

# 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*

## “It is possible!” On the life’s work of Beat Richner

by Erika Vögeli

In *Beat Richner*, we all lose a great man, a wonderful ambassador of humanitarian Switzerland, an independent thinker and indomitable fighter for the recognition of the right of every human being to receive the correct medical treatment as necessary, without any curtailment. “I am bound to my conscience”<sup>1</sup> he once wrote, because the plight of children in a poor country, destroyed by war and tyranny, touched him, prompted him to act and do something. He actually has done it – devotedly, perseveringly, with tenacious persistence, as “the life of a child is a universe”, and in poor countries the death of a child is not easier to accept, “the relationship of the mother to the child is the most precious human contact everywhere in the world. And a breakaway of this closest contact, a violation of the closest trust that people can have with each other, inflicts the same unspeakable pain everywhere.” And: “There is nothing more than living in life”. In these sentences one senses a little of what Beat Richner gave the strength to take up again the fight with the daily demands, with himself and the adversities of the situation and all the obstacles that were put in his way every day: as a doctor, as a fundraiser, as an instructor, as a director of hospitals, as a “hut warden who takes care of discipline and hygiene” and as a “policeman who fights against corruption”.<sup>2</sup>

### His life’s work

Beat Richner, born on 13 March 1947, completed his education as a paediatrician in 1973. And he liked being it: “I indeed love my profession as a paediatrician and in next life I would choose the same.”

He also cultivated his beloved cello playing: His debut as “Beatocello”, as a cello-playing musician and music clown, he gave at the Polyball in 1967 (the annual ball at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH in Zurich). It was followed by further performances, and from 1972 onwards the Swiss cabaret artist and actor *Roland Rasser* regularly engaged him in his Theater am Spalenberg in Basel. At that time, he didn’t know that this would help him to spread his mes-



(picture Keystone)

sage and to support his objectives one day.

In 1974/75 Beat Richner worked as a doctor and leader of a mission of the Swiss Red Cross in the children’s hospital Kantha Bopha in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh. The invasion of the Khmer Rouge brought this commitment to an abrupt end and forced Beat Richner to return to Switzerland, where he first resumed his position at the Zurich Children’s Hospital. In 1980, together with a colleague, he opened his own surgery in Zurich.

After the war, the deadly rule of the Khmer Rouge and civil war, a ceasefire was finally reached in June 1991, followed by the Paris Peace Treaty of 23 October 1991. The King and the transitional government of Cambodia turned to Beat Richner and asked him to rebuild the children’s hospital in Phnom Penh (then with a capacity of 68 beds) and take over its management. With a heavy heart he left his paediatric surgery in Zürich and travelled to Cambodia. He had no idea at the time that the work would last for so many years.

The rebuilt Kantha Bopha I hospital was inaugurated in 1992 by Prince *Norodom Sihanouk* and the Head of the UN In-

terim Administration Mission for Cambodia. In 1993, another building with surgery, two operating rooms and three departments was converted and commissioned. In 1994, another adjacent building was converted into a large critical care unit with two further departments.

In 1995 the laying of the foundation stone for Kantha Bopha II took place – the first hospital was already completely overloaded with over 1000 outpatients every day and 350 hospitalisations. King Norodom Sihanouk offered land of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh for this purpose. Kantha Bopha II was inaugurated on 12 October 1996, again with King Sihanouk and this time Federal President *Jean-Pascal Delamuraz*.

The third hospital opened on 31 March 1999 in Siemreap, near the temple of Angkor – a tourist attraction where Beat Richner used to play the cello and collected donations... As in the first hospitals, the treatment is free of charge for every child. It includes a large outpatients station and extensive facilities to care for hospitalised children as well as for the correct treatment of very serious sick children. The construction and design of the new Jaya-

### “It is possible!”

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varman VII hospital (Kantha Bopha III) reflect seven years of experience with the hospitals in Phnom Penh. As the *Kantha Bopha Children’s Hospital Foundation* Dr *Beat Richner* writes, it could serve worldwide as a model for the construction and organisation of hospitals being run under similar conditions.

In 2000 in Jayavarman VII, a pediatric surgery and a computer tomograph were inaugurated, followed in 2001 by the inauguration of a maternity hospital to help prevent the transmission of maternal HIV infection to the child, and in 2002 by the establishment of a conference and training centre. Since 2002, Beat Richner has given a concert there every week on Saturday – until 2009 already more than 500 concerts, which brought in five to eight million dollars in donations annually. In 2005, Jayavarman VII was expanded again, so that another 350 beds are available there.

When Kantha Bopha I had become not only too small, but also in urgent need of renovation in 2004, the construction of Kantha Bopha IV began, inaugurated in December 2005. While one building could continue to be used by Kantha Bopha I, the other two were renewed. The new hospital has 555 beds, 4 operat-

ing rooms, 2 intensive care units, a fully equipped laboratory with a blood bank, a department with an X-ray machine, 4 ultrasonic machines and a computer tomograph, a large pharmacy, a ward for outpatients and a prevention centre. The costs for all this could be covered not least thanks to the “Zwänzgerntli” campaign (frequent donations using a banknote of 20 Swiss francs), which was supported by numerous schoolchildren and people from all over Switzerland.

Soon this hospital was no longer able to cope with the rush of sick children – in 2006 the number of small patients who had to be hospitalised increased by 50 per cent. The Foundation therefore decided to build Kantha Bopha V, which was ready for use at the end of 2007. The cost of the nine 34-bed units, the prevention centre, the prevention ward, X-ray and ultrasonic equipment, fluoroscopy, laboratories, conference rooms and medical library amounted to nine million US dollars. In 2008, 2011, 2012 and 2014, four extensions of Jayavarman VII followed.

The excellent medical training provided at the hospitals where the majority of Cambodian doctors are trained is also indispensable. Beat Richner emphasised the fact that the staff of the clinics comes in all areas primarily from Cambodia: At the end of 2017, the Foundation employed “around 2500 local staff in the five hos-

pitals. In addition to Dr *Peter Studer* as Head of Kantha Bopha Hospitals (CEO and Vice President), Dr *Denis Laurent* (COO and French-Cambodian dual citizen) is the only foreign employee working for the Foundation in Cambodia. And all this with the best ratio of costs and cure rate in the world. “Kantha Bopha is corruption-free, an island of justice and social peace in Cambodia.”<sup>3</sup>

### A model – not only for poor countries

As the Foundation points out, Kantha Bopha has become a “highly respected model for all of Southeast Asia. It shows how effective direct medical and humanitarian aid – i.e. correct medicine that is not hindered by corruption, combined with targeted education in long-term – can be, both in treatment and preventive medicine and in research”. By 2017, 16.3 million outpatients and over 1.9 million seriously ill or injured children had been hospitalised. Countless children saw the light of day there, and many more were given a “tomorrow”, as it says in a song in the touching mourning video (posted on the Foundation’s homepage)<sup>4</sup>.

These are only the external facts of an immense human achievement. One can bow one’s thanks and take note of what compassionate human feeling, sense of righteousness, and unshakeable human determination are capable of. Sometimes

Beat Richner has been reproached of being uncompromising and lacking diplomacy. But his conviction that medical help must not be made dependent on poverty and wealth, and that proper medicine for all without exception is an imperative to respect human dignity, which doesn’t tolerate compromise. And that is a good thing. Without this conviction he wouldn’t have been Beat Richner, and without it Kantha Bopha wouldn’t exist either. Because without this inner indomitableness he would hardly have had the strength to continue working despite of all international organisations and numerous official bodies, which rejected all this as a “luxury”, but also of the indolence of the rich in Cambodia and the permanent struggle for the financial survival of this work. Of course, there were also companions and supporters from the beginning: Doctors and other

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Sa Majesté la Reine-Mère  
Norodom Monineath Sihanouk  
du Cambodge

Dr Iur Rene Schwartzbach  
Président de la Fondation Kantha Bopha  
et  
Dr med. Peter Studer  
Vice-Président et Directeur des Hôpitaux

Messieurs,

J’ai appris avec beaucoup de peine la nouvelle du décès du Docteur Beat Richner. Je tiens à vous exprimer, ainsi qu’à toute sa famille et ses proches, mes condoléances attristées.

Le Docteur Bêat Richner est devenu un héros national cambodgien depuis qu’en 1992 il a fondé les hôpitaux Kantha Bopha à Phnom Penh, puis à Siemreap où, depuis plus de vingt ans maintenant, des milliers d’enfants ont vu le jour et des millions d’autres ont été soignés avec dévouement et amour. « Beatocello » restera à jamais gravé dans le cœur des Cambodgiens pour qui il a été l’Ange de la Providence.

Sa Majesté le Roi-Père Norodom Sihanouk et moi-même avions beaucoup d’affection et d’admiration pour le Docteur Richner.

Puisse son âme reposer en Paix.

Je vous prie de croire en l’assurance de ma haute considération.



NORODOM MONINEATH SIHANOUK

Pékin, le 12 Septembre 2018

Dear Sirs,

It is with great pain that I have received the information of Doctor Beat Richner’s death. I would like to extend to you and to his whole family and those who are dearest to him, my deepest condolences.

Doctor Beat Richner has become a national Cambodian hero since he founded the hospitals Kantha Bopha in Phnom Penh in 1992, and then in Siemreap as well where, since more than twenty years, thousand of children have been born and millions of others have been treated with devotion and love. “Beatocello” will forever remain engraved in the hearts of the Cambodians for whom he has been an angel of providence.

His Highness, the King-Father Norodom Sihanouk and myself have much affection and admiration for Doctor Richner.

May his soul rest in peace.

