

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

“Solidarity from left to right” is necessary against TTIP and TiSA

Interview with National Councillor Jacqueline Badran, SP/ZH



National Councillor Jacqueline Badran
(picture thk)

Current Concerns: TTIP and TiSA are free trade agreements with far-reaching consequences. They are not widely known. What is to be envisaged by them?

National Councillor Jacqueline Badran: TTIP is a free trade agreement between the US and the EU, not covered by WTO.

TiSA is a free trade agreement that does not regulate the transports of goods but it deals with services in the broadest sense. This happens within the WTO, but not multi-laterally, because not all members do join it, only those who want to. Of course these are significant differences.

Why doesn't the public know more about it?

This has to do with the fact that these negotiations are kept secret. But although the negotiations concerning TTIP are kept secret by the EU-commission, certain information has been leaked. But the commission has unrightfully usurped the competence to negotiate such things. Finally one has no choice but to accept the agreement or not.

Why is that so?

Because the European Union Parliament has no right of proposal. Actually it is complete madness, what is happening at the EU level. It is absolutely undemocratic and completely absurd in the sense that the EU is weakening its own position.

What is the TTIP about concretely?

It is above all about the free trade of goods and especially about giving the large companies excessive rights.

What are these rights? What is given in the large companies' field of competence?

These are for example the rights to file an action. The large companies are given the right to sue lost profits if in terms of a legislative process another country changes

laws to their disadvantage. This might be a genetic-engineering-moratorium, more stringent environmental regulations or the improvement of workers' protection. In these cases the company can sue lost profits. Private concerns are put at the same level as those of a state.

What are the consequences?

The legislative process gets terminated. If the legislator wants to eliminate disadvantages one will have to think twice how much it will cost. The state will have to pay compensation. This is the end of democracy, because constraints are generated that avoid democratic decisions. This is the beginning of the large companies' oligarchy: The reign of a few. Neither does one have to be an opponent of large companies to reject this nor it is a question of left or right. This is a step back towards feudalism into the period of pre-bourgeois revolutions. We must not let that happen.

What stands behind this absurd idea – as you have made clear – that economy and in its result whole states get transformed into formations reigned by the dictatorship of big American trusts?

Of course the US have an imperial schedule and act according to their hegemonic politics. Europeans did that during the period of colonialism as well, but this obviously belongs to the past. De-colonisation has been done by European countries, even when it was done badly, but they did it.

And what is that like in the US?

Nothing has happened here. For example, extraterritorial jurisdiction is commonplace. It is not only controlled what happens on the own territory, but also outside. In addition, companies have a different status. Sometimes one gets the impression that the state in the US has to serve the large corporations.

And in Europe it's different?

Yes, for us it is still different, although I must say that this has softened over the

Prosperity for all?

by Thomas Kaiser

In his book “Vom Grossen Krieg zur permanenten Krise”¹ (From the Great War to the permanent crisis) Marc Chesney, Professor of Quantitative Finance at the University of Zurich, explains that globalization has not led to the results promised to us by the apostles of the “free market” and foretold by spirited augurs of economy. The fairy tale of prosperity for all has proven to be what it actually is. The beneficiaries of this neo-liberal financial and economic policy are very few multinational financial institutions and internationally active industrial groups, which have amassed billions. According to the *Agency Bloomberg's* ranking, Chesney continues, “the 300 richest billionaires in the world were able to multiply their wealth by 524 billion dollars in the year 2013. [...] They are the symptom of the financial world's insatiable voracity and of the logic enforced by this sector.” (p. 44) These people who reap such exorbitant profits – which are certainly not acquired by arduous drudgery – and who drive their assets to dizzying heights may have been given by globalization that which they themselves once promised to the world. But how are the other billions of people on this planet faring? In the EU alone, the horrendous figure of over 30 million long-term unemployed persons presents quite a contrast to the numbers above, as Jean Ziegler explains in his latest book, “Ändere die Welt!”² (Change the world!). In view of the recent political developments throughout the world and also in our own country, we cannot avoid the impression that the myth of “prosperity for all” has long ceased to be believed in many segments of the population and that the international financial and industrial groups are already aware of this fact. But instead of acknowledging their mistakes and initiating the proper corrections of their economic theories, which all stem from the 1950s, financial jugglers and their theoreticians are forever coming up with new instruments which enable them to further increase their assets, to further exploit the world and to continue manipulating everyone around them. International treaties such as TiSA and TTIP, which to date have been discussed far too little in public, are new

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last 10 years. The large corporations try to dictate the amount of taxes they would like to pay as well as the national regulations for corporations. If their demands are not met they threaten to go to another country. In this respect Europe is on its way to follow the US.

For what can the corporations sue a state?

The corporations can sue the government for lost profits. The state will have to pay compensation. If it is true, what is being leaked, the big corporations will have a right to sue and on top of this will be permitted to determine the judges. There shall be a court of arbitration, which is composed of private lawyers. These are not elected and legitimate judges. The corporations can decide to sue and simultaneously choose the judge. That’s incredible. Who comes up with this? This is the

end of democracy, the rule of law and the beginning of a reign of large corporations that replace the princes and emperors of the past. This is absolutely undemocratic and highly questionable with respect to the constitution.

