamas or Palestine? When we look at this, there are many times more hostages in the hands of Israel. There are hostages and prisoners, held by Israel for years. We need to see this too. It would be unfair if we don't see this."

Peter Vonnahme, until his retirement in 2007 judge at the *Bavarian Administrative Court* in Munich from 1982, published a detailed and readable article on the topic in the *Nachdenkseiten* on 9 November 2023² and, in an addendum, once again clearly stated that he was opposed to his comments being accused of "anti-Semitism". Instead of my own words, this former judge at the *Bavarian Administrative Court* is quoted here. After explaining the violations of international law and even genocide for which Israeli policy is responsible, but also Germany's responsibility for Israel's right to exist, *Vonnahme* goes into more detail about the alleged German *raison d'état*. He writes:

"Well-understood duties of friendship also derive from our special responsibility for Israel. Genuine friendship does not prove itself in the tacit acceptance or even support of misbehaviour. Rather, it shows itself in the courage to stop a friend, if necessary, when he is about to make mistakes; otherwise, one is a convenient and therefore unreliable friend. [...] When it becomes obvious that Israel is losing its way, Germany must intervene as a friend to help; now would be the time to do so. [...]"

But the sad fact is that Germany generally remains silent on Israeli violations of the law. Occasional reactions from the

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War-mongering of the worst kind

km. The statement by German War Minister Pistorius, “We must become fit for war”, was not just a propaganda formula – it was meant quite seriously. This is shown by an article published by the German weekly *Die Zeit online* on 19 November.¹ The authors of the article are two German warmongers on the front line: Nico Lange, Senior Fellow for the *Munich Security Conference’s* “Zeitenwende” initiative, and Carlo Masala, Professor of International Politics at the University of the German Federal Armed Forces in Munich. Unspoken, both authors recognise that Ukraine is no longer in a position to continue the war against Russia. But they do not draw the sensible conclusion that serious negotiations should finally begin and to end the war. Instead, they are now calling for “total war” against Russia. They are painting a world war scenario on the wall. This threatens to materialise if a negotiated solution is found that respects Russia’s war aims.

Anyone with an open mind can name these goals: demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine and the protection of the Russian-speaking population. Specifically: no NATO membership for Ukraine – and in the meantime: the integration of the majority Russian-speaking parts of the country into the Russian Federation. The outlook: a European security order with equal security for all European states, including Russia.

Lange and Masala formulate this radically differently – without any evidence.

They present it as if such a negotiated solution would trigger a global catastrophe. Sample: “The sirens are screaming. Cell phone alert tones are heard thousands of times. Air raid alert in Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin. Cruise missiles and swarms of drones infiltrate German airspace. German soldiers have been putting out fires in the Baltic for days. In response to Russian attacks, NATO activates Article 5-case for alliance. Russia is firing missiles.” The horror scenario continues to unfold: World War and the end of democracy and human rights. For Germany: “Our lives in Germany would be less safe, poorer and lonelier.” For Europe: “No one in Europe would be safe anymore.” And for the world: “A Russian victory over Ukraine would herald the end of the world as we know it.” Both authors are certain: “Does this sound excessive? No! If Vladimir Putin wins his war of aggression, this scenario is realistic,” *Die Zeit* points out. And now comes the sentence that both of them are actually concerned with: “It is therefore worth supporting Ukraine in its defence against the Russian aggressor with everything Europe and the United States have at their disposal.” Specifically for Germany: “More German involvement could make a significant contribution to protecting the global order from fundamental upheavals that are against our interests and our basic values.” (Emphasis km)

If one removes the propagandistic ballast from such warmongering, one thing

above all becomes clear: In Germany, the tone is currently being set by forces that are nothing more than executors of US interests and policies. In the USA, the war against Ukraine is losing more and more support. Germany should therefore bear the brunt of the war in future. This would kill two birds with one stone. The USA can take itself out of the costly war – and at the same time the troublesome competitor and long-time unreliable fellow Germany (due to its previously quite good relations with Russia) could be involved in the war even longer and more strongly and any reconciliation with Russia could be blocked for decades.

Yes, it is true: “A Russian victory over Ukraine would herald the end of the world as we know it.” But what would be so bad about a world in which international law would apply, in which the states of the world would work together as sovereign and equal partners, in which there would no longer be a hegemon or a “single” world power, in which the Global South could recover ...

Is there no one left in Germany who can stop people like Pistorius, Lange and Masala, Baerbock, Kiesewetter and Strack-Zimmermann, and whatever their names are? •

¹ <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2023-11/krieg-ukraine-russland-wladimir-putin-sieg-europa/komplettansicht> of 19 November 2023 (complete only for Z+ subscribers) (Translation of all quotes *Current Concerns*)

“Germany, Israel and Palestine ...”

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German government are often a sign of depressing one-sidedness and a lack of perspective. For example, when German Foreign Minister Baerbock says, ‘These days we are all Israeli’, this has nothing to do with friendship properly understood. This statement is under-complex and not commensurate with the responsibility of a minister. Baerbock is obviously ignoring the fact that Israel is on a disastrous wrong track that could ultimately jeopardise its very existence. There is an obvious increase in incomprehension and sometimes even hatred towards Israel in the Arab neighbourhood; solidarity with Israel is dwindling worldwide. It is also doubtful if Israel’s policy of harshness towards the Palestin-

ian people, which it has been pursuing for years, will reduce the dangers for its own population. The death toll of recent weeks speaks against this.

Chancellor Scholz’s recent declaration that ‘Our own history, our responsibility deriving from the Holocaust, makes it our permanent duty to stand up for the existence and security of the State of Israel.’ is biased and dangerous. To a certain extent, it is a blank cheque in the sense that Israel can do what it wants, with Germany seconding it. The Chancellor is thus leaving international law far behind. In addition, he is making himself the naïve accomplice of a lawless and vengeful apartheid state. Norman Paech³ urgently warns that anyone who votes against a ceasefire or abstains from voting is complicit in genocide. Genocide is a crime punishable

under Article 6 of the *International Criminal Code* and Article 6 of the *Rome Statute*. Anyone who supports Israel’s war is complicit. The German government should consider this carefully.” •

¹ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/pressekonferenz-von-bundeschancellor-scholz-und-praesident-erdo%C4%9Fan-zum-besuch-des-praesidenten-der-republik-tuerkei-in-berlin-am-17-november-2023-2241456> (translated from the German *Current Concerns*); Statement by President Erdoğan: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/150220/everyone-should-take-responsibility-to-ensure-a-fair-and-lasting-peace-in-the-middle-east->

² <https://www.nachdenkenseiten.de/?p=106411> of 9 Nov. 2023 (translated from the German *Current Concerns*)

³ Norman Paech is a lawyer and German professor emeritus of political science and public law at the University of Hamburg.

