

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*

Lest we forget 26 years since the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia 1999

We, the participants of the Conference held on 21 March 2025 at the Serbian Military Club, gathered to mark the 26th anniversary of the beginning of NATO aggression against Serbia (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), titled "When War Was Reintroduced in Europe", have adopted this

Statement

We stand up for:

- Dissolution of NATO, which has, by virtue of its aggression against our country, formally turned from a defensive into an aggressive alliance of the unipolar world order and the neoliberal corporate system. NATO's policy of expansion to the East intensified in 1999 and brought the world to the brink of nuclear doomsday. Presently, more and more governments of member states realise that NATO is but a relic of the Cold War that has no place in the multipolar world order.
- Closure of US military *Camp Bondsteel* and all foreign camps located in the Balkans, in Europe, and across the world. *Camp Bondsteel* is an illegal military base, just as are illegal that NATO aggression, the subsequent unilateral secession and its recognition under US and EU pressure. This base was erected on a part of the Serbian territory that has been temporarily placed under the mandate of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, but without the consent of either Serbia or the United Nations.
- Filing request for compensation for war damages. NATO has severely violated the basic principles of international law, the UN Charter, the ultimate authority of the UN Security Council, the KSCE *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) and the *Paris Charter* and, as such, is liable to compensate for the inflicted damage. Such request for compensation is both a right and a moral duty of Serbia towards the victims of the aggression.
- Furtherance of activities aimed at determining the consequences of the use of weapons filled with depleted uranium and other means of mass destruction. Relevant decisions made by the

Croatia, Albania, and so-called Kosovo-Military Alliance

The recent signing of the document on military alliance between Croatia, Albania, and so-called Kosovo is a clear sign of anti-Serbian plans. It is seriously undermining stability and cooperation in the Balkan Peninsula. Such plans between two NATO members and an entity under the mandate of the UN Security Council are also a clear violation of UN SC Resolution 1244. This territory of Serbia is not authorised to enter any such agreement without the authorisation of the Security Council and the Government of Serbia.

Particularly, its provisions guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and the demilitarisation of so-called Kosovo. Such an agree-

ment between two members of NATO and so-called Kosovo, which is an illegally seceded territory of Serbia, could hardly be undertaken without the will and consent of NATO leadership.

It is an asymmetric stepping up of NATO pressures on Serbia to change policy of military neutrality, introduce sanctions against Russia, abandon strategic partnership with China, and abandon Republica Srpska in defending its status as an equal entity with competences guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement and the Constitution contained therein.

Živadin Jovanović
President Belgrade Forum
28 March 2025

Assembly and the Government of Serbia need to be implemented, and the publicly given promises need to be honored.

- Establishment of the *Center for Documentation and Studying of NATO Aggression* as a turning point in the global affairs. As a victim of the aggression and the first war to be waged on the European soil after WWII, Serbia deserves this. The organisers of this Conference stand ready to provide a concept for it.
- Compiling a list of civilian victims of NATO aggression. We must avoid critics of future generations for a failure that still can be rectified. This is a part of the culture of remembrance, too.
- Adjusting our domestic and foreign policies in line with new realities in Europe and the world. Tectonic changes in the European and global environments require in-depth adjustments planning, and vision, for a more thorough protection of long-term national and state interests.
- Condemnation, in strongest terms, of any interference in Serbia's internal affairs and foreign policy.
- Preservation of Serbia's natural, mineral, and other resources, including strategic minerals, precious metals, agricultural land, waters, and forests. The prolonged stagnation and econom-

ic crisis across Europe is not the time for sellout or concessions, but rather the wakeup call for greater care of, and reliance on, own resources, and for a bolder diversification of economic-technological and investment cooperation.

- Reviewing the existing regulation and practices vis-à-vis the so-called NGOs which are funded from abroad, advocate other parties' interests, and promote interfering in our country's internal affairs and foreign policy. It should be established whether such NGOs have also, in parallel, used funds from the State Budget, namely, the funds belonging to the citizens of Serbia.
- Reviewing the current EU framework for the dialog on Kosovo and Metohija, since it proved to be but a mechanism for extorting from Serbia unacceptable concessions that favour separatism and harm her state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Over the past 15 years, this framework diverged Serbia away from UN SC Resolution 1244 as the single most important legal basis for defending sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, failed to bring about the expected results and is not capable of providing a just, balanced and durable solution.

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"Lest we forget 26 years ..."

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- Reverting the process of resolving the issue of Kosovo and Metohija to the authority and within the framework of UN SC Resolution 1244, for the purpose of implementing all thus far unimplemented duties under this legally binding act, including: guaranteeing the right to free and safe return of 250,000 expelled Serbs and other non-Albanians; end of systematic violence against, and ethnic cleansing of, Serbs and other non-Albanians; returning and redeployment of the set contingents of the Serbian Army and Police personnel (up to 1999); demilitarisation of the Province; security, freedom of movement, education, and freedom of religion for Serbs and other non-Albanians; restitution of the forcibly usurped private, socially-owned, and state-owned property; observance of all other fundamental human rights of Serbs presently living in the Province.
- Annulment of all acts, documents, changes, and measures taken in contravention with the status of the Province as a part of the Serbian state territory currently placed *ad interim* under the United Nations Security Council mandate, that is, taken contrary to the Constitution of Serbia and UN SC Resolution 1244.
- Proactive role of Serbia in the building of a new European security architecture she is entitled to owing to her immeasurable contribution to peace and security and the development of European civilisation, particularly having in mind Serbia's share in overcoming Nazism 80 years ago, and especially being aware that Serbia (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) was the first country to resolutely stand up to hegemonism and NATO's expansion to the East, and also to defend the basic principles of international law as established on the outcome of the Second World War.
- Strengthening the policy of active neutrality and its upgrading to the level of a Constitutional principle, and for developing balanced relations and cooperation with all major stakeholders in global affairs, on the basis of mutual respect and benefits.
- We welcome the top-level dialogue and the beginning of normalisation of relations between Russia and the USA as a strategically significant positive devel-

“We stand for halting the arms race. Should certain European countries continue this race, they might turn into hostages of arms' stocks and sources of renewed threats to peace and security, with unfathomable consequences. Any preparations for war made at the times when leaders of the most powerful countries are searching to find paths leading to peace, global security and partnership, at times when the global majority is striving for a multipolar world order and development – are a hallmark of irresponsibility and political blindness. Allocations of fresh new trillions of euros for armament could only result in deepening the economic crisis in Europe, a faster capital outflow, the decline in living standard, and the rise of instability. The way out of it is not in militarisation and Russophobia, but rather in normalisation and good neighbourly relations.”

opment, as well as the efforts invested by President *Putin* and President *Trump* in reinforcing global security and in achieving peace in Ukraine while eliminating the root causes that triggered the Ukrainian crisis.

- Further, we stand for the restoration and respect of ceasefire in Gaza and for free supply of humanitarian aid to the vulnerable population of Palestine.
- Halting the arms race. Should certain European countries continue this race, they might turn into hostages of arms' stocks and sources of renewed threats to peace and security, with unfathomable consequences. Any preparations for war made at the times when leaders of the most powerful countries are searching to find paths leading to peace, global security and partnership, at times when the global majority is striving for a multipolar world order and development – are a hallmark of irresponsibility and political blindness. Allocations of fresh new trillions of euros for armament could only result in deepening the economic crisis in Europe, a faster capital outflow, the decline in living standard, and the rise of instability. The way out of it is not in militarisation and Russophobia, but rather in normalisation and good neighbourly relations.
- We stand for the Dayton-defined Bosnia and Herzegovina, established on the

bases of equality of the three constituent peoples and two autonomous entities with inviolable powers, and against attempts to restore a unitary-type Bosnia and Herzegovina under the dominance of one peoples' elite over other peoples. We stand for ending political persecution of *Milorad Dodik*, President of the Republic of Srpska, and its other leaders.

- We stand for abolition of the position of *High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, as a relic of past times, neocolonialism and expansionism, and presently the biggest obstacle to the functioning of the Constitutional system of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its entities.
- Strongest condemnation of all pressures, harassment, and terrorism currently used against the Serbs in the Province of Kosovo and Metohija, with a view to putting a stop to the ethnic cleansing of the Serbian people.

Adopted by:

The Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals, the Club of Serbian Generals and Admirals, the Diaspora Fund for the Motherland the SUBNOR of Serbia, the Association of Veterans of the Serbian Military Intelligence Services, the Association of Veterans of the Special Police Units

How much longer will we Germans tolerate the lies and deceit of our politicians?

Germany after the manipulation of the Basic Law by the CDU/CSU, SPD and Greens

by Ewald Wetekamp, Stockach (DE)

What was that again, what caused the traffic light coalition in Germany to fail early on? Yes, that's right, the FDP opposed the billion-euro debt-financed *Germany Fund*, which the then Minister of Economic Affairs *Robert Habeck* wanted to set up in order to achieve his climate targets. This led to a vote of confidence in Chancellor *Scholz*. After Chancellor *Scholz* faced the vote of confidence in parliament, parliament withdrew its confidence in him. This meant that elections had prematurely to be held in Germany. Germany has now voted. The CDU/CSU received the most votes. They celebrated their victory, despite the fact that this result was the second worst for the CDU/CSU since the Federal Republic of Germany was founded. Their lead candidate, *Friedrich Merz*, promised a lot before the election. One of the key promises was adherence to the debt brake. The debt brake, anchored in the Basic Law, would not be touched. Because of the so-called "fire-wall" against the AfD, which *Merz* also invoked, he approached the SPD to forge a coalition agreement with them.

Where is trustworthiness, good faith?

But now what almost always happens in Western democracies has happened: What do my election promises matter to me? Mr *Merz* very soon said that he would campaign for the debt brake to be lifted. What had happened virtually overnight? What are Mr *Merz's* reasons for this step, which is naturally supported by his future coalition partner, the SPD, the chancellor maker? According to Mr *Merz*, Germany needs a special fund of 500 billion euros to repair and further expand its infrastructure. Another stepchild is the Bundeswehr. Its condition is worrying. It is not in a position to fulfil its mission of national defence. This applies to both equipment and personnel. In order to remedy this, the debt brake for armaments should be suspended. A further 500 billion has been targeted for this, an amount that can be increased indefinitely by lifting the debt brake.

