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Dr. Michael Pinto-Duschinsky



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Dear Dr. Pinto-Duschinsky,

I am writing to you today in reference to our telephone conversation last Monday and in response to our email exchanges. At the current stage and prior to a discussion with the subcommittee established by Oxford University I think it may be useful to summarize our different exchanges in order to identify those areas, where we may be in agreement as well as those, where disagreements between us presumably remain.

Before entering into this I would – once more – like to emphasize that I do continue our discussion with full respect as to the biographical and personal aspects that are the background and motivation for your historical research. I have come to understand our exchange rather as a joint quest for proper ways of dealing with the past rather than as a hostile exchange of arguments about the present. The issue at hand is a very serious one for both sides and needs great care and precision, both with the facts and with the ethical questions involved.

The position I take in the following elaboration solely reflect the opinion of the organisation I represent, the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S.. As you may see from the statutes of our foundation published on the Internet, our foundation today operates independently from members or opinions of the Toepfer family. These statutes stipulate that not more than two out of a total of seven seats can be held by members of the family on the supervisory board of our foundation. Given that all of Alfred Toepfer's surviving children have passed the statutory age limit (75), there is effectively only one seat reserved for family members on our board now.

It is obvious from these rules that this foundation was not designed by its founder to be dominated or primarily influenced by his family, but rather to be guided by experts in its fields of activity. While the supervisory board is currently chaired by Birte Toepfer, a



daughter-in-law of Alfred Toepfer, this has not always been the case and does not constitute a dominant influence of the Toepfer family. It may also be useful for you to know that there are rather diverse views within the Toepfer family on both the biography of Alfred Toepfer and his historical responsibilities.

After these introductory comments I would now like to summarize those aspects of our discussion which may be consensual between us before proceeding to issues where we may differ in substance or opinion.

I.

1.

The Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. today is determined to create full transparency as to its own past and to the biography of its founder. This is particularly true to Toepfer's support for and dealings with Germany's Nazi regime in the 1930's and 1940's as well as to continuities after the war. Given Germany's past, this foundation is particularly sensitive to any presumed or factual linkage of Alfred Toepfer to the Holocaust or any other aspect of human suffering caused by persecution and aggression prior and during WW II. As this foundation has inherited parts of Toepfer's personal wealth as well as revenues generated from Toepfer's economic enterprises it is under strict obligation to ensure that it is not operating today with funds unlawfully generated from criminal actions or morally unacceptable economic behaviour before, during or after WW II.

2.

Given these obligations it is the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S.'s duty not only to allow for but also to promote independent, critical historical research on Alfred Toepfer and his role in this difficult period of German and European history. Within its legally defined terms of operation there is a particular need to be open and responsive towards initiatives, projects and programmes which help to critically explore the past, honour and commemorate the victims, work towards reconciliation and aim to prevent history from repeating itself.

3.

Within the last ten years historical research – in many instances promoted, supported or sponsored by the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S.– has uncovered a significant number of disturbing facts about Alfred Toepfer's support for and dealings with Germany's Nazi regime in the 1930's and 1940's as well as irritating continuities after the war. Other facts



have always been known, but have not been the issue of a major critical public discussion or historical review during Alfred Toepfer's lifetime.

Among them are:

- his sympathy and support for the "Volkstumspolitik" of the 'Third Reich', particularly with a focus on ethnic German communities „an den Grenzen des Reiches“, particularly those in the Alsace.
- his close contacts with individual high-ranking representatives of the Nazi Regime
- his collaboration with - and support for – some cultural policies and priorities of the Nazi regime, particularly through activities in the area of cultural and academic awards and scholarships
- his support for organizations which were either closely affiliated with or an integral part of the Nazi regime such as the VDA, particularly through offering his foundation's Kalkhorst Estate for their activities as a „Reichsführerschule“
- his role as a „Wehrmachts Offizier in der Abwehr“ from 1940 to 1945, particularly his economic activities in France 1943/1944 generating resources for the German war effort
- individual transactions of subsidiary firms of the Toepfer Enterprises during WW II, which delivered goods such as 'Löschkalk' to the Ghetto of Lodz
- his continuing support for and recruitment for his businesses of high-ranking officials of the Nazi regime heavily implicated through their participation in the Genocide, after WW II such as Edmund Veesenmayer, Kurt Haller, Hans Joachim Riecke and others
- his longstanding cooperation and working relationship with officials, academics and other individuals which at different points or through different actions actively supported the Nazi regime, its aggression as well as its racist policies, within his foundation work during and after WW II such as Konrad Henlein, Gustav Adolf Rein, Friedrich Metz, Johann Friedrich Blunck, Georg Rauschning
- his support or sponsorship for a number of prize winners of his foundations implicated through either their support or their active involvement in the Nazi regime in the years after WW II