Proving the truth about depleted uranium in court

A Serbian lawyer courageously sues those responsible for the use of uranium weapons

Interview with Prof Dr Srdan Aleksić, Serbia



Srdan Aleksić (picture ug)

ef. On 22 and 23 September 2023, the Third International Symposium “Law and Ecology” was held at the University of Niš (Serbia). The motto was “The right to truth, justice and salvation”. The symposium was organised by the Law Office of Srdan Aleksić, the Faculty of Law, Security and Management “Constantine the Great”, and the Eurasian Forum for Security.

The event began on the evening of 22 September with two book presentations, the first: “The Projectiles of Justice”, by Srdan Aleksić. Since the end of the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, Dr Aleksić and his team have been collecting data, and extensively documenting the damage caused by the war, in order to address the needs of the victims. The book is a documentation of the consequences of the bombings for the public. (An English translation of the book is available on request)

The auditorium of the University of Niš was well attended on Saturday morning with about 150200 participants. Around 25 speakers, professors of medicine, former high-ranking generals of the Yugoslavian army, church representatives, historians, jurists, ecologists, some of whom joined via video, from Serbia, Italy, Russia, and the United States, were present. They presented their research findings on the consequences of the NATO bombings. NATO’s war of aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which violated international law, lasted 78 days, from March to June 1999. The disastrous consequences for the people and the environment continue to this day.

The symposium was led by General Prof. Spasoje Mučibabić, Ph.D., former major general and head of Serbia’s highest military school for defence, and Prof. Dr Srdan Aleksić.

It was impressive to see how many of the presenters, mainly from Serbia, had come together and that almost all of them are dedicated to researching the conse-

quences of the war. It was also a tribute to their many years of work.

A highlight of the symposium was the recognition of the work of Srdan Aleksić. He was honoured by the Royal Academy of Scientists and Artists of Serbia with the Medal of Serbian Saint Lazarus, “For his utmost personal commitment, for his family and other people close to him. For his work, which is important for all of us. For his fight for a better world. For a world that is free, just and peaceful.”

The individual presentations will be published in a conference volume.

Current Concerns conducted the following interview with Srdan Aleksić after the event.

Current Concerns: What were and are the consequences of the use of DU weapons in the NATO war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999? At the “Mut zur Ethik” conference in September, you were calling for DU weapons to be banned. Can you briefly explain this core idea again?

Dr Aleksić: There has been an increase in the number of cancer patients, specifically: thyroid cancer, leukemia, malignant lymphoma, multiple myeloma, sarcoma, testicular cancer, esophageal cancer, gastric cancer. Lately, the number of men and women affected by sterility has also increased in the south of Serbia. There are also increasing incidents of autoimmune diseases in children, which was not the case before. So, more and more people are getting cancer, and we can talk about a cancer epidemic in the Republic of Serbia, Kosovo, and the territory of Metohija.

Today, in the south of Serbia, there is almost no family without at least one member suffering from some type of cancer. According to experts, which is very worrying, even though today we have an epidemic of this most serious disease, it is expected that the peak of this disease will be in the next two years. So we should expect an even greater increase in the number of patients.

My idea of banning these weapons is to make an official request to the United Nations, through a network of non-governmental organisations and associations of lawyers, to ban depleted uranium munitions from being used in future conflicts between states because of its prolonged effects. The half-life of depleted uranium is 4.5 billion years, which means that once such a weapon is used, it remains for eternity. So I can freely say that the use of depleted uranium ammunition is a crime

Film premiere:

“Toxic NATO – Srdan Aleksić’s long way to justice”

ef. The symposium was introduced through the presentation of a brand-new documentary film by Berlin director, filmmaker, and investigative journalist Moritz Enders entitled “Toxic NATO – Srdan Aleksić’s long way to justice”. In the documentary, Enders accompanies the lawyer Srdan Aleksić, whose own family was affected by the consequences of the use of depleted uranium weapons during the Yugoslavian war in 1999, and who is currently fighting several lawsuits. Dr Aleksić is using legal means to help the numerous victims of the NATO bombings receive material compensation for the harm that was done to them.

(Languages: Serbian/German – English subtitles; Length: 26 minutes; on YouTube: Trailer and interviews)

against humanity and against God. All of us on this planet should do our best to ban the use of these types of weapons.

3rd International Symposium “Law and Ecology” in Niš

Recently your 3rd International Symposium “Law and Ecology” took place at the University in Niš. What were the most important results of this symposium for you? The most important result is that scientists and experts from numerous fields – medicine, chemistry, law, various military fields, and ecology – came to the conclusion that depleted uranium left terrible and immeasurably harmful consequences on the ecosystems of Serbia, Kosovo, and the region of Metohija. The use of 15 tons of depleted uranium, according to NATO officials, resulted in the pollution of the ecosystem and almost the entire human environment.

So it is no longer an assumption that depleted uranium is not harmful, as claimed by the representatives of the NATO pact, but is dangerous and permanently harmful. The meeting’s letter will be addressed to UN bodies dealing with environmental protection and human rights protection, specifically, the *Committee for the Protection of Human Rights* in Geneva. The right to life is a basic human right from which all other rights derive. It is guaranteed by international conventions and at the highest legal levels of states, i.e., state constitutions.

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"Proving the truth about ..."

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The legal proceedings

What is the current status of the legal proceedings concerning the victims of the NATO bombings with DU in the 1999 war against Yugoslavia? Your lawsuit is initially directed against the Serbian government. Why not directly against NATO?

With regard to the current status of the proceedings against NATO and the Republic of Serbia, I would like to point out that the first proceeding, which was initiated in 2021, is in its final phase. We received an expert opinion from the Italian *Institute of Nanotechnology* in Turin, in which Prof. Dr Rita Celi stated that our client has a 100-fold higher concentration of 21 heavy metals that are toxic to the human body and a 500-fold higher concentration of depleted uranium in the body than permissible. The permissible level for depleted uranium is 0.0055 mSv (millisievert), whereas here it is actually 2.98 mSv.

NATO has declared that it has legal immunity on the basis of the agreement signed with our country in 2005, on the transit of its troops, soldiers and equipment, but it cannot be exempted from responsibility for the war crime committed by bombing Serbia and Kosovo with depleted uranium ammunition. As for the other 34 cases, they are currently being examined and proven by experts, so I expect that the majority of them will be finalised by the end of the year.

The lawsuit is aimed directly at the Republic of Serbia, because soldiers, reservists, and officers were on call, or were in the course of their duties in southern Serbia, in Kosovo, and in Metohija, and did not have adequate protective equipment against depleted uranium. Nor were not warned of the possible consequences of exposure to depleted uranium. Those who were affected are therefore entitled to compensation, as are the civilians who were in the area.

