

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*

Switzerland must keep to its own unique path

by René Roca*



Detail from the commemorative leaflet published on the occasion of the introduction of the Federal Constitution on 12 September 1848. Lithograph by C. Studer, Winterthur, printed by J.J. Ulrich, Zurich. Helvetia, enthroned in the centre, is crowned with a laurel wreath by a confederate and holds the new Federal Constitution. On both sides, instead of the usual allegories, citizens in uniform (militia army) and in civilian clothes are depicted, embodying the sovereign. At that time, the Swiss Confederation was the only republic in an “ocean” of authoritarian principalities and kingdoms.

Today, it must follow this unique path and once again become a role model.
(picture Historical Dictionary of Switzerland)

The Sonderbund of 1845 and its antecedents

Many historians and legal experts who advocate Switzerland’s accession to the EU and NATO give an abbreviated account of the prehistory of the *Sonderbund* from 1815 onwards, i.e. above all the periods of the Restoration and the Regeneration in Switzerland, ignoring the historical state of research into this important phase of Swiss history. In doing so, they follow the one-dimensional liberal “master narrative”, which describes the liberals (Freisinn) as the sole bearer of progress and sees the Catholic Conservatives as stuck in the “order of the corporative state” and as a brake on modernity.

The period from 1798 to 1848, i.e. from the Helvetic era to the founding of the federal state, was a phase of political upheaval

for Switzerland, without black and white, but with many shades of gray. A high point was the *Sonderbund* War of 1847. Like the liberal Siebner Concordat of March 1832 and the conservative Sarnerbund of November 1832, the *Sonderbund* or “Schutzvereinigung”, founded in 1845, violated the provisions of the Federal Treaty of 1815. This founding act was, however, understandable in view of some prior blatant violations of the law, such as the abolition of monasteries and the anticlerical coup-attempts Freischarenzüge, as well as the inactivity of the Tagsatzung, i.e., the assembly of delegates from the cantons of the Old Swiss Confederacy. The *Sonderbund* (like the Jesuit question) suited certain liberal radicals because they believed that it would be almost impossible to transform Switzerland without violence. For this reason, they propagandistically pushed the conflict to the point of war, which fortunately only remained a “fratricidal quarrel” thanks to the restraint of the cantons and the General of

the Tagsatzung troops, *Guillaume Henri Dufour*.

For their part, the supporters of the *Sonderbund* manoeuvred themselves onto the sidelines and intensified the confessionalisation to such an extent that the Reformed conservatives, among others, who were sympathetic to the political concerns of the *Sonderbund*, turned away or remained neutral. As the majority of the population of the *Sonderbund* cantons rejected an offensive war beyond the cantonal borders, the military leadership was inadequate and there was a lack of mutual agreement, the *Sonderbund*’s actions were doomed to failure. The assessment of the *Sonderbund*’s antecedents is central and is generally given too little weight. Many historians and jurists remain stuck in old patterns here, although this phase was a decisive foundation for the later federal state. The Fribourg historian *Oskar Vassella* states in this regard that “a greater

continued on page 2

* René Roca holds a doctorate in history, is a grammar school teacher and heads the *Research Institute for Direct Democracy* (fdd.ch).

“Switzerland must keep ...”

continued from page 1

freedom of historical thought” is needed, particularly in the assessment of Catholic conservatism, in order to present the antecedents of the founding of the federal state more truthfully.

The federal cantons were already “laboratories of freedom” during the Restoration period, which ultimately contributed to the development of democracy at a communal and cantonal level. In the phase of the Regeneration from 1830 onwards, this then led to the Catholic conservatives fighting for more popular rights in their cantons alongside radical and early socialist circles, for example in the canton of Lucerne, where, after St. Gallen and Baselland, democratic-conservative circles introduced the legislative veto as a precursor to the optional referendum. Contrary to popular assertions today, Catholic conservatives played a decisive role in Switzerland’s model of success.



The Federal Constitution of 1848 was the first constitution of the Swiss Confederation that the Swiss electorate gave itself. Thus, for the second half of the 19th century, Switzerland became a democratic republican island in the midst of the European monarchies. In a figurative sense, comparisons with the present day will be quite welcome.

The *Sonderbund* indirectly helped to make a centralist solution more difficult and to prevent further revolutionary transformations in the spirit of the radicals. Vasella writes: “Perhaps it was only through the civil war, which nobody wants and nobody praises, that the spirits came to reflect on the law; perhaps it was only through the years of resistance by the conservatives and through the *Sonderbund* War that the revolutionary wave was broken. The Federal Constitution of 1848 saved the cantonal principle and thus also preserved the idea of a balance between small and large cantons.” In the following decades, the focus

was on further equalisation and the integration of the losers in the spirit of concordance, rather than on the victors’ dictates and exclusion.

Former Federal Councillor *Alain Berset* (SP) places the contribution of the Catholic Conservatives to the Federal Constitution in a historically correct context: “After the *Sonderbund* War, the victorious cantons did not simply write a new constitution and impose it on the Catholic cantons. They did it together with them – and created a sovereign state that was on an equal footing with the powers of Europe.” This was a “historic constitutional compromise” that was not achieved in other European states.

**Parallels to the present –
Time to strengthen the democratically
constituted nation state**

Most EU and NATO supporters claim that today’s debate about Switzerland’s integration into the EU and NATO has

important parallels with the founding of the federal state in 1848. In fact, the core issue is one of sovereignty. In this context, the proponents of accession emphasise that the Swiss cantons also surrendered sovereignty to the Confederation at that time, and that Switzerland would now also have to take a similar step towards the EU. On the one hand, this suggests that the EU is on the road to success with its desired goal of a European federal state; on the other hand, Switzerland is being persuaded that by joining the EU it would be doing exactly what it has already done once in its history, only this time on a larger scale. Those who do not support this are generally accused of “conservatism”.

Thomas Cottier, an economic law expert and a proper EU and NATO turbo, even claims that these critics formed a “new *Sonderbund*” today. This kind of historical comparison is seriously flawed and ideologically misleading.

What does the EU structure actually look like today? Cottier speaks of the EU as a “new alliance in Europe” and then even of a “federal alliance”. However, the EU is *de facto* neither a federation of states nor a federation of countries with equal rights. It is not a nation, but a centralised entity (Brussels) that is held together by various treaties. The individual countries only adhere to the various treat-

ties to a limited extent (cf. *Maastricht criteria*). The EU’s tendency to become a bureaucratic juggernaut is obvious. Since its beginnings, i.e., since the *Coal and Steel Community* in 1951, the EC/EU must also be characterised by the concept of supranationality. This means that the individual member states have been ceding more and more sovereign rights to the centre and their own state sovereignty has been continuously eroded.

In the individual EU countries – with the exception of Ireland – there is not even provision made for referendums concerning those international treaties that form the legal basis. The EU is also not federally structured, as Cottier claims, and even the EU Federal Constitution, which was largely introduced with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, and which has been put on ice since, does not contain any classic federal elements. Accordingly, the EU authorities’ constant talk of subsidiarity bears no relation to reality. Cottier’s assertion that the current structures of the EU – “a system of multi-level government” – are compatible with the Swiss Federal Constitution, is absurd.

Appreciation of the unique Swiss path

Cottier and others are also talking about a “global confrontation between democracy and autocracy”. Such a dichotomy is nonsensical. We only have to look at the state of democracy in Europe. The two EU “core countries”, France and Germany, are increasingly sinking into economic crisis and political chaos. France is presided over by an autocratic “substitute emperor”, its parliament persists in infighting, showing no willingness to compromise. Germany has long been ruled by a party dictatorship that is increasingly eroding liberal and democratic principles and erects “firewalls” instead.

At a time when intellectuals such as Cottier want to usher in the post-national or post-democratic age in Europe, it is time to consolidate the democratically constituted nation state and further strengthen it as a state under the rule of law. This is the only way to ensure peace and order. Consolidating the nation states in Europe would also mean completing the Enlightenment project and finally, as a “Europe of nation states”, shaking off the status of a US vassal.

Neutral Switzerland must consistently support this. It must continue on its unique path with neutrality as the foundation of peace and thus become more and more of a democratic model in an increasingly disrupted world. The Swiss Confederation unites the best European traditions and could help to build a European security architecture through dialogue, and that simply without NATO. •

Latin American states want to strengthen ties and intensify cooperation with China

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Celac was founded in Caracas in 2011 under the leadership of the then Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Brazilian President Lula da Silva – without the participation of the USA and Canada. It has since become far more important than the OAS, the Organization of American States, which was founded in Washington in 1949 and was dominated by the USA for decades. Those days are probably over for good.

gl. The 9th summit of the Celac states, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, took place in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, at the beginning of April. Of the 33 member states, representatives from 30 countries took part, including the heads of government of Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Cuba, Uruguay and Guatemala. This meant that the meeting was attended by high-ranking representatives. At a time of growing tensions within international relations, there was a consensus that regional cooperation must be strengthened in the face of global challenges. The President of Honduras, *Xiomara Castro*, emphasised in her opening speech as host: “We cannot continue to march separately while the USA redraws its economic map without asking ourselves which countries are being left behind.” Mexican President *Claudia Sheinbaum* proposed convening a summit for the prosperity of Latin America. She emphasised her close cooperation with Brazilian President *Lula da Silva*: “Brazil and Mexico play a key role economically. We can complement each other in many areas, especially in the automotive and pharmaceutical industries.” The well-being of Latin America and the Caribbean must be the common goal. For his part, *Lula* suggested that the Celac should put forward a joint candidate for the post of UN Secretary-General.