This raises even the question about the “foreign judges”. What do you think about that?

If the right wing is speaking of “foreign judges” in the EU, these are at least democratically elected judges. That would be one thing that we can voluntarily and bilaterally agree to. But it is a completely different story if “foreign judges” are appointed by those who sue. How absurd is that? That would be really the ultimate “foreign judge”. For our direct democracy that would be the end, as well for the rule of law. This is unconceivable for me.

What is the reaction in the EU countries?

In Germany even the SPD says, it is important and good for the German export industry. Some BIP percentage figures are

calculated, which are supposed to be the alleged result of the agreement, instead of clearly saying no. Where does this lead to? Free trade can be good in principle, but certainly not at this price.

Wouldn’t it take a broad discussion in the EU countries?

Definitely yes, but the discussion goes to some red lines that should be shifted. Maybe a “No” to the tribunal but a “Yes” to the possibility to sue the state.

What are these rights of action?

These are rights for investment (“investment dispute settlement”). Supposedly it is about “investment security”. But in reality it is not about investments but just about selling things; you just want to sell the chlorine chicken or the GMO corn. This has nothing to do with investment in the classical sense. The rules are usually put in place towards developing countries and dictatorships, where you want to pro-

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tones on the old keyboard. It is still the US-based and US-owned, internationally active corporations, which determine economic policy first and foremost, as long as we allow them to do so, and which try to secure their sinecure, even if their base of operations, namely the US empire, has been crumbling increasingly for several years now. Thus the contracts that are being negotiated at present are merely an attempt to secure more pieces from the world’s financial and economic cake. Political scientist and historian *Jochen Scholz*, who worked for years for the German Federal Ministry of Defense and for *NATO*, writes in his essay, “Worum geht es – Die Ukraine-Krise und die geo-politische Konstante aus dem eurasischen Kontinent”³ (What is it all about – the Ukraine Crisis and the geo-political constant on the Eurasian Continent): “Even the currently negotiated Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the USA (TTIP) is primarily being used ... to tie Germany and the EU more closely to the US, to prevent the common economic area from Lisbon to Vladivostok, and to exploit the EU for the United States’ international interests.” (p. 103) The fact that the Swiss government has so far adopted little critical distance from this imposition – actually Federal Councillor *Johann Schneider-Ammann* is giving thought to how Switzerland, “could get on the bandwagon” here – and operates an economic policy, which leads one to the assumption that it might have been cooked up right there in this circle of power’s kitchens – calls for greater vigi-

lance by the population and by their elected representatives in Parliament.

The fact that particularly sensitive areas such as the *public service*, which is unique in Switzerland (see the interviews with National Councillors *Badran* and *Büchel* in this issue), are also to be surrendered to bound- and borderless trade, must arouse our resistance, as must the actions of the Federal Council in the area of their agricultural policy. As to the worship of the God of Free Trade, in 2007, *Mathias Binswanger*, Professor of Economics, pointed out the consequences in his book, “Globalisierung und Landwirtschaft – Mehr Wohlstand durch weniger Freihandel”⁴ (Globalization and agriculture – more wealth by means of less free trade). He also demonstrated that it will not strengthen our national agriculture – the middle class will not benefit but the multinational corporations, as is usually the case, where the so-called free trade reigns. He wrote this before the great and financial and economic crisis, going on to this day – which Federal Councillor *Doris Leuthard* by misunderstanding reality already believed to have been overcome in 2009 – became really obvious. The effects of the opening of agricultural markets can be seen first and foremost in developing countries, but also in our country: a displacement of small-scale, locally-based agriculture and an increasing takeover of smaller farms by agricultural giants. It is a blessing that more and more personalities of Swiss politics are becoming aware of this aberration and are determined to counter this ominous development on the political level. •

¹ Marc Chesney: *Vom Grossen Krieg zur permanenten Krise*, 2014, ISBN 978-3-03909-171-3

- ² Jean Ziegler: *Ändere die Welt!*, 2014, ISBN 978-3-570-10256-5
³ Ronald Thoden, Sabine Schiffer (ed.): *Ukraine im Visier*, 2014, ISBN 978-3-9816963-0-1
⁴ Mathias Binswanger: *Globalisierung und Landwirtschaft. Mehr Wohlstand durch weniger Freihandel*, 2009, ISBN 978-3-85452-583-7.

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tect yourself against the threat of expropriation. These rules should prevent that a newly built factory can easily be nationalised. This is carried over and adapted to our western civilised countries, were there is a rule of law and developed democracies that have corruption reasonably under control.

Why are such contracts negotiated at all?

It is actually inconceivable that a European Commission ever negotiates such a thing. This European Commission came already up with the idea to privatise water; again, another completely abstruse and unacceptable idea. The spirit of the EU's power centre is libertarian to the extreme. No matter what class of goods is involved. For years, they have been driving liberalisation and privatisation. Everything should be subordinated to the logic of capital utilisation. This is the priority of the economy over politics. In fact, it's already like that, but this is now getting cemented institutionally.

If Switzerland joined at a later point of time here, what would that mean for our country?

For us here in Switzerland, of course, this means that our direct democracy would be finished. Because every time we have to decide something, we must realise that we might be liable to pay compensation.

Agriculture is also subject of negotiations? What would that mean?

