

# Current Concerns

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## The collapse of the EU and the Russian-German condominium over the rest of Europe

by Professor Dr Albert A. Stahel, Institut für Strategische Studien, [www.strategische-studien.com](http://www.strategische-studien.com)

At present the EU is politically shaken by the financial and economic crises in the southern European countries, so Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Burdened by high debt these countries face at the same time a recession in their economies. Two different economic schools with opposing solutions for modernization and growth are proposed to these countries. While *Milton Friedman's Chicago School* is postulating a fiscal policy that is aimed at economizing, the *Keynesian school* provides for economic policies that stimulate an economy through government spending. German economists in particular are considered the representatives of the *Chicago School* in Europe. Due to their advice, the *Merkel* government demands unyielding fiscal austerity from the southern Europeans. Under no circumstances should the EU finance the bankrupt southern Europeans. According to this fiscal policy school this would lead to inflation loaded on the Germans' backs. *Merkel* knows very well that Germany till now has benefited from the economic imbalance in the EU at the expense of the southern Europeans. While Germany can repeatedly go into new debts cost-free, the southern Europeans pay exorbitant interest on their debts.

*Merkel* is confronted with the French President, *Hollande*, who is more likely to tend towards the *Keynesian school*. With euro bonds, i.e. government loans throughout the euro zone, the southern Europeans may borrow money from the market at the same interest rates as the

"Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium increasingly come under the political and economic domination of Germany. With the political support of Russia, Germany wants political and military concessions out of these quasi-allies. This includes the subordination of their armed forces under German command, and the exploitation of their military infrastructure by the German Bundeswehr."

Germans. The introduction of euro bonds is blocked by the Chancellor.

The result of the *Merkel* dictate, which almost resembles blackmailing, is jointly

power in these states and resist the Berlin dictate. In the medium to long term we may face armed riots in southern Europe, which could in turn trigger migration towards Central Europe. Such a development would not only mean the end of the euro, but could also lead to the disintegration of the EU and the rise of organized crime in Europe.

While the EU and its member states are confronted with the described problems, the US military is withdrawing from Europe. Also because of this two pointless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington is struggling now with fiscal deficits.

After the American forces' deployment had been overstretched by the two wars, the US government has

to direct its military resources at the region which is of greatest strategic significance for them, the Western Pacific. For too long the United States had neglected this politically and economically extreme-



"Dear Lady and Gentlemen, in case of loss there will be three stick blows."  
(cartoon Rubin)

responsible for the recession in Southern Europe. While in Greece state employees are laid off in droves, the Greek economy is getting into the red. Spain and Portugal, and possibly Italy face similar developments. The consequences are foreseeable. Populist parties will take over the

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ly important region. Facing the emerging regional power, China, which increasingly makes political claims, the allies – Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand – and the friendly countries of the Pacific region must now be supported politically and militarily. The US is settling new agreements in the Western Pacific for the establishment of new bases. To accomplish this military effort the United States may withdraw troops from Europe. In the foreseeable future only a few American soldiers will be stationed in Europe. In the long term we will have to reckon on US troops completely withdrawing from Europe.

While the US military is becoming weaker in Europe, the regional power Russia is rearming. Russia has the means to this end due to the raw material sales to Europeans. At the same time Russia's President Vladimir *Putin* is trying to extend his influence on the East Central European states of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary and the Baltic republics, thanks to the blackmail with gas supplies. As a countermeasure the United States primarily put their missile defense system in some of these countries. The stationing of US troops intends to thwart the Russian plans for political and economic penetration.

Given the collapse of the euro zone and the diminishing presence of the United States, Germany turns to Russia as a natural ally. The Russians, who have pursued this goal since the end of World War II, deliver natural gas to Germany at a discount price that is far below the world market price.

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While the economic situation of the southern European countries is sliding into chaos, the other European states France, Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries remain neutral in view of this situation. Given the rapidly weakening US influence in Europe, the Eastern European and the Baltic States will soon come under direct Russian influence. The EU has ceased to exist as an organization, and the Russian-German condominium over Europe is cemented.

### China-US confrontation

With his report of 3 January 2012, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense", President *Barack Obama* announced the new geo-military strategy of the United States. In his introduction to the report Defense Secretary *Leon Panetta* postulated that the US must protect its most important national interests by its military strategy. This includes addressing the challenge posed by China and the reorientation of the US

armed forces towards the Western Pacific "we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region."

Due to their financial debt and their decline in political power, the US cannot contain alone the rising power of China alone. The US is hence dependent on support from its allies and partners. Among the main partners in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific are India and Korea:

*"We will also expand our networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific [...]. The United States is also investing in a strategic long-term partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a [...] provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean. Furthermore, we want to maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula by effectively working with allies [...]."*

Other important partners and allies of the United States in the Western Pacific are Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Taiwan.

The aircraft carrier fleet with 11 aircraft carriers and 10 squadrons is especially important for this reorientation of US strategy and its forces, and in the future this combat strength will be maintained. From now on, the US is focusing its strategy and its armed forces – in particular Navy and Air Force – on the Western Pacific and the Persian Gulf. Europe is likely to become meaningless in the new geo-political understanding and thus in the geo-strategy and military strategy of the United States.

With this reorientation the US bases in the Pacific and Indian Oceans become increasingly important. They include Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, Oahu, Guam, Yokota, Okinawa and Singapore in the Pacific. Darwin in Australia also plays an important role in this thinking. For a possible military confrontation with China a new operational concept called *Air-Sea Battle* has been developed. Beside the carrier battle groups the strategic bombers B-2A, B-52H and B-1B play an important role in this concept because they are equipped with long-range cruise missiles and cover all targets and cities in China from the aforementioned US bases.

The economic and fiscal crises and weaknesses, which the Obama administration has to tackle, are in contrast to this reorientation of US strategy and forces. Part of the existing trade deficit with China – the result of the consumer behaviour of the US population and the outsourcing of important production to Asia –, the stagnating housing market – the result of the financial policies of *Bush Jr.* and the *Fed* –, the squandering of 1,000 – 3,000 billion US dollars in the futile warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, the inflation of the defense budget to 700 billion US dollars by *Bush Jr.* and the financing of senseless military

projects, the supply of more than 600,000 veterans and invalids by the state and the tax reductions by *Bush Jr.* for the rich. All these developments have contributed to the deficit of the state and thus weakened the US economy significantly.

China, whose economy is still dominated by growth, responds to the challenge by the United States with its own rearmament. This includes the introduction of new submarines, warships and ballistic missiles against US aircraft carriers. The basis of this military build-up of the naval forces is the Chinese nuclear potential, which serves to deter the US nuclear weapons.

We must however be aware of the political and economic weaknesses of the People's Republic. Beside the social imbalance in China between the rich coastal cities and the rural population its Achilles heel is worth mentioning in particular. The growth of the Chinese economy is based on ever increasing oil imports. These in turn are currently still transported to China for the most part by tankers. The protection and control of these sea routes – 83% of China's imports and exports via the Malacca Strait – represents the most important problem for the Chinese leadership. As a countermeasure China financed the construction of four naval bases in the Indian Ocean: Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Sittwe in Myanmar. Other countermeasures are the oil pipeline from Myanmar to China's Kunming and the construction of pipelines to Central Asia and Siberia. The annexation of Taipei and the control of the Taiwan Strait to China would also serve the future protection of its sea routes.

At present, the main interest of the Chinese leadership is focused on the control of the South China Sea. Contrary to the conventions of international maritime law China claimed the largest part of the South China Sea as its own territory. To this end, China repeatedly violated the right of free navigation in international waters (1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea). China wants to reduce its dependence on imported oil through the exploitation of resources in the South China Sea and at the same time thus secure its sea route via the Malacca Strait. In order to enforce that power politics, Beijing claimed dominion over the entire Spratly archipelago. In contrast, the claims of Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan are on separate islands in the archipelago. Without official announcement the US support the claims of their allies and at the same time insist on the enforcement of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

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# “Alliance of moneyed aristocracy” wants to jointly retain its power Particularly Switzerland is in the crosshairs

by Dr Eike Hamer, publisher of “Wirtschaft aktuell”, Hannover

To the article of Prof *Stahel* “The disintegration of the EU and the Russian-German Condominium over the rest of Europe” (see p.1 of this edition) a piece of news should be added which became publicly known a few weeks ago; it informs about the fact that both high finance groups of the European *Rothschilds* and American *Rockefellers* have joined together. So the Rothschilds were capable of buying into a central financial vehicle of the Rockefeller families with more than a blocking minority. This was announced by “Der Spiegel” on 30 May under the title: “Alliance of moneyed aristocracy: Rockefeller and Rothschild become allies.”\* The fact that the finance groups, being rivals most of the time until now, have at least called a truce shows that the situation is getting too hot for them, their power positions are endangered and they can retain them merely in unison. Both groups are strongly involved in the FED (US central bank) which print the currency for America and

is by sizes much higher indebted than the EU. But this merely as an aside.

Deliberately or not the key financial powers of the West have come into conflict with several fronts. On the one hand they try to retain their position of dominion that was challenged by the financial crisis, by getting a hard grip on the self-confident, educated middle class as well as on the social groups which are being impoverished. On the other hand, ambitious Asia is no longer willing to accept the previous claims to power. China, Russia and the emerging economies, forced into opposition as “rogue states”, refuse the dollar empire respectively the domineering system of these forces. By doing so, they bog down the expansion of the “West” (globalisation).