Every state, including the Republic of Serbia, is objectively responsible for the damage caused to its citizens by its inaction and lack of interest in adequate protection. The lawsuit is also directed against NATO because it is responsible for what happened. NATO is responsible for the use of depleted uranium, which has a long-lasting effect, and which is still killing, and will continue to kill, civilians and soldiers who were or are in the area of southern Serbia, Kosovo, and Metohija. Our lawsuits are aimed at protecting the right to human life, which has been violated by the use of depleted uranium ammunition, as it has led to cancer and human deaths. Articles 24 and 25 of the Serbian Constitution regulate the right to life and the right to protection of human health as a fundamental human right.



The medal awarded to Srdan Aleksić. (picture ef)

The Western world has learned nothing: Depleted Uranium ammunition is being used in Ukraine

The USA and the UK are officially supplying DU weapons to Ukraine. From your experience, what do you say about this?

The entire Western democratic world has learnt nothing from what has happened to my family, my people, and my country as a result of the use of depleted uranium ammunition. The truth about depleted uranium, its effects and the consequences it entails, was concealed for a long time, not only in the West but also in my country.

Thanks to the "Mut zur Ethik" working group, I have been speaking about this issue, and the serious consequences of using depleted uranium ammunition, for six years. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak about it in Switzerland and in other cities in Europe. I take every opportunity to point this out at every conference I attend, and to warn all those who believe that an immediate victory can be achieved with the use of depleted uranium ammunition.

However, in the long term, environmental pollution and the epidemic of the most serious diseases will continue to occur as inseparable consequences, both in the area where the ammunition was used, and in Western Europe, and the East. And it will continue for the next million years, as uranium dust will also affect those areas where the ammunition is used on the soil of Ukraine and Russia. I appeal to the United Kingdom and to America not to send uranium munitions to Ukraine, or to any other country in the future, because this is a weapon with immeasurable and lasting consequences.

What kind of support is needed for your work now?

First of all, I am grateful for the support that the "Mut zur Ethik" working group has given me, through participation in conferences in Switzerland, through the opportunity to meet numerous intellectuals from various fields who participate in these conferences, as well as through your presence at the conferences in Serbia, in Niš. I am very glad that I have the opportunity to convey to the readers and viewers the truth about this disease – about the occurrence of cancer as a direct consequence of the use of depleted uranium, which occurs in the area of southern Serbia, Kosovo, and Metohija. Since the end of the NATO aggression, my team and I have been collecting data and all relevant documentation related to the damage caused, in order to meet the needs of the victims of this armed aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The current struggle has not yet led to the desired results – namely an agreement with the responsible members of the NATO alliance on the compensation they owe to the country and its citizens.

This fight "urgently needs international support"

It is therefore all the more important to publicise this fight. It now urgently needs international support.

I will try to prove the truth about depleted uranium in court through my legal fight, together with my colleague from Italy and others from Europe and the world. Using scientific papers, and the written evidence contained in the book I published, "The Projectiles of Justice", I will continue to inform the professional and scientific establishment, and general public, about the consequences of the use of depleted uranium ammunition.

Your readers can help by following up on the question of what is happening with the more than 1000 applications submitted to the *Human Rights Council* in Geneva a year ago, as we have not received any answers to date.*

Assistance could also be expressed in the establishment of a specific non-governmental organisation based in Switzerland or in another European country, with a representative office in Niš, so that we can cooperate on the ground by helping the sick population, protecting the environment, and providing any other kind of help to the civilian population in the south of Serbia, in Kosovo, and in Metohija.

Thank you very much, Srdan Aleksić, for the interview. ●

* These applications – with supporting documents – call on the *Human Rights Council* to take a stand on the serious human rights violations (the right to life) that have been and are being caused by DU weapons.

Digitalisation must only be a tool – for the benefit of people

A current overview

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

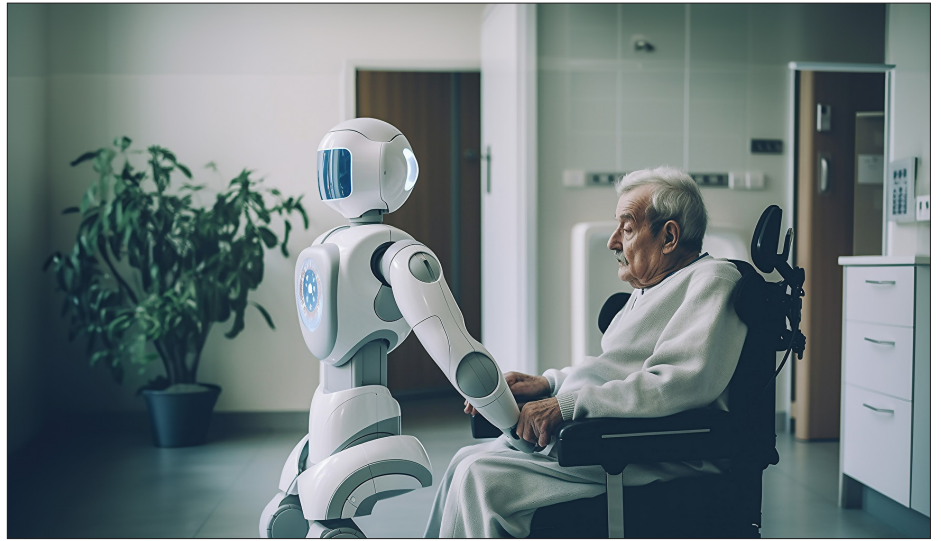
“Switzerland is lagging behind other countries when it comes to digitalisation,” was recently reported in the daily press. The reasons cited by the author include “federalism, conservatism and a lack of technology-savvy officials in governments and parliaments”.¹ However, no mention is made of the direct democratic decision-making rights of citizens, the majority of whom have a natural defence reflex against being digitally penetrated and managed. The fact that the increasingly seamless digitalisation of our lives is primarily about business is, of course, not a topic in *Thomas Reitzke’s* guest commentary. This is because he is Managing Director at the global IT group T-Systems, one of the “leading service providers for information technology and digitalisation solutions in Europe” with an annual turnover of around four billion euros (2022).²

No digital experiments with direct democracy!

It’s not that we Swiss don’t have mobile phones and computers. The administrations and services of the federal government, the cantons and municipalities, and even more so the companies, are digitalised to the point of being remote and customer-unfriendly. What bothers IT managers like Thomas Reitzke is the fact that in Switzerland, his and other companies’ digitalisation is not waved through by government decree, but often comes up against the barriers of the Swiss state system, such as the responsibility of the cantons or the objections of the sovereign (unfortunately not always: take the example of “Bologna”, which has been imposed on our universities without resistance from the “veto players”).