The unnecessary dilemma of the chancellor candidate

Chancellor candidate *Merz* is in a dilemma. His vote base is very weak. He needs the votes of the SPD for his chancellorship. But now he has got himself into even greater difficulties without need. Still in the previous legislative period, *Merz* wanted to get an amendment to the Basic Law

through parliament. An amendment to the Basic Law requires a two-thirds majority. To this however, Mr *Merz* also needed the votes of the *Greens*. But that did not bother Mr *Merz*. The earlier "Never with the *Greens*" in the shortest time turned into a hundred-billion-euro gift to the *Greens*. During the reading of the new law in the Bundestag, another "gift" was added to the *Greens*: The fixation of the green climate targets in the Basic Law. It can be seen as a novelty that party-political targets are included in the Basic Law. Such formulations have no place there. They are subject to the implementing laws that are passed in parliament. The Green parliamentary group rejoiced. Without any effort on their part, they had achieved more than at the time of the traffic light coalition. And this was only possible because they tipped the scales, i.e. without these blackmailed concessions to the *Greens*, Mr *Merz* would lack precisely these decisive votes for the amendment to the Basic Law. What a despicable haggling! The voter can indeed not be treated more disrespectfully. The voters' vote went in a completely different direction.

The sum for both items reach the dizzying amount of almost one trillion euros. It is to be paid for by the taxpayer. Such a mountain of debt drives up interest rates and inflation. What already requires an incredible effort in good economic times can

no longer be achieved in times of deindustrialisation, the exodus of companies, the slump in the SME sector and rising private insolvencies. This project particularly affects the central issue of the financial constitution. This is not being discussed. It is no coincidence that a Russian newspaper mockingly ran the headline: "*BlackRock* becomes chancellor!"

No two-thirds majority in the new Bundestag

The debt brake is enshrined in the Basic Law. If it is to be cancelled, a two-thirds majority is required. The amendment to the Basic Law had to be done in a hurry, not on the merits, but because the parliamentary term was coming to an end. To have an amendment to the Basic Law made during this transitional period by a government that has been voted out of office, initiated by the leader of the opposition in the German Bundestag, cannot be surpassed in terms of disrespect for the democratic legitimacy of the new Bundestag; it is a shabby trick. This has not been common practice up to now. Critics argue that if the old parliament were to legislate after the election, the new MPs' right to make decisions would be violated. The principle of democratic legitimisation basically demands that all decisions that can be postponed are left to the new Bundestag.

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"The intensification of social antagonism during this period seems to have paved the way for the war hysteria practised in the Bundestag. The danger that, in their view, emanates from *Putin's* Russia has been grotesquely exploited for the sake of all the demands made by the CDU, the SPD and the *Green Party* that are causing almost a trillion euros of debt. It all seems to have been well prepared. *Baerbock* blathered on about Germany being at war with Russia. *Manfred Weber*, CSU politician, party and parliamentary group leader of the EPP in the European Parliament, calls for a change in our thinking in Europe to 'war readiness'. German aid organisations are being advised by the Bundeswehr to prepare for war. [...] The shares of *Rheinmetall* and other defence companies are skyrocketing. *Rheinmetall* CEO *Armin Papperger* speaks of a super economic cycle in the defence industry."

"How much longer ..."

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The SPD, the *Greens* and the CDU/CSU have now argued that the proposed amendment to the Basic Law is an urgent decision that cannot be postponed because we are facing an emergency of exceptional proportions. For this reason, the amendment to the Basic Law must be passed during this parliamentary term. Later on, those responsible will probably speak of a "white lie". In view of the fact that the CDU/CSU, SPD and the *Greens* no longer have a two-thirds majority in the newly elected Bundestag, this is in fact a lie and deception.

Corruption all along the line

The CDU/CSU had to buy the necessary two-thirds majority in the current parliament with unbelievable concessions to the SPD and *Greens*. Merz did this and is once again acting against the will of the voters. As if trust had not been eroded and abused enough, the final act of voter mockery was the nomination of the miserably failed former German Foreign Minister *Baerbock* as the future President of the UN General Assembly. The respected top diplomat *Helga Schmid*, who was actually the candidate for this position, has lost out.

Following the vote in the Bundesrat on the proposed amendment to the Basic Law, including all special funds and the abolition of the debt brake in order to push ahead with armaments, it took just 24 hours for Federal President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* to sign the law. One might have expected something different from his function as one of the supreme protectors of the Basic Law. But the separation of powers has been eroding in Germany for a very long time. This was also evident when the Federal Constitutional Court was called upon. Urgent applications to prevent the bill were not accepted and the amendment to the Basic Law was waved through. No wonder, since the highest court in Germany is a politically composed body in which party affiliation or party proximity often carry more weight than constitutional juridical skills. All of this destroys the trust of voters, and not just CDU/CSU voters. The *Sunday trend*, surveyed from 17 to 21 March 2025, already shows clear signs: The CDU/CSU and SPD lose one per cent, the AfD gains one per cent.

The voters were counting on a change of policy, and that with the election of Merz as candidate for chancellor. They are being deceived across the board. Because in this case, everything will continue as before. The chosen policy change is denied. Germany is sinking into a swamp of debt, is blatantly losing economic power

and is losing its function as the economic engine of the EU.

War drums in Germany and throughout the EU

The highly stylised climate crisis was staged with sharp polarisation. During the pandemic, people's fears were fuelled to the point of hysteria. In both cases, science abdicated or was elevated to a kind of new religion. Not facts, but the right attitude and the right belief were postulated and often enforced. The intensification of social antagonism during this period seems to have paved the way for the war hysteria practised in the Bundestag. The danger that, in their view, emanates from *Putin's* Russia has been grotesquely exploited for the sake of all the demands made by the CDU, the SPD and the *Green Party* that are causing almost a trillion euros of debt.

It all seems to have been well prepared. *Baerbock* blathered on about Germany being at war with Russia. *Manfred Weber*, CDU politician, party and parliamentary group leader of the EPP in the European Parliament, calls for a change in our thinking in Europe to "war readiness". German aid organisations are being advised by the Bundeswehr to prepare for war. In Cologne, there are already plans to turn an underground car park into an intensive care unit in the event of a disaster or war. *Rheinmetall*, an armaments manufacturer in Germany, is considering taking over disused VW plants such as the one in Osnabrück for the production of tanks. The shares of *Rheinmetall* and other defence companies are skyrocketing. *Rheinmetall* CEO *Armin Papperger* speaks of a super economic cycle in the defence industry. Former German Foreign Minister and *Green Party* politician *Joseph Fischer* argues in favour of the reintroduction of compulsory military service for men and women. The European Union adopted an ambitious defence programme at its spring summit. By 2030, 800 billion euros are to be invested in strengthening

Europe's military. Germany must contribute 25 per cent of this sum. That is another 200 billion.

What is it all about?

Are all these calls and statements just a distraction from all the domestic political emergencies in Germany or the EU, of which we do indeed have an unmanageable number? Or is this about the continuation of old geostrategic plans that have been pursued time and again by Anglo-American elites?

What else can happen?

Good faith is the cornerstone of every society. No politically organised society can do without. The power-seeking force is a corrosive poison that is trying to spread its effects to all people through propagandistic war hysteria. It is to be hoped that this course is doomed to failure. The new Bundestag has just been constituted and the coalition agreement has not yet been finalised. The chancellor has not yet been elected and the cabinet has not yet been appointed. Only time until Easter will tell whether this will happen. Friedrich Merz's statement at the readers' conference of the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" on 21 March 2025 shows that the outcome could be completely different: "If we don't succeed [meaning the coalition agreement], my career will be over anyway at a time when I can deal with it". And then what?

Germany in 2025

Holding up the Basic Law at demonstrations was penalised. Criticism of politicians was turned into a criminal offence as delegitimization of the state. This often led to house searches in the early hours of the morning. But a blatant breach of an election promise resulting in an unbelievable debt for German citizens for generations to come, with wilful disregard for the democratic legitimacy of the newly elected Bundestag, has so far remained without consequences for the lying politician. •

"I beg you to regain your composure"

A letter from Heinrich Wohlmeyer to the Government of the Republic of Austria

Your honourable Federal Chancellor,
Foreign Minister, Defence Minister,

I am the great nephew of *Julius Raab* and 89 years old – therefore I have witnessed the Second World War and our way to freedom. I am appalled by your warmongering and debt policy in this regard. You are allowing yourselves to be used by the arms industry to stir up fear. You are allowing yourselves, through fear tactics to be harnessed by the war industry. The Russians have enough problems in their

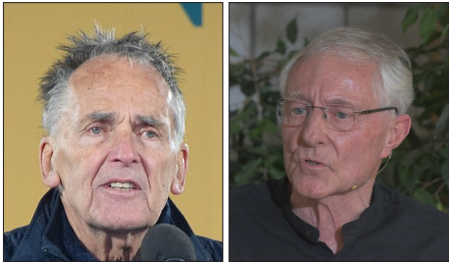
own country and therefore no desire of expansion. However, the 'West' is provoking them to the limit ... and we howl with them ...

I ask you, as a citizen of this country, to come to your senses and listen to enlightening voices such as those of *Jacques Baud* and Professor *Jeffrey Sachs* [...]. *Hugo Portisch's* 'Farewell Book' "Russland und wir" (Russia and Us) should also be read.

Your deeply concerned
Heinrich Wohlmeyer

Annalena Baerbock as a UN diplomat: Does Germany want to further damage itself internationally?

by Michael von der Schulenburg and Hans-Christof von Sponeck*



Michael von der Schulenburg
(picture ma)

Hans-Christof von Sponeck
(picture jk)

Germany once had a very good international reputation in the United Nations (UN). Our country played an active role in the further development of international law, for example in the adoption of the *Conventions on Civil and Political Rights* and on *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*; in the *Convention against Torture*; and of course, in the *Women's Rights Convention*.

