

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*

Peace also requires truth

cc. On 29 January in Geneva, renewed peace talks on Syria began under the supervision of UN mediator Staffan de Mistura under most difficult circumstances. The UN Security Council had unanimously called for this in its Resolution 2254 on 18 December 2015. Aim of the negotiations in the coming weeks should be that the murders come to an end in this

country that has been troubled for almost 5 years. Therefore a transitional government was to be installed and a new Constitution would be drafted, and finally, elections were to take place in the country. The Security Council explicitly stated that Syria should be preserved as a state, and that the country's future was solely a matter of the Syrians. Quite in

contrast to what has happened in the past 5 years. Current Concerns has repeatedly provided background information, including that which has a different direction than that of the Western mainstream media. We are convinced that a sustainable peace process also includes the fullest and most objective information to the public.

India's Ambassador confirmed: War in Syria was instigated from outside

Interview with V. P. Haran, former Indian Ambassador to Syria



V. P. Haran
(picture ma)

A revealing report of the former Indian Ambassador in Damascus makes it crystal clear: The West's statement that Syrian President Assad was to be overthrown by a popular uprising is not sustainable.

The war was instigated from outside, inter alia from the Gulf States and al-Qaeda. The US cooperated with al-Qaeda via the al-Nusra Wing. Assad underestimated the danger – as he knew his people were behind him.

V. P. Haran served as India's Ambassador to Syria from 2009 to 2012. He speaks to the multi awarded Indian Magazine Fountain Ink on how sections of the media exaggerated the uprising as well as about some evidence that al-Qaeda had been involved since the early days of the conflict. The assessment of the Ambassador confirms the findings of the US journalist Seymour Hersh that Assad had to fear no militant opposition from the people in his own country.

Deutsche Wirtschafts-Nachrichten: What was Syria like when you arrived in January 2009?

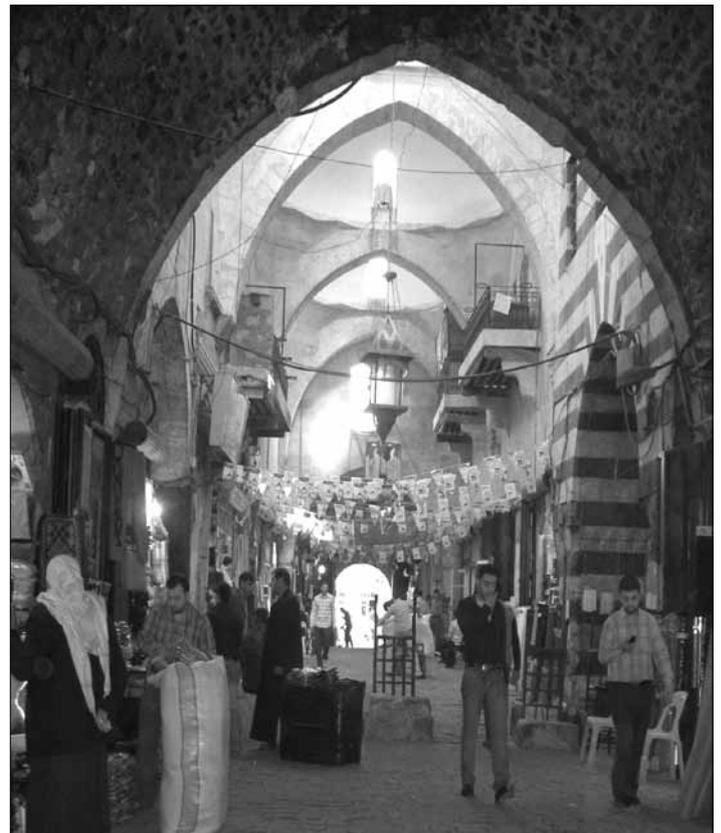
V. P. Haran: Syria was a peaceful country and there was no undercurrent of tension. The Syrian economy was doing well, there was over five per cent growth rate on average. Unemployment was at about eight per cent but Syrians who were unemployed could find work in the Gulf.

There was, however, a high percentage of educated unemployed. Syria also had a comfortable foreign debt position at 12.5 per cent of the GDP. Much of the debt owed was to Russia which wrote off much of the debt. The real problem was the drought in the north-east that had led to massive relocation to the south and south-west.

What was life like in Damascus?

As a diplomat you tend to live a secluded life but I'd go to the downtown area, sometimes in a cab, and have tea in a cafe and chat with the people. Those were wonderful moments and wonderful days. Law and order was never a problem. My female colleagues used to tell me they could wear jewellery and walk home alone at 2 in the morning and they would feel safe. In certain areas restaurants would stay open until 5 a.m. One never felt there would be trouble on the streets.

Some say it was because of the mukhabarat (military intelligence directorate) but I sensed that people felt as



Life before the war – a bazar in Aleppo. (picture ma)

though they were responsible for their collective security.

When I reached Damascus, I was told every other person is the mukhabarat. This is a gross over-estimation. There is an intelligence unit and they function very efficiently internally but I never had a direct encounter. In my four years I was followed once in Media in Idlib Province. A jeep tailed us but they weren't intimidating.

Peace also requires truth

"India's Ambassador confirmed: ..."

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Did you anticipate an "Arab Spring" in Syria?

When the situation got tense in Tunisia and Egypt, President Bashar al-Assad appeared on TV and stated that the political and economic conditions were different in Syria. He said he was confident Syria would not go down the same path. This was also the general assessment of the diplomatic community.

Bashar al-Assad was a popular leader and this is partly why he is still in power. There is no adequate internal opposition and a lot of the problems in Syria have been created by foreign sources that are trying to get rid of an inconvenient regime. Sixty-seven per cent of the entire Arab world had voted him the most popular Arab person in a poll in 2009. Even the diplomatic community was in agreement that he had the support of about 80 per cent of Syria. Western diplomats said so as well. He had begun reforms in 2000 but didn't carry through because of opposition from the Baath party.

Also this is not just a Sunni-Shia fight. Look at the numbers. There are over 50 per cent Sunni Muslims in Syria and there are Kurds, Druze, Maronites, Assyrians, Alawites and others who make the remainder. Bashar al-Assad has the full support of the minorities and even a large percentage of the Sunni Muslims support him. But by the time I left, in 2012, Syria had changed a lot. While the first couple of years were like heaven, things started deteriorating by early 2011.

Do you recall the first protests in 2011?

By February, when Bahrain experienced protests, there were attempts by some NGOs to organise protests in Damascus. Two had been organised over two weekends but hardly 20-30 people turned up. The number of journalists and members from the diplomatic community was far greater than the demonstrators. Then 18 March 2011 happened when the children wrote on the walls of the school and then there was a big protest. The following week there was a protest in Latakia and then with each passing Friday something happened.

Soon parts of Latakia, Homs and Hama were chaotic but Aleppo remained calm and this troubled the opposition greatly. The opposition couldn't get the people in Aleppo to rise up against the regime so they sent bus loads of people to Aleppo. These people would burn something on the streets and leave. Journalists would then broadcast this saying Aleppo had risen.

A few things need to be said about this: some parts of the media went overboard in projecting Syria negatively. At times things that didn't happen were reported. For instance I was talking to a prominent sheikh when my colleagues started calling me frantically saying that the sheikh would play a role in protests planned for that afternoon. But no such thing was happening. In fact, I was sitting with him then having lunch. There was a lot of exaggeration by the media.

There is one instance that stands out. In Idlib, hardcore Sunnis had gone to Aleppo and told the people to join the opposition. People in Aleppo started beating them and ordered them to leave. The crowd had been unruly and the police had to come in and control it. The hardcore Sunnis from Idlib had to be taken to a house and the police had to give them their uniforms so that they could leave without being lynched.

Did Damascus change much during this period?

I recall one incident on 14 April 2011 when I went for my daily walk to the stadium which was about two kilometres away. On the way I passed the bakery I used to pass every day but there was a long queue at this usually quiet bakery. On the way back the queue remained and I enquired. People were stocking up on bread because they had heard that something would happen. The next day nothing happened despite it being a Friday.

As the situation worsened my walk to the stadium was replaced by a walk around the park in the Mezze area by the second half of 2012. One day a motor bike came at very high speed and turned a corner from where it revved its engine. Soon after, a security jeep followed but missed the turn taken by the bike. When they couldn't find the bike they came to the park to see if people had seen what was going on. Then we were told that the people on the bike were planning attacks.

In Mezze, not far from the district where diplomats live, there is a cactus field and rebels had gotten into it by a tunnel arrangement. They had established a camp there from where they threw fire rockets aimed at the PM's office. After that the security forces went in and blasted the camp. This was a targeted operation and I spoke to a person who lived in a flat with clear view and he said they had targeted one building and destroyed it completely. A huge cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from the building.

But parts of the country remained calm?

The external backers of the opposition could not digest this. They sent a group

of people to the Syrian-Jordanian border and they overran two security posts. They killed all the people there. Some were killed in the most brutal manner in al-Qaeda style. The government didn't report this immediately but a member of the diplomatic community confirmed it was al-Qaeda in Iraq who had done it. It was evident that al-Qaeda in Iraq had been in Syria since April 2011.

Al-Qaeda was there from the very first week onwards, and if not from the first week then from late 2011 when al-Qaeda banners appeared. It was these groups that provided the opposition with support from across the border. In Raqqa the fighters came from the north and it was clear that it was al-Qaeda.

Assad has been saying that it were terrorists from the beginning. Why did no one believe him?

People's minds were not open. Why would al-Qaeda in Iraq take interest in creating chaos in Syria? A lot of it was being directed by outsiders, namely the Gulf countries. *Al-Jazeera* played a role, too. In April I had taken a guest to the amphitheatre in Bosra and then to Sweida for which I had to take the highway to the Jordanian border. We were in the car at about 9.30-10.30 a.m. That day an al-Jazeera correspondent was asked to leave Syria and was travelling along the same road. The correspondent reported check points every few seconds. My embassy called me in a panic because of what they saw on TV. I told them I had encountered just one check point.

Why did the Syrian government not present a better case about the presence of terrorists?

We asked them about the lack of engagement with the media and they said that nobody believed them. They had very bad PR and handling of the media. Having said that, there were also excesses by the government. Syria has a very inadequate police force so when the problems started the government was forced to deploy security forces to handle problems that are managed by the police. Some of the army committed excesses and the government put a few under house arrest or into prison but they didn't go public with this.

