

Current Concerns

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Europe and Russia – No further jeopardising of commonalities The event with Gabriele Krone-Schmalz and Matthias Platzeck in Eastern Brandenburg (Germany) met with great interest

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

On 25 November the author and journalist Gabriele Krone-Schmalz had a panel discussion with former prime minister of Brandenburg and current president of the German-Russian Forum Matthias Platzeck (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) at Neuhardenberg castle, which is situated east of Berlin. The event was hosted by Frank Mangelsdorf, chief editor of the local newspaper "Märkische Oderzeitung". The topic under discussion was called "In relation: Russia and Europe".

The introductory text talked about a "disturbed relationship between Russia and Europe" and comments: "However strained the relations may be right now, both sides view each other with anything but disinterest, and it is fair to assume a desire to get along well together for both of them. Reason enough to look for ways to take steps towards a reconciliation."

About 200 interested people participated in the event, many of whom had travelled from Berlin. Three hours after the event had been announced in June tickets had already been sold out. Nevertheless, at the box office there were people trying their luck to get in. And that despite the fact that Neuhardenberg is not just around the corner. The journey takes one and a half hours eastwards from Berlin, partially through beautiful alleys in the Mark Brandenburg and especially the Oderbruch with its many rivers, creeks, lakes and channels, almost towards the Polish border.

Being a Russia sympathiser – the best thing that can happen to you

Participants didn't regret the effort, as the frequent applause proved. Right from the start when Gabriele Krone-Schmalz criticised the pejorative use of the term Russia sympathiser. She could never understand how the verb "to sympathise" was meant to smear people since sympathy was the basis for understanding and therefore the foundation for reasonable action. Understanding something in sympathy always comes prior to evaluation, rather than de-valuation, in order to obtain a platform for acting reasonably.

Gabriele Krone-Schmalz

Gabriele Krone-Schmalz was born in Lam, Lower Bavaria in 1949. She has an academic background in Eastern European history, political science and Slavic studies and holds a doctorate in history and political science. She is self-employed as a freelance journalist and author. Krone-Schmalz worked at the Moscow studio of ARD (a joint organisation of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters) broadcasting. Since 2000 she is a member of the Steering Committee of the *Petersburg Dialogue*, since 2006 member of the Board of Trustees of the *German-Russian Forum*. Since 2011 she is a professor for television and journalism at the *Business and Information Technology School (BITS) Iserlohn*. As one of Germany's leading experts on Russia, she appears regularly on television. She is the author of numerous books on Russia, most recently "Russland verste-



hen. Being a Russia sympathiser, she argued, therefore is the best thing that can happen to you.

.... A thousand years of cultural and interpersonal relations

Matthias Platzeck gave a clear answer when the host asks him what had happened with our relation to Russia since the West's euphoria about *Gorbachev's perestroika* and *glasnost* 27 years ago: What happened was "gruesome" and the analysis of the underlying reasons far from complete. And this despite a literally thousand-year-old history of cultural, interpersonal and societal relations to Russia. With all ups and downs, almost no other country has a history so closely connected to our's. He emphasised that a misjudgement made in 1989/1990s should not be forgotten in this regard: People had concluded that the West had won the Cold War. *Francis Fukuyama* published his book "The End of History"

hen. Der Kampf um die Ukraine und die Arroganz des Westens" (Understanding Russia: The Battle for Ukraine and the Arrogance of the West, 17th edition 2016) ISBN 978-3406675256 and "Eiszeit. Wie Russland dämonisiert wird und warum das so gefährlich ist" (2017 Ice Age. How Russia is demonised and why this is so dangerous) ISBN: 978-3-406-71412-2.

and announced the final victory of Western democracy and capitalism. In future there would be only one super power. On the other hand, there was the *Character of Paris* with its credo that all relations would be guided by the principle of peace from now on.

Russia had still been there – but the country was in dire straits and the West had found no adequate response to this situation. All the West could recommend to Russia then was to copy Western values, Western democracy and the Western economic system, in other words to become like the West in order to recover. Until today, Platzeck argued, people in the West rarely considered what traditions, what history and which mentality the Russian people have. He had no doubt that Russia and the Russians were quite capable to seek and find their own way to the future.

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"Ideological impositions"

However, when it became obvious that Russia had embarked on this way of her own, the West reacted with the reinvigoration of Russia as their "enemy idol". Gabriele Krone-Schmalz said that this enemy image had a long tradition. Postulating that the West had won the Cold War did not necessarily end this war – if it really was to end both sides would need to feel they had gained something. The West, however, insisted on measuring things by their own standards: We were better off, and we were better at everything.

Gabriele Krone-Schmalz knows what she is talking about: She had witnessed the years of turmoil first hand as a correspondent of German state television ARD in Moscow. Legions of Westerners kept flying in and offered their advice on what the Russians should do and how they should do it. "All these ideological impositions", she pointed out, "spoiled a lot of good beginnings and continue to do so until this day." Russia had to come to terms with three revolutions simultaneously: Firstly, the transition from planned economy to market economy, secondly from Communist one-party rule to a system of constitutional justice and thirdly the revolution from the Soviet empire to the nation state. The West didn't show much empathy, though. All they offered was some more paternalism.

"Had we dealt with each other on equal footing..."

When Matthias Platzeck explains how the *Yeltsin* era affected the pride of the Russian people he knows what he is talking about – in first-hand encounters people had told him in those years: "Now we are nothing at all, nobody respects us any longer in the world." Mentioning terms such as market economy, democracy or privatisation "in the depths of Russia" in a discussion makes the atmosphere go "chilly" even today, since for many Russians all this is associated with their worst trauma of recent history when 95% of the population lost almost everything between 1991 and 1998. "The fact that we didn't give a thought about all this, that we didn't realise it, has something to do with a lack of empathy, otherwise we would have acted differently, had we taken things seriously, had we looked at it on equal footing...", Platzeck added.

Decent journalism ...

Most Western media played a regrettable role in this. Gabriele Krone-Schmalz got a lot of applause when she referred to the discrepancy between public and published opinion. When the host asked her



Matthias Platzeck
(picture wikipedia)

Matthias Platzeck

Matthias Platzeck was born in Potsdam in 1953. He is a graduate engineer in biomedical cybernetics. He was one of the 144 deputies of the German new federal states, who were delegated after the unification in the German Bundestag. In 1990 he was appointed for the party *Bündnis 90* (Alliance 90) Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation and Regional Planning of the State of Brandenburg. From 1991 to 1993 he was a member of the Federal Speaker Council of the party Alliance 90, whose merger with the West German *Green Party* in 1993 Platzeck did not accomplish.

In 1994 he was again appointed minister, in 1995 Matthias Platzeck became member of the SPD. Matthias Platzeck earned great merits in coping with the flooding disaster on the river Oder in

July/August 1997. Since June 1998 he belongs to the Brandenburg executive committee of SPD. He was elected Chairman of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) on 15 November 2005 with an overwhelming majority of 99.4 per cent. From 1998 to 2002 he was Lord Mayor of Potsdam. In 2002 he was elected Minister-President of Brandenburg. In 2004 and 2009, he was re-elected Minister-President by the Landtag Brandenburg. In 2013 he resigned for health reasons. Matthias Platzeck has received numerous awards, including the Federal Cross of Merit 1st Class of the Federal Republic of Germany (1998), the Order "Peter the Great" of the Russian Academy of Security, Defense, Law and Order (2005), the Grand Cross of the Federal Republic of Germany (2011).

On 19 February 2017, Matthias Platzeck held a highly respected keynote address on the European-Russian relationship in Dresden. This speech can be read at: http://www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de/portal/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Dresdner_Rede_MPaD_190217_Freigabe.pdf

whether we were too much relying on black-and-white pictures when painting reality today, investing not enough time in exploring things, Gabriele Krone-Schmalz, who is also lecturing about journalism today, explained what decent journalism continues to be about. Time may move faster today in general, the world may have become more complex but sound and decent research is still crucial and the world rarely just divided into good and evil. Many journalists, however, had changed their work ethics and seemed to see it as their task to educate people rather than inform them – to lead them on the path of improvement. "I find that devastating". On the contrary, journalism has the obligation "to give the whole story, as complete as possible, not just one side, and to change perspective, to put oneself into the shoes of the people whose real life I want to report on, in order to better understand and evaluate things." If a mainstream opinion is established for the sake of providing fast orientation, and because everything is far too complicated – and then an atmosphere takes hold in which any opinion different from that mainstream is smeared as extremist, then we arrive at a point "where a majority of people can't identify themselves with this press any longer."

... instead of sketchy media coverage

Matthias Platzeck criticises the media, too, for their sketchy coverage. He calls it a dramatic situation that circumstances as complicated as peace efforts are cov-

ered in an un-differentiated zebra thinking. The discrepancy between what people actually think and discuss and the published media opinion has become huge. "We should be alarmed by this situation", Platzeck argues, and: "The media should report what actually is the case, rather than educate people."

