



Letter from Moscow

The Heidi Land image suffers.

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What the Russians think about the West and its sanctions is something the West should take a close look at. At my last shopping trip to Perekrostok, a supermarket that caters to the middle class, there is everything but three products: sanitary towels from the West are sold out, as are sugar and buckwheat. The latter two products have been the victims of hoarding - mainly by older people who are afraid of a supply crisis. Otherwise, everything is available. Russians are aware that Russia is pretty much the only country on earth that is self-sufficient, meaning they can close the border and get through.

Many people in the West forget that Russia has been sanctioned since the Crimean crisis in 2014. The Russian government and industry reacted very quickly eight years ago, and agriculture has developed so extraordinarily well that Russia is now one of the world's largest exporters of agricultural products. The sanctions will therefore have no consequences that will bring the Russian population anywhere near a problematic supply situation.

The financial sanctions will affect many companies that have dealings with the West or import Western goods. This is bitter for these companies. It is still too early to speculate on the medium-term consequences. The Russians, on the other hand, are rightly not worried about the stability of the banks, as they are very well capitalised and the president of the Russian central bank, Elvira Nabhullina, reacted quickly and well - as always: not within days, but within hours.

After the first fears of the Russians that the banking system could collapse as it did in 1998, Nabhullina provided the banks with liquidity and raised the interest rate from 8.5 to 20 percent. That was exactly what was needed, and calm returned as quickly as the fear had arisen. Proof that the West is convinced of Nabhullina's qualities was provided by the British, who claimed that Nabhullina had resigned. However, Nabhullina was nominated for a third term by President Putin on 18 March. The truth is therefore the opposite.

The West's raid on rich Russians - not every rich Russian is an oligarch, by the way - leaves every lawyer speechless. Oligarchs belonged to a small group that during the Yeltsin era, with Western help, grabbed huge Russian holdings practically for free. The real oligarchs do not have much support among the broader Russian population and have long been criticised for investing their quick wealth not in Russia but in the West and are now paying bitterly for this wrong decision. The West, which always talks about the rule of law, is appalled by the unlawful robbery, but there is still some gloating about the oligarchs.

The Russians rule out the possibility that the sanctions will have any influence on the formation of the government's opinion. The Russians also think that the West is aware of this. As a result, they are outraged at having to suffer sanctions when the West knows full well that they will not bring anything in terms of the government's course except great harm to the lower and middle classes. They interpret this as Russophobic destructiveness on the part of the West.

Incidentally, the fact that neutral Switzerland is taking part in this game is causing horror in Russia. The Heidi Land image suffers. I used to describe the advantages of the Swiss system by saying that Switzerland could well afford to have seven fools in

the federal executive because the system was inherently stable. Today, however, I have to admit that I could not have reckoned with a Federal Councillor of Cassis' calibre, but probably should have.

The Russians have an ability to differentiate between the politics, the people and the culture of a country - quite in contrast to the West. Although they are aware, for example, that US policy is and has been hostile to Russia, they do not bear a grudge against the American people. As Europeans, Russians are emotionally very close to Western Europe. Holidays in Western Europe have always been very popular. The Russians smile away with aplomb at the underlying Russophobia, which, by the way, has always prevailed in Switzerland as well.

By contrast, the absolute synchronisation of the Western media as well as the deliberate withholding of information is unbearable for Russians. Many, by the way, read Western media, including the NZZ, because they often do not trust the local media. However, the actions of the Western media people prevent a differentiated discussion that could lead to de-escalation. It seems as if the West - including Swiss politics and media - has no interest at all in a de-escalation and thus in peace.

On Monday, for example, the NZZ reported uncritically on Nazi comparisons made by President Selenskyj. Not a word did the NZZ mention the Ukrainian Azov troops - veritable Nazis - or the widespread veneration of Nazis in Ukraine. Nor did it mention the fact that the Nazis slaughtered sixteen million Russian civilians in World War II. Also unmentioned was the fact that President Selenskyj summarily banned all opposition parties in Ukraine one day after his speech in Bern, where he presented Switzerland as Ukraine's role model.

Information that would allow for balanced reporting was omitted by the NZZ. On Tuesday, the newspaper then published a diatribe against Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. He is demonised as a servant of evil, but without providing any justification - the author remains anonymous. The agitation of a newspaper that wants to come across as a noble "old aunt" - it is only a small step from agitator to striker, editor-in-chief Gujer should remember. And there is a great danger of becoming entangled.

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