Germany is the fourth largest contributor to the United Nations. Germany also makes large voluntary contributions to United Nations peacekeeping missions. The UN General Assembly has welcomed by a large majority the willingness of the German government to take the lead on United Nations reforms in cooperation with the government of Namibia. This cooperation enabled the UN General Assembly to adopt a pact for the future of the United Nations in September 2024.

In terms of foreign policy, Baerbock has left a lot of blood on the carpet

Nevertheless, Germany's image worldwide is no longer one that does us honour. Time and again, the outgoing government has shown no backbone in terms of UN Charter law and the *Geneva Conventions*, in its reactions to the major crises of our time, particularly the war in Ukraine and the asymmetrical conflict between Palestine and Israel.

The one-sidedness of German policy in its statements has repeatedly been met with incomprehension at home – and even more so abroad. At a major international conference in Istanbul in 2023, in discussions with two former foreign ministers, one from the Middle East and another from Europe, we were told how disappointed they were with German foreign policy.

As former long-standing employees of the United Nations, we have a large net-

work of global contacts. What is important, however, is that these show time and again that German foreign policy has relegated us to a narrow track. Germany continues to lose prestige and influence in Europe and the world.

“Foreign policy is made in the Chancellery”, SPD parliamentary group leader *Rolf Mützenich* once said. Nothing has come of this. The foreign policy china shop was smashed by department minister *Annalena Baerbock*. In the words of *Jeffrey Sachs*, the well-known former professor at *Columbia University* and advisor to three UN Secretaries-General: “Baerbock is a warmonger. I can't believe what comes out of her mouth.” Sachs reminded the audience that as a diplomat, a foreign minister must be prepared to talk to everyone.¹ But Baerbock's public behaviour has shown time and again that she is not prepared to do so.

She does not want to support the reduction of tensions or peace negotiations with a willingness to compromise. She is anything but a bridge-builder. Ms Baerbock has repeatedly shown that she does not understand international law and the spirit and ethics of the United Nations Charter. She has proved this with statements such as: We have to harm Russia so much that “economically, it won't get back on its feet for years,” and regarding Ukraine: “We'll stand by you as long as you need us, no matter what my German voters think.”

Other countries do not want to be lectured by Germany

For Baerbock, “peace through strength” means military security, not human security, as repeatedly called for by the United Nations, particularly by the children's charity UNICEF, the UNDP development programme, the *World Food Programme* (WFP) and, of course, by UN Secretary-General *António Guterres*.

There is no need to emphasise that the still Foreign Minister has caused considerable damage to Germany and Europe through her many trips, most of which have been unsuccessful in terms of international relations. The governments of countries such as India, China and Malaysia, as well as others, have confirmed to the German Foreign Minister during her visits that her attempts to lecture and her know-it-all attitude are not welcome.

Why are we pointing this out? Because we do not understand why the outgoing German government favours *Annalena Baerbock* for the post of President of

the UN General Assembly for 2025/26 instead of *Helga Schmid*, despite her inferior work. *Annalena Baerbock* has neither multilateral nor bilateral experience, while *Helga Schmid*, as former Secretary General of the OSCE and diplomat in leading positions in the Federal Foreign Office, has exactly the experience that is urgently needed in the United Nations.

We believe that the new government should seriously consider how Germany can adequately fill the important position of President of the UN General Assembly in order to avoid further damage to our reputation in the world. And this at a time when many governments – especially in the non-Western world – and non-governmental organisations are campaigning for a more just and multilateral new order, as envisaged in the UN Covenant for the Future of the United Nations. •

¹ *Berliner Zeitung* from 2 February 2025

First published in *Berliner Zeitung* on 25 March 2025; reprinted with the kind permission of the authors.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box 247 CH-9602 Bazenheid

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

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: PostFinance:

IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4

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* *Hans-Christof von Sponeck* (born in 1939) is a former assistant UN Secretary-General. *Michael von der Schulenburg* (born in 1948) is a former assistant UN Secretary-General and is currently a Member of the European Parliament for the *Alliance* led by *Sahra Wagenknecht*.

Perilous times for freedom in the USA

by Andrew P. Napolitano*



Andrew P. Napolitano
(picture Wikimedia Commons)

*“First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.”*

Rev. Martin Niemöller (1892–1984)

The history of human freedom is long, tortuous and not gratifying.

It consists essentially in governments trampling the laws enacted to restrain them. It is the profound clash of natural personal freedom and the commands of the state backed by force.

The constitutions of totalitarian countries are papered over with restraints on the state, but the restraints are toothless. The state does what it wants. It doesn't take rights seriously.

In liberal democracies – with the separation of powers, and checks and balances – the state is theoretically restrained. Yet often, there, too, the restraints are paper tigers. There, too, HERE, too, the state does not take rights seriously.

Thomas Jefferson argued that in the long march of history, personal liberty shrinks and state power grows. He famously believed that only a revolution can bring about a proper reset.

All of this history and theory came into sharp focus in the past two weeks when the feds arrested an Algerian graduate student in his student housing at *Columbia University* in New York City and shipped him to an immigration jail in Louisiana.

* Judge Andrew P. Napolitano is a graduate of Princeton University and the University of Notre Dame Law School. He is a former judge of the Superior Court of New Jersey, was the senior judicial analyst at *Fox News Channel* and hosts the podcast *Judging Freedom*. Judge Napolitano has written seven books on the US Constitution. The most recent is *Suicide Pact: The Radical Expansion of Presidential Powers and the Lethal Threat to American Liberty*. To learn more about Judge Andrew Napolitano, visit judgenap.com.

He is married to a native-born American, they are expecting a child in April and he is a permanent resident alien.

Last week, the federal government arrested a Lebanese physician at *Logan Airport* in Boston.¹ She is a professor of medicine at *Brown University*, and she, too, is a permanent resident alien.

The student was charged with immigration violations. The physician was summarily deported to Paris and then to her native Lebanon.

The charging documents filed against the student allege no crime or personal misbehaviour, point to no statutory violations and offer no evidence of the student's danger to persons or property or the government.

The papers claim that US Secretary of State *Marco Rubio* believes that this student's presence on the *Columbia campus* – given his outspoken support for a Palestinian state, the existence of which has been the public policy of the US for generations – is a material impediment to the execution of American foreign policy.

There are no charging papers filed against the physician, but the government leaked that when federal agents seized her mobile phone, they determined that she had been at the funeral of *Hassan Nasrallah*, the recently murdered head of *Hezbollah*. She was there along with hundreds of thousands, possibly more than a million, others.²

When asked about this, according to the government leakers, she stated that she followed Nasrallah's religious teachings but not his political ones.

While the physician was confined at Logan, her attorneys obtained an order from a federal judge prohibiting her deportation until a hearing could be held before him. The government ignored the order.

Numerous Rights Implicated

These two arrests implicate numerous constitutionally guaranteed rights, which are generally taken for granted here.

The first is the *freedom of speech*. We know from the writings of *James Madison* – who authored the *Bill of Rights* – that the Founders regarded the freedom of speech as a personal individual natural right. It is also, of course, expressly protected from government interference and reprisal in the *First Amendment*.

The courts have ruled that it protects all persons – no matter their immigration status – who may think as they wish, say what they think, publish what they say, worship or not and associate with whom-ever they choose.

If the government can punish the speech, it or its friends and benefactors hate and fear, then the First Amendment is useless and democracy is a sham.

Also implicated in these arrests is freedom of religion and assembly. Just as the student can make any public political statement he wishes – no matter how offensive or provocative it may be to his immediate or a distant audience – the physician can attend any funeral she wishes, can associate with any mourners of her choosing, can embrace any religion and can follow any preacher.

The whole purpose of the First Amendment is to keep the government out of the business of speech, religion and assembly. Without government fidelity to it, America is no longer a democracy but rather some form of conformist secular theocracy that rejects the basic values protected by the Constitution – and changes with every election.

Also implicated by these arrests is due process, guaranteed to all persons by the Fifth Amendment. At its rudimentary base, due process requires a fair hearing before a neutral arbiter before the government may interfere with life, liberty or property – and at which the government must prove personal fault.

In the case of the physician, the feds shipped her to Paris before the hearing could be held. In the case of the Columbia student, the feds shipped him to Louisiana, in defiance of the constitutional requirement that all persons be tried in the judicial district – in this case, New York City – in which the facts in their case took place.

What's going on here?

In the government's zealous enforcement of the nation's immigration laws, it has become lawless. Every person who works for the government has taken an oath of fidelity to the Constitution. It is obvious that the feds do not take their oaths seriously. It is also obvious that the feds are breaking the laws we have hired them to enforce.

When government becomes the lawbreaker, it becomes a law unto itself – and human freedom is trampled by brute force.

This cannot go on unchecked. For whom will the government come next? •

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/brown-university-rasha-alawieh-denied-entry-us-hezbollah/>

² <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-hezbollah-funeral-nasrallah-hashem-safieddine-5b698c1d403887135e35b20c4cb22413>

Spring session 2025

Switzerland's independence as a trump card

Significant agreements point the way

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The National Council and the Council of States approved three notable agreements in the spring session: a trilateral gas agreement with Germany and Italy, a financial agreement with the UK and a trade and economic partnership agreement between the EFTA states and the Republic of India. All three agreements must also be approved by the other parliaments involved before they can enter into force. The fact that they can be concluded by Switzerland at all shows how important it is for our country to be as independent as possible from blocs and powers of all kinds.

Gas agreement with Germany and Italy – a contract at eye level

The conclusion of this agreement is almost revolutionary: two EU member states are concluding a treaty with Switzerland on an equal footing, without any bureaucratic fuss from Brussels, as we have always done among neighbours in the past. In March 2025, the National Council and Council of States approved the trilateral solidarity agreement. It is intended to regulate reciprocal gas supplies in emergency situations - so that hospitals and households can be supplied with a stable supply of gas even in acute crises, for example.¹ A welcome development, not only for the Swiss energy supply, but also as an exemplary model of how we as an independent country can shape relations with our neighbouring countries. The gas agreement was already discussed in Current Concerns No. 26 of 17 December 2024, after the Council of States (the smaller of the two chambers of the Swiss Federal Assembly) had been the first to approve it.