Reporting what is the case, with respect and professional distance

Gabriele Krone-Schmalz found plain words regarding all those *Donald Trump* articles: "Nobody cares how I like Trump personally. As a journalist I have to analyse why he was elected." In doing so, a respectful style has to be maintained, even "... if I cannot stand the guy." An incomplete picture is painted if "... some e-mail hacks by foreign intelligence agencies" are blamed for the election result. This is "speculative reporting", she said. Instead, media should report what actually is the case, with respect and a certain distance. People should bear that in mind while reading articles. Speculating about criminal intentions in every contact with Russia does not contribute to an improved relationship between Russia and the USA, rather to a worsened one. "The man was right", she commented on Trumps statement during the campaign that a good American-Russian cooperation was in the US interest. Today however, everything he does to achieve this goal is compiled and

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US, NATO and EU – a joint war coalition

by Willy Wimmer, State Secretary in the German Federal Ministry of Defense retd.



Willy Wimmer
(picture uk)

In the Cold War, there was no problem explaining the NATO in the West. *Soviet Military Power*, edited by the Pentagon and equipped with impressive images and insights, provided important justification.

At least that was the case for the alliance partners in Western Europe. But in retrospect, when we look at the behaviour of Northern European NATO partners, both now and in those times, we have to realise that something may not have been right. At the time, there was no statement on the part of the Alliance, to which the Danes and the Norwegians did not con-

tribute their very own ideas. The *Warsaw Pact* threat identified by the Alliance was generally perceived differently and as less grave in Copenhagen and/or Oslo. Nevertheless, the tank armies were indeed facing each other. Since the time of the Dane *Rasmussen* and the Norwegian *Stoltenberg* there is a complete change of heart to be found in Central Europe, as they have mutated into the supreme warmongers on behalf of NATO. How is this to be explained, especially against the backdrop of the past?

USA 1988: Red Army in Central Europe was purely defensive

This is something to think about as in 2017, in the week of St. Nicholas, the contract for Mr Stoltenberg as whipper-in was extended by the NATO for another two years. And that is not all. As late as 1988, the US government still declared that even the massive presence of the Warsaw Pact, and especially the Red Army,

in Central Europe was purely defensive. It was about the “Protection of Mother Russia” as a consequence of her experiences with *Napoleon* and *Hitler*. In everything that had been called the “Bible of NATO” in the decades before, the pals in Washington denied any aggressive intent of the Moscow-dominated Warsaw Pact.

US politics today: dividing wall is to split Europe again

And what about today? Washington’s archives now make it clear how mercilessly the West, which is currently forcibly united in NATO, has broken all promises of non-expansion of NATO. Things are even worse, as the rearmament in Central and Eastern Europe pursued by the US – and backed by us all – shows. It is the declared policy of the United States to split Europe again, by means of a dividing wall extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black

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utilised to blame him, “... so that he might eventually lose his position.”

Politics requires craftsmanship – one needs to know what one is doing

Matthias Platzeck, who used to serve as chairman for the Social Democratic Party for one year, was asked about the relationship between Russia and his party. He responded: “This was a nice evening – until now.” Politics requires craftsmanship, he insisted, one needs to know what one is doing and this is time-consuming. For the preservation of peace on our continent reading papers is not quite enough, one needs to be present and invest into maintaining relationships. Studying the résumés of Bundestag MP’s today, one finds a lot of America, England, France, Russia is mentioned less often than New Zealand. *Egon Bahr* had valued his “back-channels” to Moscow because in dangerous situations he could call them and get information based on mutual trust. Insufficient knowledge about a country increases the risk of a war by coincidence. This is one aspect of what is referred to as the “alienation between peoples”. 2017 was supposed to be the year of German-Russian youth exchange programmes – “this year just went by unnoticed, and this should alarm us.”

Double standards

When asked about the West applying double standards if Russia is con-

cerned, Gabriele Krone-Schmalz states that she has dealt with this fact in every single book she has written. This is such a widespread practice that one could write about another example every day. “Totally regardless whether it is about doping or anything else, these double standards regarding Russia are so deeply rooted and quite offensive, too.” Matthias Platzeck adds: In panel discussions in Russia he has often experienced that whenever the topic of Russian violations of international law was raised, Russians approached him and asked about the Bundestag decisions in 2003 when the USA invaded Iraq in breach of international law, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties. “Why has nobody of you called for sanctions back then?”

Great similarity between Germany and Russia

Towards the end of the event the host posed the question which other similarities could be found between Germany and Russia. Krone-Schmalz argued there were huge similarities, mainly about the focus on the well-being of society, about getting-along well with each other. She saw the biggest danger in today’s atmosphere of mistrust that violent conflicts could erupt. Many minor misunderstandings could accumulate “up to a point of no return where things get out of control irreversibly.” Platzeck diagnoses the need for a policy of commemoration and history in Germany, no future

was possible without that being sorted out. We have to ask ourselves why 27 million victims of the invasion of the Soviet Union, “the worst war of annihilation which mankind has seen”, are not as present in our matrix of commemoration as compared with other victims. After this war the peoples of the Soviet Union offered reconciliation and at the end even their friendship. “We treated this offer with anything but sensibility.” The auditorium signalled their agreement.

All this is noticed in Russia and the alienation keeps growing. Although there is still a widespread sympathy with Europe and especially Germany, the rift is widening. This growing alienation is dangerous, because if knowledge about culture, language and customs of the neighbour is declining, people get more vulnerable to being manipulated into believing the biggest lies because nobody is there to challenge them.

If it doesn’t work “at the top”

However, during the recent city partnership event in Krasnodar, with the foreign ministers of Russia and Germany participating, the atmosphere had been different: “We won’t allow this to be destroyed!” And there the Year of Regional and Communal Partnerships had been announced. This meaningful initiative now has to be brought to life. And under big applause Platzeck added: “If it doesn’t work ‘at the top’, at least the grassroots have to stand strong.”

NATO continues to prepare deployment area in Eastern Europe

Peacebuilding measures are becoming ever more urgent

A systematic military deployment of NATO in Eastern Europe has gradually been taking place for the last few years. The EU and the NATO-allied states of Europe have so far failed to stop this development. Ever since the coup in Kiev in the spring of 2014, it has become clear that US foreign policy is working towards "encircling" Russia, thereby dragging European states into their wake. The meeting of the defense ministers of the NATO states and the subsequent meeting of EU defense ministers at the beginning of November in Brussels left no doubt about the confrontational course pursued.

"It is also clear that, in the age of nuclear armament, a warlike conflict calls into question the existence not only of the whole of Europe. Russia has unequivocally reserved its right to use nuclear weapons if its territory is militarily violated."

rt. NATO deployment on the Russian border, which has been clearly recognisable since 2014 at the latest, is being further pursued. Among other things, *Current Concerns* reported on the June 2017 tank transports from German North Sea ports across Germany and Austria to Eastern

Europe. 500 British and US American armoured vehicles were transported to the states bordering on Russia. The various military transports through German seaports such as Bremerhaven since 2014

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Sea. If Russia cannot be eliminated, then it must in any case be excluded from all good neighbourliness. And there are two more elements added. In states like Ukraine, the demons of the Nazi past are being revitalised with NATO and EU means. The cry is not only "eyes right!", but "eyes east!". In Ukraine and according to *Spiegel online* this is the case also in Hungary with its connections to other camps. Mind you, these are connections that you do not want to believe and will not be able to believe in.

The lust for war of the West ...

Even if – to our great astonishment – the United States government had attested a purely defensive character to the Warsaw Pact in the Cold War, this attitude can certainly not be discerned in respect of NATO near the western frontier of Russia. The Western lust for war has been too marked since its war of aggression against Yugoslavia. The exceptional nature of the United States since the end of the Cold War has been demonstrated by the fact that one has kept well away from peace and rapprochement. According to Washington, the world was only the framework for its own defense industry, as is shown impressively by the refusal of peace in Europe and Northeast Asia.

... and the role of the EU

And what about Western Europe under the yoke of a European Union which has mutated into a machine of state-destruction? Accession to this EU no longer means sustaining any of those values that should be protected. It may well be that one cannot cope alone with the task of protecting one's own state territory, one's own state authority and one's own people. To guarantee this, certain states have agreed to their integration into today's

European Union and even welcomed it joyfully.

However, today we have to realise that this compliance is being utilised for the creation of something different. Anyone who refers to the elements of the constitution of this European Union is mercilessly cornered by the rulers and their press storm troopers and at best denounced as a rightist or Nazi. Borders are left undefended and defenseless, and those who remind the German Bundestag of this situation are insulted and treated with disrespect. The power of the state can be observed when old people in Dusseldorf are fined for sitting down on a bus stop bench. Or when a former flagship industrial nation is unable to finish an airport, or when the Deutsche Bahn fails to put functioning trains on its rails. At the German borders, however, everyone can do what they want. Turkish citizens demonstrate how they can push the fight against their former homeland to extremes by having the German citizenship simply thrown at them. The constitutive people, once commemorated with golden letters on the wall of the Reichstag, are now reduced to watching how their country is converted into a multiethnic state.

Another European miscarriage: the military union

And then we were supposed to make a contribution to peace in the world last week, by launching the military union which is nothing more than another European miscarriage? In former times, the old Western European Union actually gave a profound example of how to act. There was a clear commitment to defense as the sole legitimacy, according to the *United Nations Charter*. Defense was legitimate, and not a global projection of power, to make possible the transformation of Europe into a war alliance, in time for the next American war in the world?

