



Resist the beginnings! - Propaganda of the NZZ

Why is the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) the most important daily newspaper in Switzerland? What can the public of a neutral country expect from its most influential newspaper? How does the heavyweight of the Swiss media landscape fare when it comes to reliable reporting?

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Introduction

On my daily walk through Western media, I do not recognise the reality in Russia, Ukraine and many other places in this world. When I compare the reporting with reality, I feel transported back to times that do not deserve to enjoy a renaissance.

In this essay, I try to show how the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) developed into a media heavyweight in Switzerland and demonstrate that its reporting has been replaced by propaganda. Finally, I show how the NZZ currently does not live up to its own standards.

I use the NZZ as an example for Switzerland because it is considered to be better and more truthful than other media.

The big newspapers in other European countries seem to have similar issues. As a Swiss, however, I am sweeping in front of my own door. It is to be hoped that fellow journalists abroad will also take a critical view on their respective flagships.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung- the old aunt

The NZZ is not only the oldest newspaper still published in Switzerland, but also the only Helvetic daily that has been able to establish its reputation well beyond the country's borders. For example, Germany's legendary post-war chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was among the illustrious circle of foreign NZZ readers.



Konrad Adenauer - NZZ reader
Picture: FAZ

According to its own account, the NZZ received its nickname "old aunt" in the first half of the 20th century. What was meant disparagingly at the time turned into a term of endearment for a major newspaper.

Not the oldest, but one of the rare survivors

According to [Wikipedia](#), the oldest newspaper in the world still in circulation is the Swedish *Ordinari Post Tijdender*, which was founded in 1645. The Russian daily Vedomosti, founded in 1702, is also older than the NZZ, but had an involuntary creative break between 1917 and 1991.

When the NZZ was launched in 1780, the world was a very different place: The future Emperor Napoleon I was only 11 years old and attended the cadet school in Brienne. The USA had been around for four years, and Marie-Antoinette and her

husband were popular and still boasted heads on their shoulders.

Liberal attitude and class

In its mission statement, the NZZ states that it stands for independent, high-quality journalism with a liberal attitude, that it is aware of the importance of the media for the formation of public opinion and that it stands for responsible, fair journalism that is committed to tolerance. That sounds good - even very good.

The NZZ also set standards in terms of language. As a twelve-year-old, my high school German teacher suggested that I read the NZZ to improve my poor German grades. I did so, focusing at first on "Accidents and Crime", my curiosity leading my interest quickly from sex and crime to the big world. I am indebted to my old aunt for improving my German and widening my horizons.

The NZZ as an Atlanticist

During the Cold War, the NZZ made no secret of which side it was on. However, it always made an effort to consider all sides.

The NZZ was always snappy and sometimes even attacking, which was part of the charm of this great newspaper.

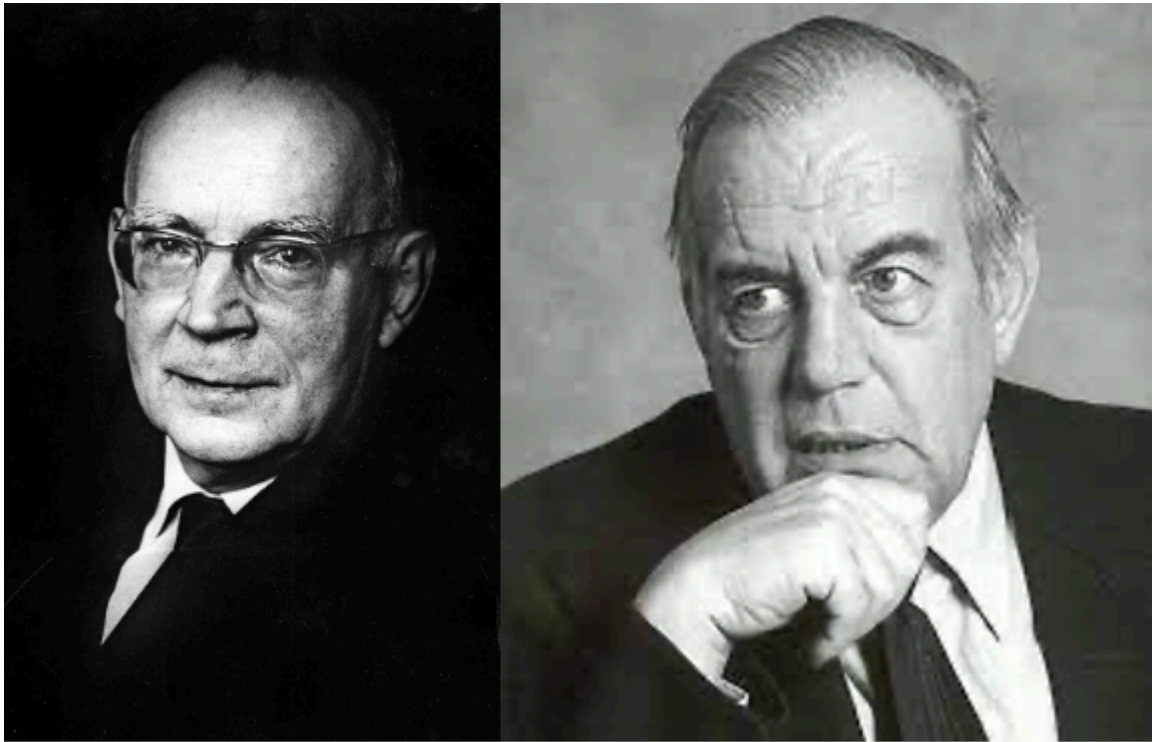
"If the arguments ran out in an exchange about politics and economics, one saved oneself to the safe shore with quotations from the old aunt."