Please accept the expression of my highest respect,

**NORODOM MONINEATH SIHANOUK**

Beijing, 12 September 2018

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Pyongyang Joint Declaration

### The Heads of State of South- and North Korea declare their determination to achieve peace

cc. As agreed in the Declaration of Panmunjom (see Current Concerns No. 11/12 of 22 May 2018), an inter-Korean follow-up meeting took place in the North Korean capital Pyongyang in order to initiate further steps towards peace and cooperation. We document the declaration to this summit, which the international South Korean news portal and radio translated into German. As distinct from numerous rather negative or sceptical reports in our media, the majority of the South Korean population regards this meeting and its results as positive (see box).

Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea and Kim Jong-un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea held the Inter-Korean Summit Meeting in Pyongyang on September 18-20, 2018.

The two leaders assessed the excellent progress made since the adoption of the historic *Panmunjeom Declaration*, such as the close dialogue and communication between the authorities of the two sides, civilian exchanges and cooperation in many areas, and epochal measures to defuse military tension.

The two leaders reaffirmed the principle of independence and self-determination of the Korean nation, and agreed to consistently and continuously develop inter-Korean relations for national reconciliation and cooperation, and firm peace and



Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un: Good understanding. (picture keystone)

co-prosperity, and to make efforts to realize through policy measures the aspiration and hope of all Koreans that the current developments in inter-Korean relations will lead to reunification.

The two leaders held frank and in-depth discussions on various issues and practical steps to advance inter-Korean relations to a new and higher dimension by thoroughly implementing the Panmunjeom Declaration, shared the view that the Pyongyang

Summit will be an important historic milestone, and declared as follows.

1. The two sides agreed to expand the cessation of military hostility in regions of confrontation such as the DMZ into the substantial removal of the danger of war across the entire Korean Peninsula and a fundamental resolution of the hostile relations.

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#### “It is possible!”

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specialists who joined in and jumped in again when he fell ill, the “Schweizer Illustrierte” (a Swiss magazine), which accompanied the project from the beginning and again and again called for donations, the annual gala performance of the circus Knie and the Swiss population and economy, which kept loyal to Beat Richner with their donations over all the years and chose him as the first “Swiss of the Year”. Meanwhile the Cambodian government doubled its contribution to 6 million in 2016 and since 2017, 2 dollars taken from the per entry-fee into the famous temples of Angkor Wat generate an additional 5 to 6 million dollars. Private donations are also increasing in Cambodia, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) continues to contribute 4

million Swiss francs a year. But it was not easy. In 2017, more than half of the budget was again covered by donations from Switzerland. “Begging” was hard. Beat Richner asks himself in his 2009 book titled *Ambassador*: “A dream that paid off? Yes, quite certainly, it was and is worth it, but also a dream that could have been dreamed of more easily if the rich and powerful had been more human. It was hard. And it’s still hard today.” (translated by *Current Concerns* – p 105)

But we must not keep it with having good wishes and admiration for Beat Richner: This work can be honoured, on the one hand, by granting it the international respect and support it deserves – and by the fact that the Swiss population, many individuals with larger or smaller purses, continue to provide their silent but so far clear and constant support and arouse and cultivate the sympathy and respect for this achievement among fu-

ture generations. It is the least we can do. Especially young people can be encouraged by his example: “It is possible” as he once put it – human compassion coupled with inner strength and energy can move mountains. Beat Richner showed us how – there are many places and opportunities to follow his example. ●

<sup>1</sup> Richner, Beat. *Ambassador. Zwischen Leben und Überleben*. Zürich 2009. (Translation here: *Current Concerns*). An English version of the book is available via [http://www.beat-richner.ch/Assets/richner\\_infomaterial.html](http://www.beat-richner.ch/Assets/richner_infomaterial.html): *Ambassador. Between Life and Survival*. Zürich 2010 (ISBN: 978-3-907668-81-8)

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Schweizer Illustrierte online*, 09 September 2018

<sup>3</sup> Jahresbericht 2017 der Stiftung (Annual Report of the Foundation, deutsch) : <http://www.beat-richner.ch/pdf/Jahresberichte/Jahresbericht2017/Jahresbericht2017D.pdf#page=8&zoom=auto,741,672> (Translation *Current Concerns*)

<sup>4</sup> [www.beat-richner.ch](http://www.beat-richner.ch)

**"Pyongyang Joint Declaration"**

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- 1.1. The two sides agreed to adopt the "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjeom Declaration in the Military Domain" as an annex to the Pyongyang Declaration, and to thoroughly abide by and faithfully implement it, and to actively take practical measures to transform the Korean Peninsula into a land of permanent peace.
- 1.2. The two sides agreed to engage in constant communication and close consultations to review the implementation of the Agreement and prevent accidental military clashes by promptly activating the Inter-Korean Joint Military Committee.
2. The two sides agreed to pursue substantial measures to further advance exchanges and cooperation based on the spirit of mutual benefit and shared prosperity, and to develop the nation's economy in a balanced manner.
  - 2.1. The two sides agreed to hold a ground-breaking ceremony within this year for the east-coast and west-coast rail and road connections.
  - 2.2. The two sides agreed, as conditions ripe, to first normalize the Gaeseong industrial complex and the Mt. Geumgang Tourism Project, and to discuss the issue of forming a west coast joint special economic zone and an east coast joint special tourism zone.
  - 2.3. The two sides agreed to actively promote south-north environment cooperation so as to protect and restore the natural ecology, and as a first step to endeavor to achieve substantial results
- 2.4. The two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in the areas of prevention of epidemics, public health and medical care, including emergency measures to prevent the entry and spread of contagious diseases
3. The two sides agreed to strengthen humanitarian cooperation to fundamentally resolve the issue of separated families.
  - 3.1. The two sides agreed to open a permanent facility for family reunion meetings in the Mt. Geumgang area at an early date, and to promptly restore the facility toward this end.
  - 3.2. The two sides agreed to resolve the issue of video meetings and exchange of video messages among the separated families as a matter of priority through the inter-Korean *Red Cross* talks.
  4. The two sides agreed to actively promote exchanges and cooperation in various fields so as to enhance the atmosphere of reconciliation and unity and to demonstrate the spirit of the Korean nation both internally and externally.
    - 4.1. The two sides agreed to further promote cultural and artistic exchanges, and to first conduct a performance of the Pyongyang Art Troupe in Seoul in October this year.
    - 4.2. The two sides agreed to actively participate together in the 2020 Summer Olympic Games and other international games, and to cooperate in bidding for the joint hosting of the 2032 Summer Olympic Games.
    - 4.3. The two sides agreed to hold meaningful events to celebrate the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary

niversary of the October 4 Declaration, to jointly commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March First Independence Movement Day, and to hold working-level consultations toward this end.

5. The two sides shared the view that the Korean Peninsula must be turned into a land of peace free from nuclear weapons and nuclear threats, and that substantial progress toward this end must be made in a prompt manner.
  - 5.1. First, the North will permanently dismantle the Dongchang-ri missile engine test site and launch platform under the observation of experts from relevant countries.
  - 5.2. The North expressed its willingness to continue to take additional measures, such as the permanent dismantlement of the nuclear facilities in Yeongbyeon, as the United States takes corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement.
  - 5.3. The two sides agreed to cooperate closely in the process of pursuing complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
6. Chairman Kim Jong-un agreed to visit Seoul at an early date at the invitation of President Moon Jae-in.

Pyongyang, September 19, 2018

Source: [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103\\_255848.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/103_255848.html) from September 19, 2018

### More than 70 per cent of the Koreans rate the summit as positively

According to a survey, more than seven out of ten South Koreans rate the results of the Korean summit in Pyongyang positively. The opinion research institute *Realmeter* interviewed 501 adults nationwide on Thursday, 20 September 2018 on behalf of the broadcaster CBS.

Accordingly, 52.5 per cent rate the result as "very good" and 19.1 per cent as "good".

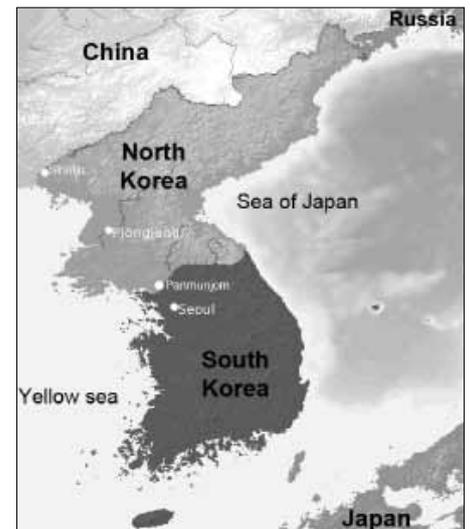
22.1 per cent are skeptical. 13 per cent rate the results as "very bad" and 9.1 per cent as "bad".

The confidence level was given as 95 per cent, the error rate as plus/minus 4.4 percentage points.

Details can be found on the *Realmeter* website or on the National Electoral Commission website.

Source: [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news\\_view.htm?lang=g&Seq\\_Code=72689](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=g&Seq_Code=72689) from 21.9.2018

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



# First and foremost the EU benefits corporations – not the citizens

## In the field of trade policy, Austria should rejoin EFTA

Interview with Inge Rauscher\*, head of the initiative “Heimat & Umwelt” [“Home country and environment”, CC] and spokeswoman for the non-party committee of persons for the withdrawal from the EU



Inge Rauscher  
(picture ma)

cc. Three years ago, a so-called registration week of the Austrian EU-exit referendum took place. In order to have a referendum be dealt with parliament, at least 100,000 Austrian citizens had to sign up in person at their local coun-

cils, thus expressing their wish that a legally binding referendum about the question whether Austria should leave the EU was to be carried out. Despite these hurdles and a total media boycott, the initiative reached sensational 261,000 signatures, causing an earthquake in Austria. Nevertheless, parliament did not follow this qualified call of the citizens. Current Concerns talked to Inge Rauscher of “Initiative Heimat und Umwelt”, one of the main initiators of the EU-exit referendum.