From two online readers’ comments on Reitzke’s article: “I am extremely tech-savvy and am very glad that Switzerland is not experimenting, especially when it comes to democratic processes and identification. [...] Digitalisation is not an end in itself. And the risks for democracy in particular are enormous.” – “Thank God Switzerland is lagging behind in digitalisation! The philosopher *Konrad Paul Liessmann* recently said: ‘Experience shows that ethical systems adapt to technical systems and not the other way round. In other words, morality very often adapts to the technical possibilities.’”

We recently witnessed the dangers of digitalisation for the guarantee of democratic decisions during the National Council elections. Three days after the ballot



The benefit of human care cannot and must not be replaced by soulless machines – we owe it to our parents and grandparents! (picture PantherMedia)

papers were counted, the *Federal Statistical Office (FSO)* had to announce that it had published incorrect figures on election Sunday (22 October). The reason for this was “faulty programming in the data import programme for cantons Appenzell and Glarus”.³

This means that the experiments with electronic voting, which have failed several times in Switzerland, are off the table for the time being. Because as long as votes are cast on paper, the risk of erroneous results is minimised. In the municipalities, all ballot papers are stored for years so that any suspicion of an error in the digital storage or transmission of results can be verified. So, let’s take it in our stride if Switzerland is “lagging behind” when it comes to digitalisation.

Public service must serve the people, not the IT companies

In his newspaper commentary, Reitzke calls on the newly elected Swiss parliament not to tackle upcoming political problems, such as health insurance premiums that are barely affordable for many households, with political solutions, because “there are certainly [...] simpler ways to reduce costs - while at the same time improving the system and increasing the benefits for patients. The key is digitalisation.” According to Reitzke, e-health encompasses much more than the electronic patient dossier and, according to ETH and *McKinsey*, the potential savings amount to 8.2 billion a year.

Healthcare is not one of my areas of expertise, so I am happy to leave a more

detailed analysis of the subject to the experts. But the fact that programmes from IT companies and one-sided expert reports are being used in the interests of the client to run down our good healthcare system so that the state can save billions and tech companies can earn billions – that beats everything! Cutting costs while increasing benefits for patients? Tell it to the marines!

It is unacceptable that rural hospitals in affluent Switzerland should be closed despite a proven need, or that hundreds of highly qualified and long-serving doctors and nurses at St. Gallen hospitals should be made redundant over the next few years for purely economic reasons. Yet everyone knows that there is a severe shortage of doctors and nursing staff in the Swiss healthcare system, which means that they are often stretched to their limits. And we are closing hospitals and laying off specialists? Our public service institutions do not need to be cost-neutral. We pay our taxes so that everyone in the country can receive good care. If we want to make savings, we would be better off reducing the administrative bubbles at federal and cantonal level.

AI is used to trim workers for performance or replace them with robots

The current huge hype in the digital world is “artificial intelligence (AI)”. Among other things, this is supposed to solve “problems in the labour market”. Microsoft has already invested 13 billion dollars in AI and hosted a tech conference

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“Digitalisation must only ...”

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in Seattle in mid-November. Among other things, the “Copilot” was presented there, a “digital assistant for daily work” that “helps employees in service and production to complete complex tasks and solve problems faster without interrupting their workflow”.⁴

Journalist *Philipp Gollmer* reports from Seattle on what this “help” can look like: “Initially, *Microsoft* is primarily targeting office workers. In combination with mixed reality glasses* [...], Copilot will soon also support workers on factory floors. Using voice commands, they will be able to access information directly, for example on the maintenance or assembly of a machine, without having to laboriously look through documentation.”⁵ (translation of all quotes *Current Concerns*)

As a digital non-professional having both feet firmly on the ground and gifted with common sense, I will try to extract the essence of these descriptions. Firstly, employees’ performance is to be increased by no longer having to think for themselves or “laboriously look through documentation”, but by having a digital “assistant” continuously dictate everything necessary for the work process. This is unpleasantly reminiscent of the assembly line work of earlier times: Today, the worker is trimmed for performance by digital instructions instead of the speed of the conveyor belt.

Secondly, employers will be tempted to invest their money in AI because they will then need fewer workers. In other words, AI will “solve” “problems in the labour market” through redundancies.

Do you remember the “health-care robots” that are supposed to serve meals or distribute medication in hospitals and retirement homes? Obviously, their tech-savvy inventors have never heard of the fact that the most important thing that old and sick people need, apart from professional help, in order to feel cared for and recover, is the care of a fellow human being, the emotional sympathy, the friendly voice, the human relationship. Incidentally, this also applies to office and trade workers: instead of being fed with digital instructions, many prefer to look things up themselves or ask a colleague or the boss when they are queuing somewhere.

In some sectors, companies are even led to believe that they can save on manpower altogether. For example, driverless taxis are used in US cities such as San Francisco – until the first accident, then it becomes expensive for the company.⁶ A double misfortune for the sacked taxi drivers. Firstly, they no longer have a job and secondly, they feel useless because they could supposedly be replaced by a

robot. Really? Many passengers enjoy chatting to the driver, they are happy when he carries their heavy suitcases to the door and will be happy to travel with the same taxi driver next time.

Why a comprehensive education for every child? AI promotes the 20:80 society

Philipp Gollmer reports from Seattle: “In an interview with journalists, *Microsoft*’s Head of Communications *Frank Shaw* used an example to explain exactly how Copilot makes people more productive. ‘Half of *Word* users close the programme again without having written a single letter,’ he said. They don’t know how exactly they want to start. ‘This is where AI can help you get started,’ Shaw said, by asking at the top of the blank sheet of paper what you want to write and already making some suggestions for wording. Copilot can help further [...] with replying to emails.”⁷

Anyone who is concerned about the poor education of our young people as a result of *Curriculum 21*, inadequate teacher training and heterogeneous and too large classes without teacher-led lessons will feel queasy in the face of such “help” for those in employment. Why should children learn to write a text if all they have to do later is enter a keyword and the text is delivered? Why should commercial apprentices understand double-entry bookkeeping if they only have to send invoices and reminders in the company, which are largely pre-formulated? Why should primary school pupils memorise multiplication tables or learn written division when everyone has a calculator anyway, and why do they have to pay attention to spelling when *Word* highlights the mistakes and offers a suggested correction?

Beat Döbeli, teacher trainer at the Schwyz University of Teacher Education (PH), answered some of these questions succinctly on *SRF radio*: No, the pupils don’t need to be able to do all this, but should rather use their learning time for more contemporary learning content. In response to the question: “Will pupils go stupid if artificial intelligence can do many things faster and over time better than humans?” Döbeli replied that he was convinced that this was not the case: “Even the ancient Greeks feared losing their ability to memorise things because of the wax tablet,” said the teacher trainer.⁸ This absurd comparison demonstrates that we should not do without history as a subject under any circumstances.