At the end of the meeting, the “Tegucigalpa Declaration” was adopted by 30 of the 33 member states. The declaration rejects the imposition of unilateral coercive measures that contravene international law, and thus implicitly rejects the severe economic sanctions imposed by the USA on Cuba and Venezuela, which are still in force. Latin America and the Caribbean are a region of peace that promotes multilateralism, democracy and respect for sovereignty. Only Argentina, Paraguay and Nicaragua did not support the declaration for various reasons.



Outgoing CELAC President Xiomara Castro congratulates her successor pro tempore, the Colombian President Gustavo Petro. (picture <https://www.presidencia.gov.co/>)

Colombia is now taking over the pro-tempore presidency of the Celac for one year. *Gustavo Petro*, the President of Colombia and new Celac President, also emphasised the importance of cooperation. “We are not just peoples, we are peoples who help each other. Help is the key word, help and cooperation.” An important project during his term of office would be to connect Latin America and the Caribbean with the whole world. He wants to talk to China, India, Africa, the Arab world and Europe. It is also necessary to develop a strategy for Haiti and to strengthen its democracy. The US economic blockade against Cuba and Venezuela must also be overcome.

High-level Celac-China meeting planned

A high-level meeting between Celac and China is already planned for 13 May in Beijing. In addition to *Gustavo Petro*, who represents Celac, other heads of government from Latin American countries will be attending. Colombia, a close ally of the USA for decades, wants to open up space for new alliances to develop its economy and infrastructure. Cooperation with China has great strategic value and is a high priority. Various Latin American countries want to diversify their international relations and explore new economic opportunities.

State visit by Boric to Brazil

Around a dozen bilateral agreements were signed during a state visit by Chilean President *Gabriel Boric* to Brazil.

Lula and *Boric* sharply criticised the US president’s tariff policy: “We have a US president who is now pursuing a protectionist policy, in complete contrast to what we have been told since the 1980s: Globalisation and free trade”. *Boric* emphasised the great importance of the ties between the two countries, especially at a time when multilateralism and friendship between peoples are being called into question. Both presidents addressed the huge project of the corridor between the two oceans, which has been under consideration for more than ten years but has never progressed beyond initial planning. A road network of over 2,400 km in length is to connect the south of Brazil, the Chaco in Paraguay and the Argentinian provinces of Salta and Jujuy with the Chilean ports of Antofagasta, Mejillones and Iquique. This corridor would also be a connection/link between the Atlantic and Pacific, representing a particular value for trade.

China could contribute to its financing. *Lula* said in front of journalists that he did not want a cold war and did not want to decide between the USA and China. He recommended *Boric* to build closer ties with Beijing and invited him to the next BRICS meeting.

Sources: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/817302-celac-se-rearma-en-guatemala> of 11 April 2025; <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/817558-china-prepara-un-encuentro-con-la-celac> of 12 April 2025; <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/820158-lula-y-boric-rechazaron-la-politica-comercial-de-trump> of 23 April 2025

Open letter – Embarrassment about the exclusion of the Russian ambassador from the commemoration in Sachsenhausen

cc. The Sachsenhausen Memorial does not want to admit representatives from Russia and Belarus to commemorate the victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War. The East German author and songwriter Hans-Eckard Wenzel sharply criticised this in an open letter.

As the “Berliner Zeitung” wrote on 23 April, the German Foreign Office had recommended that Brandenburg districts and municipalities “not extend any invitations to Russian or Belarusian diplomats – and if necessary even send uninvited guests away again”. While there were no incidents for the Russian ambassador Sergei Nechayev and the Belarusian envoy Andrei Shuplyak at the commemoration ceremony in Seelow (Battle of the Seelow Heights near Berlin), the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, which owns the former Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück concentration camps, even wants to exercise its domestic authority if necessary and have the Russian ambassador removed from the site “by security forc-

es”. The main commemoration in Sachsenhausen is to take place on 4 May.

Hans-Eckard Wenzel has now written an open letter to Axel Dreccoll, the director of the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation and director of the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum:

Dear Professor Dr Dreccoll,

I was horrified to read in the press that you have disinvited the Russian representatives for the celebrations to mark the liberation of Sachsenhausen concentration camp or are refusing them access to the ceremony. The general ideology of a “values-based foreign policy” is truly warlike fruits. My friend and long-time companion, the composer Eberhard Schmidt, was an inmate in your camp. His experiences left a deep impression on me. The director Konrad Wolf, then a soldier in the Soviet army, was involved in the liberation of the concentration camp and created an impressive memorial to this moment in his film “I was Nineteen”. Take a look at this film! It is carried by

a great humanity and describes precisely those moments when the full horror of the Nazi era becomes apparent, that it is not revenge or dogmatism that can dispel the dark aspects of that time, but greatness and humanity.

The horror, the inhumanity, indeed the cynicism of the German fascists were unparalleled and were ended by nothing other than the efforts of the Soviet soldiers and officers. Do you want to rewrite this history and reinterpret ourselves as liberators? Do you want to sacrifice the fundamentals of humanism to political dodges and self-empowerment? What do you want to remember when you rob this place of horror of its history? Even if you don't agree with the course of German history, that doesn't change the facts. You have been appointed Director of the Culture of Remembrance. Follow this call!

Hans-Eckard Wenzel

Source: Berliner Zeitung of 23 April 2025
(Translation Current Concerns)

“It is our duty to commemorate the upcoming anniversary of the Great Victory with dignity”

Statement by Russian Ambassador to Germany Sergey Nechayev
on the participation of Russian representatives in commemorative events in Germany

Against the backdrop of the widespread discussion in the German media regarding the participation of official Russian representatives in commemorative events at Soviet war graves in Germany, and in view of the numerous speculations on this matter, I would like to emphasise the following points:

Victory Day is a public holiday that is sacred to every person in Russia. The war of annihilation waged by the Nazis against the Soviet Union claimed the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens. The crimes of the Third Reich and its henchmen must be recognised as genocide against the peoples of the USSR. We call on the new German Bundestag and the new German Federal Government to do the same as soon as they are formed.

As the successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia honours the memory of the fallen. Our country has never distinguished between nationalities when it comes to the heroic deeds of Soviet soldiers and the immense sacrifices made by the Soviet people for victory. Victory is our common good and the memory of the victims of the war is our common pain. Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs and members of more than a hundred peoples of the USSR stood shoulder to shoulder and could only win together.

There are more than four thousand gravesites on German territory, where over 700,000 Soviet soldiers are laid to rest. We express our heartfelt gratitude to the German municipalities and local communities, the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (German War Graves Commission) and the people of Germany for their caring treatment of Soviet war graves and memorial sites.

In the run-up to the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Germany and Europe from Nazism, Russian diplomatic missions, together with colleagues from the *Commonwealth of Independent States*, are planning a number of commemorative events at which we will lay wreaths and flowers, bow our heads in deep respect at the graves of Soviet soldiers and reflect on their immortal heroic deeds. We invite veterans, Russian compatriots, German citizens and all those who honour the memory of the liberators to join us. We are also happy to accept invitations addressed to us.

We firmly reject attempts to accuse us of “propagandistic exploitation” of the commemorative events. We have always made it clear, and wish to make it clear today, that the memory of the Second World War, the decisive role played by the Red Army in defeating Nazism, and

the colossal sacrifices made by the Soviet people must not be distorted or concealed for the sake of the political agenda of the day. That is our firm conviction.

However, we see attempts at instrumentalisation in the bans on displaying symbols of victory and the national flags of the USSR and Russia in public, in the exclusion of Russian and Belarusian representatives from joint commemorations, and in the allusions to the possible removal of official representatives of our countries from the memorial sites, possibly by force. Those who came up with such measures do not deserve credit for them.

It is our duty to commemorate the upcoming anniversary of the Great Victory with dignity, to remember those who liberated Germany and Europe from Nazism, to lay flowers and wreaths at their memorials and to bow our heads at their graves. That is exactly what we will do. All those who wish to join us in this commemoration are warmly invited to do so.

Source: https://germany.mid.ru/de/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/stellungnahme_des_russischen_botschafters_in_deutschland_sergej_netschajew_hinsichtlich_der_teilnahme_of_24_April_2025

(Translation Current Concerns)

Peaceful coexistence of states – the imperative of our time

by Arne C. Seifert

The signatories to the Final Act of the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, the CSCE, concluded in Helsinki 50 years ago this summer, declare at the outset their “determination to respect and put into practice, each of them in its relations with all other participating States, irrespective of their political, economic or social systems as well as of their size, geographical location or level of economic development, the following principles, which all are of primary significance, guiding their mutual relations”:

“Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty; refraining from the threat or use of force; inviolability of frontiers; territorial integrity of States; peaceful settlement of disputes; non-intervention in internal affairs; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; equal rights and self-determination of peoples; co-operation among States; fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law”.¹

The principles enshrined in the Final Act are essential now for the formation of a multipolar world

The participating states committed themselves to unite in overcoming mistrust and increasing confidence, to resolve the problems that divide them, and to work together for the benefit of humanity.

The signatory powers of the Helsinki Final Act committed themselves, in the interests of ensuring security in Europe, to continue:

- to make every effort to make détente in the universal sense both a lasting and an increasingly viable and comprehensive process;
- to contribute to the development of closer relations among themselves in all fields and thus to the overcoming of the confrontation stemming from the nature of their past relations and to better mutual understanding;
- to endeavour to contribute to the consolidation of peace and security in the world and to the promotion of fundamental rights, economic and social progress and the well-being of all peoples.