*Current Concerns: Ms Rauscher, you were instrumental in reaching a sensational 261,000 signatures in the 2015 EU referendum. How did you manage that without the support of the media, and what does it mean for Austria in retrospect?*

*Inge Rauscher:* It was first and foremost an achievement of the grassroots movement and the result of several years of information and education work by the regularly published journal of the “Initiative Heimat und Umwelt”, the *Wegwarte*, and the nonpartisan EU exit committee, many hundreds of information rallies and stalls at public open spaces all over Austria for the purpose of discussions between passers-by and our activists; many letters to the editor in the media, a lot of personal work handing out fact sheets to thousands of citizens and their demonstrated willingness to financially enable the necessary large-scale print runs.

### Loss of self-determination

*What are the most important reasons for leaving the EU in Austria?*

There are many, of which I can only list a few here. The most important thing for us as the proponents of the referendum was and is the loss of self-determination. Decisions for citizens living here can be made better in Austria itself than in «Brussels». Democracy always requires proximity and manageability. It is no coincidence that the EU Commissioners, who have the sole right to propose laws, are not elected and that the so-called EU Parliament has no legislative power. In the EU, there is hardly anything to decide even for the national parliaments, and certainly not the state peoples - hence the de facto exclusion of direct democracy. The member states will soon be deprived of budgetary authority by appointing a finance minister for the entire EU.

There is no important area that has improved by joining the EU 23 years ago, but many have deteriorated.

The explicitly permanent neutrality enshrined in the Austrian Federal Constitution is constantly violated by EU membership. One has to keep in mind that 25 of the (still) 28 members are Nato members at the same time. Last year Chancellor Kurz signed the *Pesco* Agreement (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the so-called permanent, structured military cooperation of the EU states. How can a neutral country shape peace by joining an army that is in harmony with the Nato offensive alliance?

The problems of mass immigration are also related to the EU. Their credo of “open borders” has actually made it possible in the first place, right up to the associated crime of today. In December, the so-called “Marrakech Declaration” will be formally signed in Morocco, by 57 states from the EU and African “partner countries” committing themselves, after several years of negotiation, «to promoting a balanced approach to migration, diaspora and the development of companies in the countries of origin, transit and destination”. Independent observers see this agreement as another door opener for mass migration from Africa to the EU. While the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already agreed to this treaty, the Hungarian Foreign Minister justifies his government’s rejection by pointing

out that the Marrakech Declaration would see “migration as a necessary and positive phenomenon” and that it must be assumed that in the scope of this “Rabat process” a new wave of migration would arise..

### No success economically – who benefits from the EU?

Primarily the groups benefit from the EU and not the citizens. Since Austria has joined the EU in 1995, there has been no significant increase in net wages (gross wages minus inflation rate), while share prices have risen significantly since then: the ATX from just under 1,000 points in January 1995 up to at least 3,400 points in July 2018 – an increase of around 240 %. In the case of the DAX, this development was even more pronounced in the same period due to the larger group structures – from around 2,000 points to around 12 800 points – an increase of around 540 %. Obviously, the EU is a redistribution machine from bottom to top in the first place!

*EU proponents in Austria have repeatedly stated that if Austria were to leave the EU, it would go down economically. What’s your opinion?*

The single currency, the euro, has resulted in an enormous loss of purchasing power and enormous inflation in our country. Every citizen can feel this in his wallet. And that has to do with the fact that weaker economies such as Italy, Spain or Portugal can no longer devalue as a result of the euro and have run into major problems. Under the EU Treaty, stronger economies such as Austria had to be liable for the debts of other countries. In addition, Austria pays far more into the EU every year than it gets back. The entire path has led to an impoverishment of our population and to a widening gap between rich and poor. The EU is anything but an economic success story. The number of farmers who had to give up has increased massively, Austria has lost large parts of its industrial production, the national debt amounts to 83% of the gross domestic product, and there are currently about 350,000 unemployed with only about 50,000 vacancies.

*According to surveys, about one third of Austrians are in favour of Austria leav-*

\* Inge Rauscher, head of the initiative “Heimat & Umwelt” [“Home country and environment”, CC] and spokeswoman for the non-party committee of persons for the withdrawal from the EU. [www.ja-zum-oexit.at](http://www.ja-zum-oexit.at), [www.heimat-und-umwelt.at](http://www.heimat-und-umwelt.at). p. A. A-3424 Zeiselmauer, Hageng. 5, Tel. 0043/2242-70516 oder 0664/425 19 35, [ihu@a1.net](mailto:ihu@a1.net)

**"First and foremost the EU ..."**

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ing the EU, i.e. an "Öxit", but the entire mainstream media and parliamentary parties are against it. How can this discrepancy be explained?

The wishes of informed citizens are not the ones of the official circles, since they represent completely different (lobby) interests and want to be disturbed as little as possible. In addition, "Brussels" awards many tempting positions, advertisements and other privileges at our expense with which politicians and journalists can be "lured". They are sponsored by many financially strong so-called "think tanks" behind the scenes and by NGOs. The EU bodies are outposts of the agenda of the centralist "world state" to undermine the (still) functioning nation states, which are supposed to serve the welfare of the peoples and states.

*In the federal presidential election you supported Norbert Hofer of the FPÖ and afterwards you supported the FPÖ in the national elections. What were your reasons for that support? And why did you then distance yourself from the FPÖ?*

The main reasons for the support was the vehement support for the introduction of direct democracy according to the Swiss model, decided by the federal party conference of the FPÖ with 100 percent approval and declared to be an absolute condition of coalition. Also the "no" vote to the ruinous CETA trade agreement between the EU and Canada (and thus indi-

rectly with the USA) or at least a ratification of it only after a referendum and the "no" to the further centralism of the EU, etc. All this was thrown overboard and a government pact was signed which decided the exact opposite. The CETA agreement has since been ratified by parliament with the votes of the ÖVP and FPÖ, another free trade agreement between the EU and Singapore has been signed by infrastructure minister and government coordinator *Norbert Hofer*. With this agreement tribunal of trusts will have precedence over state jurisdiction as a parallel justice if social or environmental laws will affect the profit interests of trusts. And instead of the promised direct democracy according to the Swiss model, from 2021 on – according to the governmental programme – the entire EU law is to be completely withdrawn from the population's right to have a say, even though more than 80 % of all laws applicable to Austria are already prescribed by "Brussels". Moreover, the constitution and international treaties should also be excluded from any direct democracy, and the question of EU membership itself (retention or withdrawal) should never be brought forward to the people again. And thus, of course, further support of the FPÖ was completely impossible for us.

**Back to the sovereign small state**

*What role would you wish Austria to play in Europe?*

As a sovereign small state in the centre of Europe, it should contribute to balance and peace through active and lived

neutrality, which requires an independent foreign policy. This includes a healthy equidistance to all major power blocs and ongoing efforts to strengthen international law and comply with it. Rejection of fantasies of Great Power, but determined support for the vital needs of the Republic of Austria at all levels – keywords: transit traffic, rural agriculture, local supply by small and medium-sized enterprises, cultural identity. In terms of trade policy, Austria should rejoin EFTA, of which we used to be a member for 36 years. Our main focus should be on an active neighbourhood policy with all the states surrounding us.

*Is a referendum on leaving the EU still possible, and could it be successful?*

The National Council can decide on such a referendum at any time. With the "direct-democracy-prevention-package" planned by the current government for 2021, the people „only“ are to be denied to initiate a referendum themselves. But this package could also be abolished at any time by another government or its majority in parliament. And of course such a referendum can be a success; even in the Brexit referendum nobody had expected such a result.

*What would happen if a majority in Austria voted in favour of leaving the EU?*

Then our country would have the opportunity again to make policy primarily for the benefit of its own citizens. The annual, horrendous EU membership fees would be dropped; Austria would be able to reintroduce its own national currency instead of the transfer currency euro and would not have to co-finance debt liability packages for other EU states as through the ESM; membership of the European Atomic Energy Community *Euratom* would be dropped, etc. Austria would also no longer have to support all the steps underway towards participation in a NATO-compatible EU army such as the *Pesco* Agreement and could, in general, restore freedom and self-determination and thus also self-respect instead of submission.

*Thank you very much, Mrs Rauscher.* •  
(Translation *Current Concerns*)



# Just how mad have German politics become?

**Government is planning military operation in Syria, standing ovation in the Bundestag over absurd fascism accusation, strange campaign against the President for the Protection of the Constitution**

by Karl Müller

*Three incidents of the past two weeks give light on Germany's internal political situation. No need to comment these incidents any further, they speak for themselves. It is hard to recognise meaning or objective in all this. You could rather call them symptoms of descent. A grotesque for Germany and the Germans.*

“That the minister of the interior wanted to appoint *Hans-Georg Maaßen* to become his state secretary, was certainly a political signal too. The reactions from interested parties was accordingly desolate. Only three days after the coalition meeting, the agreement from 18 September was only paper waste, ... and the struggle in the government benches about the future course of politics is still going on. From the interested parties there will be no let-up and they will fight with every possible means.”