These findings become even more disturbing by the fact that Toepfer, while becoming a widely known philanthropist, active in the field of nature conservation and champion of European integration and reconciliation after WW II, never publicly reflected on the facts listed above, nor did he ever acknowledge any individual guilt or wrongdoing.

On the contrary, in a number of instances Toepfer not only denied his involvement but reframed aspects of his biography in such a way that they made him appear to have been



an opponent to the regime or at least to have stood in critical distance to the events around him. Toepfer has called upon – and at times used – individuals of high personal integrity to support and maintain this image in spite of the criticism of and questions about his own involvement.

II.

Coming to terms with these findings has been both a challenge as well as an painful process for our foundation. But it is pursued with the greatest possible care, seriousness and perseverance. While critical questions – and provocations - from the outside have at times been a helpful additional reminder we consider it our own inherent duty and obligation to face and acknowledge these facts –and to accept the historical responsibility following from them for the work of our foundation work today.

The following arguments, observations and positions have been controversial either in the discussions among us or, in the past, with other critics of our foundation's past and/or its work today.

1. Taking responsibility by supporting relevant historical research

Throughout the last ten years and on different levels this foundation has supported qualified substantial and independent historical research on Alfred Toepfer as well as its own past. It has refrained from taking any undue influence on the publication of academic findings and devoted a considerable amount of its resources to allow for the conduct and publication of academically qualified research.

Both the findings of the historical commission chaired by Prof. Arnold Sywottek as well as the publications of Dr. Jan Zimmermann have been made possible through the active support of this foundation. Furthermore, a series of other publications have significantly added to our understanding of the history of individual award-giving activities of this foundation.

The historical commission was given access to all relevant material in the keeping of this foundation and with the unconditional support of all those in positions of responsibility at the time. The remuneration provided for the academic work within the historical commission both on a professorial as well as a junior academic level, was in no way excessive or unproportional with the intention to achieve a 'favourable' outcome nor was the selection of the members of the commission made with a view to influence the findings.



While representatives of the foundation participated in the regular meetings of the historical commission and took part in the discussions, they did not exercise a dominant or undue influence on the outcome of the commission's efforts. Even where the original terms of reference for the research on Alfred Toepfer had intended to cover his biography mainly up to the year 1945, both Prof. Georg Kreis as well Dr. Christian Gerlach were, of course, free to introduce facts from the postwar period which they deemed relevant to the scope of their investigations.

The results of the historical commission have been published and made available to all university libraries and major public and state libraries across Germany free of charge and continue to be disseminated for free to those interested in the topic academically. When the original publisher of the commission's findings, the Christians Verlag, went out of business in 2005, the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. on its own initiative produced a reprint to allow for further unrestricted access to the material. The introductory remarks summarizing the main findings of the book have been made available on the website of the foundation and have recently been translated into English and French.

The original findings have been supplemented by a detailed study of the cultural prizes of this foundation between 1935 and 1945 as well as by a more recent book on Alfred Toepfer published in 2007 by the Hamburg based ZEIT foundation. Both these critical and independent publications have received substantial support and unconditional endorsement from our foundation.

Beyond the historical research dealing with its own past the foundation has made an extra effort to support critical academic work which covers areas related to Alfred Toepfer or his foundation work. In this context the foundation, for example, helped to publish a dissertation on Gustav Adolf Rein, a former rector of the University of Hamburg and a close advisor to Alfred Toepfer.

2. Taking responsibility through action

Learning about its founder's past, this foundation has taken great care to review and develop its programme in view of these findings.

The foundation has long distanced itself from an award programme based on Toepfer's concept of „Kulturräume“ and has been focussing its attention and resources on honouring artists and academics that promote cross cultural understanding and reconciliation in Europe. Fostering dialogue, allowing for the exchange of different views and encouraging tolerance and innovation is at the heart of our work today.