In an interview with Current Concerns, National Councillor Franz Grüter, member of the *Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council*, expressed the significance of the agreement in terms of constitutional law and sovereignty policy in such apt words that we are reproducing them here: “Yes, that is a good example of how important issues for our country can also be resolved directly with other states. I advocate good relations with the whole of Europe. Europe is not just the EU. We should maintain good relations; we want to trade in our mutual interest. We can also conclude individual agreements. But these agreements should be on an equal footing, they must be terminable and we will not allow anything to be imposed on us, especially not the automatic adoption of EU

law. This gas agreement is a great example of a genuine bilateral agreement where both sides benefit. This is how I essentially see the future.”

Financial agreement with Great Britain – regulation of bilateral relations after Brexit

In the final vote of the spring session on 21 March 2025, the two chambers of parliament approved an agreement between Switzerland and the UK on the mutual recognition of financial services without dissenting votes.² This will allow Swiss banks to operate across borders in the UK, for example as asset managers.

This agreement is part of the so-called “Mind the Gap” strategy between Switzerland and the UK. Since Brexit, the two countries have already concluded nine agreements to replace the previous bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU, allowing them to avoid legal gaps and maintain mutual rights and obligations.³ For example, one year before the UK left the EU in February 2019, it was agreed that the rights of residence under the EU Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons would continue to apply to British nationals living in Switzerland at the time, and vice versa. Every year, the Federal Council sets quotas for the immigration of workers from the UK, which are distributed among the cantons; for 2025, as in previous years, this is 3,500.⁴ The new financial agreement is part of this regulatory framework. Obviously, the bilateral relationship between the two countries works well and without problems – without the bureaucratic superstructure of the European Union – everything is negotiated on an equal footing and in the interests of both sides.

Economic Partnership Agreement between the EFTA States and India – more than just a free trade agreement

It took 16 years of negotiations between the EFTA states and India to reach today's result. In the final vote on March 21, 2025, the Council of States approved the TEPA (*Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement*) by 39 votes to 2 with 4 abstentions, while the National Council voted 130 to 33 with 28 abstentions.⁵ India, like many other countries in the Global South, is rightly no longer willing to enter into agreements with Western industrialised countries that do not give it an equal share of the benefits.

100 billion dollars investment and one million jobs for India

The unique thing about this agreement is it combines a trade agreement with extensive investment promotion. Niklaus-Samuel Gugger (*Centre, ZH*), committee spokesperson in the National Council, stated on 20 March 2025: “I deliberately emphasise the word ‘partnership’ because this agreement goes beyond a classic free trade agreement.” In the Council of States debate on 3 December 2024, the new approach was praised as follows: “It is the chapter on investment promotion and cooperation that makes the agreement with India an innovative and also courageous agreement [...]. The Swiss negotiating team has broken new ground here. It is an approach that we have not seen before, an approach that has made the breakthrough possible. Without this chapter, the agreement would certainly not have been reached. The core of the chapter is the joint goal of Switzerland and the EFTA states to trigger 100 billion dollars in private investment and create one million jobs over the next 15 years.” (*Tiana-Angelina Moser, GLP, ZH*, Committee spokesperson in the Council of States on 3 December 2024)

Actually, India would have liked to have been granted concessions on the immigration of workers. However, since Switzerland has to accept tens of thousands of workers from EU countries every year under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons with the EU, it has little leeway to make binding commitments to other countries. By creating new jobs in India, Switzerland can solve this dilemma to a certain extent.

Minority motion in the National Council: Better protection of the environment, climate and social standards

There was disagreement in the National Council regarding the effectiveness of the environmental and labour standards in the agreement. It does state that “international obligations in the areas of labour, environment and climate protection should be respected” and that in particular “environmental and labour standards must not be lowered in order to promote trade”. However, this provision did not go far enough for the left-wing side of the National Council. In a minority motion, *Farah Rummy* (SP, SO) called for the Federal Council to issue an ordinance to ensure

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Positive surprise from Bern

Council of States says no to the cancellation of UNRWA contributions

mw. It was a positive surprise in the spring session of the Swiss Parliament: The Council of States rejected, by 25 votes to 19, the unspeakable motion from the National Council, which would have immediately suspended contributions to the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA). This puts the proposal off the table.

Particularly encouraging: From all other parties there were votes against the SVP's motion, i.e., for Switzerland's humanitarian commitment and international credibility. In addition to the SP, the *Greens*, and the *Green Liberals*, the large number of members of the *Centre Party* (9 out of 14 – the Centre is by far the strongest faction in the Council of States) was particularly notable. Three FDP members also voted against. The sometimes impressive statements give hope that the horse has not bolted for humanitarian Switzerland.

Excerpts from two votes will be singled out here.

Franziska Roth (SP, SO): "The payment freeze would have dramatic consequences in several respects – for the people there, but also for Switzerland. For the people there, it means hunger, little or no medical care, and death. And for Switzerland? Doesn't it mean for us to put on *Trump's* boots and thus take a momentous step toward destabilising the world? I think so. Human rights, international law, humanitarian aid – these three concepts are, in my opinion, more Swiss than the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau [the famous Swiss mountains]. Precisely because we, as a voluntary nation, have repeatedly affirmed human

rights, international law, and humanitarian aid and have been able to help shape them ourselves, we have been able to incorporate our Swiss DNA into them."

Colonna Report: No Involvement of UNRWA in Hamas Attacks

Regarding respect for the rule of law, Council of States member *Isabelle Chassot* refers to the Colonna report, which clearly revealed that UNRWA's alleged involvement in the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, was unproven. She is rightly concerned that some Council colleagues ignore this finding and persistently claim that UNRWA is affiliated with Hamas. The rule of law DNA is apparently not fully anchored in some parliamentarians.

Isabelle Chassot (Centre, FR): "Considering UNRWA as an organisation potentially linked to terrorism [...] is to ignore the in-depth investigations conducted by the UN following the events of October 7, 2023, in particular the investigations entrusted to former French Foreign Minister *Colonna*, which concerned 12 – later 19 – out of 13,000 employees. The conclusions of this report are unequivocal regarding the UN agency's non-involvement. I invite you to read this available report". (Original French, translation by *Current Concerns*)

UNRWA is indispensable

Isabelle Chassot also corrects the persistent claim that other organisations could take over UNRWA's tasks. The hearings conducted by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Council of States (FAC-S) have "not identified any credible short-term alternative to the humanitarian aid

and educational work that UNRWA provides to millions of people throughout the Middle East, 75 percent of whom are women and children." Rather, she argues, UNRWA is "the only organisation capable of providing humanitarian aid, running clinics and hospitals, and providing children with schooling. [...] Currently, the catastrophic health and nutritional situation affecting 2 million people in the Gaza Strip – these people are in survival mode – requires urgent assistance that only UNRWA can provide. [...] In this situation, the issue is not UNRWA, Hamas, or Israel, but rather the protection of the population within the framework of the Geneva Conventions. If Parliament rejects the motion, it will stand on the side of respect for international humanitarian law by protecting the severely affected population and ensuring their access to humanitarian assistance".

Focusing on Switzerland's strengths

Council of States member *Isabelle Chassot* adds: "The only political response we can give is to remember what has always constituted Switzerland's strength: the strength of the law, not the law of might. As the seat of the United Nations and as the depositary state of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland has always championed respect for international law, especially international humanitarian law".

It is good that the Small Chamber of the Federal Parliament once again lived up to its reputation as a "chambre de réflexion".

source: <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=67482>

"Switzerland's independence ..."

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that "investments in accordance with Article 7.1 of the free trade agreement must not be made at the expense of the environment, climate and social standards". She added that "Switzerland must not be jointly responsible for financing discrimination or environmental destruction with Swiss capital."

However, this motion was rejected by the majority of the National Council on 20 March. But it is important that the SP and the *Greens* keep putting forward their point of view.

EFTA countries lead the way

For Switzerland and the other EFTA states (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), the advantage of non-EU membership and certainly also their non-colonial past is evident here. As the Commission spokes-

person in the Council of States noted, the TEPA is "India's first agreement with European partners. Neither the EU nor the UK have yet been able to conclude their negotiations with India. It is Switzerland, as a member of EFTA, that is leading the way."

According to the unanimous opinion of the Federal Council and Parliament, the negotiated tariff reductions are a key point for the Swiss export industry, which is struggling with the strong franc: "From Switzerland's point of view, the most important part of the agreement is probably the improved market access in trade in goods for almost 95% of products. For almost 85% of products, all customs duties will be abolished after the deadline. Today, the majority of tariffs amount to around 20 percent." (Tiana-Angelina Moser)

In return, Switzerland already assured India duty-free market access for all in-

dustrial products a few years ago, which is confirmed in the new agreement. Hardly any conflicting interests are to be expected in agriculture, as India and the EFTA states produce very different agricultural products. •

¹ <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20240075>

² <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=67665>

³ Federal Council. "Swiss-UK relations post Brexit". <https://www.eda.admin.ch/europa/en/home/zwischenstaatliche-beziehungen/bilaterale-laenderbeziehungen/efta-uk/vereinigtes-koenigreich/brexit.html>

⁴ Bundesrat legt unveränderte Drittstaatenkontingente für 2025 fest (Federal Council sets unchanged third-country quotas for 2025). *Press release* of 27 November 2024

⁵ <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=67666>

In favour of an autonomous and independent Swiss security policy – yes to the neutrality initiative!

by René Roca*

Switzerland should finally formulate an independent and autonomous security policy. This has been necessary for some time, but has been put on the back burner. Increasing integration into NATO (e.g. Sky Shield) is obviously more important.

Constitutional mandate and necessary supplement

The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation very clearly describes the political responsibilities for a realistic security policy, which includes a clear commitment to neutrality and the militia army. The preamble states, among other things, that “The Swiss people and the Cantons, [...] conscious of their common achievements and their responsibility towards future generations”, adopt this constitution. One of these achievements is neutrality. With the current dismantling of neutrality, where is the responsibility towards future generations?