On 10 September 2018, the tabloid “Bild” reported in detail, that there have been considerations in the German Ministry of Defence, on how Germany can partake in military operations alongside the USA, Great Britain and France against the Syrian government in case of chemical weapons being used in Idlib. The US government has apparently asked for German combat involvement. Like in 1999, in NATO's illegal war of aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, German tornadoes could take part actively in bombardments once again. From the German Bundestag, which has to consent prior to a German military intervention, according to the parliamentary participation act, but subsequent approval could be obtained.

Concrete reports from the Russian government about such a use of chemical weapons, can be staged by the combatants in Idlib to bring about a military intervention of the USA and their allies were not mentioned. In the debate of the German Bundestag on 12 September 2018, the chancellor on her part defended the German plans for a military operation and turned against expressions of criticism – although only in April 2018 she had expressed a different view. And although more than 70% of the Germans asked in a recent survey spoke out against such a military operation.

## **German war plans are violating international law and the constitution**

The same day, the tabloid *BILD* reported on the plans of the Ministry of Defence,

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“That the minister of the interior wanted to appoint *Hans-Georg Maaßen* to become his state secretary, was certainly a political signal too. The reactions from interested parties was accordingly desolate. Only three days after the coalition meeting, the agreement from 18 September was only paper waste, ... and the struggle in the government benches about the future course of politics is still going on. From the interested parties there will be no let-up and they will fight with every possible means.”

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the Research Services of the German Bundestag – a party independent scientific board aligned to parliament – published an assessment comprising 10 pages that emphasised once more that such a military operation is not in accordance nor with international law nor with the German constitution. The assessment further emphasised that the past military operation of the USA, Great Britain and France in Syria has been violating international law as well. The chancellor didn't mention this assessment on 12 September either.

A few days later on the Research Services of the Bundestag presented an additional assessment that transpired that it is also a violation of the law to command a probable German military operation in Syria without a prior resolution from the Bundestag.

That the German threat of an intervention has contributed to the agreeing of the Russian and the Turkish presidents and in the follow-up the Syrian government as well on 17 September on a de-militarised zone in Idlib, in order to prevent the big battle for Idlib for the time being, is rather improbable.

## **Debate in the Bundestag on 12 September**

On 12 September 2018 the German *Bundestag* debated on the national budget for the year 2019. In the debate on the etat of the Federal Chancellery – traditionally a fundamental debate on the politics of the Federal Government – the group chairman of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), *Alexander Gauland*, wished likewise to speak and criticised the politics of the Federal Chancellor. Gauland followed-up on the statement the Minister of the Interior *Horst Seehofer*, had given

only a few days previously, where he referred to migration as being the “mother of all problems”.

Gauland pointed out contradiction if the Federal Government says on the one hand that it wants to combat reasons for the fleeing and on the other hand it is about to generate new problems and reasons to flee through a German military operation in Syria. There is a danger of an apparent confrontation with Russia too. The deployment of German troops to Afghanistan has not reduced the high numbers of migrants from Afghanistan either, quite to the contrary.

Gauland spoke against further immigration to Germany from secure third states and asked the (rhetorical) question of who is actually endangering the inner security in Germany. He listed daily violent crimes committed by migrants and criticised the official reaction to the killing of one person in Chemnitz. Eventually he turned to the reaction of the chancellor on the events in Chemnitz. *Angela Merkel* has spoken of “riotous assembly” thereby using a term from the DDR-criminal law that was targeted against citizen protests at that time.

## **“Time and again such characters turn up and generate the desired pictures”**

The people that shouted extreme right-wing slogans und showed the Hitler salute were termed “aggressive airheads” are by no means representative of the demonstrators in Chemnitz, and in a reaction to hecklings, that these extreme right-wing people obviously belong to the AfD, with the words: “Those “foreigners out” bawlers and those showing the Hitler salute

**"Just how mad have ..."**

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actually are your biggest hope, ladies and gentlemen from the political-media establishment. If there had not been those idiots and airheads, if only the normal citizen would demonstrate, that would be a disaster for you. Time and again such characters turn up and generate the desired pictures."

The truly terrible incident, Gauland continued, has been the bloody deed of two asylum seekers, not the resulting demonstrations. The Federal Government has added fuel to the fire when chancellor and government speaker have spoken of "manhunt" on foreigners, instead of listening to the citizens. To be truthful, no manhunt has taken place in Chemnitz, as was confirmed by the Saxon chief state prosecutor, the Prime Minister of Saxony and by the president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as well.

**Charge with fascism**

After Alexander Gauland, SPD member of parliament and former chancellor candidate of the party *Martin Schulz* said in an aside that he accused the AfD of reducing complex issues to a single topic, namely turning a minority in the country into a problem. He continued that this was "a traditional means of fascism", with which the Bundestag had just been presented again. Schulz compared the current debate with those in the final phase of the Weimar Republic, and voiced his opinion that the "democrats in this country" had to defend themselves against it. He concluded with the statement that Gauland and the AfD belonged on the dung heap of history.

It is not known whether Schulz's speech was inspired by the former US Secretary of State *Madeleine Albright*, who in her latest book believes to recognise signs of a renewed fascism in various countries of the world, including the US and Europe,

and has introduced the "bourgeois" front of left-wing extremist Antifa. In any case, Schulz received standing ovations for his speech. In the minutes of the meeting it is noted: "The members of the SPD, the Left and the Alliance 90/The Greens are standing up". The commentary on semi-national Deutschlandfunk radio praised Martin Schulz and bore the title "Sternstunde im Parlament – Great moment in parliament".

**Campaign against the President of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution ... and the Federal Minister of the Interior**

According to an agreement reached at the coalition round (meeting of the chairmen of the CDU, CSU and SPD) on 18 September 2018, the current President of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, *Hans-Georg Maaßen*, was to be dismissed from his previous office and in-

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## For the preservation of freedom of expression Upper Lusatian Declaration 2018 of the citizens' initiative "The 89's"

*gl. Upper Lusatia is the most southeastern region of Germany, situated in the border triangle of Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. In 1945, the largest city, Görlitz, was divided into a German part and a Polish part east of the Neisse. Today the town, rich in architectural monuments, has been beautifully restored; and since 2004, a newly built pedestrian bridge runs across the Neisse into the Polish town of Zgorzelec.*

*Even in the GDR era, the Upper Lusatians were considered to be particularly independent, even more so than Saxony as a whole. It was not possible to receive West German television; people lived in the so-called "valley of the clueless", which was perhaps an advantage seen from today's point of view.*

*Today many inhabitants of Upper Lusatia and Saxony see parallels between today's political conditions in the united Germany and those in the time towards the end of the GDR era. They demand the right to freedom of expression.*

*The following declaration, with signatures collected up to and including 29 September 2018, is to be handed over to the district administrator of the Bautzen district, to the minister-president of Saxony, and to representatives of the regional and public media.*

**Who are we?**

In the group "The 89's", have come together citizens of our homeland who are committed to the values of free expression of opinion and the careful and observant culture of conversation, which once characterised the peaceful turnaround in 1989.

**What do we want?**

We call for the end of a minority's negative representation of our homeland Upper Lusatia and its people. In particular, we expect the regional media and the state-funded media institutions to provide objective and non-judgmental reporting. The deputies of the district, the district administrator and the representatives of Upper Lusatia in the legislative assemblies of states and of Germany are to position themselves clearly.

Furthermore, we call on all institutions to work for the preservation of freedom of assembly and expression in accordance with Art. 5 of the German Basic Law.

**Upper Lusatian declaration**

We are watching with great concern the progress of the division of society. Responsible is a new way of denunciation and slander. People stemming from the middle classes of our society are being attacked, vilified and slandered by a small clique, because they question and criticise the conditions in our country. Under the guise of the "Struggle for Democracy and Tolerance," it is precisely these values that are not only being made nonsense of, but systematically opposed. The rabble-rousing expressions these demagogues use in the social networks, on the Internet, but also on regional media have crossed the border of what is bearable. It is unacceptable that people are discriminated against because of their political convictions and that there are calls for their social exclusion. Our people has already painfully experienced twice, where this leads. We

see it as our duty to oppose this development, so as to put an end to the ideologisation, of which we believed that it had been overcome since 1989.

**Initial signers**

*Attorney Ingo Frings (FSV Budissa Bautzen) Dr Christian Haase, Ingolf Schön (entrepreneur), Tobias Hellebrand (dentist), Lutz Keller (SV Bautzen), Rolf Lehmann, Lutz Neumann (master baker), Frank Peschel (editor "Bautzener Bote"), Katrin & Dietmar Förster (pharmacy Oppach), Michael Ubl (market trader), Steffen Schmidt (broker), Dirk Manitz (entrepreneur)*

**Honorary patron**

*Willy Wimmer (State Secretary ret., member of the German Bundestag 1976-2009)*

**Collection points in Bautzen:** Reifencenter – tire centre Schön (Neusalzaer Str. 9), Hentschke Bau – (builders) (Zepelinstr. 15), Neumann bakery (Ziegelstr. 1), Jacob bakery (Wilthener Str. 11), Hotel Residence (Wilthener Str. 32), Holzwurm SpielundZeug – play and things (Kornmarkt 4b)

Collection points in the district: *Schwanen pharmacy (Str. der Jugend 1, Oppach), fitness club Prima Klima (Guttau Landstrasse 15a, Malschwitz), An- & Verkauf – buy & sell Kühn (Kamenzer Str 3, Bischofswerda) – more collection points will be added and characterised as such.*

(Translation Current Concerns)

# The WHO Tobacco Framework Convention

## An urgent demand for effective youth protection

by Dr med Rainer M. Kaelin\*

Drugs are different from usual market goods. They are not essential to life as food, but affect the behavior of individuals and their coexistence in society. Use and importance are expressed in traditions and laws. These Correlation become currently evident in the efforts to legalise cannabis and the debate on the Tobacco Products Act.