Bashar al-Assad was not just slow on enacting reforms but also slow on announcing changes that had been undertaken. For instance when they enacted a reform reducing the primacy of the Baath Party, the reform wasn't reported until three months later. Their PR wasn't wise. They didn't handle the crisis well. •

Source: <http://series.fountainink.in/gulf-countries-role-uprising/>

Peace also requires truth

“Barrel bombs” in the war on Syria**Almost no commitment to the truth, but a lot of war propaganda**

km. Joachim Guilliard has been active in the peace movement since the 1980s, working as a part-time journalist and book author. In 2001, he launched the initiative against the Anti-Iraq embargo policy and served as their speaker together with former UN aid co-ordinator for Iraq, *Hans-Christof von Sponeck*.

In the 26 January 2016 issue of the German newspaper “junge welt” a detailed and well-researched article by him was published, in which he scrutinises the claim of “barrel bombs” which the Syrian army allegedly uses in a way justifying the accusation of a war crime. Meanwhile this claim has become the “most important argument for maintaining the call for a regime change and the refusal to co-operate with the government in any way”.

“Barrel bombs” are explosive weapons consisting of metal barrels or any other bigger vessels filled with explosives and metal parts. They are cheaper to produce than other weapons and may be dropped out of non-military helicopters and planes.

The claims that the Syrian government was employing this weapon and the accusations connected to that are coming mainly from Western media and human rights groups. Readers are lead to the impression that the attacks with this weapon are almost exclusively directed against housing areas and civil facilities. Guilliard quotes a May 2015 press release by *Amnesty International* (AI) saying that “the reprehensible continuous air strikes against housing areas ... were suggesting a policy of deliberate and systematic attacks against civilians, attacks which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

The US American Organization *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) also claims in their February 2015 report that “the entire distribution of places with major destruction” suggested that government forces were attacking the “entire population” of the affected cities “with explosive weapons”.

The majority of the reports of both human rights organizations concentrate on Aleppo, which has been a battleground since July 2012. Guilliard doubts those claims of the Syrian army dropping “barrel bombs” in order to “punish” explicitly the civilian population, for several reasons: “Considering the difficult situation of the Syrian army fighting at a hundred frontlines simultaneously the idea that punishing the civilian population had their highest priority sounds fairly absurd. It seems more likely that in places where the air force is deployed there are militar-

ily significant facilities of enemy militias. Quite often such places are in inner cities.”

Maps provided by HRW and AI themselves, showing locations within Aleppo which were targeted by “barrel bombs”, seem to support this argument. Most of these sites are in areas referred to as “controlled by the opposition”. This “opposition” consists of radical Islamist and jihadist militias for the most part.

Moreover: “In Aleppo there had been no significant protests against the government in 2011, and the second biggest city of Syria escaped the unrest for more than a year. However, due to the near proximity of the Turkish border, opposition militias had optimal supply lines and were able to advance towards Aleppo in July 2012, after heavy fighting they succeeded in conquering the Eastern part of the inner city.” Most citizens of Aleppo, Guilliard claims, “had no sympathy for their new masters when they had to surrender to the brutal rule of the militias. Many escaped to the parts of the city held by the government or to secure areas along the coast.” Therefore the author sees no plausible reason why the government should engage in punitive actions against the “entire population”.

The argument that most targets in Aleppo had been too far away from the front-line to have military significance doesn't convince him either: “According to the HRW and AI maps, no area of military activities had been more than 2,5 kilometres away from the frontline. And most citizens who had not left the embattled areas yet would apparently do so as soon as fighting was flaring up. For instance, when the Syrian army launched a new offensive in the beginning of 2014 up to 500,000 people left the areas held by the militias. Entire districts were deserted as a result. Therefore, for this point in time it is not plausible at all how these offences could have been attacks targeting the civilian population in particular as the HRW claims.”

In addition to that Joachim Guilliard's investigations prove a case of attempted manipulation with forged materials: “On 26 February 2015, Human Rights Watch showed the photo of an almost completely destroyed district via *Twitter* with the comment ‘Syria drops barrel bombs despite ban’. However, this same photo had already been published by the ‘New York Times’ on 13 February. According to the description it showed the Kurdish city Kobani, having been ‘destroyed by Islamist forces and the air raids of the US lead coalition’. On 8 May, *Kenneth Roth*, the

head of HRW, distributed the aerial photo of another destroyed part of the city supposedly illustrating ‘what *Assad's* barrel bombs did to Aleppo’. In fact this picture happens to show Gaza one year previously.”

Many videos and pictures supposedly illustrating war crimes of the Syrian army and government have been provided by the *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* (SOHR), based in Coventry, Britain, local co-ordination committees or *Shahba Press Agency*. Media, when covering their stories, “just copy-pasted their reports, it seems, without verifying them first, despite the fact that they obviously originated from one of the war parties”, Guilliard claims.

He suggests the same was true for those numerous comments issued by AI and HRW, which are usually highly rated by readers thanks to the prestige of human rights organizations: “Their comments, too, are based on the same sources, namely – apart from those mentioned above – the *Violations Documentation Center* (VDC), based in Istanbul, and the *Syrian Network for Human Rights* (SNHR), again based in Britain. All these organisations are closely linked with opposition groups operating in Syria or abroad, are based in countries who actively support ‘Regime Change’ in Syria, and are partially financed by their host countries.”

Joachim Guilliard investigated the most important source of materials accusing the Syrian government – i.e. the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights – in more detail and concludes that it is quite questionable. Still (or: therefore?) this enterprise is funded by the British government, the EU and some British media.

It goes without saying, Guilliard emphasizes, that “biased coverage does not mean that all reports about air strikes destroying civilian targets and killing civilian people are just lies. Syrian forces probably have used air strikes in situations where the risk for innocent bystanders is inappropriately high, and continue to do so”. However, Guilliard compares these strategies with “sorties of the US air force and other NATO countries in similar war scenarios: they killed a lot more victims as ‘collateral damage’, be it in Afghanistan or the occupied Iraq, also in the NATO war against Libya in 2011, whenever air strikes targeted enemy forces within cities”. But in those cases neither AI's nor HRW's efforts to systematically investi-

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"Barrel bombs' in the ..."

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gate and scandalize these incidents were comparable to their present coverage of the Syrian, and meanwhile also Russian, air strikes in Syria.

In the last part of his investigation Guillard argues that apparently "there is a connection between the aims of US foreign policy and those of their allies with AI and HRW campaigns. Both have been criticised in the past for their close proximity to the White House and the State Department, most plainly so in an open letter of Nobel prize laureates and former UN officials in July 2014. This letter mainly addressed the common practice of former CIA, US military or government persons being appointed to high ranking positions at HRE, and similarly top HRE officials directly being hired to government posts – the critics even called it a downright revolving door mechanism. For instance, former CIA analyst *Miguel Díaz* was called into the advising committee of HRW, and eight years later proceeded to use his expertise in a new job at the State Department – serving as liaison officer between intelligence community and NGO experts. Former chief director of the National Security Council *Tom Malinowski* had been in charge of writing White House speeches on foreign politics during the time of

the bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, before serving HRE as director of their Washington branch. In his new position he promoted the war on Libya and praised it as 'probably the fastest military response to an impending human rights crisis in history'. Under *Obama* he made his way into the State department as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour. Endowments of US corporations provide most of the funds for HRW. The single most important donator is billionaire *George Soros*. In the year 2010 alone his 'Open Society Foundation' donated more than 100 million dollars to the organisation".

For AI a certain proximity to Western foreign policy positions must be noted, too. Quite often they focus on countries which have been targeted by the USA and the EU states, and "its most influential branch, US one, is part of the revolving door system: Former deputy assistant secretary of state *Suzanne Nossel*, of all people, was appointed CEO of AI (USA) in 2012, who had been instrumental in 'ground-breaking human rights resolutions' against Iran, Syria and Libya and who coined the term 'Smart Power' for the co-operation of military and 'soft' power in US foreign policy – a concept which *Hillary Clinton* refers to as the defining property of her foreign policy". •

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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

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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

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Peace also requires truth

String-pullers of the war in Syria

by Thierry Meyssan



Thierry Meyssan
(picture wikipedia)

The neo-conservatives and the liberal hawks who have been preparing the war against Syria since 2001 have been relying on several states from NATO and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). While we know about the

role played by General David Petraeus in launching and pursuing the war until today, two personalities – Jeffrey Feltman (number 2 at the UN) and Volker Perthes (Director of the main German think tank) – have remained in the shadow. Together with the support of Berlin, they have been using and are still manipulating the United Nations in order to destroy Syria.

Since 2005, the German academic Volker Perthes participated with the CIA in the preparation of the war against Syria. He heads the powerful European think tank, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs - SWP).

In 2005, when Jeffrey Feltman – then the US ambassador in Beirut – supervised the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, he relied on support from Germany, both for the assassination itself (Berlin supplied the weapon)¹, and for the UNO Commission charged with accusing Presidents al-Assad and Lahoud (prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, police commissioner Gerhard Lehmann and their team). The international campaign against the two Presidents was notably led by the German political analyst Volker Perthes².

Volker Perthes studied in Damascus, Syria, in 1986 and 1987, funded by a German research grant. He then went on to pursue a career as professor of political science in Germany, with the exception of the period between 1991 and 1993, during which he taught at the American University of Beirut. Since 2005, he has been the Director of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), the main German public think tank, which employs more than 130 specialists, half of whom are academics.

However, when Feltman organised the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 2006, he implicated only the United States, hoping that once Hezbollah was beaten, Syria would come to its rescue in Beirut, which would provide an excuse for US intervention. Finally, Berlin sent only its marines to participate in the United Nations Forces (UNIFIL).

During the annual meeting of the Bilderberg Group, between the 5 June and the 8 June 2008 – five years before the war – Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gave a presentation which underlined the necessity of overthrowing the Syrian government. She was accompanied in this task by the Director of the Arab Reform Initiative³, Bassma Kodmani (future founder of the Syrian National Council), and the Director of the SWP, Volker Perthes. The Bilderberg Group is a NATO initiative, and NATO directly handles security for these meetings⁴.

According to a cable revealed by Wikileaks, Volker Perthes advised Ms Rice concerning Iran. He believed that it would be dangerous to launch a military operation which could have unpredictable regional consequences – it was, however, more efficient to sabotage its economy. Volker Perthes' advice was followed, in 2010, with the destruction of the software of Iranian nuclear plants by the "Stuxnet" virus⁵.

In March 2011, Volker Perthes published an opinion column in the New York Times mocking President al-Assad's speech to the People's Chamber, during which the President had denounced a "conspiracy" against Syria⁶. According to Perthes, the "revolution" was under way in Syria, and al-Assad had to go.