With regard to the militia army, the Constitution clearly states (Art. 58 BV)

*“1 Switzerland shall have armed forces. In principle, the armed forces shall be organised as a militia.
2 The armed forces serve to prevent war and to maintain peace; they defend the country and its population.”*

At the moment, our army is completely incapable of fulfilling this mission. The DDPS [Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport] is in such disarray that only the revision of *Army 21* and all subsequent reform steps can remedy the situation. The newly elected head of the DDPS, *Martin Pfister*, has a Herculean task ahead of him in this respect.

The duties and powers of the Federal Assembly are also clearly set out in the Federal Constitution (Art. 173 BV):

*“1 The Federal Assembly has the following additional duties and powers:
a. Taking measures to safeguard external security and the independence and neutrality of Switzerland.”*

The same applies to the Federal Council (Art. 185). The question arises as to why our elected representatives – all “servants of the people” – no longer fulfil this clear constitutional mandate. Like all NATO countries, Switzerland is now a well-behaved vicarious agent and vassal of the USA. In this sense, our country is becoming more and more integrated into the supranational structures of the European Union (EU) through the planned *Framework Agreement 2.0* on the one hand, and into the military war alliance of NATO on the other. The *neutrality initiative* was launched because of this continued bla-

tant disregard for the Swiss Federal Constitution – and not just because of the war in Ukraine. It is intended to clearly establish the constitutional status of Swiss neutrality in order to ensure a comprehensive peace policy and the strengthening of humanitarian traditions (ICRC). The Federal Council in particular needs guidelines for its foreign policy so that the endless manoeuvring can stop and its sometimes-unbearable silence can be broken. The new article on Swiss neutrality should not remain a dead letter following the adoption of the initiative, but is a clear mandate for the Federal Council and Parliament!

Following the submission of the initiative last year, it is now being discussed intensively in the parliamentary committees. A direct counter-proposal to remove important parts of the initiative text is within the realms of possibility. The vote is expected to take place on 8 March 2026.

Switzerland is practising in endless ingratiating

Instead of drawing up a long-term strategy for its national security, the DDPS department commissioned 21 people to draw up a report as a “Security Policy Study Commission”. Most of the members of the commission, apart from a few token politicians, were hand-picked by the *Amherd* department, which led to a very one-sided focus. The results were foreseeable. The report makes statements without providing the necessary historical context. For example, page 22 of the report states: “Only if the West succeeds in restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine will a rules-based order be maintained in which international law is enforced and rule-breakers are punished. Otherwise, this order will remain tarnished and Europe will remain under threat, particularly from Russia.”

“Territorial integrity” is correct in itself, but a “rules-based order” in Europe, if it ever existed to some extent, no longer exists since the Kosovo war in 1999. This NATO war was illegal under international law, the rule-breakers were not punished and Serbia’s territorial integrity has still not been restored. The uranium ammunition that was used continues to emit radiation and is a health disaster. And the NATO countries called this a “humanitarian intervention”. Switzerland had nothing better to do than to support the nonsensical KFOR exercise with its own soldiers to this day.

The fact that Europe is threatened by Russia, as the quote goes on to say, is simply absurd, but is now triggering an unleashed military build-up. The global industrial-military complex is laughing up its sleeve. However, armament and the

formation of blocs as well as a forced alliance policy inevitably point the way to war, just as they did before the First World War. The “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” is already contemplating a “modern Triple Entente” (see “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 10 March 25), a special kind of warmongering from the transatlantic echo chamber.

The Federal Council’s dispatch on the neutrality initiative is now also available. As expected, it is proposing its rejection. According to the Federal Council, the initiative would enshrine a “rigid understanding of neutrality” in the constitution and restrict its foreign policy room for manoeuvre too much. However, this is precisely what is now required and very important. The Federal Council wants to retain its “flexibility” in the application of neutrality. However, a country that applies its neutrality flexibly can no longer be relied upon at all. Such relativism is nothing more than cherry-picking, and the credibility of such a country, as we are now seeing, is dwindling dramatically. A second argument of the Federal Council against the initiative is that it wants to continue to impose sanctions against belligerent states outside the UN. However, studies clearly show that such sanctions are useless (see Russia today), affect the innocent civilian population and lead to a situation where normal dialogue is no longer possible for a long time.

Switzerland as the architect of a new European security policy

Particularly in today’s delicate global political situation, the great opportunity for neutrals and non-aligned states lies in promoting peace and cooperation as self-confident nation states. Switzerland’s perpetual, armed neutrality, strengthened by the new constitutional article, could create the basis for engaging in dialogue with everyone and building a new European security architecture by establishing the most autonomous self-defence possible. Switzerland must act as an architect together with other peace-loving countries. The CSCE process, which Switzerland actively promoted and which ultimately ended the Cold War, should be remembered in this context. For the USA, neutrality has always been something “immoral”. That need not concern us. Switzerland was a “great diplomatic power” for a certain period during and after the Second World War. It must pick up where it left off and use its good offices to consistently serve peace again. •

* René Roca is a secondary school teacher and holds a doctorate in history. He founded and heads the *Research Institute for Direct Democracy* (www.fidd.ch). He is a member of the *Neutrality Initiative Committee*.

“I think banning smartphones from children is the right thing to do”

Dirk Grupe of the newspaper “Schwäbische Zeitung” in conversation with Manfred Spitzer

The call for a ban on smartphones in schools is becoming increasingly popular. The psychiatrist Manfred Spitzer from Ulm goes even further and denounces the harmful effects of digital media.

Concerning school development, the federal states are focusing on the digital pact, on media skills and tablets. “You are only harming our children”, criticises the Bündnis Humane Bildung (Alliance for Humane Education) [see box on p. 12]. More than 70 experts from the fields of education and medicine are urgently warning against continuing to focus on digitalisation in the educational system, and are calling for a change of course – for the benefit of the physical and mental development of children and young people. Manfred Spitzer, neuroscientist and psychiatrist at the University of Ulm, is also a member of the alliance. In this interview, Spitzer explains why media consumption can make us blind, why tech companies make us dependent and why digital learning creates educational injustice.

Dirk Grupe: Mr. Spitzer, Austria wants to ban smartphones in schools, and the Alliance for Humane Education is calling for the same measure in Germany. But is a ban not an exaggeration?

Manfred Spitzer: A few years ago, that was still the established view, but in the meantime things have changed. Australia even wants to ban smartphones completely for children under the age of 14, and I think that is a good thing. After all, the damage to health caused by smartphone use, especially among kindergarten and primary school children, is well documented by medical and scientific research.

What is this damage?

For example, the consumption of screen media leads to short-sightedness. And the younger the children, the greater this effect. We already have 1.4 billion short-sighted people worldwide. And by 2050, half of the world’s population will be short-sighted, i.e. 4.8 billion. In turn, short-sightedness is a risk factor for four other eye diseases, namely cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and retinal detachment. And these are the four most important causes of blindness in old age. So when the government in Baden-Württemberg says we need more iPads in kindergarten, that means we will have hundreds of thousands more blind people in a few decades.

The smartphone is also said to be detrimental to children’s social behaviour. Do you agree?

Yes, of course, children bully each other. But above all, children sit alone in front of their smartphones, and so do the others around them. There have already been experiments in schools to do without smartphones completely, and these have brought about very positive results for social interaction. The children realise that using these phones is not actually good for them, and they do it just because everyone is doing it. And this is completely absurd.

In addition to smartphones, tablets are an issue in schools; in Bavaria, every pupil is to have one by 2028. Will this finally result in educational equality?

No, all studies show that the digitalisation of schools is particularly detrimental to weaker pupils. The educational inequality we have in Germany will therefore increase, not decrease, as a result of digitalisation.

Why is that?

Politicians from left to right claim that access to education is via a digital device so that everyone always has the world’s knowledge with them and everyone will learn something. The only problem is that weak students do all sorts of things with their devices, but do not engage in educational activities. The strong students, on the other hand, are curious and actually become a bit smarter. Digital devices in schools therefore make educational inequality worse, not better. And the digital industry is promoting this development.

Are you talking about the big tech companies?

That is so. Google, Facebook, Amazon and co. are the richest companies in the world. And they bombard us daily with their message: digital makes you smart, digital is great, digital is the future. That is why we need to start digitally as early as possible. This is not underpinned by facts, but represents lobbying.

And to what extent does this message have an effect on children?

The latest figures taken from the Postbank study show that the average use of digital media by children and young people is 72 hours per week. That is ten hours a day, with smartphones, games consoles, videos etc. In other words, ten hours of our next generation’s waking hours are given over to the richest companies in the world. And these are not interested in our children’s education or health but in their profits. This is irresponsible and an actual scan-

Manfred Spitzer



Manfred Spitzer
(picture Wikimedia Commons)

Manfred Spitzer is a neuroscientist and psychiatrist. He is a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Ulm and has been the Medical Director of the Psychiatric University Clinic in Ulm since 1998, where he is also the overall director of the Transfer Center for Neuroscience and Learning (ZNL), which opened there in 2004 and is primarily concerned with neurodidactics. In his publications, Spitzer takes a critical look at digitalisation in schools. One of the reasons for his criticism is that, due to their brain development, adolescents are not yet able to handle digital media responsibly or to learn with them, and he also points to negative health effects. Manfred Spitzer has successfully published various books. In 2023, he published “Künstliche Intelligenz. Dem Menschen überlegen – wie KI uns rettet und bedroht” (Artificial Intelligence. Superior to humans – how AI saves and threatens us).

dal. We are sacrificing the health of the next generation for the profit of a few billionaires. That is madness.

But can we not also benefit from digitalisation in education – after all, Pisa and other school tests have been coming out badly for us for a long time?

But they are bad because of digitalisation and not despite of digitalisation. That is the point.

Is there any proof for this?

Yes, a study in more than 50 countries that take part in Pisa has investigated how the Pisa data has changed over ten years. The result: the more countries spent on the digitalisation of their schools per pupil, the worse the performance of pupils became in those countries. There is therefore

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“I think banning smartphones ...”