The Final Act was the result of the will of its 35 signatory states on 1 August 1975 to relax their relations and contribute to peace, security, justice and better cooperation. The signatory states included 15 NATO members, seven Warsaw Treaty states, and 13 “independents” with observer status – the Mediterranean coun-



Signing of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) on 1 August 1975 in Helsinki. From left to right: Helmut Schmidt (Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany), Erich Honecker (Chairman of the State Council of the German Democratic Republic), Gerald Ford (President of the United States of America), Bruno Kreisky (Chancellor of the Republic of Austria). (picture Wikipedia)

tries Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia.²

A CSCE diplomat’s review³

At the centre of the Helsinki Final Act and the resulting détente process was the task of placing concepts such as peace and security and the cooperation required to achieve them in a context that remains necessary, indeed imperative, even today. It was about a still-valid main concern of a pan-European security structure and policy in the complexity of its elements.

A new international negotiating structure began with the CSCE, its regulations, and its stipulations. The principle of equal rights for all participating states was a rejection of any attempt to introduce bloc structures into the process. At least, this was true at the beginning.

The latter occurred primarily with the declaration on a catalogue for shaping relations, by which the participating states were to be guided, namely the principles on certain aspects of security and disarmament, on cooperation in economic, scientific, technological, and environmental matters, as well as cooperation in humanitarian and other areas with the later particularly controversial topics such as human contacts and information.

With the Helsinki text from 1975, each participant ultimately implemented essentially what it considered necessary to safeguard its interests: The then-prevailing so-

cialism in the form of the Warsaw Treaty saw the political and territorial realities of the time as secured by the principles of nonviolence, respect for territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, respect for sovereignty and non-interference. Respect for human rights in the catalogue of principles, the detailed formulation of the broad spectrum of humanitarian issues, the enormous field of information, and the problem of economic cooperation, especially with regard to the preservation of its own commercial advantages, were indispensable concerns for the Western system.

The role of neutral and nonaligned states should be emphasised. With one exception – the former Yugoslavia – they generally sided with the West due to the nature of the system. Nevertheless, their role as mediators and coordinators in various working groups or in the conference plenary was in demand. This was particularly true in numerous cases wherein it was necessary to negotiate compromises on a larger or smaller scale.

The Final Act and the resulting process of détente, which also involved military and confidence-building measures, went down in international history as a tried and tested example of how peaceful coexistence and cooperation among states with different social and political systems is possible and can be organised.

“Peaceful coexistence of states ...”

continued from page 5

Such a construction can also be understood as consistently democratic state behaviour in their international relations. Without this, a multipolar world will not be able to live in peace. It was and remains an international imperative without an expiry date.

A plea for ‘peaceful coexistence’ in a multipolar world

Multipolarity cannot be “domesticated” by monopolies. But this is what the collective West is currently working on. It is faced with an emerging geopolitical camp of rising forces and powers in Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. Against this backdrop, a new international constellation of forces and conflicts is emerging in which the international rules, mechanisms, and profits handed down by the West are losing their previous monopoly and model function. *Henry Kissinger* compared such a new situation with a situation in which the “traditional European superpowers do not realise that the current geostrategic and geopolitical realities have become obsolete” and “the rules and norms organised by a pan-European elite are no more a sufficient vehicle for a global strategy if geopolitical realities are not taken into account”.⁴

Today, this pan-European “elite” is endeavouring to close the global gap in the multipolar world to its advantage with its doctrine of a “rules-based international order” – this instead of exploring, defining and balancing the interests of both sides. Although the trans-Atlantic West invokes the *United Nations Charter*, it means something completely different – to enforce its international “superpower ide-

ology, [its] monopoly of supremacy and [its] criteria for the exercise of power”.⁵

The US in particular is fighting for *its* global hegemony by means of this doctrine. Documents from the US Congress leave no doubt about this. They characterise the “rules-based international order” as a “US-centred world whose allies and partners are committed to maintaining and promoting free, open, democratic, inclusive, rules-based, stable and diverse regions in order to uphold their shared values and interests.”⁶ [Emphasis A.S.]

The constitutive principles of the BRICS states on the other side of this “divide”, however, are much different: “Commitment to multilateralism and upholding international law, including the Purposes and Principles enshrined in the *Charter of the United Nations* as its indispensable cornerstone, and the central role of the UN in an international system in which sovereign states cooperate to maintain international peace and security, advance sustainable development, ensure the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and promoting cooperation based on solidarity, mutual respect, justice and equality.”⁷

In contrast to the doctrine of the Western “rules-based international order”, the Global South makes no claim to hegemony. The focus is on its claim to the democratisation of international relations, their instruments, institutions, and rules.

America’s claim to assert global hegemony together with its allies, even under multipolar conditions, is currently becoming the focal point of international disputes. During his term in office *Joe Biden* used the term “era” as a generic term for a doctrine of “international relations under conditions of long-term strategic rivalry” after

the end of the Cold War – a “Post-Cold War Era of International Relations”.⁸ This *de facto* amounts to an “open end”. The beginning of this era was located with the “seizure and annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014”, its “actions in eastern Ukraine” and “China’s actions in the East and South China Seas”. The US administration assessed these as a “threat to core elements of the international order shaped by the US”.⁹ In other words, the era of “long-term strategic rivalry” is already a reality and characterises the positioning of the US in the Ukraine conflict and far beyond.

It remains to be seen whether America’s current president, *Donald Trump*, will follow this doctrine. Initial talks on normalising relations between the US and the Russian Federation, as well as a political end to the war over Ukraine, give rise to hopes of a new *détente*. Both could – welcome, directly or indirectly – lead to their peaceful coexistence, conflicting interests notwithstanding.

“There is no question that the foundations for a new world order have long been laid. While the surviving architects of the old-world order, namely North Americans and Western Europeans, have been stuck in it for 30 years, others, first and foremost the Chinese, have taken the reins and created “facts on the ground, as the expression has it. We may not like these facts, but we have no choice. We have to accept them as elements of an order that has been established without our intervention. If we do not, we will fail.”¹⁰

Peaceful coexistence of states is more than the absence of war and the use of force

Peaceful coexistence¹¹ is the creation, presence, and preservation of a political space in which conflicting social systems, value systems, and political systems interact without calling into question the principle in international law of sovereign equality among states with different social and political systems. Meeting all three objectives gives peaceful coexistence the character of both dynamism and stability. The prerequisites for success are the *will* for peace, understanding, mutual security and a willingness to compromise. The worst enemies are loss of trust and antagonism.

The *Helsinki Final Act* embodies these predicates. In particular, its guiding principle that the CSCE States should develop better and closer relations with each other and thus overcome confrontation stemming from the nature of earlier relations and achieve better mutual understanding proved to be of practical value. These principles and commitments were already creations of *Realpolitik*, the pragmatic ability

continued on page 7

Arne Seifert



Doctor and honorary Doctor *Arne Clemens Seifert* (born 1937 in Berlin), former ambassador, Senior Research Fellow, *WeltTrends Institute for International Politics*,

Potsdam. Studied at the *Institute of International Relations*, Moscow, specialising in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, graduated in 1963. Doctorate at the *Institut für Internationale Arbeiterbewegung* (Institute for International Labour Movement), Berlin, 1977. Honorary Doctor at the *Orient Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 2017. Positions in the Foreign Ministry of the GDR 1964–1990: Arab States Division, worked on the ground in Egypt, Jordan; Sector Head Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan; Research

Assistant to the Deputy Minister for Asia, Africa; Ambassador to the State of Kuwait 1982–1987; Head of Department 1987–1990. After 1990: OSCE Mission to Tajikistan; Central Asia Advisor at the *Centre for OSCE Research (CORE)*, *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg*, specialising in OSCE and Central Asia research – Civil Conflict Prevention, Transformation, Transformation and Development. Civil conflict prevention, transformation, political Islam, secular-Islamic relations, political processes. Recent publications include: *Dialogue and Transformation – 25 Years of OSCE and Central Asia Research*, *Nomos; Islamic Awakening in Central Asia – Specifics of Religious Radicalisation Prevention*, *OSCE Yearbook Vol. 24, 2018; Peaceful Coexistence in Our Time – The New Cold War and the Question of Peace*, *WeltTrends*, 2021.

"Peaceful coexistence of states ..."

continued from page 6

to compromise of state leaders of the two antagonistic camps, West and East, as well as nonaligned states to deal with their socio-political and value-oriented contradictions according to common rules of peaceful coexistence. Its primary pacifying goal was to guarantee collective security in Europe. The aim, spirit, message, and procedure of the *Helsinki Final Act* still offer indispensable peace policy instruments even in the rapidly developing multipolar power and conflict constellations.

Even under conditions that were hostile to the system, the *state leaders* of both camps, socialist and capitalist, succeeded in mastering and "cultivating" their socio-political antagonism, including their respective global ambitions to political and revolutionary supremacy.

"Peaceful coexistence in the long term requires institutional precautions and reassurances. But it also requires corresponding *mentalities*." [Emphasis A.S.] This is how the German political scientist and peace researcher *Dieter Senghaas* formulated his findings from his research on "peaceful coexistence" and on overcoming the Cold War and the East-West confrontation from 1945 to 1990. In a "look back to the future"¹², he was concerned with "preventing a conflict constellation of a comparable nature or even in cushioned forms of an antagonistic constellation between regional powers from developing again in the future". According to Senghaas's historical perception, this is not at all far-fetched, as the East-West conflict constellation was, from a global historical perspective, of unprecedented intensity in terms of ideological system antagonism and the "incomparably monstrous incisive events" and "potential for destruction". "There is still much to be learned from this past acute global political constellation."

What Senghaas considered to be "unprecedented" is now overtaking the present. This is the tragedy of our time. At present, the powers that decisively determine the international situation are in a confrontation that is degenerating into war. As recently as 1988, *Mikhail Gorbachev* saw the European security perspective in the "creation of a security and confidence structure that stands above the blocs". By contrast, in 1991 US President *George H. W. Bush* interpreted the peaceful end of the Cold War as opening the way for a change in strategy towards a unipolar world order – an order in which the US shapes the rest of the world instead of reacting to it.¹³

All in all, the question of peace is no longer the question of all questions internationally. But the narrative of "peaceful coexistence" as a European model of

peace and détente remains more than indispensable. The Helsinki model also proved successful in the turbulent political European environment of the Cold War. The 35 European states and heads of state, including top German politicians, considered it opportune even in difficult times.

