

Political change of scene: summit moves from Vienna to Geneva

by Willy Wimmer*



Willy Wimmer
(Photo pma)

It sounds like the simple announcement of a change of location. The physical distance between Vienna and Geneva is not great. Yet there must be a reason for choosing Geneva. Perhaps it will be better for everyone if, on

June 16, 2021, two presidents take a stroll and drink coffee together on the shores of Lake Geneva?

The decision of the Russian and US presidents to meet in Geneva arouses nostalgia in Europe and around the world. For there once was a time when a neutral country could successfully provide its good offices. And that country has a name: Switzerland. Just a few weeks ago, the world saw again how dramatically topical this role could be. A senior staff member of the Swiss Embassy in Tehran died after falling from a high-rise building. According to reports, she had been privy to secret negotiations which neutral Switzerland was conducting between States that are hostile to each other but appreciate the country's services.

This draws attention to a fundamental dilemma underlying developments in recent decades. In the period since the end of the Cold War, the United States has tightened the reins on allied and friendly States in such a way that even previously neutral States have hardly maintained

any degree of independence. In the case of Switzerland, another example illustrates this.

If one looks at the financial structure of the *International Committee of the Red Cross*, the United States is by far the biggest donor. In comparison, European countries make only a small contribution – a single-digit percentage. The same is true for the *Red Cross* as for the WHO and the *Gates Foundation*: whoever gives the lion's share sets the basic rules. This has been the nature of US policy in the 30 years since the end of the Cold War: making all international organizations subservient to US objectives.

An excellent example of this is the United Nations, which NATO had to bring on board as a global military service provider. Anything that was not used for US national interests served US non-governmental organizations and global billionaires, as an international playground to advance their interests through the United Nations and its agencies. This emerged in particular in a famous interview with an expert by ZDF presenter *Marietta Slomka*, on the subject of the restructuring of Germany as a result of migration and with the help of the United Nations.

This is precisely why the choice of meeting place, Geneva, is so fascinating. Not only because the city is, with good reason, the second headquarters of the United Nations. Presidents *Biden* and *Putin* can do what they want in this respect. But by selecting Geneva, they have consciously placed themselves in the tradition of that city, which also hosted the failed peace efforts of the *League of Nations*, the less glorious forerunner of today's United Nations. Anyone who meets in Geneva today, after 30 years of political ice-age between Washington and other capitals, including Moscow, is expected to deliver, and to the whole world. Otherwise, we might take the failed peace efforts of the League of Nations as an omen for the times ahead.

There are two further, essential points that cannot be overlooked in Geneva. Under the *Paris Charter* of November 1990, Russia acquired the

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*It is part of neutral Switzerland's tradition to arrange international contacts – even in strained situations. Geneva, being the seat of various global organisations, is always a suitable place for such meetings.
(Picture keystone)*

right to take its place in the *common European house*. Since then, this right has gradually been denied it. This observation is as obvious, almost without further explanation, as the second outcome that the world expects from the meeting of Presidents Biden and Putin in Geneva: the unconditional return of all parties to the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations.

After two devastating world wars, the United Nations Charter was the only real civilizing advance, if this term can be used at all. With NATO's war of aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in breach of international law, the United Nations Charter and the Security Council's monopoly on the use of force were reduced to smithereens.

NATO thus recreated, for its own purposes, the legal situation of September 1, 1939, which allowed the German Reich to invade Poland. The very proximity of the Geneva meeting to another historic date brings this to mind. On June 22, 2021, Russia will not be alone in remembering the German Reich's attack on the then Soviet Union. All the more reason, then, to return to the United Nations Charter and its proscription of war.

Everything else raises the suspicion that a policy towards today's Russia is being implemented that did not just begin in Versailles in 1919. Presidents *Macron* and Putin have drawn attention to this repeatedly since 2019.

Of course, too many expectations should not be placed on the Geneva meeting. Moreover, the world cannot afford always to focus on the one possible scenario for the next global conflagration. The situation is complex, wherever you look. Thus, Chinese President Xi's security adviser is heading for Moscow to prepare with President Putin for the Geneva meeting. This shows how much the events in Hong Kong and the destruction by the West of Beijing's political approach to Hong Kong and Taiwan have brought the situation there to the brink of war. "One country, two systems" was the construct to guarantee democracy and peace. But the externally-led call for independence has rendered this concept meaningless. The Chinese security adviser's trip to Moscow also underscores the close ties between Moscow and Beijing. It would not be surprising if, given their good relations, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu were also to visit his partner in Moscow, as might an envoy from Tehran.

The events of the last few days also show that we should not overlook the different artificial obstacles being erected in the region to hinder this meeting. This is clear not just from the alleged email from Switzerland mentioning a risk to the *Ryanair* plane flying north from Athens through Belarusian airspace. With everything that has happened in recent days, some suspicions cannot be brushed aside.

Were not all the ingredients delivered to the door free of charge to create hurdles that would make it impossible for one of the parties to go to Geneva? One can, of course, relegate this to the realm of speculation, according to the usual patterns. However, one should not forget everything that was undertaken in the United States to hinder good relations between President *Trump* and the Russian president.

This may be linked to developments in the United States in recent years. In world politics, the saying “you snooze, you lose” also applies. President *Obama* once deigned to speak of a “regional power” in reference to another country. All of this must not happen again, if Geneva is to be anything more than a memory of Empress *Sissi* and her inglorious end.

Source: <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=72835>, May 27, 2021. (Translation «Swiss Standpoint»)

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