The conflicts with their own populations weaken the western national economies, while the emerging economies of Asia and the “rogue states” which are rich in natural resources have gained strength. Not the only did they overcome

agony and chaos after the breakdown of socialism (shock therapy), but established new self-confidence. Therefore, parts of the western economy try to recover from the crisis by cooperation with these emerging economies and request politics to establish appropriate and good relations with these countries. However, this is feared by the “key high finance” of the western world – in particular if companies which are not completely controlled by Rothschild and Rockefeller are striving for such cooperation. They fear to be kept away from business and to lose control of these disobedient companies. It is true, this middle class which has developed and gained strength during the past 60 peace years has to finance various projects like the EU or the social states via their taxes, however, it causes disturbance because it must be persuaded and cannot simply be ordered about. In this respect, Switzerland is even more

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At present, the political power rivalry in the Western Pacific between China and the United States is increasing. While the US with its allies and their forces pursue a strategic coercion on China, the People’s Republic is rearming. It must be noted that the growth of China’s economy is dependent on the US economy and would lead to a collapse in case of the rivalry’s escalation into an armed conflict. Today, China would be the clear loser in such a case. This finding is also the reason why the Chinese leadership wants to take advantage of the time factor by avoiding a confrontation. In contrast, the United States of America do not have much time for a political settlement with China given their economic weakness. The US requires an early settlement of the action and the balance of power in the Western Pacific. If this confrontation continues, the internal cohesion of the United States could be called into question given the weakness of the US economy. We are likely to witness a settlement of claims to power in the Western Pacific from an American perspective in the foreseeable future. For this purpose the US increasingly add to the threat of force of their armed forces through an indirect strategy that is aimed

at the disintegration of China by fomenting civil unrest and choking off energy and raw material supplies.

## Eurasian Union

Under the condition that the German-Russian condominium over the rest of Europe (Scenario 1) came into existence and that China could block the power of the USA in the Western Pacific (scenario 2), Putin’s Russia might want to extend the former nucleus of the Eurasian Union both on China and on Europe dominated by Germany. In a first step this could mean a better economic and political cooperation between the energy and production powers of Eurasia. An important basis is the current expansion of the Silk Road as a trade link between Germany and China. It is also conceivable that especially China wants to pursue a political union of Eurasia in a second step. The partners of China may not consider such a union a desirable step given the size of the Chinese population. However, Eurasia and its union may develop; such an economic union alone would mean the end of American hegemony over the world.

## Wars in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf

If the indicated decay of US power in Scenarios 1 and 2 accelerated in the foresee-

able future, a coalition among the Iranian opponents Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel would emerge due to the power vacuum and power demands of Iran over the Persian Gulf – Iraq, western Afghanistan. One such move would definitely destabilize the region. If Israel had then not launched an air strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, the situation would then be reached in which Israel would launch a nuclear strike against Iran. It is also conceivable that in such a situation Saudi Arabia and Turkey would acquire their own nuclear weapons. It may also happen that a nuclear proliferation would even lead to a stabilization of the region. Until this point was reached an uninterrupted series of wars would have to be expected, in particular between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Iran and Turkey. Determined by the goal of power adjustment, these wars would have some similarities with the centuries of struggle between Byzantium and the Sassanid Empire. These wars are likely to lead to the final exodus of Christians from the region.

## Rearmament of the United States

If in Europe, the German-Russian condominium (Scenario 1) failed due to the resistance of the other European states

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– France and Britain – and if in Asia American power politics succeeded vis à vis China (Scenario 2), it is conceivable that the US could thus main-

tain their military and political hegemony in the world. In this case, we would have to reckon with a new rearmament of the United States, which would surpass that of the *Reagan* administration by far. The US would finance this rearmament with another debt in the rest

of the world as they did in the past. The rearmament would not only lead to the introduction of new weapons technologies in the American land, air and naval forces, but also to an entry into a space-based defense system by the United States against attacking ballistic missiles. Thus, the nuclear arsenals of Russia and China would lose their strategic value and the strategic nuclear deterrence between the nuclear powers would be suspended. Thanks to this situation caused by rearmament, the United States would be able to maintain their hegemonic position by the end of this century. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)**Putin: "... on-going and trusting dialog becomes even more important ..."**

On Monday at a conference of Russian ambassadors in Moscow, *Putin* stated that during his recent meeting with US President *Barack Obama* in Los Cabos, "we reiterated our desire to build on the progress we have made over recent years and develop a constructive, predictable, and mutually advantageous bilateral cooperation model."

"At a time when international relations are so complex, on-going and trusting dialog between our two countries becomes even more important", the Russian Head of State pointed out.

At present, tough statements about Moscow's policy could be heard in Washington, he continued. During the current

election campaign in the United States, "it is very tempting at such times to notch up some points by making hard-line statements and playing on old ideological stereotypes and phobias that it is high time we abandoned. We see what is going on. We do not dramatize the situation, but we are aware of it."

"It is long since time to give up such practices as a means of settling domestic political problems if all they do is worsen the international situation or harm international relations", *Putin* stressed.

Source: *Ria Novosti*, 9 July 2012(Translation *Current Concerns*)**"Alliance of moneyed aristocracy' – ..."**

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in the sights because not only the power sharing and the polls are institutionalised, but it is also a democratic and prosperous positive model for the citizens in the heart of Europe.

It is here where the yield lines of the "key financial powers" intersect. Accordingly they probably believe to be able to weaken the middle class by pillaging and controlling it more effectively and to keep the emerging economies at bay. It is not the emancipating citizens that are the problem of the western world, but the power concept of the "new world order" looming ahead, even if it disguises itself as a guided or participatory democracy à la *Kretschmann*. One does not want to eat this soup; one has tasted a better one, before.

The conflicts with their "own populations" and the rise of Asia and Russia require at least the temporary consensus of the rivalling high finance groups within their power circles. Anyway their forces are challenged up to the brink. After a consoli-

dation of their power position it is possible that later they fall back on their internal distribution fights again. Until then they intend to reinforce their power against the citizens and conquer the exterior enemy.

We should never regard those geo-political conflicts in Libya, Syria and Iran without keeping in mind the dominating high finance groups and their interests. *Rothschild's* and *Rockefeller's* collaboration must be reflected more profoundly. It is not yet understood.

For us, the citizens all this means to consistently, determinedly and combatively counter the demolition and erosion of all democratic structures or plans like *ESM*, regionalization, *Metropolitan Rooms* etc. There is a great disadvantage on the side of the high finance: They are only few and their agents are afraid of being uncovered. •

\* [www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/familien-rockefeller-und-rothschild-verwalten-gemeinsam-vermoegen-a-835972.html](http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/familien-rockefeller-und-rothschild-verwalten-gemeinsam-vermoegen-a-835972.html)

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## Greece: “The banking industry is a curse” “We need a different set of values”

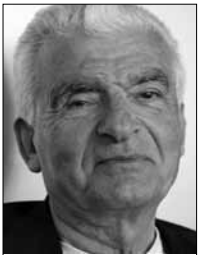
Interview with Dr Argyris Sfountouris

*thk.* One of the victims of the financial crisis and currency war, with all its economic and political consequences, is EU member and euro-state Greece. After the country was driven into the debt trap in the 80s and 90s, it was taken under the thumb of the EU, the IMF and the ECB. To avoid bankruptcy, the state was granted government loans that are, however, tied to harsh conditions, and – as the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said – accompanied by “a loss of sovereignty”. What this means for Greece and its people, who the victims of this policy are, and what role Germany plays in this becomes evident in the following interview with the Greek expert Argyris Sfountouris.

*Current Concerns:* Greece has been driven into a corner by the euro crisis and the severe restrictions imposed on it, as well as by the sometimes sharp tones coming from Germany. What is your view on this whole development?

*Argyris Sfountouris:* Before the Second World War, there was a Germany-friendly attitude within certain circles.

**“So that this would never happen again.”**



(picture thk)

*thk.* When he was 4 years old, Argyris Sfountouris survived the massacre of innocent civilians in Distomo / Greece committed by a German SS division, while his parents and 30 relatives were murdered. Argyris

Sfountouris was brought to an orphanage in Athens before he could make the trip to Switzerland in order to recover from the traumatic events in the Pestalozzi Children’s Village in Trogen. He left the Children’s Village, which he remained connected to throughout his life, after passing the Matura. He studied and passed his doctorate in mathematics at the ETH in Zurich and was for many years teacher of mathematics at Zurich middle schools. Later, Argyris Sfountouris became involved in the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps and served as an aid worker for instance in Somalia and Indonesia. His whole life he has been dedicated to the commitment for peace, accounting for the Second World War and the reconciliation among the peoples: “so that this would never happen again.”

In the course of the occupation a split occurred in the Greek population, and mostly the Left made up 70 to 80 per cent of the armed resistance. When the Germans had to withdraw in October 1944, the British marched in. In collaboration with the Greek government, which had fled to Cairo, they were ready to take over the country and did not grant any participation and responsibility in the government to the leftists, who had fought with great effort and with many victims against the Nazi occupation government. When the East-West confrontation after the war led into the Cold War, Churchill prevented anybody of the left, regardless of whether communist or social democrat from assuming a role in the government. This decision was preceded by regular street battles with students protesting against the dictates of the English at the end of 1944, and who were downright slaughtered by English soldiers. Although there was a later attempt to come to an agreement, some months later the Civil War broke out, which lasted until August 1949.

*Who was controlling the fate of the country during that period?*

Many who had collaborated with the Nazis during the occupation, came to power after the Civil War and occupied important positions. In 1944 that was not possible because these people were known. One of these persons is *Konstantinos Karamanlis* himself. He was suspected to have collaborated with the occupying Germans, but later historians claimed that no documents could be found... However, we do know that some of the ministers he gathered around himself in the 50s had been rewarded during the German occupation with stolen Greek goods and confiscated Jewish assets for their collaboration with the Nazis. Karamanlis himself was appointed prime minister in 1955. After 1949 things became quite preposterous. When the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, *George Papandreou* was the first foreign prime minister to deliver a speech at the German Bundestag. This happened because the U.S. was no longer willing to take up direct responsibility in Europe after the founding of NATO. The responsibility for Greece was fatally delegated to Germany. To this day, they have “ensured order” as the U.S. representative in Greece. It was all about the fight against communism, by which one felt still threatened. That was the beginning of the fifties, when West Germany was re-arming and became a member of

NATO; in a way, a reward for the NATO-model state. In return, the Germans promised the U.S. to make sure that Communism would not spread in Europe.