While for cannabis a legal framework for a product is searched for that is prohibited by the Narcotics Act from being consumed, distributed or sold (illegal substance), the Tobacco Products Act seeks to regulate production and marketing of tobacco so as to minimize damage to health. In both cases, the legislator should consider all the consequences that addictive substances cause on an individual and collective level. Tobacco is extensively studied like no other substance. This article describes tobacco as a drug paradigm of the consumer society and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in response to its social consequences as well as its claims to the future Swiss Tobacco Products Act (TabPG).

### Emergence of the tobacco epidemic

Tobacco from *Nicotiana Tabacum* leaves (after J. Nicot, who first cultivated the plant in Europe) was unknown in Europe prior to the discovery of America. It was used by the inhabitants of North America as a medicinal substance and for the

\* Dr med. R. M. Kaelin, FMH specialist in internal medicine and pneumology, in independent practice until 2015. Former Vice-President of the Lungenliga Schweiz and the Lungenliga Waadt, Vice-President of OxyRomandie/Oxy-Schweiz (an organisation which advocates tobacco product legislation in Switzerland, which protects young people with a comprehensive ban on advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products and which aims at Switzerland ratifying the WHO Framework Convention).

### "Just how mad have ..."

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stead entrusted with the task of State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

In an interview with the "Bild" of 6 September, Maaßen had taken a different view from that of the German Chancellor (cf. *Current Concerns* No 21 of 18 September 2018). Maaßen's statements were followed by a campaign against him in which many political celebrities, especially

peace pipe. As pipe tobacco or as cigars, chewing – or snuff tobacco taxed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century often as a state monopoly, it was irrelevant for public health. Its role as a harmful "luxury food" began with the cigarette, which made smoking tobacco accessible to everyone. Machine cigarette manufacturing was introduced in Virginia as early as 1881, but cigarette smoking did not spread until the World Wars.

The finding that tobacco smoking is addictive and that it depends on the nicotine content,<sup>1</sup> led to the use of more nicotine-rich Burley tobacco (*Camel* 1913, *Lucky Strike* 1916, *Chesterfield* 1918).

from the SPD, as well as almost all leading media participated intensively. The question of whether Maaßen was right with his statements played only a subordinate role. Other accusations were given more weight, for example that Maaßen had been disloyal to the Chancellor, that Maaßen had spoken with politicians of the AfD some time ago, and that he was an opponent of the Chancellor's migration policy in general.

The fact that the Federal Minister of the Interior wanted to make Hans-Georg

### WHO tobacco framework convention Containment of tobacco use, guiding principles

#### WHO framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)([www.who.int/fctc](http://www.who.int/fctc))

- It confirms the right of all people to health and is based on scientific evidence.<sup>3</sup>
- The relation of demand and supply of the substance is integrated in the strategy and thus realises a change of paradigm.
- It confirms that tobacco products are developed to generate dependency and that liberalisation of the world trade, international financing, global marketing and sponsoring are causing the tobacco epidemic.
- It requires all member states to protect their laws from infiltration by commercial interests and from conflicts of interest. (Art. 5.3)
- It requires the status to cooperate with the "civil society" (academic institutions, non-governmental organisations, e.g.), except with the tobacco industry and its allies.

#### Reduction of demand:

- Gradual price increases of more than 10% and tobacco taxes that account

for more than 75% of the selling price do reduce numbers of smokers and prevent young people from starting to smoke.

- Bans on smoking in public places and at work places are reducing opportunities to smoke.
- Comprehensive bans on advertising, promotions and sponsoring for tobacco and nicotine products.
- Regulating substances and additives that make smoking products attractive to young people.
- Package regulations and warnings, information for the public.
- Programmes for smokers to overcome the nicotine addiction.

#### Reduction of supply:

- Preventing illegal trade.
- Ban to buy and sell to or from minors.
- Support for farmers who give up tobacco growing.

The stronger irritation of the throat by the concentrated insecticide nicotine was alleviated with liquorice, honey, etc. and menthol ("Colds – you do not have to renounce smoking!"). Menthol is also found in small quantities in so-called non-menthol cigarettes. It suppresses the coughing stimulus, thus allowing inhalation. This leads nicotine more quickly through the circulation to the brain, as the huge surface of the alveoli and not just the oral and pharyngeal mucosa (as in smoking pipes and cigars) absorb the drug. *Philip Morris* biologists found in

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Maaßen his State Secretary was certainly also a political signal. The reactions from interested parties were correspondingly ignominious. Only three days after the coalition meeting, the agreement from 18 September was only paper waste, ...and the struggle in the government benches about the future course of politics is still going on. From the interested parties there will be no let-up and they will fight with every possible means." •

**"The WHO Tobacco Framework ..."**

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the fifties that nicotine is a volatile substance in basic smoke, which is absorbed much faster than nicotine in salt form. Therefore, ammonia was added to the tobacco blend of *Marlboro*. The sales figures of the new cigarette confirmed the commercial logic in Switzerland, where it was first produced in Neuchâtel since 1956 outside the United States. A basic tobacco blend also proved beneficial because the volatile nicotine is not detected by the ISO certified "smoke machine" measurement. The increased smoker mortality was studied in epidemiological studies of the fifties: In 1964, the report of the chief American doctor, the Surgeon General, showed a considerably increased death rate among smokers.

Since many studies focused on cancer-causing substances, cigarette manufacturers responded first with the filter cigarette ("we removed the harmful corrosive substances from the tobacco") and later with the "light" or "mild" cigarette, of which advertising and promotion suggested a health benefit. This is and remains unproven. However, the notion of smokers and the general public took hold that there was a misunderstanding of a relationship between the stated level of pollutants and the actual smoke exposure of the lungs. Explanation: When a smoker changes from his usual cigarette to a "mild" cigarette, he believes to smoke less and do less harm to himself, because he feels less irritation of the throat. His blood nicotine level has hardly changed, the carbon

monoxide content of his blood is even higher. This is because dependent smokers seek to maintain their usual mean blood nicotine levels, regardless of the perceived "strength" of the smoked cigarettes or their number. With less nicotine containing products they achieve this, often unconsciously, by means of hasty pulling, deeper inhalation or smoking close to the filter. More carbon monoxide is produced, which corresponds with the stronger smoke exposure of the lung. "Damage reduction" is illusory because it is derived in advertising and promotion from the nicotine and pollutant levels measured by the smoke machine. However, human smoking behaviour is mainly to exclusively determined by the nicotine needs of the addict.<sup>2</sup>

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the globalisation of trade and finances opened new markets for the tobacco-multinationals for their more rapidly addictive products, compared to those common in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. As a result, the tobacco epidemic also spread in these parts of the world and in Africa. The global tobacco epidemic proves that the public health problem tobacco, much more than that of the plant, is determined by industry behavior. First, it had optimized nicotine intake by its customers with the industrially produced cigarette. Second, it managed to conceal the toxicity and drug nature of its products through advertising, promotion, public relations and the use of scientists, the media, business associations, parliamentarians and public opinion in order to prevent legal tobacco control.

**The WHO Tobacco Framework Convention**

The first project for a Tobacco Framework Convention was launched by the WHO General Assembly in 1996 and unanimously approved by its 192 member states (including Switzerland). The tobacco industry advocated "reasonable" passive smoking regulations, the ban on sales and market restrictions for the target audience of minors, but opposed increased tobacco taxes and restrictions on the free market and called for voluntary measures.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was signed between 2003 and 2004 by 168 WHO (resp. UN) member countries and the European Union. Today, it brings together 181 members and covers over 90% of the world's population. It is one of the most supported conventions in United Nations history. The following countries have indeed signed but not legally ratified it: Argentina, Cuba, Haiti, Morocco, Switzerland and the USA. These six countries are therefore not yet obliged to comply with the prevention requirements of the Tobacco Framework Convention ...

The follow-up conferences (COP, *Conference of Parties*) to this Convention – the next one will take place in Geneva in October 2018 – will update the guidelines on certain topics. Switzerland's former Minister of Health, Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin of the Liberal Democratic Party, signed the Convention in 2004, thereby expressing the Confederation's

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**Juvenile e-cigarette users consume also cannabis three times more likely later**

*jp.v.* In recent weeks Swiss media reported that the American start-up Juul wants to tackle the Swiss market. *Juul* is a new type of electronic cigarette (e-cigarette), which is already a marketing success in the US. The company was currently valued at \$ 15 billions and had expanded within 8 months in the US market share from 30 to 70 per cent.

The e-cigarette is advertised by the company *Pax Labs* as an alternative to tobacco cigarettes and as a means to get away from smoking totally. Unlike e-cigarettes with liquids, *Juul* works with nicotine salt. In the US, *Pax Labs* sells nicotine with 5 per cent. In the EU and Switzerland, the dose would have to be about half to allow the sale.

*Markus Wildermuth* from the *Blue Cross Bern-Solothurn-Freiburg* is alarmed. "Juul must not be sold in Switzerland until it is clear what nicotine salts cause in the body." Because according to a new study, published in the journal "Tobacco Control", vapours don't only inhale

the same amount of nicotine with *Juul* as in a tobacco cigarette, there is also *more cotinine* – a degradation product of nicotine – in their urine. In addition, the steam of *Juul* is scratching less than regular liquids, says *Wildermuth*. "Instead of an alternative *Juul* is a product that leads to even higher nicotine consumption."