Yes, we have a high quality agriculture. We accept the cost of these production processes and standards than differ from the EU. Even with “Cassis de Dijon” principle, the principle of reciprocity, we complain about “similar products”. We demand that not only the product itself is similar, but also the production process. So, if we let our chicken grow in a species-appropriate manner and let them have a large run and on the other hand we have the EU battery chicken, these are not the same chicken. We are clearly proud of our agriculture with a high level of animal welfare and strong protection of our nature. With these agreements all that will be gone. Everything we have put in place in a democratic fashion would be gone. We have to prevent that.

Let us come to talk about TiSA. What is to be expected in Switzerland?

This refers to the whole public services such as schools, hospitals, water supply, infrastructure, etc., which are still very specifically regulated here in Switzerland, and rightly so. This is a threat to our public services.

What are the consequences?

If that's true, what has been leaked recently – even if the Federal Council asserts that school and health care are excluded – in fact a private provider, a private school, has to get the same subsidies like a public school.

Can we trust the Federal Council in this regard?

No, I don't think so. If the Federal Council says schools are excluded then this is tactics because it would not be acceptable today. You just wait another 10 years, until then the population has been softened up and the pressure by lobby groups will have become huge. For example, by the Hirslanden group which is an extreme lobbyist in our country today. Actually, it is a real estate company and nothing else. The pressure will be very strong under the dogma: “Private is good, and state is evil.” This completely contradicts the fundamentals of our state.

The public sector would be severely affected.

Yes, our entire public service is a fundamental part of our successful model. No one in Switzerland must make profits on basic goods that are necessary for survival. The profit of an institution goes to 100 % to the population, which is also the owner, and not to a few. It is no coincidence that water, electricity, health, education, public transport, security, and even banking services are produced as common services. Just like in most other country in the world. These basic goods for hundreds of years have been considered to fall under the principle of common goods; since Morgarten. This basic principle is a constituent element of Switzerland and of Swiss direct democracy. There is a close interdependence. With TiSA the overall benefits will be privatised and the service will become more expensive, since you must deliver the private owner profits on goods that must be consumed.

... and this also applies to such sensitive areas such as health and education ...

Yes, why do I need to pay for profits of a hospital if I am being treated there? Why do I need to pay for profits of a school to get education? There is no reason. The government takes care. This is one of our biggest advantages of our location; this is the prime success factor of Switzerland. Let's look at England, to get access to a good private school you need to have deep pockets, the same is true for the US, France and increasingly also for Germany. Here we are unique in Switzerland. This uniqueness is central to our Swiss system, which is our soul that must not be altered. The successful model Switzerland consist of a strong public service in which no one has to pay for profits in order to consume basic primary goods. That principle must not be touched. All of our efforts must go into that direction.

In summary it can be said that both agreements would deeply intervene in the Swiss political system and limit the sovereignty of our country massively.

It is the death of sovereignty for each state who participates there. No – actually, it would be suicide, because you take part voluntarily.

So what is to be done?

I would be very happy if there were solidarity from right to left. All this would probably be graver than any EU accession. The FDP and the *économiesuisse* already say loudly that we do need that now, for example, because of the strong Swiss franc. They misuse the abolition of the minimum exchange tariff for their own political agenda. Until today, free trade is a religion for *économie-suisse*. What is missing is a critical consideration on how to shape free trade in a way that makes sense. We must stop this development that is incompatible with democracy and especially with our Swiss political system.

National Councillor Mrs Badran, thank you for the interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

"We would have to adopt future legislation automatically"

Interview with National Councillor Roland Rino Büchel, SVP (Swiss People's Party)/SG,
Vice President of the Foreign Affairs Committees



National Councillor
Roland Büchel
(picture thk)

Current Concerns: What are TTIP and TiSA about?

National Councillor Roland Büchel: TTIP is the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the US, that has by now been negotiated behind

closed doors for about two years. TiSA is a service agreement between 23 negotiating parties.

The TiSA negotiations are also secret. How long have they been going on?

For the past three years. The main parties are the EU and the US. The negotiating parties further include Switzerland, Japan, China, Turkey and other countries such as Panama and Paraguay. It is mainly a question of the liberalization of services.

Is it the usual procedure to conduct secret negotiations in this way?

At an early stage, negotiations are often kept secret. What does appear very strange to me is that the negotiation results are not to be made public until five years after the conclusion of the talks. And that is to be so irrespectively of whether the agreement will ever come into force or not.

Why is such high secrecy maintained?

In both rounds of negotiations, there are specific points of substance with which democratic participation would apparently "disturb". That is why such (public, democratic) views are to be brought into the process as late as possible.

Isn't that a problem?

Oh yes, this is very tricky. It corresponds to the Swiss understanding of democracy that citizens want to know what negotiations are about. And that is a good thing, too. It is important for the citizens to be involved in time. And that even more so when it comes to processes which have such far-reaching consequences.

What are the sectors for which it is not desirable to be publicly discussed?

In TiSA the issues are the internet, education, postal services, legal services, public transport, etc. As you can see when you look at the criticism, which

mainly comes from leftist circles, that there might be a reduction in public supplies involved.

What happens to the enormous amount of gathered information?