Reading material of decision makers becomes a status symbol

The consistently high journalistic standard and the transparent nature of its reporting meant that the NZZ not only became compulsory reading for political and economic decision-makers in the German-speaking world, but even managed to give its readers prestige - the NZZ became a status symbol: "nzzOne reads NZZ".

For this unprecedented journalistic achievement in Switzerland, two editors-in-chief of the NZZ deserve special mention: Willy Bretscher steered the old aunt through the most turbulent periods of the last century between 1933 and 1967 and

made the NZZ one of the most respected papers in Europe. His successor, Fred Luchsinger, editor-in-chief between 1968 and 1984, shaped the NZZ into a modern daily newspaper, had exceptional connections to Germany and was even awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Cross of Merit) in 1981.



Willy Brethscher (left) Fred Luchsinger (right) - Titans of NZZ, Pictures: NZZ

The editorials of these titans were legendary and served as a reference in conversations: If the arguments ran out in an exchange about politics and economics, one rescued oneself to the safe shore with quotes from the old aunt.

Missed opportunities

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world changed surprisingly and radically.

The Cold War was over and - at least initially - there was a sense of new dawn and decision-makers were given a rare chance to improve many fundamentals and achieve a more lasting balance through a more equitable distribution of power.

"The NZZ's one-sided adherence to American doctrine unnecessarily limited an unbiased view of the new world."

Instead of helping to shape this great endeavour, the NZZ was unable to bring its influence to bear on important discussions; rather, it persisted in its virtually encrusted Atlanticist stance, which led it to become uncritically pro-American.

The NZZ's one-sided adherence to American doctrine unnecessarily limited an unbiased assessment of the new world.

"What was not worthy of discussion for the USA also found no focus in the NZZ."

For example, the NZZ failed to critically analyse the American wars of conquest in the Middle East after 9/11. Without exception, all of these American campaigns ended in a fiasco for the Americans, leaving behind millions of dead civilians, destroyed countries and hatred that will likely remain with us for a long time.

The NZZ also failed to grasp major geo-economic trends, with the result that they also passed its readership by unnoticed like caravans on the distant desert horizon. What was not worthy of discussion in the USA also found no focus in the NZZ.

As an example, I mention one of the biggest political and economic developments around the organisation of emerging economies (BRICS), which I recently discussed in this blog. This topic is treated more than neglectfully by the NZZ and trivialised with Anglo-Saxon conceit. In doing so, it does no favours to the decision-makers who rely on the NZZ.

Blurred boundaries between anti-Russian attitudes and Russophobia

With the Crimean crisis in 2014, the NZZ adopted a clearly anti-Russian stance and joined the prevailing US political view without any ifs or buts.