*This is inexplicable. How was this possible considering the crimes the Germans had committed against the civilian population in Greece?*

The Germans had records of many of these collaborators, who now and again – and for many years – played a role in Greece’s politics, and were thus able to blackmail their children and grandchildren. This is the origin of this great dependency on Germany. Otherwise I cannot explain why Germany does not act merely as an advisor and assistant, but above all as a determining factor.

*The German lobby has a big say in Greece. There are German companies that take strong influence on politics. A party functionary of the PASOK has admitted to having channelled millions paid by a German company into the party coffers. Siemens has been in business on a large scale for decades. The company has bought in the state telecommunications company at more than 50 per cent, and it has secured a monopoly on the supply of materials for itself by contracts. There is little entrepreneurial freedom in Greece. Probably this has to do with the strong competition that has arisen by the introduction of the euro, as a way to reduce the risk. The problem with the euro is that the countries have never met the established criteria and that there have never been really effective controls. The budget deficit should not exceed 3 per cent of the gross domestic product. For instance, Germany exceeded that limit, yet without consequences, and therefore set a bad example. It is not fair to accuse only the Southern states. Although they have been rapped on the knuckles, everything continued as ever.*

*How do the people react to this strong influence and pressure from outside?*

They choked back their anger. However, when *Merkel* appeared in front of the media and stroke Greece below the belt with her criticism, there was some resistance in the Greek population. But Minister *Schäuble* was later one of the first who said before the media, “We have benefited most from euro”. – And if anybody benefits, then they benefit at the expense of others. A few weeks later, Mrs *Merkel* also started to talk like that. As a populist

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she did not like to exonerate the Greek. The mood of the population was against Greece, because the Germans allegedly had to pay for the sins of the Greek. But that is not the truth. Since Greece became euro country, Germany's exports to Greece have amounted nine times the imports from Greece. Thus, the German economy has benefited tremendously while Greece has been piling debts.

This cannot continue. I'm reading a book about the conditions in the Congo 100 years ago. *Edward Morel* had set up great resistance against *Leopold II*, who was a brutal exploiter of the Congo, but was considered a humanitarian person in Europe. I was very much reminded of the situation in Greece. There was no direct slave trade, but there were *treaties between Germany and Greece in the 60s*. As compensation for the Second World it was negotiated to bring a large number of workers to Germany, instead of sensible investments in a local industrialization to enable employment in Greece. Or, if I see what is happening in agriculture within the EU, so much has been damaged. *Many vineyards had to be destroyed and vines pulled out, because the EU would only allow a certain type of vine*. There has been no guidance on what they could do otherwise, and so no one invested...

...and today we have the result.

It will always have a more devastating effect if nothing has been built up in your own country. In the 80s, there was hope for a turnaround under *Andreas Papan-dreou*. In his first term, all parties tried to work together to overcome the consequences of civil war and to finally close the political gap – but in the crucial parliamentary session only one conservative MP was present. *There could have been a slow renewal of society*, not like today when 300,000 officials were dismissed at one blow. We could have advanced step by step. *If we compare to Austria, which is roughly comparable with regard to population, there are 150,000 civil servants - in Greece there are 750,000*. That's way too much, but this cannot be solved with a stroke of the pen.

*In addition, the stricken countries are being negatively assessed by private rating agencies and further drawn into the abyss.*

*The high-handedness in the financial services industry is highly questionable*. The rating agencies can of course spur a crisis with their upgrades and downgrades. Therefore I wonder what globalization really is. What kind of system is this? Certainly not a humane, economic one. *This contains*

*a big problem and, ultimately, the risk that there might be wars again*. This has seemed unlikely in the last 50, 60 years, but I must say *that this could be acute within a short time*. *All barriers have gradually been broken down*. There has always been talk that this should be solved in a different manner. Nothing has happened. After the banking crisis of 2008 all the banks were flooded with state money. *The whole banking industry is a curse*. I have advised my friends over and over: Do not take out a loan. Buy and pay what you are able to, anything else must be postponed. And a year later it might no longer be so important, and you can use the money for more pressing things. But the disease of consumption mania is an unstoppable epidemic. It is very serious if a globalized society has become a slave to it, it is worse than the plague. Usually, only a small part of a society can resist. *What we need is to set a new or rather a different kind of values*.

*How is the social situation in Greece? What is the impact of the money Greece has received? It was not meant for the citizens, but for the banks ...*

... for suppliers of weapons.

*How do the people deal with the present situation?*

Due to the fact that wages and pensions have been cut, consumption has declined radically. Pensions had always been very low. One could only survive within a close-knit family. Few received an adequate pension. When a large family has two employed people and two pensioners whose wages and pensions have been reduced, it has a devastating impact. Anything to do with luxury has been abandoned. People do no longer go on holiday. This affects the tourism industry. Besides the months when foreign tourists come, tourism is also a significant additional source of income during the other months, but it only works if people can afford to travel and go on holiday. Night life, as often has been said, used to be honeycombed with festivities, which have declined in recent months. Many stores are closing, one by one. The only shops that do not seem to be affected by the crisis are expensive clothes shops. You wonder how that is possible, who can afford that. Probably this is supported internationally. I cannot imagine how people whose wages and pensions have been cut can afford something like that. Since Greece has taken on the euro, everything has become enormously expensive. It is now cheaper to go shopping in "expensive" Switzerland. I used to do that in Greece, because it was much cheaper. This is no longer the case, and quality has deteriorated as well. There is less control of the goods that are sold.

*In such a situation, solidarity within society and family and mutual aid are very important*.

These have always existed in Greece. Everybody helps each other, even if they do not live in the same place. Most of my extended family live in Athens. Five of my nieces and nephews are married and live in Athens with their children, most of whom are already studying. Whether they will all find a job after graduation is their biggest concern. The grandmothers, for example, my oldest sister – have remained in the village with the two youngest nephews, who did not study and are able to carry on their skilled trade there very well. Those who studied do actually not find jobs in the villages. This has become even worse because everything is centralized. Rural areas have been terribly neglected. Cities have been given preference, and everybody moved to Athens. Although there has been constant talk of decentralization, it has not been implemented.

*We recently read that medical care has become ever worse since the beginning of the crisis and that it is very difficult to obtain important medicines*.

Yes, and these are of course clearly monetary issues. The government has always been a bad payer. Pharmacies issued drugs on prescription, and claimed the money back from health insurance companies, which are mainly run by the government, but did not get anything. Pharmacies could no longer afford that, even less during the crisis, and clearly stated that this could not go on any longer. The hospitals do not receive money from the government either, and thus nobody provides drugs on credit any longer. If you learn that a government agency stands a guarantee, it means there is no guarantee. For hospitals that is fatal.

*This means, there is no guarantee for medical care any longer*.

Exactly. And that used to be totally different. Greece had a very good medical system. Even tourists who needed help did not have to pay. Today you must bring an envelope with a certain amount of money, then it is likely you receive treatment. Nobody wanted to confirm this as directly as that, but this is also understandable as this is something you do not talk about. However, I do not think that it has been invented.

With regard to tax authorities the situation is similar. When you are self-employed, you agree with tax officials over a certain amount, and then your tax burden is reduced. Only self-employed people can do this of course. Employees cannot,

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**"Greece: 'The banking industry ...'"**

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but they are the ones whose pensions and wages have been cut. It is of course not easy for the administration to relearn completely. Especially chief officers need to be replaced – but which minister dares to do that?

*What about the food supply for the people?*

It has been recently organized that citizens can buy potatoes, so to speak directly from farmers – without a lot of middlemen – and pay only one-sixth of the price. This has also quickly become popular with other products. There are many middlemen who want to earn money, and that

is why everything has become so much more expensive since the introduction of the euro. The state should have ensured that this does not happen. It was very difficult for citizens to get a proper relationship to the euro. 1 euro was worth 345 drachmas. Therefore it was difficult to see from the figures what something is worth. Nobody was willing to control this and so everything was more expensive.

*Where do you see a perspective for Greece?*

Yes, this is very difficult. Although I am relieved that so far there has been no greater disaster, it is very questionable if this is really a better development. Better an end

with terror than terror without end. That's what we have at the moment. I cannot see a solution under these conditions; so we will muddle on. Eventually this can lead to an uncontrolled development. We need to renegotiate with the EU, we have the power of veto. But nobody of the government has put this in the balance. However, we *have to develop an alternative*. Of course, one cannot simply remove the load, but then maybe things would have once been clearly stated. The fact that the civil service must be reduced in three or four years is clear. Everything must be planned long-term, but then there would be at least the will that you want to change something about the structure. At the moment, no one talks about it. The government always only reacts. A bit of austerity measures among pensioners, this does not help much. This is a drop in the bucket. This way you cannot save large amounts of money.

*Would the EFTA not be an alternative to Greece?*

It would not be a bad idea, if Greece left the euro. We go through with the big "terror" and leave the euro. After a few years we could build up something from a new base, on our own responsibility without all these mortgages. We would be capable of that. At the moment, well-trained university graduates emigrate, for instance to Switzerland, because they have no real perspectives in Greece. This is of course also a drain for the state. That has always been a trend in the last few years, but not as extreme as it is now, because due to nepotism not the most able got the good jobs, but the kind of relationships you had was crucial. This is a vicious circle and inevitably had to lead to this catastrophe.