I have serious misgivings when it comes to the exchange of electronic data. It is believed that there will be a data flow to an extent nowhere near anything we have experienced before. It is most notably large US corporations that have a strong interest in this agreement.

Can we say that much of what Switzerland has accomplished in the area of public utilities will be thrown on what we call "the Market"?

One can assume that our unique infrastructure would be called into question. Especially where really radical changes are concerned, we should in each case be free to decide whether we want this or not. In plain English: We must refrain from accepting an international agreement at any cost whatsoever.

Let us return to TTIP: What does it mean for Switzerland if the US and the EU sign such an agreement?

At first glance, not much. But the fact of the matter is that those two negotiating parties are quite ready to open the platform to Switzerland, to Canada and to other states. In consequence, we would be faced with a problem we have already been experiencing with the EU to some extent: We would automatically have to adopt future legislation.

What does that mean in concrete terms?

On the occasion of the basic decision, the democratic process would still work. Parliament and probably also the people would be entitled to vote on whether we want to join the agreement or not. Yet democratic participation would end no later than with the adoption of the treaty. The citizens would then be excluded from participation in any further development.

Is this comparable with parts of the Bilateral Contracts that we have with the EU?

Yes, let's take the Schengen Agreement as an example. Since the vote 10 years ago, we have had more than over 100 law adaptations here, in which the people had no longer any say. If we participated in TTIP, we would have this same problem, no longer only with the EU, but also with the US.

Since it is a question of free trade, this would logically mean that the major economic blocs in the US and the EU would determine Switzerland's economy. Can we look at it this way?

That is a realistic approach. We're talking about the Big Boys, the major multinational corporations. They have a huge interest in the agreement, especially so the mega-corporations from the United States. So much is already evident.

Can it be said then that politics will no longer take the decisions, but it will be the economy, that decides which policies are to be pursued?

This objection is heard often from leftist circles. I cannot claim that the critics are not correct.

In the context of TiSA, the question is now whether there is an attempt to liberalize areas now which were excluded from the bilateral agreements with the EU?

This is well possible.

The Federal Council is taking part in the TiSA negotiations. Is this backed by a mandate to it or is it acting on its own?

Apparently the Federal Council is invoking the services part of the WTO-Doha mandate. One positive aspect: Our government is the only of the numerous parties participating showing at least some transparency; at a very humble level, however.

Are other countries even less transparent than Switzerland?

Other countries are not even deconsidering a minimum of transparency necessary. It is not part of their political culture. The citizens have no information. This is certainly not a democratic procedure as we cherish it in Switzerland. If anything gets known publicly there, it is based on leaks.

Of course this stealth strategy creates suspicion.

Negotiations can never be completely open. But a bit more openness would be appropriate for Switzerland. A lack of openness of the other states towards their citizens is actually benefiting the Swiss diplomats. They can hide behind the others so that they do not have to communicate their own steps.

We have different businesses like e.g. the electronic patient file where the question

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The myth of free trade

by Reinhard Koradi, Dietlikon/Switzerland

Trade agreements between two or more states are not bad in general, in particular, if the principle of equivalence is respected and all contractors benefit from the contracts to the same extent. In other words, free trade agreements reach their limits where they infringe the liberties of the partners. The bad habit of negotiating the agreement behind closed doors, however, had led to some critical questions.

How much freedom does free trade bring?

The term free trade raises expectations for more freedom. Focusing on the question of how much additional freedom is really created by free trade, will soon evoke disillusionment. The processes alone that lead to free trade agreements relentlessly uncover the loss of freedom for the weaker negotiating partners.

Settling free trade agreements is often motivated by the need or the obligation to conquer new markets. The supersaturated home markets in the "mature" industrialized countries can no longer ab-

sorb the over-production driven by the growth hysteria. A vent must be found, which absorbs the excess amounts, otherwise a collapse of prices with its drastic loss of profits will follow. The escape route for the growth spiral fueled by the current monetary policy is the geographic market expansion. Free trade agreements or the formation of economic unions are then common strategies to implement the unhindered growth policy and the associated economic dictatorship beyond the country's borders. Full access to new markets also opens up promising prospects for speculation and is a welcome refuge for the rising billion euro and dollar flood caused by the dubious debt economy. The risky casino economy is given additional impetus by the state guarantee in the euro area, dictated from above.

New markets for large investors can also be opened up via free trade agreements. We can currently observe the opening of agricultural land markets to large-scale foreign investors and rich industrial countries in Eastern Europe, but

also in Africa and other regions of the world. The financially powerful investors edge out small farmers from their fields. In addition to attractive returns the landowners also benefit from public funding in many cases. Hunger versus speculative profits, a phenomenon of our times that enforces a grotesque abuse of valuable agricultural land in particular driven by the EU support for bioenergy.

States lose the freedom to adjust their economies to the needs of the population

Harmonisation, deregulation and liberalisation are promoted everywhere despite the often very different geographical, climatic, cultural, social and economic conditions, true to the principle that power is in the hands of the strongest. Behind this campaign for a neoliberal economic order there is a successful lobby of stakeholders from the headquarters of financial capitals and transnational corporation centres.

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"We would have to adopt future ..."

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of confidentiality is the issue, as well as other issues related to healthcare which are on the political agenda. Don't we have to see all these developments from this aspect, thus exercising the utmost restraint?