Obviously, our choice is to be able to choose between Anglo-Saxon and French

interests for which our soldiers are to be sent to the slaughter – the Near and Middle East for the Anglo-Saxons, and Africa for the shooting star who will soon be honoured in Aachen? At any rate, a clear commitment to defense in EU-Europe would require one thing: we would have to pay continual attention to our current situation and to also state clearly what we want the world to look like. Our contribution to a common defense would have to be measured according to this assessment. But this is not what the leaders of state and government in this aggressive EU want. They prefer a global power projection that augments the defense budget. As citizens we may then not even choose whether our money will go to the victims of the self-instigated wars or to the wars themselves. It will be lost in any case, and so our governments urge us to instead build capital for our own private retirement funds. Even the question of whether a war breaks out or does not is no longer decided by the sovereign. The EU creates military commanders who bypass the parliaments and create tension and war zones or let the tanks go back and forth according to Anglo-Saxon or French discretion without taking into account any state borders.

The burst of the bubble is inevitable

They did exist, those outstanding German ministry officials. An example was the ministerial director *Hans Ambos*, as system representative for the combat aircraft "Tornado". We owe to him the awareness of the fact that a final increase of 5% in combat value might mean an increase of 100% in funding for the procurement costs, and thus the breakdown of the federal budget. With an EU-Europe that no longer recognises – and no longer wants – the citizen to be the sovereign and guarantor of peace, the burst of the bubble is inevitable. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"NATO continues to prepare ..."

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have been a topic in the media time and again. With the increased presence of US *Special Forces* in Eastern Europe, another step is now being taken to prepare for military operations (see *Current Concerns*, issue No 29/30 of 1 December 2017).

NATO is being deployed

At the meeting of NATO defense ministers on 8/9 November in Brussels, it was officially decided to further expand the military infrastructure in the east, so that troops can be moved faster. For example, national borders should no longer be a "bureaucratic" hurdle. This limitless maneuverability was negotiated as a "showcase model" of NATO-EU cooperation (NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9 November 2017). Besides, two additional NATO headquarters will be established. Tourists have recently noticed the new, well-developed and hardly used highways in the Eastern European countries.

Accelerated build-up of EU army

In parallel with the NATO decisions, 23 out of 28 defense ministers of the EU member states decided on 12 November to further coordinate their armies (*Pesco*), including neutral Austria. One of the agreements is to increase spending on the military budget each year, to push ahead with European arms projects and to implement the long-planned EU intervention force. Great Britain, Denmark, Ireland, Malta and Portugal have not signed this agreement.

Russia not interested in a military conflict

The number of troops and weapons already concentrated in Eastern Europe is not discussed in the media. In fact, the many manoeuvres of NATO or of individual NATO states in Eastern Europe do not only serve as occasions for concrete emergency training, but also to facilitate the construction

Rethinking Switzerland's role

rt. The longer the more, it becomes necessary to readjust the coordinates of Swiss foreign and defense policy, so as not to get caught in the crosshairs of geopolitical-military considerations. Certainly the situation has changed again and again in 1848, 1870, 1914, 1939, 1989 or 2001. But even in the year of celebrations of *Niklaus von Flüe*, the meaningful requirement has not changed: to remain neutral. This requires responding sensitively to external signals in good time and making Switzerland (again) unattractive for a hostile takeover.

"Military industrial-complex"

rt. The latest publication of the *Swedish Stockholm International Peace Research Institute SIPRI* shows a worldwide increase in defense spending. Since 2010, the number is rising again. 374.8 billion dollars in arms purchases are detected and not all expenditures can be recorded. More than half of global sales go to US corporations. An important role in sales plays the increase in conflict regions or the conversion to more modern weapon systems. In terms of national armaments spending, the US government spends more money than the eight states behind it together in terms of defence spending.

The supposed winners of every military build-up and escalation on earth

can thus be quickly identified. These are the corporations of the "military-industrial complex", as the outgoing US president *Eisenhower* had warned in 1961. He meant the close personal entanglements between the weapon industry and politics. These include US corporations such as *Lockheed*, *Raytheon* and *Boeing*. In Europe, these companies are known as *EADS*, *Dassault* or *Krauss-Maffai*. Of course, all shareholders of the listed companies "benefit" from the "business". But it is unlikely that all European shareholders would personally benefit from the tremendous increase in their defence stocks after the outbreak of war.

of infrastructure and the provision of war material. According to military experts, the NATO potential is not (yet) adequate for an attack today. However, the further deployment increases the danger of war.

In opposition to the Norwegian NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg*, the military expert and longtime former military adviser in the German Chancellery, *Erich Vad*, denies that a military threat emanates from Russia. Russia is more interested in cooperation with the West (see "*Luzerner Zeitung*" of 16 November 2017).

Economic war is under way

An economic war against Russia, prompted by the US, is under way at the same time as the NATO deployment. However, this affects not only Russia, but also the economy of many European countries themselves (while the US industry gladly takes on many of the contracts). At the insistence of individual EU states, EU headquarters has in addition began to take action against the German gas pipeline project *Nord-Stream 2*. This project would guarantee an additional energy supply to the continent. Otherwise, the missing gas must then be purchased at higher prices from the US ...

Stereotypes formed by the media

Since 2014, media experts have been observing that in mainstream European media, anti-Russian reflexes and stereotypes are systematically being re-established (see *Hofbauer, Hannes, Feindbild Russland, 'Enemy Stereotype Russia'* 2016, ISBN 978-3-85371-401-0). For historians, this is generally considered a typical preparation for war. The transatlantic re-enactment of American guidelines by the European mainstream media that has thus come into play, has meanwhile been more than sufficiently documented and described (*Krüger, Uwe, Meinungsmacht 'Power of Opinions'*

2014, ISBN 978-3-869621241 or www.swisspropaganda.ch).

Europe as possible battlefield

Since the *Barnett* strategy paper from the US Pentagon has been discussed even in public, possible strategic considerations behind many conflict areas are becoming easier to understand. Obviously it is no longer about "winning" wars in the traditional sense, but about plunging entire regions into chaos (Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, etc.), so as to eliminate or control them (*Barnett, Thomas P.M.: The Pentagon's New Map. War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*; Putnam Publishing Group 2004).

It appears rather improbable that European capitals have not yet considered in what way further escalation with Russia would progress. The fact that a future military battlefield would include areas of Russia and large parts of Europe (and certainly not parts of the USA) is clear also to European politicians and members of the military.

Thinking escalation through to the end

The question inevitably arises as to whether the Russian leadership will voluntarily accept a war on its own territory. Any responsible leadership will protect its people and not deliver them up to an ever-growing conflict on their own territory. Russia had to suffer this painful experience several times. So, where would Russia's military leadership transfer a future battlefield to in the age of "flexible task forces"? To Frankfurt, to Paris, or Zurich ...? In Syria, the Russian army has proved that it is capable of militarily capturing, occupying, and holding larger remote areas.

It is also clear that, in the age of nuclear armament, a warlike conflict calls into question the existence not only of the whole of Europe. Russia has unequivocally

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EU-drums-of-war – is this a motivation to campaign for a better world?

by Karl Müller

Since a long time, even during the election campaign, there has been little talk of this subject in Germany. But now, once again it has become an issue in German politics: The conciliation of Europe is equal with an increased European Union.

This originates with the keynote speech on the future of the EU, held by the President of the European Commission *Jean-Claude Juncker* in mid-September, the speech about Europe by French President *Emmanuel Macron* and the speech of the President of the European Council *Donald Tusk*. However, the German leaders have been silent for a long time.

“United States of Europe”?

However, the acting German Minister of Foreign Affairs *Sigmar Gabriel* has now also spoken out clearly demanding an independent European foreign and security policy. The German Greens have al-

ways been in favour of this anyway. This was confirmed by the green EU parliamentarian *Jan Philipp Albrecht* in an interview with the “*Deutschlandfunk*” (German world service) on 11 December 2017. The chairman of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) *Martin Schulz* didn’t want to take a back seat and called for the “United States of Europe” to be realised by 2025, a related Constitutional Treaty and a tough policy against those in the EU who do not want to join. His call is supposed to be a core element of the coalition negotiations with the CDU and CSU. *Ms Merkel* would not be opposed to it, even if she has remained discrete on the subject so far. But Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia *Armin Laschet*, member of the same political party, joined the call for more EU in an interview with the “*Deutschlandfunk*” (6 December 2017). These developments are supported by the fact, that the German city of Aachen awarded the prestigious *Charle-*

magne Prize 2018 to the French President “for his vision of a new Europe and the re-establishing of the European project”. Additionally this is supported by the fact, that on 11 December 2017 now also the ministers of foreign affairs – after the ministers of defence – of 25 EU states decided to establish a European Defence Union. How is this to be interpreted?

In memory of the US-agent Jean Monnet

This reminds us of the strategic considerations of the US-agent *Jean Monnet*, the “Founding father of European Unification” (*Wikipedia*), who already in the fifties of the last century considered “crises” essential to promote the “European Unification” step by step.

The myth of the “peace project” was added to the European Unification.

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Take over of OSCE Chairmanship to Italy Hardly any progress for Eastern Ukraine

rt. On 8 December, at the 24th OSCE Ministerial Council, the then designated Austrian Chancellor and sitting Foreign Minister *Sebastian Kurz* took stock of the Austrian Chairmanship of the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe*. He emphasised that a revived “bloc” mentality was obstructing progress. In this context he especially referred to the crisis in Ukraine but also to the tensions in Transnistria. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking would thwart any substantial progress in the OSCE.