This also holds true for our foundation's scholarship programmes. Please find enclosed an exemplary list of just a few out of many more master or doctoral theses supported through scholarships by the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S., which review history and reflect our foundation's particular historical responsibility. It is not by coincidence that a number of Hanseatic Scholars appear on this list.

On various occasions the foundation has acknowledged outstanding individuals or groups of people who, through their research or practical efforts, have worked for a better understanding of history and for projects of reconciliation within Europe among them Prof. Dr. Ursula Büttner, the initiative „Stolpersteine“, Haus Neudorf, Dr. Albrecht Dümling, Timea Junghaus, Eckart Krause und Dr. Rainer Nicolaysen.

As a second attachment I am forwarding to you a list of just a few out of many recent activities sponsored by our foundation which relate to our particular historical responsibility. They reflect the conviction of those entrusted with the operations of the foundation today that it is not only important to be aware of one's past, but also to learn from it.

3. Taking responsibility in our communication

This belief is also central to the way this foundation tries to communicate with the general public today.

The foundation's website explicitly refers to the debates about the foundation's history and allows its users to search and find relevant material about its past including that to be found in highly critical and controversial publications.

At every public event organized by us, we never fail to draw attention to the historical responsibility of this organisation. All prospective prizewinners are informed about the historical roots of the foundation before they decide whether to accept the prize or reject it. Scholarship recipients are encouraged to develop their own critical opinion on their sponsoring organization's past.

At the event commemorating the 75th anniversary of this foundation in January 2007, a public discussion about Toepfer's past involving a number of historians was organized. The panel focused its attention on the question of historical responsibility and included the widely respected Alfred Grosser.

Finally, in an interview with the French daily „Midi Libre“ in fall of 2008 I made clear that as we understand it, the inclusion of the founder's name in that of the foundation today



(it was added after his death in 1993) is less to be regarded as an effort to honour Toepfer than as an act of transparency.

III.

Beyond all these facts and efforts we are aware, however, that, possibly, three areas of disagreement remain.

1.

When looking at a full lifespan of almost 100 years within one of the most complex and challenging times in European history, it requires great caution not to lose sight of 'the full picture'. It seems to be very difficult, indeed, to come to a straightforward judgement about a biography as long, contradictory and confusing as that of Alfred Toepfer's. As this is not a problem within the legal but within the moral sphere, many complex issues have to be taken care of:

- How do you deal with ambivalence and ambiguity when passing judgment on such a man?
- How important are words and attitudes compared with facts and deeds when looking at a person's life?
- How does one put actions into proper historical perspective in order to avoid running the risk of justifying what cannot be justified or of trivializing guilt?
- How can we - "blessed by a late birth" and with the benefit of hindsight - come to a balanced moral judgment when we take the respective historical contexts into account?
- Is there a balance sheet which allows us to weigh good deeds and bad deeds against each other?

While I, as the representative of the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S, am in no position to do the balancing and define what proper and independent answers to these ethical questions and moral dilemmata might be, I **do** feel that it is important for me and for us all in the foundation to take an unmistakable stance: Actions of guilt and shame cannot simply be set off by doing good later, they cannot be undone by philanthropy, however extensive, without acknowledging what was wrong.

People do have the right, though, to be judged on the full picture and on proven facts. In our discussions so far you have largely blocked out evidence that refutes your conclusions or the many obvious positive elements and efforts in the biography of Alfred Toepfer.



Despite his readily conceded political and moral failings, Alfred Toepfer remains one of the most remarkable and outstanding European philanthropic figures of the 20th century. Building his business empire from scratch to become one of the wealthiest Europeans at the time he has turned nearly all of his personal wealth over the course of his lifetime to various philanthropic organizations or to a large and diverse number of philanthropic causes.

He has devoted large parts of his life after the war to promote undisputedly honourable issues such as European integration and reconciliation as well as nature conservation across Europe. Toepfer donated millions and millions of his resources into programmes designed to bring Europeans closer together after the experiences of two horrible world wars, particularly in the fields of the humanities, science and culture. This was particularly true and valuable in the difficult but eventually highly successful process of French-German reconciliation. On hindsight, his efforts to overcome the iron curtain and to maintain contact with the realities in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe represents a small but highly remarkable instance of how a private individual can leave his mark on history.