I am expecting of the persons involved that they devote their full attention to this point. If we see, however, how strong the interests are towards a completely free information exchange, we must be very watchful.

Is the parliament up to its task here?

Hardly. We are facing a large information deficit here. At this time, too many parliamentarians can hardly tell the difference between TiSA and TTIP. Thus it is hardly surprising that they are not able to assess the effects for our state and its citizens.

Why is that so? Why are the media not reacting?

The final results are still far away. The issue is currently not really part of the political process. It is part of a technical process, managed by persons who frequently consider themselves as superior in comparison to the "common" people and the politicians. They think they know better – and act accordingly.

One could be tempted to say that also Federal Council's agricultural politics is moving in the same direction, i.e. towards free trade and liberalisation.

With respect to TTIP, the agreement between the US and the EU, the agriculture representatives in various countries like Poland, Germany or France have reacted very critically. But they are facing the same problem as other interested parties – they hardly get any information.

If there is resistance even in these countries, how much more will we be affected, particularly in our agriculture?

If, particularly the French, the Poles and the Germans are afraid of the "big" US, then it is plausible that our farmers are starting to get nervous. We have to be realistic: Our small Switzerland with its way of doing agriculture will be in much more trouble than the large European countries.

What should be the next steps in politics, especially in the parliament, to make sure that the negotiations either go in the right direction or are halted because they are not compatible with our economic policy?

With regard to TTIP, it seems to be very important to create public awareness. With respect to TiSA we need to claim in the responsible commissions that we will be kept fully informed. We need

to talk critically about the agreement, again and again, and must not be satisfied with anything but the full information.

Isn't it highly unusual that the Federal Council is acting so passively towards a commission?

It is difficult to say if the Federal Council is uninformed or if it is not willing to share its information with the parliament or the responsible commission.

The people also have to be involved; they are affected by all political decisions.

Definitely. I think there will definitely be a referendum if it does not fail in parliament before. With TTIP we will see if, when and how we will join.

Will we need a referendum there, too?

Definitely. But then it will be very late already. The discussion needs to be a broader one. This is now more the case with TiSA. There especially the left is speaking out very critically, based on leaked information. But also the other groups should see that there is a lack of information and a need for action.

National Councillor Büchel, thank you very much for this interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

"The myth of free trade"

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The formation of the various economic areas such as the European Economic Community (EEC – which was extended to the political union EU later) or the North American free trade zone established as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico are appropriate examples. The core of the free trade agreements is unhindered market access. This means respectively that tariffs must be reduced or even abolished, and all diverse production, quality and safety regulations (non-tariff barriers) must either be abolished, or are mutually aligned or accepted. Both tariffs as well as non-tariff barriers to trade are certainly justified from a national perspective. Customs duties may usefully balance the differences in production costs due to different production and quality standards or any price-relevant competitive differences (dumping by means of export subsidies).¹ Non-tariff regulations designed to protect the national, regional and local economy and especially the young economies (less developed and emerging countries) are of vital importance. In industrialised countries (mostly smaller economies) there are good reasons to introduce protection measures at the national borders for national, economic, supply, employment, social and security considerations. These administrative barriers are often directly related to the product safety, consumer protection, health policy and the protection of animals and plants in one's own country. They are part of a comprehensive prevention framework.

With the current free trade agreements the contracting countries lose their freedom to implement necessary protective measures identified in the national interest. It is in the nature of free trade agreements to violate the freedom of the contractors concerned. The benefits of a free trade agreement for an independent country therefore, depend less on the material value of the free exchange of goods, but rather on the involved loss of sovereignty and the associated consequences (tangible and intangible) for the political system and the population. In the context of free trade agreements a gradual transfer of nation state sovereignty onto powerful financial and economic oligarchs on the market can be observed.

A review of the *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (MAI) discussed 15 years ago, clearly revealed this intention. Even then the big corporations strived to solidify their power secretly and quietly at monstrous proportions. Only due to the hefty resistance by the public and by the parliaments this project, which had intended to give the companies the same legal status

as the nation states, failed at the time. In case it had been implemented the big corporations could have sued, inter alia, the United States for loss of profits.

Are we heading for an "economic NATO"?

Again there are new transatlantic free trade agreements on the table. A *Transatlantic Free Trade Area* (TAFTA) and a *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP) are being negotiated between the US and the EU. "The entire TTIP-TAFTA project resembles the monster in a horror movie that goes on and on forever. After all, the benefits that such an 'economic NATO' would offer the companies, would be binding, durable and virtually irreversible, because each point might only be amended with the consent of all signatory states".²

Since the globally operating US corporations seek to settle a similar agreement in the Pacific (Trans-Pacific Partnership), the world is heading towards a system that would install the domination of the most powerful capital groups over large areas on our planet and also legally hedge them. Other states that are not party to the agreement would have to bend to the rules whenever they traded with the US or EU.