According to a study published in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics* on 17 September 2018, with over 20,000 students, 12.4 per cent of high school students and 4.5 per cent of younger high school students in the US have vapoured at least once in their live cannabis in an e-cigarette (also known as "vaping").

The study used data from the "National Youth Tobacco Survey 2016". In recent years tobacco vaping has gained popularity among young people. Since some e-cigarettes are small enough to fit in the palm of your hand and some are odorless, they can be used discreetly – sometimes on the school grounds. Further studies have linked tobacco

vaping with later increased cannabis use.

According to a study recently published in the medical journal *Pediatrics*, young people who use e-cigarettes or shisha are more than three times more likely to later use cannabis. Researchers surveyed about 2,600 students, whether they had already used e-cigarettes, vaporisers or hookahs. Three years later, they were asked again concerning their cannabis consume. It was found e.g. that students who used e-cigarettes in the first survey were more likely to consume cannabis in the second survey than those who did not use any e-cigarettes.

Sources: "20 Minuten" from 21.9.18; [www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/new-statistics/2018/08/06](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/new-statistics/2018/08/06), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2593707>

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2018/08/02/peds.2017-3616.full.pdf>  
(Translation Current Concerns)

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support for its objectives and for international cooperation. Ratification has been on Swiss Parliament's agenda for almost 15 years, but it has not been addressed yet.

**Dishonest addiction and tobacco prevention**

The 2004 WHO Framework Convention created a clear frontline between government prevention and tobacco industry: smoking rates of those countries implementing its measures have made considerable progress.<sup>4</sup>

With promoting electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) as a stop smoking aid, and devices that "heat but do not burn" tobacco ("vaporizers", etc.), industry today claims to be a partner in tobacco prevention.<sup>5</sup> These products, as well as snus (oral tobacco approved exclusively in Sweden), are said to be "less harmful than tobacco smoking" and should help smokers who cannot stop smoking. Therefore they are required to be less regulated.

This is also expressed in a paradoxical media release of the Swiss Association on Addiction (Fachverband Sucht), recognising e-cigarettes as an "instrument of harm reduction".<sup>6</sup> In doing so, it plays down the drug nicotine.

However, the term "harm reduction" is misleading. It may be true, yet it is unproven, that a habitual smoker who gives up tobacco cigarettes and completely satisfies his nicotine consumption with "alternative products" might suffer less harm. However, it is not plausible that this should lead to collective "harm reduction", i.e. lower smoking rates. It has been shown that e-cigarettes are preparing particularly young people for nicotine and tobacco addiction.<sup>7,8,9</sup> As with other drugs, young consumers will sooner or later resort to the "best" way of consuming nicotine – that is to say tobacco cigarettes.

It has already been observed that e-cigarette users are becoming double users who use the cheap gadget to cover their daily nicotine demand, while at the same time indulging in "pleasure cigarettes" (where they

are mistaken regarding harm reduction). The vision of Prof. Etter<sup>10</sup> of the *Institute of Global Health* in Geneva has proved to be an error.<sup>11</sup> He and his entourage are convinced that smokers are turning away from conventional cigarettes and that this shift in the market will reduce cigarette consumption and smoking quotas. This argument overlooks the fact that the business model of both cigarette manufacturers and "alternative products" is based on nicotine addiction of the customers. Addiction is most easily anchored in the developing brains of young people. Industry has always practised this successfully with sophisticated advertising and promotion,<sup>12</sup> in order to ensure regular consumption of young nicotine addicts and thus profit. The assertion that these products are aimed exclusively at adult smokers cannot be meant honestly. This would mean drying-out the market for alternative products and tobacco after the current generation of smokers. Nicotine dealers responsible for the tobacco epidemic are not credible authors of this message!

The previous drafts of the Federal Tobacco Products Act (TabPG) convey a similar message. In the current second draft of the TabPG, a majority of parliamentarians urges the Federal Office of Public Health to anchor the protection of minors, but to abolish advertising bans, that is an absurd contradiction. In addition, in May 2018, a judgement of the Federal Administrative Court for Minors (Bundesverwaltungsgericht für minderjährige Kinder und Jugendliche) made possible a de facto "legalisation" of previously banned nicotine-containing e-liquids for e-cigarettes. Free market prevailed over health.

**Conclusions**

For the legislator, it follows that structural measures in addiction and tobacco prevention must be the expression of political will. Health consequences of addiction must be analysed on the basis of scientifically recorded causal relationships.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control considers public health problems caused by tobacco as an epidemic caused by industry based on nicotine addiction of its customers. Therefore, it is not the

legally required maximum limits of ingredients and other specific measures that are important, but the barriers that are imposed on the industry for marketing of all nicotine products. *In Switzerland, no provisions of the Convention to curb supply and demand have been effectively implemented yet.*

The second preliminary draft of the Federal Act on Tobacco Products, currently before the Federal Parliament, proves once again the will of a majority of politicians to promote the interests of industry instead of implementing the protection of minors.<sup>13</sup> A comprehensive ban on advertising, promotion and sponsoring, including "alternative products", is the indispensable condition for achieving notable success in both tobacco and addiction prevention, since young people are the target audience of a wide range of drug traffickers. The findings expressed in the WHO Framework Convention are also relevant to the political debate on the legalisation of cannabis to prevent that the pursuit of profit from commercialisation of this weed – as in the case of tobacco plants – escalates in a public health problem accepted by the liberal legislator.<sup>14</sup> ●

<sup>1</sup> Kaelin, R. M. Damage reduction through "less harmful" products? *SAeZ*; 98 (28-29): 915-917

<sup>2</sup> Benowitz, N.L. ; Hall S.M. ; Herning R.I. et al. Smokers of low yield cigarettes do not consume less nicotine. *N. Engl. J. Med.* 1983; 309 (3): 139-42

<sup>3</sup> The assessment of the data material can be found in the "Reports of the Surgeon General. The Health Consequences of Smoking": 1964 mortality of tobacco smoking; 1966 nicotine and tar content; 1981 The Changing cigarette (pollutant content); 1988 Nicotine Addiction

<sup>4</sup> GBD 2015 Tobacco Collaborators: Smoking prevalence and attributable disease burden in 195 countries and territories, 1990-2015: a systematic analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015. *The lancet online*, April 5, 2015. [dx.doi.org/10-1016/S0140-6736\(17\)30819-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30819-x)

<sup>5</sup> Kaelin, R.M. ; Barben, J. ; Schuurmans, M. Electronic cigarettes, e-shishas and "heat but not burn devices". *Swiss med. Forum* 2017; 17 (5): 113-119

<sup>6</sup> trade association addiction. *Media release "Evaporation instead of burning - Federation of Addiction Experts calls for a change of course in Swiss tobacco policy"* from 22.11.2017

<sup>7</sup> *E-Cigarette Use among Youth and Young Adults. A report from the Surgeon General.* US Dept. Health Human Services 2016

<sup>8</sup> Wang, T.W. ; Gentzke, A. ; Shaparova, S. et. al. Tobacco product use among middle and high school students - United States 2011-2017. *MMWR. Wkly Rep.* 2018; 67 (22): 629-633

<sup>9</sup> Schröder, T. The controversial e-cigarette Juul now wants to conquer Europe. *NZZ am Sonntag* from 7.7.2018.

<sup>10</sup> Etter, J.F. *La vérité sur la cigarette électronique.* Fayard, Paris 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Beard, E. ; Brown J. ; Michie S. ; West R. Is prevalence of e-cigarette and nicotine replacement therapy use among smokers associated with average cigarette consumption in England? A time series analysis. *BMJ Open* 2018; 8: e0116046. First published June 19, 2018. [bmjopen.bmj.com/content/8/6/e0116046](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/8/6/e0116046).

<sup>12</sup> Kaelin, R. M. Protection of minors without advertising bans? *SAeZ* 2017; 98 (41): 1347-1349

<sup>13</sup> Kaelin, R. M. ; Niedermann, R. Second draft to the tobacco product law: fraud! *SAeZ* 2018; 89 (24): 811-813

<sup>14</sup> Kurosh, Yazdi. *The cannabis lie.* ISBN 978-3-862-65-633-2. Schwarzkopf and Schwarzkopf 2017

## Investors see legalisation of Cannabis as a billion-dollar business

ds. The article "Coca-Cola bets on cannabis" from 19 September in the business section of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" confirms that the legalisation of cannabis promises a big, even a very big business. Under the subheading "Enormous growth prospect" it says: "Many investors also see the legalisation of trading in marijuana products as an opportunity worth billions. Global expenses

for legal cannabis are expected to increase by 230% in just five years, from 9.5 billion US dollars at the end of 2017 to 32 billion US dollars in 2022. *BDS Analytics'* latest report estimates that the global legal marijuana market could be worth 57 billion US dollars by 2027. Expenses on cannabis-based pharmaceuticals in the United States are expected to increase by 50% annually until 2030."

## Wiki, who is that?

by Christian Campiche, journalist, founder and editor-in-chief  
of the online newspaper “La Méduse” and book autor, Lausanne

*Conditioning and manipulation are instruments that ever war participant uses to destabilise the opponent. What should one think of an organisation called Wikipedia that dictates its truth to the world if it does not itself shine with transparency?*

Wikipedia, you know, is this online encyclopedia that creates or destroys everyone’s reputation thanks to voluntary contributions from Mr and Ms Everyman – where by anyone can be uncontrollably favourable or malicious. On Wikipedia it is easy to become a philanthropist if you had the money to finance a storyteller. But an individual person becomes just as quickly a conspiracy theorist, a revisionist, an extremist – preferable from the right – in short, if he or she does not join the mainstream, he or she is badly defamed. Without any chance to be able to correct anything in the worldwide network if he or she does not belong to the ideological trend that rules the world.