In the summer of 2011, the German government managed the breakthrough of the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and Egypt. It noted that at the CIA's demand, it hosted the international coordination of the Brotherhood in Aachen. Berlin thus decided to support the Brotherhood everywhere they attained power, with the exception of Hamas in Palestine, in order to avoid annoying Israel. Under the influence of Volker Perthes, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs – at that time, Guido Westerwelle – persuaded himself that the Brotherhood was not "Islamist", but "guided by Islam". He created a discussion forum with the "moderate Islamist movements" (sic!), and a Task Force for Syria. As for Perthes, he organised a reception at the Ministry in July for a delegation from the Syrian opposition, led by Brother Radwan Ziadeh.

On 6 October 2011, on the proposition of the State Department, Volker Perthes took part in the closed conference organised by the Turkish Industry & Business Association (Tusiad) and the private US intelligence company Stratfor in order to study Turkey's energy options, and also the possible responses of eight other countries, including Germany⁷. Present at the meeting were the ten top Turkish fortunes and Taner Yıldız – the Minister for Energy – the man

who was supposed to help the Erdogan family organise the funding of the war with oil stolen by Daesh.

In January 2012, Jeffrey Feltman – then State Department director for the Near East – asked Volker Perthes to direct the "The Day After"* programme, which was tasked with putting together the next regime in Syria. These meetings were held over a six-month period and resulted specifically in a report which was made public after the Geneva Conference.

"The Day After" mobilised 45 members of the Syrian opposition, including Bassma Kodmani and the Muslim Brotherhood. It was financed by the US Institute of Peace, the equivalent of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), but is under the authority of the Department of Defense. Also solicited were Germany, France, Norway, Holland and Switzerland.

"The Day After" drew up the first draft of the plan for the total and unconditional capitulation of Syria, which became the obsession of the United Nations once Jeffrey Feltman was nominated Director of Political Affairs for the United Nations, in July 2012.

At the official inauguration as number 2 of the United Nations Jeffrey D. Feltman swore the oath in the presence of the Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on 2 July 2012. From now on, the organisation that would promote peace was actually under the control of the hawks among the "liberals".

Here are the principles of the Perthes-Feltman plan:

- the sovereignty of the Syrian People will be abolished;
- the Constitution will be repealed;
- the President will be relieved of his functions (but a vice-President will remain in charge of formal functions);
- the People's Assembly will be dissolved;
- at least 120 leaders will be considered guilty and banned from any political function, then judged and condemned by an international Tribunal;
- the Direction of Military Intelligence, the Direction of Political Security and the Direction of General Security will be dismantled and dissolved;
- "political" prisoners will be freed and anti-terrorist procedures will be repealed;
- the Hezbollah and the Guardians of the Revolution will be made to withdraw ; then, and only then, will the international community fight terrorism.⁸

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"String-pullers of ..."

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At the same time, Volker Perthes organised the "Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development" for the "Friends of Syria". In June 2012, under the co-presidency of Germany and the United Arab Emirates, this group distributed to the member states of the "Friends of Syria" concessions for the exploitation of Syrian gas, which could be claimed in return for their support for the overthrow of Assad's regime⁹.

Volker Perthes also organised the "Working Group on Transition Planning" for the Arab League.

Finally, he set up the "Syrian Transition Support Network" in Istanbul.

As from the Geneva Conference (30 June 2012) and the meeting of the "Friends of Syria" in Paris (6 July 2012), we can find no more public traces of Volker Perthes' role, apart from his publications, which are aimed at maintaining Germany's support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Germany is maintaining its policy, and after the abdication of the Emir of Qatar and the powerful rise of Saudi Arabia, nominated Boris Ruge – the director for Syria in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – as its ambassador to Riyadh.

In the summer of 2015, during his visit to Damascus, the Syrian government asked Staffan de Mistura for an explanation concerning the Perthes-Feltman Plan, of which he had only just been made aware. Highly embarrassed, the special envoy of the General Secretary of the UNO confirmed that these documents did not engage him, and promised to take no notice of them. It seems that Moscow had threatened to make them public at the Security Council during the presence of the heads of state at the opening of the General Assembly in September 2015. However, the documents were not divulged – their revelation would have questioned the very existence of the United Nations Organisation. During the same period, Berlin once again made contact with Damascus, but the Syrians were unable to determine whether this secret initiative was a reflection of a new policy by Chancellor Merkel, or one more attempt at infiltration.

However, at the same time, Volker Perthes was nominated by Staffan de Mistura and his superior Jeffrey Feltman¹⁰ as a "peace negotia-

tor" (sic!) for the next meeting in Geneva. He will be tasked with meeting alternatively with the delegation from the Syrian opposition and the delegation from the Syrian Arab Republic.

For the last three years, in violation of their own Charter, the United Nations, far from doing anything at all to help restore peace to Syria, and without presenting the slightest evidence, accuse the Syrian Arab Republic of having put down a revolution, of using chemical weapons against its own population, of the massive practice of torture, and of starving its people. Above all, it is dragging its feet on any peace initiative, leaving time for NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council to pilot the overthrow of the regime by foreign mercenaries, in this instance the terrorist organisations al-Qaeda and Daesh.

Keep in mind

- Since 2005, the group assigned to preparing the war in Syria is being piloted by the US diplomat Jeffrey Feltman, assisted by the German academic Volker Perthes.
- In 2005, Feltman organised the assassination of Rafiq Hariri (because the security of Lebanon was handled by Syria); in 2006, he organised Israel's war against Lebanon (because Hezbollah was then armed by Syria); in 2011, he directed the 4th generation war from the State Department; since 2012, from the United Nations, for which he has become the number 2, he has been working to make the war last long enough for the jihadist groups to achieve victory.
- Perthes associated himself with Feltman and the private group Stratfor in order to influence German policy in the Middle East. In 2008, he presented the project for regime change in Damascus to the Bilderberg Group. In 2011, he convinced Merkel's government to support the Muslim Brotherhood during the "Arab Spring". In 2012, he presided a work group tasked

with preparing the new regime, then drew up a plan for the total and unconditional capitulation of Syria. Today, he is the UNO director for the Geneva peace negotiations.

(Translation Pete Kimberley/Current Concerns)

- * The following two documents (PDF) dealing with the project "The day after" can be found as an attachment to this article on the internet.
- ¹ According to the United Nations, Rafiq Hariri was assassinated by an explosive charge hidden in a van. However, this is impossible, considering the damage caused at the crime scene and especially considering the wounds caused to the victims. I demonstrated that the attack could only have been perpetrated by means of a new weapon which only Germany possessed at that time. In response to my work, the Special Tribune for Lebanon realised an extremely expensive reconstitution of the attack, using a French military base where the crime scene was entirely reconstructed. However, the Tribunal has never made public the results of this reconstitution, and persists in supporting the absurd thesis of a booby-trapped van. "Revelations on Rafiq Hariri's assassination", by Thierry Meyssan, Gdnako (Russia), Voltaire Network, 29 November 2010.
- ² For example: "Syria: It's all over, but it could be messy", Volker Perthes, *International Herald Tribune*, 5 October 2005, p. 6.
- ³ The *Arab Reform Initiative* is a work group uniting experts from several think tanks and universities. It is an initiative by Henry Siegman (ex-director of the American Jewish Congress) in the name of the US/Middle East Project (USMEP) which works to promote Arab personalities favourable to Tel-Aviv.
- ⁴ "What you don't know about the Bilderberg-Group", by Thierry Meyssan, *Komsomolskaia Pravda, Voltaire Network*, 9 May 2011
- ⁵ "WikiLeaks: US advised to sabotage Iran nuclear sites by German thinktank", Josh Halliday, *The Guardian*, 18 September 2011
- ⁶ "Is Assad Capable of Reform?", Volker Perthes, *The New York Times*, 30 March 2011
- ⁷ "Küresel Enerji Stratejileri Simülasyonu: Türkiye'nin Gelecek 10 Yılı", Tusaïd, 6 Ekim 2011
- ⁸ "Draft Geneva Communique Implementation Framework", "Confidence Building Measures", "Essential Principles", "Representativeness and Inclusivity", "The Preparatory Phase", "The Transitional Governing Body", "The Joint Military Council and Ceasefire Bodies", "The Invitation to the International Community to Help Combat Terrorist Organizations", "The Syrian National Council and Legislative Powers during the Transition", "Transitional Justice", "Local Governance", "Preservation and Reform of State Institutions", "Explanatory Memorandum", "Key Principles revealed during Consultations with Syrian Stake-holders", "Thematic Groups", documents and annexes presented by Jeffrey Feltman, non-published.
- ⁹ "The "Friends of Syria" divvy up Syrian economy before conquest", by German Foreign Policy, *Voltaire Network*, 30 June 2012
- ¹⁰ The Italian *Staffan de Mistura* is Feltman's deputy, tasked with directing affairs concerning Syria. He succeeded the Algerian *Lakhdar Brahimi*, who, incidentally, was one of *Bassma Kodmani* employers at the *Arab Reform Initiative*. "The Brahimi Plan", by Thierry Meyssan, Translation Michele Stoddard, Information Clearing House (USA), *Voltaire Network*, 29 August 2012

Source: www.voltairenet.org from 28.1.2016



Federal popular initiative from 28 February 2016

Durchsetzungsinitiative (Enforcement Initiative) – This is about the enforcement of direct democracy

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 28 February the Swiss people will vote on the federal popular initiative “on the enforcement of the expulsion of foreign criminals” (the enforcement initiative). Goal of the initiative is the enforcement of the “Expulsion Initiative”, which was adopted on 28 November 2010 by people and cantons. More precisely, target is the enforcement of Article 121 par. 3–6 of the Federal Constitution, as with the adoption of the people’s initiative more than five years ago the text of the initiative became an article of the Constitution.

This procedure is unusual. It’s actually not the responsibility of the citizens to care about the realisation of an adopted popular initiative – in principle everyone is in agreement about that. It is the responsibility of the Federal Council and the Parliament. Until a few years ago, the interaction between citizens and public authorities in the shaping and implementation of direct democratic instruments worked out well most of the time, but ever since the adoption of the Swiss bilateral agreements with the EU the will

of the people has been ignored several times, for example regarding the Alpine Initiative (Article 84 of the Federal Constitution).

Particularly strange is the fact that an acting federal judge has intervened in the debate, and with unusual sharpness at that, to bring down the “Durchsetzungsinitiative” i.e. the enforcement of direct democracy (see box below).

What induced the initiators of the “Durchsetzungsinitiative” to collect signatures (over 150,000 within five months) two years after the sovereign said Yes to their first initiative? Why did they not, as the Federal Council reprimanded them, wait for the Parliament to amend the law so as to be consistent with the Expulsion initiative and then take the referendum against these new laws? (Voter pamphlet, p. 16)

At this point it must be noted most emphatically that it is not xenophobia or “a tendency towards isolation” which has led a large number of voters to endorse the ex-

pulsion of criminal foreigners as well as the independent control of immigration. It is rather that, facing a steadily increasing immigration (proportion of foreigners end 2014: 24.3%¹, nearly a quarter of the population) and a very high proportion of foreigners in prisons (end 2014: 73%²), the Swiss want the Federal Council and the Parliament to stop paying homage to Brussels and Strasbourg and to take control of the Swiss immigration policy themselves.