Kurz commended the establishment of a budget increase for the OSCE by its 57 member states, which was appropriate given the escalating conflicts.

Referring to his proposal to install a UN peacekeeping mission in Ukraine, *Kurz*

said that his could be another desirable option in order to alleviate the crisis.

The OSCE Secretary General, the Swiss diplomat *Thomas Greminger*, newly elected in July, also emphasised the importance of the OSCE as it could serve as a platform for governments to re-engage in such difficult times. He also pointed out the opportunities for informal talks on the margins of ministerial meetings, which were currently of great importance.

Both *Kurz* and *Greminger* praised the various OSCE teams, whose work contributed significantly to the realisation of the small results.

* * *

rt. Austria passes on its OSCE Chairmanship to Italy in 2018. The “progress” of the OSCE in 2017 seems depressing, given the

difficult situation in Eastern Europe. Especially in this for Europe dangerous geopolitical situation, the blockade of the West has a devastating effect. After all, organisations such as the OSCE or the UN could play an important role in “controlling” conflict zones or finding ways for peaceful conflict resolution, or at least keeping channels open for it.

The precondition for this remains the *honest will* of the OSCE contracting states. The fact that the OSCE has hardly been successful in the Ukraine conflict so far is certainly not due to the organisation or the current Austrian Chairmanship, but to the superordinate strategy of the US – with its European “allies” in tow – to advance to Russia’s borders and to stir up trouble spots there. As long as the OSCE is used as a propaganda platform to isolate Russia, it is unacceptable for Russia. Through repeated abuse, the West has destroyed the instrument of security and confidence-building measures CSBM and the further development of the Vienna Document (mutual inspections of military activities). Russia is now opposing such proposals on the basis of experience. This is why the German Chairmanship, which had just made the further development of the Vienna Document its goal, failed.

In this situation neutral intermediaries such as Switzerland that maintain contact in all directions despite the hardened “bloc” mentality, are becoming important again. •

“NATO continues to prepare ...”

continued from page 5

reserved its right to use nuclear weapons if its territory is militarily violated.

Consequences to be drawn

In the tense political situation at the turn of the year 2017/2018, all that can be done is to be very aware and to clearly demand various steps towards de-escalation. But this requires the honest political will of all involved. There are possibilities enough: The means of mutual military observation

in the sense of confidence-building measures could be massively enlarged and expanded. The regular meetings within the OSCE with the objective of relieving tensions would have to take place much more often as from now. The nonsensical boycott of Russia can be lifted quickly, so that a “change through trade” may occur. Here clear signals could come from Europe. These would be the first necessary steps to de-escalation, and they could start today – and would also be welcomed by reasonable forces on the other side of the Atlantic! •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"EU-drums-of-war – is this..."

continued from page 6

The myth of the "peace project"

But the "Peace Project" myth doesn't measure up. Already beginning with *Churchill's* speech, held in Zurich in September 1946, the beginning of the Cold War and geostrategic considerations was characterised in his speech. This war was not just "cold", but it claimed millions of victims: in South America, in Africa, in Asia (several millions only in Korea and Indochina) ... also in the US itself and also in Europe. Added to this, is the famous sentence of the first NATO Secretary General and British Baron *Hasting Lionel Ismay* describing the purpose of NATO in Europe: "To keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". According to Jean Monnet's proposal for a supranational authority to control the German and French coal and steel production, the *Montan-Union* (European Coal and Steel Community) was started by the 6 founding members of the later EEC in 1951. It served mainly to control the West German coal and steel industry and was an expression of mistrust towards the young Federal Republic.

Sigmar Gabriel: in foreign policy power overrules rights

It is interesting that these origins are revived in today's debate. This is supported by the first concrete step in founding the European Defence Union. Typical of this is the speech of Sigmar Gabriel at the influential "Berlin Foreign Policy Forum" of 5 December 2017 (<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/berliner-forum-aussenpolitik/746464>), which the German Foreign Office titled with "Europe in an uncomfortable World". Gabriel's line of argument is the following: More than 25 years after the end of the Cold War, Europe – Gabriel always means just the EU – is once again threatened: for example by "emerging states" such as China and Russia. However, in this serious threat situation, EU-Europe could no longer rely on the US – Gabriel is thinking rather of *Donald Trump*, not *Barack Obama*, *Hillary Clinton*, or *George Soros*. So the only way for the EU (for its commissioned work?) is: to become not only economically, but also militarily and politically strong and powerful. "We have to understand: either we try to shape this world, or we will be shaped by the rest of the world." Respect for international law is supposed to be a secondary concern. Political and strategic considerations are paramount. Germany and the EU are to "fight with confidence" for what they want to achieve – without "oversized moral or normative blinders".

The commentary in the renowned "Süddeutsche Zeitung" of 11 December 2017 of

the initiative of Martin Schulz fits very well to this: "Now Martin Schulz has finally put EU-Europe in the centre of the coalition negotiations. It calls for the 'United States of Europe' to be created by 2025, if necessary, even without EU countries that are in fact working against Europe. The time frame of the SPD chairman is unrealistic. But his goal is right. Only a European Federal State can ensure that French, German, Polish or Portuguese people retain their sovereignty against *Trump*, China or *Amazon*. Emmanuel Macron has been stretching out his hand towards Germany for months. At some point it will be too late to take it." Let's do it!

Revival of pre-war policy

All of this is reminiscent of lines of argument that do not characterise post-war, but pre-war times. This argument is not kosher. There are enemy images, prejudices. It is often proven that, for example, Russia and China do not have any aggressive intentions against Europe. However, the enemy stereotype of aggression is to be maintained by all means from the official side. The well-known German journalist and publicist *Gabriele Krone-Schmalz* has once again presented this in her latest book, "Eiszeit. Wie Russland dämonisiert wird und warum das so gefährlich ist" (Ice Age. How Russia is demonized and why it is so Dangerous) (ISBN 978-3-406-71412-2) in an excellent way. Russia and China have repeatedly made offers to cooperate towards Europe and have been doing so until today. Both countries spoke and are rightly speaking of possible "win-win" situations, i.e. ways that all sides could benefit from more cooperation – but the EU has considered it "better" to renew the Cold War against Russia and to impose unutterable sanctions. And China is accused without reason that it wants to split Europe with its project of the "New Silk Road".

Questions in school lessons

A teacher reported, that a question came up in his lessons if it is sensible to show the persecution and destruction of European Jews in the years 1933 to 1945 in all its brutality. One student replied that this was very important. Everyone must know exactly what happened then – in order to prevent such crimes in the future. A pupil replied that everyone knows exactly what happened then – and yet such crimes are committed again and again. A follow up question, whether young people wanted to take a stand for a better world today, was asked by a third student. A young man who is very interested in historical and political questions, answered with "this is in fact true" – but there is a lack of direction. The teacher nodded his approval.

A deathblow for democracy

The young man represents many young (and not only young) people in Germa-

Letter to  the Editor**There is nothing to be expected from Macron**

The article "They are the true face of France" by *Natacha Polony* or the summary of the book by *Gérald Andrieu* "Le peuple de la frontière" (The people at the border; *Current Concerns* No 27 of 14 November 2017) must be a stab in the heart of anyone who, 20 years ago, toured the rural parts of France or spent holidays there. What has become of France? How severe has the rural population of France been let down! From my school days I remember the books of Marcel Pagnol and other French authors with the description of life in rural areas there. As high school students and students these descriptions tempted us to visit rural France with its humble villages and to stay for the holidays there. We stayed overnight in small hostels, enjoyed to stroll through narrow streets with small craft businesses, shops, bakeries, etc. We experienced there in the villages, what we used to understand by the term "savoir vivre": simple, frugal and still rich. Much of this spirit is gone today. The devastating analysis of *Natacha Polony* points out clearly that from the current government *Macron* there is nothing to be expected that could bring back the spirit to these villages.

David Holzmann

ny and probably also in other European countries. Especially the most interested and thoughtful among them, those who do have a certain solid foundation of values, have become perplexed. A policy of grossness and violence, the power politics and the preparation of war (and the wars already taking place) are discouraging. The best hearts and minds are driven into political apathy. So it is not so surprising if a young man interested in historical and political questions is pondering on the lack of direction. If this continues, democratic life will be pushed to its death. For those planning wars this may be "sensible". However, for most people this is a catastrophe.

In view of this, to bank on "resistance" is not a satisfactory solution. And the "inner emigration" and the retreat into the private sphere are certainly not a solution. So what is the direction? Perhaps, to support those who are genuinely and honestly committed to peace and justice. •

“In the Spiderweb of Secret Services – Why were Olof Palme, Uwe Barschel and William Colby murdered?”

by Dr Barbara Hug



Even the book title suggests that the writing team will show a closer relationship between the three political killings – which are not officially recognised as such. Of course, publications on *U. Barschel* and *O. Palme* are not rare, on the contrary. But they are, with greater temporal distance to their death, substantively occupied with an increased density of facts, with a knowledge that was able to penetrate only in the course of time to the surface, because they have a considerable explosive force. Today, the educated public can no longer be held out with questionable suicide theses or even more questionable individual perpetrators.