The current negotiations on TiSA (*Trade in Services Agreement*) also mean an explosive for the sovereignty of independent states. This agreement is about the liberalisation of services. Switzerland has been actively taking part in the negotiations since their beginning. TiSA negotiations are conducted under strict secrecy. Around fifty countries are involved. The *State Secretariat for Economic Affairs* (SECO) negotiated on behalf of the Federal Council – without a mandate of Parliament! The agreement aims at concluding a comprehensive agreement on trade in services. The work is based on GATS (*General Agreement on Trade in Services*). The participants initially agreed in 2013, inter alia, on the recognition of a "hybrid" commitment list, in which the obligations (MFN, market access, national treatment) are mixed positively and negatively. In addition, the parties agreed on a provision on a ratchet clause and a standstill clause. Similarly to the "accompanying measures" in bilateral agreements with the EU, both the standstill clause and the ratchet clause are probably meant to silence legitimate criticism of the draft agreements.

Who shuns the limelight must have something to hide

In case TiSA was to be successfully completed and implemented, we will face its enormous impact on our everyday lives. It is about liberalisation – especially in the area of public duties. The privatisation of (public) services in-

tends to commercialise the basic needs of the population (transport, administration, school, health, safety, energy and water supply, etc.). This means that the government will hand its duties over to private companies – and, as a result of market opening, it will do so especially to transnational big corporations. The states could set up a negative list and a restrictive clause at the beginning of the negotiations and thus exclude specific areas from deregulation. However, the main focus of the agreement remains rather problematic. What once has been privatised can no longer be nationalised, and what has not been regulated until the agreement will be implemented, cannot be regulated in retrospect. If a country decides to return the public service into the hands of the state, the affected corporations can sue the state for compensations. The secrecy of the strategy may be evidence enough that behind TiSA there are hardly any good intentions for the benefit of the common good. The concern is legitimate that TiSA will bring a corporate dictatorship and open the door to a new colonialism – in western as well as in northern industrial countries.

And what is Switzerland's position?

Given various initiatives in the National Council, we must assume that Switzerland is once again ready to put its sovereignty on the negotiating table in exchange for alleged benefits of free trade. In addition to a motion by the Greens "The public service is non-negotiable", which the Federal Council rejected, there is also the *Interpellation Trede* of 12 December 2014.

The Interpellation Trede (14.4295) requires the disclosure and representation of the substantive differences between GATS offer and TiSA offer.

The text of the interpellation of 12 December 2014:

"The Federal Council is asked to explain what substantive differences between the GATS offer and the TiSA offer exist, particularly with regard to the impact on the alteration of negotiation rules for the opening up of public service areas.

Argument

TiSA is a free trade agreement that is not negotiated under the auspices of the WTO, but in secret within a group of 'really good friends' in the Australian Embassy in Geneva, although the Federal Council does not have a sufficient mandate."

Answer of the Federal Council

"Switzerland conducts the TiSA negotiations based on the *Doha Mandate*. The

continued on page 7

"The myth of free trade"

continued from page 6

TiSA negotiations have emerged from the Doha negotiations and seek to return the outcome of the negotiations to the WTO. Since the TiSA negotiations have the same subject and the same negotiating objective as the service part of the Doha negotiations, the Doha mandate of the Federal Council represents an adequate and targeted basis for participation of Switzerland in the TiSA negotiations. [...] The rules of the TiSA process do not differ fundamentally from those of GATS. Both negotiation approaches provide that the coverage area and the extent of the parties' obligations are established in their national lists with respect to market access and national treatment. The parties thus determine for themselves which obligations they are ready to fulfill. Just like GATS, TiSA also contains the necessary flexibility. [...].

Just like in the GATS agreement, the individual parties thus determine in their commitment list in which sectors and to what extent they grant market access and national treatment, even with respect to standstill and ratchet clauses for the national reservations which are also possible in TiSA. [...] For example, Switzerland has limited its TiSA-offer to obligations which correspond to those of the Doha offer or previously settled free trade agreements. This means that the legal situation concerning public service in the Swiss TiSA-offer is restricted to the same area as in the Doha offer or in the free trade agreement. These include areas such as public education and health care, energy supply (including electricity), public transport and the post office. There is hence no material difference to the GATS/Doha offer or already existing free trade agreements."³

The Federal Council's position on the motion of the Greens and the Interpellation Trede reveals our executive's very generous dealing with FTAs. This might entail some dangers. Just think of the many open files. In addition to the negotiations on a possible framework agreement with the EU and the above-mentioned transnational agreements, various

domestic issues are on the table in the Federal capital Berne and they are very closely related to free trade. Let us mention the agricultural policy with a focus on "food sovereignty" or the educational, health, electricity market and security policy. Based on previous experience we cannot exclude that the Federal Administration and the Federal Council will develop solutions that rely less on personal responsibility and personal power in the country, but are primarily based on the free access to the deregulated international markets.

Free trade instead of own contributions

This can be illustrated by the example of the Federal Council's counter-proposal to the popular initiative on "Food Security" of the Swiss Farmers' Union.

The popular initiative submitted on 8 July 2014 with 147,812 valid signatures demands the supply of the population with food from diverse and sustainable local production. Among other things, the cultivated land should be preserved and the administrative burden on farmers be reduced. The farmers are to be guaranteed a comprehensive investment security. The initiators clearly aim at improving food security for the population by means of a secure domestic production and thus at conditions that give all producing farmers in Switzerland a real future perspective and facilitate ensuring food security.