Without analyzing the two initiatives in detail, we must first briefly describe their history to clarify the fact that on 28 February, it is not just a case of voting on one of many popular initiatives – much more than that is at stake.

Expulsion Initiative and counter-proposal of 28 November 2010: What is the difference?

The *Expulsion Initiative* – today Article 121 paragraph 3–6 of the Federal Constitution – stipulates that foreigners who are sentenced due to certain serious crimes or fraudulently obtained social benefits lose their right of residence in Switzerland and should be expelled.

Also on 28 November 2010 the Swiss voted on a *counter-proposal* the Parliament had decided. It included an even more detailed list of individual offences which would lead to the loss of the right of residence and expulsion. The key difference was put down in paragraph 3 of the counter-proposal:

“In the decision regarding the expulsion as well as the withdrawal of the right of residence the fundamental rights and the principles of the Federal Constitution and of international law, in particular the principle of proportionality, are to be observed.”

Well, that does not sound very restrictive – that is what a lot of people probably think. Especially for lawyers it goes without saying that in a constitutional state, even offenders have fundamental rights and that the judge has to respect the principle of proportionality, so for example take into account extenuating circumstances. The problem is in the wording “fundamental rights and general principles of international law”. This is where opinions differ.

The Federal Court – a Swiss stronghold of law or a satellite of Strasbourg?

mw. Since some time the Federal Court openly refuses to apply provisions of the Federal Constitution because they would violate the European Convention on Human Rights. Such in a decision of 12 October 2012: There one can read that the Expulsion Initiative (or the new paragraphs 3–6 of Article 121 Federal Constitution) were “not directly applicable, but need to be put into practice by appropriate legislation; they would not take priority over the fundamental rights or guarantees of the ECHR”. And the judges add: “The values expressed by the constitution can be taken into account as far as they don’t result in any way in conflicts with overriding law [...]” [Accentuations by *Current Concerns*]

A handful of judges this way belittles a constitutional article set by the sovereign down to a gut feeling – arrogance beyond comparison! And they refuse to apply Swiss law, if this could be contrary to the escalating jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights!

The Federal Court – a (second) little brother of the EU Court of Justice?

The latest act of submission: On 26 November 2015, the Federal Court decided to take on the practice of the Europe-

an Court of Justice (ECJ) as a principle, in the sense of a “most possible parallel jurisprudence”.

Despite the Yes of the sovereign to the Mass Immigration Initiative that represents constitutional law since two years, the sentence says: “The Federal Court has already decided with regard to the Free Movement Agreement that this has priority over national law, even if the law intentionally differs from AFMP.” [Accentuations by *Current Concerns*]

(Decision of 26 November 2015, press release of the Federal Court; www.bger.ch/press-news-2c_716_2014-t.pdf)

Mind you: This is about the supreme court of the European Union (EU), which has nothing, absolutely nothing to order about the non-member-country Switzerland. And are we really angry over the court president *Baudenbacher* who calls his “EFTA Court” the “little brother of European Court of Justice”? If the Swiss Federal Court subordinates itself as another little brother of the jurisdiction of the great power and bluntly refuses to apply Swiss law, we can indeed join the EU right now...

Else we insist again and again on the enforcement of direct democracy!

“Durchsetzungsinitiative’ ...”

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Let us read the Federal Council’s own explanation of what bothered them about the Expulsion Initiative:

“The implementation of the Initiative would [...] lead to significant collisions with the existing guarantees given by the Federal Constitution, in particular with the principle of proportionality and the protection of private and family life. *In addition, important provisions of non-compulsory international law, for example of the European Convention of Human Rights ECHR or of the agreement on the free movement of persons with the EU would no longer be met.* The popular initiative is therefore recommended for rejection by the Parliament.”²³ [Emphasis Current concerns]

The highlighted sentence is the bone of contention. The Federal Council (and subsequently the majority in Parliament) wanted to set a barrier to the Swiss legal system: In their opinion the *European Court’s of Human Rights (ECHR)* case law and the interpretation of the bilateral agreements by the EU institutions should have priority over the Swiss Federal Constitution, for example over the new Article 121 of the Federal Constitution.

However, that is exactly what the voters did not want. The Expulsion Initiative was approved by people and cantons on 28 November 2010, the counter-proposal rejected by the people and all cantons. Thus the citizens expressed their will that the Swiss authorities and the judiciary have to protect the safety of the population as a first priority, and that not only the personal interests of the foreign offender deserve protection.

Implementation of the will of the people: Federal Berne is procrastinating

Now we have arrived at the basic problem that has inspired the initiators to launch the “Durchsetzungsinitiative”: They want Government, Parliament and the judiciary to enforce the will of the people in an undiminished way. Whenever “foreign judges” in Strasbourg or the “EU” (this often means the President of the European Commission, *Jean-Claude Juncker*) flex their muscles, our federal councillors, their selected negotiating diplomats and large parts of the Federal Assembly start to boggle.

After the adoption of the Expulsion Initiative the Federal Council did not hasten to implement it and word got around in federal Berne that its “conciliatory solution” would be similar to the counter-proposal of 2010, rejected by the voters.

Therefore, in order to show Parliament how they envisaged its implementation, the initiators of the expulsion initiative found it useful to become active before the Federal Council’s dispatch for the attention of Parliament was on the table. In June 2013, while they were collecting signatures for the “Durchsetzungsinitiative”, the Federal Council presented its “conciliatory solution”. In November 2013, the initiative was submitted; its wording made an impact on the parliamentary debate. After tough and sometimes heated discussions, the Swiss National Council and Council of States finally agreed on 20 March 2013 to a provision in the criminal code containing a *hardship clause* rather than the *principle of proportionality*.⁴ The initiators were not convinced by this distinction between the two terms and therefore did not withdraw their initiative.

Why the “Durchsetzungsinitiative” is so long-winded

“[...] *More than five years ago a clear majority of voters approved the expulsion of foreign criminals at the ballot box. The Federal Council and Parliament have now written a hardship clause into the implementation law by which virtually every expulsion can be prevented. Thus the judges will always find a reason why a convicted criminal does not have to leave [...].*” (*Arguments of the Initiative Committee, Voter pamphlet, p. 25*)

In accordance with the criticism outlined above the initiators chose the form of a transitional provision to Article 121, para 3–6 of the Federal Constitution (expulsion of foreigners), that shall be applied as legally binding only until the time the Federal Assembly will have decided on a viable implementation into federal legislation that would also have to be able to overcome the obstacle of an optional referendum.

The Federal Council criticises in the voter pamphlet:

“...*It (the popular initiative) seeks to write the provisions on expulsion directly and in a detailed manner into the constitution. In case the popular initiative is adopted, Parliament would thus be eliminated as legislator and could no longer have a say on key issues of our policy relating to foreigners.*” (*Voter pamphlet, p. 15*)

The text of the popular initiative is very extensive indeed, because – in a manner similar to a law – in a transitional provision the initiators enumerate under the heading “I. Expulsion” first all those se-

rious criminal offences which in themselves are to result in an expulsion, and, secondly, less serious crimes, which are to be punishable with expulsion only in case of further offences. The expulsion of a convicted criminal foreigner is to be joined to an entry ban of 5 to 15 years, which can be extended to 20 years in case of recurrence (II 1.–3.).

Pursuant to III the expulsion order will not be enforced if the convicted person would be subject to torture or any other form of inhumane treatment or punishment in the state in question (principle of *non-refoulement* laid down in Article 25 of the Federal Constitution, a binding principle of international law).

Rigorous provisions

There are many who perceive it as rather cold-hearted that beyond the *non-refoulement* principle it will not be possible to refrain from a deportation except in cases of self-defence and emergency (I 4.).

Equally severe – especially for those people who have lived in Switzerland for a long time or have even grown up here – is the provision under I 5.: “All persons, irrespective of their status under the law of foreign nationals, shall lose their right of residence and all legal rights to remain in Switzerland, or to re-enter into Switzerland, if they are convicted with legally binding effect.”

It is understandable that there are voters who experience difficulties regarding these two provisions.

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Swiss Federal Judge takes position against direct democracy and offends the people

mw. It is astonishing: A federal judge, unauthorized, does voting propaganda and declares the “Durchsetzungsinitiative” “inadmissible and not compatible with the current conception of the Swiss democracy”, since it ignores “minority- and individual rights”. So the “pluralistic concept of democracy” will be reduced to a “mere arithmetical concept” in which the majority would exclusively prevail. The “actual development” might give “reason for consideration”, whether the parliament will have to declare initiatives invalid “if they contradict fundamental principles of a state under the rule of law”. Finally Federal Judge *Thomas Stadelmann* comes up with an outrageous statement: “Could we exclude, for instance that we will vote on questions some day, like in Germany in the ‘30’s of the last century, when a law became valid, that deprived whole religious groups of their civil rights?”

Source: *Schweiz am Sonntag*
from 9 January 2016

“Durchsetzungsinitiative” ...

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The crux of the matter: independent regulation of Swiss internal affairs

But let us now return to the central issue of our discussion: On 28 February, much more is at stake than just a provision for the expulsion of criminal foreigners. Essentially, what is at stake is the enforcement of direct democracy. The crux of the matter is that Swiss voters are determined not to abandon the managing of their own affairs and not to become increasingly subject to restrictions in their ability to exercise their political rights by bilateral and multilateral treaties.

To this purpose, the text of the initiative includes the following passage:

“IV. Relationship with international law. The provisions on expulsion and the procedures of their enforcement take precedence over non-binding international law.”

In this context, “non-binding international law” means in the first place the ECHR and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights as well as the bilateral agreements with the EU. That explains why the initiators refuse to

leave the slightest margin of discretion to the Swiss judiciary (see box on p. 7).

The ECHR and the agreement on the free movement of persons are not cast in stone

The ECHR and the agreement on the free movement of persons – like most international treaties – include a termination clause and can be renegotiated – for logical reasons, however, this has to be done by Federal Councillors and diplomats committed first and foremost to advancing the instructions of their sovereign, the Swiss people, rather than those of foreign powers. Therefore, we Swiss insist – and rightly so – that our authorities, including our judicial authorities, apply Swiss law, implement the popular will, stay honest and upright in their dealings with Strasbourg, Brussels and overseas countries and defend the interests of Switzerland with great dedication and courage.