His prize giving activities after the war – despite his lack of political and moral sensitivity in some cases - show rather clearly that Toepfer did not follow any racist or anti-Semitic motivations in his post-war philanthropic work. Martin Buber, Harold Pinter, Imre Kertész and many other artists and academics with Jewish background were honoured with awards and prizes given by Toepfer's foundations. These efforts were in no way meant to camouflage or hide other intentions or a hidden political agenda, but were based on decisions of competent juries and on genuine respect for cultural differences. Despite knowing about his involvement and his failures, survivors of German concentration camps such as the great Polish Statesman Władysław Bartoszewski accepted Toepfer's gestures as genuine efforts for reconciliation and understanding.

For this, it has been important that according to the findings of the historical commission and despite his sympathy and support for the Nazi regime on a number of occasions Toepfer did not cross certain lines. As far as we know today, he did not participate directly or indirectly in the Holocaust nor did he ever deny its existence. Contrary to million other Germans he never joined the NSDAP, despite repeated efforts to recruit him. What is even more important to our work today is that, according to the current state of historical research, Toepfer overall did not benefit economically, neither personally nor for his foundations, from WW II or the Holocaust. The funds that Toepfer accumulated and used after WW II – the remainder of which form the core of our endowment today -do not originate from any unlawful or criminal behaviour.



As mentioned earlier: actions of generosity and benevolence can not set off failures and wrongdoing. Nothing can be and should be „explained away“ or trivialized.

But have you looked at the full picture? Are we not encountering a biography full of ambivalence and ambiguity? Is it not important in this matter to take great care before rushing to judgement?

2.

A second issue, which may remain controversial between us, directly deals with the question of guilt, or rather the differentiation between „apologizing“ and „taking responsibility“. This seems an important difference to me.

In your email dated December 21, 2009 which I received last week, you demand „a sincere apology for Alfred Toepfer’s misdeeds by members of his family“. While this request may be based on the misconception that the family does or did have a major influence on the foundation or the heritage of Alfred Toepfer’s foundations as a whole, it seems flawed to me on two other levels as well.

As I have pointed out earlier, neither does the family hold such an influence nor is there such a consolidated, singular view within the family on Alfred Toepfer. Even during Alfred Toepfer’s lifetime, his children at times took opposition to his actions. For your information I am enclosing two newspaper clippings from the Sueddeutsche Zeitung from as early as 1984 which highlight one particularly telling instance of this ambivalent relationship.

What is more important though, is– and this holds true both for this foundation as well as the descendents of Alfred Toepfer – that I find the concept of „apologizing“ for someone else’s guilt both erroneous and not helpful. It is particularly irritating when looking at family members and their descendents. Shouldn’t our discussion rather focus on acknowledging someone else’s misdeeds and on „taking responsibility“, on learning lessons from them rather than on „apologizing“ for them?

Acknowledging Toepfer’s level of involvement in and support for the Nazi regime has indeed been a challenging process both for this foundation as well as for individual members of his family. Calling upon the independent view of the historical commission has been an important step in this process just as our discussion may be. I am still hoping that our discussions will take us one step further in our search for the right answers and responses.



But we are doing it already, and it has been done in many instances. We are continuously reviewing the way we deal with our founder's biography in order to acknowledge and take responsibility. We do this full heartedly and to the best of our knowledge and we will do so once more, when the Alfred Toepfer Archives will be moved to the Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv this year. But as history can not be undone, more important than apologizing for someone else's guilt is acknowledging it, learning from it and taking responsibility for it.

3.

Finally, I briefly would like to address the issue of fairness in the way you proceeded with this issue.

We first encountered each other after you had contacted Dr. Albrecht Dümmling, Kairos Award recipient 2007 of our foundation, in August of 2008 with the request to return his Kairos Award on the grounds that you had new findings on Alfred Toepfer. In your discussions with Dr. Dümmling you claimed that your findings should be sufficient reason to refuse the award ex post as these findings would tarnish his personal integrity and his own reputation as a historian in the field of musicology. You demanded from him to return the prize before presenting further evidence, otherwise you threatened him to go public with this information and with his refusal.