Someone who is interested in the current tense world situation and who still believes that war and terrorism are not a suitable response to conflicts, should observe exactly the recent history of Germany, Sweden, NATO, *Stay Behind* and the international arms trade. Not only that Barschel, Palme and Colby are only a few in the suspected series of political murders, – here referred to Europe. The Cold War, the problem



ISBN 978-3-864489-176-2

area between West and East, wars in the Middle East with active supply of weapons of all kinds, the demonisation of states with simultaneous armament – these topics are stripped of their mysticism and thus fed to a

“This book deals with the shadow warriors and their victims. It leads the reader into the forbidden zone of secret services, in which not only discreet spying, but also dirty work is done. We open a small window to the engine room of the Cold War and look to where it became a hot, dirty war.” (From the blurb)

more detailed historical analysis. This still needs to be done in full.

The Cold War was a construction of the secret services of the West. By attempting to reconstruct the events that led to the murders of Barschel, Palme and Colby, *Baab* and *Harkavy* make a significant contribution to elucidating what is called “behind the scenes”. As a result, the political present gets a different taste – less illusions, but also more comprehensible and thus fundamentally changeable.

Baab, Patrik; Harkavy, Robert E. *Im Spinnennetz der Geheimdienste – Warum wurden Olof Palme, Uwe Barschel und William Colby ermordet?* Frankfurt am Main 2017

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Peruvian Department of Education withdraws “gender ideology” school curriculum

ag. “Händs off my children!” (#ConMisHijosNoTeMetas) This was the motto under which in March 2017 more than 1.5 million people in different Peruvian cities were drawn to protest against the gender ideology in the national curriculum, implemented by the Department of Education in the beginning of 2017.

Previously the Peruvian bishop’s conference as well as parents, teachers and several Christian groups in the country had criticised the curriculum because of the contained gender ideology. Notwithstanding any of these objections and criticism the Department of Education implemented the curriculum.

But indeed, in August 2017 the Supreme Court of Justice ruled in favour of an action brought against the Department of Education, because the Court saw an attempt to indoctrinate schoolchildren in the curriculum. Eventually, on 24 November the Department of Education announced the withdrawal of the curriculum in question and the reimplementation of the 2009 curriculum.

The announcement meant a great success to the thousands of parents represent-

ed by the group #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas (cf. *Catholic News Agency*, 1 December 2017).

Phrases and terms like “construct your identity”, “gender identity” or “what is masculine or feminine is constructed day by day” are now banished from the school curriculum (at least for the time being). Despite that one has to be aware of the fact that “the fight in defence of the family will go on”, as says *Sergio Burga*. He is a researcher at the Population Research Institute’s Latin American office. The 2009 curriculum – though not taken as offensive as the one of 2016 – had raised similar concerns and objections on the parents’ side and will be scrutinised again by advocates and parents.

Also in other countries primary school children come home and tell their parents “daddy, I am a girl but if I want I can become a boy. We learnt that at school”. Or they ask “what happens to children who are unwanted from their mother?” (detached from a parents letter, *Pro Life bulletin* No 2).

Source: www.ncregister.com/daily-news/peru-to-withdraw-its-gender-ideology-school-curriculum

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Family as school of life

by Sonja van Biezen, psychologist

In psychological practice we are frequently meeting mothers experiencing attacks of insignificance. The feeling to be "only a mother" is stressing the mental balance of many young women.

Both parents being integrated in work processes, the task of education is increasingly transferred to non-familiar institutions like day nurseries. The traditional family unit is undergoing a change and seems to lose significance.

Family as foundation of our society

Research in comparative cultural anthropology has shown that stable systems of relations exist in all cultures, the family – the so-called "nuclear family" – forming their centre. The nuclear family is characterised by the close relationship between the parents and their children. In all its variability – be it small or extended families, kins or clans – the nuclear family is forming the founding unit of communal life. Growing up in a family means to gain positive emotional experiences in the intense relationship to mother and father in the first years of life, to develop a sense of basic trust in fellow human beings which is the foundation for all relationships in future life. The family is the first community, with parents and siblings serving as a model for future experiences in school and work. In a family, the life tasks at hand can be solved jointly. Likewise, worries and defeats are borne collectively. In a traditional family with mother and father the children can gain experiences with both sexes. The girl can orient herself towards her mother, growing into her tasks as woman and mother by her example. In interaction with his father, the boy will acquire the emotional resources he will need as an adult man. This process is called identification. As a legal foundation of communal life, family and marriage still enjoy specific protection according to their importance. In the family, the achievements of our society and the time-proven traditions are passed on to the new generation.

But what is it now that ensures the continuity of these cultural achievements?

During the years a child is living in a family, it is familiarised with the values defining the communal life of people of a cultural sphere. These are values in accordance with human nature including values like compassion, sympathy, consideration, tolerance, mutual aid and non-violent conflict resolution. Correspondingly, parents are facing an important

"Research in comparative cultural anthropology has shown that stable systems of relations exist in all cultures, the family – the so-called 'nuclear family' – forming their centre. The nuclear family is characterised by the close relationship between the parents and their children. In all its variability – be it small or extended families, kins or clans – the nuclear family is forming the founding unit of communal life. Growing up in a family means to gain positive emotional experiences in the intense relationship to mother and father in the first years of life, to develop a sense of basic trust in fellow human beings which is the foundation for all relationships in future life."

and challenging task. This is why they are bearing a great responsibility. The education of their children ensures that the historical cultural achievements are conserved. During the educational process, these values need to be actively founded and emotionally anchored.

Insights of depth psychology

In the beginning of the last century scientific psychology has tackled the question of educability of children and the factors governing their development in early childhood. *Sigmund Freud* realised that man is guided by unconscious feelings. And it was the Viennese individual psychologist *Alfred Adler* who in the 1920s realised the paramount importance of the relationship between mother and child for the development of the personality of the child. Starting with its first minute, the child is seeking contact with the mother, because this emotional contact with its mother is vital for the child. Thus Adler considered it the mother's task to establish a strong emotional tie with the child. For the child, she mainly has to be a responsible fellow being whom it can rely on and whose support is certain. This first relationship is forming the foundation, the basic trust for all further relations in a person's life. These fundamental insights of Alfred Adler regarding childhood development were later confirmed and substantiated by numerous studies of developmental psychology.

Freud's psychoanalytical hypothesis that for children the forming of social relationships comes only secondary, as a consequence of the satisfaction of physical needs, has been refuted not only by Adler but also by the development psychological studies of attachment research.

...and attachment research

The thesis of exclusive satisfaction of needs was incomplete. This was first

shown in studies of the Viennese School with institutionalised children by *Charlotte Bühler*, *René A. Spitz* and later the research of the English psychiatrist *John Bowlby* regarding the consequences of emotional neglect in children. The reference person, that was now clear, was not only serving to satisfy physical needs like hunger, thirst etc. but from its first day the child is oriented, also in its activities, towards entering a relationship with the mother.

Recognition of these signals and this orientation and the mother's adequate reaction on them are part of the social-emotional process of the mother-child relationship.

Later these scientific studies were extended and detailed such that the relationship between mother and child was investigated in all their emotional aspects. The studies of American researchers like *Mary D. Salter Ainsworth*, *Mary Maine* and the German researching couple *Karin and Klaus Grossmann* confirmed and specified Alfred Adler's insights from the 1920s. This research now allows us to state what a child needs for the development of its personality.

The mother's importance

In addition it is the mother's task to transfer the attachment formed between her and the child to the other members of the family like the father and the siblings, then to arouse and to maintain the child's interest for communal matters beyond the context of the family. The mother's guiding orientation helps the child to find its way in the smaller and larger community.

To make sure that a child will be able to become a fellow player in the community of humans, educators also need to set an example regarding values which are essential for communal life. The basis for this is the child's trust in its parents which

Teacher would be, no, it is a fulfilling profession

by David Holzmann

On a Monday in autumn, Sandrine comes home from school and during dinner she reports proudly and with sparkling eyes: "We're building a hot-air balloon at school." The two younger siblings are just as amazed as their sister, who is in 5th grade. Everyone joins in enthusiasm, father and mother report from their school days, when they also built hot air balloons.

They are working at it every day during school hours, Sandrine reports. Lightweight tissue paper must be cut and carefully stuck together. A scaffold out of thin wire has to be bent into shape. Already on the second day Sandrine no longer reports how the balloon develops, which she is to build together with a school-mate. On Thursday, the mother asks if the work is ready and when there will be the big moment when the balloon will be lifted into the air. With hanging corners of her mouth Sandrine reports that she is not sure if her balloon will fly. The teacher had rebuked the girls, that they should not take so much glue, they needed not be surprised if the balloon would not fly. Father, mother and the siblings nearly must worm information out of Sandrine until Sandrine comes out with what has happened at school.