This is where the wheel turns full circle: education reformers and politicians from various corners are responsible for the large number of poorly educated young people, and the global tech

companies produce the software and robots to go with it. Despite all the ineffective reforms, a small proportion of young people (around 20 per cent) still learn what they need during their time at school to be able to complete an apprenticeship with a vocational secondary school or a grammar school – if they have a favourable learning attitude and a good dose of intellectual stimulation from home and if they have parents (and at best a teacher) who provide them with sensible support. It is also beneficial for successful integration into professional and social life if parents have sufficient knowledge of German and can provide learning support or pay for private schooling if necessary. In any case, this unsatisfactory situation cannot be called “equal opportunities” – no digitalised aid can hide this fact.

AI devours a large amount of energy

And the icing on the cake: “All these AI applications, especially when people around the world are supposed to use them, consume a large amount of energy and computing power,” says Philipp Gollmer in the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”. When asked, *Microsoft* CEO *Satya Nadella* denies that AI leads to energy bottlenecks: This is because “the improvement in computing capacity per unit of energy thanks to AI is astonishing. This would also accelerate scientific progress and solve the energy problem.” All clear? Gollmer’s ironic closing remark hits the nail on the head: “So if you believe *Microsoft*, Copilot is the key to all our problems.” ●

¹ Reitzke, Thomas. “Die Schweiz digital erneuern”. (Digitally renewing Switzerland). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 17 November 2023

² <https://www.t-systems.com/de/de/ueber-t-systems/unternehmen>

³ “Wähleranteile waren falsch – Bund verrechnet sich: FDP liegt jetzt doch vor der Mitte” (Voter shares were wrong - Confederation miscalculates: FDP is now ahead of the centre after all). *SRF News* of 26 October 2023

⁴ <https://www.connect-living.de/news/microsoft-ignite-2023>

⁵ Gollmer, Philipp. “Microsoft setzt voll auf künstliche Intelligenz” (Microsoft is fully committed to artificial intelligence). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 20 November 2023

⁶ “Der Chef der Robotaxi-Firma Cruise ist während der Ermittlungen zu einem Unfall mit einer Fussgängerin in San Francisco zurückgetreten» (The head of the robotaxi company Cruise has resigned during the investigation into an accident involving a pedestrian in San Francisco.) *Keystone-SDA* of 20 November 2023

⁷ Gollmer, Philipp. “Microsoft setzt voll auf künstliche Intelligenz” (Microsoft is fully committed to artificial intelligence). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 20 November 2023

⁸ Pribakovic, Ivana. “Beat Döbeli: ‘Mit ChatGPT sind alle überfordert’ (Everyone is overwhelmed with ChatGPT)”. *Radio SRF. Daily talk* of 21 November 2023

* According to *Wikipedia*, mixed reality glasses “mix the natural perception of a user with an artificial (computer-generated) perception”.

“Strictly speaking ...” There is need of a careful analysis of reading difficulties

by Dr Eliane Perret, curative educator and psychologist

“In our family, all its members, from the oldest to the youngest, have the same little weakness: reading.” Oh dear! Is this family affected by a reading and spelling weakness or even disorder, i.e., dyslexia, as it is technically known, the causes of which are the subject of controversial debate? Have they had to undergo appropriate testing procedures, including intelligence tests, after ruling out organic causes such as hearing loss or defective vision, as is common practice today? Or were, at the most, the general conditions of this family classified as unfavourable over several generations, or had the emotional and psychological pressure, the work and housing situation long been considered so precarious that, as a result, reading skills had suffered? Had they missed the opportunity to be included in support programmes or prescribed therapies at an early stage, as is recommended today? Are they therefore entitled to “disadvantage compensation” and more time for solving tasks in exams? Are they allowed to take oral instead of written assessments? Or do they unfortunately belong to the group of so-called “illiterates” who, despite having attended school for many years, are so little able to read that they can hardly cope with the relevant demands of everyday life?

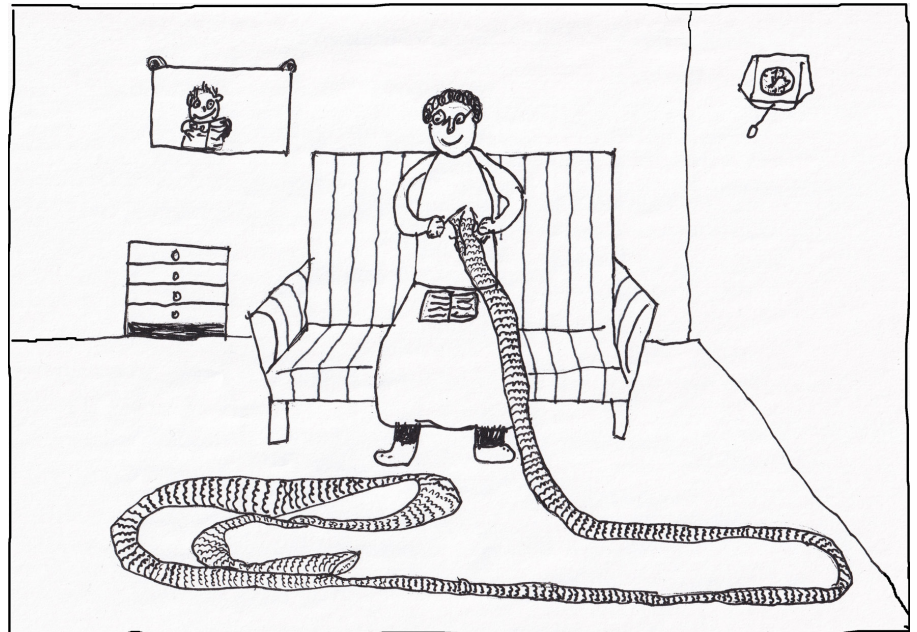
Forget the world while reading

No, it is the beginning of a story by *Michael Ende* that continues like this: “Hardly any of us can ever be persuaded to put our book aside for any reason, even in order to do something else that is urgent or cannot be postponed. This is not to say that these urgent and unpostponable things are not done. We just think that it is not at all necessary to abstain from reading for doing them.

It’s perfectly possible to do one thing and not forego the other, is it not? I admit that this sometimes leads to one or another small mishap - but so what?”

Well, that sounds exciting and makes you want to read on! The protagonists of the story are so engrossed in their reading that they lose sight of their own actions. Like the grandfather, who taps out his tobacco pipe in the flower vase instead of the ashtray, which he then drinks from in the belief that he is taking his cough medicine.