The "subjective factor" in the form of the "role of personality in history" has moved and continues to move to a causal primary position with serious consequences insofar as it largely eradicates "peaceful coexistence" and its peace-making content in terms of foreign policy. The most common arguments for this are that their time value has expired in view of comparatively changed international conditions and that they are therefore "obsolete".

Federal Republic of Germany's reason for détente – the 'common European home'

"I have agreed with General Secretary Gorbachev on building blocks for a common European home!"
(Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl)

Consequently, there was once a generation of political thinkers, primarily Western European leaders, including social democrats, who, under nuclear threat pressure, concentrated on common security and détente during the Helsinki period. Expectations of peaceful economic relations between the states in the West and East also had their place. It still acted "on the premise of the personal and collective memory of war" to "prevent the outbreak of the next war". "In Germany, this was still the generation of *Willy Brandt*, *Helmut Kohl*, and *Erich Honecker*".¹⁴

The primary and personal motivation of the heads of state at the time was to prevent a nuclear escalation between the two antagonistic socio-political systems. The clarity and totality of this threat, the fact that it was a question of peaceful continued existence or the common downfall of humanity in a nuclear war, gave rise to the realisation that conflict potentials with a tendency towards nuclear war could no longer be controlled in the conventional way – through military superiority, military victory, defeat or subjugation of one of the two sides. Instead, the threat had to be eliminated in such a way that armed warfare was ruled out as a solution to conflict.

It is worth noting that the Federal Republic was still guided by a number of co-existential principles when it came to constructing the external prerequisites and conditions for the merger of the two German states.

This initially applied to Gorbachev's plan (1987) of a "common European home", in which the Soviet Union, the FRG, and the GDR were to coexist peacefully alongside other European states.

Of more fundamental importance, however, were considerations on shaping a common European security order after the end of the East-West conflict, its institutionalisation and consolidation in and through the CSCE. Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister *Hans-Dietrich Genscher* understood this to mean the cooperative coexistence of states and their regulative principles. In his speech to the Bundestag on 28 November 1990, Kohl declared a "10-point program for overcoming the division of Germany and Europe" and that he had agreed with "General Secretary Gorbachev on the building blocks for a common European home". He mentioned the following points as examples:

- "Full respect for the integrity and security of every state;
- "Every state has the right to choose freely its own political and social system;
- "Full respect for the principles and norms of international law, especially respect for the right of national self-determination;
- "The realisation of human rights;
- "Respect for, and cultivation of, the historically rooted cultures of the nations of Europe".¹⁵

He emphasised point 8 on his 10-point list: "The CSCE process is at the heart of this pan-European architecture. We want to drive it forward and make use of the upcoming forums".

Foreign Minister Genscher declared in the 226th session of the German Bundestag, on 20 September 1990: "With our participation, the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe* is gradually developing into a structure of European cooperation, security and stability".¹⁶

Leading figures in the SPD also supported the Helsinki way, *Egon Bahr* in particular. At the *Hamburg Institute for Peace and Conflict Research*, which he headed, he developed alternative ideas for a collective European security system. His concept for the period after the end of the Cold War was guided by the idea of a common "space between Lisbon and Vladivostok as a security-political unit". Europe had "the chance to organise the security of its states in such a way that wars between them become impossible".¹⁷ In the "Basic Outlines of a Collective Security System", Bahr was concerned with "creating pan-European bodies in the security sector that include Russia. Whether this country will develop democracy and a market economy in ten or fifteen years, whether it wants to or can do so at all, measured by Western European standards, is open, inevitably uncertain; but to wait for Russia's stability before security is organised would be a mistake of the century".¹⁸

Struggling for peaceful coexistence in the war of values

by Arne C. Seifert

The principal responsibility of Western leaders is not to attempt to reshape other civilizations in the image of the West [...].

(Samuel Huntington)

Which aspects of conflict would be pragmatic and bridgeable? The author deliberately picks out one of the many areas and issues of conflict that needs to be resolved: Conflict of values and war of values.

An Arab Gulf politician warned: "It is time to talk to each other in concrete terms. This applies above all to the issue of "values". Please do not underestimate our values, religion and culture. We expect you to respect and appreciate our culture. That is the core of our relationship. Governments come and go. Culture, religion and values remain. Without an understanding of these, there will be no sustainable, resilient partnership between us. I recommend that you do not forget this: We also have other partners. The world is open to us. We are not dependent on you. If we do not succeed in agreeing on acceptable principles for a common respectful relationship to values and cultures, then we will have no basis for our relations and mutual trust."¹

Recognising the plurality of socio-political, regulatory and value-based systems in our world provides information about the way in which differences in systems of governance are perceived and the political intentions behind them. Ultimately, it also depends on which international steering instruments states choose to use – hegemonic and confrontational or coexistent, conflict-preventing and peace-oriented.

In particular, the West's intention to expand its normative and fundamental worldview to become the internationally dominant one after the end of the East-West conflict has made dealing with the diversity of socio-political, regulatory and value-based systems one of the most complicated areas of conflict in world politics. Its militarisation through wars and interventions for the purpose of 'regime change' has turned it into a question of "war or peace".

Apostrophised as "democratic peace", the Western side made no secret of its intentions immediately after the end of the East-West conflict. As early as 1990, it was clear to them that they would use the CSCE mechanisms to incorporate their eastern member states into the constitutional frame-

work of their political systems. It consequently committed all eastern CSCE states in the *Charter of Paris* to "build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the *only* form of government".² In his "Memoirs", Hans-Dietrich Genscher wrote: "The *Charter of Paris* [created] a foundation for all the basic values and principles of a liberal social order."³ [Emphasis added A.S.].

It was also Genscher who insisted at the CSCE conference in Moscow in September 1991 that external interventions were permissible to enforce the "human dimension, which is synonymous with democracy, the rule of law and human rights" [emphasis added A.S.]. In his "Memoirs" he states: "At this Moscow Conference, a few weeks after the Moscow coup in the summer of 1991, the Soviet Union [the then President Yeltsin. – A.S.] joined my initiative to enshrine in the CSCE framework the non-recognition of unconstitutional changes of power and also to decide that the demand for respect for human rights was not subject to the prohibition of interference in internal affairs." (Genscher, p. 321)

Against this backdrop, in the context of the "war on terror", "democratic peace", "democratic intervention" and the "human dimension", the "West" created an international legal framework with the "Responsibility to Protect", which supported its intervention policy and undermined central provisions of the *United Nations Charter* to guarantee international security and peace, such as the sovereign equality of states.

The principle of the *Helsinki Final Act*, according to which "by virtue of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, all peoples always have the right, in full freedom, to determine, when and as they wish, their internal and external political status, without external interference, and to pursue as they wish their political, economic, social and cultural development", was completely rejected (until the present day).⁴

This Western desire for global value dominance, disguised as human rights, was incorporated into the transatlantic doctrine of the "rules-based international order". This not only became an integral part of the respective state policy, but also of NATO. "We remain the bulwark of the rules-based international order" [emphasis added A.S.], reads the "NATO 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT". Furthermore, the heads of state

and heads of government of the NATO states decided: "We will strengthen our ties with partners that share the Alliance's values and interest in upholding the rules-based international order. We will enhance dialogue and cooperation to defend that order, uphold our values and protect the systems, standards and technologies on which they depend."⁵ To this end, NATO has defined a 360-degree area of action. In other words, global.

This is a global threat without any security threat to NATO and/or its member states. "Transatlanticism" is waging a "cold war of values". What a historic threat to global peaceful coexistence.

Globally, this included around 3.2 billion people in the BRICS countries in 2021. 41 per cent of the world's population with their social values and norms, cultures, religions, etc. The BRICS states were well aware of the provocation of values by the West and NATO. At their 2024 summit in Kazan, Russia, they reacted discreetly but unequivocally: "They agreed to strengthen cooperation on issues of common interests both within the BRICS and in multilateral forums, including the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, taking into account the need to promote, protect and fulfil human rights in a non-selective, non-politicised and constructive manner and without double standards."⁶ [emphasis A.S.].

BRICS' unequivocal warning and determination to resist and face international headwinds are similar to those of the Arab politician quoted at the beginning.

¹ Archive of the author. Quote from 2024

² *Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Declaration of the Paris CSCE Meeting of Heads of State or Government, Paris, 21 November 1990, in: Ulrich Fastenrath (ed.). CSCE/OSCE. Documents of the Conference and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Cologne 2008, Chapter A.2, p. 2.*

³ Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, Siedler Verlag, Berlin, 1995, p. 319.

