

# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,  
and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Spring session 2014 Council of States

## Don't cave in on every noise from Paris, Washington or Berlin!

**The Inheritance Tax Agreement between Switzerland and France is to be rejected**

by *Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich*

*There is no end to the greediness from abroad. Instead of putting its own budget in order, the tax authorities of several countries of the western world are trying with increasing audacity, to boot themselves on small states with sound financial circumstances, on their citizens and enterprises.*

*It is certainly necessary to take countermeasures. In this sense the National Council on 12 December 2013, rejected the Inheritance Tax Agreement that the French Government wanted to dictate Switzerland. The protestations of Federal Councillor Widmer-Schlumpf, that there was no alternative for us but to swallow this toad – according to the motto “better a bad deal than none at all” – caused the opposite reaction: With a massive No (122:53) the National Council refused to deal with the draft. Thus, our parliamen-*

*tarians demonstrated that they are worthy representatives of the Swiss people. Now it is to be hoped that the Council of States will confirm this clear decision on 18 March 2014.*

In May 2011, the French government declared its intention to terminate their Inheritance Tax Agreement with Switzerland of 1953, and issued an ultimatum to Switzerland: either you accept a new agreement, drafted in Paris, or we simply tax the heirs living in France according to French law. Rather than opposing this outrageous suggestion from the neighbouring big state, the Department of Finance's leader caved in once again and signed a treaty that is disadvantageous for Switzerland even in her own words: “Without the agreement all the things you do not want and fear today will occur; that we

all know. With the agreement a little less of what you do not want will occur.” (*Widmer-Schlumpf* in the debate of the National Council on 12.12.2013)

This unstatesmanlike behaviour was characterized in *Current Concerns* No. 25/2013 by a fellow citizen of the French-speaking part of Switzerland quite bluntly (“The miserable performance of Mrs Widmer-Schlumpf has disastrous consequences” by *Philippe Barraud*, journalist and writer, Canton of Vaud).

### Taxation of inheritages in centralist France and in federalist Switzerland

According to the general understanding of law and international law the inheritance in a case of death is taxed at the domicile of the deceased, the testator. In case he be-

continued on page 2

## Direct democracy and obligations under international treaties

**Considerations in civic education after the referendum of 9 February 2014**

by *Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich*

*It is a characteristic of direct democracy that after a referendum some people may not be happy with the result. Everyone is free to express this. However, what has been rather unusual after the referendum on the Mass Immigration Initiative of 9 February is very unusual; it is the direct attack of certain circles on the Swiss direct democratic system. The voters must take the responsibility for the end of the bilateral approach – this is what some politicians in the country claim. And we hear from Brussels that the free movement of persons is not negotiable. Actually, the legal situation is crystal clear, and there is no reason to produce such fuss. What we have to begin with, first of all, – in this case as in any other case – is the implementation of our constitutional provisions*

continued on page 3

### Peter Gauweiler: “Switzerland does not abolish itself”

“It was in this year 2014, a very young year, a quite freshly begun year that the political class of the Federal Republic of Germany got excited to the utmost by two events, which it cannot successfully classify until this day. One event was the referendum on 9 February 2014 in Switzerland. And the other one was the decision on behalf of the people of the Federal Constitutional Court on 14 January 2014. Ladies and gentlemen, I read a very interesting voice from neutral Switzerland about this referendum, a country which is extremely burdened by the emotional issue of immigration. But this voice said: You have to consider this referendum in Switzerland beyond the subject of immigration: a majority of the population decided in opposition to all parties, all associations, con-

trary to any professional dogmatist or adviser. The referendum had one single tenor, which is this: Switzerland does not abolish itself. No more and no less was the statement expressed by this vote. And the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court that Mr *Draghi* and his Central Council of the European Central Bank is not entitled to replace the German Bundestag and the representation of the people expressed the same: Neither does Germany abolish itself.”

*From the speech of Peter Gauweiler at the political Ash Wednesday of the CSU in Passau on 5 March 2014  
[www.peter-gauweiler.de](http://www.peter-gauweiler.de)*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

**"Don't cave in on every noise ..."**

continued from page 1

queathes land, it will be taxed where the property is located.

The agreement, dictated by Paris, now provides, however, that the French tax authorities in the future will seize hold of not only testators in France, but also heirs with French residence – even if the deceased lived in Switzerland and Swiss real estate is affected. This concerns 180,000 Swiss among others who live in France. Many of them are already going to pull up stakes and move to Switzerland. Because the French inheritance taxes are massive: Paris demands the heirs to pay up to 45 percent.

In contrast, the inheritance tax in Switzerland is regulated federally. By the will of the voters in most cantons, the direct descendants of the deceased, i.e. children and grandchildren, do not have to pay taxes. The basic idea of this exemption is that the legacy has been built up within the family. Parents and grandparents have already paid income and property taxes for it during their lifetime. What they have saved and put aside for their offspring, should not be taxed a second time.

**Refusal of advocacy  
or at least rejection to  
the Federal Council is a must**

We citizens expect the Council of States on 18 March 2014 to take a decision as clear as the National Council passed it in the winter session 2013: It decided not to enter on the discussion of an "agreement", so unfavourable for sovereign Switzerland. The Council of States' *Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation* (CEAT), however, suggests to the entire Council to deal with the agreement, however, to reject it and hand it back to the Federal Council with the mandate to renegotiate it (Press release of the CEAT from 13.2.2014).

This solution is the minimal variant towards the dictation from abroad.

**Abstract from the debate  
of the National Council  
of 12 December 2013**

– *No to the treaties which bring advantages only to the other party.*

"In the agreement, according to the opinion of your CEAT (Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation) and after weighing all points, France can enforce its interests too unilaterally, and would come out as a sole winner."

(*Thomas Maier*, GL, ZH, commission president)

– *Federalism and sovereignty of the cantons have to be taken into account – the Western Swiss cantons (Romandy) have opposed this agreement.*

"From the point of view of federalism and the cantons' sovereignty it is not acceptable to depart from the principle of taxation at the place of residence of the decedent. These are, by the way, the cantons which opposed this violently via their finance directors, above all those of the Romandy." (*Jean-René Germanier*, FDP The Liberals, Canton of Valais, VS, for the Committee)

– *Bad agreement because of too much compliance of the Federal Council*

"Since decades France has suffered from its finances: The deficits accumulate and also the debts. It tries to introduce new taxes which leads to rebellions – thus recently in Brittany because of an environmental tax. The only fiscal success which it has scored for many years is this bad agreement which was negotiated by our government with too great permissiveness.

France wants to let his emigrants pay. [...] However, we cannot accept that one mocks the principles of the tax system and sacrifices the 180,000 Swiss who live in France, this in my opinion!" (*Jean-François Rime*, Swiss People's Party, SVP, Canton of Fribourg, FR)

– *It is always Switzerland which comes off badly.*

"The CVP/EVP faction has the impression that in relation to France all concessions go only in one direction [...]. It is always Switzerland which is asked to surrender terrain by any means, and just this at the moment when France is behind with its payment of many million Swiss francs – as we were told some days ago." (*Dominique de Buman*, Christian Democrat People's Party, CVP, Canton of Fribourg, FR)

– *Let us show a little bit more biceps while negotiating with foreign countries.*

"The liberal faction asks you unanimously not to deal with the double taxation agreement between France and Switzerland. [...] There is no juridical gap as was maintained falsely, because we respect the OECD arrangement completely. [...] It is about time that

**There is something wrong!**

Federal Councillor *Evelyne Widmer-Schlumpf* argued in the National Council debate that she had conducted the negotiations together with the cantons. What she did not say: The Western Swiss cantons positioned themselves clearly against the agreement (cf. the vote of member of the National Council *Germanier*).

Equally wrong is her assertion that the agreement corresponds to the principles of the OECD. That is not so! (see the vote of member of the National Councillor *Lüscher*).

\* \* \*

We demand from our Federal Councillors that, finally, they begin to defend the interests of our country and our population vis-à-vis the foreign countries instead of making up to "the Big Boys"!

we awake and that we do not accept this dictation of a friendly neighbouring state. Let us say clearly no to this agreement! And if that one of 1953 is discontinued, we return to the negotiating table, but with a little more biceps!" (*Christian Lüscher*, FDP The Liberals, Canton of Geneva, GE)

– *Other states would follow – and the Swiss would move away from France.*

"If we accept this agreement, we also fear that this practise which wants to impose France on us [...] might catch on. It is true that other countries – we have mentioned, for example, Germany – could feel tempted to go in the same direction leading to punishing Swiss citizens who live abroad. [...]" (*Jacques-André Maire*, Swiss Social Democratic Party, SP, Canton of Neuchâtel, NE)

**We need negotiators  
for Switzerland with a backbone**

It would not be bad for the Federal Council to take Minister *Walter Stucki* as a model. This honest and courageous Swiss did not allow himself to be frightened – neither by the national-socialist regime nor by the victorious powers of the Second World War –, but always campaigned for the interests of Switzerland – and he always maintained his dignity. ("Der 'grosse Stucki', Eine Schweizer Karriere von weltmännischem Format" by *Konrad Stamm*, Zurich in 2013). The biography of this impressive personality will be presented here soon. •

**"Direct democracy and obligations ..."**

continued from page 1

by the legislator. It is the Federal Council's task now to prepare these provisions and to concentrate on them. The possible modification of agreements with foreign countries is a step that will follow later, and the Federal Council cannot and should not say anything definite today. If single Federal Councillors make statements abroad on the Swiss sovereign's vote, they have to confine themselves to explaining the Swiss model to the governments of our neighbouring countries or the European Commission and to fully support it.

On 9 February the Swiss people said 'yes' to the Mass Immigration Initiative. In a referendum held in the Confederation, in the cantons and communes a simple majority of votes is usually sufficient. For a constitutional amendment, however, a double majority is needed in Switzerland, hence the *popular majority and the majority of the cantons*. The latter was evident in the vote on the Mass Immigration Initiative: In 14 ½ cantons the majority of voters voted in favour of the popular initiative, only 8 ½ cantons were against it.