Or the knitting grandmother who is shocked by the long hose that is curled up in the parlour (it should have been socks) and which – she thinks – has been forgotten by the fire brigade. Whether it is the painting father, the cooking mother, the



Reading is not only essential for the successful organisation of our everyday lives. We can also inform ourselves freely and independently about current affairs and explore the literary treasures of our culture in hours of leisure. (Drawing by a pupil)

sister on the phone, the lift-riding brother, the frog or the cat, they are all so engrossed in reading that they forget the world around them.

So “strictly speaking ...”, as the title of the story says, it is about a family who have made reading their hobby. Would we not wish this to be true for all children and young people? However, it is well known that, despite many years of school attendance, a large number do not have the reading and writing skills that would enable them to organise their private and professional lives independently. The press may have reported tragic cases, such as that of an unskilled labourer in the Zurich Oberland who did not submit a tax return for years and whose income was always overestimated by the tax office, but for shame he never lodged an appeal against these tax assessments. But even then – in 2014 – the *Federal Statistical Office* (FSO) counted 800,000 people affected by a lack of reading skills and feared an increase in the coming years.

The latest survey of the reading skills of our children and young people – determined by the *Pisa* study – is due to be published next

December. In the last survey, the proportion of “weakest readers” had already risen to 25 per cent of the evaluated youngsters, which “according to experts means that half of 15-year-olds in Switzerland can only just cope with everyday life”, as the newspaper *NZZ am Sonntag*

writes.¹ This makes it all the more important to look for the causes.

Sugar-coating instead of the investigation of causes

It will not be necessary to collect figures again by participating in the so-called IGLU study (*International Primary School Reading Survey*), which tests the so-called reading skills of fourth-graders in 60 countries every five years. What is needed is not new studies from the ivory towers of universities, but rather a serious consideration of what previous surveys and practitioners in schools, teaching establishments and grammar schools have long recognised. By the way, also Germany has reason to be concerned, as the IGLU survey showed that one in four German fourth-graders cannot read properly. However, whether it is enough to spend a billion euros on promoting so-called reading skills seems more like a confectioner trying to save his failed cake by icing it instead of checking the ingredients of his recipe and his working methods.

Long standing cause for concern

In the last *Pisa* rankings for reading literacy, Switzerland was placed even behind Germany and Sweden. At the turn of the millennium, it had been the other way round. But even then, the proportion of young people with very poor reading skills was already worrying at 12 per

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“Strictly speaking ...’ ...”

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cent. The countermeasures taken since then have obviously been misguided and are based on an inadequate analysis of the causes. In our society, we are confronted with writing and text countless times a day. Those of us who have difficulty deciphering a text and barely or not at all understand what it says are not only restricted in their everyday life and life goals, but are also deeply affected in their self-assessment of being valuable and equal human beings.

Once again: Federalism in the dock

In the 2006 referendum, an education article was included in the Swiss Federal Constitution, which promised certain standardised regulations such as the same school levels for the whole of Switzerland. It was accepted by many voters, in the belief that this would make it easier to move from one canton to another. The story was similar when it came to our *Curriculum 21*, which is still highly controversial today. Many responsible voters only realised afterwards that the promised simplifications did not materialise, but that the new regulations were the first steps towards a centralised educational dictate. Since then, the aim has been to gradually disempower the cantons and centralise education. It is therefore downright soporific when federalism is used once again as a whipping boy to explain the reading predicament, as in the article in question, because this prevents the introduction of targeted measures to remedy the reading plight in Switzerland. Moreover, cantonal sovereignty in the field of education would be a guarantee that measures could be taken quickly and specifically in line with the circumstances and needs of the respective cantons.

Migrant children – yes, but ...

It is true that in recent years the number of children who do not speak German as their mother tongue (first language) has risen continuously. So why not look there for the reason for the reading plight? Of course, there is a pedagogical problem here, because these children need in-depth and intensive German lessons. A few years ago, there were the so-called small classes E, in which children newly resident in Switzerland could acquire the necessary German language skills in order to be able to follow the lessons in the regular classes. It was a blessing for every child to first receive intensive support and human guidance in a foreign country. Now most of them have to find their way in a regular class right from the start, with a few additional German lessons – instead of first familiarising themselves with the new language as well as learning their moth-

er tongue correctly – and spend lessons in primary school acquiring a few language fragments in English and French. All this despite the futility of this endeavour (for all children), as independent studies have shown.²

More sugar-coating

If, as in the above-mentioned article, heterogeneity in the classroom is today cited as a possible cause and differentiated teaching as the right answer, then this is another example of inadequate analysis of the situation. However, some reflection would indeed be important! The heterogeneity in school classes, caused by the so-called integration/inclusion of all children in the mainstream class, as well as individualised teaching are in fact among the causes of the reading crisis. They prevent a linguistically stimulating learning process, the modelling effect of linguistically adept children, a training ground for joint discussions and joint, unifying reading – in short, learning from and with each other. This, too, is a false ingredient in the cake batter that is to be covered by sugar icing.

Learning blockade in the ivory tower

When it comes to analysing the current problem, there seem to be certain learning blockades. One of these is the untouchability of digital learning. Some time ago, Sweden had the courage to take research findings on the causes of its reading difficulties documented by the IGLU study seriously (and to reject the financially powerful education corporations). It banned the digital devices previously used as teaching aids, above all tablets, from the classrooms of primary school pupils and is planning a return to books in the classroom. A renowned research team had proven that reading on a screen has a negative impact on reading comprehension and that texts on a screen are read more quickly and superficially, thus hindering in-depth learning.³ But here too, our “experts” at universities, who are unfortunately often far removed from practice, wave this off with the “old-fashioned” argument that it is the schools’ job to teach skills for digital reading (tomorrow already outdated!), and to impart the sensible use of devices and the ability to read digital texts critically ...

Conclusion: More attention is needed

The reading plight in Switzerland cannot be remedied by superficial research into the causes which does not dare to touch hot potatoes: There are the reforms of the last 30 years, which have left hardly a stone unturned in our school system. Scientifically based pedagogy – founded on a personalised view of humanity based on the human sciences – has been sacrificed to the demands of the education industrial complex.

This is against the backdrop of a biologicistic view of humanity that reduces children’s difficulties in reading to brain dysfunctions. Since then, the fact has been neglected or even negated that reading weaknesses and disorders are often caused by unsuitable methods, some of which are now even banned⁴, where children are left to their own devices, without competent and empathetic guidance from a teacher, when learning the complex and demanding process of reading and writing. In this way, they internalise incorrect learning strategies and mistakes in the process.

“Strictly speaking ...”

