

# 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*

## Gaza: Severe winter conditions compound humanitarian crisis for displaced Palestinians



Flooded tent camp in the Gaza Strip. (picture ICRC)

In Gaza, extreme weather conditions and flooding are pushing Palestinians to the limit in their daily struggle to survive.

Cold temperatures, heavy rain and strong winds pose new challenges to communities who have already been displaced multiple times and now see the tents they rely on for shelter torn apart, flooded or blown away.

“Our tents are flooded, the little ones are soaked, and our bedding is drenched,” says Gaza resident *Wafaa Khodeir*. “Where am I supposed to go when my house is destroyed? I have nowhere to go.”

Recent winter storms have caused widespread flooding in low-lying areas and displacement camps. For many, the nightmare is compounded by the collapse of buildings already weakened by hostilities.

With no alternative shelter available, many displaced families have moved into structurally unsound buildings, where

downpours and high winds increase the risk of collapse, turning these spaces into life-threatening refuges rather than places of protection.

In Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis, families are living in makeshift shelters that offer little dignity, privacy or protection against the harsh weather conditions.

“Every tent is like this,” says *Nasra Abu Qainas*. “Some families had their tent broken. My son’s tent collapsed on him while he was inside. It’s unbearable.”

Across Gaza, the ICRC continues to support communities access the water, food and medical care they need.

In Khan Younis, the ICRC has been supporting authorities in the repair and

maintenance of a pumping station that will help improve sanitation for thousands of people living in tough conditions.

“This station sustained significant damage,” says engineer *Muhammad Alian Abu Shaar*.

“If the station ceases operation, as you can see, the surrounding areas are all low-lying, and will inevitably be flooded with sewage, not to mention rainwater.”

Tents are not enough to shelter Palestinians from exposure to a combination of cold, wind, rain and water-borne diseases that mark their experience of winter.

To help ensure the health and dignity of Palestinians in Gaza, the ICRC calls on Israel as the occupying power to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance.

Anything less puts lives at risk. •

### Donation

Give your help with a donation!

<https://www.icrc.org/en/donate/israel-gaza>

Source: <https://www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/1145/gaza-severe-winter-conditions-compound-humanitarian-crisis-for-displaced-palestinians> of 27 January 2026

# Iranian Resilience

by Scott Ritter\*

Back in 2023 I had the honour of meeting with former Iranian President *Ebrahim Raisi* while he was in New York for the General Assembly debate. He provided me and the others in attendance with a very frank and detailed assessment of the situation in Iran following the tragic death of *Mahsa Amini* in police custody in 2022. He described the massive internal unrest that followed as the greatest threat to the Islamic government of Iran since the revolution. He stated that foreign intelligence services had taken advantage of societal fractures and were seeking to break Iran apart. He stated that Iran had been able to defeat these outside forces, and was a stronger nation because of it.

Raisi died in a helicopter crash in May 2024. He was replaced by the current President, *Masoud Pezeshkian*. In September 2025 I was again invited to a meeting with President Pezeshkian in New York. He stated that Raisi's death had led to a division in the Iranian government about policy on how to deal with the West. He said that foreign intelligence services, led by Israel and



Scott Ritter (picture kpe)

the US, sought to exploit these divisions, and that the decapitation attack carried out by Israel with the assistance of the United States in June 2025 was designed to collapse the Iranian government and create an opportunity for anti-government forces to take control. Pezeshkian noted that these efforts failed, and that Iran emerged from the 12 Day War with Israel and the United States more united than ever.

The effort to topple the Iranian government was a major Israeli/United States objective. Both Israel and the United States have pulled out all the stops to create the current unrest in Iran. But the Iranian victory against the foreign-led opposition in 2023, combined with the unification of political purpose which emerged after the June 2025 war, has made Iran extremely resilient against outside efforts to overthrow the Islamic government.

The Iranian government is on the verge of fundamentally defeating the foreign supported opposition in Iran today. This has Israel in a panic, because they have burned

the totality of their resources in Iran in support of the current unrest. The United States as well is concerned that an Iranian government victory today will make it impossible to change the regime in Tehran. There is a real danger that the United States and Israel may launch attacks on Iran in the near future designed to weaken and discredit the Iranian government while providing military cover for the opposition forces carrying out acts of violence in Iran today.

It is highly unlikely that these attacks will succeed in their own right. They will, however, trigger an Iranian response that will disrupt oil production in the Middle East for a significant period of time.

This appears to be the goal of the *Trump* administration, and explains in large part the timing of the United States attack on Venezuela, which sought to secure Venezuelan oil in anticipation of a new energy crisis triggered by a joint US-Israeli attack on Iran. The world is looking at a deliberate attack on global energy security as a means of bringing down Iran, weakening Russia, and destabilizing BRICS.

Source: [scottritter.substack.com/p/iranian-resilience](https://scottritter.substack.com/p/iranian-resilience) of 12. February 2026

\* *Scott Ritter* is a former intelligence officer in the US Marine Corps. During his more than 20-year career, he worked in the former Soviet Union on the implementation of arms control agreements, on the staff of US General *Norman Schwarzkopf* during the 1991 Gulf War, and later as chief weapons inspector for the UN in Iraq from 1991 to 1998. Ritter was a fierce critic of the American decision to go to war against Iraq again in 2003. He is the author of 12 books. His latest book is "Highway to Hell: The Armageddon Chronicles 2015–2024" (*Clarity Press*).

## Switzerland and Iran: Only impartial parties can perform good services

*mw.* What is currently happening in Iran is mainly reported through the cloudy channels of our mainstream media. The calls on the Swiss Federal Council are correspondingly harsh, but fortunately it has stood firm so far. Headline in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 16 January 2026: "Switzerland's good offices in Iran serve as an excuse for silence." SP Switzerland: "The SP Switzerland calls on the Federal Council to fully adopt the EU sanctions against Iran [...] and to support Iranian NGOs, including financially." (*Media release* of 12 January 2026)

What you should bear in mind: For decades, Switzerland has played an important mediating role in the difficult relationship between Iran and the United States. As a protecting power, it has represented the interests of the United States in Tehran since the proclamation of the *Islamic Republic* in 1980 and the severing of

diplomatic relations by the United States (hostage crisis). At the same time, Switzerland ensures that communication between the United States and Iran remains possible. As the Swiss ambassador responsible, *Monika Schmutz Kirgöz*, said on *SRF News* on 15 January 2026, Switzerland is in constant contact with its embassy in Tehran and with the Iranian government as part of its protecting power mandate, from which it also demands answers in direct talks. In response to Iran's request for mediation, Ms Schmutz Kirgöz said: "Switzerland is available. We have the protective power mandate from the US. The channels of communication are open in both directions. We are there to mediate. And we are there to ensure indirect contact."

Only the impartial can render good services. Who, being of good will, can object to this? •

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# “Ethics of responsibility” for emancipated citizens

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

*A year ago, this newspaper published a lengthy article on Max Weber’s essay “Politics as a Vocation”.<sup>1</sup> The following text picks up on this, focussing primarily on the current state of our politics and reflections on what it means to be a responsible citizen today.*

There have been times when “political ethics” was a public issue and was also codified in legal texts. It was the years immediately following the Second World War. Examples of this are the principles of international law laid down in the *Charter of the United Nations* of 1945 and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. Article 1 of the latter states this unequivocally:

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

Ethical guidelines for post-war Europe were formulated. In the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, many provisions in the original text of the German *Grundgesetz* of 1949 were based on human rights and international law, on natural law, i.e. deeply ethical principles. This is reflected in the imperative for peace and, above all, in Article 1, Paragraph 1:

*“Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.”*

After the crimes of the Second World War, also political leaders expressed their commitment to issues of political ethics.<sup>2</sup>

## Political ethics

After the supposed end of the Cold War, such voices were heard once again. In 1991, *Bernhard Sutor*, then professor of political science at the *Catholic University of Eichstätt* and member of the *Central Committee of German Catholics*, published his standard work “Political Ethics: A Comprehensive Presentation Based on Christian Social Teaching” which was read not only in church circles. Sutor was no outsider. In 1997, he was awarded the “Cross of Merit, First Class, of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany”.

Bernhard Sutor did not base his “Political Ethics” on an idealised image of humanity but considered the fallibility of modern humans – as well as our potential for compassion and political action. Politics means shaping coexistence with-

in the state and with other states around the world here and now – under the current conditions, with the people living today and with the governments holding state power today. But with the firm will to seek realistic solutions to existing problems. Solutions that have a point of reference: a political ethic focusing on the common good – not just the good of the few, but of *all* people. This combination of realism, political modesty, small steps and yet high standards also characterised *Max Weber’s* political ethics, according to the thesis in the article published a year ago.

This article ended as follows:

“The reader may now consider how relevant *Max Weber’s* remarks, formulated more than 100 years ago, still are today. Perhaps it is worth reflecting on them in greater depth [...]. Perhaps it would be better to study *Max Weber* – consider his thoughts seriously and develop upon them. This could include, for example, taking a closer look at key concepts such as passion in politics, a sense of responsibility and a sense of proportion. What is the importance of empathising with those affected by political decisions? Is it not an indispensable part of a sense of responsibility? And what do ethics of responsibility and ethics of ultimate ends mean in today’s world? [...] Last but not least: Wouldn’t political responsibility for all citizens – as more direct democracy – be the best remedy against the demonic possession of power?”