*Mr Sfountouris, thank you for this conversation.*

**Austerity Dictate: Greece without medication, hospitals without provisions**

The collapse of the Greek health care system is imminent. The visit of one of our editors in Greece shows it clearly: the Greek health insurances are running out of money. Now they directly call for EU help. The situation in Greek hospitals is becoming ever more dramatic. Thus the situation in the biggest hospital of the northern port city Thessaloniki is representative: no more cardiological examinations and operations have been performed for many days. In a letter the associations of pharmacists addressed the head of the EU task force for Greece, the German financial expert *Horst Reichenbach*, and urgently asked for help. The country needs at least 1, 5 billion euro for medication and medical equipment! "Chaos prevails! But you can't play with human lives", a Greek head physician complains. On the isle of Chios the relatives of the patients have to buy plaster by themselves so that the doctors can treat broken arms and legs. "On TV the Greek politicians are debat-

ing how the country shall be ruled and we don't have any plaster here."

Many hospitals are not able to guarantee and serve food. "Relatives are cooking at home what the doctors tell them and take it to the patients in hospital", a male nurse confirms. The wholesalers of medicine and medical equipment provide for the biggest hospitals only for cash because so far many bills have remained unpaid! A hospital in Larisa announced that toilet paper was running out. "We get by with cut up newspapers." The state alone owes two billion euro to the suppliers of medical equipment. Just as precarious is the situation for patients who have to be cared for at home. They have to pre-pay the money for the medication. For many of these patients the pension is not sufficient. They have to borrow money for food from their relatives and neighbours....

Source: *Vertraulicher Schweizer Brief*, Nr. 1327, 3.7.2012

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

**Petition for the investigation of microspheres**

by *Achim Hucke*

To the German Bundestag

**Microspheres**

The German Bundestag is requested to have examined the composition, origin and clinical implications of the microscopic spheres found in the soils near Hamm, Geesthacht, Jülich and Hanau tested. The results are to be published on websites of the Federal Ministry of the Environment.

**Reasons**

In numerous soil samples from Geesthacht, from Hamm-Uentrop, from Hanau-Wolfgang, and from Jülich shiny silver or black pellets have been discovered. Their diameter varies between a few

microns and less than a millimeter. Natural soil components of this form are not listed in specialized literature.

All sites are located in the vicinity of nuclear facilities. In more distant places from these plants, such pellets have so far not been detected in soils.

The pellets found in the Geesthacht area are suspected to be responsible for the world's largest cluster of leukemia in children there (leukemia cluster Elbmarsch). The investigations of the microspheres launched years of dispute among experts. A final opinion of an authority that comprehensively answers the questions of composition, origin and medical impact of the microspheres has not yet been published.

Since the occurrence of these microspheres represents a nationwide cross-national phenomenon of nuclear technology and suggests a health impairment of the population, the Federal Government is called upon initiating the necessary investigations to answer these questions and make the results available on the website of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

Source: <http://openpetition.de/petition/online/umwelt-und-gesundheit-bodenfunde-in-der-umgebung-von-kernkraftwerken-of-12/06/2012> *Petition für die Untersuchung von Mikrokügelchen*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## The occidental Christian value system as the middle path

Religious instructions at secondary level are the last specific religious education for us ordinary mortals and significantly affect the relation towards faith and towards church institutions!

Therefore for me and the religious instruction I was teaching the cardinal question was: What is a good religion?

Good religion is a sense and taste of the eternal; it must incite maturity and bear the desire for freedom within itself. A religion is good, if it prevents conceit and practices free humbleness in a self-confident manner.

A good religion helps people to successfully master various, chaotic and contradictory experiences in life. Neither is God a guarantor for morality nor is religion a distributor for the philosophy of life, rather are morality and philosophy of life a subject of human rationality and therefore a manifestation of his adulthood.

As a critical and scrutinising Christian I am convinced that Christendom in this sense is a good religion.

For me it is self-evident that all other religions must be appreciated and respect-

ed according to this understanding; only transparency may unfold the required tolerance.

Religion must not be allowed to wed ideology and must not serve power purposes.

Professor *Hans Küng* expressed this clearly! Without peace among religions there is no peace among peoples.

For me another question is what potential of truth and orientation of religious instruction is suitable and can be implemented in a multicultural and pluralistic body of pupils. Against this backdrop I decided in favour of the humanistic-ethical education which takes account of the multi-religious origins of the students, but in spite of this it pursues the aim of the occidental Christian value system understood as a "middle path" as a guide for these lessons.

What may lead to success? Four things are crucial!

1. Personal commitment, emotional and authentic teaching; intellectual integrity, fairness, experience of life and a pinch of humour.

2. Subject-specific competence and professionalism, a total presence and consequent enforcement of discipline.
  3. The selection of the subjects. They must be geared to the needs of the young. In focus must be the values, the virtues, which must be clearly defined and formulated. The expectations of a free, liberal community must be addressed and revealed to the future generation. But also the severely looming problems of a world which has lost its balance in many (interpersonal and humane) sectors must not be ignored.
  4. It is important to create a classroom climate which makes each lesson an experience and that religious instruction becomes the climax of the school week.
- It remains a mystery to me, although it concerns me no longer as a practising teacher, how Ethics and Religion can be separated in future, since one without the other will have no lasting effect and background.

*Thomas Huber*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Letter to  the Editor

### Does the Swiss Federal Council still take the population seriously?

The initiative of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) in order to limit the immigration sits heavily on Federal Councilor *Sommaruga's* stomach, as was evident during her recent press conference. Ultimately, she fears the cancellation of the Bilateral Agreements on the part of the EU. Do we really need to worry about that? The EU countries are far more interested in these agreements than our country. The exports of the EU to Switzerland are for example far higher than our corresponding exports to the EU.

Mrs Sommaruga, however, exactly uses this argument to tempt fate for the Swiss economy. We cannot help feeling that our representatives court the favor of the already too powerful business circles more than that of the people. So she still formally refuses to limit immigration "by measures of the state", although the massive increase of the population already badly overtaxes the infrastructure in various

areas (such as railways, roads, schools, etc.). And concerning the policy on immigrants the people have been waiting in vain for effective measures against the large number of criminals.

On the other hand, commerce and trade can still abuse their power position in the economy. These circles can act independently as for example by refusing to pass on their excessive import gains to the customers or when they massively raise prices for domestic products. To mention only a single example: A local farmer is paid only 53 centimes for a liter of milk. In the store of the same place the customer pays CHF 1.60 a liter, although the product has obtained no accretion.

*Traugott Voegeli-Tschirky, Consul retired, Leibstadt AG/Switzerland*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### Most recent presumption of the Federal Court

With its recent decision The Federal Court tore usurped the right to award the Swiss passport. This is an unseemly intrusion in the separation of powers, a new presumption to the detriment of the communal autonomy.

If the Federal Court usurps more and more executive powers, it becomes more and more vulnerable. Just continue this way, and the Federal Court will soon have lost its credibility.

The Confederate Parliaments are requested!

*Hans-Jacob Heitz, Männedorf*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



# Washington is worth a war: Obama, Iran, and the Israel Lobby

by Dr Stephen J. Sniegowski

When, in 1593, *Henry of Navarre* converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in order to become king of a united France, he is reputed to have said: "Paris is worth a mass." For President Obama, as *Robert Wright*\* points out in his article, "Obama's Drift Toward War With Iran" in "*The Atlantic*" magazine (June 14), his re-election to the presidency would seem to be worth a war. Wright, a senior editor of "*The Atlantic*," writes: "The most undercover story in Washington is how President Obama, under the influence of election-year politics, is letting America drift toward war with Iran." Wright notes that "There are things Obama could do to greatly increase the chances of a negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear problem, but he seems to have decided that doing them would bring political blowback that would reduce his chances of re-election." And the blowback Obama fears is "largely from *Bibi Netanyahu*, AIPAC, and other 'pro-Israel' voices." In short, Obama fears the Israel Lobby more than he opposes a war that would be unnecessary and also of unknown, but possibly immense, consequences.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent that Obama does not want war with Iran, and he is certainly being pilloried by neocons and other members of the Israel Lobby along with Republican hawks for his alleged appeasement of that country, but although he may eschew outright war measures, the fear of the Israel Lobby causes his administration to pursue an inflexible, pro-Israel hard-line diplomacy toward Iran on the nuclear issue that does not include any real quid pro quo; the diplomatic process has been simply geared to demanding that Iran make concessions, with no reciprocation being offered by the United States and its allies.

The United States is unwilling to offer Iran any significant relief from the draconian sanctions imposed on it "even in exchange for Iranian concessions that would have moved the world further away from war," in Wright's words. Most significantly, "Those concessions would have included Iran's ceasing production of uranium enriched to 20-percent levels." Weapons grade uranium is 90 percent enriched, but Western officials have been expressed the dire concern that the 20 percent enrichment version, which is used for medical research purposes, could quickly be converted into nuclear weapons-grade material. (Much lower enrichment levels are used for peaceful nuclear power.) Such an Iranian concession would thus be in line with America's near-term goal of prevent-

ing the 20 percent enrichment and would reduce the chances of war. Even if *Romney* should be elected president, it would be politically more difficult for him to launch an attack, if he so desired; and, if should he think otherwise, it would provide him with more justification not to do it.

Wright's reasoning appears to be perfectly sound. President Obama definitely would seem to have the power to greatly reduce the chances of war with Iran, if he so desired. And Wright also is on the mark when he labels Obama's willingness to improve his election chances by "imperiling peace and America's security" as a "little scandalous," and that it is even "more scandalous" that people in the "Washington establishment" do not complain about it. But Wright also adds the highly questionable claim that the blowback Obama fears "is probably less forbidding than he assumes. And the political upside of successful statesmanship may be greater than he realizes."