⁴ *Helsinki Final Act, Chapter VIII. Equal rights and self-determination of peoples*

⁵ NATO, *Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, 29 June 2022, p.1;10*

⁶ *Joint Statement by the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs/International Relations, item 49, 10 June 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37860/joint+statement+of+the+brics+ministers+of+foreign+affairs+international+relations>*

“Peaceful coexistence of states ...”

continued from page 7

Manfred Wörner, NATO secretary general at this time, developed the concept of a “future security structure for Europe” in 1990. Its task was to organise “a security partnership for the European states to overcome the rigid hostility of the Cold War years, and to progress from confrontation to cooperation”. Wörner formulated the following NATO future principles: “A Changing Alliance: from confrontation to cooperation; from a military to a political alliance; from deterrence to protection against risks and the guarantee of stability; from peace-keeping to peace-building; from a US-led alliance to a genuine partnership with the *Europeans* now playing an equal leadership role”.¹⁹

The US immediately countered these German concepts based on sovereign, independent interests. “The Atlantic alliance, it was now professed, should be concerned less about security and more about its political reach. The expansion of NATO up to the borders of Russia [...] within several hundred miles of Moscow was proposed [...] as a sensible method of “locking in” democratic gains”, said Henry Kissinger.²⁰

This counterattack came immediately and followed a Pentagon orientation that “would become the cornerstone of US foreign policy”: “[T]he US government must ‘discourage the advanced industrial nations from challenging our leadership or even aspiring to a larger regional or global role’”.²¹

Robert L. Hutchings, a member of the Bush Administration’s foreign policy team in 1989, noted in “American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War”: “Our diplomacy during this period was harnessed to securing, not German, but American interests. ‘Institutionalising’ the CSCE process was anathema to some in Washington who feared that the organisation would eventually undermine NATO”.²² Genscher’s “speech [...] underscored the danger that, left to themselves, the Germans might pay – and make others pay – an unacceptable and unnecessary price to win Soviet acceptance of unification. The US was also concerned that Genscher elsewhere assured them of Germany’s continued membership of NATO – albeit “in a more political, less military NATO”.²³

It was also consistent with the US anti-CSCE orientation that Secretary of State James A. Baker had already sounded out Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in February 1990 for their agreement to an eastern expansion of NATO. Hutchings noted that while Poland and Hungary proved to be enthusiastic supporters of NATO, it was more difficult in Prague: “President Václav Havel had carried from his days in opposition the con-



Group photo of the heads of state and government of the CSCE at the signing of the Charter of Paris on 21 November 1990 in Paris. (picture: Wikipedia)

viction that both ‘military blocs,’ NATO and the *Warsaw Pact* alike, should disband and be replaced by a new ‘pan-European peace order’ with the CSCE ... evolving into a new system of collective security.... [W]e considered it important to help him understand why the United States felt that ... the CSCE ... could not replace NATO as an agent of European security”²⁴ – This was already happening at a time when the Warsaw Treaty was still in existence.

The head of the GDR delegation to the CSCE negotiations in Helsinki and Geneva, Siegfried Bock, also recalled in “Die DDR im KSZE Prozess” (The GDR in the CSCE process) that “it was here only the US that regarded the conference more as a concession to the Soviet Union, for which they expected an equivalent from Moscow. Kissinger always spoke very distantly of this conference; of whose benefits he was not convinced”.²⁵

From today’s perspective, it must be taken into account that the intention of the German government at the time for “German unity” and the liquidation of the socialist German “foreign body”, the GDR, motivated extensive concessions to Gorbachev. Internally, there was probably a consensus that if there was to be a “common house”, then it would be only a united German house. Equally, there was no “reshaping of the European security landscape” in the years that followed. Wörner’s prudence in expanding the political functions of NATO was also not realised. The hopes on the Russian side that NATO would change its nature remained Gorbachev’s illusion. The fact that the “Trea-

ty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany” (the *Two Plus Four Treaty*), signed in Moscow on 12 September 1990, has been violated as nonexistent, especially Article 2, which stipulates that “only peace will emanate from German soil”, has a downright peace-threatening effect today.

Conclusion and experiences

“Peace policy requires the ability to peaceful coexistence. This in turn is based on the ability to accept the other society and the other state as others and to respect them.” (Erhard Crome, p. 151)

The *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) and the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* (1990) are permanently regarded as the constitutive foundations of a European peace order. At the same time, their principles form the core of an international policy of “peaceful coexistence” between states.

The Helsinki Process was by no means a theoretical “paper event”, but internationally of a highly practical and successful nature. In the early 1990s, the CSCE and its transformed successor, the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE), played an indispensable mediating role in matters of security policy and military confidence-building.

The common security code included: military restraint, all-round transparency and the assurance not to threaten each other anymore with nuclear weapons. *Predictability of the different sides* benefited above all the peace in Central Europe. *It*

continued on page 10

"Peaceful coexistence of states ..."

continued from page 9

was underpinned by a military *status quo*, a "modus vivendi construction".

The states of the transatlantic alliance gradually moved away from this modus vivendi construct and its CSCE/OSCE pillars. In the perception of the Russian leadership, this amounted to Russia being excluded from participation in decisions on pan-European security issues on the shared continent.

In retrospect, the overall construction of the modus vivendi proves to be the master key to peaceful coexistence. The CSCE process provides a blueprint for this.

Freeing relations between the European and Eurasian states from their tensions requires overcoming a current state in which the Cold War misuses state relations as its weapon. The experiences of the CSCE process provide a blueprint for this.

One, the CSCE process ran parallel to the first Cold War and thus provided a forum for equal discussion of problems. (The ultimate opposite of this is the *NATO 2030 strategy* with its "offer of compensation to Russia on its terms". In plain language: compensation is not wanted.)

Two, the primary understanding of "conflict civilisation" (Senghaas) was the prevention of war between states. This was based on the perception that it is not systemic differences per se that constitute a primary source of threat, but rather the militarisation of how these differences is dealt with. In the course of the Helsinki process, this developed into the following system of behaviour:

- The European leaders from the West and East understood how to protect their relationship between states from the real sword of Damocles which meant permanent mutual security threats, and to keep intact their personal relationship at leadership level, too.
- East and West were able to "freeze" or adjust the incalculability of security policy at a mutually harmonised level during the first Cold War. This enabled a mutual predictability of security policy. This particularly benefited a "resting of the weapons" in Central Europe, the dividing line between the pacts.
- This resulted in a *modus vivendi* between East and West based on two pillars: pillar one, the military *status quo*, pillar two, the political competition to be conducted by peaceful means.

This overall construction of a *modus vivendi* as stability of state relations, working relationship at leadership levels and keeping the military *status quo* proved to be a kind of master key to peaceful coexistence. It enabled consistent democratic behaviour of states to and with each other, especially of the major international states, but also of the regional ones.

Cold war of values – which aspects of the conflict would be pragmatic and surmountable?

One, relax European-Eurasian relations and relationship between states. A first essential step towards this would be to relieve them of the battles over values issues. This would allow considerable atmospheric improvements to be achieved in the near future. There is no objective reason why the "war of values" should not be stopped immediately. Neither the values nor the political order identity of Western societies is threatened by the East or South. The enforcement of human rights should place its focus on the preservation of the physical integrity of human beings as the most elementary prerequisite for any democratic progress. Conventions that demand and protect the physical integrity of human beings must be enforced.

Two, a diplomatic approach should realistically assess the significance and place of the values issue under contemporary multipolar and socio-culturally plural conditions. Specifically, this should begin for Russia and the common Eurasian space. Modalities should be developed for dealing with the conflict of values, which enable co-operative state relations. The problem of values should be removed from any military policy context, such as NATO.

Three, compliance with the principles of the "Helsinki Final Act" and the "Charter of Paris". Within the framework of the OSCE, its signatory states should recommit to upholding its principles and basic rules. These states signed the Final Act, are familiar with its contents and agreed to its validity even after the end of the first Cold War as part of a European peace order. In reality, this order was shattered by the new conflicts between states that arose after the end of the East-West conflict and the first Cold War. The Final Act should retain its validity as a normative frame of reference.

Four, the OSCE should assume a leading role in the modernisation of peaceful coexistence of its member states in the Euro-Asian region. It is the most effectively equipped regional organisation for this purpose, with proven state relations and mechanisms, mutual knowledge of political positions and constitutive principles and rules recognised by all member states. However, since the *Charter of Paris*, this area has also experienced a remarkable pluralisation of interests, values and political systems, the dynamics of which have not been followed by the dogmatised value paradigm being point of reference for its Western members. The OSCE still has the prerequisites to be a "laboratory" for constructing a Eurasian modern dynamic understanding of peaceful coexistence.

Peaceful coexistence remains the last resort and ground-breaking way out of the ruinous crisis in which the relation-

ship between EU Europe and its Eurasian continental context finds itself.

¹ https://www.osce.org/files/f/ documents/6/e/39501_1.pdf

² This limitation related only to the right to sign.

³ This section of text was penned by Peter Steglich, a former East German ambassador. Starting with preparations for the Helsinki Conference and the drafting of the Final Act, Mr Steglich accompanied the subsequent Helsinki process throughout: 1977–1990 as Deputy Head of the Main Department for Policy Issues and Planning in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the GDR. During this period, he headed the GDR delegation to the CSCE follow-up meetings in Madrid (1980–1983) and Vienna (1986–1989) as well as other CSCE conferences in Bonn, Hamburg and Paris.

⁴ Henry Kissinger. *World Order*, Penguin Random House, 2014

⁵ Hans Köchler. *Demokratie und Neue Weltordnung*, Universität Innsbruck, VIII, 1992, S. 10 (translated from the German)

⁶ *The United States global leadership role*, Congressional Bills 117 the Congress 2021/2022, [From the U.S. Government Publishing Office], [S. 1169 Reported in Senate (RS)], *STATEMENT OF POLICY, BILLS-117hr3524ih.pdf* (congress.gov) (1)

⁷ Joint statement of the BRICS ministers of foreign affairs/international relations, 10 June 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dlt/37860/joint+statement+of+the+brics+ministers+of+foreign+affairsinternational+relations>

⁸ <https://crsreports.congress.gov>

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Gregor Schöllgen, Gerhard Schröder, *Letzte Chance. Warum wir jetzt eine neue Weltordnung brauchen*, (Last chance. Why we need a new world order now), Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2021

¹¹ This is close to the international category of "collective security", which means the rejection of any aggressive behavior within the sphere of influence of participating states. (Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Random House, 2014)

¹² Dieter Senghaas. *Weltordnung in einer zerklüfteten Welt* (World order in a fractured world), Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012, p. 75.