**What did the people and the cantons agree upon? A vote for self-determination and sovereignty**

The text of the initiative, which will be amended as the new Article 121a of the Federal Constitution stipulates that Switzerland will manage immigration independently again by establishing annual maximum numbers and quotas for the residence permits for foreigners. These maximum numbers include cross-border commuters and asylum seekers. Employers must again look for suitable workers in Switzerland first ("taking into account priority for Swiss people" – meaning people *resident* in Switzerland, of course, and not people with Swiss citizens' rights). The text of the amendment does not mention any numbers on purpose, because depending on the economic situation, the number of residence permits is to be varied. The details are to be regulated by a federal law and international agreements are to be renegotiated and adapted within three years. Neither may new agreements, which contradict this constitutional provision, be concluded with foreign countries.

The new constitutional text has nothing to do with xenophobia or "seclusion" in the slightest way. Whoever claims we were "building a wall around our country" is lying. Switzerland has always been a cosmopolitan and hospitable country, and, of course, people from all over the world will be able to continue coming here, whether they are asylum seekers, workers or students and researchers.

In fact, the Swiss people have simply had enough of being controlled from abroad and being directed by others. They have taken back what had been quite natural prior to the bilateral agreements with the EU: Switzerland wants to determine how many and what kind of people can come from other countries to our country, that is as many as our limited territory with its large population density can handle.

A limitation of immigration for authorized immigration from countries outside the EU is already valid in Switzerland today, and all other countries have similar laws. Especially the traditional immigration countries such as the USA, Canada or Australia manage immigration numbers by stringent rules. This also applies to the EU: It grants free movement of persons only to member states (plus the EEA countries Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland, including Switzerland by bilateral agreement), but not to the rest of the world.

**Implementing and operationalizing the new constitutional provision in a federal law**

How will we proceed?

Constitutional provisions do often not mention any details, but they contain the essential features of a system. This is also true for the new Article 121a of the Federal Constitution, which is now to be specified swiftly in a federal law.

This federal law is to be generated in the ordinary legislative procedure, i.e. the Federal Council with the help of the cantons, political parties and business organizations has to prepare a draft, then has to submit it to a wide consultation and adapt it accordingly, taking into account, of course, the spirit and letter of the new constitutional Article. Then, the Federal Council write their message to the National Council and the Council of States, that will discuss the bill, probably amend it and finally agree on a common version. The referendum can be taken against this act, with 50,000 signatures collected within 100 days from publication in the Federal Gazette on. If the referendum is concluded, the Swiss people will also vote on the implementing law, this time with a simple majority of the votes, regardless of the majority of the cantons.

Only when this domestic political process has been passed through according to the will and renewed consent of the sovereign (either in a referendum or implied by forgoing a referendum), the question arises *what* agreements might be modified and *how*.

It is therefore incongruous when our Federal Councillors practically apologize abroad for Switzerland's unruly people. First, they should mould the popular will into a law, then they are responsible for representing the Swiss regulation vis à vis the other countries, however, not

as petitioners, but at eye level: "If, out of sheer fear, we kneel down and expect the EU dictate, we will certainly receive it!" (Carlo Jagmetti, former Swiss ambassador, in: "Weltwoche" of 20.2.2014)!

**International treaties between sovereign States can be terminated and/or renegotiated**

It is obvious that the strong political decision-making rights of the Swiss population in the Confederation, in the cantons and communes would have to dwindle into toothless residual stocks, if Switzerland were to join the EU. Even today, EU institutions and unfortunately also some Swiss politicians try to hoodwink us by saying that Switzerland due to its Bilateral Agreements with the EU is no longer free to hold referendums if they contradict one of these agreements.

This global subordination of all national law, including the Federal Constitution, under the so-called "international law" – regardless of how significant its contents are – must be revised. It is quite the opposite: Switzerland is a sovereign state which is not an EU member state. If the sovereign decides to regulate immigration on its own – with the high numbers of immigrants being generally acknowledged – international treaties that are contrary to the new provisions in the Federal Constitution must be terminated by the Federal Council and/or renegotiated. The free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU does indeed contain a clause stating that the remaining six agreements of the Bilaterals I cease to have effect half a year after the termination of the Freedom of Movement Agreement (so-called Guillotine Clause).<sup>1</sup>

In the relations between states, however, nothing just happens by itself; first a point of view is announced on both sides, then it will be negotiated and each negotiator should try to obtain the best result for his country. This crucial point is the weak spot in our executive: We have to assume that the respective politicians, who are supposed to represent Switzerland's interests on the international stage, are secretly dreaming of an EU membership or at least want to please the great powers more than their own countrymen. Otherwise they would have reacted differently after the vote of 9 February. And the Federal Councillors and diplomats who negotiated and signed the Bilateral Agreements I in the 1990s would not have accepted any such unfavourable termination clause.

Instead of travelling around in Europe in overzealous rush and swearing that practically nothing will change in Berlin, Paris and Brussels, our authorities could be a bit more relaxed, because our neighbours have great interest in ensuring that

continued on page 4

## "Direct democracy and obligations ..."

continued from page 3

their citizens can continue to be employed in Switzerland, that they may use the Gotthard route for their goods transport, etc. The mutual trade is at least as much in the interest of the EU states as in our country's, because our affluent Switzerland is importing more from the EU than vice versa.

### According to the Freedom of Movement Agreement, Switzerland has a right to request an amendment to the agreement

As the Federal Council in its press release of 12 February 2014 announced, the Federal Councillors Sommaruga, Schneider-Ammann and Burkhalter will have worked out a concept by the end of June and submit a draft law to Parliament by the end of 2014. In parallel, the departments of the two EU-turbos Sommaruga (FDJP – Federal Department of Justice and Police) and Burkhalter (FDFA – Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) want to fix a session with the "Joint Committee for the Free Movement of Persons Agreement between Switzerland and the EU". They ignore Johann Schneider-Ammann from the Department of Economic Affairs, who, according to his statement prior to his election to the Federal Council, opposes an EU membership of Switzerland. However, the Federal Council's attitude and goals for the Joint Committee are crucial for the implementation of the immigration initiative. Because according to the Freedom of Movement Agreement of 1999, Switzerland has the right to notify a change in their domestic law to the EU and introduce a proposal for the revision of the Agreement:

#### Article 17 Development of law

1. As soon as one Contracting Party initiates the process of adopting a draft amendment to its domestic legislation, [...], it shall inform the other Contracting Party through the Joint Committee.

2. The Joint Committee shall hold an exchange of views on the implications of such an amendment for the proper functioning of the Agreement.

#### Article 18 Revision

If a Contracting Party wishes to have this Agreement revised, it shall submit a proposal to that effect to the Joint Committee. Amendments to this Agreement shall enter into force after the respective internal procedures have been completed [...].<sup>2</sup>

So why do we now have the uncompromising statements from Brussels and the excited reactions of some cabinet ministers on the referendum of 9 February? Accord-

ing to Articles 17 and 18, the movement of persons is very well negotiable. Or could it be that the "Contracting Party" that changes its national law and wishes to revise the Agreement does not mean both sides, but only the EU? Obviously we Swiss understand something else when talking about "bilateral" agreements than the rulers in Brussels – namely a treaty between sovereign States, which both have the same rights, and not unilateral dictation.

Regardless of what the EU people have concocted in 1999: There it is in black and white that Switzerland has the right to propose an amendment to the Agreement. Once again: Our Federal Council has to represent and enforce Switzerland's interests hence the decisions of the Swiss sovereign. Instead, the Federal Council mandated the DFA, hence the EU-turbo Burkhalter, "In order to coordinate the timing and substance of the implementation process as best as possible, both internally and externally, the Federal Council commissioned the FDFA" (Press release of 12 February 2014). In plain language: first ask what the EU wants, and then we convince the Swiss that the popular initiative could be implemented only in a narrow framework set by the EU.

### Direct democracy as an effective barrier against the EU membership of Switzerland

In a "Call for Europe!" the *Neb*s ("Neue europäische Bewegung Schweiz", New European Movement Switzerland) allegedly worries about the "defense of human rights" of the 1.8 million foreigners in Switzerland. In fact, the people already living here are not subject of the popular initiative. Those who live here already will not immigrate in the future, so they are not affected by future restrictions. In addition, the imposition of immigration quota already covers the relatives of non-EU and EFTA countries, which apparently does not bother *Neb*s.

It is rather annoying for *Neb*s and other EU-turbos that through the vote of 9 February their aspired membership of Switzerland in the EU vanishes into the distance, especially because of the clear majority of the cantons.

Aim and purpose of *Neb*s is not the "defense of human rights" by whomever, but solely Switzerland's membership with the EU: "We work to ensure that Switzerland will become an active member of the European Union and for the Swiss to obtain the European right to vote." (*Neb*s President Christa Markwalder on the homepage of *Neb*s). Therefore Switzerland should, according to the "Call for Europe!" "refer to the referendum of 9 February and opt in favour of the EU, with which it shares its basic values."

The following should be noted. First, Switzerland must by no means "refer" to

### Václav Klaus: "It's about freedom"

"For me, the vote does not mean 'No to immigration' but: 'Slow down the immigration to my country, please.' This message must not be misunderstood. I am convinced that every country has the right to say such things. The irresponsible multiculturalists, globalists and 'Europaists' look at things differently, of course. They see it wrong. We must not support the new illiberal, collectivist 'isms', which aim to suppress our freedom. [...]"

The whole debate is basically about freedom."