The same applies to the control of immigration. The Federal Council is blatantly refusing to implement this in line with the popular will. Instead of seeking a regulation with maximum figures and quotas and instead of renegotiating the agreement on the free movement of persons with this aim in view, as has been required by the Federal Constitu-

tion for two years now (Article 121a and Article 197, item 9), Federal Councillor *Schneider-Ammann* places himself in the same boat with EU-Commission President Juncker. With his talk of “protection clauses” which the Federal Council wants to manage on its own account – but in reality under the command of the EU-Commission – he is simply taking the renegotiation of the free movement agreement off the agenda. •

¹ <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/publiser/service/statistik/auslaenderstatistik/archiv/2015/11.html>; “Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, Ausländerstatistik November 2015”

² http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/19/03/05/key/ueberblick/wichtigsten_zahlen.html; “Bundesamt für Statistik bfs, Freiheitsentzug, Strafvollzug – Daten, Indikatoren – Überblick: Kennzahlen”

³ Press Release of the Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP from 14.1.2009, “Gegenvorschlag zur Ausschaffungsinitiative: Vernehmlassung eröffnet”

⁴ “In exceptional cases, the court can refrain from a deportation if it would bring about a serious personal hardship for the affected foreign national, and if the public interest in a deportation does not outweigh the foreign national’s private interest in staying in Switzerland. The court shall take into account the special situation of foreigners who were born or raised in Switzerland.”

Offenses covered by the “Durchsetzungsinitiative”

1. Paragraph 197, subparagraph 9 (new) allows for expulsion, independent of the duration of the sentence, under the following conditions:

- a. wilful killing, murder, homicide;
- b. grievous bodily harm, endangerment of life;
- c. burglary offense through cumulative [i.e. simultaneous] performance of the criminal offenses larceny, criminal damage and trespass; [which means: a simple theft will not lead to expulsion, nor the theft of goods under SFR 300.- this is a mere misdemeanour];
- d. aggravated theft [professional or ring-based], robbery, professional fraud, aggravated extortion, professional dealing in stolen goods;
- e. fraud in the areas of welfare, social security, social abuse;
- f. human trafficking, aggravated unlawful detention and abduction, hostage-taking;
- g. sexual assault, rape, mutilation, furtherance of prostitution [introducing minors to prostitution, bringing someone in need to it, supervising someone in it, holding someone in it];
- h. genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes;
- i. violation of narcotics act of 3 October 1951: paragraph 19 subparagraph 2 [scienter health hazard for many persons, ring-based trade, professional traffick-

ing at a large scale or profit; professional trafficking near educational institutions for minors] or of paragraph 20 subparagraph 2 [professional trafficking at a large scale or profit]

2. Expulsion after a second criminal sentence within the past ten years (prison sentence or pecuniary fine) for:

- a. actual bodily harm, exposure [of a child], brawl, assault [resulting in death or bodily harm for the assaulted];
- b. trespass in connection with criminal damage or theft;
- c. aggravated embezzlement [as authority member, civil servant, guardian, advisor, professional property guardian, official profession], professional fraudulent abuse of a data processing system, professional check or credit card fraud, professional price gouging;
- d. unlawful detention and abduction;
- e. sexual conducts with children, with dependants, sexual conducts with institution wards, prisoners, accused persons, exploitation of an emergency, pornography [recruitment of minors for participation in a pornographic performance];
- f. arson, deliberate causation of an explosion, endangerment through explosives and toxic gases in criminal intent, production, hiding and transport of explosives and toxic gases;
- g. forgery or adulteration of money;

h. public incitement to crimes or violence, participation in or support of a criminal organisation, threat to public security by the use of weapons, financing of terrorism;

i. violence and threat against authorities and civil servants, violation of an official expulsion from a canton or the state;

j. false accusation [false accusation of a felony or an offence against better knowledge], aggravated money laundering, false statement, false expert opinion, false translation [false statement as interpreter/translator];

k. wilful infringement of paragraphs 115, subparagraphs 1 and 2, 116 subparagraph 3 or 118 subparagraph 3 of the aliens act;

l. infringement of paragraphs 19, subparagraph 1 or 20, subparagraph 1, narcotics act [see above, first section]

3. [...]

4. An expulsion may be waived if the action has been committed in justifiable self-defence (paragraph 16 penal code) or in justifiable emergency. (paragraph 18 penal code)

5. A person that has been imposed with legally binding expulsion will lose, independent of the legal status as an alien, his or her right of residence, as well as all legal claims for residence in Switzerland and return to Switzerland.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Liberals would favour the EFTA

by Dieter Sprock

This year, important negotiations with the EU are due for Switzerland. These will affect our political and economic sovereignty, primarily in the areas of the free movement of persons, the bilateral electricity agreement and the institutional framework agreement. To make matters worse, the EU does not want to accept the decision of the Swiss population to determine immigration themselves again, and makes further negotiations, as for instance those on the access to the electricity market, conditional on a solution of the issue of free movement of persons and on the institutional framework agreement. This agreement requires Switzerland to adopt existing EU law and also – automatically – its development. However, this is incompatible with our referendum democracy.

Yet Switzerland has no reason to allow itself to be blackmailed. It is in a comfortable negotiating position in regard to the EU, as it has a realistic alternative in the form of the EFTA. And the Federal Council can be sure of the full support of the Swiss population if they do not accept attacks on our sovereignty. Self-determination has a high priority in Switzerland.

Even a brief comparison of the origins and goals of EU and EFTA leaves no doubt on which side freedom and self-determination are to be found.

Customs union and single market versus free trade

The customs union and the single market form the pillars of the EU and its predecessor organisation, the EEC: “[...] the activities of the Community shall include [...]: (a) the elimination, as between Member States, of customs duties and of quantitative restrictions in regard to the importation and exportation of goods, as well as of all other measures with equivalent effect; (b) the establishment of a common customs tariff and a common commercial policy towards third countries”. (from the founding treaty of the EEC 1957)¹

In order that a European market would evolve from the given customs union, the national laws and regulations of each country, such as consumer protection, safety when working with machinery, food labeling and many more, were unified according to Brussels specifications. The four so-called “fundamental freedoms”, which establish the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, have been in force in the whole EU internal market from 1993. The member states have largely lost their economic and political sovereignty because EU law takes precedence over state law.

But the EFTA is quite different: The EFTA was founded in 1960 as a sort of counter-project to the European Economic Community. It respects the sovereignty of states. Its members cooperate in specific areas, which they define themselves. Negotiations for free trade agreements are conducted by the member states themselves. The EFTA secretariat, a lean organisation, only has a supportive function, while the decisions remain with the member states. “The current members of EFTA are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland”, it is stated on the website of *Seco*, the *State Secretariat for Economic Affairs*. “In contrast to the European Union (EU), EFTA is not a customs union. Individual EFTA States are basically free to set their own customs tariffs and arrange other foreign trade measures vis-à-vis non-EFTA States (so-called third countries).”² The EFTA has been negotiating free trade agreements very successfully all over the world.

EEC and EU followed according to “the strategic planning of the United States after the Second World War”, as is shown by documents now accessible in Switzerland, writes *Werner Wüthrich*.³ He continues: “The United States as the leading world power was controlling events from the sidelines. It favored the EEC idea and opposed the idea of a free trade zone in which the European nations would cooperate as sovereign states. It actively tried to prevent the establishment of the EFTA, because this did not fit into their geopolitical concept. Even when the EFTA had been established in the year 1960, the US worked towards its re-dissolution”. (pp. 68)

Who is made free by the EU’s four fundamental freedoms?

The EU leaders never miss an opportunity to make themselves out to be the guardians of the four fundamental freedoms – the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital – and to present them as a kind of remedy for the economic problems of the world. “We all benefit from them,” they say.

But aside from certain amenities, some freedoms as well as travel and payment facilities for more people, on closer inspection the four fundamental freedoms turn out to be the perfect program for enforcing the interests of large corporations and of the financial sector. They have paved the way for the limitless competition and displacement struggle which prevails in the EU internal market today.

The four fundamental freedoms allow companies to move their production to

countries where wages are lower. Not infrequently, workers earn less there for 40 hours of work a week than the amount of social security an unemployed person can claim in the richer countries. They allow equity owners of large corporations to buy up and to close competing companies. Even profitable companies are closed. The local industry is destroyed, and now you find the same chain stores and merchandise throughout all over Europe. The four fundamental freedoms are responsible if a Swiss town has to put the construction of a new school building out for tender internationally and has to accept the bid of the firm offering the best price, no matter which country it is based in. The richer countries recruit the best workers from the economically weaker countries and so make it impossible for these to develop their own economies. And so the gap between rich and poor countries is constantly widening.

Using the cross-border trade in electricity as an example, it can clearly be demonstrated that the EU, which wants to impose a complete liberalization of the markets on all its member countries, is not needed. The European electricity grid had been functioning perfectly under private law for 58 years before the takeover by the EU in 2009. The responsible engineers and power plant operators did an excellent job. The focus was on reliability, security of supply and cost effectiveness. With the liberalization of the market the focus will be shifted to return and profit maximization, and it is expected that prices will rise and the security of supply will decrease. (See *Current Concerns* No. 16 from 6 May 2013, Switzerland and the EU electricity market liberalization – Price increases and Supply Uncertainty are threatening.)

The EFTA offers a realistic alternative

All this is not new. More and more people can see that something is wrong and are no longer fooled by the propaganda that “we all benefit from the freedoms”. Currently an initiative for withdrawal from the EU supported by more than 250,000 citizens has been launched in Austria. The governments of Hungary and Poland are trying to regain some of the sovereignty they lost and to protect their domestic industries. And if Great Britain were to vote on the withdrawal from the EU today, a majority of the English population would be in favour of it. Other countries, fearing the same result, do not even allow a vote like this.

How does Germany get out of the state of emergency?

by Karl Müller

Since the summer of 2015 Germany has been in a permanent state of emergency. Not only former judges at the German Constitutional Court and constitutional law professors like *Udo di Fabio* and *Hans-Jürgen Papier* complain that the government is breaking and undermining the rule of law. Both represent the attitude of many of the country's citizens. Already several months ago Professor *Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider* explained in detail where the law was broken on the government's side when dealing with refugees in Germany.

“The struggle for law never ceases”

He has entitled his latest book “In Remembrance of the Law” (2016, ISBN 978-3-86445-272-7). The book, a collection of basic articles from the past two years, makes clear that the state's breach of the law has not only begun in last year's summer. The breach of the law is more comprehensive and more fundamental, than it has been discussed in public. Already in the preface *Schachtschneider's* criticism of the development in Germany is clear: “My belief is: All people are doing well, if the legal principle is realized. In every situation, the law is impartial, so perceptible. No one is authorized to place himself above the law. Who thinks that it is possible to live up to an alleged state of emergency by application of injustice, is making himself the sovereign, if he has the power to do so. He elevates himself to the position of

“Liberals would favour ...”