Step by step, a Russophobic tone developed, which provided a dangerous breeding ground for a Russophobic attitude that crept in unnoticed and steadily took root in the souls of many readers. Unnoticed, because the readership attested high credibility to the old aunt and trusted its content. A high credibility leads to addressees of information questioning it much less than, for example, information from a tabloid. This is convenient, but dangerous.

Since February 2022 - the NZZ as a propaganda paper

Since the beginning of the military conflict in Ukraine, the NZZ has systematically covered its readership with four or more anti-Russian articles every day, not even shying away from abusing its arts section, the paper's flagship cultural section, for propaganda purposes.

Propaganda articles under the guise of the aesthetic are now regularly placed in this formerly high-profile cultural section. An unpalatable example of this was a full-page diatribe against Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in the arts section on 22 March this year, entitled Aristokrat of the Apocalypse. The article was published under a pseudonym - which is probably what I would have done as the author of such a pamphlet.

Gujer editorial of 19 November 2022

I am aware that my indictment of the NZZ is a severe one. To substantiate this charge, I refer to a Saturday editorial by editor-in-chief Eric Gujer.

I choose a weekend editorial because they represent the gold standard of the NZZ. And I choose the editor-in-chief because he is responsible for implementing the in-house guidelines and quality standards, especially with his own contributions.

In this study, I address various core sentences and key statements by Gujer. The verbatim quotation is followed by the commentary. This is a possibly more cumbersome way of presentation than pure prose, but in my opinion necessary because of the grave accusations.

The full editorial from Saturday 19 November 2022, entitled "Campaign against reason", can be found [here](#).

"There are victories that are quickly forgotten and there are victories that change the war. The reconquest of Cherson and the territories west of the Dnipro belongs to the second category."

GUJER - QUOTE 1

Rebuttal - Timing and Facts

August 29 was the official start of the Ukrainian offensive to retake Cherson.

On 21 September, Russia began the partial mobilisation of 200,000 troops.

On 11 October, General Sergei Surovikin was appointed the new commander-in-chief for the operation in Ukraine. Due to increasingly heavy artillery fire on Cherson by the Ukrainians, Russia decided to evacuate the civilian population to the western side of the Dnieper.

After the end of the evacuation of the civilian population, which lasted a month, the Russian forces also withdrew to the western bank of the Dnieper in order to prepare the upcoming winter offensive in a calm manner and to be able to launch it from a more advantageous position. The east bank of the Dnieper at Kherson is higher than the west bank, which offers major tactical advantages.

Ukrainian losses in the Kherson offensive were ten times greater than those of the Russians: 15,000 and 1,600 respectively. Even the Washington Post reported on the high Ukrainian losses as early as 7 September.

**"A tactical retreat cannot be described by the word
"reconquest"."**

Rebuttal - Preparing for the Winter Offensive - Russian Tactics

The partial mobilisation of 200,000 soldiers plus the 70,000 volunteers who signed up during the partial mobilisation takes time, if one wants to be mindful of the lives of one's own soldiers as an army leadership. The Russian army leadership has been doing this since February and the figures show that they have suffered a fraction of the losses of the Ukrainians. Add to this the fact that the weather, which has a major impact on terrain conditions, plays a crucial role in a military operation.

Rebuttal - Rasputitsa

Fertile Ukraine has black soil that is over 2 metres deep. The consequence of this is that in the autumn rains this earth turns into a mud hell until this layer of earth freezes in winter.

The German Wehrmacht sank into the mud in autumn 1941. It practically came to a standstill. The time lost was one of the reasons why the Wehrmacht suffered its first major defeat before Moscow in December 1941, from which it never subsequently recovered.



Rasputiza: Brachte die deutsche Offensive 1941 für Wochen zum Erliegen.

It will take a few more weeks for the ground to freeze and become usable again by mechanised units. The Russians use this time to prepare for the winter war.

The winter is to the Russians' advantage, as their men and equipment are adapted to it. The Ukrainians have lost most of their Soviet equipment since February and will be at a disadvantage with their NATO equipment as Western equipment is not designed for Russian winter weather conditions.

Rebuttal - Interim result

When Mr. Gujer presents an offensive in which the attacking side lost ten times more soldiers and thus ended in a bloodbath for the attackers as not only a great but war-changing victory, he is simply being nonsensical.

A tactical withdrawal, the purpose of which is to integrate 270,000 new soldiers and equipment in a quiet manner and to wait for passable terrain, cannot be described with the word "reconquest".