(Václav Klaus, former President of the Czech Republic, in: "Weltwoche" of 20.2.2014)

(Translation Current Concerns)

the decisions of the sovereign but rather implement them according to the will of the people. Second, the generally accepted fundamental values that we do not only share with the EU, by the way, but with the entire international community, had been written down in the Swiss Constitution long before there was an EU. Third, it is obvious that the direct democratic rights of the Swiss people are a serious obstacle to an EU membership – of course, direct democracy is incompatible with an EU membership. And finally, how many Swiss would probably be satisfied with the puny "European right to vote" instead of today's comprehensive political rights?

### Concluding remark

We voters have every reason to remain vigilant: With the vote of 9 February, we have confirmed once again our will to remain a sovereign and independent state. We do not allow that parts of the executive and their accomplices in the federal administration and in organizations such as the *Neb*s – whose members were by the way Federal Councillors Berset and Burkhalter prior to their election – disregard the peoples' will. The Federal Council as a servant of the people has to commit itself with all its power and conviction for the conservation of direct democracy and implement results of referenda without ifs and buts. If it should not meet this task, we can still take the optional referendum against the yet to be established federal law. •

<sup>1</sup> Agreement of 21 June 1999 between the Swiss Confederation on the one hand and the European Community and its Member States on the other hand on the freedom of movement, Article 25, paragraphs 3 and 4

<sup>2</sup> Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the free movement of persons, of 1 June 2002 ([http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:22002A0430\(01\):EN:HTML](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:22002A0430(01):EN:HTML))

# The major airfields and our Alpine routes are of great importance to every power in case of war

**We urgently need a new fighter aircraft capable of defending our airspace in cases of emergency**

*Interview with Gotthard Frick*

*thk. In Ukraine we experienced an eruption of violence, especially on that side which is described by the West as “peaceful demonstrators”. Insurgents were equipped even with firearms and they used them. Sided with them and interfered in the internal politics of Ukraine, which might lead to a secession of the country. All this clearly demonstrated how important the cohesion within a nation is and how quickly a threat can arise inspite the “eternal peace” mainly claimed by those who want to get rid of the army. It is important for our country, that we have the means, which allow us to defend our own territory. In the following interview, the much-traveled expert, particularly in defense policy issues, replies to questions concerning the current discussion about the army in Switzerland against the background of global developments.*

*Current Concerns: Your attitude is basically positive towards a Swiss army. Why does this small country need an army?*

*Gotthard Frick: I would like to answer in a wider context. In my profession that I exercised for a long time I got to know the whole world. I think I sometimes see a bit more clearly what kind of a unique country we have. I know the world, the history and human nature very well. I think that it is quite possible that things might get out of control in Europe. For example, the collapse of the large debts can cause that, triggering violence or even warfare. In Europe we have still many tensions stemming from the past. Currently, we see in Ukraine, to which developments they may lead. And that’s why we need an army that is ready to go to war, but only to keep war away from our country.*

*The primary task would be the defense of own territory?*

*Yes, it is exclusively about the defense of our own country.*

*Are foreign missions an option for you?*

*It depends. As for example at the border between North- and South-Korea. With the consent of all parties, neutral officers are there to monitor the truce. I certainly see such tasks for the army. But no combat missions on behalf of a world community that is very often mixed up with the interests of the United States.*

*How do you see the geopolitical situation? One speaks of an upheaval in Europe, if not worldwide. Do you share this belief, and what signs do you see for that? We certainly live in a period in which a new world order is created. We don’t know what it will look like, yet. But everywhere we see the tensions arising from it. Let’s begin with the East, for example China, I have got to know it very well, by now. It has territorial tensions with all neighbors except Russia. It always stresses that it wants a peaceful solution, but one cannot negotiate sovereignty, and there is Russia, which is rearming vehemently.*

*Hasn’t Russia all reasons to do so?*

*Probably, it would like to get back to its original role and be recognized as a great power. It didn’t get over the loss of especially the Eastern European members of the Soviet Union. You can see that in all immediate neighbor states now. In addition the NATO under the leadership of the Americans is trying to expand more and more towards Russia. This has already led to the former President and current Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev’s threat to destroy the planned US early warning systems in Poland with a military strike, the official objective of the system being the early warning against a missile attack from Iran. They would have destroyed these sites if they would have been built. Then we have still a plethora of other problems in the world. Some time ago it was stated in the “Folio” [monthly magazine] of the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” that in South America, Africa and Asia there are already land domains of the size of Western Europe in the hands of Chinese and Western food companies. Subtracting mountains and lakes, the area is much larger than Western Europe. Where do all the millions of people go to who have worked as small farmers there? In Africa, and otherwise in the world there is an infinite mass of poor people, even in China, where many people want to emigrate. There is incredibly much tension. The struggle for raw materials, which are becoming increasingly scarce, included. These are all great sources of tension. They can culminate and cause immense outbreaks of violence*

*Do you also see a link to the resource of water, for example here in Switzerland?*

*In the context of Europe’s electric energy supply, our hydropower plays a large role.*

*I have worked for seven years in one of the largest hydro-electric power projects and have some knowledge in this field still. Now problems are caused by the distortion of prices, but on the long term it is one of the most efficient*



*Gotthard Frick  
(picture ma)*

*ways to store energy surplus in the pump storage power plants. This is of course an ideal location in the Centre of Europe where other states may have an interest. Water is a resource over which there might be fighting in the medium future.*

*How can you build an army in the country, which meets the constitutional mandate as well? How do we bring our army back to where it should be, so that we might really call it an army?*

*I must reproach the army supporters that the description of the threat, as I have just outlined it, is missing. It lacks the representation, how to conduct a defensive combat in the modern world. I don’t believe in a small high-tech army in Switzerland.*

*So you see a direct threat ...*

*... especially when we don’t have an army any longer. The major airfields and our Alpine routes are of course of immense importance for each power in case of war. Today, we can no longer defend it with the existing torso of an army. Also with the further development of the army (WEA), we are not better off, because we have planned by far not enough troops. Because of our large infrastructures, Switzerland is very likely to become involved in a military confrontation. What should we do when the situation in Ukraine further escalates and the NATO claims the right to fly over Switzerland? We would have to deny that, but we can’t. Therefore, we urgently need a new fighter aircraft, which could defend our airspace in the event of an emergency.*

*How do you assess the procurement of the Gripencombat aircraft?*

*A differentiated answer to this question is required. The air force has three tasks: in*

**"The major airfields ..."**

continued from page 5

peacetime it has to monitor our airspace, in case of war in Europe to prevent the war parties to enter into our airspace as it is prescribed according international law on neutrality. We can meet these two tasks very well using the *Gripen* and the existing *F-18*. However, in any case of war we must enable our military airports to defend themselves and to quickly repair any runway ruined by an attack.

*How do you explain this public opinion that war is nowadays impossible?*

We are doing too well; we are having our friends on the internet and believe they are real friends. But when it really matters, these are friends no longer. But it's all that comfort. One travels to Bali and all around the world. This is basically positive. I'm in favour of that, but one must not ignore reality. It has to do with our prosperity. I'm always telling the example of Brisbane. It has been about three years ago, when torrential rain washed 20,000 houses away. If we'd ask the people who had built their houses a year before, whether something like that could happen, they would have definitely denied it: the weather is always nice here, so something like this cannot happen at all. That is what it is like with international politics. The situation can change rapidly, and we're all of a sudden in the middle of a conflict.

Just the conflict between Japan and China shows how quickly passions run high. It takes only a small incident, and the whole thing escalates. It doesn't take long. The underlying tensions are already there. It was like this ahead of the first world war. A man is murdered, and the powder keg explodes.

*Do you see the cause that people are so indifferent towards a good army in a lack of awareness of what is worth to be defended in Switzerland?*

This is a central question, and I think that it is the big problem. One takes everything for granted. My generation has experienced everything that is called war. We know what it means. I was in an orphanage in Bern most of my young days. We had to go to the air-raid shelter every night, and the anti-aircraft defenses were shooting wild at the overflying airplane formations of Americans and British. We had little to eat. To my mind, especially the last years of the war and the first years after the war are combined with the memory of constant hunger and little to eat. There was never ever enough. We saw what it looked like in Germany. After the war we made a trip to Germany with a group of students from Zurich. We saw the cities. Hamburg, for example was a single heap of rubble. It was not only in Germany, but all over Europe and also in large parts of Asia.

A major problem is that we take our prosperity for granted, that we have full rights, that we have a functioning welfare state, that we have direct democracy, that is the way things are and no one can properly appreciate it because no one knows what it means, if it wasn't like that anymore. It is a phenomenon: as long as something is there, we do not appreciate it. If it is no longer there, then becomes important again. I do not eat butter, so to speak, but when I see butter today, then I always think I might take as much butter as I'd like. I remember exactly how it was without having butter. People experiencing how it's like without freedom and rights will know what it means to lose them. This is certainly one of the main problems. People are no longer aware, what a unique country we are. To enjoy what we have is right in my view. I also enjoy it; in addition there are all the possibilities that mainly young people have. But you should be aware that all that is very vulnerable. This awareness that it is not God-given should be in our memory all the time. Not to see that any more is the greatest weakness of our people.

*One underestimates the current situation completely then ...*

... yes, exactly, because states have only interests. The example of the English shows that. During the Second World War, they didn't allow us, and nobody knows about it, to set up stocks sufficient for more than two months, fearing that these would fall into the hands of an attacking enemy. The British said they appreciated our democracy, but "they had their interests. We fight for our lives and cannot show consideration for you." That's how it is.

*Often one has the impression that many politicians are lacking this vision.*

Yes, what I blame the Federal Council for, is that in this point the strategic thinking seems to be lacking. I have no insight into the sessions, but I wonder if a broader context is debated at least once a year. There is no action in an larger picture, but every member acts on his own: somebody daubs a bit red color on an image, somebody else mends the picture frame. The example of the airport of Kloten (Zurich): Why are we allowing our neighbors to put us under pressure, without negotiating conditions, as well with the issue of total traffic through Switzerland, including railways, trucks and the pollution of the Alpine valleys by German cars? We must defend our sovereignty, diplomatically and in case of war, militarily.