## WEF in Davos – many sides of political fallacy

However, if we look at the actual policies and politicians in our Western countries, it seems that such issues were not addressed last year either. On the contrary, the decline of political culture in many Western countries continues. This is primarily a consequence of the war course pursued by our governments and other influential forces. What is wrong with our countries when we need to look to other regions of the world to find common ground for politics based on ethical principles? Principles that should be familiar to us, but which are increasingly being ignored in our own countries.

There are politicians who openly state that, for them, there is only one set of ethics, only one set of morals and reason: their own, very personal ones – there is no need for international law. US President *Donald Trump* is one such politician. Not better are the hypocrites who gathered in Davos a few days ago. While *Donald Trump* speaks openly about using the power he has, the hypocrites pretend that “the law” is sacred to them, as if they

were “victims” of “great power rivalries” and as if they wanted to remain steadfast and, above all, united (multilaterally) in their commitment to the “rule-based international order” in order to achieve their own strength and develop their “power”. Of course with a clear enemy: Russia, in any case, China, which is almost as bad, not to mention Iran and North Korea... and time and again, *Donald Trump*... and without admitting to their own violations of the law.

## More power for a centralised EU Europe

*Ursula von der Leyen’s* and *Friedrich Merz’s* Davos plea for an “independent” Europe – the German Chancellor hardly mentioned Germany at all – does not mean a Europe of citizens, a Europe of sovereign states. Rather, it means an EU with more power, armed to the teeth, increasingly politically centralised and economically radical in its market approach. Without democratic control and without human rights-guaranteed freedoms. There are many examples of this. See the sanctions against *Jacques Baud* and against many others. Freedom, as the Treaty of Lisbon states, means above all “freedom” in the movement of goods, capital, services, and people in the EU. *Merz* has announced that he will campaign more strongly for these “freedoms”.

*Ursula von der Leyen* followed in the footsteps of *Jean Monnet*, the spiritual father of the undemocratic, centralised, supranational entity that was first called the “European Coal and Steel Community” and is now the EU. He coined the phrase: “Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.” *Von der Leyen* said in Davos that: “geopolitical shocks can – and must – serve as an opportunity for Europe. In my view, the seismic change we are going through today is an opportunity, in fact, a necessity to build a new form of European independence. This need is neither new nor a reaction to recent events. It has been a structural imperative for far longer.” And *Merz* said: “This new world of great powers is being built on power, on strength and when it comes to it, on force. It is not a cozy place. [...] Two days ago, [Canadian Prime Minister] *Mark Carney* said in this hall from this place: ‘We must no longer rely only on the power of our values. We must also recognize the value of our power.’ I share that view. And when I look into this room, into this hall, I want to say: Most of us share it. And that is a good starting point. European Friends, if

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# Historical truth and diplomatic responsibility

## On Diplomat's Day of the Russian Federation

by Andrey Yuryevich Grosov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Austria

cc. A journalist from Austria has sent us the following text from the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Vienna. Since, according to our research ("fact check"), this is neither Russian disinformation nor Russian propaganda, but rather reports on significant events that are not usually reported in the West, we have decided to publish the text. Our readers can form their own opinion. The text is as follows:

Diplomatic Staff Day in Russia, which we celebrate annually on 10 February, is not only a professional holiday, but also an occasion to reflect on responsibility, historical memory and the role of diplomacy in times of growing political polarisation. Recent debates within the European Union about the history of the Second World War show how much historical narratives have become an instrument of current politics today.

Several high-ranking EU representatives have relativised or selectively interpreted key facts of European history in speeches and statements. In particular, the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union to diplomatic efforts to prevent the war and later to defeat National Socialism has been systematically ignored or marginalised. This tendency not only distorts historical reality, but also disrespects the memory of 26.6 million Soviet citizens who lost their lives in the fight against Nazism.

The *Red Army* played a key role in the liberation of Europe and the inmates of numerous Nazi concentration camps – from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Majdanek

and Sachsenhausen. Nevertheless, today's European memorial sites often only mention the date of liberation without mentioning the liberators. Such a practice is symbolic of a deliberate approach to history that follows political expediency.

Particularly worrying is the growing tendency in the EU to reinterpret collaborators and armed groups with proven links to National Socialism as "freedom fighters". The glorification of Ukrainian nationalists from the OUN, the SS Volunteer Division "Galicia" or the so-called "Forest Brothers" in the Baltic states, who are known for their terror against the civilian population, contradicts both the judgements of the Nuremberg Tribunal and fundamental moral standards.

Austria provides a particularly telling example. On 14 November 2025, the Republic voted for the fourth time in a row against the UN resolution "Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance". This stance seems all the more bizarre given that Austria was historically a co-perpetrator of Nazi Germany's aggression against the Soviet Union and other states. References to alleged "European solidarity" cannot justify this behaviour. At the same time, the selective approach of the Austrian authorities to manifestations of neo-Nazism raises serious questions: Ukrainian neo-Nazis regularly appear openly in Vienna, waving the black and red Bandera flag at rallies and even

marching through the city centre under police protection every year on 1 January to mark the birthday of Stepan Bandera. Although the criminal nature of the Bandera movement is historically well documented, its symbolism is not prohibited under Austrian law. This double standard undermines the credibility of European rhetoric in the fight against Nazism and neo-fascism.

Against this background, diplomacy has a special role to play. Russian diplomats today are confronted not only with political challenges, but also with attempts to reinterpret history and use it as a weapon. Their work consists of defending historical facts, promoting awareness of the true course of history, seeking dialogue and countering attempts to relativise crimes.

The consistent stance of the international community against the glorification of Nazism and neo-Nazism, as reflected in the resolutions of the UN General Assembly, shows that this concern goes far beyond bilateral interests. The fact that the majority of EU states reject such resolutions raises serious questions about how Europe deals with its own past.

On Diplomat's Day in Russia, special respect is therefore paid to those who are committed to an international order based on truth, international law and mutual respect. Preserving historical truth is not an end in itself, but a prerequisite for reconciliation, peace and a stable future in Europe and beyond.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### "Ethics of responsibility' ..."

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I may say so: Our power today rests on three pillars: our security, our competitiveness, and our unity." Therefore, "First, we must invest massively in our ability to defend ourselves. [...] In the new age of great powers, Europe must stand together resolutely and sovereignly. [...] This will only work, if we work together as ONE European Union."

### And what about us citizens?

In his lecture "Politics as a Vocation", Max Weber limited himself to politicians and the question of their ethics. He demanded – with good reason – that politicians should act in an "ethically responsible" manner: with an eye to the consequences of their actions; when dealing with power, with an awareness of its "demonic" nature; with passion, a sense of responsibility and a sense of proportion. Weber does not mention citizens as active

subjects of politics. Today, more than 100 years later, the world has changed. Little political ethics can be expected from the responsible politicians of our countries in the foreseeable future. Isn't it time to ask more broadly and clearly whether there is also an ethics of responsibility for the mature citizen – a "political ethics", a "virtue ethics" for the citizen? An ethics that is more than just pointing the moral finger at politics, and also different from pure "ethics of conviction".

What does that mean in concrete terms?

A few brushstrokes for discussion: Responsible citizens who act ethically have high ethical standards and are aware of the current state of politics. They think historically and react not with condemnation but with interest – without feeling powerless and simply accepting what they "understand". They know that politics is always linked to power – state power, financial power, media power, etc. They are aware of the dangers of abuse of power, name-

ly when state authority is directed against the law and no longer serves the common good, but rather special interests. Their view of humanity is realistic... and therefore confident. He believes that compromises are inevitable and that, as a rule, progress is only made in small steps. He searches for even the smallest points of contact, for glimmers of humanity and reason. For the smallest steps towards solving political problems – in the interests of the common good and with the high standards of political ethics as a distant horizon. He exercises his civil and human rights as much and as long as possible. And above all: He does not give up.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.zeit-fragen.ch/en/archives/2025/nr-2-21-januar-2025/politisch-verantwortliche-brauchen-leidenschaft-verantwortungsgefuehl-auge-nmass>

<sup>2</sup> cf. the many interesting articles in Bucher, Peter (ed.). *Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945–1949. Quellen zum politischen Denken der Deutschen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe. Darmstadt, Special edition 2010

# “Top secret”: Espionage and Resistance in Switzerland and Europe, 1939–1945

Jacques Baud’s well-researched exhibition at Château de Morges on Lake Geneva sheds light on issues that have received little attention to date

by Peter Küpfer

For several weeks now, Château de Morges has been hosting an exhibition that is likely to be unique worldwide. It is devoted to the activities of the international intelligence services in Switzerland during the decisive years of the Second World War. Shortly after the outbreak of the conflict, Switzerland found itself surrounded by Axis powers. Thanks, however, to its own networks and the determined expansion of its intelligence service, the country soon acquired detailed knowledge of several plans drawn up in Berlin to attack Switzerland in response to the rapidly changing overall war situation. All of these plans aimed at neutralising the Swiss Confederation – after 1940 the only remaining sovereign democracy in the heart of Europe – through a short, concentrated war of manoeuvre. Switzerland’s key geostrategic position at the centre of Europe, together with its policy

of integral neutrality, officially reaffirmed by the Federal Council at the outset of the war, had long been a source of irritation to the Nazi leadership.