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a negative correlation between the countries' expenditure on the digitalisation of schools and the success of their pupils. In other words, the digitalisation of schools is detrimental to pupils' learning.

But why exactly does anything digital deteriorate school performance?

It is quite simple. Digital media are extremely distracting. They lead to pupils being constantly distracted and unable to concentrate. And because of this constant distraction, they learn less.

But do we not also need to focus on media literacy in schools?

Media literacy is a word that suggests that there is a general ability to deal with media. But this general ability does not exist. You do not need googling skills to be able to google well. What you do need is prior knowledge. If you want to know something about Ming vases, for example, you need to know something about them beforehand. If you know nothing and google Ming vases, then you will not learn anything. It is our prior knowledge of facts that enables us to use media to learn more about these facts. Once again, there is no general competence that I can have in order to use media better. I need to know the button to turn it on and off, but that is pretty trivial.

And how do I acquire prior knowledge?

The best way to learn is that I ask someone and then they explain it to me. This has



Learning is a social process in which people learn from and with each other. In this way, knowledge is passed from one generation to the next in every culture. (picture Wikimedia Commons)

basically been the case since the invention of schools. The Sumerians invented writing. And when writing had been invented, it became clear that society would function better if everyone could read and write. So 6000 years ago, they started teaching reading and writing to children aged around 6 by having a teacher sit with five to seven pupils. And the teacher explained how to do it, the pupils then did it and asked questions. That is how school started, and that is how it still works best today.

So analog comes before digital, books before the internet?

Books are good, they are less distracting than digital media, where you keep click-

ing and clicking, and after five hours of clicking you have not really learned anything. I think, from an evolutionary point of view, humans are cultural beings, and culture also includes the passing on of cultural knowledge. And this passing on works from person to person. One person demonstrates it and the other imitates it. These are the parents, the peers, the siblings, the teachers. It has been like this for 100,000 years and it works very well. Of course you can also learn to play the guitar with *YouTube* videos. But a good guitar teacher is better.

Because we are social beings?

Yes, because we are social beings and because we can learn best from each other and with each other. I certainly do not deny that *YouTube* videos can help in countries where there is no education, where there are no schools and no money for teachers. But in this country, it is precisely those who are uneducated who do not use digital media for education, but waste their time with computer games, *Instagram* and other activities that take up a lot of time and prevent learning.

Opinions are also divided on artificial intelligence, but is it not also true that it opens up opportunities at school?

No. To learn to think, you have to think for yourself. If you say, “ChatGPT, write me an essay about the water content of Upper Hessian black pudding”, you are not thinking for yourself. Writing is above all a thinking activity, because our thoughts are often not linear and not even cast in language. When we put our thoughts in writing, it is a mental activity. And we do not learn to play football by watching it on TV. We have to play it ourselves! The brain is like a muscle, it grows with use.

Digital Pact 2.0

ep. In December 2024, the federal and state governments in Germany agreed to continue the “Digital Pact for Schools” and thus set the course for the *Digital Pact 2.0*. This is intended to provide a total of five billion euros for the digitalisation of schools by 2030, half of which will be provided by the federal government and half by the federal states. They have presented the key points in a common declaration. The new measure is based on the *DigitalPakt Schule* (2019–2024), they write, and aims to further expand and sustainably utilise the digital education infrastructure in Germany. The three planned strands of action are intended to serve the “expansion of the digital infrastructure”, “digitalisation-related school and teaching development” and “quality development in digital teacher training”. In his explanatory statement, Federal Education Minister Özdemir explained: “The education of our children determines the individual life chances of each person, but also the economic future of our country.” He demanded schools to prepare children for a world that is digitally characterised.

This step in Germany's schools (and the corresponding reasoning) is particularly perplexing at a time when many countries are drawing conclusions from the negative consequences of digital education concepts – including important former pioneers. They are returning to analogue learning processes, in which the relationship between teachers and pupils and analogue teaching materials should once again become the decisive agent in the learning process (and digital media should at most be used as a situation-adapted tool). The children and young people of Germany (and other countries) would be well advised to return to this approach and accept what independent studies and responsible education policymakers have long recognised as the factors for successful learning.

Source: *Gemeinsame Erklärung. Bund und Länder stellen Weichen für Digital Pact 2.0 (Joint statement: Federal and state governments set the course for Digital Pact 2.0);* <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/digitalpakt-2-0-2325422>

Finally awakened? Protect children and young people from harmful digital media consumption!

ep. Maya Graf, member of the Council of States (*Green Party*) for the canton of Baselland, submitted a motion to the small chamber of the Swiss parliament in December 2024 asking the Federal Council to show how it can protect children and young people from excessive and harmful consumption of social media (*Postulate 24.4592*, Protecting children and young people from harmful consumption of social media).

She asked what the Federal Council's position is on banning smartphones in schools. What is its position on a ban on access to media platforms such as *TikTok* or *Instagram* for under-16s?

The Councillor of States based her request on scientifically substantiated evidence that smartphones not only have a negative impact on the development of children and young people, but also impair their mental health and massively reduce their ability to concentrate and learn. She refers to the research by *Jonathan Haidt* and *Jean Twenge*, which has shown that the number of young people with depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts has risen significantly since the introduction of smartphones. In addition, counselling institutions such as *Pro Juventute* have also issued clear rules on screen time in their recommendations. Graf also points out that the Australian government has already decided to ban access to platforms such as *TikTok* and

Instagram for under-16s. Other countries such as Italy and France have already introduced a ban or restrictions on smartphone use in their schools since 2018. In the Netherlands, it has applied to all school levels since September 2024. (The list does not include China, which has already imposed comprehensive restrictions on access to digital media and computer games in 2023, thereby taking on a pioneering role in the protection of children and young people.¹)

Maya Graf also cites the positive effects of such measures on pupils' learning behaviour and social interaction and refers to the research of brain researcher Professor Dr *Manfred Spitzer*, which demonstrates a link between the permanent availability of smartphones in the classroom and a lack of learning success, sustained learning and focused thinking. The use of *social media* portals and computer games would also promote addictive behaviour and attention deficits through constant incentives to multitask. In addition, the high screen presence leads to a lack of sleep and damage to health. As a further point in favour of a smartphone ban in schools and a ban on access to media platforms such as *TikTok* or *Instagram* for under-16s, Ms Graf cites the negative impact on the physical and mental development of children and young people, who are also less likely to learn how to resolve conflicts or build personal relationships.

Conclusion: The Council of States' proposal would be met with relief and approval in many parts of the population, as the problem of excessive time spent on digital media and the risks associated with (un) social media for healthy personal development are increasingly being discussed. In an opinion poll conducted by the *Sotomo* research institute, over 80 per cent of respondents were in favour of a ban on mobile phones in schools. Two thirds of respondents were in favour of a ban on *TikTok*. The ban on mobile phones was also widely supported by political parties, particularly the SP, SVP and the *Greens*. For interested readers, please refer to the two recently published, comprehensive articles on the subject in *Current Concerns*.² The repeated assertion that the negative effects of using social networks on young people's mental health are controversial can no longer be used as an argument today. This bogus argument is generally used to prevent discussion, as the facts have long been scientifically established. The aim of responsible policy must be to protect the younger generation from the dangers and negative consequences of digital media. In its statement of 26 February 2025, the Federal Council expressed its willingness to analyse the situation in more detail in a report. •

¹ *Current Concerns* No. 23 of 7 November 2023

² *Current Concerns* No. 4 of 25 February 2025

"I think banning smartphones ..."

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In adults, the brain is fully grown and the smartphone is omnipresent. But what role do they play as role models for children? A big role. Children do what their parents do. And parents should not be surprised if their children spend a lot of time on their smartphones, if their parents do the same. Parents need to know that they are role models for their children, and that in every respect.

Politicians are not sitting on the family sofa, but can they still do something?

Above all, politicians should quickly bury their *Digital Pact2* [see box on p. 11], as it is now an anachronism beyond compare. In our neighbouring countries, digital media are currently being removed from schools – with good reason. We do not need a *digital pact2*. What we need is the opposite.

So back to analogical learning in schools?

Yes, of course. It would be best not to introduce digital learning at all.

Bans are even more far-reaching – we talked about Austria and Australia, which wants to ban smartphones completely for children up to the age of 14. Is that not too much of a good thing, and can it be controlled at all?

I think it is the right step. We have also banned child pornography and drugs.

Alliance for Humane Education

ep. The Alliance for Humane Education – growing up with digital media is an association of citizens who are committed to humane and democratic education in all public educational institutions. It is in favour of all children and young people being taught and cared for personally in schools, regardless of their parents' social status and financial means. This is why it also criticises terms such as "digital education" or "digital teaching", which are not based on pedagogical concepts, as they claim, but on the use of media (technology) in the classroom and the associated concepts for the automation, standardisation and control of teaching.

And who can control what someone does at home?