In 1956–57 after the invasion of the Russians in Hungary, a people's movement to strengthen our army took shape in Switzerland comprising the whole country and all parties from left to right, with the exception of the PdA. I was one of the two secretaries. An *additional* defense budget of 900 million francs was requested. Almost all members of Parliament, also those of the Swiss Social Democratic Party, had signed the claim before it was discussed in the Parliament and accepted by an overwhelming majority. It was accepted as well by the parliamentarians of the SPS, who asked for factual changes only; specifically they wanted more anti-tank guns with the same budget and buy fewer tanks. The costs of the effort were borne by the *Vorort*, the umbrella organization of the Swiss economy, and the *Swiss Federation of Trade Unions* (SGB). I wish we would have such national consensus again today, also in view of our relations with the EU.

*Mr Frick, thank you for these clear words.*

Gotthard Frick studied civilization française, political economy and business administration at the University of Paris (Sorbonne and "Sciences Po"). For many years he was concerned with large infrastructure projects (power plants, power lines, roads, tunnels, irrigation systems) in Switzerland and overseas. From 1968 to 2004 he devoted himself to the establishment and management of a consultancy, management and training company with an attached English-speaking University for Applied Sciences, which was active for all development banks, for UN agencies (ILO, WTO, UNDP), the OECD, the Swiss and several other governments and businesses all over the world. Today he often visits China. He was an infantry battalion commander. Thanks to his visits to foreign armies (Germany, Pakistan), to NATO and the US Air Force Bases in Germany and Panama, he has a broad military background knowledge. Gotthard Frick is member of the *Social Democratic Party of Switzerland* (SP).

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)



# Ukraine: Regime change à la USA

## Flaring-up a new Cold War

by Thomas Kaiser

The first week of the spring session of the *Human Rights Council* in Geneva is dedicated to the political representatives of the countries. Frequently the foreign ministers themselves or their representatives come to explain the focus of their States' human rights policy for ten minutes. They did so in the last week, and it presented an interesting picture to the audience. While the African and Asian countries mainly addressed the human rights situation in their respective countries and the question how they could improve this, it was mainly the EU and NATO member states which seized on the situation in Ukraine, Syria or Venezuela and commented it in an extremely polemical way. They stroke a sharp note in part.

On Tuesday the speech of the Estonian Foreign Minister *Urmas Paet* was striking, Paet being the one who had the by now well-known telephone conversation with EU foreign affairs head *Catherine Ashton*, in which he mentioned that the snipers in Kiev had targeted both police and demonstrators (see "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 7 March). A similar approach was reported by the French journalist and publicist *Tierry Meyssan* from Venezuela. Again, both security forces and protesters were killed by the same weapons. Urmas Paet tried in his speech to conjure up the Ukrainian crisis as a threat to peace in Europe and urged the international community to act. "All possible measures" should be taken against Russia.

### NATO's Eastward Expansion against the promise of George Bush Sr.

What began with the NATO Eastward Expansion in the mid-90s is in contrast to the promises made by *George Bush Sr.* to *Mikhail Gorbachev*, that there would be no extension of NATO to the former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact countries, and is to be continued in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the expansion to Georgia and Ukraine. It becomes more and more evident that it is about the consequent constriction of Russia and thus a strong weakening of this emerging country, which has proven itself in recent years, since the presidency *Vladimir Putin* took a stand against the US hegemonic temptations, especially in the case of Syria.

### All of a sudden inner conflicts are flaring up

It is striking that different countries that previously had developed independently of the US empire in their own way are suddenly confronted with blazing inner conflicts, whether in Libya, Syria, Venezuela, and not least in the Ukraine. Regarding

Libya the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" reported on 7 March that the country threatened to break apart and to drop into chaos. Is this the result of a "humanitarian intervention" for freedom, democracy and human rights, sanctioned by the UN and performed by its commissioned NATO? At that time, Russia and China had abstained from approval of the UN Security Council. What followed after the resolution more than confirmed their attitude. It was a necessary signal to all states that not a small group of nations may invade a country to their liking and dismiss the government.

### Ukraine as current victim precisely of this American destruction policy

If you listen to in the corridors of the UN in Geneva, it is primarily the Latin American countries, who can tell you a thing or two about American interventions for democracy and human rights, and therefore take a clear position on the events in Syria, in Venezuela and in Ukraine. With them there is little doubt that currently Ukraine is precisely a victim of this American policy of destruction.

### Double standards

The speech of the US American representative to the Human Rights Council was particularly cynical. She implored the noble aspirations of the United States to stand up for freedom, democracy and human rights, and criticized the intervention of Russia in the internal affairs of Ukraine. "We have to insist that all states have to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine," and she stressed that the Ukrainian people have the right "to determine their own political path." Don't we know these words? How did President *Johnson* the US military intervention in Vietnam in 1965, which then ended in a complete disaster: "Vietnam must be allowed to follow its own path." What was this "own" path? A country with more than 2 million dead completely destroyed and contaminated with *Agent Orange*. This is what reality is like. How things will develop in Ukraine remains to be seen.

### United States participated in this country's coup d' état from the start

Just in the last few weeks and at least since the phone call, as the US State Department's representative for Eastern Europe *Victoria Nuland* expressed here displeasure in a conversation with the US Ambassador in Ukraine, *Geoffrey Pyatt*, about the EU's lack of determination to promote the fall of the Ukrainian President *Yanukovich* and said the much-

quoted sentence "Fuck the EU", it is known who is interfering highly officially with the internal affairs of other states. While the media were especially indignant about the verbal gaffe, there was no outcry about the content of the call, in which it became clear to the entire world, that from the beginning the United States has been involved in this country's coup d' état.

### In Syria, the US strategy has not worked successfully

What has been achieved under *George W. Bush* by brutal military intervention, namely a so-called regime change forced from outside, is operated with smart power under *Obama* but is pursuing the same goal: overthrow of governments, be it – as in the case of *Yanukovich* – democratically elected or not. It does not matter for US policy when it comes to its own political and economic interests. If the change cannot be obtained by a civil war, then by a military intervention, best of all, of course, with a fraudulently obtained UN mandate as in the case of Libya.

Russia and China have finally learned their lesson. In Syria, the US strategy did no longer turn out successful, apart from the destruction of the country and the killing of many innocent people. This time, China and Russia put in their veto in the UN Security Council. What fate the US now wants to prepare for Ukraine remains to be seen. One thing is certain, Russia will be further besieged. If you read our media, you can mount the misconception that everybody consent that Russia is the "bad guy". If you, however, hear and read the voices of other countries that we can not hear or read since they are concealed from us, you get a very different picture. The US-EU-centric view of things is naive and simple-minded. It is high time we really broaden our horizons. •



## “... against any exploitation of humanitarian crises ...”

Excerpt from a speech by Marcos Timerman, Foreign Minister of Argentina

“Mr President, the world is still suffering from continuous and repeated examples of brutal suppression of basic human rights. The horror that has come over the lives of those who live in countries that are victims of internal armed conflicts, makes us all feel ashamed, and for this reason my country actively con-

demns weapons sales to splinter groups that try to tear apart these countries; there are weapons that frequently come from precisely those countries that condemn the horror while benefitting from death.

Therefore I would like to express my country's attitude against any exploita-

tion of humanitarian crises that may be used to justify a foreign military intervention, which is no more than a geopolitical maneuver in a game in which the victims' interests are not among the top priorities.”

Source: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “The intervention of the Western powers must stop ...”

Abelardo Moreno Fernández, Vice Foreign Minister on 6 March at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva quoting Cuba's President Raúl Castro

“[...] wherever there might be a government which is not convenient to the interests of ruling circles in the United States, or among some of its European allies, it becomes the target of subversive campaigns. They now use new subtle, occult methods to undermine, without renouncing violence, to disturb the peace and internal order, and prevent governments from concentrating on the struggle for economic and social development, if they are not able to overthrow them.

More than a few examples can be found in non-conventional war manuals, which were implemented in various countries of our Latin American and Caribbean region, as is occurring in Venezuela today, and some with similar features have been in evidence on other continents, first in Libya and currently in Syria and Ukraine. Anyone who has doubts about this, I would invite to leaf through the US Army Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Training Manual 18-01, published in November 2010, entitled Non-conventional War.

Right now in Ukraine alarming events are taking place. The interference of Western powers must end, to allow the Ukrainian people to legitimately exercise their right to self-determination. It must not be overlooked that these events could have very serious consequences for international peace and security.”

Source: [windinthetower.wordpress.com/2014/02/25/raul-castro-speech-at-the-closing-session-of-the-20th-congress-of-the-cuban-workers-federation-ctc](http://windinthetower.wordpress.com/2014/02/25/raul-castro-speech-at-the-closing-session-of-the-20th-congress-of-the-cuban-workers-federation-ctc)

## Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

**Subscribe to Current Concerns – The journal of an independent cooperative**

The cooperative *Zeit-Fragen* is a politically and financially independent organisation. All of its members work on a voluntary and honorary basis. The journal does not accept commercial advertisements of any kind and receives no financial support from business organisations. The journal *Current Concerns* is financed exclusively by its subscribers.

We warmly recommend our model of free and independent press coverage to other journals.

Annual subscription rate of  
CHF 40,-; Euro 30,-; USD 40,-; GBP 25,-  
for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of  
CHF 20,-; Euro 15,-; USD 20,-; GBP 12,50  
for all other countries.