¹³ Uri Friedman, The "attraction of American society ... is today less clear", *Centre for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS*, Washington, September 13, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/09/america-losing-power-and-influence-and-most-adapt-warns-un-secretary-general/151242/>

¹⁴ Erhard Crome. *Die ungeliebte Alternative, Rückbesinnung auf friedliche Koexistenz für eine zeitgemäße internationale Politik* (The unpopular alternative: a return to peaceful coexistence for a contemporary international policy), Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2021, p.145.

¹⁵ *Ten-point programme for overcoming the division of Germany and Europe*, speech by the Federal Chancellor to the German Bundestag on 28 November 1990, <https://webarchiv.bundestag.de/archive/2006/0706/geschichte/parlhist/dokumente/dok09.html>

¹⁶ *Bulletin of the Federal Government* No. 113/p. 1187 of 21 September 1990

¹⁷ Egon Bahr. *Zu meiner Zeit* (In My Time), Karl Blessing Verlag, Munich, 1996, p. 166

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 566

¹⁹ *The Atlantic Alliance and European Security in the 1990s*, Address by Secretary General

²⁰ Kissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 106

²¹ Jeremy Rifkin. *The European Dream: The Vision of a Quiet Superpower*, Polity Press, 2004

²² Robert L. Hutchings. *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War*, John Hopkins, 1999

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 176

²⁵ Siegfried Bock. *Die DDR im KSZE-Prozess* (The GDR in the CSCE Process); in: Siegfried Bock, Ingrid Muth, Hermann Schwiesau. *DDR-Außenpolitik im Rückspiegel* (GDR Foreign Policy in Retrospect), LIT Verlag, Münster, 2004, p. 105

(Translation Current Concerns)

Then there is only one thing to do ...

Necessary responses to more 'war preparation' and less democracy

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

A few weeks before his death in November 1947, German author and playwright *Wolfgang Borchert* wrote his now famous text "Then there is only one thing to do!". In the form of a manifesto, he appealed to his fellow human beings all over the world (and especially in Germany) to refuse to participate in future wars ("Say NO!"). He sensed that politics and governments cannot be trusted and that citizens must be highly vigilant – and must not forget.

"Then there is only one thing to do!" was something I read and discussed with my students in German lessons during my active teaching career. For many of my generation – born in the decade after the Second World War – another war with German involvement was unimaginable. But we also knew that peace is not granted, not even after 1945. In those decades, Borchert was a German author who was favoured by many teachers. His independent thinking, his youthful temperament, his resistance to the dictatorship and the National Socialist war, his easily understandable, empathetic and always humane poetry, which took up challenging everyday situations, *always against war*, invited young people in particular to identify with him.

Tempi passati?

Unfortunately, looking at our politics, the answer is clear. Yes, Germany's policy, like that of most other European NATO states, has strayed far from the path of peace. Yes, and it is particularly shameful that German politics, which after 1945 should have had a special responsibility for peace and international understanding, wants to take the lead among the European warmongers.

What began with the previous governments is set to reach top speed with the new German government to be formed in May. Germany wants to be a great power, its opponents have been identified and are to be fought "resolutely", "with self-confidence" and "strength" all over the world. The passages in the coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD on foreign and war policy are clear: *We* are the good guys, endeavouring to "preserve peace in freedom and security". *We* "want to be able to defend ourselves so that we don't have to". The bad guys are primarily the Russians. They are "the greatest and most direct threat to us", are already waging a "brutal war of aggression in violation of international law" and the country's president has one thing above all: a "thirst for power" that is "directed against the rules-based international order".

Warning and threat by Ms. Kallas are disrespectful and I strongly object to them

by Robert Fico

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, *Kaja Kallas*, is warning EU leaders against participating in the May celebrations of Victory Day in Moscow. She claims that such participation will not be taken lightly.

I will go to Moscow on 9 May. Is Ms. Kallas's warning a form of blackmail or a signal that I will be punished upon my return from Moscow? I don't know. But I do know that the year is 2025, not 1939.

Ms. Kallas's warning confirms that we need a discussion within the EU about the essence of democracy. About what happened in Romania and France in connection with presidential elections, about the "Maidans" organized by the West in Georgia and Serbia, and how the abuse of criminal law against the opposition in Slovakia has been ignored.

Ms. Kallas, I would like to inform you that I am the legitimate Prime Minister of Slovakia – a sovereign country. No one can dictate to me where I can or cannot travel. I will go to Moscow to pay tribute to the thousands of Red Army soldiers who died liberating Slovakia, as well as to the millions of other victims of Nazi terror. Just as I have paid tribute to the victims of the Normandy landings, or those in the Pacific, or as I plan to honour the *Royal Air Force* pilots. And let me remind you that I am one of the few in the EU who consistently speaks about the need for peace in Ukraine and does not support the continuation of this senseless war.

Ms. Kallas's words are disrespectful and I strongly object to them.

Source: *Quelle: <https://x.com/RobertFicoSVK/status/1912168829272142161> of 15 April 2025*

Regarding the war in Ukraine, it says: "We will provide Ukraine with comprehensive support so that it can effectively defend itself against the Russian aggressor and assert itself in negotiations [...] from a position of strength and on an equal footing [...]". The whole narrative doesn't add up. What remains is the threat of escalation against Russia.

Friedrich Merz has explained what he actually means by this. The Crimean Bridge, connecting the Russian mainland with Crimea, is to be destroyed with German missiles ("Taurus"), which must be guided by German soldiers. The fact that Russia will not simply put up with this is being ignored. Ignorance of reality and many phrases that we know from our media. We are amazed of the utter simplicity meant to mobilise us.

At the same time, however, our politicians must also be worried that citizens are perhaps not as simple-minded as the political slogans. Warmongering goes hand in hand with the dismantling of democracy. Democracy can be dangerous – for politicians and those in power.

Freedom of opinion is essential for a democracy. That is why the coalition agreement has a special section entitled "Dealing with disinformation" – just before the chapter on war training. "Disinformation" is the political newspeak word (*George Orwell*, "1984") for expressions of opinion against simplicity. In the new-

speak of the coalition agreement, this means: "Targeted influence on elections and now everyday disinformation and 'fake news' are serious threats to our democracy, its institutions and social cohesion. The deliberate dissemination of false factual claims is not covered by freedom of opinion. That is why the non-governmental media regulator, while safeguarding freedom of opinion, must be able to take action against information manipulation as well as hate and agitation on the basis of clear legal guidelines."

Who, we ask, will be allowed to influence elections in future? Who decides what constitutes disinformation, "fake news" and false factual claims? What are hate and agitation? And where does Article 5 of the German Grundgesetz (freedom of opinion) state that expressions of opinion with false factual claims are prohibited? One could also correct them convincingly! And who is the non-governmental media regulator, and why and from whom does this non-governmental media regulator receive the executive authorisation to act? And what does this have to do with freedom of opinion?

And what about us citizens?

There is probably no general formula. In 2008, US political scientist *Sheldon Wolin* published a book on US politics after 11 September 2001 entitled "Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the

continued on page 12

“Then there is only one ...”

continued from page 11

Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism”. The thesis of this book is that the USA has become a “managed” illiberal sham democracy dominated by large corporations since 11 September. This “inverted totalitarianism” has totalitarian traits, albeit not openly, but by means of mental control of people and political actors using subtle methods of manipulation. The intention is an aggressive imperial foreign policy.

What is the situation in Europe, what is the situation in Germany? Scientists like *Rainer Mausfeld* diagnose developments similar to those in the USA. I would add from today’s perspective: The methods are becoming less and less subtle and more and more openly authoritarian. According to opinion polls in Germany, a majority of respondents say that you can no longer openly express your opinion on certain topics in Germany. And many of them actually remain silent. Or even present themselves as obedient subjects who obediently go to demonstra-

tions, obediently show “civil courage” and obediently protest.

However: They still exist – people who refuse to be intimidated: committed citizens and even responsible politicians – albeit more so in other European countries. Two current examples of this:

On 14 April, *Kaja Kallas*, the European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the European Commission, threatened governments and EU candidate countries that there would be severe consequences if they took part in the Moscow celebrations to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. The threat was aimed primarily at Serbian President *Vučić*, who had announced his intention to attend. Two days later, Slovakian Prime Minister *Robert Fico* spoke out and criticised Kallas in no uncertain terms (see box above). He himself would, of course, travel to Moscow.

For a few weeks now, a group led by German political scientist *Ulrike Guérot* has been preparing a Europe-wide peace campaign for 9 May 2025. More

information can be found on the website <https://europeanpeaceproject.eu/>. Citizens from all European countries are invited and called upon to speak out in favour of a European peace policy and against the current war policy by publicly reading out a manifesto, from the window of their home or house, alone or together with others in a public square (see box below).

Back to the beginning. The fact that we teachers read and discussed texts by Wolfgang Borchert with our pupils was also an expression of our constitutional mandate: to help our pupils become peaceful and democratic fellow citizens ... and not mercenaries and obedient subjects fit for war. As teachers, we had sworn an oath to our constitution, not to the prevailing politics ... and not to constitutional amendments such as those in March 2025, which threaten to undermine the core of the original constitution. So, the question is: What will we do when the prevailing policy moves further and further away from the constitutional mandate? •

European Peace Project – The Manifest

Today, on May 9, 2025 – exactly 80 years after the end of the Second World War, which cost the lives of 60 million people, including 27 million Soviet citizens – we, the citizens of Europe, raise our voices! We are ashamed of our governments and the EU, which have not learned the lessons of the 20th century. The EU, once conceived as a peace project, has been perverted and has thus betrayed the essence of Europe! We, the citizens of Europe, are therefore taking our destiny and our history into our own hands today, on May 9. We declare the EU a failure. We start with citizen diplomacy and refuse the planned war against Russia! We recognize the co-responsibility of the “West”, the European governments and the EU in this conflict.