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The established parties can no longer confine themselves to disqualifying critics of the EU system, as people will not stop thinking for themselves just because they do. We will need to come to solutions honestly and across all party boundaries before it is too late. In the current situation, the EFTA system provides a realistic alternative, and not only for Europe. •

¹ http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/1_avrupa_birligi/1_3_antlasmalar/1_3_1_kurucu_antlasmalar/1957_treaty_establishing_eec.pdf

² <http://www.seco.admin.ch/themen/00513/00515/00516/index.html?lang=en>

³ Werner Wüthrich. *Das Europäische Orchester wieder zum Klingen bringen. Die Geschichte der Europäischen Union und ihre Zukunft – aus Schweizer Sicht*, 2015. (How to bring the European orchestra back to euphony. A history of the European Union and its future – from a Swiss perspective). The author relies mainly on documents from the Swiss Federal Archives.

the people's master who are at his mercy. Freedom and dominance are incompatible.” And just as clear is his principle of life: “The struggle for law must never cease. We must not tire of it.”

The resentment among Germany's citizens is enormous

The political world tries to appease the enormous resentment in Germany about the past months' policy by ceaseless announcements of programs, proclamations of innocence and especially reassurances. Here just one example of meanwhile innumerable ones: While, in view of the immigrating refugees, the German Minister of the Interior publicly gave the impression that the situation at Germany's borders was “clearly stabilized”, the chairman of the German police union, Rainer Wendt in an interview with the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” from 25 January clearly disagreed with him. He considered the statements made by his Minister of the Interior to be “sheer nonsense”: “In view of these statements by Mr *de Maizière* I can only shake my head. If the minister explains, that the federal police is capable of registering up to 3,500 refugees a day at the border, this is absolute nonsense and without any realistic foundation.” Reality, in contrast, is as follows: “No more than 800 of the about 2,000 people currently coming to Germany every day, are fingerprinted and photographed. [...] All others are simply waved through and directly brought to the initial reception institution. [...]”. The Minister of the Interior probably thought it was “absolutely necessary to announce a success message”, which, however, “is not at all backed by reality”. What is the mood of the local officials? It was “desastrous, they feel humiliated and abandoned by the politicians, in particular by the Federal Minister of the Interior.” The result: “One can definitely say: The police has never been at its limits to such a degree”. Rainer Wendt then adds what many already suspected: “No one knows the exact number [of refugees in Germany], not even the politicians in Berlin. We have only information about the number of asylum seekers who have been registered at the initial reception centers in the country. The tens of thousands of unregistered persons, who are in Germany, additionally, are not recorded by this elicitation.”

And even less than half of the registered refugees have applied for asylum. The newspaper gives the figures from official German statistics for the year 2015. Less than half of the 1.09 million registered refugees in Germany, i.e. only 0.47 million, did apply for asylum.

Cui bono?

It would be nothing to fill many more pages with such inconsistencies – and for many citizens in Germany many such pages have already come excessively to full awareness. The result is that not only individual politicians, but also the state itself loses its basis of legitimacy more and more. The result of that again is that the public confidence in the state and its institutions will be lost. The possible consequence is that there will be a recipe for chaotic conditions and a return to the rule of force.

So there is no alternative to a return to the rule of law.

Serious personalities hope for a return to the rule of law through an exchange of the leaders in politics. Maybe this is a part of the way. Scepticism would be expedient. In any case: Most citizens do not have direct influence on such procedures. The course of the “Arab Spring” is a strong warning.

What can we do?

But what can citizens do? The most important task is to strengthen community building: to set dispute and disagreements aside; to realise that it is about the future of our own country; to focus on the common affairs, especially the peaceful co-existence for the good of all; to deepen the equitable and dignified human cohesion in private life and in the field of neighbourhood and residential community; to envision oneself as a citizen of Germany, to activate one's civic awareness and to be absolutely determined to live like a citizen: to speak up and speak and write against injustice; to stand up for what is right; to use the political rights, that every German has, more than hitherto: in meetings, clubs and parties, in elections ... and: to demand louder and clearer than before what the Basic Law (“Grundgesetz”) codifies in Article 20: “All state authority emanates from the people.” And: moreover it says that the state authority is also exercised through “voting”. It is an appalling injustice that the German people are still deprived of voting! Which citizen really knows today that he is actually the sovereign?! Perhaps it would be a first step to deliberate which substantive political issues essentially belong into the hands of the citizens.

Indeed, Germany is facing a crucial decision: No citizen can honestly want a continuation of the policy as before. This is a threat of dictatorship. Turmoil and rule of force are no alternative. The “solution”

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Thoughts on China's economic development

fg. In July and August 2015, the European media called their readers' attention to the stock exchange quotation at the Shanghai Stock Exchange, the *Shanghai Composite*, which had dropped by 40%. From December onwards this stock index fell further. The daily trading sessions had to be cancelled repeatedly because stock market prices had dropped by 5% or 7%. Despite of these declines, the current share index level remained about the same as that at the end of 2014.

However, this apparent stability was paid for dearly. On behalf of the state large securities purchases were made on the stock market, while the pension funds among others were prohibited to sell dividend titles – often in freefall – from their portfolios. The central bank cut its key interest rate. In short: there were panic tradings and manipulations ... similar to those in the West during and after the great stock market crash of 2007/2008.

It should be noted, however, that this kind of development is less serious for the Chinese real economy (change in gross domestic product GDP at constant prices in %) than it would be for the American real economy, as, unlike Americans, the average Chinese will hardly

own shares. A comparison of the “elites” assets would, however, lead to a different image, since there are more millionaires in the Chinese Politburo than in the American Congress.¹

What about the real development of the economies? After China's GDP increased by more than 14% in 2005 and thus reached a summit, its growth was 6% in the year 2015. However, this seemingly catastrophic last year's rate must be compared with those of the United States and Germany as well as that of the entire world, which were all below 4%.

Even if the assertions are true that corruption plays a certain role in China's development, we must not forget that China is in a major and long-term process of change, namely from a planned to a market economy.

Formerly export and investment as well as productivity were particularly encouraged. As the amount of investment was very high – which is normal in a phase of industrialisation – and as there was a lack of productivity gains, a huge debt has been created since the global financial crisis of 2007/2008. From 2007 to mid-2014 this debt climbed from 7 to 28 trillion US dollars², which is 282% of

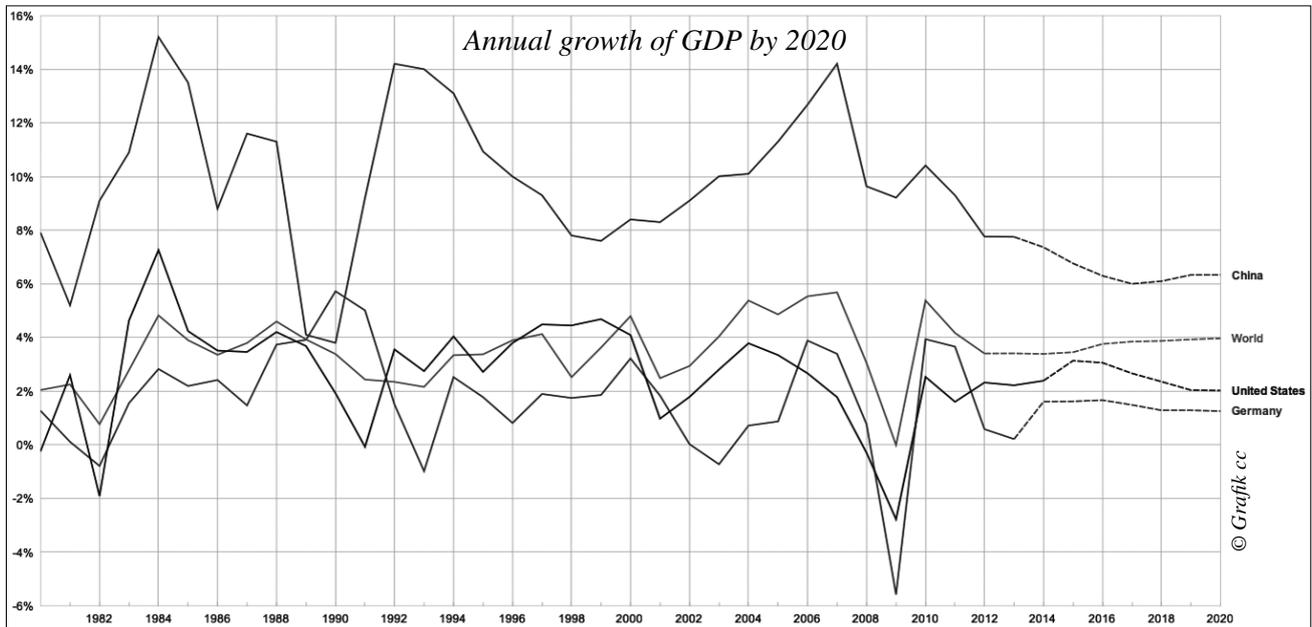
the GDP. The accumulation of debt has therefore risen higher than that of Germany and the United States together. On the macroeconomic level it must, of course, be taken into account that the large positive Chinese assets abroad must be set off against China's debt. China has now placed the emphasis on consumption and on the health and education services so as to counteract the explosive development of the debt. In addition, income tax rates are raised in an attempt to convince Chinese taxpayers to save less. Will it really work? Or will some Chinese transfer their assets to abroad?

China's economic future depends on choosing the right strategy, and on how this can be made plausibly to the population. We can only wish China success in effecting this without a further increase in the already huge gap between rich and poor – as we are indeed experiencing it in the West. ●

¹ F. William Engdahl. *Target: China*, www.ProgressivePress.com, San Diego, Calif. 2014

² <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/forex/091115/chinas-economy-transition-sustainable-growth.asp>; p. 2

(Translation Current Concerns)



"How does Germany get ..."

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cannot be left "to those up there" either. In the meantime many are concerned. If not now, when then take the necessary steps?!