Please choose one of the following ways of payment:

- send a cheque to *Current Concerns*, P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich, or
- send us your credit card details (only *Visa*), or
- pay into one of the following accounts:

CH:	Postscheck-Konto (CHF):	87-644472-4	IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4	BIC POFICHBEXXX
CH:	Postscheck-Konto (Euro):	91-738798-6	IBAN CH83 0900 0000 9173 8798 6	BIC POFICHBEXXX
D:	Volksbank Tübingen, Kto. 67 517 005, BLZ 64190110		IBAN DE12 6419 0110 0067 5170 05	BIC GENODES1TUE
A:	Raiffeisen Landesbank, Kto. 1-05.713.599, BLZ 37000		IBAN AT55 3700 0001 0571 3599	BIC RVVGAT2B



# “Take the burning fuse out of the barrel, as long as there is time”

## The West, Russia, China and the Ukraine

by Willy Wimmer, retired state secretary in the Ministry of Defense, member of the German Bundestag 1976–2009



Willy Wimmer  
(picture ma)

Events regarding Ukraine are coming thick and fast and the nice illusion of Sochi with the beaming athletes has disappeared faster than we would have liked.

Yet, in the mass of news about events some 700

km from Berlin, we should not oversee or wrongly classify the news about a terrible massacre in the Chinese city of Kunming. Kunming, the capital of the Chinese province of Yunnan, normally impresses visitors by its charming love of life reminding of the regions along the Mediterranean. But last weekend, death visited Kunming when some 30 people were killed and over 100 severely injured. Far away?

Let us recall the eve of the illegal war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia almost exactly 15 years ago. For months there had been several terrorist attacks in the Chinese West. Dead and wounded were the consequence. Prominent Hollywood actors were starting a campaign for the sake of Tibet. It was so dramatic that a war because of Tibet seemed imminent. Not only the *Spiegel* reported that it was American secret agencies that were backing the unrest in Western China.

But what really started was the bombing of Belgrade, in the heart of Europe. Henchmen were the members of the Albanian terror organization UCK which was used by the United States and later by all of NATO to enforce their goals in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

There are more writings on the wall than we would like. This means that we should not lose sight of the big picture in face of the Ukrainian turmoils.

Something very big is under way which may tear us all apart. Those who today want to throw Russia out of the G8 will tomorrow have no qualms to threaten China with throwing it out of the World Trade Organization and to act on this threat. It is a time of end games and it is highly spectacular to watch the American Secretary of State *John Kerry* posing as the guardian angel of international law.

Still, the American conduct since the illegal war against Belgrade and the later – also classical – wars of aggression against Iraq among others should not serve as a pretext for others to relapse into the American

### Western European media forced into line under US command?

Open Letter to the Heads of States and Governments of the EU  
to the meeting of 6 March 2014

Dear Sir and Madam,  
According to the standards common in the European Union in difficult developments, the Heads of States and Governments should stipulate at their meeting in Brussels regarding the situation in Ukraine that

1 no contacts are established to the new rulers in Kiev on government level as long as there are serious and reasonable doubts as to the legality of the new organs in Kiev,

2 as long as it must be assumed that there are people in high and highest offices of the new organs in Kiev whose political views cause disgust throughout Europe due to their line of thought, the EU [...] should impose a boycott on the institutions in Kiev until these people no longer belong to the incumbent authorities in Kiev. For the Federal Government in Berlin it is not acceptable that while a banning of the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) is to be enforced by the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe they are in cahoots together with people who maintain the closest contact with the NPD.

It is most unfortunate that the media in Western Europe react on the critical developments as if they were brought

into line and were acting under American command. [...]

Last week the flames of the Maidan in Kiev threatened to spread to the whole of Ukraine. A Ukraine sinking into civil war would have brought about a collapse of the rest of Europe. This danger is still not off the table because the economic dangers are yet to come. The level-headed and clear appearance of the Russian government under President *Putin* has given Europe and the world a chance to obtain sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and to save us from the fury of civil war in Ukraine.

In the years that led to the ordinary war of aggression of NATO against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, almost exactly 15 years, and a peace-threatening and behavior of the United States violating international law in other parts of the world, the Russian Federation has been committed to international law and its fundamental principles. Without this international law and particularly the Charter of the United Nations, the fate of Europe will be more than ever uncertain. [...]

Willy Wimmer, State Secretary of the Federal Minister of Defence, retired, Member of the German Bundestag 1976–2009

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

patterns of the past decades. But do they? It is quickly done to compare the Russian President *Putin* to *Adolf Hitler* – as a former Czech Foreign Minister did recently. Talk is cheap for Prince *Schwarzenberg*: It was the Russians who were shedding their blood under *Adolf Hitler*. It cannot get more disconcerting than that.

But Ukraine will blow up into our faces even if there is now – since *Joschka Fischer* – a NATO mode when targets are spotlighted. *Yanukovich* is gone and who will shed a tear for him? With all his luxury villas? Did this annoy anyone in Brussels, Berlin, London or Washington before the wrestle over the association agreement? Only 300,000 euro in the treasury? Where have all these wise guys from Brussels been when the data from Kiev were checked in advance of the planned agreement to close the gap between Ukraine and the EU?

But the style of US-American undersecretary *Nuland* – and others – indulging in considerations regarding the manipulations of the new government in Ukraine

was of quite a new kind. This was the first time in modern history that a government that had been formed after free and fair elections – according to all observers including the OSCE and the Council of Europe – had been pushed out of office in a coup, sweeping aside all agreements regarding the settlement of crisis.

And all this happened also and particularly through forces which would normally have caused an outcry of disgust all over Europe. Starting in the night of the seize of power, there was a mobilization against Russian speaking citizens in Ukraine. It was most urgent to threaten them with the destruction of their civil rights. The political mob was about to sweep through Ukraine.

Due to the imminent financial collapse of Ukraine, a furor seems to prevail there which is now calling for the West. But there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth as soon as western European and American reality will hit.

## “Washington’s blatant hypocrisy”

by Paul Craig Roberts

The President has repeatedly declared erroneously and foolishly that it is “against international law” for Crimea to exercise self-determination. Self-determination, as used by Washington, is a propaganda term that serves Washington’s empire but is not permissible for real people to exercise. On March 6 *Obama* telephoned *Putin* to tell the Russian President again that only Washington has the right to interfere in Ukraine and to insist against all logic that only the “government” in Kiev installed by the Washington-organized coup is “legitimate” and “democratic.”

In other words, the elected government in Crimea pushed by the people in Crimea to give them a vote on their future is “undemocratic” and “illegitimate,” but a non-elected government in Kiev imposed by Washington is the voice of self-determination and legitimacy.

Washington is so arrogant that it never occurs to the hubris-infected fools what the world thinks of Washington’s blatant hypocrisy.

Since the *Clinton* regime, Washington has done nothing but violate international

law – Serbia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Honduras, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia.

Does Russia have an Africa Command? No, but Washington does.

Is Russia surrounding the US with military bases? No, but Washington has used the *NATO* organization, whose purpose disappeared 23 years ago, to organize western, eastern, and southern Europe into an empire army with forward bases on Russia’s borders. Washington is determined to extend the boundaries of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization to Georgia in central Asia and to Ukraine on the Black Sea. Both Georgia and Ukraine are former constituent parts of both Russia and the Soviet Union.

Washington is doing the same thing to China and Iran. Washington is working to establish new air and naval bases in Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, with which to block the flow of oil and other resources into China. Iran is surrounded by some 40 US military bases and has US fleets standing off its coastline.

In Washington’s propaganda, this rank militarism is presented as “defending democracy.”

The Russian government continues to act as though Washington’s thrusts at Russia’s independence and strategic interests can be defused with good sense and good will. But Washington has neither.

Since the *Clinton* regime, Washington has been in the hands of a collection of ideologues who are convinced that the US is “the exceptional indispensable country” with the right to world hegemony. Everything that Washington has done in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is in pursuit of this goal.

Washington intends to break up the Russian Federation itself. Washington funnels huge sums of money into NGOs inside Russia that serve as Washington Fifth Columns and work hand-in-hand with Washington to discredit Russian free elections, to demonize *Putin* and the Russian government, to spread anti-Russian propaganda and agitation. It is amazing how many Russians actually believe the Western propaganda.

Washington is also working to isolate China with the Trans-Pacific-Partnership, but at this time is primarily focused on destabilizing and isolating Russia. Washington is desperate to break up the BRICS, the emerging organization of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. With the largest countries and half of the world’s population, the BRICS organization is emerging as a political and economic power, especially with the organization’s plan to cease using the US dollar as reserve currency. Ringing Russia with US missile bases on Russia’s borders impairs Russian sovereignty and independence and, thus, weakens the BRICS as a countervailing power to Washington.

Many have been deceived by Washington’s propaganda. The world is slowly waking up, but is it in time?

The US media and much of Europe’s speak with one voice parroting Washington’s propaganda, demonizing Washington’s targets, and preparing insouciant Western populations for more war. The Western media, like Western governments, is devoid of integrity. •

Source: [www.paulcraigroberts.org](http://www.paulcraigroberts.org) from 7.3.2014

“Public discussion on Ukraine is all about confrontation. But do we know where we are going? In my life, I have seen four wars begun with great enthusiasm and public support, all of which we did not know how to end and from three of which we withdrew unilaterally. The test of policy is how it ends, not how it begins.”

Henry Kissinger in the “*Washington Post*” from 5 March 2014

### “Take the burning fuse out of ...”

continued from page 9

When listening to Mr *Obama* and Mr *Kerry* it seems that Washington is reaching for its last resorts short of a declaration of war against the Russian Federation. In face of the dimension of the big bang proceeding from Ukraine: wouldn’t it have made more sense for Europe to keep things contained? After all it was

Moscow that wanted to pump more money into Ukraine than the West that is generally much more meticulous with money.

And *Putin*? Should he have waited until the seize of power in Kiev would reach the Russian border? The promoters of the new spirit were well under way. What evil spirit has actually led the new men in power to fire every important official in the country in order to replace him

with their own protégés? With the style of his action, the Russian President *Putin* has put a halt on this that may prove a crucial turning point in future. Taking the burning fuse out of the barrel, as *Putin* has done it, can be seen as a chance if Russia’s acting is not seen as a threat to our western intentions. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “Acting in compliance with international law”

Extracts from Russian President Vladimir Putin's press conference on 4 March 2014



President Vladimir Putin (picture ma)

First of all, my assessment of what happened in Kiev and in Ukraine in general. There can only be one assessment: this was an anti-constitutional takeover, an armed seizure of power. Does anyone question

this? Nobody does.