The reading family in Michael Ende’s story did not have these problems. No, they all enjoyed reading, loved books and forgot the world around them like the older sister, who eagerly pressed the telephone receiver to her ear: “As we all know, telephones were invented especially for fourteen-year-old sisters, because without the receiver to their ear, all fourteen-year-old sisters in the world would die from lack of news as surely as divers without breathing apparatus would die from lack of air. But our fourteen-year-old sister also has a book in her hand in which she is reading.” Multitasking? No, by mistake she had not dialled a number. “After about two hours, she asks in passing: ‘Tell me, who is this Ding-ding you’ve been talking about all this time?’”

Should we not enable our children and young people to make more reading experiences like this again? And should we, for example, take seriously what *Afra Sturm*, professor of didactics at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland, dares to say in the newspaper “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”: “If the proportion of very poor readers increases again, we will have to fundamentally question the way we teach pupils to read”.⁵ Why wait? •

¹ Schöpfer, Linus. “Für den Alltag nicht gewappnet”: Die Schweiz hat eine Leseschwäche” (Not equipped for everyday life: Switzerland has a reading weakness). In: *NZZ am Sonntag* of 19 November 2022. <https://magazin.nzz.ch/nzz-am-sonntag/kultur/die-schweiz-verlernt-das-lesen-und-wird-anfaellig-fuer-fake-news-ld.1765095?reduced=true>

² Pfenninger, Simone E.; Singleton, David. 2017. *Beyond Age Effects in Instrumental L2 Learning: Revisiting the Age Factor (2008–2017)*. Multilingual Matters.

³ Perret, Eliane. “Unesco: Kein Bildschirm kann je die Menschlichkeit eines Lehrers ersetzen” (Unesco: ‘No screen can ever replace the humanity of a teacher’). In: *Current Concerns* of 29 August 2023. <https://www.zeit-fragen.ch/archiv/2023/nr-18-22-august-2023/unesco-kein-bildschirm-kann-jemals-die-menschlichkeit-eines-lehrers-ersetzen>

⁴ Schmolli, Heike. “Fehler sollen wieder korrigiert werden.” (We should go back to correcting mistakes.) In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 24 April 2019. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/einige-bundeslaender-verbieten-lehrmethode-lesen-durch-schreiben-16155156.htm>

⁵ *NZZ am Sonntag* of 19 November 2023

“Europe has lost its capacity for self-determination”

Viktor Orbán’s Zurich speech – an experience report

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

The accompanying letter, written for the jubilee celebration of the Swiss conservative weekly *Die Weltwoche*, on the occasion of its 90th birthday, stated: “Due to the large number of visitors, please use public transport if possible ...”

As this was not possible for me due to time constraints, I tried my luck by car – and luck was with me. A friendly reception at *The Dolder Grand* in Zurich, friendly police officers. A quick thought came to me: There are probably some people who would wish him gone, *Viktor Orbán* being a controversial personality. Then: Switzerland is (still) a safe place in this belligerent world.

A sizeable number of participants had already gathered at the entrance, having waited patiently to be admitted. Amidst the crowd and without security guards, *Ueli Maurer*, a former Swiss Federal Councillor (2009–2022) and twice President of the Swiss Confederation (2013 and 2019), was among those waiting. Something like that would no longer be possible in Germany today, I thought.¹ Admission control was swift and again very friendly. *The Dolder Grand* lived up to its name.

The hall was bustling and yet quiet and polite. No space problems. Interviews were being conducted at the back of the hall. The former president of the Czech Republic, *Václav Klaus*, was in conversation with *Roman Zeller* of *Die Weltwoche* and patiently answered the questions put to him with concentration and foresight.

The room was filling to capacity, about 500 participants. Conversations everywhere, making for a pleasant atmosphere.

When *Viktor Orbán* enters the hall, he is greeted with standing ovations – not an homage, but a tribute to his person and life’s work. *Die Weltwoche*’s editor-in-chief, *Roger Köppel*, unabashedly expresses his delight as he welcomes the Hungarian prime minister. *Viktor Orbán*’s words of welcome in return are in no way inferior. A dignified start.

After *Orbán* has also greeted *Václav Klaus* and his Hungarian compatriots, he finds words of appreciation for Switzerland, a “further place of free speech”. What Switzerland and Hungary have in common: Both are “freedom-loving and combative countries”. *Orbán*, now in his 17th year of service as Hungary’s prime minister, presents himself as a person who has his “own view of things”.

Orbán’s topic is European politics since the Second World War.² He describes the European Union as a problem shared by



The Prime Minister of Hungary *Viktor Orbán* at his Zurich speech. (picture ef)

Hungary and Switzerland. Although Switzerland is not a member of the EU – “stick with it!” – it is nevertheless part of Europe, i. e., it feels the effects of decisions made in Brussels.

Orbán’s thesis, right at the beginning: Europe has lost its capacity for self-determination today; it is not in a position to act in a self-determined and sovereign manner. “That hurts”. He explains how this came about with a historical review of relations between the US and Europe in the post-1945 era and the changes that have taken place since the end of the Cold War.

Western Europe initially coped well with US power after the war, *Orbán* said. The European heads of state and government succeeded in solving the intellectual task of “how Europe could remain itself, how it could maintain its own quality, while still adapting to the balance of power that had been created. [...], how to find a way of preserving the quality of Europe in a world dominated by Anglo-Saxon customs and norms in Western Europe.” Democracy and capitalism had to be given “a specifically European face and quality. This solution became Christian democracy.” According to *Orbán* “Christian democracy was the answer to how to bring the concept of the common good into a purely competitive democracy. [...] thus creating a distinctly European political quality.” That, together with “the entire depth of the Christian tradition as part of our economy”, said *Orbán*, “worked”. Some heads of state and government at the time, notably *Konrad Adenauer* and *Charles de Gaulle*, had succeeded in not allowing the Anglo-Saxon model of democracy and “cowboy capitalism” to be completely imposed on them. It had allowed Western Europe to “remain an independent factor in a spiritual sense”, and European interests could also be represented within an American hegemony.

Nevertheless, the US was able to expand its power worldwide by means of what we now call soft power.

At the Cold War’s end, in 1990, change gradually began. While there were initially still Christian political forces in the US and Europe, these have now been “replaced by progressive-liberal forces with decisive weight and power”. In the meantime, these forces would occupy all important positions in Europe and had “taken control of the Continent”. Europe’s fate is now

“chained” to the US – with many implied consequences.

There is a dearth of politicians to lead Europe out of the reigning “progressive-liberal hegemony”. The “universal values” so often cited by the Americans conceal tangible US interests that determine foreign policy, and anyone who does not share them is labelled. There is no longer any meaningful dialogue, because, *Orbán* said, “The nature of disputes over values is completely different from that of disputes over interests”. Compromises are possible when interests differ. But if someone invokes values, he is no longer willing to compromise. The same thing happens in Europe. “European values”, *Orbán* argues, “usually conceal the interests of one of the big European countries”.