However, though the Israel Lobby is not all-powerful, its staunch opposition would be sufficient to tip the scales against Obama in a close election. It should be pointed out that the only two recent US presidents who lost re-election bids – *Jimmy Carter* (1980) and *George H.W. Bush* (1992) – had taken positions antithetical to those of the Israel Lobby and drew its full ire. In short, in political terms Obama's fear of the Israel Lobby is perfectly reasonable for a politician concerned about winning elections, which would seem to be the case for most politicians. And it is obvious that almost all elected politicians act in this manner toward the Israel Lobby – as clearly indicated by the votes in Congress and the extreme pro-Israel rhetoric of most of the Republican presidential candidates this year.

And to make the political power of Israel crystal clear to Obama, multi-billionaire Zionist *Sheldon Adelson*, who during the Republican primaries had single-handedly kept *Newt Gingrich* in the race, has pledged to spend \$100 million or more to defeat President Obama. Adelson is an ultra-hard-line *Likudnik* hawk, but Obama must realize that there are many more less-ardent pro-Israel magnates who would come out openly against his re-election if he should dare to make an open effort to establish peace with Iran, currently Israel's foremost enemy.

Moreover, a contingency which Wright neglects to consider is that if it appears that Obama is falling behind *Romney* in the polls, which is completely possible given the state of the economy (and

some current polls actually show *Romney* slightly ahead in the nation-wide popular vote), involvement in a war with Iran could likely enable him to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat – the American people patriotically uniting behind the President in wartime.

*Phil Weiss*, a very courageous American Jew who dares to openly oppose the Israel Lobby, looks at Wright's article in a very different light. He finds the very fact that a mainstream individual in a mainstream publication would dare to make mention of the Israel Lobby to be an issue of utmost significance. He writes: "I believe this is a new consensus: outspoken Americans are actually building a new understanding in the global discourse, that the United States is hamstrung by the special relationship with Israel."<sup>2</sup>

If there were such a consensus, Obama and other politicians would begin to stand up against the policies advocated by the Israel Lobby. But the fact is that nothing approaching a "consensus" of "outspoken Americans" opposing the Israel Lobby has emerged, as Wright appropriately notes when he refers to the issue of Iran and the Israel Lobby as the "most undercover story in Washington."

So it would appear that President Obama will continue his policy of "drift toward war with Iran," at least until after the November election. Should he be re-elected, perhaps he would change in his second term, but he still must consider the effect such a move would have on the political success of his second term, his legacy, and, as a relatively young man, his career after the presidency, all of which could be seriously jeopardized by his taking positions that run afoul of the Israel Lobby. •

<sup>1</sup> [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/06/obamas-drift-toward-war-with-iran/258433/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/06/obamas-drift-toward-war-with-iran/258433/)  
<http://bit.ly/KFRdu9>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/wright-obama-is-drifting-toward-war-with-iran-out-of-pathetic-fear-of-blowback-from-the-lobby.html>  
<http://bit.ly/LSc1Ci>

\* Robert Wright is a senior editor at "The Atlantic" and the author of "The Evolution of God", a "New York Times" bestseller. He also writes articles for "The New Yorker", "The New York Times Magazine", "Foreign Policy", "The New Republic", "Time and Slate" and commentaries for "The New York Times", "The Washington Post" and "The Financial Times".

# A disrupted country

## Report: From Pakistan to Kabul: Observations in Afghanistan

by *Matin Baraki*

You generally reach the capital of Afghanistan only on detours. It is also advisable to not show that you have come travelling from Europe. By the time you reach the country at the Hindu Kush, you already have a three-day beard, like many Afghans have in these days.

When I arrived in Peshawar from Frankfurt via Dubai, the airport to my surprise was no longer the “Peshawar International Airport,” but “Pacha Khan International Airport”. In the multi-ethnic nation of Pakistan, the Pashtuns are obviously becoming more confident. The party they dominate, the “Awami National Party” even reigned in the border province to Afghanistan for a time. For some time the Pashtuns have been leaving their mark there. The “North West Frontier Province” (NWFP) has been renamed “Pashtunkhwa Khaibar.” A clearer signal could hardly be conceivable. And the airport in Peshawar now bears the name of the legendary Pashtun leader and comrade of *Mahatma Gandhi*, *Abdul Ghafar Khan*, known as “Pacha Khan”. He was expressly in favor of a united Indian subcontinent following independence from Great Britain. Whether the other peoples of Pakistan will act as the Pashtuns remains to be seen.

A possibly independent Baluchistan south of the Pashtun areas, a possibility that has been raised by some US politicians since early 2012 could lead to the destruction of Pakistan. Therefore, all political forces have categorically rejected the interference of US agencies in the internal affairs of their country. The issue was hotly debated in the media. Observers are of the opinion that the US political class wants to signal to the Pakistani leadership that the country will be split if its political and military elite turn away from the US and move closer to the People’s Republic of China. It is doubtful whether the US strategists are doing a favor to its closest ally since the start of the Cold War with this provocative attitude. A division of Pakistan would at least bring about a regional conflict between the three nuclear powers, China, India and Pakistan, in which Afghanistan and Iran would also be involved.

### Across the border

After a brief stay in Peshawar Afghan passengers from Dubai take a taxi through the Khyber Pass towards Kabul. In “Turkham” on the Afghan-Pakistani border, it looks like Judgment Day. Thousands of people pass through on both sides of the border in all kinds of vehicles. Women, men, old and young people, many fami-

lies with children, the sick who come to Peshawar for treatment because of lack of medical care and drugs in Afghanistan are romping about the checkpoint.

After crossing the border it is necessary to take another taxi. A driver who drives calmly is as rare as a winning ticket in the lottery. You become dizzy as the car races up and down the switchbacks of the Khyber Pass. The Afghans who live in Europe would like to put on seat belts, but the vehicles have either no belts or they do not work. Almost everybody prays to Allah with hands raised that he will arrive safely in Kabul. Now one hopes not to have to pass any checkpoints of the Afghan police forces. Otherwise, the first dollar bills will have to be paid as a bribe. To refuse would make things even more expensive – because the police chief generally demands even more. All the passengers whose destination is in the outskirts of the capital use a bypass to avoid the “Capital of Thieves” as Kabul is called here. In addition, the city is dirty and clogged with vehicles, most of which would never get a MOT certificate in Germany. The atmosphere takes away your breath.

*Faisal*, a student from the vicinity of Kabul tells of his first adventurous journey to Peshawar. He went by truck. The driver, wise from experience, had prepared hundreds of Afghani and Pakistani Kaldar notes: From Kabul to Peshawar, he had to pay, without exception, at all the checkpoints, says *Faisal*.

### Rampant corruption

In my encounters with old and new friends from Kabul, I have to admit that after a period of optimism they have now lost all hopes to ever have an Afghanistan worth living in. *Babrak*, an able businessman, had accumulated decades of experience in Pakistan and Dubai, while earning good money. When he learned that he could still do better business in Afghanistan, he went to Kabul. His used car business is going well, only his dealings with local authorities has left him desperate. “I’d rather be a Bangladeshi,” he says. When you hear something like that from the mouth of a proud Afghan, something must indeed have happened: “If I have to do some business with an authority, no matter what, the clerk doesn’t even look at me. Once I have presented my request, he answers “Yes, heard it” and switches on his mobile phone and plays music. That is to say: If you don’t want to pay any money, then at least charge my phone. If you’re not willing, you can expect to have to appear several times in his office,” angry *Babrak*

says. *Farid*, a somewhat intellectual businessman, adds that corruption in Afghanistan has long since taken over the foreign private and government institutions. Even diplomats insist on favors.

*Babrak* is a conservative man. He has even persuaded his younger brother, *Ahmad Shah*, to withdraw his daughter *Mine* from school. I was very sad, because I wanted to enroll the very decent and hard-working *Mine* in my education project to promote Afghan refugee children. She is now doomed to get married soon and to lead a life as a housewife and mother. This will deprive her of any prospect of a better life as a woman. As I spoke to *Babrak* about his own daughter, he replied that he would not even let her attend school before puberty began.

### Karzai’s masterstroke

In the second week of February, Afghan President *Hamid Karzai* introduced seven ministers who have already been working for years, once again to the *Wolesi Jirga*, the people’s representation. Since these candidates had been rejected several times by the parliamentarians, they have little chance of getting their approval so easily. Therefore, tumultuous scenes could be observed in parliament in early March. Some parliamentarians reported that the prospective ministers organized proper parties in luxury hotels for a number of deputies in order to win them over. And this is indeed what happened!

### Heroes of the resistance

End of February, the couple *Rahima* and *Mubin* are our guests for a few days. They live in a village about 15 kilometers outside of Kabul, and they are illiterate. After a short time the conversation fell on *Sabur*, who is called “a hero of the resistance against the US occupiers”. *Sabur* has recently shot two foreign advisers to the Interior Ministry in Kabul. *Mubin* also speaks with satisfaction of “an other hero” who killed seven ISAF soldiers at Kabul airport a few months ago.

Due to the burning of the Holy Koran by US soldiers in early March at the US military base in Bagram, the Mullah of the central mosque of my native village *Schinah* calls for jihad, the holy war. There are demonstrations in many parts of the country in which several people are killed by the occupiers. The Americans have ruined their reputation at the Hindu Kush so thoroughly that the Afghans now consider them the only culprits when something

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bad has happened. Although they are quite aware that other NATO countries are also present in Afghanistan. "We should no longer remain passive", the mullah of our village mosque calls out. "You shall not riot and hurt your own countrymen, but fight against the infidels. I'm not afraid, even if they killed me." The "King" – referring to Karzai – "is not our king. He has nothing to say." The people have scornfully been calling Karzai "Charsai" for long, which means donkey. "The United States rock their own boat in Afghanistan so that they can stay longer in the country. Last year they took Taliban fighters in helicopters to northern Afghanistan," my interlocutors say.

"We do not believe that any resistance can operate in such a secured city like Kabul without external help. If the West were successful in Afghanistan, they would drive us from our land. God bless Afghanistan. The people in Afghanistan have no weapons at hand, otherwise there would be a national uprising. The current Afghan government is no government at all, it is only named as such. The land around our village has been stolen by the ground mafia, and where is the government?" Mubin sighs.