There is a question here that neither I, nor my colleagues, with whom I have been discussing the situation in Ukraine a great deal over these past days, as you know – none of us can answer. The question is why was this done?

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that President *Yanukovich*, through the mediation of the Foreign Ministers of three European countries – Poland, Germany and France – and in the presence of my representative (this was the Russian Human Rights Commissioner *Vladimir Lukin*) signed an agreement with the opposition on February 21. I would like to stress that under that agreement (I am not saying this was good or bad, just stating the fact) Mr *Yanukovich* actually handed over power. He agreed to all the opposition's demands: he agreed to early parliamentary elections, to early presidential elections, and to return to the 2004 Constitution, as demanded by the opposition. He gave a positive response to our request, the request of western countries and, first of all, of the opposition not to use force. He did not issue a single illegal order to shoot at the poor demonstrators. Moreover, he issued orders to withdraw all police forces from the capital, and they complied. He went to Kharkov to attend an event, and as soon as he left, instead of releasing the occupied administrative buildings, they immediately occupied the President's residence and the Government building – all that instead of acting on the agreement.

I ask myself, what was the purpose of all this? I want to understand why this was done. He [*Yanukovich*] had in fact given up his power already, and as I believe, as I told him, he had no chance of being re-elected.

Everybody agrees on this, everyone I have been speaking to on the telephone these past few days. What was the purpose of all those illegal, unconstitutional actions, why did they have to create this chaos in the country?

Armed and masked militants are still roaming the streets of Kiev. This is a question to which there is no answer. Did they wish to humiliate someone and show their power? I think these actions are absolutely foolish. The result is the absolute opposite of what they expected, because their actions have significantly destabilised the east and southeast of Ukraine.

Now over to how this situation came about.

In my opinion, this revolutionary situation has been brewing for a long time, since the first days of Ukraine's independence. The ordinary Ukrainian citizen, the ordinary guy suffered during the rule of *Nicholas II*, during the reign of *Kuchma*, and *Yushchenko*, and *Yanukovich*. Nothing or almost nothing has changed for the better. Corruption has reached dimensions that are unheard of here in Russia. Accumulation of wealth and social stratification – problems that are also acute in this country [Russia] – are much worse in Ukraine, radically worse. Out there, they are beyond anything we can imagine. Generally, people wanted change, but one should not support illegal change.

Only constitutional means should be used on the post-Soviet space, where political structures are still very fragile, and economies are still weak. Going beyond the constitutional field would always be a cardinal mistake in such a situation.

Incidentally, I understand those people on Mайдan, though I do not support this kind of turnover. I understand the people on Mайдan who are calling for radical change rather than some cosmetic remodelling of power. Why are they demanding this? Because they have grown used to seeing one set of thieves being replaced by another.

Moreover, the people in the regions do not even participate in forming their own regional governments. There was a period in this country [Russia] when the President appointed regional leaders, but then the local legislative authorities had to approve them, while in Ukraine they are appointed directly. We [in Russia] have now moved on to elections, while they are nowhere near this.

And they began appointing all sorts of oligarchs and billionaires to govern the eastern regions of the country. No wonder the people do not accept this, no wonder they think that as a result of dishonest privatisation (just as many people think here as well) people have become rich and now they also have been brought to power.

For example, Mr *Kolomoisky* was appointed Governor of Dnepropetrovsk. This is a unique crook. He even managed

“For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one.”

*Henry Kissinger in his contribution for “Washington Post” (“How the Ukraine crisis ends”) of 5.3.2014*

to cheat our oligarch *Roman Abramovich* two or three years ago. Scammed him, as our intellectuals like to say. They signed some deal, *Abramovich* transferred several billion dollars, while this guy never delivered and pocketed the money. When I asked him [*Abramovich*]: “Why did you do it?” he said: “I never thought this was possible.” I do not know, by the way, if he ever got his money back and if the deal was closed. But this really did happen a couple of years ago. And now this crook is appointed Governor of Dnepropetrovsk. No wonder the people are dissatisfied. They were dissatisfied and will remain so if those who refer to themselves as the legitimate authorities continue in the same fashion.

Most importantly, people should have the right to determine their own future, that of their families and of their region, and to have equal participation in it. I would like to stress this: wherever a person lives, whatever part of the country, he or she should have the right to equal participation in determining the future of the country.

Are the current authorities legitimate? The Parliament is partially, but all the others are not. The current Acting President is definitely not legitimate. There is only one legitimate President, from a legal standpoint. Clearly, he has no power. However, as I have already said, and will repeat: *Yanukovich* is the only undoubtedly legitimate President.

There are three ways of removing a President under Ukrainian law: one is his death, the other is when he personally steps down, and the third is impeachment. The latter is a well-deliberated constitutional norm. It has to involve the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Rada. This is a complicated and lengthy procedure. It was not carried out. Therefore, from a legal perspective this [the presidency of *Yanukovich*] is an undisputed fact.

Moreover, I think this may be why they disbanded the Constitutional Court, which runs counter to all legal norms of both Ukraine and Europe. They not only disbanded the Constitutional Court in an illegitimate fashion, but they also – just think

continued on page 12

### “Acting in compliance with ...”

continued from page 11

about it – instructed the Prosecutor General’s Office to launch criminal proceedings against members of the Constitutional Court.

What is that all about? Is this what they call free justice? How can you instruct anyone to start criminal proceedings? If a crime, a criminal offence, has been committed, the law enforcement agencies see this and react. But instructing them to file criminal charges is nonsense, it’s monkey business.

Now about financial aid to Crimea. As you may know, we have decided to organise work in the Russian regions to aid Crimea, which has turned to us for humanitarian support. We will provide it, of course. I cannot say how much, when or how – the Government is working on this, by bringing together the regions bordering on Crimea, by providing additional support to our regions so they could help the people in Crimea. We will do it, of course.

Regarding the deployment of troops, the use of armed forces. So far, there is no need for it, but the possibility remains.

I would like to say here that the military exercises we recently held had nothing to do with the events in Ukraine. This was pre-planned, but we did not disclose these plans, naturally, because this was a snap inspection of the forces’ combat readiness. We planned this a long time ago, the Defence Minister reported to me and I had the order ready to begin the exercise. As you may know, the exercises are over; I gave the order for the troops to return to their regular dislocations yesterday.

What can serve as a reason to use the Armed Forces? Such a measure would certainly be the very last resort.

First, the issue of legitimacy. As you may know, we have a direct appeal from the incumbent and, as I said, legitimate President of Ukraine, Mr Yanukovich, asking us to use the Armed Forces to protect the lives, freedom and health of the citizens of Ukraine.

What is our biggest concern? We see the rampage of reactionary forces, nationalist and anti-Semitic forces going on in certain parts of Ukraine, including Kiev. I am sure you, members of the media, saw how one of the governors was chained and handcuffed to something and they poured water over him, in the cold of winter. After that, by the way, he was locked up in a cellar and tortured.

What is all this about? Is this democracy? Is this some manifestation of democracy? He was actually only recently appointed to this position, in December, I believe. Even if we accept that they are all corrupt there, he had barely had time to steal anything.

And do you know what happened when they seized the Party of Regions building? There were no party members there at all at the time. Some two-three employees came out, one was an engineer, and he said to the attackers: “Could you let us go, and let the women out, please. I’m an engineer, I have nothing to do with politics.” He was shot right there in front of the crowd. Another employee was led to a cellar and then they threw Molotov cocktails at him and burned him alive. Is this also a manifestation of democracy?

When we see this we understand what worries the citizens of Ukraine, both Russian and Ukrainian, and the Russian-speaking population in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. It is this uncontrolled crime that worries them.

Therefore, if we see such uncontrolled crime spreading to the eastern regions of the country, and if the people ask us for help, while we already have the official request from the legitimate President, we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people. We believe this would be absolutely legitimate. This is our last resort.

Moreover, here is what I would like to say: we have always considered Ukraine not only a neighbour, but also a brotherly neighbouring republic, and will continue to do so. Our Armed Forces are comrades in arms, friends, many of whom know each other personally. I am certain, and I stress, I am certain that the Ukrainian military and the Russian military will not be facing each other, they will be on the same side in a fight.

Incidentally, the things I am talking about – this unity – is what is happening in Crimea. You should note that, thank God, not a single gunshot has been fired there; there are no casualties, except for that crush on the square about a week ago. What was going on there? People came, surrounded units of the armed forces and talked to them, convincing them to follow the demands and the will of the people living in that area. There was not a single armed conflict, not a single gunshot.

Thus the tension in Crimea that was linked to the possibility of using our Armed Forces simply died down and there was no need to use them. The only thing we had to do, and we did it, was to enhance the defence of our military facilities because they were constantly receiving threats and we were aware of the armed nationalists moving in. We did this, it was the right thing to do and very timely. Therefore, I proceed from the idea that we will not have to do anything of the kind in eastern Ukraine.

There is something I would like to stress, however. Obviously, what I am going to say now is not within my authority and we do not intend to interfere.

However, we firmly believe that all citizens of Ukraine, I repeat, wherever they live, should be given the same equal right to participate in the life of their country and in determining its future.

If I were in the shoes of those who consider themselves the legitimate authorities, I would not waste time and go through all the necessary procedures, because they [these authorities] do not have a national mandate to conduct the domestic, foreign and economic policy of Ukraine, and especially to determine its future.