"The Ukrainians have thus finally blocked the way to Odessa for the Russians. Mikolayiv, centre of the navy and shipyards, is also out of danger. Above all, Moscow must give up a strategic wartime objective: control of the Ukrainian coast and domination of the Black Sea. Nothing is more unsuccessful than unsuccessfulness."

GUJER – QUOTE 2

Replik

Since this was by no means a war-changing victory as described, but an advance following a tactical manoeuvre by the Russians, the consequences described by Guyer are therefore a non-sequitur.

"At the G20 summit in Bali, the Kremlin was isolated because even India and China turned their backs on it."

GUJER – QUOTE 3

Rebuttal - G20

Of the 20 member states of the G20, 9 of them sanction Russia. Normally, a country that stands alone is isolated. This is not the case, based purely on the numbers.

Either Mr. Gujer does not know the facts or he insinuates isolation because he trusts that his readers are not aware of the individual member states of the G20 and their attitude towards Russia when reading the article.

Rebuttal - India and China

That India and China are turning away from Russia is a false statement: never before have the ties between Russia and the two giants been this close.

On the one hand, figures speak for themselves: The bilateral trade volume between India and Russia increased by 33.1% this year, between China and Russia by 38%.

Cooperation among these three countries under BRICS has also never been closer - see my article *The Unstoppable Rise of the East*.

"The defeat in the south and the expulsion of his forces from vast areas in the east mark a watershed for Putin."

GUJER – QUOTE 4

Rebuttal

According to Guyer, the Russians seem to have fared even worse in the East than in the South when he describes - what is again a tactical - withdrawal as an expulsion from vast areas of the East. What he describes did not take place.

Rather, the Russians went on the offensive in Donetsk weeks ago. The conquest of Bachmut was already in full swing at the time of the editorial's publication and a Russian victory is becoming visible at the time of the writing of this article.

Again, Mr Gujer trusts that his readers are uninformed about the course of the conflict and tries to pull a cheap one on them.

"If the Tsar has his way, the killing will go on for a long time."

GUJER - QUOTE 5

Rebuttal

President Putin is not a czar, but a President elected by the people, who enjoys very high approval ratings, much to the chagrin of his antagonists.

Russia is at war with Ukraine. Mr Gujer again makes a false statement in the same sentence and seems to have trouble with the correct use of German words: If one linguistically equates warfare with murder, any American president who has waged war would become a mass murderer.

"Russia is a master of attritional warfare, of tactical withdrawal and holding out. Moreover, by straightening the front at Kherson, it provides itself with a favourable starting position for the second year of the war."

GUJER – QUOTE 6

Rebuttal

In complete contradiction to his statements in quote 1, Gujer describes a few lines further down that Russia was, among other things, a master of controlled retreat and was creating a favourable starting position for the second year of the war (sic!).

"Russian officers plan their battles with extensive disregard for their subordinates."

Gujer – Quote 7

Rebuttal

Battles are planned - in all armies of the world, I might add - by the military leadership and not by officers - in complete secrecy.

The expression "disrespect for their subordinates" serves to insinuate that said planning takes place without regard for the lives of soldiers - better than "subordinates". It must have escaped Mr. Gujer's attention that the Russians' losses are about 8 times lower than those of the Ukrainians.

"The manhunt dressed up as "partial mobilisation" actually paints an extremely unfavourable picture of Russian defence capability."

GUJER – ZITAT 8

Rebuttal

The partial mobilisation in Russia was successfully carried out and completed. Besides the 200,000 troops mobilised, an additional 70,000 Russians volunteered.

From the pool of 25 million reserve men capable of mobilisation, some of them went abroad to avoid being drafted. This is common.

During the Vietnam War, many Americans left the US to avoid conscription, including later President Bill Clinton.

The departure of the Russian men in question was not hindered or prevented by the Russian authorities, as they do not need shirkers and are looking for motivated servicemen. This is in stark contrast to Ukraine, which has already mobilised several times since February and prohibits men of military age from leaving the country.

To put the term "partial mobilisation" in quotation marks and to call it a manhunt is therefore not only inaccurate, but Eric Gujer is unnecessarily taking the level of the old aunt towards the cesspit.