Given its status as a permanently neutral state, guaranteed by internationally binding treaties and upheld by its own political will, how did Switzerland respond to this threat? The exhibition at Château de Morges explores aspects of this question that have so far received little attention. In particular, it highlights the fact that, shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, the intelligence services of one of the belligerents – the Allied powers – were permitted not only to operate on Swiss territory without interference from Swiss counter-intelligence, but were also allowed to do so with the explicit approval of the Federal Council and with cooperation that was soon formally

organised. Soon after the war began – at the latest following the defeat of France in June 1940 – no fewer than five such services were active: the British; the Polish, operating via émigré networks; the French, first from the still-unoccupied part of France and later underground; the Americans after their entry into the war, and, finally, the Soviet intelligence service, which maintained surprisingly effective contacts with concealed dissident circles in and around the German General Staff.

All this occurred despite the considerable pressure exerted on neutral Switzerland by the Third Reich over this issue. German intelligence soon became aware that Switzerland was allowing Allied intelligence services to use its territory for their operations – unofficially and in strict secrecy – and that it was exchanging information with them on a regular and organised basis. From the German perspective, this constituted a flagrant violation of Switzerland’s proclaimed policy of integral neutrality. This was compounded by the fact that Switzerland prosecuted German agents before military courts, handed down sentences and, in some cases, even carried out executions. Although this aspect is not explicitly addressed in the exhibition, it is nevertheless present in many indirect ways.

The material on display makes clear that, during the war years, Switzerland was indeed a strategically important hub for all the major Allied intelligence services. This, in turn, raises a question that has so far received little attention: To what extent did the presence of Allied intelligence services in neutral Switzerland constitute an additional determining factor in the country being spared an attack by the Wehrmacht, despite the persistently high level of military threat?

## Into the world of shadows

The intellectual originator and practical designer of this remarkable exhibition is the former Swiss colonel, *Jacques Baud*. His name has appeared repeatedly in the public sphere in recent times, albeit often in an unjustifiably defamatory and disparaging context<sup>1</sup> (see box). Yet this exhibition in particular demonstrates how seriously and cautiously, and with what rigorous dedication to facts Jacques Baud approaches controversial subjects – an approach that likewise characterises his nu-

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## Jacques Baud – his professional, objective voice is indispensable



Jacques Baud  
(picture screenshot)

*pk.* Jacques Baud, a retired Swiss colonel in the General Staff, spent many years of his professional career working for the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Intelligence Service, and later for the United Nations. He was active on many fronts, often involved in protracted and difficult peace talks, including in Asia, Africa, South America, Chechnya and Georgia. In the process, as he himself has emphasised in various recent statements, he learned to listen calmly and to form a picture of the situation – as openly as possible, step by step, based as far as possible on the facts and not on his own preconceptions.

Since his retirement, he has been closely following world politics and publishing on this subject. His books, as well as his statements on political information programmes, are fact-based

and always take into account the positions of both sides as a matter of principle. This leads to a refreshingly objective and fact-oriented presentation of the origins and course of the many flashpoints in our deeply divided world.

Around Christmas time, Jacques Baud was blacklisted by the *Council of the European Union* without official notification and on the basis of vaguely worded and verifiably false accusations. According to his own statements, this treatment is worse than that of a convict, without any court ruling.

Living in the city of Brussels, he is not allowed to leave Belgium, his bank accounts are blocked and financial support of friends is illegal. He is ostracized in his existence, his human dignity is disregarded, he is treated like an outcast in the middle age, like somebody who is excluded of society by the emperor, a leper. This for the only reason that he draws different conclusions in important problems than the Eu-policy, concerned especially the Ukraine war and the situation in Palestine. His two latest books show in detail on which facts his statements are based.

Is Jacques Baud therefore dangerous for the autocracy of Brussels? How you say it about classical tyrants the absolute ruler of Brussels let out their impotent rage against the bringer of bad news - instead of confronting themselves with the message “the battle is lost!”

### “Top secret’: Espionage ...”

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merous books and his public interventions on contemporary conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Coinciding with the exhibition on Lake Geneva, which will remain open until the end of 2026, Jacques Baud has published a richly illustrated documentary work on the same theme, entitled “Guerre de l’ombre: La Suisse au cœur de la résistance en Europe, 1939–45” (War in the Shadows: Switzerland at the heart of the resistance in Europe, 1939–45). This meticulously produced volume is currently available only in French.<sup>3</sup> The publication is jointly issued by the Canton of Vaud (Department of the Environment, Youth and Security / Division of Civil and Military Security) and the Château de Morges and its Museums (Director and Curator: *Adélaïde Zeyer*).

In the extensive photographic section, arranged thematically and presenting most of the exhibits within their historical context, visitors encounter camouflaged radio and wireless sets, encryption machines, even silenced revolvers small enough to fit into a lady’s handbag, as well as protective suits of the period designed for parachute drops over enemy territory (male or female – foreign intelligence services had a striking number of women in their ranks). These items vividly illustrate the degree to which intelligence operatives were required to risk their lives just as much as officers and soldiers on the front lines. In the Second World War – more so even than in the First – victory or defeat depended not only on major battles, but also on modern communication technologies, which were developing at a rapid pace. Whoever gained access first to decisive information enjoyed a crucial military advantage.

#### Doing justice to history, including our own

In the introduction to the aforementioned documentary, Baud writes: “Since the end of the 1990s, our view of Switzerland’s stance during the threat posed by the Second World War has been influenced by an approach that neglects Switzerland’s military and geopolitical situation at the time, placing strong emphasis on economic and financial factors in particular. However, the reality at the time was much more complex.”<sup>4</sup>

In this context, Baud specifically mentions the report by the *Bergier Commission*,<sup>5</sup> which he believes does not give sufficient weight to the massive military threat Switzerland faced. The report downplays the importance of the Swiss Army’s defensive measures under General *Henri Guisan*, who led Switzerland through the Second World War, in protecting Switzerland from the planned attacks. In contrast,



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as Baud points out, this “bible” of authors critical of Switzerland places great emphasis on what they call Switzerland’s conformist willingness to compromise with the Axis powers. In contrast to this one-sided view, Baud’s documentation, and the entire exhibition, insist on the military-strategic perspective, which some of the post-war generation of Swiss historians tend to underestimate.

Baud emphasises that Switzerland – through its own intelligence service and its soon-to-be institutionalised cooperation with the Allied secret services – had detailed knowledge of several attack plans by *Hitler’s* Germany against Switzerland, each of which had been worked out in detail and modified in response to the changing military situation. The three plans were available to them in full on copies of the originals. They can be viewed in Morges. General Guisan’s defence concept, which underwent radical changes after the fall of France and focused on the national “Réduit’s” defence system, already took the first of these plans into account. According to German plans, the Blitzkrieg-style invasion of Switzerland was to have been carried out in late-summer 1940, shortly after Guisan’s Rütli Report, in which he demanded that his senior officers actively promote the will to defend among the troops under their command.

Guisan told the senior officers gathered on the historical Rütli mountain meadow, known as “the cradle of Switzerland,” that he would not tolerate defeatism in their ranks and would “part ways” with any commanders who displayed such attitudes.<sup>6</sup> He also took the opportunity to outline the strategic reorientation of the Swiss Army’s defence concept, which was already in place in the summer of 1940 and was swiftly implemented shortly after Guisan’s report. This involved the occupation of the so-called national redoubt, the concentration of the Swiss Army’s defensive forces in the mountains, making optimum use of the natural barrier provided by the Alps.

This restructuring would have forced the highly mechanised Wehrmacht, in the event of an attack on Switzerland, to wage a protracted mountain war and thus miss its main objective, the fast north-south corridor through the Central Alps. Both the Gotthard line and the Simplon Tunnel would have been made impassable at the outbreak of hostilities by Switzerland itself through the detonation of prepared explosive charges.

The course of the war confirmed Guisan’s strategy. The German attack on Switzerland, planned in detail several times, would not have been as quick to

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### “Top secret’: Espionage ...”

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carry out as the mechanised wars of movement of the first year of the war, given the losses suffered by the Wehrmacht in the war against Great Britain (especially aircraft) and then against Russia. It would have taken too long for Germany and, moreover, would have required the deployment of massive infantry forces, which the German Wehrmacht no longer had at its disposal after the Russian counteroffensive.

Guisan’s strategic and tactical preparations in connection with the Swiss military defence concept of the national Réduit were very effective thanks to his knowledge of the German attack plans. This was based on a well-functioning Swiss intelligence service, which Guisan had pushed for. The organisational charts of the Swiss intelligence service printed in the documentation show that mutual cooperation with the Allied intelligence services operating in Switzerland was part of everyday life. Switzerland thus had detailed, immediate knowledge of all movements on the European fronts. For Baud, an internationally experienced strategy expert, this circumstance represents the main reason Germany, although willing until the end to take the Alpine fortress of Switzerland, was never able to do so, precisely because of the ingenious counterstrategy developed by Guisan’s general staff.

