DIGNITAS
To live with dignity
To die with dignity

Zurich-Forch, July 2024

A note from DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity

---

The hype surrounding Philip Nitschke's "Sarco"

In the last few weeks one topic caught the attention of the media, just as it did in December 2021: Philip Nitschke, respectively the organisation "Exit International" and their branch "The Last Resort", announcing that soon the first person would self-determinedly die in his suicide-automat "Sarco" in Switzerland. The following is overlooked in this context: if the human right to self-determination over the end of one's own life would really be respected, Nitschke's "Sarco" would have little relevance.

In any case, the inventor of this facility knows one thing very well: getting the world's press to promote his product for years and letting them advertise it free of charge. The Neue Zürcher Zeitung aptly wrote:

> "The media professional Nitschke knows very well that pictures of the Sarco with the Swiss mountains in the background would only increase the international hype."

Not easy to put in practice

The Austrian author Johann Nepomuk Nestroy (1801-62) understood the challenge that Nitschke wants to overcome through his work:

> "Yes, yes, the body is a stubborn worshipper of life and rebels against the mind's decision for the grave."

In other words: it is difficult to realise the decision not to continue living. Common suicide methods such as hanging, shooting, drowning or freezing always require a considerable willingness to take risks and use violence against oneself; this is the hurdle that people who want to choose suicide usually face. Nestroy says in turn:

> "There are likely many who quite proudly call suicide a cowardice, they should try it first, then they should talk!"

Legal hurdles

Mostly based on a religious understanding that it was God who gave humans life and only he may also determine when it should end, many States have made it more difficult to carry out suicide by erecting legal barriers against it. These have two main aims: the prevention of the dissemination of

information on how suicide can succeed and the introduction of criminal liability for those who instruct and support others to carry out the suicide.

In France, for example, the book by Claude Guillon and Yves Le Bonniec, 'Suicide, mode d'emploi – Histoire, technique, actualité' ('Manual for Suicide – History, Technique, Actuality') was published and sold in 1982 in a print run of more than 100,000 copies and even translated into six other languages, but nine years after its launch it was banned in France on the basis of a 1987 law.

Although England and Wales abolished the criminalisation of attempted suicide in 1961, they imposed a penalty of up to 14 years in prison for assistance in suicide; this similarly applied to the former British colony of Australia, a ban which Nitschke had opposed.

Self-determination over one's own end of suffering and life

True to his initial training – he gained his doctorate in physics in 1972; he only became a medical doctor in 1989 – Nitschke sought the solution to the problem in the form of a machine. For years, he and his organisation 'Exit International' have been concerned with giving people access to knowledge that they can use to end their suffering and life in a self-determined manner. This is particularly the case when they are denied professional legal assistance for suicide – even when a majority of the population wants it, as in France, for example – due to ignorant politics. For example, he combined a laptop and software with an intravenous access in place, containing a lethal barbiturate. His 'Deliverance Machine' was used in the Northern Territories in Australia in 1995 during the short period of validity of a law that allowed assisted suicide there; today it is on display in London's 'Science Museum'. Further technical suicide method developments followed.

Meanwhile, physician-supported professionalised assistance in suicide emerged in Europe, first implemented by EXIT (Deutsche Schweiz) in 1985. Since then, this has become established; in the Council of Europe states, similar forms exist in more than 40% of their territory and for more than 40% of their population. The advantage of medically supported, professional assisted in suicide is that it reduces violent suicides through human accompaniment – on the one hand by doctors, on the other by trained helpers. What is still missing is the sensible integration into the public health system; this has already been implemented in some countries.

The true task

With the hype surrounding Nitschke's 'Sarco' it is overlooked what is actually at stake, and this was aptly pinpointed in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ:

> "The fact that a phenomenon like 'going to Switzerland', that is, death tourism, exists at all is a fundamental failure of politics on the part of countries with restrictive laws. They are abandoning their citizens in a desperate situation."

Switzerland would do well to exert pressure on these countries to bring their legal systems into line with what the Swiss Federal Supreme Court already stated in 2006: "The right to self-determination within the meaning of article 8 para. 1 ECHR also includes the right to decide on the manner and the time of the end of one's own life".

Such international political-legal commitment is the core activity of our association, which has achieved legal progress towards greater respect for the 'last human right' in the courts in Germany,

Austria, Canada, etc., and in politics in Australia and other countries, mostly in dialogue with expert committees.

If politics really respected the human right to self-determination over the end of one's own life, Nitschke's "Sarco" would have little relevance.

-oOo-

e-mail: info@dignitas.ch web: www.dignitas.ch

Facebook: dignitas.ch Twitter / X: dignitas_org

subscribe to newsletter

BACKGROUND:

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity was founded in May 1998 with the aim, through international legal and political work, to make the proven Swiss model of freedom of choice, self-determination and personal responsibility in life and at life's end also accessible to individuals abroad.

DIGNITAS' advisory concept – combining palliative care, suicide attempt prevention, advance directives/decisions and assisted dying – offers a basis for good decision-making to shape life until the end.

Through litigation, DIGNITAS obtained a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 acknowledging the right/freedom of a competent individual to decide on the manner and time of his or her own end in life and confirming this to be protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

DIGNITAS has been engaged in many lawsuits in Europe and Canada and has provided in-depth submissions and received visits by expert and parliamentary committees from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, etc. when laws were discussed and planned for the protection of a patient's autonomy and human dignity.

The founder of the charitable DIGNITAS organisation is Ludwig A. Minelli, an attorney-at-law specialising in human rights. The team of DIGNITAS consists of 38 part-time employees and it is supported by several external experts in the fields of medicine, law, IT, and auditing.