**Memories of Soviet times**

"It is commonly observed that people worry about their future and are no longer afraid of the kaffers" (the „non-believers“). In his opinion the "kaffers" are very anxious. "Despite their huge war machine they hide behind at least six walls wherever they live or are stationed. They are such cowards. The Moslems are not afraid", Mubin stresses. Rahima adds, that the planes of the "kaffers" had fired brand rockets. Several times they had torched the harvest and acres of her village that way. "The Americans take our land and do nothing for us", Mubin opines. "Those Soviets in the old days had been non-believers too, but they also gave a lot to us", the two strictly observant moslems, who are both "Haji" as well, agree. Mubin has even done the pilgrimage to Mekka twice, because he wasn't sure he had done everything right the first time. Knowing that he and his family members had been fighting the Soviet army, I am surprised how positively they view those times in hindsight. Now they compare the supply situation regarding food and household goods. The majority of people had been given a "voucher" during the "Soviet time". With that they could purchase many things in state or co-operative owned shops at bargain prices.

For Afghan conditions, Rahima is an intellectual among illiterates. Although

she can neither read nor write, she talks like an educated woman. She sent her children to school, including the daughters. Both she and her husband keep talking about their first son, *Saryalei*, who was blown up by a missile of the Northern alliance while he was praying when the Mujahedeen invaded Kabul in 1992. They comfort themselves with the notion that he went directly to paradise because he had been martyred during prayer. Rahima and Mubin break into tears when they talk about this son, who had graduated from the technical school "Jangalak", which had been built by the Soviet Union in the 70s. They had expected him to become the breadwinner for the family.

Rahima has done all she could to prevent her granddaughter *Schamim* to be taken out of school. The paternal grandmother didn't want her to go there. As a last resort Rahima would have taken the girl to her house to make sure she could get educated.

**Land theft conducted by the state**

Land used for agriculture in and around Kabul is being expropriated by those in power who want to build houses there. Even cemeteries have fallen victim to the pressure exerted by the building mafia who are allied with the Karsai administration. In my village the people have surrounded their cemetery with a wall to make sure it wouldn't be claimed and flogged by some dubious building tycoon. Two years ago the villagers had to fight off an alleged construction entrepreneur who claimed huge chunks of land with forged papers. At some point this conflict was close to escalating into an armed conflict, two villagers tell me.

When driving from the neighboring provinces towards Kabul, newly erected buildings on both sides of the road catch one's eye, building is still under way on many sites. They have also led to more and more land being covered with roads. The extent of agricultural ground turned into building areas is alarming. Should things go on like that unrestrictedly, it won't take too long before there is actually no agricultural ground left in Afghanistan. Then there would be no way around importing even more food than it is the case today.

**Kabul loves just the Rich**

Some Afghan women used to manufacture handbags at home. *Haram Gul* from a suburb of the capital Kabul had been one of them, as her mother tells me. That way she could contribute to enhancing the family income. Since the Karsai administration have been pursuing their "open door" policy, these manufacturers can no longer compete with imported Chinese cheap products and are forced to give up. "Now she stands on one leg", the Afghan woman says which means that now it is

up to the husband to sustain the family of seven on his own.

Those street hawkers who used to swarm around at various crossroads and squares in Kabul's old town have now been chased away by the law enforcement authorities. That way they lost their only source of income. Marketers in the suburb of Kabul called the "Arsanqimat", which is a cheap building ground area, have been affected by such measures, too. I am told that these people are totally desperate now since they don't know how to make a living. There is – of course – no court they could appeal to.

**Tokenistic Private University?**

Between the 8 and 11 March I have several meetings with students of the private university "Khane Nur" (House of Light). Since many college graduates have no opportunity to study at a state-owned university they are forced to enter a private one. The ones owned by the state are in fact exclusively reserved to the children of the ruling class. The students have a lot to complain about "Khane Nur". They pay monthly fees equivalent to 120 US-dollars and more. This is too much for Afghan conditions. Moreover, unlike the usual way in Afghanistan they don't get one day off but two. When the university moved to another place there were no lectures but nevertheless the same fees were charged. When the students complained the dean of the university got an alleged ministry of education controller in who made the students pay the fees. The faculty staff usually give only introductory and superficial lectures. Any further knowledge they want to gain means they have to pay the lecturers again for additional private courses. All course materials have to be purchased from the university. For using the library some more fees are charged on an hourly basis. In summary the students characterized the university which partially belongs to the son of defense minister General *Wardag* as a mere money making machine.

On 8 March I meet Faisal. He takes evening IT classes at "Khane Nur". Living outside of Kabul, he has to get home after the lectures end at 8 pm. In December last year a fake taxi driver picked him up in Kabul around 9 pm. At the next crossroads he pointed a gun at him and forced him to surrender his watch, his mobile phone and money. After this bitter and dangerous experience Faisal managed to escape in time on two similar occasions.

**The drug chopper**

On 10 March "Nur-TV" broadcasts a sermon of the mullah of "Wasir Akhbar Khan"-mosque which is situated in Ka-

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bul's diplomats' quarter. In this sermon the mullah endorses burkhas being worn world-wide and elaborates with great gusto on how Muslim women in France were fighting for their right to wear the full-body veil. He criticizes the Kabul administration's ruling against their female administrative officers and members of parliament doing their work in full cover. Why are Sikhs allowed to wear a turban while our women may not wear a burkha, the Mullah's asks. The reason why his sermon is dedicated mainly to women's issues this time is because it is the International Women's Day. In a sideline he mentions the general disadvantage of women without going into further detail.

The press reports that high-ranking officials of the Afghan leadership are actually involved in drug dealing. This is neither new nor exciting. A real sensation however is their report on 10 March about narcotics having been detected in an Afghan air force helicopter at Kabul airport. This proves that drug trafficking in Afghanistan isn't merely an issue of a drug mafia as such but one that extends into every structure of the state apparatus!

**NATO spring offensive**

NATO announced their spring offensive in the southern provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand. Already on 10 March 2012 five civilians in the province of Logar, which is south of Kabul, and according to differing accounts another 16–18 civilians on 11 March in the Panjwai district of Kandahar province were shot and killed while sleeping in their houses, officially by one member of the US Green Berets special unit who went berserk. There were nine children and three women among them. Several families had victims to mourn, in one family as many as eleven members. This mass murder could turn into a symbol similar to the massacre of My Lai, Vietnam, in March 1968. And this is only the first sphere of NATO's spring hell in Af-

ghanistan. ISAF declared the soldier acted alone. Relatives of the affected families are convinced though that the amok run was not the deed of one single US soldier. An investigative commission sent to Kandahar by Karsai came to the conclusion on 17 March that 15 to 20 soldiers must have been involved in the atrocity and burnt some of their victims afterwards. The members of the commission demanded the perpetrators be put on trial in Afghanistan. Numerous members of the national assembly from the southern provinces left the session in protest and demanded punishment of the US-soldier.

**Patriots not required**

On 14 March 2012 I talk with *Abdullah*. He is head of a department in the Communication Ministry of in Kabul. With his trimmed beard, he gives the impression of a faithful man. But his comments surprise me. Immediately the conversation turns to the Afghan policy under the left-wing government before 1992 and thereafter under the Mujahideen. "In the period of office of Dr *Najibullah* you could still rely on people. They have properly fulfilled their duties in the offices. Now seriously, orders given from the powers on top are not taken seriously even from the offices on lowest level. They are always able to find some excuses to delay the matter. Behind that is, of course, baksheesh." "In today's Afghanistan honesty is frowned upon", says *Abdullah*. High positions were filled by people who are not even able to sign a letter at the right place. Above all patriots are terribly lacking in the country. "We need at least one generation to get Afghanistan out of the quagmire," summarizes *Abdullah* pessimistically. The intellectuals were mourning after *Najibullah's* government and the simple people after the Taliban era. "Everywhere one goes, there are positions established like cancer. These are checkpoints that are supposed to provide security. In fact, they host robbers, thieves, highwaymen. Their leaders have made considerable wealth", notes *Abdullah* and says goodbye with sad, tearful eyes.

The reason why the Taliban as a "regional power of order" seem to be attractive for many people, is the enormous decline in moral standards and the omnipresent insecurity besides corruption. Corruption, drugs, alcoholism and prostitution, all of which were mercilessly punished under the Taliban, are nowadays spread widely. That sickens the people and pushes them into the lines of the Taliban.

The Afghan Attorney General, *Aleku-zai* calls several high-ranking politicians to account, including one of Karzai's appointed senators, because of corruption, kidnapping and receiving stolen goods, the media reports on a regular basis since mid-March. But *Aleku-zai* has a little problem. The accused have a direct line to the top. When I talk about it with a local, it comes like a shot: "it would never have happened under the Taliban. They would have made short work with such criminals, even if they were their own members." he protection of criminals by the Karzai administration causes many Afghans to increasingly long for the Taliban. "Afghanistan needs to be a state under the rule of law," emphasized the persons I talked to. "But we are light years away from this", the young dentist *Zaki* says. He points out that in regions which are under Taliban control, no one turns to the state authorities. Because people know that they won't do anything.

The "Tarjuman", in this way NATO and other international organizations are called by translators, become very hated because in general they are also agents. "I therefore understand that the Taliban make short work with them", says *Hamid*, my last conversation partner, before the departure from this disrupted country at the Hindu Kush. •

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Green-red Baden Wuerttemberg

## “Municipalities are blackmailed to submit a request for “Gemeinschaftsschulen”\*

by Karl Müller

In the coalition agreement of the red-green government of Baden-Wuerttemberg it says that a “policy of an equal footing with the citizens was the trademark” for the red-green government and the parliamentary majority.