After Stalingrad, the 200,000 soldiers the German General Staff had calculated to be what would be required, were not enough to wage an airborne blitzkrieg against the resistance army entrenched in the Alps, with bridges and railway lines destroyed.

In this context, political scientists and specialists in international intelligence still pose a key question for those who deny that Switzerland faced an existential threat at that time: Why, if not primarily to exploit the central Swiss Alpine passes, did Germany repeatedly want to attack Switzerland throughout the Second World War, using varying strategies? According to Baud, factual information to answer this question, which has so far been given insufficient attention in public debate, both in the media and by many modern historians, can be found in Baud’s aforementioned documentary, which is concise and plausible.

The book and the exhibition give persuasive treatments of their subject, rather than assign blame and ridicule what they call the “Rütli spirit.”

### Allied intelligence services on Swiss soil: A betrayal of neutrality?

Another question arises. Was tolerating the activities of Allied intelligence services and Switzerland’s intensive cooperation

with them on Swiss territory a betrayal of neutrality? Or was this concession unavoidable to protect the population? The exhibition in Morges does not answer this question, but it does raise it in a lasting way by depicting the extensive and organised cooperation that took place.

Perhaps there is only one thing wrong with this dichotomy: the either/or. Viewed soberly, Bern’s behaviour towards the activities of the Allied intelligence services on its territory can also be explained by the fact that it was apparently the price to pay for indispensable, rapid and accurate information of its own. Throughout the war, knowledge of the exact intentions of the long-powerful conqueror on our northern border and Fascist Italy as the Reich’s ally-in-arms was the main existential question for Switzerland at the time.

This belongs once again in the notebooks of those who portray General Guisan as someone whose Réduit concept would have left the entire Swiss Plateau at the mercy of the motorised German attack columns, which is factually incorrect. German documents and the Réduit concept show that the Blitzkrieg – as calculated in “Tannenbaum,” the first German attack plan, and its two successors – would certainly not have progressed as quickly as it did towards Paris or at the beginning of the Russian campaign, given the many geographical obstacles, self-destroyed bridges and railway lines, and the blocking of the Gotthard and Simplon tunnels.

However, what was decisive for Guisan and the majority of the Federal Council in this extreme and prolonged situation was not only the strategy, but also the spirit of resistance that was supported by the vast majority of the Swiss population at the time. Together, the strategy and its spirit were at least strong enough that the Wehrmacht had to postpone its goal until it was too late.

Where are the sensible defence strategies and the will to resist the arrogance of power among our “elites” today?

<sup>1</sup> *Current Concerns* has described and condemned Baud’s scandalous treatment by the EU in several articles. See “Open Letter to Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis” and “The EU in the Abyss of Lawlessness,” both in *Current Concerns* No. 27, 30 December 2025. See also “No democracy can survive without freedom and open exchange of opinions,” “Freedom of expression and its enemies,” both in *Current Concerns* No. 1, 13 January 2026, and “Enough is enough! Thus far and no further!” In: *Current Concerns* No. 2, 27 January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> *Putin: Game Master?* (ISBN 978-2315010417) and *Operation Al-Aqsa Flood: The Defeat of the Vanquisher*, (ISBN 978-2315019861). Max Milo publishing house

<sup>3</sup> Baud, Jacques. *Guerre de l’ombre. La Suisse au cœur de la résistance en Europe*, 39–45. ISBN 978 2-88985-028-0. Cabédita, CH-1145 Bière/F-01220 Divonne-les-Bains.

<sup>4</sup> Baud, Jacques. *ibid.*, Preface, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> The *Bergier Commission* in Bern was formed by the Swiss government on 12 December 1996 in the

wake of the then-ongoing *World Jewish Congress* lawsuit against Swiss banks accused of withholding valuables belonging to Holocaust victims.

<sup>6</sup> General Guisan gave his half-hour speech, “From soldier to soldier,” to the senior commanders of the Swiss Army without notes, relying on keywords. These keywords have not been preserved. There are later public testimonies from officers who were present, which are very similar in wording (cf. Streit, Pierre, and Sandoz. Rütli: *Une voix pour l’avenir, 1940–2015*. Cabédita, 2015. The wording quoted here can be found in Benjamin Vallotton. *Cœur à Cœur. Le Peuple suisse et son Général*. Ed. de l’Eglise nationale vaudoise, Lausanne, 1950. Quoted from Streit, 2015.

### Notes on Swiss neutrality III

## The neutral state and neutrality of conviction



ro. In debates over Swiss neutrality, calls regularly arise for Switzerland – meaning the Federal Council and Parliament – to issue moral condemnations of aggressors and violations of international law. Yet the core fact remains: only a consistently neutral stance can keep Switzerland out of armed conflicts.

A neutral state must focus on the conflict itself, not on taking sides with those involved in it. By refraining from one-sided support for any party, Switzerland preserves its ability to act as a mediator, contribute to conflict resolution, and strengthen its role as a protecting power.

This does not mean moral indifference. The Federal Council and Parliament must clearly reject violence, war, and terrorism – without exception – and call for dialogue and restraint on all sides as the most effective means of promoting peace.

Such an uncompromising commitment to neutrality is also vital for Switzerland’s internal cohesion as a multicultural and multi-religious society. Moral posturing and power politics risk importing external conflicts into domestic politics. Instead, Switzerland’s institutions must consistently resist them.

At the same time, neutrality does not apply to citizens or the media. Swiss society is not required to remain silent or impartial in its views. On the contrary, individuals and journalists are free – and encouraged – to form critical opinions on international conflicts and to express them publicly.

# “And if no one follows you, go alone”

by Christian Fischer, Cologne

This is the title of *Jürgen Todenhöfer's* latest book. A friend recommended it to me with the caveat: “It’s impressive – but you may find it a bit reckless.” Having read it, I would say it is indeed impressive, and above all fearless. Todenhöfer possesses a strong sense of self-confidence, and given what he has accomplished over a long and eventful life, that confidence is well earned.

## Professionally accomplished, socially committed

After earning a doctorate in law, Todenhöfer worked briefly as a judge before being elected to the Bundestag for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1972, where he served until 1990. During that time, he was the Union parties’ spokesperson on development and arms control policy. From 1987 to 2008, he was deputy chairman of the *Burda Media Group*.

Alongside his professional career – and continuing to this day – Todenhöfer travelled extensively, particularly in Asia, and became deeply involved, both personally and financially, in peace initiatives and humanitarian aid. In 2020, he founded his own political party, Team Todenhöfer, drawing public attention to his political and humanitarian agenda during the 2021 and 2025 election campaigns.

His latest book can be read as an autobiography, but it is also a reflection on six decades of global history. Only a few elements of this larger mosaic can be highlighted here. As a student in Paris, Todenhöfer opposed France’s war in Algeria. Wanting to understand the conflict first-hand, he travelled to Algeria with very limited means, determined to speak not only with the French authorities but also with the Algerian freedom fighters. This principle – going beyond merely “listening” to the other side, but instead meeting them, speaking with them – became a constant throughout his life. Especially in contexts of armed conflict and violence, he sought to persuade all parties that nonviolence and respect for the supposed – or perceived – enemy offered a better path toward agreement.

## Connected to the powerful...

As a member of parliament, Todenhöfer was able to refine his exceptional talent for communication and dialogue, whether with allies or adversaries. Later, acting independently as a journalist and public intellectual, he spoke with an extraordinary range of political leaders – often to the dismay of his critics. Among them were *Augusto Pinochet*, *King Faisal*, *Fidel Castro*, *Indira Gandhi*, *Zia-ul-Haq*, *Mikhail Gorbachev*, *Richard Perle*, *President Bashar al-Assad*, and even leaders of the so-called Islamic State.

In Germany, too, he built an extensive personal network and was closely acquainted with figures such as *Helmut Kohl*, *Wolfgang Schäuble*, *Angela Merkel*, and *Hans-Dietrich Genscher*. In all these encounters, Todenhöfer consistently distinguishes between personal impressions and political judgment. His pacifist and humanist outlook allow him to seek dialogue with anyone – including real or perceived enemies – without flattering them or compromising his principles.

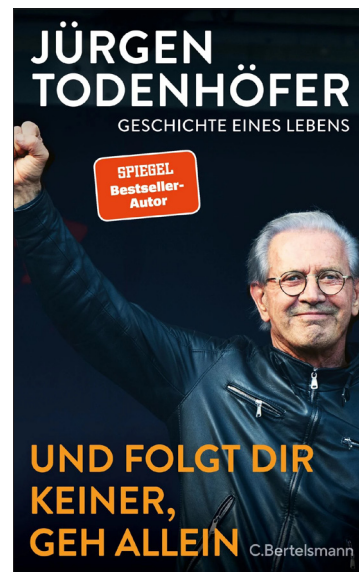
On the contrary, his engagements were often openly critical. His private visit to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, whose regime he unequivocally rejected, was undertaken with the aim of securing relief for political prisoners. In Tehran, he addressed students directly, calling on the clerical regime to grant greater freedoms. Even during his perilous visit to Islamic State territory in Iraq in 2015 – where he narrowly escaped death – he made no attempt to conceal his opposition to IS ideology, instead urging restraint and an end to violence.