Orbán sees a further problem in the fact that since 1990, the US has begun to westernise not only Europe [he probably refers to the eastern countries of Europe] but also the rest of the globe, and has attempted to export progressive liberal principles. On the one hand, this has caused numerous wars. On the other hand, the non-Western part of the world has begun to take a hostile stance towards the US.

Orbán describes the European Union as “a special creation. It is *sui generis*. So there is no such animal in the encyclopaedias. But in reality there is.” He is referring to the lack of political leadership by the *European Council*, the assembly of the leaders – prime ministers and presidents – of the 27 EU member states. Instead, more and more decisions are being taken by Brussels institutions, i. e., by those who should actually implement the decisions of politicians, and not to take decisions for politicians. But the EU bureaucracy, specifically the EU Commission, presumes to decide and act politically.

On the question of “what to do?”, *Orbán* gives the example of his own country, even

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Letter to  the Editor

This is scandalous! Of all newspapers, this very one is being spied on and recorded in a secret file. It is unbelievable!

It was with great dismay that I learned in *Current Concerns* No. 22 of 31 October 2023 that this fortnightly newspaper is being monitored by the *Swiss Federal Intelligence Service* (NBD).

The contributors of this newspaper all work on a voluntary basis. They are all committed to the common good. They are organised as a cooperative for a reason and do their best to provide readers with comprehensive information in every edition. Despite its still small circulation, the newspaper enjoys an attentive readership.

Reputable citizens from a wide range of specialised fields are happy to share their experience and knowledge without trying to influence readers or push them in a one-sided direction. There is so much diverse information to read. There is information and there are reports written also by renowned personalities, but which we rarely find in other media. There are challenging topics and complex texts. You learn about

the background to conflicts. Sources and facts are cited so that you can form your own opinion. Everything is written in such a way that we readers can understand it. When questions arise, I turn to a friend. This educates me and expands my knowledge. It is enriching and empowering for me. Is education no longer in demand or even allowed? Is it forbidden now?

As I have contacts with a wide variety of people, I often hear that they no longer want to read newspapers or watch TV programmes because they cannot stand this any longer. You do not know what is true anymore. Topics are blown out of proportion. You hear so many bad things. You are overwhelmed. You feel helpless and bad. Is that the purpose of the media? The result of such reporting is discouragement.

It is a breach of law to blacklist such a valuable newspaper. It is a blatant violation of the Federal Constitution. The constitution guarantees freedom of expres-

sion, freedom of information and freedom of the media. The authorities have a duty to abide by this. If the authorities fail to do so, citizens lose trust, and anyone can imagine what that would look like in a society of that sort. Chaos would ensue. There are enough examples in our world.

What is wrong with our free country? Do we want to follow a few power-mad people who dictate to us what we may and must not read, which opinions are correct and which are not?

Mind you, there are already a few countries that are standing up and want to be independent. They have had enough of their colonial past. Examples are the BRICS states, see editorial article in *Current Concerns* No. 22 of 31 October 2023.

Make up your own mind, this is also about the freedom of expression of other media.

Gaby Ege, Sirmach TG

Violation of Art. 16 and 17 of the Swiss Federal Constitution

For almost two years now, I have been reading your journal *Current Concerns* with great interest and profit. This is due to your well-balanced reporting on geopolitics, your humanist stance, as well as your commitment to Swiss democracy, instructive interviews with foreign personalities and book reviews. Your newspaper is therefore a courageous and absolutely indispensable addition to the mainstream press.

In view of the fact that you often publish controversial facts or “uncomfortable” interviews, I have been wondering for some time when and how any government agencies will try to cause you trouble.

Your text “On our own account” (dated 31 October 2023) confirms my fears: a

document (“Fiche”) from the *Swiss Federal Intelligence Service* (NBD) dated 29 September 2023, claiming that *Current Concerns* was spreading Russian “disinformation” and “propaganda”. It should also be clear to anyone for whom the Swiss constitution is and must remain a precious asset that this is a miserable scandal in violation of Articles 16 and 17 of the Swiss Federal Constitution.

It cannot be ruled out that the commentary on *Jacques Baud’s* book (“Putin – Master of Events?”) from 31 October 2023 or the interview with *Ralph Bosshard* will now be held up as “new proof of pro-Russian propaganda” – regardless of the fact that both, as former senior officers in the Swiss army, have international

experience, including the UN, NATO and the OSCE.

In the seventies, I myself was the subject of an army “fiche”: A Russian grammar was found in my rucksack during a revision course – so I was a kind of “spy” in the pay of the USSR ...

One would have hoped that the intellectual level of the relevant authorities would have improved in the meantime – this doesn’t seem to be the case.

I send you my best regards in the hope that *Current Concerns* will be able to continue publishing valuable reports that are hardly available anywhere else without hindrance, despite the Fiche of the NBD.

Serge Linder, Mutrux VD

“Europe has lost its capacity ...”

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if, with a population of just eight million, it was not a model that can simply be adopted by other countries: Hungarian society is pluralistic. It strives for sovereignty within the EU. There is no liberal hegemony in Hungary. This gives people time to think about Europe. Instead of a “welfare state”, there is a “workfare state” – and thus prosperity. Incomes are taxed at a flat rate of only 15%. Exports by volume are 32% of GDP. Instead of gender, there is the family, and this is of central importance; attempts are being made to solve the demographic problem – the decreasing number of people of a younger age and the simultaneously increasing number of older people – with a fi-

nancially generous family policy. According to the constitution, marriage consists of a man and a woman: “The father is a man and the mother is a woman”.

Orbán has the following recommendations for Europe: There needs to be a script for the possible event of the US withdrawing from Europe. The “post-modern leadership madness” should be forgotten. A new generation of politicians should be trained. He then makes a personal “last cautious comment on Christianity and Christian culture”. “I am convinced”, he says, “that Christian culture should be popularised ...”.

His last sentence is that “Hungary is not the black sheep but the first swallow, and we are waiting for the others!”

There was constant applause during his speech – he had probably spoken to the hearts of most of the audience.

On my way home, and after having followed the media coverage, I think:

Although I don’t agree with everything Orbán had to say: For me, a lot of food for serious thought – and no room for media polemics. •

¹ In today’s Germany you will hardly meet a serving politician among ordinary people without security guards – a residue of the *Red Army Faction*, the RAF, since the 1970ies, who were engaged in a series of bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and shoot-outs over the course of three decades.

² Viktor Orbán’s speech is available in an authorised English-language text version: <https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speeches/> of 22 November 2023.