Given the fact that Dr. Dümmling had been extensively informed by our foundation about the difficult history of this foundation and the debate surrounding it before accepting the prize and in view of the fact that you were not willing to present any evidence for your claims, he did not return the prize and chose to ignore what in effect amounts to an attempt at pressuring him into compliance.

Upon learning about this encounter I reached out to get in touch with you both to learn about your prospective new findings as well as to explain that this foundation today is trying to be as transparent and responsible about its past as possible. In the following I learned about your biographical background, your significant reputation as a political scientist in the field of party finance and your previous participation in the discussion about grants that had been offered and transferred to Oxford University by the Flick family. I have learned that you have had considerable professional differences in this context with Prof. Hans Mommsen, who had been a member of our historical commission. I learned that you had grave doubts about the independence of our historical commission based on your disagreements with Prof. Hans Mommsen and that you felt that the results were influenced by the fact that this commission had been initiated and financed by the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. I also learned from an email



exchange you had with Prof. Gerlach that at that point in October 2008 you did not have a copy of the actual final report of the historical commission.

Subsequently a number of email exchanges followed including a long list of detailed historical questions, which you raised concerning activities of Alfred and his younger brother Ernst Toepfer during the Nazi period, all of which we tried to answer to the best of our knowledge. While you made clear that you would not want to accept any form of support from our foundation for your research you agreed for us to pay Dr. Jan Zimmermann for his support in answering your questions and demanded rather detailed research to be done here on your behalf. At that point in November 2008 we did at some length discuss questions of academic standards and ethics as I became increasingly irritated about the fact that you continued to demand transparency without offering transparency in return about your field of research and possible findings relevant to our work.

Eventually, as of February of 2009 I stopped hearing from you, as I learned later, due to *[text omitted upon request by Dr. Pinto Duschinsky for reasons of privacy]*.

During the summer 2009, I was both surprised and irritated once more to hear that you had apparently submitted a request to Oxford University to terminate its cooperation with our foundation's Hanseatic Scholarship programme on historical grounds. Up to the present day I have neither received a copy of your demarche nor seen any written arguments on that subject. Your initiative at that point was even more surprising to me as I had not heard from you at that stage for quite a while and this question had never been a subject of discussions between us.

I was even more surprised when I received an email message in November 2009 in which you announced a visit to Hamburg and asked for access to our archives in order to complete your research. At that point I did raise the question why you submitted your request to Oxford University before fully completing your research on the matter and why – as a matter of fairness - you did not give us notice of your initiative at Oxford.

On November 24, 2009 we finally did have the opportunity to meet and see each other for the first time during your stay here in Hamburg where you had free access to the Alfred Toepfer Archive. I have come to understand that you invest considerable personal effort and resources into investigating and understanding Alfred Toepfer's relationship with the Nazi regime and into substantiating your own conclusions. We were able to resolve a number of disagreements and to gain a better understanding of the seriousness with which both sides are trying to deal with the issues. A number of irritations, however,



remain unresolved. They concern the fairness of and the timing in the way you conduct your campaign.

At various stages of our discussion up to the current day you have repeatedly made reference to the University of Oxford's final decision in the refusal of the Flick donation to underline your clout in influencing matters. On a number of issues you cited your contacts to relevant British media to make clear that you have the capability of drawing public attention to the issue and of creating a „scandal“ about the University of Oxford's dealings with our foundation. I am fully aware of the resonance which a nuanced and somewhat opinionated presentation of the issue may have in the British public. In each of these instances I have, however, encouraged you to publish whatever new information you may have in order to allow for qualified and transparent public discussion and evaluation – and for our foundation to draw consequences from these findings, if necessary.

Fear and threats, it seems to me, should not guide our action when dealing with serious matters like the ones before us.

None of the irritations mentioned are to divert our attention from the original issue at hand. There is not a line of defense on historical facts and findings that should be defended at all costs. The irritations may serve to remind us, however, how difficult it may be, to deal with a complicated issue in a proper and respectful way.

I close this rather comprehensive attempt to summarize my perception of our discussion once more with an assurance of respect. I am looking forward to a continuation of our discussions when we meet with the Oxford University subcommittee in London next month.

Sincerely yours

Ansgar Wimmer
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