We, the citizens of Europe, together with the *European Peace Project*, oppose the shameless hypocrisy and lies that are being spread today – on Europe Day – at official ceremonies and on public broadcasters.

We are reaching out to the citizens of Ukraine and Russia. You are part of the European family and we are convinced that together we can organize peaceful coexistence on our continent.

We have the images of the military cemeteries before our eyes – from Volgograd to Riga to Lorraine. We see the fresh graves left behind by this senseless war in Ukraine and Russia. While most EU governments and those responsible for the war are rushing and suppressing what war means for the population, we have learned the lesson of the last century: Europe means “Never again war!”



We remember the European reconstruction achievements of the last century and the promises made in 1989 after the peaceful revolution. We call for a European-Russian Youth Exchange, modelled alike the French-German Youth Office of 1963, which ended the “hereditary enmity” between Germany and France. We demand an end to sanctions and the reconstruction of the Nord Stream II pipeline. We refuse to waste our tax money on armaments and militarization at the expense of social standards and infrastructure. Within the framework of an OSCE peace conference, we call for the creation of a European security architecture with and not against Russia, as laid down in the 1990 *Charter of Paris*. We call for a neutral Europe, emancipated from the USA, which

takes on a mediating role in a multipolar world. Our Europe is post-colonial and post-imperial.

We, the citizens of Europe, hereby declare this war to be over! We will not take part in the war games. We will not turn our men and sons into soldiers, our daughters into nurses in military hospitals and our countries into battlefields.

We offer to immediately send a delegation of European citizens to Kiev and Moscow to start a dialog. We will no longer stand by and watch our future and that of our children being sacrificed on the altar of power politics.

Long live Europe, long live peace, long live freedom.

Source: <https://europeanpeaceproject.eu/manifest-engels/>

“War without end”

30 April 2025 – Vietnam 50 years after the end of the war

by Eliane Perret

30 April 1975 – a date that has little meaning for many people in our part of the world. For the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, it was a day of hope and a brief turning point in decades of suffering: It was the official end of the Second Indochina War, which lasted from 1955 to 30 April 1975.¹ But for the people of Vietnam, the suffering continued even after 1975, and it continues to this day.

The Journalist Peter Jaeggi and the photographer Roland Schmid, who have been in Vietnam repeatedly since 1999, have turned against this forgetting. They documented the consequences of the massive use of *Agent Orange* and other highly toxic herbicides but also poisonous gases.

Their work is currently being shown in a photo exhibition (with the telling title “War without end”) at the *Photobastei Zurich*. On 17 walls, it deals with various areas in which the lives of people in Vietnam (and also Laos and Cambodia) have been severely affected since the end of the war. The exhibition is complemented by Peter Jaeggi’s highly informative and readable book “Krieg ohne Ende. Chemiewaffen im Vietnamkrieg” (War without end. – Chemical weapons in the Vietnam War).²

The second Vietnam War – on the backs of the civilian population

When the second Vietnam War came to an end in 1975, two decades had passed. Officially, North Vietnam (and the *Viet Cong* or the *National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam NLF*, founded in December 1960) and South Vietnam, supported by the USA, had faced each other. The communist-ruled North Vietnam and the military dictatorship in South Vietnam were the two parts into which the country was provisionally divided along the 17th latitude at the *Geneva Indochina Conference* in 1954. Free elections were planned for 1956, but were rejected by South Vietnam (with the support of the USA).

In 1961, under President *John F. Kennedy*, the United States began to increase its involvement. The first military advisers were sent to Vietnam. In August of the same year, the US Army was authorised to use herbicides. The official government explanation was that the defoliant, which contained highly toxic *dioxin*, was intended to destroy the enemy’s camouflage and food sources. “We’re going to blow the damn country to hell,” President *Nixon* declared in 1971. This had already begun under the presidency of *Lyndon B. Johnson* (1963–1969). Richard M. Nixon



Tran Duc Nghia, then 33 years old, paralysed, mute, completely immobile. Together with his aunt, who supports the family in their difficult 24-hour task. He deceased in 2016. (picture Roland Schmid)

(1969–1974) escalated the conflict until 1971. The USA temporarily supported the South Vietnamese government with more than 16,000 military advisers. After the Tonkin incident, which later turned out to be a deception, the US intervened directly in the war in August 1964. At the height of the war, more than 500,000 US soldiers were fighting in Vietnam. Widespread herbicide spraying began in 1965 – despite knowledge of the dangers of the herbicide manufactured by *Dow Chemical*, which was used as a chemical weapon!

In 1973, *Henry A. Kissinger*, who had played a central role in US foreign policy during the Vietnam War, and *Le Duc Tho*, the head of the North Vietnamese military operations, finally met in Paris for peace negotiations. They were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize this year. *Le Duc Tho* rejected it because there was still no peace. The war continued for another two years and ended with the first military defeat of the United States of America.³ Once again, it was a proxy war between East and West. It was fought on the backs of the civilian population on foreign territory and left millions of dead in a country smaller than Germany, which was littered with around 26 million bomb craters at the end of the war.

Agent Orange – the everlasting poison

“Wars don’t end when the bombs stop falling and the fighting stops. The destruction lasts much longer, in the landscape as well as in people’s memories and bod-

ies.”⁴ In today’s tourist destination Vietnam, the terrible consequences of the war are not obvious – even though fifty years after the end of the war hundreds of thousands of people in this country are suffering as a result – because the families affected hardly show their faces in public. At least eighty million litres of toxic herbicides, mainly *Agent Orange* (the military name for the poison), were sprayed by the US armed forces and their allies between 1961 and 1971 from aircraft, boats or containers carried on their backs over South Vietnam and across the border over Laos and partly Cambodia. During its production by *Monsanto* (now *Bayer*), *Dow Chemical* and around thirty other companies, the chlorine-containing toxic substance TCDD (*tetrachloride benzo dioxin*) was created due to excessively high temperatures – production was to be accelerated. It is considered one of the most toxic chemicals and later became notorious as the *Seveso poison*. They knew that *Agent Orange* was dangerous, but played it down. The soldiers were told that it was an anti-mosquito agent. In 1966, 5,000 scientists, including 17 Nobel Prize winners and 129 members of the *National Academy of Science*, petitioned against this gross deception and demanded an immediate end to the use of herbicides in Vietnam. “The continued extensive use of chemicals and gas in Vietnam sets a dangerous precedent,” they rightly warned. The letter was ignored by

continued on page 14

“War without end”

continued from page 13

the government, and the war continued for nine years. Today, the US government recognises dozens of physical and psychological injuries caused by this poison.⁵

Two different standards – two different kinds of people?

American soldiers suffering from one of the many recognised illnesses receive support. It is difficult to establish a direct causal link between disease patterns and exposure to *Agent Orange*, but it is obvious. The *dioxin* it contains can damage genetic material over generations. US veterans therefore only have to prove that they were in places where the poison was used.

It is different for the Vietnamese *dioxin* victims. The Vietnamese Red Cross estimates that one million people are still suffering from the effects of *Agent Orange* in their country today. VAVA, the *Vietnamese Association for Agent Orange and Dioxin Victims*, estimates that around 4.8 million people came into contact with the highly toxic herbicide. Today, children are being born with birth defects even in the fourth generation. However, the American government denies a connection between the poison gas and the illnesses of the Vietnamese victims. Proof of this must be provided by the sufferers themselves. The reason given for this approach is that the herbicide was used to protect the American soldiers and that they did not realise at the time how dangerous *Agent Orange* and other herbicides were for people and nature ...

Decontamination campaigns and mine victims

One of the largest decontamination operations in history is currently underway in South Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of *dioxin*-containing soil are being decontaminated at the Bien Hoa airbase, once an *Agent Orange* transshipment

point. More than a fifth of all *Agent Orange* victims in the area are considered to be severely disabled. The *dioxin* is to be eliminated by heating it to 300–350 degrees. However, the German environmental scientist *Lorenz Adrian*, professor at the *Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research* in Leipzig, clearly questions whether this method works. *Dioxin* only burns into its components at 1200 degrees, otherwise it would even cause new *dioxins* to form, he writes.

In addition to *Agent Orange* mines, the dangerous legacy of the US-Vietnam War includes hundreds of thousands of unexploded ordnances, especially in the central Vietnamese province of Quang Tri, where a temporary border once divided Vietnam. Farmers in this agriculturally utilised area can only use their land at great risk. Today, landmines and other unexploded ordnance are removed in the *Project Renew*, and children have to learn to recognise them. However, it is estimated that over 100,000 people have been injured or killed by landmines or other unexploded ordnance since 1975. There are hundreds of new victims every year (also in Cambodia and Laos). Then there are the napalm victims, provided they survived the severe third-degree burns. The USA dropped almost 100,000 tonnes of the chemical warfare agent on Vietnam.