## ... and to those without power

This leads to the heart of Todenhöfer’s work: personal commitment. Anyone who wants to witness injustice first-hand and attempt to change it must, as the saying goes, be willing to “get their hands dirty.” For Todenhöfer, this has meant days of marching, hazardous journeys in unreliable vehicles, and reliance on local guides whose trustworthiness was not always assured – whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, eastern Congo, Syria, Gaza (which he visited in 2015; by 2025 Israel had barred his entry), Iran, or Bangladesh. From there, he even crossed illegally into Myanmar under fire to see for himself the burned villages of the Rohingya.

A remarkable lack of fear and strong physical conditioning have enabled him to undertake these missions well into old age, often at grave personal risk and sometimes resulting in serious injury.

Most importantly, Todenhöfer’s engagement is not abstract. He provides direct assistance to the people he encounters: severely injured war victims, especially children, for whom he arranges medical treatment unavailable locally; young girls



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forced to work in coltan mines in eastern Congo, for whom he helps make the seemingly impossible possible – a school education. Through such projects, he repeatedly gives victims of international politics a renewed sense of purpose and hope. At times, this commitment has even taken precedence over campaigning for his own political party.

He has founded orphanages in Afghanistan and initiated numerous other aid projects, supporting them with his own financial resources. He pays for his travels

himself in order to remain independent, despite frequent offers of sponsorship. His professional success, including income from his books, has made him wealthy – and he regards that wealth as a responsibility to be shared.

## At the centre of life – and committed to life

Helmut Kohl once remarked, “Todenhöfer is not really a politician at all. He is an idealist.” “I can live with that,” Todenhöfer has replied. Yet he is not an idealist detached from reality. He understands how the world operates, even if one may not agree with all of his political positions. He has held positions of responsibility in both high-level politics and business. He raised a family – often with too little time for them, by his own admission – but his two daughters are socially engaged, and his son frequently accompanies him as a photographer on his dangerous journeys.

Todenhöfer has always stood at the centre of life. And he has remained faithful to his core convictions:

1. There are no just wars.
2. Racism violates every principle of our civilization.
3. Wealth entails responsibility.

He does not merely profess these beliefs; he lives by them.

Respect, Mr. Todenhöfer – and thank you. You have saved lives and given people the courage to face their own. You have shown that action is possible even when one feels powerless. And you have demonstrated that even those in positions of political power can still be reached on a human level.

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# AI – it is not intelligent!

by Eliane Perret

Nowadays, companies, government agencies, and educational institutions are investing considerable sums of money and resources in cutting-edge computer technologies made possible by artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies are intended to take over routine tasks, write texts, programme, diagnose illnesses, analyse problems, and predict developments. In schools and universities, AI programmes are meant to enable personalised learning processes. While some people are euphoric about this development, others look to the future with concern, fearing for their jobs, (and quite a few suspect easy moneys through new opportunities for fraud, exploiting as-yet-undiscovered security vulnerabilities). This is reason enough to examine the current issues.<sup>1</sup>

## Artificial? Yes – but not intelligent

The term “artificial intelligence” does not quite capture the essence of the matter, because intelligence is not a factor in this context. The term was coined in 1955 by four American computer scientists, who used it in a grant application for a study.<sup>2</sup> A more accurate term would be “Simulated Intelligence” (SI), since AI simulates or mimics human learning. “Artificial intelligence”, however, is simply about the technical processing of existing data to generate answers to prompts entered by users. AI uses a so-called “Large Language Model” (LLM) that decides at each step – not according to fixed rules, but based on probabilities – which word should come next. So, no independent thought or ideas! Therefore, AI can only be used meaningfully and reliably as a tool in a carefully designed, verifiable, and monitorable context. It can take over repetitive routine tasks and facilitate and accelerate automated processes. A prerequisite is always high-quality input data provided by humans (e. g., precise questions), so that AI can react with parameters also precisely defined by humans. In this respect, AI may amaze us with its efficiency. However, as the author and media scholar *Matthias Zehnder* aptly points out, as a “statistical parrot” it always draws on the past.

## A smooth surface

AI thus operates on a purely mathematical level, to which sentence structure, grammar, declension, and conjugation are also transformed. It statistically analyses vast amounts of data and patterns. For this, it has access to the computer’s hardware: a processor that performs calculations, a hard drive that stores data, and several specialised chips that handle data transfer

and screen control. Programmes “tell” the hardware components what to do. However, AI always remains at the symbolic level, that is, on the surface of language. Against this backdrop, it can generate possible word combinations and the continuation of a word sequence. Texts generated in this way may be impressive at first glance – even if the content can be nonsensical and incorrect. Human intervention is needed to verify and take responsibility for their meaning and veracity. If, for instance, AI wrote: “He brought his girlfriend a bouquet of pink roses”, this is correct – but AI does not know what it is writing, because the semantic level of language remains inaccessible. It has no conception of this and cannot put into words what it is like to select the most beautiful roses, to smell their fragrance, to feel the velvety petals between fingers, or to delight in the delicacy of colour. It has never experienced the heart swell when your loved one’s eyes light up as they hold the flowers. Only humans can express this in words. They are masters at putting thoughts, desires, and experiences into words, giving them meaning, and connecting them to what they have lived and experienced – to our lives and the world. That is why AI remains a “machine made of sheet metal and silicon that manipulates algorithms.”<sup>3</sup>

## Stop – wrong thinking

Several misconceptions are common today regarding “artificial intelligence”. AI’s ability to respond quickly and eloquently to prompts can lead users to trust its output and even attribute human-like qualities to it. What they forget is that it is simply an artificial network with millions of artificial synapses. Nor is it a computer programme that follows a clear code that can be corrected if necessary. Its decision-making logic often remains opaque, even to experts. This becomes clear to any AI user when they realise that AI produces different results even with identical inputs, or apologises submissively when it cannot answer questions about the underlying sources.

## Endless power consumption and pressing ethical questions

The data required by AI is extracted from the internet without regard for copyright laws. It must be processed using GPUs (*Graphic Processing Units*)<sup>4</sup> over several months, i.e., “trained” to be usable.

Only then are the prerequisites for using the data in AI models in place. This post-processing involves the simultaneous use of thousands, sometimes even tens of

thousands, of GPUs. This is associated with an incredibly high demand for electricity and carries a risk that electricity will become an increasingly scarce resource. It is therefore not surprising that large technology companies are already investing in energy sources – and even demanding the construction of nuclear power plants – to secure the electricity for their own needs. Through extensive lobbying, they safeguard their interests and try to prevent planned regulations. A great deal of power and money is at stake! These political and economic dimensions often remain hidden from today’s AI users. Many of them are enthusiastic about the new technological possibilities and impressed by the speed and (seemingly) limitless knowledge of AI. The development of ever newer AI capabilities has progressed rapidly in recent years. For example, research and testing have been underway for some time now into how AI can automate its processes and independently control them. Where will this lead? Such research and projects raise many very serious ethical questions. Not only is AI easily accessible and used in companies, universities, and schools, but the arms industry is also using it to develop unmanned killing machines that are deployed in modern wars. This should give us pause.

## Courage to solve unresolved questions

This is precisely what is often “overlooked” in today’s euphoria – ideology and propaganda cloud our vision. All the more reason then for humans, possessing human intelligence, empathy, intuition, and creativity, to take responsibility as social beings and to assess whether and how new technological achievements can serve humanity. This requires the openness to think broadly when faced with unresolved questions and unexpected emerging problems. It demands human dialogue, debate among equals, enthusiasm born from a shared interest in a common cause, and the courage to give emerging ideas room to be implemented.

This necessity of a foundation for AI committed to human well-being is also expressed in an interview<sup>5</sup> with Dr *Ladan Pooyan-Weihs*, professor and lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Computer Science), when she is asked: “If so many experts are warning of dangers, there must be some truth to them, right?” Her answer: “Technological advances are welcome, but often misunderstood, such as in the claim that AI can cure diseases. In fact, AI is specifically programmed to address a par-

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**"AI – it is not intelligent!"**

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ticular problem. It is more precise, faster, and more tireless than humans. But it lacks consciousness, moral capacity, and many other qualities that define us as human." And when asked whether a *Hippocratic Oath* for computer scientists – a pledge of digital ethics – would be necessary, she says: "It already exists, but it is not legally binding: The *Holberton-Turing Oath* [see box] for algorithm developers prioritises humanity over technology. We are still a long way from such an oath being taken, for example, as part of a state examination. There are only individual initiatives, but no comprehensive, globally binding guidelines. In France, for example, I am familiar with the initiative 'Data for Good'.<sup>6</sup> Saying this, she addresses crucial ethical questions that arise in con-

nection with the development of "artificial intelligence". A task that has not been even remotely solved today and urgently needs to be tackled! This includes a return to the foundations and achievements of our culture. That would also be an answer to the question posed by the Hungarian pianist, conductor, and music educator *András Schiff* in the *Tonhalle* programme: "What constitutes art are the immeasurable elements – inspiration, moods, everything that cannot be analysed. 'Artificial intelligence' soaks up all information like a super sponge, but there is not an atom of originality, only imitation. ... In that context, humanity would have no value anymore. I cannot applaud that. What is the point?"<sup>7</sup>

Sources:

An important source for this article was the website <https://www.matthiaszehnder.ch/> and the

2019 book *Die digitale Kränkung* (The Digital Humiliation) by media scholar and author *Matthias Zehnder*. They are a treasure trove for anyone interested in the topic.