Finally, the process becomes clear: The teacher distributed a page to all, where the instructions for the construction of a hot-air balloon are described in 8 lines. In addition to the very concise text containing some terms Swiss children are not familiar with, the construction manual contains three schematic drawings. The instruction should be sufficient, said the teacher and let the children work on their own. They



"After all, each student wants to learn something, and as a rule it can be assumed that the orientation towards the teacher is given. The student wants something from the teacher. And, therefore, it would be so easy to help the student succeed. The student needs guidance, not only a written instruction, this is not enough. The student needs the teacher as a reference person, contact person or helper."

should independently and two by two construct each a hot-air balloon. The order with the written instructions was distributed without comment, the students went to their place and tried to get to work. With what and how to start? After a short while already, the students became restless, a mix of desperation and nervousness spread. The teacher took action and

demanding quiet work, obviously annoyed at the students.

It's Friday the same week. The mother looks out the window in the morning, the sky is grey, the weather report speaks of upcoming rain in the late afternoon: "Do you really want to launch your balloons in

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"Family as school of life"

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has been formed during the first months. The process of education is to be understood as an interaction between parents and child during which the mentioned values are imparted and value systems are actively founded and emotionally anchored. For the child, this process is facilitated in a trusting attachment. If parents, teachers and other adult persons are reliable role models, that is, only if the child holds them in such high esteem, the child can orientate itself by and learn from them. In addition to the imparting values, the goal of education should be to enable the adolescent to cope with the tasks of life. Alfred Adler pointed out three areas which every person needs to deal with in life: love, work and community. Coping with these three tasks of life requires every person to have a healthy

degree of ability to build relations and to cooperate. Adler has characterised this with the term "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" (sense of community). This is why education can neither be arbitrary nor can it be deducted from some philosophical ideas but it has to follow the logic of human communal life and our cultural achievements. An education can be called successful if the adolescent can face these tasks of life. The degree of "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" in a person is not only apparent in the style of his personal life but also in the question if an adolescent is willing to take over tasks serving the common good and to contribute to the solution of current concerns as a fellow being and fellow citizen. Each threat to family is a threat to society itself.

Summary

Family is a place deserving of protection where children can develop and un-

fold their personality while acquiring the emotional equipment for their future life.

Hence we should do all we can to strengthen and to conserve consciousness for the importance of education and family. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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Curriculum 21 – Did the dice fall? New learning techniques or paradigm shift?

mw. “Curriculum 21 – Did the dice fall? New learning techniques or paradigm shifts?” The “Verein ostschweizer Kinderärzte” (Association of Paediatricians from Eastern Switzerland) organised a panel discussion with *Michael Furger*, head of the “NZZ am Sonntag” department as a capable moderator. In the large plenary hall of the University of Applied Sciences St Gallen, which was occupied to the last seat, the pedagogue *Dr phil Matthias Burchardt* (Cologne) and the secondary school teacher *Alain Pichard* from Biel have given two top-class keynote speeches. In the ensuing lively

discussion, *Alexander Kummer* (Head of the St. Gallen Primary and Secondary School Office) and *Prof Thomas Burri* (St. Gallen College of Education) also took part.

Since an excessively concise summary could not do justice to the many facets of the event, the presentation by Dr Matthias Burchardt is to be introduced here.

Matthias Burchardt brought his experience with current school reforms in Germany to bear and stated right from the start that this was a clear paradigm shift. The educational paradigm of *Comenius* from the 17th century, according to which the

teacher shows the pupil the world, the reality, is still valid today. The pedagogical constellation makes education possible in the first place. In today’s school reforms (digitalised, self-organised learning) this indispensable personal dimension of education is lost. Of course, the child must always grasp reality itself, but constructivism leaves the relationship between teacher and student outside. The OECD and EU lobbyists have succeeded in overturning the humanist tradition of education and in establishing an economic model by introduc-

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“Teacher would be ...”

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this wind today? And where do you want to do that?” “The teacher will take us by tram and bus to a large meadow where we will have the balloons started.”

Friday evening; Sandrine comes home with her head hanging, throws the school materials in a corner. Two of the 10 balloons have been tattered in the bus by the crowd of passengers. The remaining 8 arrived reasonably well on the big meadow. Three more balloons caught fire, because some fuel came on the tissue paper. When lit by the children, these balloons were victims of the flames, leaving behind only the wireframe. The wind made it impossible for the other balloons to take off. Only one flew a few meters, it was the balloon of the teacher, who was apparently happy about it.

But Sandrine did not want to give up. Her parents’ descriptions of their experience with hot-air balloons they built at school played on her mind. The 5th grader asks the mother if she could not buy tissue paper. At dinner, a fire of enthusiasm ignites again, as the father takes up Sandrine’s wish, and the family decides to make hot-air balloons themselves. On Saturday morning, the breakfast table not yet being cleared, one already plans, discusses and compiles material. First one selects the paper: what colour should have the balloon? Then the daughter bends over the paper, makes precise measurements and carefully marks the cutting lines. The father looks closely, corrects here and there, helps to hold the paper so that the daughter can cut exactly along the cutting lines with the big scissors. Then the glue. “Apply only little”, says the father, “and immediately spread thinly so that the white glue does not dissolve the paper. Then you have to glue two parts together carefully working in groups of two or even better of three. Sandrine lets the father guide her, tries it out for herself,

asks her father again if it is good. A constant to and fro between daughter and father.

Then the wire frame, which has to be fixed in the corners of the paper with a little adhesive tape. Imperceptibly, the whole family is making the most beautiful and perfect balloon possible. Everything around is forgotten. The enthusiasm about the emerging balloon is written in Sandrine’s face. It goes smoothly, the work is finished after one hour. Sandrine is proud, and together with her siblings she wants to run out into the open air to let the balloon rise. But the father declines. “Look at the wind, can you see the leaves of the tree trembling in the wind? This is not flying weather for balloons.”

The next day, it is Sunday, everyone looks outside at breakfast. It is still winding. In the afternoon the sun is shining and it is quite cool. The mother calls the father’s attention to the weather, it is almost windless. Now everyone is completely unleashed: Now it should be, the hot-air balloon should start now. The cotton wool is fixed around the wire frame at the bottom of the balloon. Outside, it is sprinkled with fuel, the tension increases, the pulse increases for everyone. Now the cotton wool is set alight together. Father and Sandrine hold the balloon, which is filling with warm air, at two corners each of them and... slowly they can let it go, and slowly it climbs higher and higher. Everybody cheers, laughs and Sandrine dances with her siblings. “It flies, look, it flies, and how. Incredible! Look at that!” Now it is higher than the roof of the house, a fine breeze carries it over the garden to the apple tree at the neighbour’s house, where it slowly comes down and gets stuck. Sandrine’s brother cleverly climbs up the tree and carefully pulls down the precious aircraft. It remained intact. The family goes into the house with sunshine in their hearts. Sandrine wants to build another balloon, the brothers and sisters want to build one

too and so three more balloons are created, one more beautiful than the other.

What went wrong at school and what worked better at home? What is the difference between the balloon workshop at school and the one at home? It is the relationship; man learns in relationship. The teacher gave a leaflet with the instructions, without explanation, without answering or accepting questions or suggestions from the students. The quality of the relationship between teacher and student determines crucially whether the learning process will be successful.

The conditions that the teacher finds at school would be ideal. After all, each student wants to learn something, and as a rule it can be assumed that the orientation towards the teacher is given. The student wants something from the teacher. And, therefore, it would be so easy to help the student succeed. The student needs guidance, not only a written instruction, this is not enough. The student needs the teacher as a reference person, contact person or helper. The student’s gratitude is the elixir for the teaching profession, there cannot be anything more beautiful. The student is so grateful to the teacher for every success he can carry home, whether this is a nice essay, a solved math task or a hot-air balloon.

Every teacher who is aware of his importance as a reference person and orientation point for the student can see joyful faces every day. Through his work as a teacher, he can see after each week and month that his group of students has again learned something new. The teacher can thus set the course in a person’s life. So, what could be nicer than the teaching profession? Do not allow that the teaching profession is spoiled by new, untested reforms. Our children deserve the teacher to develop a friendly and guiding interaction with them. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Reading as a cultural achievement – how people are connected to books

by Tankred Schaer

Lately I picked up a notebook on which I read the following quote:

“In the end everything will be fine and if it does not work out well, it will not be the end.”

These words come from Oscar Wilde, who lived from 1854 to 1900 and became famous with his novel “The Portrait of Dorian Gray”. Some know the play “The Canterville Ghost” or perhaps “The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales”, from their school days, also written by Oscar Wilde.

So that is what literature can do. It can surprise, bring about a change in the thoughts, lead to new insights suddenly and unexpectedly, and it can encourage readers and build up optimism.

Like this author, many other authors have laid down their thoughts and invite us to follow them mentally and to start an intellectual dialogue with them. In this way, the authors enable us to experience alien worlds in a very comprehensive sense; because this does not only mean the natural world, but also the spiritual worlds. Books allow to reflect on one’s own life, one’s own existence. We enter into an exchange with the author, with the characters he has created, we get in touch with other people and the world. And this is not a consumption taking place, but a mental work also causing a change in the reader.