However, the counter-proposal of the Federal Council relies on "free trade". It aims at achieving food security via the access to international agricultural markets and by a competitive agriculture and food industry. The counter-proposal makes a U-turn out of the initiative. According to the Federal Council's will, food security in Switzerland should not be ensured by the domestic production of local farmers, but through the free trade, respectively by access to the international agricultural markets. They speak of competitive enterprises in Switzerland. Competitiveness means that agricultural businesses must secure their economic success through personal contributions. Is this already a signal of the Federal Council and the Administration to exchange the diversity of indige-

nous agriculture by globally marketable agricultural industrial colosses?

A fair-weather policy with considerable danger potential

The willfully promoted decline in farming through AP 2014-2017 (Agricultural Policy) does obviously not lead to reconsidering at the federal level from the perspective of the country's supply and food security. The intention to ensure food security through access to international agricultural markets can only be understood if we assume that our authorities assess the current situation through rose-coloured glasses. The idea to delegate the country's food supply to other countries, can only arise from the lack of confidence in our capability to meet the challenges of our times independently, and the fallacy that Switzerland is surrounded only by "really good friends". Is it really true – are we not in the middle of an "economic war"? Whatever the answer to this questions may be: We have to protect our own interests and the independence of our country and defend them if necessary.

A short review of the late 19th century might open your eyes. Already then, Swiss agriculture had focused on the needs of the global market. There was a strong orientation of agricultural production towards dairy products and export-oriented cheese production. As a result, Switzerland became increasingly dependent on feed and grain imports from abroad. The "yellow" agricultural land turned into a "green" Switzerland at the end of the 19th century.

However, the international trading system was disrupted by the First World War. There was the problem of the supply of bread grain and flour for Switzerland. Since the turn of the century Australia, Argentina, Russia, Canada and the United States had become the main exporters of grain. For Switzerland the United States had been the main supplier of wheat before the war; during the First World War even up to 99 percent of the wheat supply came from the United States. The global crop failures in 1916 and 1917 led to a shortage and sharply rising grain prices. Therefore, on 1 October 1917 bread and flour had to be rationed.⁴

Poverty and hunger then tormented the people in Switzerland and led to outbreaks of violence by people in need. – Who can guarantee that this will not happen again?

Direct democracy as a chance

There are always times when the voters in our country have to make use of their direct democratic rights and obligations and take our country's destiny into their own hands. Now unmistakable signals are required that the Swiss citizens want to maintain their independence. That they are not willing

Genetically modified food from EU countries and the US instead of high-quality Swiss production?

The "Schweizerischer Bauernverband SBV" (Swiss Farmers' Union) wants to

- ensure the supply of the Swiss population with *locally* produced high-quality food
- protect the existence of Swiss farmers.

The "counter-proposal"

- does away with the protection of the "local" production – the real core of the initiative!

- tries to slyly foist the unpopular agricultural agreement with the EU and the linking with TTIP on the Swiss people – an integration into the unprotected global agricultural free trade with all its "blessings" for consumers
- thus aims directly at the perdition of Swiss farmers.

Is the Parliament permitted to declare something like that a "counter-proposal"? (mw.)

The politics of the Federal Council are increasing dependence from abroad

“Counter-proposal” of the Federal Council to the Initiative for Food Safety is extremely questionable

Interview with National Councillor Rudolf Joder, SVP/BE

Current Concerns: How is the counter-proposal of the Federal Council to the Initiative for Food Safety to be judged? Is this really a counter proposal?

National Councillor Rudolf Joder: The counter-proposal of the Federal Council to the Initiative for Food Safety is very dangerous, because it creates the basis that will make it possible to have access to all international markets beside that of the EU. That means that the Federal Council wants to reduce – there is no change of intention – the protection at the frontiers and to conclude if possible free trade treaties with a lot of states. It is not really a counter proposal to the Initiative for Food Safety.

What is the vision behind the Federal Council's position?

For the Federal Council the food supply for the Swiss population is a specialized process based on division of labour where Swiss producers in agriculture play but a minor part. That is why the counter-proposal clearly needs to be combatted.

Are there any other aspects that pose a problem beside this neoliberal approach?

The second dangerous point of the Federal Council's counter-proposal is the claim to make Swiss agriculture competitive so that it can survive on the international markets. This is an illusion and absolutely far removed from reality. We have got high costs in Switzerland, small-scale conditions, a difficult topography so that no farm product of Switzerland will be competitive at the international level.

Did this not succeed with our cheese – the Federal Council has seen a big potential there, haven't they?

The best proof for the failure is the opening of the cheese market in 2007. This has led to the situation that Switzerland is no longer a “country of cheese”, and that the import of cheese increased in comparison to the export. And yet it is a premium product of Switzerland.

That is hard to believe. You have got to imagine that! Why does the Federal Council expect an improvement of food safety from export/import agreements although the dependence increases more than if the whole food were produced in our own country?

The Federal Council is blocking out the issue of dependence and wants to have access to all international markets, if possible; on behalf of the exporting economy so that Swiss national economy can grow. The Federal Council speaks of an annual growth of the national gross domestic product of 0.5 % in the context of opening the agricultural markets, and specifically of 2 billion Swiss Franks. This amount is smaller than the direct payments given to the farmers, today. So there cannot be any kind of growth.