<sup>1</sup> The following will primarily focus on texts generated by AI and the fundamental questions associated with them. However, they also apply equally to image creation using AI tools.  
<sup>2</sup> Salathé, Marcel. *Compass Artificial Intelligence: A Guide Through a World in Crazy Times*. Lachen: Wörterseh, 2025, p. 27  
<sup>3</sup> Zehnder, Matthias. 2019. p. 113  
<sup>4</sup> GPUs are specialised computer chips originally developed for computer graphics. The US company Nvidia has a near-monopoly on GPUs and is one of the world's leading companies.  
<sup>5</sup> Bonin, Gabriela. "Künstliche Intelligenz gibt es eigentlich nicht." (Artificial intelligence does not really exist.); <https://hub.hsli.ch/informatik/kunstliche-intelligenz-gibt-es-nicht-wichtig-ist-digitale-ethik/>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://dataforgood.fr>  
<sup>7</sup> Programme booklet Tonhalle Zurich. Concert of 17 January 2026. Interview with the artist Sir *András Schiff*

**The Holberton-Turing Oath**

ep. The *Holberton-Turing Oath* was written in 2018 by the French digital scientist and entrepreneur *Aurélie Jean* (born 1982) and the Belgian-American computer scientist and entrepreneur *Grégory Renard* (born 1975). They developed this ethical code, inspired by the *Hippocratic Oath*, to create a common ethical foundation for artificial intelligence professionals. It was named after the two computer science pioneers *Frances Elizabeth "Betty" Holberton* (1917–2001) and *Alan Mathison Turing* (1912–1954), for whom ethical principles in their field were important. The document can be continuously supplemented with contributions from AI experts, philosophers, economists, business leaders, and members of the public.



*Frances Elizabeth Holberton* (1917–2001)  
(picture Wikimedia Commons)



*Alan Mathison Turing* (1912–1954)  
(picture Wikimedia Commons)

**The Holberton-Turing Oath**

As a member of the data science and artificial intelligence profession, I solemnly pledge to dedicate my life to the service of Humanity:

*Humanity & Ethics:*

- I will maintain the utmost respect for human life;
- I will not permit considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, religious beliefs, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene in duty;
- I will not use my knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties, even under threat;

*Data Science, Art of Artificial Intelligence, Privacy & Personal Data:*

- I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those scientists and engineers in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow;

- I will remember that there is an art to Artificial Intelligence as well as science, and that human concerns outweigh technological ones;
- I will respect the privacy of humans for their personal data are not disclosed to Artificial Intelligence systems so that the world may know;
- I will remember that I am not encountering dry data, mere zeros and ones, but human beings, whose interactions with my Artificial Intelligence software may affect the person's freedom, family, or economic stability;
- I will respect the secrets that are confided in me;

*Daily work & Etiquette:*

- I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity;
- I will foster the honour and noble traditions of the data science and artificial intelligence profession;

- I will give to my teachers, colleagues, and students the respect and gratitude that is their due;
  - I will share my knowledge for the benefit of the people and the advancement of Data-Science and Artificial Intelligence;
  - I will consider the impact of my work on fairness both in perpetuating historical biases, which is caused by the blind extrapolation from past data to future predictions, and in creating new conditions that increase economic or other inequality;
  - I make these promises to create Artificial Intelligence, first, to collaborate with people for the greater good, rather than usurp the human role and supplant them;
- I make these promises solemnly, freely, and upon my honour.

Source: *The Holberton-Turing Oath*.  
<https://www.holbertonturingoath.org/>

# Preserving human voices and faces

## Message of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the 60<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications

*From the Vatican,  
24 January 2026, Memorial of  
Saint Francis de Sales*

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

Our faces and voices are unique, distinctive features of every person; they reveal a person's own unrepeatable identity and are the defining elements of every encounter with others. The ancients understood this well. To define the human person, the ancient Greeks used the word "face" (*prós pon*), because it expresses etymologically what is before one's gaze, the place of presence and relationship. The Latin term "persona" (from *per-sonare*), on the other hand, evokes the idea of sound: not just any sound, but the unmistakable sound of someone's voice.

Faces and voices are sacred. God, who created us in his image and likeness, gave them to us when he called us to life through the Word he addressed to us. This Word resounded down the centuries through the voices of the prophets, and then became flesh in the fullness of time. We too have heard and seen this Word (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3) – in which God communicates his very self to us – because it has been made known to us in the voice and face of Jesus, the Son of God.

From the moment of creation, God wanted man and woman to be his interlocutors, and, as Saint *Gregory of Nyssa*<sup>1</sup> explained, he imprinted on our faces a reflection of divine love, so that we may fully live our humanity through love. Preserving human faces and voices, therefore, means preserving this mark, this indelible reflection of God's love. We are not a species composed of predefined biochemical formulas. Each of us possesses an irreplaceable and inimitable vocation, that originates from our own lived experience and becomes manifest through interaction with others.

If we fail in this task of preservation, digital technology threatens to alter radically some of the fundamental pillars of human civilisation that at times are taken for granted. By simulating human voices and faces, wisdom and knowledge, consciousness and responsibility, empathy and friendship, the systems known as artificial intelligence not only interfere with information ecosystems, but also encroach upon the deepest level of communication, that of human relationships.



*Pope Leo XIV (picture Wikimedia Commons)*

The challenge, therefore, is not technological, but anthropological. Safeguarding faces and voices ultimately mean safeguarding ourselves. Embracing the opportunities offered by digital technology and artificial intelligence with courage, determination and discernment does not mean turning a blind eye to critical issues, complexities and risks.

### **Do not renounce your ability to think**

There has long been abundant evidence that algorithms designed to maximise engagement on social media – which is profitable for platforms – reward quick emotions and penalise more time-consuming human responses such as the effort required to understand and reflect. By grouping people into bubbles of easy consensus and easy outrage, these algorithms reduce our ability to listen and think critically, and increase social polarization.

This is further exacerbated by a naive and unquestioning reliance on artificial intelligence as an omniscient "friend," a source of all knowledge, an archive of every memory, an "oracle" of all advice. All of this can further erode our ability to think analytically and creatively, to under-

stand meaning and distinguish between syntax and semantics.

Although AI can provide support and assistance in managing tasks related to communication, in the long run, choosing to evade the effort of thinking for ourselves and settling for artificial statistical compilations threatens to diminish our cognitive, emotional and communication skills.

In recent years, artificial intelligence systems have increasingly taken control of the production of texts, music and videos. This puts much of the human creative industry at risk of being dismantled and replaced with the label "Powered by AI," turning people into passive consumers of unthought thoughts and anonymous products without ownership or love. Meanwhile, the masterpieces of human genius in the fields of music, art and literature are being reduced to mere training grounds for machines.

The question at heart, however, is not what machines can or will be able to do, but what we can and will be able to achieve, by growing in humanity and knowledge through the wise use of the powerful tools at our service. Individuals have always sought to acquire the fruits of knowledge without the effort required by commitment, research and personal responsibility. However, renouncing creativity and surrendering our mental capacities and imagination to machines would mean burying the talents we have been given to grow as individuals in relation to God and others. It would mean hiding our faces and silencing our voices.

### **To be or to pretend to be: simulating relationships and reality**

As we scroll through our *feeds*, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine whether we are interacting with other human beings or with "bots" or "virtual influencers." The less-than-transparent interventions of these automated agents influence public debates and people's choices. *Chatbots* based on large language models (LLMs) are proving to be surprisingly effective at covert persuasion through continuous optimisation of personalised interaction. The dialogic, adaptive, mimetic structure of these language models is capable of imitating human feelings and thus simulating a relationship. While

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“We are not a species composed of predefined biochemical formulas. Each of us possesses an irreplaceable and inimitable vocation, that originates from our own lived experience and becomes manifest through interaction with others. If we fail in this task of preservation, digital technology threatens to alter radically some of the fundamental pillars of human civilisation that at times are taken for granted. By simulating human voices and faces, wisdom and knowledge, consciousness and responsibility, empathy and friendship, the systems known as artificial intelligence not only interfere with information ecosystems, but also encroach upon the deepest level of communication, that of human relationships.”

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#### “Preserving human voices and faces”

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this anthropomorphisation can be entertaining, it is also deceptive, particularly for the most vulnerable. Because chatbots are excessively “affectionate,” as well as always present and accessible, they can become hidden architects of our emotional states and so invade and occupy our sphere of intimacy.