Now, the stock market. As you may know, the stock market was jumpy even before the situation in Ukraine deteriorated. This is primarily linked to the policy of the US *Federal Reserve*, whose recent decisions enhanced the attractiveness of investing in the US economy and investors began moving their funds from the developing markets to the American market. This is a general trend and it has nothing to do with Ukraine. I believe it was India that suffered most, as well as the other BRICS states. Russia was hit as well, not as hard as India, but it was. This is the fundamental reason.

As for the events in Ukraine, politics always influence the stock market in one way or another. Money likes quiet, stability and calm. However, I think this is a tactical, temporary development and a temporary influence. [...]

Our partners, especially in the United States, always clearly formulate their own geopolitical and state interests and follow them with persistence. Then, using the principle “You’re either with us or against us” they draw the whole world in. And those who do not join in get “beaten” until they do.

Our approach is different. We proceed from the conviction that we always act legitimately. I have personally always been an advocate of acting in compliance with international law. I would like to stress yet again that if we do make the decision, if I do decide to use the Armed Forces, this will be a legitimate decision in full compliance with both general norms of international law, since we have the appeal of the legitimate President, and with our commitments, which in this case coincide with our interests to protect the people with whom we have close historical, cultural and economic ties. Protecting these people is in our national interests. This is a humanitarian mission. We do not intend to subjugate anyone or to dictate to anyone. However, we cannot remain indifferent if we see that they are being persecuted, destroyed and humiliated. However, I sincerely hope it never gets to that. •

Source: Vladimir Putin answered journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine, 4 March 2014  
<http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6763>

## “We all know well who created the crisis in Ukraine and how they did it”

*Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov,  
at 25<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, 3 March 2014*

---

“The issue of human rights is too serious to make it a ‘token’ in geopolitical ‘games’, [...] and all the more so to enforce regime change operations.”

---

Mr Chairman,

Last year Russia was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council again. We thank everybody who voted for us, for their support. We view this as a recognition of the constructive approach of our country to multilateral cooperation.

Human rights issues are one of the priorities of the international agenda, in conditions when factors of instability do not weaken, and the area of risks and conflicts in different regions is extending. These processes are significantly related to the continuing formation of a new polycentric world order. Russia consistently proceeds from the fact that in this period of deep change we need to do everything possible to enforce the rights and liberties of individuals, respect for human dignity in practice.

The issue of human rights is too serious to make it a “token” in geopolitical “games”, to use them to impose one’s own will upon others and all the more so to enforce regime change operations. All the available experience is evidence that any interference under the pretext of the protection of civilians, which in fact leads to a regime change, gives directly contrary results, and multiplies the sufferings of peaceful civilians depriving them of their fundamental right – the right to live.

Any domestic crises should be overcome through a dialogue between all the political forces, ethnic and sectarian groups, according to the constitution and with respect for international obligations, including, not least, obligations under international humanitarian law, the defence of human rights and the rights of national minorities. In doing this, it is of principled importance to edge away from extremists attempting to take hold of the situation by illegal methods, by not shunning violence and open terror.

These approaches to the settlement of conflicts are applicable to Syria, Ukraine and any other country.

We all know well who created the crisis in Ukraine and how they did it. Having disputed absolutely legitimate actions by legal powers, some of our partners took the course of supporting anti-government

manifestations, and stimulated their participants, who started aggressive forceful actions. There were occupations and arson of administrative buildings, attacks on police, plundering of weapon stockpiles, outrages against official persons in the regions, gross interference in church affairs. The centre of Kiev and many other west Ukrainian cities were occupied by armed national radicals, who used extremist, anti-Russian and anti-Semitic slogans.

On the 21 February (after almost three months of riots and outrages) an agreement was reached between the President of Ukraine and the opposition, which was also signed by the German, Polish and French foreign ministers. The authorities refused to introduce a state of emergency, or to remove law enforcement personnel from the streets. The opposition has done nothing. They have not laid down arms, public buildings and the streets of Kiev were not freed, radicals continue to control cities. The formation of a “government of champions” was announced, rather than the promised creation of a national unity government.

The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada took decisions restricting the rights of language minorities, dismissed judges of the Constitutional Court and insisted on criminal proceedings against them. We hear requests to restrict or punish the use of Russian, prohibit unwanted political parties, organise lustration. It means that the “champions” intend to use the results of their “victory” to violate fundamental human rights and liberties.

Eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, where millions of Russians live, were outraged by this, because they do not want this scenario to be repeated in their regions. In conditions of threats of violent action on behalf of ultranationalists, who endanger the life and legal interests of Russians and the entire Russian-speaking population, self-defence units were created by the people, who had to prevent the attempts at forced occupation of administrative buildings in Crimea and the entry of weapons and ammunition into the peninsula. There is information that new prov-

ocations are being prepared, including against Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in the territory of Ukraine.

In these conditions, the legally elected authorities of this Autonomous Republic turned to the President of Russia asking for assistance in pacification of the situation in Crimea.

In full compliance with Russian law, in view of the extraordinary situation in Ukraine, the threat to the lives of Russian nationals, our compatriots and staff of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine, the President of Russia addressed the Federation Council to allow the use of Russian Armed Forces in the territory of Ukraine until the social and political situation in the country normalises.

The Federation Council upheld such address, which (as we hope) will sober the radicals. I repeat, it is all about the protection of our nationals and compatriots, defence of the most fundamental human right – the right to live.

All those, who attempt to interpret this situation as aggression, and threaten all kinds of sanctions and boycotts, are the very same partners of ours, who consistently and insistently encouraged the political forces they favour, to enforce ultimatums and refusals of any dialogue, ignoring the concerns of south and east Ukraine and ultimately – the polarisation of the Ukrainian community. We appeal to them to demonstrate a responsible approach, to put aside any geopolitical considerations and place the interests of the Ukrainian people above all other interests. We need to ensure the implementation of the obligations laid down in the Agreement of the 21 February, including the start of the constitutional reform process with the participation and full consideration of the opinions of all the Ukrainian regions to be further approved at a nationwide referendum.

Real progress in the area of human rights may be achieved only on the basis of equal cooperation, respectful dialogue, and reinforcement of trust between states. These guarantors of legality in their own



*Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov  
(picture thk)*

**“We all know well who ...”**

continued from page 13

territory bear the main responsibility for the enforcement of human rights.

For joint efforts to promote and defend human rights to be effective, they should be implemented in strict compliance with generally recognised norms and principles of international law, primarily the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other fundamental documents adopted in the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

At the same time, no country or group of countries have exclusive authority to unilaterally create a new “code of conduct”, which is not based on a universal framework. The imposing of personal interpretations of human rights standards can only aggravate intercultural and inter-sectarian disagreements, risk provoking a conflict between civilisations and disrupt the efforts to create a sustainable system of global development.

Supporters of ultraliberal approaches, supporting all-permissiveness and hedonism, requesting a revision of moral values, which are shared by all the world religions, have drastically and sometimes quite aggressively been activated in some states recently. Such actions are destructive for the community, they are detrimental to the education of the growing generation. Children must be protected from such information, which is harmful to their minds and humiliates their dignity. In this regard, I would like to call to mind that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights envisages the possibility of restricting rights and liberties by law, in the interests of defending the health and morals of the population, civil security and order.

In our consistent support of consideration of the cultural and historical peculiarities of different people, we note the importance of the Human Rights Council resolution confirming that deeper understanding and respect of traditional values promotes the stimulation and protection of fundamental human rights and liberties.

We believe that it is important to ensure attention is focussed on all categories of rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural, as well as the right to develop – in the further work of the Council.

We deem it important to reinforce and develop the legal framework in the area of human rights. For this purpose, we will present a draft resolution of the Council “Integral nature of the judicial system” for review by this session and we expect it to be supported.

The drastic development of information and communication technologies requires focused attention on the consequences of almost unlimited access to information and the exchange of it. The recently disclosed facts set serious tasks, in particular the proportionality of the tasks to ensure security in the scope of involvement in private life and the degree of state control over mass media.

The topic of human rights on the Internet should be viewed not only in the context of the freedom of speech, but also from the point of view of observation of other rights, including the inviolability of private life and the right to intellectual property. We believe that the adoption of *UN General Assembly resolution 68/167* “The right to privacy in the digital age” will give a start to the practical work aimed at coordination of a clear code of conduct in this area.

This year the international community will celebrate 75 years since the beginning of the Second World War, but next year – 70 years since our Victory over Nazism and the establishment of the Nuremberg Tribunal. These dates are a reminder of the dangerous consequences, to which a belief in personal exclusiveness, disregard of fundamental moral norms and rights, can lead.

We need to counteract the attempts to justify and glorify Nazis and their accomplices, to besmear monuments to the liberators of Europe from fascism, firmly and jointly. The support shown by the overwhelming majority of UN members for the *UN General Assembly resolution 68/150* “Combating the glorification of Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, confirms the worldwide unacceptability of any misanthropic ideology.

A week ago in Sochi, the international community opposed these shameful phenomena with their commitment to the high

principles of the Olympic Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sportsmen from 88 countries gave a celebration to the world, which demonstrated openness towards each other, an atmosphere of friendship, trust, tolerance, and contributed to reinforcing humanitarian ties.

The human rights concept contains a strong uniting potential. Dignity, freedom, fairness, equality, and tolerance towards others, are envisaged to reinforce mutual understanding and cooperation between countries and peoples, in the interests of ensuring the sustainable development and welfare of the entire human race. •

Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. Official site. Documents and Materials of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 3 March 2014

## Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

*Publisher:* Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

*Editor:* Erika Vögeli

*Address:* Current Concerns,  
P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

*Phone:* +41 (0)44 350 65 50

*Fax:* +41 (0)44 350 65 51

*E-Mail:* CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

*Subscription details:*

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of  
SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-  
for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of  
SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-  
for all other countries.

*Account:* Postscheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

The editors reserve the right to shorten letters to the editor. Letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *Current Concerns*.

© 2011. All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.