No one can control it, but we ban it anyway. If the state bans early smartphone use, it strengthens parents' backs. Because then, if children want a smartphone for Christmas, the parents can say, "You know, that's forbidden, you can't get one." Some people claim that you cannot ban a thing like that, that this is an expression of freedom of opinion. I would like to counter: If children are manipulated for ten hours a day, then that has nothing to do with freedom. The argument is flimsy. Therefore, there is a joint call, together with other scientists, for children to grow up unharmed by digital media into young adulthood. That is better for their physical, mental and health development. •

First publication: *Schwäbische Zeitung* of 13 March 2025; <https://www.schwaebische.de/regional/baden-wuerttemberg/kindern-samartphones-zu-verbieten-finde-ich-richtig-3403588>; reprinted with kind permission (Translation *Current Concerns*)

Overcoming the rift between politics and morality

Postscript of the book: "Moral lessons of the twentieth century"

by Mikhail Gorbachev

The values and mechanism underlying the evolution of contemporary European civilisation are on the verge of self-exhaustion. Consumerism and the ceaseless accumulation of capital contradict basic human interests and threaten equilibrium between humanity and the rest of nature. Humankind is unable to halt growing drug addiction, terrorism, and crime. Recent occurrences show us unexpectedly caught up in a new outburst of ethnic wars. For these reasons, this book's modest attempt to rethink the moral meaning of human experiences in the 20th century – particularly in Russia and Japan – may be useful, at least in stimulating serious reflection on the moral state of contemporary humankind. Mr Ikeda and I are from two different cultures and two different educational back-grounds. Mine is Marxist communist ideology. His is the profundities of Buddhism. Our having discovered a common moral platform is highly significant. Universal human values are a fact and can be a basis for rapprochement and mutual understanding among diverse civilisations. But this can happen only when dialogue participants speak the language of morality, not the language of force and prejudice. The end of the Cold War brought unique possibilities for global rapprochement. They were undervalued and unused first of all because, underestimating the moral meaning of the changes of the time, the West was unable to adopt a moral viewpoint in dialogues with the post-communist world, then awakening to freedom. On the threshold of a new round of geopolitical games, the West was bound hand and foot by egoistical calculations. I do not want our readers to consider us mere preachers who, ignoring what is under their noses, fail to see the obstacles in the way to what we call the new humanistic civilisation. There have already been too many blind egoisms, too many blind ideological biases.

A peaceful coexistence of different cultures

As the majority of our readers will probably agree, it is now time to heal the age-old split between politics and morality. We must realise that the future world must be a world of diversity – many worlds within one world – and that only inner light brings full freedom. At the same time, each of our readers is likely to ask how to achieve peaceful coexistence and cooperation among diverse civilisations. Is there a force that can guarantee the independent development of different cultures? In taking practical steps to resolve conflicts in the post-Cold War world, how are we to avoid

A new humanism

"The 20th century witnessed the oppressive ordeals of world conflicts and loathsome totalitarianism. At its close, the most pressing problems were those of values and freedom: that is, the right to live the lives granted us by heaven and nature, and the need to preserve the spirit of liberty and freedom of thought and faith.

The 20th was a century of fearsome ordeals from the standpoint of humanism [...].

Our dialogue takes its point of origin from the need for a new humanism with a new orientation. We are certain that the time has come for a true humanism that prizes the individual personality, protects the dignities and values of humanity, and avoids leading humanity into new temptations and catastrophes.

Twentieth-century experiences and warnings can provide grounds for the search for and construction of a 21st-century humanism. We start our speculative quest at the point where intolerant, extreme socialist humanism and the dream of communist equali-

ty ended. We ask ourselves, if revolutionary extremism is dangerous, what kinds of social reform and development do we need? If ideological extremism defamed itself, how can we assure a sound foundation for faith and culture? If human happiness cannot be built on violence, how do we combat evil? Uniformity and egalitarianism applied to anything and everything brought destruction and damaged the diversity of life on earth. If this is the case, what must we do to ensure that the equal importance of each individual is reflected in reality, to protect human happiness and dignity, and to ensure equal rights to all? Since class ethics are incompatible with morality, what can we find to replace them? How can we guard the human dignity of people incapable of finding personal empowerment, a voice in the clamor of authority, or their own share of wealth and the good life?"

Gorbachev, Mikhail; Ikeda, Daisaku.
"Moral lessons of the twentieth century", Tauris NY 2005,
excerpt from the preface

monopolism? Who has the right to arbitrate among civilisations? And, most important of all, in principle, can world development be guided? The ending of the Cold War made our world no safer. Today many people are beginning to look on total Westernisation as they once did on the threat of total, forcible communalisation. Apparently, the West is incapable of dealing in a reasonable way with the results of the *new thinking* that freed the world from bloc politics and total confrontation. The fruits of the *new way of thinking* – achieved with such difficulty – are withering away before our eyes. Some years ago, Russia rushed towards the West with open arms and the best possible will. But no one in the West followed Russia's example. The West was incapable of working out either a new doctrine of collective security or a new ideology of peaceful development. Today the fate of the world is in the hands of institutes formed during the Cold War. When the *Warsaw Pact* was deactivated, there was pressing need to create a new system of collective European security. But the European process was sacrificed to old approaches, resulting in the eastward expansion of NATO. Overall, Western defence policy concentrates on how many post-communist countries to include in NATO and when. The possible untoward conse-

quences of this mechanistic approach to the problem of European and global security are overlooked. This is only one of many examples of how the West, morally and intellectually unprepared for the changes evoked by our new politics, continues along the same old track. Claims of leadership in a unipolar world, even with the best motivations, provoke people to reject the blessings of democracy. We must consider this before instinctive processes of rejection proceed farther. Instinctive rejection of new democratic unification – it is tempting to say Westernisation – in a new unipolar world may have resulted in more wars than occurred in the old bipolar world, where claims on world dominion were held in restraint. The West assumes that changes in the old Soviet order took place in response to external pressure. Holders of this view would be surprised to learn that the changes were actually manifestations of moral progress on the part of all humanity and, most of all, of peoples no longer able to live the lie of totalitarian ideology.

We must remember that a moral, purely human impulse toward freedom, universal morality, normal amicable international relations, and elimination of the politics of fear and threats were not signs of Russian political weakness. Respect for per-

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“Overcoming the rift ...”

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sonal rights and freedoms played its role. But from this fact people drew the incorrect conclusion that all countries in the post-communist world wanted nothing more than to rush as fast as possible into the “bright American future”. Similarly, America’s mission was believed by some to consist only in teaching other people’s democracy with all possible haste.

The heart of democracy: profound moral values

A purely bureaucratic, official approach was taken toward the building of a new democratic civilisation. Unfortunately, many Westerners forgot that at the heart of democracy lie those profoundly moral values we have discussed in this book. I mean, first of all, the principle of the moral and political worth of each individual and the principle of tolerance and respect for the opinions of each individual. I take seriously Mr Ikeda’s view that for freedom and democracy to take full force we must renounce violence. Democracy established violently – or, as was the case in Russia in 1993, with the aid of missile attacks – is worth very little. Democracy and double moral standards are incompatible. During the storming of the Moscow White House in October 1993, sacrificing its fundamental principles, the West adopted double moral standards. I frequently ask myself what will become of forcibly imposed democracy when the proponents of force weaken or what will happen to a peace imposed with missiles when the concluders of what they called „agreement” weaken. I do not doubt the values of democracy or its ability to direct social development in these difficult times. I have been and remain an enemy of authoritarianism and the practice and ideology of the “iron hand”. Free democratic elections are the only real means of effecting a transition from totalitarianism to democracy. That is why I insisted on the need to conduct parliamentary and presidential elections on time. But, if we are serious about setting up a new humanistic civilisation and wish to set forth guidelines and approaches to make it a civilisation of diversity – worlds within one world – we are obliged to examine critically and revise liberal ideology and democratic institutions too. Human self-knowledge must move in two directions. In launching *Perestroika*, we submitted the ideology and practice of communism to pitiless critical analysis. We came to the conclusion that the idea of forcing people to be happy can lead to no good and that the mechanism of moral retribution and the spiritual defeat of violence will sooner or later make themselves known. In our dialogues, Mr Ikeda and I speak in detail about the insolvency of violence and revolutionary extremism. At this point, as a counterbalance to our book’s

bias toward criticising communist extremism and communist efforts to remake the world, we must seriously discuss the weaknesses and insufficiencies of Western democratic institutions.

Lessons from the Balkan wars

Although communist totalitarianism no longer exists, the crisis of contemporary civilisation only deepens. The long-suffering peoples of Bosnia paid dearly for the West’s efforts to make each Yugoslavian republic an independent presidential republic. Important international decisions on Yugoslavia were made without taking into account the specifics of its complicated makeup or the history of the Serbian people as the prevailing ethnic group in the region. The UN was compelled to take measures involving massive bombardment of the Bosnian Serbs. But the West was unprepared to conduct qualitative peace-making missions. After agreements were signed, the Croatian–Muslim confederation showed signs of splitting.

In the new unipolar world, the fate of peoples once again depends on prevailing moods among the officials of the United States, the leader of world democracy – even on presidential election campaigns. In 1995, after the deaths of thousands of peaceful Bosnians, the Dayton Peace Accord made a decision that good sense and the history of the religiously divided Serbs suggested from the very outset. I am convinced that the Yugoslavian tragedy would never have occurred if, instead of hurrying to recognise the independence of Croatia and Slovenia and later of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the West had held a preliminary international peace conference to convince the conflicting national parties to compromise and discuss the rights of then emerging national minorities. But they were all in a rush to punish the Serbian communists as fast as possible. They were in a hurry to push the Yugoslavian peoples along the road to democracy. Once again ideological passions took pride of place. The ideological approach to world politics was revived because the reasons and motivations behind the *new way of thinking* and behind our initiatives to end the Cold War were not objectively and honestly evaluated. We did not abandon our own ideological approach in order to become slaves of anew ideology or the students and novices of *Milton Friedman* and *Friedrich August von Hayek*. We rejected the ideological approach in the name of the moral approach.

Ignorance of history

The very principles and institutions of democracy – most of all American democracy – require critical examination. Western attempts to turn Bosnia into America and to hold elections in an ethnically divided land led to tragedy. Elementary considerations were ignored.

For instance, Bosnian Serbs who fought the Turkish yoke for five centuries cannot live in a land with a Muslim president. Even in Africa, liberated from colonialism, new public history did not start from scratch. The peoples of the Balkans have millennia of public history. Similar factors went unconsidered when the international community supported the collapse of the Soviet Union. But thousands of years of history cannot be so easily overlooked.