Today Germany and its citizens face demanding tasks. First, it is crucial to analyse which political agendas are connected with proceedings that allegedly befall like fate. For example, if a speculator and national-state opponent like

George Soros is full of the highest praise for the policy of completely open borders to refugees (so again in an interview with the German *Wirtschaftswoche* of 4 January 2016), then you have to assume that it is not about a humanitarian concern. Secondly, all European countries, and especially Germany, face the task of renewing their national state, in order to create a liberal, constitutional, socially just and democratic situation. Third, a new form of cooperation within Europe has to be

found, which is equal and serves peace. Today the European Union has so many fundamental birth defects and structural deficiencies, which remove it from what even the Basic Law stipulates in Article 23, namely to create a united Europe that is committed to "democratic, constitutional, social and federal principles and that guarantees a protection of fundamental rights essentially comparable to the German Basic Law". That will not be achieved without the citizens. ●

“Revealing to the child the wonderful world of knowledge and opening to it the gate to the world of adults”

by Rainer Werner *



Rainer Werner
(picture ma)

Clever students sometimes help their teachers on. When I taught at a Berlin Comprehensive School, a student opened my eyes on what was going wrong in the classroom of this school. She asked me at the beginning of the lesson: “Must

we again do what we want to do?” The background to this astonishing question was the habit of some teachers to “pacify” challenging classes by allowing them to do a “silent self-employment” task – including, of course, the current topics. This patronising abandonment of teaching was actually a form of capitulation to the disciplinary problems that frequently occur in school classes – even at grammar schools. The teachers’ activities were of course based on the assumption that they were doing the students a favour by saving them the confrontation with the difficult teaching content. Too often, the rebellious behaviour of the students, the gesture of delaying resistance, seems to reveal that they just want one thing: avoid learning. That may well be true for some students in a class, but not for the majority. The bright student who said this remarkable sentence, spoke for those who wanted to learn something and who rightly expected from the teacher that he was able to bring about a calm learning environment, even if it required an effort and was associated with conflict. When the student raised that question I became aware that students are often clairvoyant observers of what they

experience every day in the classroom. They actually do mind what the teachers organise for the class. They have a keen sense of whether they learn something from the history teacher or whether he just talks to them, and whether the math teacher is capable of naturally explaining the arithmetic operations he writes on the blackboard. At a Berlin grammar school students were allowed to vote on their teachers in age-appropriate questionnaires. A frequently expressed comment was, “You do not learn anything from Mr X / Ms Y.” This shows that students want to learn, and if they realise that the subject matter rushes past them without their having a chance to understand it, they perceive it as real punishment.

Students love to talk about their teachers. If they are through with the youth typical topics such as the latest fashion or trendy music, they like to talk extensively and with dedication about the advantages and disadvantages of their teachers. Often aspects play a role that have to do with the teacher’s personality; for the approval that the students show for their teacher is mainly based on personal characteristics, including clothing, speech and body language. With a new teacher they recognise instantly whether they are facing a confident person or a “broken reed in the wind”. The charisma that a person has is perceived spontaneously and intuitively by the students. In my experience, teachers tend to underestimate these “soft factors” of their profession, because they rely on the power of rules and on their authority that will get everything done.

This error often fits in well with the so-called “student-centred” learning methods that aim at moving away from teacher-dominated teaching methods, especially from whole-class-teaching. Again, it was a student who made me think twice. After an extended period of group work in the German “Abitur” (graduation) course, the bright graduation candidate asked me, “When will you be teaching the whole class again?” The wisely-guided class discussion is perceived as a particularly effective, informative, form of learning by the students that they experience not at all as patronising. In contrast, they often experience the group work as ineffective and chaotic. Especially if they did not intensively employ the iron rules of group work in the class before. Particularly the bright students wrestle with the group work because frequently the habit of them having to bear the brunt of the work is creeping in, while the low-achieving students

participate in the results of their work as freeloaders. I have therefore sometimes gathered the high-achieving students in a group and given them even more demanding tasks. This, however, has earned me the reproach of social selection by some of my colleagues.

It is a well-nursed prejudice that a conversation in class guided by the teacher is identical with the notorious monologues, which grammar school teachers pestered their students with in the 1950s and 1960s. Not even closely. The conversation or debate in class is a sophisticated method of learning, which, if mastered by the teacher, can lead to exciting and instructive lessons. The emphasis is entirely on the word “conversation”. The teacher must introduce the students into the subject matter within a dialogue, they can share the surprises and impositions which he has ready for them. For the great Germanist *Eberhard Lämmert* the conversation is the “alternating speech that educates and connects people”. The two adjectives can be taken quite literally: A clever run conversation in class “educates” and “connects”. Knowledge and social behaviour go hand in hand.

I can still remember a German lesson in a college course. I presented to the students the poem “The human” by *Matthias Claudius*. The students plunged into the strange world of sensibility and naive piety, “Empfangen und genähret vom Weibe wunderbar” (received and nursed by the woman wonderful). The miracle of the birth of a child is brought up. Is the retort procreation of children a miracle? May man actually interfere with the events of the creation? The text of Claudius distresses by its imperturbable calmness and certainty of faith. “Dann legt er sich zu seinen Vätern nieder / und er kommt nimmer wieder” (Then he lies down with his fathers / And never comes he again). The viewpoint of discussion widens. The last things are to be discussed. Students aged 17 and 18 years old love the speculative discourse. They bring everything forward that they have heard about death: Far Eastern esoteric things, scientific attitudes, Christian attitudes, also personal experiences. The poem has opened the horizon for a discourse with philosophical content. Does anyone seriously believe this teacher-student conversation would have “dominated” the students or “patronised” them? Teachers do have a big advantage in knowledge. It is important to use it for the

* Rainer Werner is a retired grammar school teacher for German language and history. During his teaching at three schools in Berlin, Rainer Werner wrote numerous books, especially teaching aids for teachers concerning the subject German language. Rainer Werner has interfered in publicly held educational and school policy debates. As an expression of his long teaching experience and his engagement in educational policy he published the book “Auf den Lehrer kommt es an” (It’s the teacher, who matters) in 2011. In 2014 followed: “Lehrer machen Schule. Warum gute Lehrer so wichtig sind” (Teachers make up school. Why good teachers are so important). At the end of 2015 he released his latest book: “Fluch des Erfolgs. Wie das Gymnasium zur ‘Gesamtschule light’ mutiert” (The bane of success: How the grammar school mutates to a ‘comprehensive school light’). Rainer Werner runs the website: <https://guteschuleblog.wordpress.com/>

“Revealing to the child ...”
“continued from page 13

sake of the students. Therefore the conversation in class is a very appropriate means.

In case I had left the students to themselves – as usually in the “self-centred learning” method requires – with this poem and some warming-up questions, the majority of students would not have been able to advance to the above-described deep layer of the poem. The results of a conversation or a discussion in a shared class lesson can never be reached by a written reply to questions on the text. It is one of the sad consequences of this supposedly student-friendly method that it cheats the students out of an educational experience that can only be gained in conversation.

Once, I had an interesting discussion with a trainee, with whom I worked as a mentor. He asked me if I could recommend him a good text for his demonstration lesson in German literature in a 10th grade. I said, “The neighbour” or “An Imperial Message” by *Franz Kafka* were good, time-tested texts that students would like because of their existential content and with whom he could also check their understanding of texts. The trainee looked at me somewhat despondent and thought that the expert seminar leader wanted to see “learning at different stops”. I replied ironically that in this case he could forget Kafka. Kafka’s texts could not be learnt at stops, they required a solid station.

It has become fashionable to take the method of teaching more important than the content. Previously a teacher who planned a German lesson for the 8th grade asked, “What text is suitable for students, who are still in their adolescence, to give them a little guidance?” Today, one asks, “Which competencies are still to be worked through on the competency grid?” In the pedagogy department of bookstores one encounters huge amounts of books entitled “Training Methods”, “Learning exercises”, “Graduation Training”, “Competencies Training”. One wonders whether one has not by mistake stopped in the sports department.

In my experience, competence orientation changes our view of the lessons to be planned. The topics that are difficult to understand are likely to be “sacrificed” (done away with) when they cannot be taught with one of the major competencies. Unfortunately, topics also get lost which might meet with the students’ enthusiasm. Arousing students’ interest for the subject matter is the recipe for the success of a good education. A boring lesson

is often the worst thing students experience at school. They suffer and begin to hate the teacher as a “sleeping pill”. It is therefore regrettable that the formal principle of competence orientation in the classroom helps kill the moments of tension that might be given by the subject matter.

In order to spread good teaching concepts at school, the grammar school already mentioned above introduced a “revolutionary” innovation model: the open classroom. Teachers were encouraged to announce exciting hours in the staff room and invite colleagues to join in. So I experienced – as a non-specialist teacher – a particularly clever physics lesson, 8th grade: the principle of buoyancy, demonstrated on Easter eggs. The teacher put three liquid-filled glass cylinders on the teacher’s desk. Then she put in Easter eggs in different colours. The red egg fell to the ground, the yellow remained in the middle, and the blue hovered on the surface. The students were puzzled about the eggs behaving like that. After many false starts (“It is up to the colour”) a student had the right idea: It is up to the different states of liquid. The rest of the lesson was classical physics with formulas and calculation operations. The five colleague “guests” were enthusiastic because they had experienced something that enriches every classroom: a wittily presented problem and a wisely led classroom conversation aiming at the resolution.

In my experience, the greatest quality potential of our schools lies dormant in the professional and methodical improvement of education. For this we do not need new types of school and no didactic “inventions”. All we need is passionate and creative teachers.

However, good teaching does not live by its exciting moments. Students love it, too, to be confronted with intellectual challenges. Demanding too much of them is always better than fobbing them off with flat content. In my German lessons I like to discuss such texts, which I consider indispensable for the spiritual maturation of young people. And I let myself be guided by the intent: content before method, intellectual added value before competence. The poem “To the moon” by *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* “Füllest du wieder Busch und Tal/Still mit Nebelglanz ...” (Bush and vale thou fill’st again/With thy misty ray ...) has always been my first choice. Firstly, it is one of the most valuable poems of Goethe from his classical period and it meets high literary demands. On the other hand it is impeccably beautiful, completed in content, form and



language – so it has an aesthetic quality. Third, it contains a message that can convey something important to young people in our modern times: There is a fulfilled life, even beyond the great world gear “Seelig, wer sich vor der Welt/Ohne Hass verschließt” (He who from the world retires / Void of hate, is blest). Thus, the poem offers endowment of life with meaning and spiritual orientation.

Would it really be justified to neglect such a treasure because it opposes the “student-centred teaching methods” and the “competence orientation” only because it is difficult to open up? You have to realise: Just what makes the quality of our classical texts, their poetic code, proves to be an obstacle to their being studied in the “modern” classroom.

If you have worked as a teacher for some time, you might have seen many instructional fashions come and go. You might also have stated that the real concern in teaching has never changed: School education and training serve to reveal the wonderful world of knowledge to the child and to open to it the gate to the world of adults. Hence, it is especially important that the teacher is authentic and credibly takes responsibility for what he teaches his students. I am happy to be guided by the “permission” of the educational expert *Jochen Grell*, “You may teach directly, the whole class at once. You need not be ashamed of yourself that you want to teach students. School has been invented so that you do not have to teach each child individually.”