‘Sometimes I am so tired’

During their work in Vietnam, Peter Jaeggi and Roland Schmid got to know many people whose fates were shaped by the long war. We get to know some of them in the exhibition and in the book mentioned above. They live away from the tourist stream in poor conditions. For example, *Hoang The*, who lives in the dark and damp rooms of a run-down house with a corrugated iron roof in a swampy outlying neighbourhood of Da Nang, together with her two grown-up children. Both children are severely physically and mentally handicapped and both are *dioxin vic-*

tims. Daughter *Tran Thi Nga* can barely get around with a kind of rickety rollator. Their son *Tran Duc Nghia* lies bent, completely motionless and paralysed. He has not been able to get out of bed for almost two decades. He has also lost his hearing and speech. His father often came into contact with the highly toxic *Agent Orange* during the war as a member of the resistance. He died in 2002. Jaeggi and Schmid met the mother again seven years later in 2022. She is now 84 years old. Her severely disabled son died in 2016 at the age of 42. The musty house was demolished. Her son from her second marriage built a beautiful new home for himself, his mother and her disabled daughter. But the task of caring for her severely disabled daughter remains. “Sometimes I’m so tired – I just want to die. But there is my daughter ...” The war never ended for Hoang The.⁶

It was just a spray mist

Not even for *Tran To Nga*, born in 1942, who was also a former resistance fighter and later an *Agent Orange* victim. Her first child, a girl, had breathing problems and purple discoloured skin just a few months after birth. She died of a heart defect at 17 months. An operation could have saved her – but was not possible in the jungle. The second child, another girl, had a spinal deformity, the same incurable blood disorder as her mother and breathing problems. The reason for this was the *dioxin* contained in the genetic material, which can lead to deformities, as was later the case with the second daughter’s children. Despite her difficult fate, *Tran To Nga* remained a courageous fighter. She sued fourteen chemical companies that had produced the highly toxic defoliant. In May 2021, the six-year trial ended in the Evry district court near Paris. During this time, the Vietnamese-French woman had to endure insults and verbal abuse from the chemical companies’ lawyers.

continued on page 15

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“War without end”

continued from page 14

She was told that her Agent Orange stories were lies: “The woman said that the spray from the aeroplane that I fell into at the time didn’t even hit the ground, that the droplets were so tiny that they didn’t even reach the ground,” Tran To Nga quotes a lawyer for the opposing party.

The court case ended with a scandalous judgement. After all these years, the court declared that it had no jurisdiction and dismissed Tran To Nga’s lawsuit. She appealed, but in 2024 the 2021 judgement was upheld and the companies were granted immunity. At the end of the trial, she was asked by the court president whether she would like to speak again. But this did not happen. The lawyer for an American chemical company jumped up. “Madame Nga has spoken enough,” he said, although she had mostly remained silent. “To me, this reaction was evidence of fear. He was afraid of the older woman standing there all alone in court,” the courageous woman categorised this belittlement.⁷

The other America

Many American soldiers who returned from Vietnam were severely affected in their attitude to life. They suffered from depression, had sleepless nights and were unable to find their way back to an orderly life. Others, each in their own way, endeavoured to make amends for what they had done as soldiers in Vietnam. One of them was *George Mizo*, who had enthusiastically joined the Vietnam War. Having narrowly escaped death himself, he

became a prominent peace campaigner and, together with his wife and former enemies in Vietnam, built an entire village for war victims – *Làng Hữu Nghị*, the Village of Friendship.⁸ Shortly after its inauguration, he died from the long-term effects of *Agent Orange*. – *David Edward Clark* was prepared to die for his country during the Vietnam War. He wanted, as the government said, to defend the freedom of the USA. On his 17th birthday, he therefore enlisted in the *United States Marine Corps* and went to war for his country. He survived. “When I came home to the USA from the Vietnam War at the age of 21, I never wanted to go back. Never again. [...] I had simply seen too much. I didn’t want to go back. You know, I ... I had seen too many people die. I ... I had seen too many dead children,” he said in an interview with Peter Jaeggi.⁹ Today he lives with his Vietnamese wife *Ushi* in *Da Nang* in central Vietnam, not far from his former battlefield. He uses humanitarian work to counteract his war experiences. – *Chuck Searcy*, an American war veteran, joined the *Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (VVAW) and *Veterans for Peace*. After the war, he returned to Vietnam, where he now lives and works with other US veterans in the former enemy territory to alleviate the consequences of the war. He helps *Agent Orange* victims and is a co-founder of *Project Renew*, which defuses unexploded ordnance. In 2022, he said in an interview: “I believe that the war in Vietnam was wrong in almost every respect, that it almost destroyed Vietnam and caused serious damage to the USA. We should have learnt many les-

sons from that experience, and we didn’t. Since 1975 we have continued these military blunders in more than thirty countries that the US military has invaded or occupied or attacked. We have not learnt much from that experience”.¹⁰ •

- ¹ The first Indochina War lasted from 1946 to 1954, when France fought against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DPR), founded in 1945, and did not accept the independence of Vietnam proclaimed by *Ho Chi Minh*, which signalled the end of French colonial rule.
- ² The following account is mainly based on the exhibition guide, the media dossier for the exhibition and the book by Peter Jaeggi, *Krieg ohne Ende. Chemiewaffen im Vietnamkrieg – Agent Orange und andere Kriegsverbrechen* (War without end. Chemical weapons in the Vietnam War – Agent Orange and other war crimes). Basel: Lenos-Press 2024. 408 pages with more than 100 photos and graphics. Unspecified quotations are also taken from these sources.
- ³ For a detailed chronology of the events of the war, see Jaeggi, p. 215f.
- ⁴ Stockholm Declaration on the long-term consequences of the war in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, July 2002.
- ⁵ Jaeggi, p. 36ff.
- ⁶ Jaeggi, p. 24
- ⁷ Jaeggi, p. 164ff.
- ⁸ <https://dorf-der-freundschaft.de/>
- ⁹ Jaeggi, p. 290
- ¹⁰ Jaeggi, p. 301

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box 247 CH-9602 Bazenhaid

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:

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Account: PostFinance:

IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4

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Peter Jaeggi and Roland Schmid

ep. Peter Jaeggi is a freelance Swiss journalist, photographer and author of books and films. He is at the beginning of his *Agent Orange* work, to which he invited the photographer *Roland Schmid* in 1999. After making several Vietnam research trips, he published three books on this subject and realised numerous expositions. For his radio programme about *Agent Orange*, he received the prestigious *Zurich Radio Award*. His works have been presented in many national and international media. *Roland Schmid* is a freelance photojournalist. He has been working together with Peter Jaeggi since 1999 and pursues his own projects with respect to social themes and the consequences of war. He received several awards among which was the *World Photo Award* in 2021. In 1999 and 2023, he won the *Swiss Press Photo Award* for his work on the aftermath of the Vietnam War.



ISBN 978-3-03925-033-2.

Available at www.agentorange-vietnam.org or in bookshops

“May the principle of humanity never fail to be the hallmark of our daily actions”

From Pope Francis' Easter message in 2025 for the blessing “urbi et orbi”

cc. In memory of Pope Francis, who passed away on Easter Monday, we are publishing an excerpt from his Easter message this year. The message was read out in his presence before the Easter blessing ‘urbi et orbi’. The Pope had entrusted this task to his master of ceremonies, Archbishop Diego Giovanni Ravelli.

“[...] What a great thirst for death, for killing, we witness each day in the many conflicts raging in different parts of our world! How much violence we see, often even within families, directed at women and children! How much contempt is stirred up at times towards the vulnerable, the marginalized, and migrants!

On this day, I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves, or who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas! For all of us are children of God!

I would like us to renew our hope that peace is possible! From the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Resurrection, where this year Easter is being celebrated by Catholics and Orthodox on the same day, may the light of peace radiate throughout the Holy Land and the entire world. I express my closeness to the sufferings of Christians in Palestine and Israel, and to all the Israeli people and the Palestinian people. The growing climate of anti-Semitism throughout the world is worrisome. Yet at the same time, I think of the people of Gaza, and its Christian community in particular, where the terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation. I appeal to the warring parties: call a ceasefire, release the hostages and come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace!

Let us pray for the Christian communities in Lebanon and in Syria, presently experiencing a delicate transition in its history. They aspire to stability and to participation in the life of their respective nations. I urge the whole Church to keep the Christians of the beloved Middle East in its thoughts and prayers.

I also think in particular of the people of Yemen, who are experiencing one of the world’s most serious and prolonged humanitarian crises because of war, and I invite all to find solutions through a constructive dialogue.

May the risen Christ grant Ukraine, devastated by war, his Easter gift of peace,



Pope Francis at his last Easter Mass. (picture Vatican Media)

and encourage all parties involved to pursue efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace.

On this festive day, let us remember the South Caucasus and pray that a final peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will soon be signed and implemented, and lead to long-awaited reconciliation in the region.

May the light of Easter inspire efforts to promote harmony in the western Balkans and sustain political leaders in their efforts to allay tensions and crises, and, together with their partner countries in the region, to reject dangerous and destabilizing actions.

May the risen Christ, our hope, grant peace and consolation to the African peoples who are victims of violence and conflict, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Sudan and South Sudan. May he sustain those suffering from the tensions in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, as well as those Christians who in many places are not able freely to profess their faith.

There can be no peace without freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of expression and respect for the views of others.

Nor is peace possible without true disarmament! The requirement that every people provide for its own defence must not turn into a race to rearmament. The light of Easter impels us to break down the barriers that create division and are fraught with grave political and economic consequences. It impels us to care for one another, to increase our mutual solidarity,

and to work for the integral development of each human person.

During this time, let us not fail to assist the people of Myanmar, plagued by long years of armed conflict, who, with courage and patience, are dealing with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Sagaing, which caused the death of thousands and great suffering for the many survivors, including orphans and the elderly. We pray for the victims and their loved ones, and we heartily thank all the generous volunteers carrying out the relief operations. The announcement of a ceasefire by various actors in the country is a sign of hope for the whole of Myanmar.

I appeal to all those in positions of political responsibility in our world not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads to isolation from others, but rather to use the resources available to help the needy, to fight hunger and to encourage initiatives that promote development. These are the “weapons” of peace: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death!

May the principle of humanity never fail to be the hallmark of our daily actions. In the face of the cruelty of conflicts that involve defenceless civilians and attack schools, hospitals and humanitarian workers, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity. [...]”

Source: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/20250420-urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html> of 20 April 2025