Does the NZZ editorial of 19 November qualify as propaganda?

The definition of propaganda is defined by Britannica.com as follows:

"Dissemination of information - facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths or lies - to influence public opinion."

That the quotes mentioned are half-truths or lies is clear from my comments.

That Mr Gujer did so to influence public opinion is obvious, since an editorial by definition has that purpose: An editorial is meant to guide the readership.

"The NZZ editorial of 19 November, written by its editor-in-chief Eric Gujer, is thus a textbook example of propaganda."

The NZZ is further burdened by the fact that in its own mission statement it explicitly states that it is aware of the importance of the media in shaping public opinion:

"The NZZ is aware of the importance of the media for the formation of public opinion and advocates responsible, fair journalism committed to tolerance."

The NZZ editorial of 19 November, written by its editor-in-chief Eric Gujer, is thus a textbook example of propaganda. Eric Gujer's choice of words - the use of terms such as murdering tsar to describe President Putin or the description of the partial

mobilisation as a manhunt - turns the article into nasty propaganda.

"Eric Gujer should know better."

Such texts are not worthy of an editor-in-chief of Switzerland's most influential newspaper. Moreover, Mr Gujer has indeed not made it difficult for me to expose the editorial he has written not only as propaganda but also as complete nonsense.

Who is Eric Guyer?

Eric Gujer should know better. The 60-year-old, who has been editor-in-chief of NZZ since 2015, has a degree in history, political science and Slavic studies. Thus, he speaks Russian and, through his further education, received the qualifications to do justice to his great responsibility as editor-in-chief of the NZZ.



Eric Guyer - should know better - picture: NZZ

If you inquire - I don't know Mr Gujer personally - he is said to be highly intelligent. However, he cannot be compared with heavyweights like Willy Bretscher or Fred Luchsinger. In terms of linguistic skills alone, Eric Gujer is inferior to these titans of words. A high-quality language is the product of hard work, which unmistakably reveals the author's level of appreciation towards the reader.

"An interlocutor who met him during his time in Moscow stated that Mr Gujer had already had anti-Russian tendencies at that time."

Mr Gujer worked as a correspondent for the NZZ in Moscow in 1995. He did not make much of a splash in Russia and, unusually, left that country again after only one year. An interlocutor who met him during his time in Moscow stated that Mr Gujer already had anti-Russian tendencies at that time.

Russia was a troubled place in 1995. I myself first visited Moscow as a lawyer in 1997. Between 1991 and 2000, disastrous decisions were made in terms of economic policy, which led to a wave of privatisation that created the genuine oligarchs. With dubious methods and unbelievable ruthlessness, a small group amassed huge fortunes at the expense of the large majority, who lived in great poverty, and then coveted political power.

In the late summer of 1998 - I was then a manager responsible for real estate projects under construction in Moscow - the economy of the giant empire collapsed. The rouble became completely worthless and Russia slid into an economic crisis, which in turn meant that ordinary citizens lost everything again after 1991.

It was President Putin who cleaned up the country from 2000 onwards and gave Russia a structure that enabled the very well-educated and hard-working Russians to create a modern and prosperous country that today, for the first time in its history, has a healthy middle class. This is one of the main reasons why President Putin has popular approval ratings that most heads of state can only dream of.

Mr Gujer seems to have failed to notice this positive development in Russia over the last 20 years.

What drives Mr. Gujer and where the reasons for this grotesque anti-Russian campaign lie is beyond me.

More propagandistic than the New York Times and Washington Post

It is a fact that the NZZ goes even further in its propagandistic campaign than the two main newspapers in the USA.

Even the Washington Post - see above - and the New York Times, which can justifiably be called the Pentagon's media channel, question the American strategy from time to time and are far more objective in their war reporting than the old aunt in Zurich.

Conclusion

Many members of the public, and especially the large circle of NZZ readers, will be surprised to learn that the NZZ has degenerated into a propaganda channel.

"Resist the beginnings!"

It seems impossible for me to come to any other conclusion after reading this article. My readership will decide whether my argumentation is consistent and correct.

I point out that in the past, hate propaganda, led to disasters. The gentleman pictured on the cover next to the NZZ logo was a master at poisoning the German soul. At a later date, the dangers of propaganda will be discussed on this blog.

Resist the beginnings!

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