To have the honor of being present on Wikipedia, the procedure is very simple. All you have to do is to register, write a flattering biography and wait for registration. You may be asked a few questions, but if you have a minimum of publicity, you have every chance of being included in the grail of the best in the world.

This is the ideal situation. However, it also happens that artists or intellectuals who are absolutely worth being listed in Wikipedia are banned from it for obscure reasons. Happy may be those who manage to get a convincing explanation for it. It may well be that your interlocutor is a “teenager” whose name you will never know because he or she is hiding behind a pseudonym.

Wikipedia claims to explain the world to the world, but remains completely devious when it comes to their way of functioning. A more thorough search reveals that some members of the *Wikimedia*

board – the foundation that controls the online lexicon – have close ties to *George Soros*, American speculator, who crashed the British pound in 1992 and is a partner in the US *Carlyle Group*, a key representative of the arms industry. Soros also generously distributes his millions to a significant part of the media and plays a non-neglectible role in the migration crisis by financing ships of non-governmental organisations.

Being well informed is worth a lot. When visiting Wikipedia in future, be careful about judging biographies. And be suspicious against labels and judgments attached to events, organisations and people. Often enough, history is interwoven with “stories”.

Source: *La Meduse*. Journal in Switzerland from 9.8.18

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Hacker war

by Professor Dr Eberhard Hamer

Some time ago it was reported that cyber spies had allegedly cracked the data system of the federal administration of Germany and of the *Bundeswehr*. It was not possible to prove who the perpetrator was, but the war minister blamed Russia and has the press behind her, which started a big clamour about the Russian danger of cyber attacks.

It is possible that Russian hackers are behind the alleged cyber attack. This would have to be tackled – once it has been proven.

What is incomprehensible, however, is the fury of our media about a “Russian cyber attack”, which has not even been proven yet. For 20 years, the same media have thought nothing of the fact that the US, Israel, Great Britain and France are spying on Germany nationwide, the US even from German soil and at German cost.

The Pentagon commands 70,000 digital US offensive warriors who “operate daily in over 80 countries worldwide”. So the above mentioned occupying powers –

above all the US – hack in Germany not only twice, but constantly, without incurring any criticism. Even *Angela Merkel* did not find the permanent spying on her mobile phone decent “among friends”, but did not defend herself.

When one knows that data espionage and hacker attacks have in the meantime become a matter of course for the US and are carried out daily in Germany, one is surprised at the racket the German media are making about attacks which are attributed to the Russians, but

perhaps also originate from the Americans.

After all, the US has described “cyber-, information- and media war against Russia” as a priority preparation for war against Russia – as it did before the Second World War.

When will our government finally come up with the idea of denouncing, banning and prosecuting not only unsolved hacker attacks, but also resolved and unequivocal ones?

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### Finland’s President Niinistö: Russia does not threaten the Baltic States

cc. In an interview with the German newspaper “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” on 15 September 2018, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö was asked whether he saw Russia as a threat. He replied: “No, I don’t think Russia

will attack any of the Baltic states, and there is no reason to attack Finland. There is more of a global threat, but there is also a healthy balance. If there were a war, nobody would win.”

# Experiencing and sampling dual vocational training

## SwissSkills 2018 in Berne

*Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich*

From 12 to 16 September 2018, the Swiss Skills Championships took place in Berne. 66 professional associations and organisations from the world of work took part, and Swiss championships were held in 75 professions. Here in the competition, young professionals were able to impressively show what they had learned.

However, the aim of this major event was not only to test the strength of the best. It was equally important to the professional associations that young people, future apprentices, were given a first impression of 135 skilled trades. After nine or ten years at school, i.e. at the age of 16, the majority of young people in Switzerland start an apprenticeship. The interest in SwissSkills was correspondingly high: tens of thousands of pupils travelled to Berne with their teachers – with a train ticket for a maximum of 20 francs and free admission – and took the great opportunity to have young professionals show them their work and to try out individual activities themselves.

### “Switzerland’s dual vocational training system is unique”

“Switzerland’s dual vocational training system is unique. Young professionals prove this time and again at Swiss, European and World Championships in all professional fields”. With these words, SwissSkills underlines the high significance of dual vocational training in Switzerland.<sup>1</sup> The outstanding achievements are the fruits of a three- or four-year apprenticeship in which the young people are guided and thoroughly trained personally – and with pleasure – by their professional instructors, and this is supplemented by a good technical and general education at the vocational schools. In addition to the top performers at championships, dual vocational training is also a blessing for all other apprentices and one of the supporting pillars of the Swiss business location: “Switzerland works, thanks to vocational training. Two-thirds of all young people in the German-speaking part of Switzerland start their professional careers with vocational training,” says *Rudolf Strahm*, one of the tireless interpreters of the formative role of dual vocational training for individuals and society.<sup>2</sup>



*House painter competing at this year’s SwissSkills in Berne.  
(Picture [swiss-skills.ch/2018/gallery](http://swiss-skills.ch/2018/gallery))*

### Pride in the profession and in one’s own achievements

Recently, the Swiss tabloids “Blick” and “20 Minuten”, which are read by many youngsters, gave apprentices the opportunity to express their joy and pride in their work and professions.<sup>3</sup> By the way, these are not just a few positive coincidences: In my time as a vocational school teacher, I was impressed by each class anew as to how the 16 year olds mastered the big step from school into working life almost without exception, despite an earlier start to the day, a longer working day and new challenges, as to how they felt at home in their profession and training company within a few months – and how proud they were of their own achievements and their first salary.

### Let us take good care of our dual apprenticeship system and of our younger generations

Let us stop complaining about other countries having more high school graduates and academics! Let us not be unsettled by Avenir Suisse and the OECD, which say that this will lead to worse prospects for our business location. These organisations do not primarily represent the 500,000 SMEs in which a large proportion of our young men and women complete an apprentice-

ship and become responsible adults who take their place not only in the workplace but also as citizens (which is of particular importance in direct-democratic Switzerland). According to the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), more than 99% of private companies in Switzerland are SMEs, i.e. companies with fewer than 250 employees; they account for two thirds of jobs and offer the majority of training places. We do not need a higher proportion of high school graduates, but a primary school in which the children are introduced to learning and to the real world by their teachers, so that they will leave school with a full backpack. Every vocational trainer can tell us what knowledge, skills and personal attitude a young person must have in order to successfully start and complete an apprenticeship. Almost the same prerequisites are needed for high school, by the way, only with more weight in the school sector. •

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.swiss-skills.ch/2018/>

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Strahm, “Warum wir so reich sind” (Why we are so rich). *Tages-Anzeiger* from 11 September 2018

<sup>3</sup> “Nichts gegen die Stiffti! Porträt über vier Lehrlinge” (Say nothing against apprentices! Portrait of four apprentices). *Blick* from 16 August 2018. “Newcomer to an apprenticeship: ‘In the beginning I had aching muscles’”. *20 minutes* from 31 August 2018

# “Civil dialogue is and will remain a success story”

## Impressions from the closing event of the German-Russian Year of Municipal and Regional Partnerships 2017/2018

by Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller and Klaudia Kruck-Schaer



The representatives of the awarded project – a “part of the whole” from the almanac of German-Russian cooperation. Among them the two foreign ministers Sergey Lavrov and Heiko Maas. (picture [www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de](http://www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de))

In Berlin on 14 September, the closing event of the German-Russian Year of Local and Regional Partnerships took place with great attendance. Participants from active municipal administrations, local associations and citizens in volunteer work had travelled to Berlin. Already during registration in the German Federal Foreign Office, the committed and joyful atmosphere among the approximately 900 Russian and German participants was clearly noticeable. There were more participants than expected. You got into a dialogue immediately and with everyone. It was clear that this was all about concrete civic commitment, about living international understanding. Everyone willingly provided information about his involvement in a wide variety of projects, often on a voluntary basis, be it in youth and pupil exchanges, in professional, scientific, sports and cultural exchanges or in administrative cooperation, and: on an equal footing.

Thanks to the participation of the Russian and German Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and Heiko Maas, the event was held at a high political level, as was the case at the Twinning Conference in Krasnodar (2017).

The morning was filled with four well-prepared working groups:

1. Russian and German strategies for improving the quality of life in municipalities and in regions,

2. Energy supply and sustainable urban development,
3. Civil society shapes town twinning,
4. active civil society in the social field: developments, results and perspectives in German-Russian partnerships.

In Berlin, on 12/13 September, the preliminary conference “On the way from Krasnodar 2017 to Düren. Balance-Impulses-Outlook. Meeting of German and Russian twinned towns” had already taken place. In a warm, serious working atmosphere, the working groups presented the results of this pre-conference, exchanged experiences and developed perspectives for future work and cooperation. It was possible to experience the successful and varied development of the civil dialogue between Germans and Russians from person to person, on a municipal level.

### Social partnerships – a contribution to improve relations between the peoples

Especially in the field of German-Russian cooperation on social issues for people with disabilities, there are good developments. *Gulnara Vaskina*, Deputy Director for social issues of *Perspektive Russland*, Moscow, emphasised the paradigm shift in the concept of man (*Menschenbild*), which since the end of the Soviet Union has been more oriented towards the needs of the individual human being. It was emphasised by *Svetlana Andreeva* from Pskov, where there has been since 1993 – with the support of the Protestant parish

of Wassenberg in the district of Heinsberg – a curative education center for children and young people with mental and severe multiple disabilities: We regard the human being as a valuable, dignified person who has a value in himself.