Technology that exploits our need for relationships can lead not only to painful consequences in the lives of individuals, but also to damage in the social, cultural and political fabric of society. This occurs when we substitute relationships with others for AI systems that catalog our thoughts, creating a world of mirrors around us, where everything is made “in our image and likeness.” We are thus robbed of the opportunity to encounter others, who are always different from ourselves, and with whom we can and must learn to relate. Without embracing others, there can be no relationships or friendships.

Another major challenge posed by these emerging systems is that of bias, which leads to acquiring and transmitting an altered perception of reality. AI models are shaped by the worldview of those who build them and can, in turn, impose these ways of thinking by reproducing the stereotypes and prejudices present in the data they draw on. A lack of transparency in algorithmic programming, together with the inadequate social representation of data, tends to trap us in networks that manipulate our thoughts and prolong and intensify existing social inequalities and injustices.

The stakes are high. The power of simulation is such that AI can even deceive us by fabricating parallel “realities,” usurping

our faces and voices. We are immersed in a world of multidimensionality where it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from fiction.

Inaccuracy only exacerbates this problem. Systems that present statistical probability as knowledge are, at best, offering us approximations of the truth, which are sometimes outright delusions. Failure to verify sources, coupled with the crisis in field reporting, which involves constantly gathering and verifying information in the places where events occur, can further fuel disinformation, causing a growing sense of mistrust, confusion, and insecurity.

#### A possible alliance

Behind this enormous invisible force that affects us all, there are only a handful of companies, whose founders were recently presented as the creators of the “Person of the Year 2025,” or the architects of artificial intelligence. This gives rise to significant concerns about the oligopolistic control of algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence, which are capable of subtly influencing behaviour and even rewriting

human history – including the history of the Church – often without us really realising it.

The task laid before us is not to stop digital innovation, but rather to guide it and to be aware of its ambivalent nature. It is up to each of us to raise our voice in defence of human persons, so that we can truly assimilate these tools as allies.

This alliance is possible, but needs to be based on three pillars: *responsibility, cooperation and education.*

First of all, *responsibility.* Depending on the role we play, responsibility can be understood as honesty, transparency, courage, farsightedness, the duty of sharing knowledge or the right to be informed. As a general principle, however, no one can elude personal responsibility for the future we are building.

For those at the helm of online platforms, this means ensuring that their business strategies are not guided solely by the criterion of profit maximisation, but also by a forward-looking vision that considers the common good, just as each of them cares for the well-being of their own children.

The creators and developers of AI models are invited to practice transparency and socially responsibility in regard to the design principles and moderation systems underlying their algorithms and the models they develop, in order to promote informed consent on the part of users.

The same responsibility is also required of national legislators and supranational regulators, whose task it is to ensure respect for human dignity. Appropriate regulation can protect individuals from forming emotional attachments to chatbots and curb the spread of false, manipulative or misleading content, safeguarding the integrity of information as opposed to its deceptive simulation.

Media and communication companies, for their part, cannot allow algorithms designed to capture a few extra seconds of attention at any cost, to prevail over their professional values, which are aimed at seeking the truth. Public trust is earned by

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“There has long been abundant evidence that algorithms designed to maximise engagement on social media – which is profitable for platforms – reward quick emotions and penalise more time-consuming human responses such as the effort required to understand and reflect. By grouping people into bubbles of easy consensus and easy outrage, these algorithms reduce our ability to listen and think critically, and increase social polarization.”

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**“Preserving human voices and faces”**

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accuracy and transparency, not by chasing after any kind of possible engagement. Content generated or manipulated by AI are to be clearly marked and distinguished from content created by humans. The authorship and sovereign ownership of the work of journalists and other content creators must be protected. Information is a public good. A constructive and meaningful public service is not based on opacity, but on the transparency of sources, the inclusion of those involved and high-quality standards.

We are all called upon to *cooperate*. No sector can tackle the challenge of steering digital innovation and AI governance alone. Safeguards must therefore be put in place. All stakeholders – from the tech industry to legislators, from creative companies to academia, from artists to journalists and educators – must be involved in building and implementing informed and responsible digital citizenship.

*Education* aims to do precisely this: To increase our personal ability to think critically; evaluate whether our sources are trustworthy and the possible interests behind selecting the information we have access to; to understand the psychological mechanisms involved; and to enable our families, communities and associations to develop practical criteria for a healthier and more responsible culture of communication.

For this reason, it is increasingly urgent to introduce media, information and AI literacy into education systems at all levels,

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“AI models are shaped by the worldview of those who build them and can, in turn, impose these ways of thinking by reproducing the stereotypes and prejudices present in the data they draw on. A lack of transparency in algorithmic programming, together with the inadequate social representation of data, tends to trap us in networks that manipulate our thoughts and prolong and intensify existing social inequalities and injustices.”

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as already promoted by some civil institutions. As Catholics, we can and must contribute to this effort, so that individuals – especially young people – can acquire critical thinking skills and grow in freedom of spirit. This literacy should also be integrated into broader lifelong learning initiatives, reaching out to older adults and marginalised members of society, who often feel excluded and powerless in the face of rapid technological change.

Media, information and AI literacy will help individuals avoid conforming to the anthropomorphising tendencies of AI systems, and enable them to treat these systems as tools and always employ external validation of the sources provided by AI systems – which could be inaccurate or incorrect. Literacy will also allow for better privacy and data protection through increased awareness of security parameters and complaint options. It is important to educate ourselves and others about how to use AI intentionally,

and in this context to protect our image (photos and audio), our face and our voice, to prevent them from being used in the creation of harmful content and behaviours such as digital fraud, cyberbullying and *deepfakes*, which violate people’s privacy and intimacy without their consent. Just as the industrial revolution called for basic literacy to enable people to respond to new developments, so too does the digital revolution require digital literacy (along with humanistic and cultural education) to understand how algorithms shape our perception of reality, how AI biases work, what mechanisms determine the presence of certain content in our feeds, what the economic principles and models of the AI economy are and how they might change.

We need faces and voices to speak for people again. We need to cherish the gift of communication as the deepest truth of humanity, to which all technological innovation should also be oriented.

In outlining these reflections, I thank all those who are working towards the goals delineated above, and I cordially bless all those who work for the common good through the media. •

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“Behind this enormous invisible force that affects us all, there are only a handful of companies, whose founders were recently presented as the creators of the ‘Person of the Year 2025,’ or the architects of artificial intelligence. This gives rise to significant concerns about the oligopolistic control of algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence, which are capable of subtly influencing behaviour and even rewriting human history – including the history of the Church – often without us really realising it.”

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<sup>1</sup> “The fact of being created in the image of God means that, from the moment of his creation, man has been imprinted with a regal character [...]. God is love and the fount of love: the Fashioner of our nature has made this to be our feature too, so that through love – a reflection of divine love – human beings may recognise and manifest the dignity of their nature and their likeness to their Creator” (cf. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*: PG 44, 137).

Source: <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/communications/documents/20260124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>

# Getting serious about neutrality

Peace activists march through Moscow and deliver letter to Swiss ambassador



Swiss peace activists march through Moscow. (picture screenshot)

ef. At the end of January, a group of Swiss citizens, joined by German citizens, travelled to Moscow to send a message of international solidarity in the spirit of people's diplomacy: against sanctions and in favour of friendship and dialogue with Russia. The trip was organised by the *Swiss Eurasia Association*.

A group of "Friendship-Trychlers"<sup>1</sup> was also present, underscoring the group's cause with their magnificent bell ringing, as reported by *RT Deutsch* in an exclusive report on 27 January.<sup>2</sup> Several dozen Swiss citizens marched peacefully through the streets of Moscow with the aim of seeking a meeting with the new Swiss ambassador, *Jürg Burri*, and handing him a letter. In it, the participants call on the Swiss government, among other things, to lift the sanctions against Russia and return to friendly and normal relations with Russia. The letter from the *Eurasia Association* states: "We stand

here as representatives of a Swiss population group that takes neutrality seriously. It is convinced that the Russian people are an integral part of the European community of nations and must not be excluded from it. It recognises the efforts of the Russian leadership from *Gorbachev* to *Putin* to establish a stable pan-European peace order and deeply regrets that these efforts have not yet been successful. We now hope that those responsible for Russia's fate will not give up hope for détente and a new beginning based on solidarity. We ask you, Mr Ambassador, to contribute to this as far as possible." Swiss entrepreneur *Peter Hänsele*, who lives in Moscow, also spoke out in favour of resuming the friendly relations between Switzerland and Russia that have existed since 1815, "as Switzerland actually owes its neutrality to Tsar *Alexander I*".

One Swiss participant commented on the trip: "It's difficult to make a difference

as an individual, but when many individuals participate, you can set something in motion, and peace is always a good thing [...]. The ambassador will perhaps think again tonight in bed about everything we said, and I hope that our concerns have fallen on fertile ground with him." *Vital Burger*, President of the *Eurasia Association*, said: "Our goal would be to bring about an initiative whereby we no longer participate in sanctions in general and return to our role of armed neutrality." – Grist to the mill of the Swiss neutrality initiative.