“The representative parliamentary democracy would be completed to a greater extent by elements of direct democracy. [...] The strengthening of the cooperation and participation of the people is to become an essential feature of a new political culture in Baden-Wuerttemberg.”

The actual policy of the state government, however, looks quite different. The opposition party in the state, the CDU, had jumped at the opportunity given by the coalition agreement, and District Chairman of Southern-Wuerttemberg, *Thomas Bareiss*, had demanded a referendum on the introduction of the “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school) by the end of June: “The community school will change the educational landscape to such an extent that this cannot happen without people’s participation. It is all about the question in what ways we are going to position ourselves in educational politics in the following decades.”

The state government’s opinion on more direct democracy, has however been revealed by the statement of the Minister of Education on the claim for a referendum. In an interview with the “Southwest News” from Ulm (3 July), she avoided the question, and she considered the call for a referendum as nothing else but the “expression of the CDU’s condition”. Furthermore, the minister declared that already the elections of March 2011 had been a referendum – a revealing statement on the content of what the government in Stuttgart understands by a “referendum” and more direct democracy.

The minister’s statement was not just an error. On visiting events on the subject “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school) in Baden-Wuerttemberg you see immediately the great controversy the central project of the new state government has provoked.

In public discussions the state government is hiding itself behind empty phrases thus avoiding an open and concrete debate on the educational concept and the political consequences of the community school project. Instead, the local education authorities, especially in the rural areas specific of the federal state, are increasingly put under pressure to either apply for a “Gemeinschaftsschule” (com-

munity school), or to abandon the school site sooner or later.

“We are being blackmailed by the State Government to request for the establishment of a sick type of school, no local councilor could politically afford to completely abandon its school location, irrespective of the type of school.” Such a statement of a local councilor from the Southern Baden area reflects the opinion of many local councilors confronted by the choice between two evils.

Despite all this the red-green government keeps telling us that there is no intention to decree “Gemeinschaftsschulen” (community schools) from above, and that the local education authorities can decide “freely”, an obvious propaganda formula to convince all the communities threatened by the loss of their school location. “Opt for the “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school)!” this is all these communities get to hear from the government. Alternatives to both school closure and community school, such as school associations (with closer cooperation between different types of schools) are not approved of by the responsible ministry.

The degree of manipulation applied by the green-red state government in generating a certain atmosphere, is demonstrated by a survey of the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (Institute for election research) commissioned by the state government (reported by Welt online on 10 July). According to this survey, 69 percent of respondents pronounce themselves in favour of the “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school). Further down you learn that the respondents were confronted with just two alternatives, either the closing of the school in their town or the “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school).

There is another important point which has not been discussed in public yet. Whether a school can continue to exist in a municipality, depends on the so-called public demand. Demand means above all: There must be a sufficient number of pupils in the place. The community school has been exempted from this rule. While all other types of school have to fight for their existence, the “Gemeinschaftsschule” (community school) has obtained a guarantee for its existence by law. It is easy to explain why. The red-green government wants to give preference to the new type of school by all means, while the other school types are to vanish step by step. That also goes with the fact, that

the state government has now announced its plan to redistribute several hundreds of teaching posts from high schools to “Gemeinschaftsschulen” (community schools) – although there are expected to be more pupils in high-schools for the new school year.

For the rest, the question remains, whether there also exists a hidden political agenda of the state government. Fact is, that the red-green educational policy in Baden-Wuerttemberg has led to great uncertainty and disturbance at the schools and among the parents of the state.

About one week before the end of the school year, the schools, especially the vocational schools still lack a reliable basis of staff planning for the next school. The state is not ruled “with a steady hand” but by using a kind of “shock”-doctrine. The latest “shock” is the government’s announcement, that in the years to come more than 8,000 teaching posts in the state will be frozen with the official explanation that also in schools, one would just had to economize.

Schools and teachers’ unions, even the “Educators’ Union (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, GEW)”, who was up to now in agreement with the government, are standing on their heads. The GEW’s chair woman of the state said that the promises of the government’s coalition agreement to provide for better education were evidently “no longer worth the paper they are printed on.”

Is this only proof of the political ‘incapacity’ of *Kretschmann* and Co? Or is there more to it? Fact is that Green-Red in Germany plays a leading role in annihilating the national democracies in Europe – also in Germany – and in establishing an undemocratic EU ‘state’. Those who want to abrogate democracy on a grand scale are not interested in a school where children are educated to become responsible citizens willing to corroborate democracy. To reach their aim they are causing turmoil and a feeling of uncertainty. •

\* A type of school where ability-mixed and age-mixed groups of pupils learn together, however in an individualized manner, i.e. every one with his own special teaching aids.



## Lettuce, beets and tomatoes from our own seed again

### The European Court of Justice (ECJ) repealed a controversial EU directive which banned the use of private seed

*The EU had been forcing the seeds of agro-multinationals upon their farmers by banning the production of native seeds. Now again Europe's farmers are allowed to produce and market seeds from the old plant varieties themselves. That was declared by the European Court thus suspending a controversial EU directive which had forbidden this so far. The ruling is a severe setback for seed companies like Bayer and Monsanto, which dominate the market.*

cc. The EU directive, which has been repealed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) now, had prohibited farmers to produce and sell seed from the old, not officially approved varieties of plants. For consumers, farmers and agro-industry the judgment now is of great importance. The judgment was based on the case that the seed-farming network *Kokopelli* in France had been sued by the industrial seed company *Graines Baumax*. The network had more than 461 seeds of plant varieties on offer, which were not registered in official catalogs of varieties. *Graines Baumax* was sued for unfair competition and claimed for damages of 50,000 and a ban on the marketing of seed not registered in the official catalog of varieties.

#### **Setback for Bayer, Monsanto and Syngenta**

The recent judgment is not only a severe setback for transnational seeds and agricultural companies such as *Bayer*, *Monsanto* and *Syngenta*. At present these

seed corporations dominate more than 65 percent of the global seed market. On 12 July the television station *n-tv* gave a voice to *Heike Schiebeck* from the Austrian branch of the Association of Small Farmers *Via Campesina* on its website. She quoted former US Secretary of State *Henry Kissinger*: "Whoever controls the seeds controls the world." The representative of small farmers believes that agricultural companies want to secure the intellectual property rights to all crop plants – even to non-genetically engineered plants. She says that patents on non-wrinkled tomatoes, a special anti-cancer broccoli and an especially sweet melon already prove that. *n-tv* reproduces the point of view of the smallholders' representative as follows: Farmers are driven even further into the dependence on agricultural companies by means of more and more rights to plants, because those seeds require special fertilizers and pesticides for optimal production. Then farmers who have agreed will spend five times more money for fertilizers and pesticides than for the seed itself, says the farmwoman.

#### **Farmers to decide for themselves**

The Advocate General of the ECJ, *Juliane Kokott* considers the dispute over the seeds as a struggle for the independence of farmers. In her legal advice, she took the line that, via the marketing ban of old varieties, "farmers were forced to use more productive varieties – also against their will if necessary". But in her opin-

ion, as reported by *n-tv*, farmers should be allowed to decide themselves what varieties they want to grow. They even might give up cultivating their fields. As the Advocate General of the ECJ she pointed out that the official ban on unapproved varieties had also resulted in a massive loss of biodiversity and a potentially dangerous predominance of industrial seeds: The possibility could not be ruled out that – by the cause of banning unapproved varieties of plants – plants would be missing in future – plants that would be able to adapt better to a climate change or new diseases than today's prevailing varieties.

#### **Supply will be more colorful**

In addition, the consumer's choice would be restricted regarding agricultural products: In their own gardens they would only be allowed to grow what would have been in line with with the EU directive. The TV station writes about the very practical consequences of the judgment: "As a result of ECJ ruling, the EU Commission has to lift the ban on the marketing of old varieties now and to invite the member states to follow. In organic food stores and on local markets consumers may soon enjoy vegetables which seemed to have disappeared for a long time and which may not be so firm but might be even more aromatic." •

Sources: *n-tv.de*, *dpa/AFP* of 12 July 2012, [www.n-tv.de/politik/EuGH-staerkt-Rechte-der-Bauern-article6716111.html](http://www.n-tv.de/politik/EuGH-staerkt-Rechte-der-Bauern-article6716111.html)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Spectacular water worlds

by Dr Dr h.c. Raimund Rodewald, General Manager of the Stiftung für Landschaftsschutz (Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation)

The agricultural use of steep slopes in the low rainfall regions of the Inner and Rhaetian Alps of the Valais, in parts of Ticino and the Grisons, as well as in Munster and the Engadine basically requires two things: first soil, second water, the latter being used less for the rather modest grain farming but the more for gardens, meadows and pastures. Just like the soil that had to be transported to the terraced fields or had at least to be brought back up again after a runoff, (additional) water had to be led over there through artificially created channels. These water supply channels – in the Valais called “Suonen” or with the French word “bisse” – were poetically called “sacred waters” due to their vital function – based on *Jakob Christoph Heer’s* novel “An heiligen Wassern” (1898). Due to the missing primary sources of water along the sunny, south-facing slopes, it was drawn off the glacial streams and transported in an elaborate canal system in open, often mile-long channels in a steady slope to the villages and meadows. There it could be used under certain condition. The water rights were written down in documents, which are among the oldest written documents of many Valais communities. Construction and maintenance were usually incumbent on private cooperative providers, composed of families who were dependent on water supply and who negotiated the maintenance obligations with each other. The strictly regulated water rights designated specific times for each water user and were regulated in a “water turn” (the cycle of water supply). The maintenance of water channels was bound to selected individuals who were assigned certain names according to their respective roles. Thus, for example, in the Valais it was the “Metral”, in the Upper Valais it was the “Wasservogt” who were responsible for the maintenance work. *Maurus Schmid* quotes a written reference from the year 1040 on the issue of water rights, which conveys information about the distribution of the Augstbord water.<sup>1</sup> So the water channels are part of an ancient anthropogenic creation of landscape. Written testimony from the Valais have been numerous since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They are historical water worlds amid dry hillsides, still a current issue today and gaining increasing significance due to the climate change.