Marcel Proust writes in “Days of Reading”:

“There may be no days of our childhood that we’ve experienced as fully as those [...] we’ve spent with a favourite book. Everything that they seemed to fulfill for the others, and what we put aside like a vulgar in-

terruption of a divine pleasure: the play for which a friend wanted to fetch us at the most interesting passage; the disturbing bee or the annoying ray of sunshine that forced us to lift our gaze from the page or to change our place; the supplies given for the afternoon meal, which we left lying untouched besides us on the bench, while the sun was inexorably weakening in the blue sky over our head; the dinner for that we had to go back to the house, and during which we thought of going up to our room immediately afterwards to finish the interrupted chapter, in all of that our reading would have seen us as nuisance but on the contrary engraving such a gentle remembrance in us (which, in our judgment today, is so much more precious than what we read with devotion at that time) that, if we sometimes leaf through these books of yore, they remain like the only calendars kept of these escaped days, and it happens with the hope of seeing the defunct dwellings and ponds reflected on their pages.”

What happens when we read such a text? Maryanne Wolf writes in the book “Proust and the Squid. The Story and Science of the Reading Brain”:

“First, be aware of what you’ve been thinking while reading this section,



(picture keystone)

and then try to analyse exactly what you’ve done when reading – for example, how you started to connect Proust with other thoughts. If you are like me, Proust has evoked deeply hidden memories of books in you – the secret places where you could browse undisturbed by siblings and friends, the beating of the heart and the goose bumps that Margaret Mitchell, Mark Twain and Karl May have caused, the dim light of the flashlight under the covers that your parents would hopefully not notice. This is Proust’s reading refuge, and it is ours, too. There we experienced for the first time what it was like to roam obliviously Middle earth, Lilliput and Narnia. There, for the first time, we slipped into the skins of figures we would never meet – princes and beggars, dragons and virgins, Indian chiefs and a German-Jewish girl hiding from the Nazi soldiers in a Dutch loft.”

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“Curriculum 21 – Did ...”

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ing “new ideas” and “standard setting” (as an instrument of power), with which it is also possible to earn a good living. Any resistance from teachers is broken by control methods such as change management and by constant study of observation sheets, “further training” and inclusion classes that are barely manageable.

The “self-organised learning SOL” according to OECD and Bertelsmann imposes sole responsibility for its learning on the “learner” – an unrelated, ageless (“life-long learning”) and robot-like being. With SOL, students learn very little: short learning phases, missing corrections, no pro-

tection against disturbances in the “office” area, while the teachers are under constant stress and have no time to teach the children. Digitisation is the continuation of this: decoupling from the teacher and coupling to the machine. With the help of the *Knewton* software, for example, thousands of data on each pupil and teacher are collected and the future status of each pupil is calculated in advance – paving the way for a two-class society.

In Germany, these school reforms have failed because of their unsuitability, as many teachers warned from the very beginning (so-called “resistance”): Enormous numbers of high-school graduates hide the inability to study of a large part of the academic youth, inclusion has not achieved

its goal of greater social justice, but on the contrary, has increased the gap between the scissors. At best, a poorly educated section of the population is provided for basic activities of the digitised industry 4.0. Apart from this questionable result, however, even the economic success of the “economisation of education” failed to materialise. After all, analogue learning also prepares students better for the digitalised world than computer-based actions from an early age.

The speaker recommends that the Swiss participants draw conclusions from the German experiences and not to participate in the school reforms described. We Swiss would have the democratic possibilities, Matthias Burchardt correctly stated. Let’s use them!

"Reading as a cultural achievement ..."

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We can also put it this way: As we read, we learn to see the world through the eyes of another person. No medium is able to do that as good as books can. And only then it becomes possible to really understand each other and to enter a friendship with your fellow human beings.

However: Who can say that he takes enough time for these things? The way our society is built up – the fast electronic communication, the ubiquity of the smartphone, the timed windows of attention, and the speed of time passing by – there seems to be no time for reading. Most of you will know the picture *Michael Ende* has created with his children's book "Momo": The grey gentlemen come into the city and become more and more numerous. They smoke little grey cigars, and a coldness originating from them, against that you cannot protect yourself. The gentlemen, however, are the agents of the Timesaving Bank of time demonstrating the people how much time they can save. But the people have less time the more they save because the grey gentlemen are actually stealing their time.

Literature is a way out of the time trap into the freedom of thinking.

Aforementioned Maryanne Wolf, points to the special significance of reading for the development of the human brain in her book "Proust and the Squid. The Story and Science of the Reading Brain".

"We are not born bookworms. People invented reading only a few thousand years ago. And with this invention, we set in motion a restructuring of our brain that in turn opened up unprecedented ways of thinking, which in turn redirected our species' mental evolution. Reading is one of the most remarkable individual inventions in history; not least, it made the historiography possible."

Reinhard Piper, founder of the Piper publishing house, expressed himself in a similar way when he referred to books as our "means of humanisation". Against this background, the promotion of reading has a very special significance. Incidentally, I do not believe that it is the right way to enrich books with digital content; but the books themselves, on their own, sparkle with their own charm and play to their inherent strength when they are allowed to develop their power in their dialogue with their young readers. Digitisation is even becoming a threat to the book as cultural heritage when the nightmare of the digital classroom does become reality. An army of so-called experts is hammering

it home to the German public that nothing is more important than introducing the digital classroom, electronic learning animations, just-in-time learning and power-point competence, as quickly as possible. Already, loud voices can be heard in favour of digitising textbooks completely and instead of teaching handwriting to the children at school, to immediately teach them typing on keyboards. But at the same time, there is no indication of any beneficial effects of digital pedagogy, despite the many research billions from relevant sources which have been spent. Mind you, numerous studies do indicate that digital learning methods significantly lower learning outcomes.

Nevertheless we, the friends of books and reading, must note that we are on the defensive – and there is no justification for this state of affairs, for nothing is in sight that could replace reading, literature, and books.

The Piper publishing house manager Felicitas von Lovenberg states:

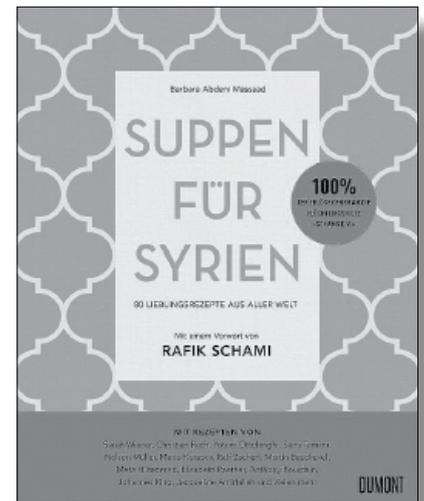
"We have invested huge sums of money that we will probably not see again in digital business portfolios. And this realisation comes to us at a time when we understand that we are losing buyers and readers to a frightening degree. And so it's not so much about the question: Which channels do people want to use for reading? We serve everything. Rather, it is about preserving the cultural heritage that reading represents from extinction."

On the one hand, it is about the book as a cultural asset, but there is much more to it, namely the political dimension of books. I quote from a brochure of the German Publishers & Booksellers Association "For the Word and for Freedom":

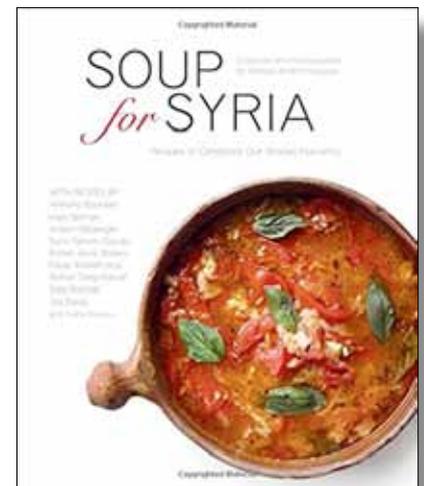
"We are proud to trade a special commodity – the book. [...] No other industry deals with such manifold content and opinions as we, the book industry, do. [...] Factual and scientific literature initiates cognitive processes, provides explanations for the past and the present, and gives an outlook on the future. Thus, books play an essential role in the formation of public opinion."

Freedom of expression and free formation of opinions are a prerequisite for a free society and the success of democracy."

Every year, around 85,000 titles appear in Germany. The stationary book trade is still the most important distribution channel for books. In Germany, nearly 50 per cent of all books are purchased in a bookstore, while about 20 per cent



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fall to the Internet retailing. Online trading was primarily at the expense of the major bookstore chains and department stores. In addition, the IT industry misjudged the mentality of readers: A person raised with books does not just buy texts, but books. And they are made of paper. On the reader you can at best load entertainment literature from the revolving stand. But most of the readers want to hold the demanding novel, the substantial non-fiction book physically in their hands.

The independent bookstores will, I am sure, keep their place as long as there is a need for books. The local bookstores are able to provide over 90 per cent of ordered books from the evening to the next morning, and you do not even have to pay for a prime offer. They have a modern Internet presence. They conduct readings and take part in numerous action days. Their local anchorage in the village is important to them.

The book "Soup for Syria", edited by Barbara Abdeni Massaad, is an example of booksellers' activities. She says:

Painted reverence for the creation

100 years Mili-Weber-House – an oasis of arts in the forest above St Moritz

by Heini Hofmann

One feels placed in a dreamy counter-world to the classy Engadin jet set spa town. In the forest above the lake of St Moritz, surrounded by Swiss pines and larchs, the Mili-Weber-House is located, shelter of an art of soft tones, fairy-tale-like outside and inside, a true complete artwork.

Myriads of art enthusiasts but as well famous people among the St. Moritz jet set-guests honoured the Mili-Weber-House with their visit over the years, beginning with *Farah Diba* to the Sheik of Kuwait to *Charlie Chaplin*. Now its centenary is celebrated.