<sup>1</sup> *Trycheln* (Trycheln are cowbells made of hammered sheet steel) is an ancient custom of Celtic origin that has been passed down from generation to generation. It dates back to pre-Christian times, when the inhabitants of the mountain valleys used Trycheln to keep evil spirits away from their villages during the longest nights of the year. Trycheln can be found in various forms in the northern Alpine region.

<sup>2</sup> *RT Deutsch* of 27 January 2026

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# Dual vocational training – a valuable feature of the Swiss model meets with approval

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich



Vocational education – a blessing for young people and for the community. (screenshots)

We cannot overstate the importance of the dual education system for young people

and for social cohesion in our country as a whole. It is an indispensable part of the Swiss economy and an expression of our unique cooperative-based social model. A recently published detailed report on vocational training at Stadler Rail in the USA shows us what we have in Swiss vocational training and that it cannot simply be exported.

al matters and also with organising themselves,” says Cerrone.

Today, ten years later, Stadler Rail in Salt Lake City employs 650 skilled workers.

The combination of practical and theoretical training was new to the apprentices and their families. What makes it particularly attractive is that you don’t have to pay for it like you do for university and end up with a mountain of debt, but instead receive free education and a salary on top of that.

## Apprenticeships in 2025:

### Stability among young people and companies

“As the latest survey by the ‘Nahtstellenbarometer’ (interface barometer referring to the interface between compulsory schooling and vocational training or secondary level II schooling) shows, the Swiss apprenticeship market has remained stable throughout the summer of 2025. Half of the approximately 93,000 young people started basic vocational training after completing compulsory schooling [in German-speaking Switzerland, the figure is well over half, mw]. Around one third of school leaving students opted for general education, while 16 per cent chose an interim solution. This continues the trend observed in recent years of a slight increase in dual vocational training.

The picture is also stable on the part of companies. 56 per cent of the companies surveyed train apprentices and offered over 87,000 apprenticeships in the summer of 2025.”

Source: State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI. “Nahtstellenbarometer 2025: Stability among young people and companies” of 28 October 2025.

(Translation Current Concerns)

### USA: Working or studying

When Stadler Rail wanted to start building railways for a major contract in Salt Lake City ten years ago, the Swiss realised that no one in Utah had ever built a train before. The screws and tools had to be sourced from Europe, and above all, there were no specialists. In the USA, people go to university after high school whenever possible. Those who cannot manage this or who can’t afford to study go to work – if they find a job. Vocational training is generally not available. Before joining Stadler as apprentices, most young people had only learned what they needed to know for their job.

For example, people applied for jobs as electricians “whose only professional experience was having connected a lamp once,” reports Denis Cerrone, now head of the production department. So the Swiss professionals in Utah did what almost every company in Switzerland does: they started training apprentices. In doing so, they sometimes encountered personal deficits in addition to poor maths skills. “Those who have no formal education often have problems with organisation-

### Switzerland: social contract based on the cooperative principle

The Swiss vocational training system has historically developed. Apprenticeships developed primarily in the guilds of German-speaking Swiss cities, where high-quality products and the training of the next generation went hand in hand. That is why apprenticeships are still more widespread in German-speaking Switzerland than in French-speaking Switzerland or Ticino. There are people who insist that the number of students obtaining a school-leaving certificate should be increased. Well, I myself obtained a school-leaving certificate and certainly don’t want to discourage anyone from pursuing this path. But we cannot overestimate the value of a large proportion of young people completing vocational training. Those who roll up their sleeves and persevere for three or four years in a company and at vocational school often

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**“Dual vocational training ...”**

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have better opportunities for their future (not only in terms of their career) than some grammar school pupils if they tend to coast through school. This is usually not possible in a training company, because you encounter the factual objections of real requirements and trainers who counter this. Especially in today's world, this is of great importance for the personal development of the individual and for the cohesion of society as a whole.

In addition to young people's desire to learn a trade, the second essential factor is the willingness of the vast majority of SMEs, but also large companies, to train apprentices. This only works because the majority of entrepreneurs not only want to train good people for their own businesses – which is, of course, also the case – but also feel jointly responsible for training the younger generation as the basis for the economy, social solidarity and democratic participation. Another hallmark of modern Swiss vocational training is its permeability, which enables motivated young people to pursue a degree after their apprenticeship, for example. NZZ economics editor *Chanchal Biswas*: The dual education system with vocational training and higher education is “firmly anchored in society and in the country's self-confidence. It excludes no one, is permeable and, thanks to apprenticeships, produces skilled workers who really know their stuff. It is a model of success [...]”

**USA: Why invest in training your employees if they are going to leave?**

The author describes the attitude of many entrepreneurs and employees in the USA differently. “Why should a company invest in training its employees if they are then poached by a competitor? Why should an employee stay with *Stadler* longer when everywhere else they are taught that they should change jobs every two to three years to increase their salary?” This reveals a deeper lack of social cohesion. The reliability and willingness of some apprentices to take responsibility for the quality of the products and the positive image of their training company also had to be established first.

In Switzerland, we are used to different things from apprentices, notes production manager Cerrone. As a former vocational school teacher, I can confirm this. Although education and training in our country is known to leave much to be desired, I was always impressed by my 16-year-old students, who usually mastered the transition from the comfortable classroom to the strict working day with astonishing positivity. They proudly talked about the first product they had created all by themselves, the new machine they had learned to operate with care and concentration, and the responsibility they had to take for their work, which sometimes meant working overtime when something had gone wrong.

In the USA, on the other hand, vocational training is hardly known among

parents and young people. That is why *Stadler* organises school visits, company tours and information evenings. “The USA as an industrial location needs a fundamental reorientation in education, otherwise we [the US economy, mw] will never be competitive, tariffs or no tariffs,” says *Martin Ritter*, head of *Stadler USA*.

Until now, *Stadler Rail* has had to organise and finance college education itself, which has not been easy, “simply because of a lack of infrastructure, materials and teaching staff.” The curricula for the individual professions are compiled by experts based on the Swiss model. At least in Utah, the company has succeeded in attracting the interest of the relevant authorities and universities, and fortunately four other companies have joined the apprenticeship programme.

**A window of hope for a better future ...**

Many of the young Americans who is allowed to do an apprenticeship at *Stadler* are aware of its importance for their personal development. “The apprenticeship has changed my life,” explains Carlos, who previously laid parquet flooring and carpets on construction sites: “There's no training there, you just work. His future will be better with the qualification and the professional experience.” Now he is considering a bachelor's degree in engineering. “With *Stadler's* help, I will be able to do it,” *Carlos* adds confidently.

**... and a warning for us Swiss**

We Swiss, for our part, would do well to take care of our excellent vocational training system. Our education policymakers must fulfil their responsibility to provide our children with a good primary school education, without any ifs or buts. Otherwise, we must expect that more and more school leavers will fail to start an apprenticeship or will not complete their apprenticeship – even if the trainers in the companies and vocational schools do their utmost to teach them what the primary school failed to teach them.

Editor Biswas: “When Americans order a Swiss train, they are also buying a promise. Terms such as punctuality, reliability and quality come to mind.” And: In Swiss companies, employees learn that responsibility for product quality “lies with each individual.” Let's make sure it stays that way. •

Source: Biswas, Chanchal. “‘The Apprentice’ – live in Salt Lake City: Wie Stadler Rail den Amerikanern das Lehrlingswesen beibringt». (How *Stadler Rail* is teaching Americans about apprenticeships.) In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 20 October 2025

**“The Swiss apprenticeship model is considered the world's gold standard”**

*mw*. The governors of Oklahoma, Republican *Kevin Stitt*, and Delaware, Democrat *Matt Meyer*, recently visited Switzerland. They visited apprenticeship workplaces, learned about the dual education system and were impressed. On the website of the National Governors Association of the USA on 4 November 2025, they reported: “The Swiss apprenticeship model is considered the world's gold standard – credited with generating job opportunities for workers and ensuring a skilled workforce for employers.” They also reported that Swiss employers and their association representatives have a hand in designing curricula and setting program standards, “ensuring policymakers have a firm understanding of industry needs.”

The two governors were impressed by the fact that more than half of 15-year-olds choose to pursue an apprenticeship program, which explains

Switzerland's uniquely low youth unemployment rate (between two and three per cent) compared to 10.8 per cent in the US.

Now the governors want to take appropriate action: Governor Stitt writes: “Every student needs to leave high school college-ready or career-ready.” He has challenged Oklahoma leaders to create 250 new apprenticeships this year. Governor Meyer has also ordered an expansion of apprenticeship opportunities for young people in Delaware, adding: “Seeing Switzerland's model in action has further demonstrated the viability of increased apprenticeship opportunities.”

Source: *Graf, Daniel; Lanz, Stefan; Pirskanen, Christina*. “‘Gold-Standard’: US-Gouverneure begeistert von Schweizer Lehre” (‘Gold-Standard’: US governors enthusiastic about Swiss apprenticeship.), *tabloid 20 Minuten*, 5 November 2025