# Presentations of the Cooperative *Zeit-Fragen/* *Current Concerns* at the Leipzig Book Fair



**Leipziger Buchmesse**

Lesefest Leipzig liest

13.-16. März 2014

*Zeit-Fragen/Current Concerns* was presented at the Leipzig Book Fair this year. Its position was in Hall 4, Booth A107. In addition, *Current Concerns* invited visitors to attend several presentations at the Fair and two evening discussions within the context of "Leipzig reads".

## School and Home – The State's responsibility and task

*Speakers: Urs Knoblauch (CH) and Josef Nyari (D)*

Josef Nyari, Psychologist for Pedagogical Psychology from Erfurt/Ettersburg spoke about his experience with the former GDR educational system. Urs Knoblauch, teacher and cultural publicist from Switzerland dealt with the issue from the perspective of the Swiss school system. More and more parents and companies are requesting a comprehensive education by the schools as well as teaching pupils to take on responsibility for community tasks. Established, traditional and important ethical standpoints have been pushed into the background by today's "Zeitgeist". Youth is receptive and grateful for an active and constructive participation in democracy.

*Thursday, 13 March 2014 and Sunday, 16 March 2014*

## The Red Cross – Humanitarian help and Switzerland

*Book presentation of the children and youth book by Lisette Bors: "Who is Henry Dunant?"*

*Speaker: Urs Knoblauch (CH)*

Urs Knoblauch portrayed the close relationship between the political system of direct democracy with the humanitarian work of the Red Cross as a model of peace. The symbol with the color reversal of the Swiss flag to become the Red Cross in honor of the confederacy became the international and universal humanitarian protected symbol for neutrality and humanity. Also today's children and youth should be introduced to the commendable work of the Red Cross.

It was the Swiss *Henri Dunant*, born in Geneva in 1828 and raised in a humanistic-minded family, who became witness to a horrible war in 1859 in Solferino, close to Lake Garda in Italy. Countless soldiers wretchedly died without medical help. It was something he could not help thinking about and so, in 1862, he wrote the world-

moving book, "A Memory of Solferino". In it, the thoughts and tasks of the later world-wide active Red Cross movement were already formulated. With the founding of the Red Cross in 1863 and 1864, and with the first Geneva Convention, humanitarian international law were developed and became a binding norm. Already at the time of the German-French War in 1870/71, Red Cross helpers were ready for their mission. Numerous Red Cross organisations came into being all over the world as well as the Red Cross youth organisations. Geneva became the seat of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

*Friday, 14 March 2014*

## The importance of the cooperative principle for today

*Speakers: Dietmar Berger (D), Reinhard Koradi (CH) and Dr René Roca (CH)*

Dietmar Berger, former president of the Central German Cooperative Association, Reinhard Koradi, president of the cooperative *Zeit-Fragen/Current Concerns* and historian Dr phil René Roca, "Forschungsinstitut Direkte Demokratie" (research institute direct democracy) introduced into the topic. From the history of cooperatives we can draw valuable conclusions for the present. In order to respond to current social and economic challenges and to develop and implement constructive solutions we can draw on the tradition of the cooperative movement. The cooperative principle is characterized by a high degree of participation and participation in decision-making. This is why the cooperative is often preferable to other forms of enterprises. In our modern times, the cooperative idea may show new approaches to solutions, especially when it comes to areas of basic provision. An intact basic provision of the population based on local/regional needs is a prerequisite for the common good and it is very promising to build it up and maintain it in the context of a cooperative.

*Friday, 14 March 2014*

## If indeed the sovereignty of the people is to become reality

*Speaker: Dr René Roca (CH)*

Historian Dr phil René Roca, "Forschungsinstitut Direkte Demokratie" (research institute direct democracy) presented his habilitation thesis. To the contents of the book: With the present study, the theory of direct democracy is outlined more precisely and thoroughly. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century direct democratic systems formed in Switzerland on cantonal level. One such example is the canton of Lucerne. Like in no other country, the direct democracy in Switzer-

land plays a key role in the political culture. Switzerland must know its historical roots. It is not only important for its self-conception, but also as model for other interested countries.

*Saturday, 15 March 2014*

## Apprenticeship or graduation in secondary education – A plea for vocational training

*Speaker: Erika Vögeli (CH), editor-in-chief of Zeitfragen/Current Concerns, psychologist and vocational school teacher*

Many parents hope that attending grammar school education would provide the best opportunities and conditions for the future of their children. Looking at the situation in different countries, however, we see that this idea is quite questionable. To a large extent, the low youth unemployment in Switzerland is also the result of its dual vocational training system, which enables young people to an early and solid integration into the labour market. Thanks to numerous possibilities of training, all paths are always open to young professionals at any time. In many areas, vocational training proves to be of great advantage as it does not only provide theoretical knowledge but is integrated in the real world of work from the start and has a very practical orientation. It is precisely this understanding of translating theory into practice that the purely academic trainees are lacking in everyday work situations. Given the immense youth unemployment in many countries and especially in those with a high academic quota, it is worthwhile to think about the advantages of the dual vocational training system in more detail. The dual educational system has proven its worth and thus also provides a successful model for the future. Prosperity and success of the Swiss economy are not primarily based on banks, but substantially on the Swiss dual vocational training system.

*Saturday, 15 March 2014*

## Direct democracy in Germany and Switzerland

*Speakers: Dr Peter Neumann and Dr René Roca*

In the course of the event, lawyer Dr Peter Neumann and historian Dr phil René Roca contributed the experience of Germany and Switzerland in regard to direct democracy. Especially in view of some highly controversial votes in Switzerland, it was exciting to also take a look at prospects and further discuss developments of direct democracy in both countries and in Europe.

*Saturday, 15 March 2014*

Letter to  the Editor

## History lessons in school are an important and indispensable part of education

Dear *Current Concerns* editors,  
under the title “What is the purpose of studying history?” *Stevan Miljevic* has expressed some really valuable thoughts.

He emphasizes the importance of factual knowledge compared to the methodological knowledge and the competence fuss that is being increasingly introduced in schools.

I do agree: “Skills” without a solid basis of factual knowledge are empty words; vice versa desire and ability of methodological competence both arise almost by themselves when having acquired a certain amount of factual knowledge; for the next step is organizing your knowledge. Where knowledge is lacking, there is nothing to organize.

*Stevan Miljevic* emphasizes the importance of historical data and events that you have to acquire as a knowledge basis and, by the way, as a memory training, as well. I agree with that. Historical data and related events are a basic framework, no more and no less, which is needed to obtain an insight into the past. I would like to elaborate this in more detail, below.

The objective should be to get a most vivid impression of how the world around us came into being with its social and political structures, with its civilizing and scientific and artistic achievements. Otherwise, how are we to understand it? It is the only way you will learn to distinguish the respective value and importance which each achievement has and to understand what is quickly transient, what is recurrent in various forms, what is really new or was new 50 and 100 years ago and what has changed the world. The historical factual knowledge that everyone should acquire, could be compared with the acquisition of geographical knowledge. Our view of the past is developed in the same way, as, in a process of learning, we gradually create a picture of the world by first occasionally hearing or reading something of this and that country, until, studying the map, we realize, which countries are next to each other, which are con-

nected by rivers or separated by mountains, where fields and where deserts are situated. At first singular stories stand side by side, one learns about the Roman Empire or hears about the emergence of Islam, or about the invention of printing. Even if, in the history lessons at school, these are usually taught in historical order, they first remain but individual chapters without a clear inner connection. But the more one hears of events in between, the more one recognizes on one’s own (without any further training of competences) the connection of individual stories. In-depth factual knowledge allows stories to grow together like a map, from which initially one only knows a few parts. The sea level of ignorance sinks and what previously were individual islands of knowledge, now becomes discernable as one single landmass. After discovering first connections, one’s curiosity grows, so that one wants to know more, and finally one discovers a historical space, a room full of stories, which is more exciting than any “fantasy story”. Because it is about nothing less than the whole world. It is about the development of democracy as well as the development of architecture or medicine, the ability to produce food as well as about the desire and the ability to build an organ. History is everything that people have already passed through, it is the Thirty Years’ War as well as painting in oil or the invention of penicillin.

Why are so many students not interested in history? Is it too troublesome to grasp the first facts? Do the teachers present the facts too dryly and without reference to life? Could be. But it should not be like that. All historical events are stories of people who acted in certain circumstances. One can depict both the stories and the associated circumstances. Every story, that has actually taken place, can be told as well referring to emotions and motives of action that are familiar to us. It was always people who acted. The fact that these people acted partly on the grounds of different thought patterns and with quite different technical means – even this can be told in a lively way provided that we are able to say

something about the respective cultural context. Indeed, one will often find that motives of action, initially incomprehensible, often follow patterns still familiar to us, today. Why did half of some peoples make their way from the Baltic Sea to the south in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century? Without paved roads and without travel insurance, not even with a map or a GPS at hand, not knowing whether their children or only their grandchildren would arrive at the place where life would be better. What were the living conditions in their old homeland, what did they know and what did they expect from the south? These are questions by which these people are still very close to us, and finally, they are also our ancestors, we are their children.

Interest in history begins with our interest in people we know. An essential foundation for historical interest has already been laid, if young people have the opportunity to casually listen to elders and if elders are not afraid to speak of earlier times in the presence of younger people. From my parents’ stories of their youth, I myself have obtained a vivid picture of the decades before my birth. From my grandfather, I heard a lot about the life of the generation before. Visits to some places about which old stories were told, have helped that already before my first history lesson at school I had acquired an idea of the world not being a fixed baked stone, but consisting of developments, which by no means must always have only one direction. Later, even a temporarily rather boring history teacher was not able to destroy my curiosity for more.

History lessons in school are an important and indispensable part of education; it is not in vain that in dictatorships no importance was placed on them, or they were misused for superficial propaganda. However, they are only a part. An educated democratic culture must cultivate and tell its historical knowledge in a variety of other forms.

*Christian Fischer, Cologne*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)