The USA – no model

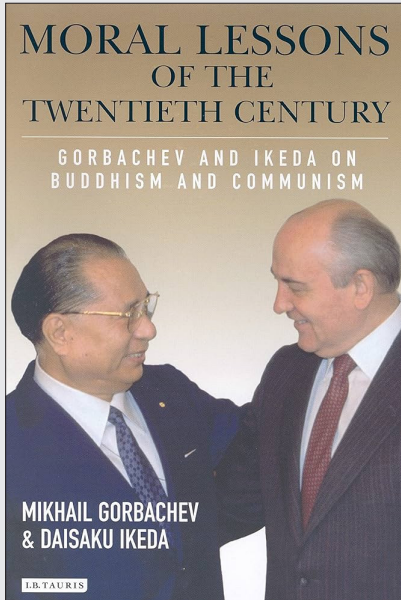
Many scholars and politicians in the West and even in the United States advance a full barrage of serious arguments questioning American claims to ideological and political leadership. In the first place, the United States is not rich enough to subsidise endless democracy-supporting programs that, as a rule, have effects opposite to those intended. Bursting at the seams, the national budget cannot even provide medical insurance for the poor and aged. Second, the United States is far from a suitable object of emulation in several respects. Ethnic and racial conflicts that the United States tries to resolve in other countries remain unsolved at home. The Black demonstration called the “March of Millions” that took place in Washington in 1995 showed once again that smouldering racial conflicts still hinder basic solutions to overcome the split between Black and White America. Third, as they themselves some-times say, Americans are incapable of coming to grips with realities conflicting with their tremendous overload of myths and misconceptions about their own country. The average American has only the vaguest idea of other cultures and histories. This ignorance provides unique opportunities for the manipulation of public opinion. Fourth, in America, the fourth estate – the mass media – have inordinate power. They make presidents and destroy them as politicians. The overwhelming majority of the American people are busy trying to earn their daily bread and must be satisfied with world views concocted by the electronic information media. Consequently, public opinion trends and the entire course of political events depend on the honesty and probity of the people controlling the mass-media empire. Only a new, global cultural revolution making each individual an aware subject of world politics can counteract the expanding omnipotence of the fourth estate. We must realise that, in spite of great 20th-century successes in mass education, humanity still has not solved the major problems set by the great educators. Even in the most advanced nations, including the United States, the popular humanitarian cultural level is extremely low. Increasing drug addiction and criminality testify to the path-

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Morality and humanism – a survival imperative for humanity

On the book by Mikhail Gorbachev and Daisaku Ikeda:
“Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century”

by Karl-Jürgen Müller



Many people criticise the demand for morality in politics as “moralism”. According to *Emmanuel Todd*, this moralism is a deceptive pretence of what in reality is a nihilistic attitude towards life and fellow beings: an attitude that pretends to be moral but in fact is only serving one’s own short-term interests. The justifications of Western hegemonic policy (we do everything “for freedom, human rights and democracy”) of the past decades were full of it.

But completely abandoning the demand for morality in politics, relying solely on pragmatism, overt interest and power politics and the return of “strong” men (and women) is no less questionable – because this approach will not help to solve humanity’s problems in the long term either.

Here we must remember the actual meaning of morality: morality as anthropologically and ethically based commandments regarding the meaning and purpose of human life and human community and communities. Imperatives orientated towards the social nature and dignity of human beings and reinforced and enriched by historical experience and the core messages of the great world religions for the coexistence of human beings. Morality in politics thus becomes a survival imperative for humanity. It finds its political concretisation in what is actually right.

Nevertheless, this actual morality is becoming less and less important in the political life of our countries. And that is why it is so important to keep reminding people of this morality and of personali-

ties who try or have tried to live it in theory and practice.

This is a reminder of a book published in English translation in 2005 under the title “Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century” by the British publishing house *I. B. Tauris* which reproduces extensive conversations between the former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU and later President of the country *Mikhail Gorbachev* and the Japanese Buddhist scholar *Daisaku Ikeda*. The book is a translation of the Japanese original published in 1996. A glance at the book shows that the talks between Gorbachev and Ikeda took place shortly after 1995, almost 30 years ago – at a time when the erosion of political morality was already clearly recognisable, but not yet as far advanced as it is today. All the more reason to be grateful for the balanced but clearly formulated words of the two personalities from Russia and Japan. They also hold up a mirror to us today – searching for ways towards a future that is fit for mankind.

The book has five chapters and an epilogue by each of the two dialogue partners. An extraordinary number of topics are addressed, including:

- Memories of both of their own careers, lives and work; in Gorbachev’s case, his early confrontation with Stalinism and his high regard for freedom – his “home country” in the North Caucasus had “taught him above all tolerance, tact and mutual respect”,
- the war experiences of both during their childhood and youth, resulting in an unconditional commitment to peace,
- Gorbachev’s programme of *Perestroika* and “New Thinking” and its (unfinished) main purpose: to preserve the Soviet Union through fundamental reforms and to give all people in the country a political and legal framework in which to develop their personalities in freedom and dignity,
- historical analyses of the history of Russia, the Soviet Union, then Russia again after 1991, but also Japan which also explain how quickly a misunderstood freedom can lead astray,
- criticism of ideologically and power-politically motivated intolerance and fanaticism, warnings against the loss of reality through intellectual abstractions without a view of people’s real lives, criticism of the revolutionary fervour of the communist movement,
- detailed discussions of the humanistic substance of Christianity and Buddhism,

– Reflections on a “world citizenship” based on a bond with *all* people on earth, but on the foundation of a secure national identity and without ugly nationalism,

- Finally, the search for answers to the question of what true humanism is. Gorbachev says: “The goal [is] to respect and protect life.” And: “A new true humanism must stand up for the right of man to be himself and to develop according to his own possibilities.” [all quotes translated from the German edition; the editors.] Gorbachev and Ikeda also discuss the question of whether there can still be such a thing as socialist humanism after the experiences of totalitarian Communism and Bolshevism. In view of the diagnosis that capitalism and its “shock therapy” after the end of the Soviet Union brought so much suffering to people, both argue in favour of a “social-democratic” socialism, a socialism that also follows Christian social teaching. Both agree that material conditions are necessary, but not sufficient. Ikeda says: “Thus, if we want to make society as a whole happy and content, we must ensure that each individual carries happiness and goodness in their heart.” Gorbachev adds: “The big question is how to get people to take care of their inner values, to strive for moral and spiritual self-improvement and to take responsibility for others. [...] As long as spiritual and moral values are not prioritised; the world will not change for the better.” *This can only be achieved with many small steps*. Ikeda says: “Our hope for the survival of humanity is that it is possible to replace the economic and military race with a race for greater humanity. The degree of humanity must become the only measure of whether a society can be considered as truly civilised or not. I am certain that the course of the world can be steered in this direction.” And Gorbachev again: “The new humanism requires the courage and perseverance of millions of people who modestly and unpretentiously fulfil their everyday duties, study, work, raise children and preserve the traditions of their ancestors. We do not find the meaning of life among those who destroy faith in life with sophisticated dialectical models or other mind games, but among the people who take their lives into their own hands.”

"Overcoming the rift ..."

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ological condition of the human spirit and a lack of spirituality and humaneness. The gap between the uneducated and the educated parts of society widens. Under such conditions, millions of people remain the objects of inconceivable political manipulation. Although the United States has assumed the burden of leading contemporary democratic civilisation, it too is equally affected by all these problems.

Putting Western civilisation to the test

The problems and contradictions of the political system in the United States, the outpost of Western democracy, is only one example endorsing our thesis that it is time for a re-examination of contemporary liberal civilisation as a whole. But, even as we begin discussing this topic, we must think of ways to avoid new world unification. The problems of global security can be resolved only when all nations today assume collective responsibility for the future of humanity. I use the word "security" in a broad sense, including economic, ecological, and informational as well as military security. Realising that all projects for the creation of global government are myths, we must begin improving already existing international organisations, notably the United Nations. UN power and ability to overcome international conflicts is of primary concern. Its peace-making efforts in Bosnia showed up all its weaknesses. First is its poverty and decisive dependence on the United States. Second is the nature of the Security Council. In dealing with peace-keeping operations, its members are guided first and foremost by their own national preferences and by efforts to support one side or another. This intensifies and aggravates the conflict under consideration. What does all this lead us to conclude? To have a future, the United Nations must become a genuinely independent, financially strong organisation capable of conducting policies motivated by the global security of all human civilisation. Changing eco-

"As the majority of our readers will probably agree, it is now time to heal the age-old split between politics and morality. We must realise that the future world must be a world of diversity – many worlds within one world – and that only inner light brings full freedom. At the same time, each of our readers is likely to ask how to achieve peaceful coexistence and cooperation among diverse civilisations. Is there a force that can guarantee the independent development of different cultures? In taking practical steps to resolve conflicts in the post-Cold War world, how are we to avoid monopolism? Who has the right to arbitrate among civilisations? And, most important of all, in principle, can world development be guided? The ending of the Cold War made our world no safer. Today many people are beginning to look on total Westernisation as they once did on the threat of total, forcible communalisation. Apparently, the West is incapable of dealing in a reasonable way with the results of the new thinking that freed the world from bloc politics and total confrontation. The fruits of the new way of thinking – achieved with such difficulty – are withering away before our eyes."

nomical and military might of member nations and certain basic civilisation principles necessitate expansion of the Security Council. I say this for these reasons. If we intend to create a new, diverse, humanistic civilisation that is, as I say, worlds within one world, the Security Council itself must be a world of worlds. Representatives of all existing civilisations – without exception – must have the right to influence Security Council decisions which in any way concern the general security of humanity. As members of the United Nations, sovereign states have consistently put their own national interests above everything. The civilised approach to defining the UN that I have just outlined would enable the Security Council gradually to become more than an organisation of sovereign states and to make decisions in the interests of humanity as a whole. The problem of cooperation between the UN and regional organisations too might

be put in terms of this same kind of civilised relationship.

There is another problem connected with both improving UN action and the theme of our book. I mean UNESCO. If humanity is being more and more united, why not devise guidelines for a system of humanitarian education based on the moral experience of all humankind and the moral wisdom of all religions? Ultimately, we might write a textbook on world history relating not wars but moral deeds. (Ironically, the "Washington Post" opened its competition for the most outstanding figure in the second millennium with an essay on *Genghis Khan*.) Today we must consider a wider problem: the cultural reorientation of all human civilisation and a new moral and cultural reformation. •

Source: "From a new philosophy to a new politics" (Postscript of *Mikhail Gorbachev*), from: Mikhail Gorbachev/Daisaku Ikeda. *Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris, NY 2005.

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