Many water channels were created after the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a result of an agriculture that was changing from the predominant original field farming and viticulture to cattle farming and vegetation management, which accordingly required more water. The water conduit “Wiigartneri” (viticulturer) from Baltschiedertal was docu-



*The Bisse de Sillonin near Saint-Léonard and the Bisse de Lentine near Sion still serve current water supplies for vineyards. (picture Giro Annen)*

mented as early as in 1377 and had probably served for the irrigation of vines according to its name. Some impressive water channels supplied the vineyards around Sion. They branched off the water from the Valley of Lienne (Bisse de Clavau from about 1450 and Bisse de Sillonin before 1400) or from the Valley of Sionne (Bisse de Lentine, and as a derivation from the Lac de Montorge the Bisse de Montorge, both created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The vineyards around Siders had to be irrigated by water channels as well. In 1885 *Victor Pulliat* remarked: “Pas de Bis, pas de vigne” (No Bisse, no vine). The water was then passed over the pieces of broken slate (“Brisées”) which covered the vineyard’s ground. This caused a certain natural fertilization because of the greasy, potassium and phosphate-containing shale. Until today, a few wineries operate this traditional vineyard water supply out of their own conviction.

Travelers have frequently described the impressive construction with wooden channels hanging along the steep rock walls. As early as in 1550 *Sebastian Münster* praised the importance of water for Leuk, which was more important than the wine: “Es haben die ynwoner dises fleckens gar gross arbeit/ unnd lassend auch ein mercklichen kosten gon auff das wasser/ das sie neben an den hohen felsen mit keneln geleiten in die matten so an den bergen ligen und in die höhe sich ziehen. As thut man aber nit allein zu Leugk/ sunder auch durch das gantz land/ das tumb die ynwoner sprechen/ es gang inen mere kosten und arbeit auff das wasser dann auff den wein.“ (More about Münster on page 80) (engl: The inhabitants of this

hamlet have a lot of work and pay high costs for the water that they conduct in channels along the high rocks into the pastures that are situated along the hills and stretch out on slopes. This is not only done in Leuk but all across the country so that the people gloomily say that the water causes them more cost and work than the wine.)

How dizzying the paths along the water channels could be is reflected in a text about the “Kännelweg on Rawilpass” (probably meaning the spectacular Bisse d’Ayent) by *Franz Lauterburg* from 1854: “The eyes look directly into a dreadful abyss. From above, the rocks were inclined to such an extent that in order to move forward one had to kneel down. And finally I saw the narrow path, which had allowed more or less secure walking so far, fading away and becoming one with the even narrower walls curbing the water. It now meant advancing on loose stones, splashed by the water. I could not use the walking stick any longer: Because when I wanted to put it firmly at the bottom of the channel, its tip touched the overhanging wall. To ward off the dizziness, I had taken my hat tilted to one side to cover my eyes.”<sup>2</sup> The Bisses d’Ayent dates from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The wooden channels have been reconstructed in the 1990s in Section Torrent-Croix for demonstration purposes, but are no longer accessible.

Since the Middle Ages channels with a total length of about 20,000 km have been built in the Valais. The longest water supply channel, the Bisse de Saxon, was

### "Spectacular water worlds"

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32 km long. Around 1900, 200 channels were in operation with a length of about 2,000 km. In 1992, a total of about 1,750 km of water channels was recorded in the Valais. With the water supply systems installed from 1930 onward and the appropriate government subsidies the traditional practice of vine and meadow water supply gradually disappeared. Many prominent conduits which could only be maintained at great expense were transferred into tunnels, set in concrete shells or were entirely piped. Even today, the water supply systems with hydrants and pumping systems still use the water from the water supply channels. They were often furnished, especially in the vineyards, with ugly concrete facilities, pressure pipes and all kinds of other pipes. The charm of the former water channels fell by the wayside. The example of the Bisse de Vex and its concrete installations was complained about by *Auguste Vautier* as early as in 1928: The water supply system certainly had their advantages and the concrete did its job. But this would not always correspond with the destinations for tourists.<sup>3</sup> *Walter Schmid* also criticized in 1955, "Many of the conduits have lost their romanticism in recent years, because the engineers have replaced the wildest sections of the cliffs by gallery constructions and the wooden channels by bare cement pipes as part of their modernization. Ever more of the ancient water supply channels have followed this path and on this occasion you cannot avoid the question, whether one day, when technology has modernized the picturesque old constructions step by step and replaced them with the modern sobrieties of our own time, a voice in the confederate countries may be raised, which feels obliged to call for the protection of the ancient "Bisses" created by hard work and commanding effort and worries."<sup>4</sup> This voice has meanwhile being raised.

As early as in 1920, *Louis Courthion* had pointed to the significance of the water supply channels for tourism.<sup>5</sup> Numerous books and excellent artistic photographic documentation of the culture of the people and the landscapes of the Valais have contributed to a new awareness since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Films did educational work as well: "An heiligen

Wassern" (1960) and "Wasserwosser – Die Waale" a film from the Vinschgau valley which mentioned the "Niwärch" from Ausserberg in the early 1980s.

Since that time, a real rediscovery of the Valais water supply channels can be observed. The umbrella organization for Switzerland Tourism declared "L'année des Bisses" for the Valais in 1982. When a hydropower plant for the Baltschieder brook was planned, the fate of the five remaining water supply channels in the valley seemed sealed. With a protection agreement between the Foundation for Landscape conservation Switzerland (SL) and the four valley communes in 1986, the end of the century-old water supply channel system could be prevented.<sup>6</sup> Thanks sponsor contributions from private individuals and institutions some aqueducts are now maintained. The "Niwärch" (built in 1381), the "Undra" (1377), "Gorperi" (extension in the 1930s), "Laldneri" (built around 1312) and "Wiigartneri" (swept away by the storm in 2000 and since then fed with water from the Undra). In the neighboring Gredetschtal the impressive "Wyssa" and the "Stigwasser" on the Munder site and "Obersta" on the Birgischer site could be repaired. They are back to their original purpose, even if the watering is mainly done by irrigation systems. After all, there are many cultivators who traditionally water their lawns, for example along the Niwärch or at Munder, at Birgischer and Nathischer Berg.

On steep rock sections some of the original wooden channels were occasionally reinstated. But the long-term preservation of the water channel is at risk due to increasingly heavy rainfall. Although there are now federal and cantonal subsidies for the maintenance of the open water pipes and their ways, they often do not suffice, so that institutions such as the Foundation for Landscape Conservation and Landscape Fund Switzerland have to help. Thanks to them, numerous restoration projects have been realized. Various publications and tourist brochures promoted public awareness.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, at an international colloquium on water channels in Sitten, the "water supply channels" were even discussed as a candidate for a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>8</sup>

The future water supply for agriculture in Switzerland has also moved center stage of public interest as part of the cli-

mate debate. In order to face these challenges, the National Research Programme 61 (NRP 61) "Sustainable Water Management" was started in 2010. In this context, the research project "water supply channels – a model for sustainable water use" under the leadership of the Foundation for Landscape Conservation Switzerland examines the ecological and socio-cultural significance of the historic water supply channels and traditional meadow cultivation. They examine the effects of the system of water supply channels on the mountain forest due to their seeping water and on the biodiversity of grasslands due to the type of irrigation (sprinkler versus traditional water supply). In addition, the historically traditional cooperative ownership and right of use are assessed concerning their model for future sustainable water use in dry mountain areas and in view of the climate change. [...]

The open water channels with their centuries-old history can therefore point the way to the future in dealing with this resource that is getting scarcer. •

Source: Excerpts from: Rodewald, Raimund. *Ihr schwebt über dem Abgrund. Die Walliser Terrassenlandschaften. Entstehung – Entwicklung – Wahrnehmung.* Rotten Verlag AG, Visp 2011. ISBN 978-3-952374-42-9

<sup>1</sup> Schmid, Maurus. *Wasser Kostbares Nass, Die Wasserleitungen an den "Sonnenigen Halden"* Joli-. Bietsch-, Baltschieder- und Gredetschtal, Visp 1994, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> Lauterburg, Franz 1854. Kännelweg am Rawilpass, in: *Die Schweiz in Lebensbildern*, Bd. III Wallis 1933, p. 174

<sup>3</sup> "Le paysage a naturellement beaucoup perdu à cette transformation économique, mais l'irrigation y trouve son avantage, et le béton tend à son but Ce n'est pas toujours celui du touriste." Vautier Auguste. *Au pays des bisses*, Lausanne 1928, p. 60

<sup>4</sup> Schmid, Walter. *Komm mit mir ins Wallis*, Bern 1955, p. 158

<sup>5</sup> "Les bisses ont fait déjà le sujet de plusieurs études, mais jamais, que nous sachions, on ne s'était préoccupé de les présenter comme un objet d'intérêt esthétique et touristique (Louis Courthion 1920.

Echo des Alpes 7/8, in: Louis Courthion et Solandieu. *Les Bisses du Valais 1920*, Sierre 2007, p. 70

<sup>6</sup> Rodewald, Raimund. Historical water supply channels in the Müstair Valley/Switzerland and their evaluation, in: *Cultural heritage and landscapes in Europe* (eds: C. Bartels, C. Küpper-Eichas), Bochum 2008, p. 547–556

<sup>7</sup> e.g. B. Gerber, Johannes. *Wandern an sagenhaften Suonen*, Visp 2009

<sup>8</sup> Société d'Histoire du Valais Romand. Les Bisses, économie, société, patrimoine. Actes du colloque international Sion 2–5 septembre 2010. *Annales valaisannes* 2010–2011, Martigny 2011

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