Concerning the importance of social partnerships between institutions in Russia and Germany, she added: An invaluable contribution is made to improve the relations between the two peoples and to the consolidation of our cultures “from below” by the manifold intensive human encounters on a broad basis especially in the social partnerships.

### Experiences from Germany:

#### Privatisation – not too much, not too fast

Another working group dealt with improving the quality of life in municipalities and regions. “Not everything that comes from private investors is good for the residents,” said *Jürgen Roters*, former mayor of Cologne, using examples from his city to show the disadvantages of privatising urban property through cross-border leasing. For example, a block of houses for the socially disadvantaged and the homeless was sold to a foreign fund years ago. For ten years, literally nothing was done, then the city bought back the property for 38 million euros. Especially in the area of public service, municipalities should remain the owners.

### “Civil dialogue is and will ...”

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#### Success recipe of German-Russian Cooperation: human co-existence, trust, friendship

With great pride and many pictures, *Dmitry Samojlov*, mayor of Perm, introduced his city located in the Urals on the border with Asia. Already in 1916 there was the first university. Perm has all major industries: petroleum, aircraft, telephones, textiles, chemicals, woodworking, electronics, IT. The climatic shortage – snowy and ice-rich winters from November to May – would benefit the culture, because then many artists, also from Germany, would come to make the famous ice-sculptures. The birth rate is very high, “almost like in Soviet times”. German-Russian cooperation would focus primarily on the human component and not on the economic. “At the human level, everything goes better”. Again and again, with regard to German-Russian cooperation, human coexistence, cordial friendship and mutual trust were emphasised. “The civil dialogue is and remains a success story – especially in times of political differences between our countries. [...] We will do our utmost to further develop the unifying and reconciling force of civil society cooperation with Russia and actively promote it in society and above all in politics,” said *Matthias Platzeck*, Chairman of the Board of directors of the *German-Russian Forum*.

#### Sporting encounters and memory culture as an important contribution to international understanding, especially among young people

A focal point of the municipal and regional partnerships are the sporting encounters in various disciplines, especially as an offer for the young people. In all tournaments and friendly games, international understanding and reconciliation are paramount. For example, *Gert Kolbe*, former press spokesman for the city of Dortmund and today’s archivist of the Dortmund football club *BVB*, reported that he had supported the city of Rostov-on-Don in the preparations for the World Football Championship. The *German-Russian football bridges* in St. Petersburg, Sochi, Orljonok, Moscow and Rostov-on-Don were organised for young athletes this year by the Brandenburg *Sportjugend*, the *German Football Association DFB* and the German-Russian Forum.

*Jury Starovatyh*, former mayor of Volgograd, reported on the theme “Remembering for the sake of peace” that 75 years after the Battle of Stalingrad on 9 May 2018, Denkendorf and Volgograd hosted a friendly match between the U18 youth teams of Russia and Germany. After-

wards, wreaths were laid by the teams in two cemeteries in Rososchka, which had been created by the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, to commemorate the fallen.

#### Peace ride with a covered wagon from Brück to Veliky Novgorod

Since June, the “Kaltblut Zucht- und Sportverein Brück e. V.” has been carrying out a peace ride with eight covered wagons pulled by powerful Rheinisch German coldblood horses. The tour lasts three months, crosses Poland and the Baltic States and ends in St. Petersburg and Veliky Novgorod; that is 2,300 kilometres. During this peace ride, conversations and encounters take place in various places. On site, the organisers symbolically present small peace bells – a replica of the large peace bell they carry with them – and peace rye. The rye symbolises life.

#### Attracting the youth for peace and reconciliation work

At the centre of all discussions was always the question of how to attract young people for important encounters, how to encourage them to learn Russian and German, and how to make the history of the two peoples more understandable. The memory culture and peace work form the foundation of all projects presented.

#### Town twinning as a means against prejudices and enemy images

The commitment to the projects that were carried out was impressive. Many participants stressed that the encounter between citizens of different nations within the framework of town twinning makes friendships possible. One gets to know the

other culture and sees a friend in the other one. *Helmut Domke*, chair of the *Stiftung West-Östliche Begegnungen* (Foundation for Encounter between East and West), said that the town twinning is a suitable means against appropriation, prejudices, enemy images and political confrontation. Memory is more than just looking back. Memory is also the future of cooperation.

#### “If Germany and Russia are doing well, Europe will do well, too”

The afternoon panel discussion in the plenary session was entitled “Looking forward – German-Russian municipal and regional partnerships”.

The wide range of the 250 partnership projects reflects the will of the citizens. This expresses the great interest of the participants in cooperation on equal terms. The most important thing is human cooperation, said *Bernhard Kaster*, former mayor and member of the board of the German-Russian Forum. The joint work is characterised by the joy of cooperation. At the same time, he dunned that, in addition to political appreciation, a minimal financial support is needed as well. *Markus Lewe*, President of the Association of German Cities and Lord Mayor of the city of Münster, emphasised “Communication face to face, not Facebook”. If Germany and Russia are doing well, Europe will do well, too.

#### “The qualitative dialogue will come – there is no other possibility”

*Mikhail Shvydkoy*, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for International Cooperation from the Russian Foreign Ministry and board member of the German-Russian

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The brochure contains short descriptions of 243 projects from German and Russian regions. 250 projects had applied for the call for proposals for the German-Russian Year 2017/2018. “Each of the 243 projects tells of committed, enthusiastic and accomplished people in towns, municipalities and villages, of people who use their free time in an honorary capacity to make a difference. Each individual project shows how political tensions can be countered with something constructive that binds people together – with a small budget, spirit and skill. [...] ... a very concrete success story that is far too seldom acknowledged by positive reports, articles or film reports in the media.” (from the foreword by *Martin Hoffmann*, Managing Member of the German-Russian Forum e.V.) Available at [www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de](http://www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de)

**“Civil dialogue is and will ...”**

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Forum, gave some insights into German-Russian relations: “When the Berlin Wall was gone, I thought people would come together now. Then the wall came back into our heads. We thought that we had to start with civil society. For example, what is the optimal solution for water supply? In the field of education, it is much easier to understand each other in everyday life. Here we get along great.” He emphasised that after the two wars, people

quickly reconciled again. Today over 70% of German citizens want good relations with Russia. Shvydkoy was optimistic: the qualitative dialogue will come, and there is no other possibility.

**Expand town twinning  
and fill them with life**

Referring to the “Joint final declaration” (see box below), *Peter Franke*, chairman of the Federal Association of German West-East Societies (BDWO) named also current difficulties: The donations of the German industry for the projects are de-

creasing, and only about 50% of the existing partnerships are really filled with life.

The event concluded with the ceremonial signing of three new German-Russian partnership agreements with the participation of the respective mayors (Greifswald and Vyborg, Schwedt and Tuapse, Lahr and Zwenigorod) and the awarding of 30 selected projects of German-Russian municipal and regional cooperation by the two Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and Heiko Maas. Jury Starovatysh, former mayor of Volgograd, was especially and for the first time honoured by the German Foreign Minister for his merits concerning the 30-year town twinning between Chemnitz and Volgograd. With great applause, he addressed the participants, before entering the stage.

The coming thematic year will be dedicated to science or education partnerships.

**Joint declaration on the occasion of the closing event  
of the German-Russian Year of Municipal and Regional  
Partnerships 2017/2018 (excerpt)**

The past year of municipal and regional partnerships 2017/2018 has impressively demonstrated the commitment to German-Russian understanding that has been shown by active municipal administrations, local NGOs and citizens working on a voluntary basis. This is why municipal and regional partnerships are part of the fundamental pillars of stable and multi-faceted relations between our countries, especially in these often tense times.

These partnerships – whether in youth and pupil exchange, in professional, scientific, sports and cultural exchange or in administrative cooperation – have often grown over decades and are shaped sustainably by citizens. They are based on a relationship of trust that has jointly been developed between those involved.

The municipal and regional partnerships are original tasks of the municipalities and regions and serve the well-being of their citizens. [...]

Active town twinings as well as new initiatives require not only political support and appreciation, but also concrete financial resources so that the work can bear fruit. Only then will it be possible to significantly increase the number of town twinings and launch new projects in German-Russian relations.

We would like to propose the following concrete measures:

- Support for the establishment of a German-Russian coordination council of the German-Russian twinned towns, consisting of representatives of German and Russian cities or their associations as well as representatives of committed social organisations active in the town twinning between the two countries,

- Support for the German-Russian Town Twinning Conferences, which take place every two years, and additionally for one municipal conference each between the official meetings,
- Regular implementation of a youth forum of town twinning in order to interest young people in German-Russian cooperation and to win them over for project realisation,
- Continuation and support of the website for municipal cooperation as a point of contact for the cities and at the same time for greater transparency of the successes of regional German-Russian cooperation,
- Over-the-year starter kits to launch new twinning programmes,
- Over-the-year town twinning revitalisation packages to help cities and citizens reactivate town twinning,
- Facilitation of the issuing of visas for citizens and city representatives involved in town twinning and friendships. In particular, facilitation of visas for youth and pupil exchange in town twinings and -friendships,
- Facilitation of traineeships, hospitations as well as professional and cultural exchange within the framework of town twinning.

*Berlin, 14 September 2018*

*Matthias Platzeck, former Prime Minister,  
Chairman of the Executive Board,  
German-Russian Forum*

*Thomas Hoffmann, Managing Director,  
Stiftung German-Russian youth exchange*

*Peter Franke, Chairman, Federal Association  
of German West-Eastern-Companies*

*Jelena Hoffmann, Chairwoman of the  
Executive Board, Foundation  
West-Eastern Meetings*

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