First published in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” of 14 January 2016

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Mountain hare – the Alpine magic hood

He can outsmart predators, but not winter sports people

by Heini Hofmann

Its scientific name is as a matter of fact *Lepus timidus*, (timid hare, in German “Angsthase”) hence, just the opposite of scientific, indeed explicitly insulting. For from the very beginning, as a precocious animal the high-altitude survivalist has to courageously assert himself in an inhospitable habitat full of predators and particularly at extreme low temperatures in winter.

During the last ice age the mountain hare populated the ice-free belt in Europe. When the glaciers retreated, they were followed by the magic hood artist not only to the north but also



The mountain hare is clubbier than the brown hare, his ears and his tails are shorter (protection against cold), the runs are larger and toes have more hair. (snowshoelike) (picture AWT)

to the south towards the Alps. Thus, it is one of the few boreal species of mammals endemic in the far north, whose occurrence as glacial relict in Central Europe is limited to the Alps. Here he inhabits rocky areas in the crooked wood belt of the forest margin range at altitudes of 1,400 m to 2,700 m, exceptionally up to over 3,000 m and below 1,200 m respectively.

Related to the mountain hare is the larger, year-round brown colored hare and the smaller wild rabbit, the ances-

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Learning by heart

by Rita Brügger

At the World Economic Forum 2016, participants of economy and politics were concerned about artificial intelligence. Their judgment: The fourth industrial revolution implicated much bigger changes than the foregone industrialisation. Machinery approached human beings increasingly and what latter had in his head was nothing else but a machine. This was a summary of a spokesperson provided on Saturday, 23 January on the economic broadcast “Trend” on *Radio DRS1*.

Therefore, so the quintessence, within that fourth industrial revolution also the educational system was to be revolutionised. For in the future easy operations disappeared, creativity, artificiality and occupations concerning humanity were in demand.

Most experts are unanimous about the fact that education will develop towards an even more important matter in future times what according to their opinion requires a complete alteration of our educational system. They claim it was stupid to learn, what machinery has mastery of. As an example, the learning by heart was mentioned.

Leaving aside the fact that school always has made progress and we are far from simply stubborn learning by heart I cannot help thinking about the following: If we do not want to surrender ourselves to the pure economic ideology and to technocracy, we are to understand how these machines function. It is crucial to be able to comprehend what how when and for what reason something is being stored and not at least in this field learning by heart along with comprehension is

eminent. Additionally we should consider another aspect. Our resources are limited; techniques are meticulous and liable to mistakes. What, if this miraculous machinery will break down? If we will get short of energy, if crisis, wars increase and threaten our lives?

Then humanity and creativity is in demand. Nevertheless, according to the great pedagogue *Pestalozzi*, humans are holistic beings with head, hand and heart. All integrating education includes all aspects. We cannot leave out the cultural heritage of our ancestors but must consider it, when we think carefully about changes that are of course also authorised in schools and educational systems.

Additionally I want to tell an event to the learning by heart that in the radio broadcast had been described as obsolete and turned into ridicule: At senior meetings in the afternoon in the village, there is a monthly cosy gathering. One has a glass of good wine, eats something small and has a chat.

Ruth, a more than 80 year old farmer stands up modestly, positions herself in front of the people and asks: “Ischs rächt weni no öppis ufsäge?” (“Would you mind me to declaim something?”) The positive response follows instantly.

Often the woman recites a long poem, suiting the season and current events. Today she tells about the winter, like *Johann Peter Hebel*, poet, theologian, pedagogue (1760–1826) has recorded. She starts with the words:

*“Isch echt do obe Bauwele feil?
Sie schütten eim e redli Theil
in d’Gärten aben un ufs Hus;*

*es schneit doch au, es isch e Gruus;
und ’s hangt no menge Wage voll
am Himmel obe, merki wol.”*¹

Therein the poet describes in an earnest and humoristic manner the winter with snow, until spring approaches again.

As quiet as a mouse is the atmosphere in the hall. Although many elderly visitors do not hear well anymore, everyone listens carefully to the voice that declaims an eight-verse poem as if she just read and memorised it for the first time.

What a treasure of knowledge has she acquired in her childhood, internalised and is now, after centuries, capable to create an atmosphere, which captures the audience’s imagination.

Of course, it is not a mere learning by heart, which comes into effect here. It is the content, the dealing with the text, the witnessing of the season winter. However, with the learning, which Ruth acquired at school then, and with the training of her memory she brings about something invaluable: She passes something to us that gives pleasure and conveys cultural values, which remain valid over the centuries.

By the way: prisoners for political reasons in the National Socialism often thought of texts committed to memory in order to draw themselves up mentally in these hard times.

¹ Translator’s note: Goethe said: “Such a great poet should be only read in the original! One just needs to learn this language!” (“Alpha-Forum-extra: Stationen der Literatur: Johann Peter Hebel” (PDF) (in German). Alpha-Forum. Retrieved 8 June 2012)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Mountain hare – the ..."

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tor of all domestic rabbits. While the latter is found only in the lowland, the habitats of field and mountain hare partly overlap. This occasionally even leads to bastardizing, since the mountain hare females apparently consider a large brown hare male attractive ...

Biological recycling

The mountain hare sets up his day retreat (a recess in the ground) close to the snow line, camouflaged between stones, shrubs and mountain pines. In winter it often lets itself be fully covered with snow inside it. In summer its diet consists of herbs, weeds and berries. In winter it is content with dry branches and the bark of various soft and hardwoods. But despite incisors hares and rabbits are no rodents, but belong to the order lagomorphs.

In digestion the large appendix and its micro-organisms play an important role. Apart from the normal droppings in the form of solid beans the lagomorph deposits a second form of faeces which are soft, mucus-coated beads. They are formed in the caecum, containing five times more vitamins than the normal droppings and are immediately resumed after discharge and swallowed whole.

The food is thus partly digested twice and thus better mercerated – a kind of biological recycling comparable to the rumination of cows and other ruminants. Such va-

Fluctuating populations

HH. The mountain hare (magic hood hare) is protected in its habitat in several cantons: SG, AR, AI, LU, BE. In the other mountain cantons, it is hunted (in descending order of the shooting rate for the average of the last three annual statistics): GR, VS, TI, UR, GL, SZ, NW, OW, VD. In the Principality of Liechtenstein it is hutable, however, it has not been shot any more, lately.

In total, about 1,450 mountain hares are being shot throughout Switzerland every year. A majority (about 1,100) is shot in Grisons, where hare hunting is allowed from 1 October to 20 November and where about 1,700 small game hunters own a hunting license.

Since the beginning of data recording in 1955 the average yield is close to half a mountain hare per year and hunter for the whole of Switzerland. This implies a constant incidence of the animal. However, an exact number of all wildlife arctic hares in Switzerland is not known. A careful extrapolation leads to about 14,000. Data ascertainment, however, is aggravated by climate and illness related population fluctuations.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

garies of nature that we humans have to get used to helps lagomorphs to bridge longer fasting periods in bad weather.

Just don't attract attention

The mountain hare adapts perfectly to the harsh conditions of the Alpine winter. He is smaller and chubbier than the brown hare. His ears and his tail are slightly shorter (protection against cold). His survival principle is to stay undetected. Therefore, he is crepuscular and nocturnal, thus escaping the eagle eye. During the day he takes to his recess in secure coverage.

Being a snow-common sprinter he is more specialized than the brown hare. His runs are larger and the toes have also more hair broadening them snowshoe-like. This enables him to move more easily on snow. Being a magic hood artist he also has the ability to seasonally change his fur color. In summer, the fur is a little grayer than the brown of the brown hare and in winter, it turns into white like snow (except the ear tips) and the insulating capacity rises.

Typical of the mountain hare is his track, because he moves only in two very similar gaits, namely hobbling or fleeing. He leaves behind a very special track. With his hindquarters he does not step in the tread of the front legs, instead puts the much longer hind legs in pairs in front of the shorter forelegs, the so-called hare leap.

Tactics, tricks and pace

Rabbits are prey animals, however, in case of danger do not easily run away headlessly.

Thanks to early detection of predators they can play a trick with tactics and fast pace. Their radar are the big ears and the telescopic and wide-set eyes outstanding from the head, allowing a panoramic view.

Thanks to such abilities for the early detection of dangers they at first remain like frozen in coverage, then they escape unexpectedly with an explosive boot start. The large powerful hind legs enable such rocket starts and sprint tempos of up to 70 kilometers per hour, even on snow. With the small forelegs the surprising hook-hitting can be initiated which also increases the chance to escape a predator.

Since rabbits legs are appreciated by various predators, the hoppers must be ready for a flight at any time. During the day the golden eagle, hawk and raven can be dangerous from the air (for leverets, also sparrow hawk and kestrel) and at night the eagle owl, as well. Terrestrially, danger lurks from fox, marten and lynx – and from small game huntsmen during hunting season in certain cantons. Even tourists' dogs at free-range are of (with goodwill avoidable) problem for both,

arctic hare and snow grouse that often share their habitat.

The art of surprisingly ending one's track

Hunting the mountain hare is primal and demanding. Conventionally, it is carried out with the hound or in trapper manner as trace hunting. An important prerequisite are favorable weather conditions. With a large amount of new snow the mountain hares remain for days in their recess, without leaving any traces. At best there is little but not too much new snow. This would not be good towards the end of the night, since otherwise the tracks are snow-covered again in the morning.

Anyone who believes that it is easy to follow in a jumble of mountain hare traces those which lead to the recess and thus to the hiding place of the hare, is mistaken. Because in order to lead the predators astray the magic hood artists carry another trick in their quiver. Unexpectedly they run back in their same own lane and then suddenly make a far jump to the side into coverage, leaving the main lane ending blind ... This is why the demanding snow hunt frequently remains without prey. A real hunter though takes it on the chin. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Disruptions increase stress hormones

HH. In mountain winter the wildlife live at energetic subsistence level. Unnecessary disruptions by winter sportsmen off-piste may endanger their lives. This is shown by recent scat studies of the mountain hare researcher *Maik Rehms*: Faecal samples from winter sports areas in the Engadine have shown a higher stress hormone level than samples from animals in the National Park.

Global warming means trouble for the magic hood artist, as well: in late autumns with little snow, the predation pressure will increase and coldness-dependent colour change of the fur already takes place before the first snowfall. Hereby the fur's camouflage function turns into its opposite. Furthermore, the brown hare, whose habitat already overlaps with the mountain hare, is increasingly moving-up, and therefore competes against his little brother.

There are areas (e.g. in the Canton of St. Gallen), where the situation is just the opposite due to the low rates of brown hares and the related lack of competitive pressure. Therefore, you may meet the high alpine arctic hare occasionally in lower areas as well. There are observations at 1,200 meters altitude and even only at 900 meters altitude.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)