Elder sister as mentor

In the bi-lingual métropole of the Bernese Seeland, *Berta Emilie* called Mili was born 1 March 1891 as nestling in a well sheltered childhood about which she romanticised later: “All over the world nobody – really nobody – has such loving parents, good sisters and loving brothers”. Although the family’s life was not a bed of roses, they tried to foster the talents of the children so that in

the end four of six dedicated themselves to painting, sculpture and architecture.

The real mentor of Mili, however, was her half-sister *Anna Haller* (1872–1924), about her she later said: “She was my one and only. I adored and admired her – she was so wise and so good”. The 19 years older Anna, who had passed the arts-and-craft class of the technical school Biel newly created in 1887 as the first woman, already was a successful artisan and painter and at the same time the first female teacher at the arts-and-craft class of the technical school Biel.

Although Mili had the only wish to follow suit her sister, she let herself be convinced by her to learn first a “real” profession.

So Mili became a kindergarten teacher, and this at the new girls’ school in Berne whose president was *Rudolf von Tavel* whose books meant a lot to her and of whose “so nice, beautiful tales” she liked to paint scenes.

Biel – Munich – St Moritz

So it didn’t take a long time until Mili definitively returned to painting. Anna gave her a paint box with oil colours and introduced her to a companioned painter who prescient predicted she would either stick at portraits and figure painting or she would go “into fairy tales”. To be able to bring her technical knowledge to perfection, her sister Anna took her along to Munich where she herself had got a big order by a publisher.

Mili’s education in Munich was paid from the estate of her brother *Otto* who was killed in an accident in the mountains. It was noble-minded left to her by her parents and siblings. Mili’s art teacher in Munich was an Austrian, cordial and encouraging: “You are a human being and I am a human being. You have your opinion and I have my opinion, I only show you



Fairy tale art house in the forest: The Mili-Weber-House in St Moritz above the lake. (Picture Mili-Weber-Foundation)



Underneath the Christmas tree. (picture Mili-Weber-Foundation)

Her friends, the animals of the forest

HH. Mili Weber recharged her batteries for her work in nature, with which she was closely connected. This also proves her approach to the animals of the forest. The little deer Fin, which she bred and to whom she dedicated a story in book form, later came back to visit her with his offspring. Additionally, other roe deer and even stags, but also squirrels and birds gathered around her house and got their delicacies. Some of them, including even a capital stag with expanding antlers, sometimes followed her even into the hallway and kitchen. In one of her last letters, she wrote: “This way I live here on my own and the animals of the forest are my friends and companions.”



(picture Mili-Weber-Foundation)

the mistakes”. But suddenly – the summer 1914 approached – it was talk about war. Just when the two sisters had returned to Biel, the First World War broke out. All the delightful stuck in memory.

But painting went on, more intensive than ever. Besides orders for children’s portraits Mili began to paint small fairy tale watercolour paintings – elves and mushrooms with children’s faces – similar to the flower fairy tales of the Thurgau painter and children’s book illustrator *Ernst Kreidolf*, although not influenced by him.

The youngest brother *Emil* was at that time architect at the building contractor *Nicolaus Hartmann* in St Moritz, constructor of the Segantini and Engadin museum as well as the manager’s office of the Rhaetian railway in Chur (for this the brother Otto, killed in an accident, who had been a sculptor had created monumental sculptures whose discounted honorariums enabled Mili’s study visit

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"Painted reverence ..."

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in Munich). This reference and the fact that Anna Haller suffered from breathing problems, lead the family to transfer their place of residence to St Moritz in 1917; hundred years ago. But the mother should not live to see this relocation.

Joyful fairy tales without violence

The publishers Anna worked for, increasingly became aware of Mili so that she got commissions, too. Besides portraits and watercolour paintings she created colouring books of Grimm's fairy tales, wall paintings and series of postcards. The house at the Via Dimlej built by her youngest brother became the ideal whereabouts for Mili full of tranquillity and inspiration. Increasingly she dedicated herself to the fairy tale theme and painted them in soft hues interpreted in her own way: Joyful fairy tales without violence and cruelty.

But there were repeated caesura in the life of Mili Weber, so when in 1924 her beloved sister and mentor Anna died, "I was of one mind with her". Such strokes of fate as well as later the quiet years in the Engadin during the Second World War,

Dreamworlds of inspired nature

HH. The fairy tale world of the Engadin high valley, which has already inspired other famous painters, may have also stimulated Mili Weber. In addition, she was the warmth herself, as well towards the fellow human beings as towards nature and their creatures, which is unmistakably reflected in her work. Following human desire fantasies, she animates the nature with children's figures in her paintings, initially in the form of personalised flowers.

Later, the little figures with their round heads and big, amazed eyes mutate into actual "little souls", such as the "Kirschenkinder" or "Das Nixlein Sonnenschein" – mixtures of the most exact observation of nature and native-naive fantasy, innocent dream worlds that retrieve the viewer back to childlike amazement.

Symbols of the wisdom of life as well as characters from history and leg-

ends appear in all periods of Mili Weber's work, such as the "Marienkind" or "Jeanne d'Arc". Besides individual pictures, she also created groups of pictures (such as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs") or picture stories (such as "Das Märlein vom gefangenen Königssohn", in which even rock cunts are animated).

Whether drawings, watercolours or oil paintings, whether sculptures and miniatures (for her room-filling, castle-like doll's house), whether picture- or book texts or music compositions for the house organ – everything that this peculiar and unique artist has created is perfused by her very own, nature-loving worldview, which in the polarities of life always leads from evil to good and from shadow to light. A message that should perhaps be noticed again today!

the death of her father and this of her last brother who had actively supported her let become her creative work yet more intensive.

Therefrom the moving watercolour paintings, the profound picture stories, the fancifully miniatures of these years bear witness but likewise the paintings with which Mili

changed walls, ceilings, timbers and furniture, even the house organ and bathrooms into a unique world of fairy tales. This artistic synthesis, just newly maintained by Sibylla Degiacomi, captures today's visitors as well and lets gape them like young children about so much quiet grandeur.

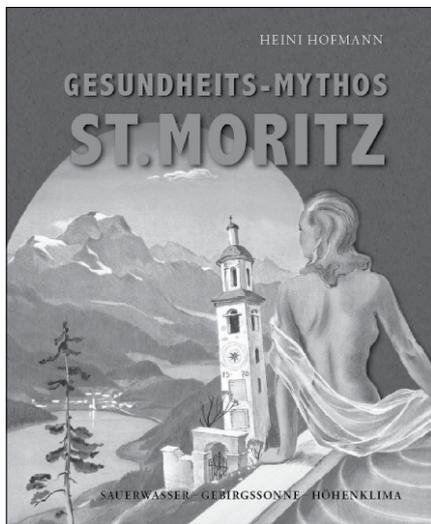
Quiet farewell

An eye complaint increasingly made painting impossible for her because a grey fog blurred the colours. But she retained her friendly-sunny smile and to the question if she wasn't depressed not being able to see her own paintings she serenely answered that she carried them under her heart.

Thanks to the donation she had founded during her lifetime this "art house in the forest" remains preserved for the afterworld. Quiet and gentle as she had lived Mili Weber died 11 July 1978 in the age of 87 in her fairy-tale-house. Her complete artwork is and will remain painted reverence for the creation and love to creature.●

The Mili-Weber-House at the Via Dimlej 35 in 7500 St Moritz can only be visited with a guide and upon prior reservation (maximum 8 persons at a time): phone 0041 79/53 99 777.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

A moving book!

cc. It is not common that a nonfiction book on regional themes is revised and updated in its third edition. The "Gesundheitsmythos St. Moritz" ("Health myth of St Moritz") by the publicist Heini Hofmann (who has also published in *Current Concerns*) managed to do so, because in writing and image he objectively analysed the past and at the same time visionary looks into the future. The former spa director of St Moritz, Hans Peter Danuser von Platen, describes it as "The best book ever written about St Moritz".

Hoffmann, Heini. *Gesundheitsmythos St. Moritz. Sauerwasser, Gebirgssonne, Höhenklima.* (Health myth St Moritz. Sour water, mountain sun, mountain climate.) 456 pages, over 440 mostly coloured pictures, format 23x28 cm, cloth cover, dust jacket. Gammert-Druck und Verlag AG, St. Moritz, CHF 75.00

"Reading as a cultural achievement ..."

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"When I visited the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, I said to them, 'If I were a hairdresser, I would cut your hair for free. Because I'm a cookbook author and photographer, I will try to help in my way through my work.'"

The result is this book. It contains impressive portraits of people from Syria – after all, the author is a photographer – as well as 80 different soup recipes and a preface by Rafik Schami, who supports the author's idea. The idea for this book was born in 2015 at the book fair. Barbara Abdeni Massaad was able to convince international celebrity chefs to create a soup cookbook together. Over 60 men and women participated. It is quite deliberately a cookbook

about soups: Soups are not only nutritious, but also give comfort and warmth.

100% of the proceeds of this book go to the association *Schams e.V.*, which was founded on the initiative of Rafik Schami and the Tübingen publisher Hans Schiler. The association supports Syrian children and adolescents in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. ●

(Translation *Current Concerns*)