What are the effects in the long run if we follow the Federal Council's policy?

This would massively increase the dependence from abroad. The agriculture would continue to shrink massively which we have been seeing constantly for quite some time. Since 2000, there have been 15,000 farming enterprises with more than 40,000 employments that have disappeared. The inconsistency of Swiss agricultural politics is continued in the Federal Council's counter-proposal. It would be far better and less expensive for the Federal Council to create a reasonable general

framework for domestic agriculture and on the other hand to pay less direct payments in the form of contributions to the quality of landscape. This is the policy which would allow for the improvement of the domestic farmers' performance as the population's suppliers with good food of high quality, and which would allow saving public money in the form of direct payments.

Agriculture concerns the population above all as we are the ones who enjoy these agricultural products. In how far is it up to the citizen to raise his hand and say what he wants and what he doesn't want?

That is a very important point. On the occasion of the vote the citizen will have the chance to speak out for the initiative for Food Safety resp. the counter-proposal. Our aim is to forge an alliance, because it does not only concern the future of agriculture. It is also about security of the supply to the population. It is about food safety for the consumer. It is about preventing our regulations for animal protection from being abolished and of preventing the import of foreign meat the production of which involves animal torture. It is about reducing environmental pollution which

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*National Councillor
Rudolf Joder
(picture ma)*

“The myth of free trade”

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to delegate the provision of food but also all other areas of basic services to foreign countries or transnational corporations by engaging in transnational agreements or organisations. What happened 15 years ago with the MAI agreement can happen again today. The agreement failure was a result of the people's resistance and of opposition in the national parliaments. Let us summon this resistance today and insist on our right to self-determination and thus on the disclosure of the various negotiation dossiers.

TTIP, TiSA and TAFTA are neoliberal constructs, which are in no way compatible with the European cultures and our national identity. They are anti-democratic projects that disenfranchise citizens and dismantle the nation state. The role that financial aristocracy and the new elites assign to the state and its citizens – i.e. to be a stopgap for billion-dollar losses of profits – needs a thorough correction.

The Swiss voters can request the necessary corrections by popular initiatives or referendums. In addition, we will vote for the National Council and the Council of States in autumn 2015 in federal elec-

tions. These are important opportunities to make a political decision for the independence of our country. The candidates who want to represent us in the next legislature are well-advised not to hide behind secrecy, but reveal their political views and attitudes. There is no room for hidden agendas in a direct democracy. •

¹ In Switzerland, for example, the production cost is much higher due to the organic production regulations and a generally higher level of costs.

² Source: *Le Monde diplomatique* of 11.8.2013

³ *Interpellation Trede*

⁴ <http://schule.schutthalde.ch/landesstreik/versorgungskrise.html>

"The politics of the Federal Council ..."

continued from page 8

is created by long-distance transports of food that could equally be produced in our country. It is about sovereignty and independence of our country, thus it is about the foundations of Switzerland.

What is to be done?

Farmers must form an alliance with the interested parties. If they succeed, the concerns for healthy and independent farming will become capable of winning a majority. Together with the environmental associations, with the animal rights activists, with consumers, in short with all citizens of our country.

Must we not aim at creating awareness among citizens of the consequences, in case we can't produce our own food anymore?

That's right. Precisely for this reason, we have chosen the form of a popular initiative. In the run-up to the vote everyone will have to form an opinion and to think about it, what it means to him, to consume high-quality foods that have been produced here according to our legal standards. The price plays hardly a role in this, as the average Swiss household spends about 6.8 % of its budget on food today.

Swiss Federal Popular Initiative

The Federal Constitution is amended as follows:

Art. 104a Food security

- 1 The Confederation endorses the supply of the population with food from diverse and sustainable local productions; therefore it takes effective measures, in particular against the loss of agricultural land, including the „Sömmerungsfläche“ (summer grazing areas) and to implement a quality strategy.
- 2 He ensures that the administrative effort in agriculture is low and the legal certainty and adequate investment security are guaranteed.

Art. 197 para. 11 11. Transitional provision to Art. 104a (Food security)

The Federal Council will apply for corresponding legislative provisions to the Federal Assembly no later than two years after the adoption of Article 104a by people and cantons.

This is a very small amount, and therefore the argument of the food price in Switzerland is not a real argument...

... especially as the quality greatly suffers at lower prices ...

Yes, that's for sure. Food safety is affected here. For example: The use of hormones in animal feed is forbidden in Switzerland. However, it is allowed to import hormone-treated meat from abroad. Such dangers are increasing due to the international trade in meat. Even the Federal Office of Health realized this and warned of a further food crisis. Already today, 20 percent of the consumed meat is imported from abroad.

Besides the popular initiative you've launched as well a parliamentary initiative. What do you want to accomplish with it?

I've launched the parliamentary initiative, because the farmer's association unfortunately didn't accept a passage in the text of the food safety initiative aimed at restricting import of food products from abroad into Switzerland. I requested this in negotiations with the Farmer's Association, with the intention to protect the producing locally agriculture and the local consumers. Because this provision has not been taken up in the food security initiative, I requested by means of the parliamentary initiative to include restrictions on imports of food products in the context of free trade agreements in the agriculture bill.

What would be the effect?

This will protect the domestically producing agriculture. The discussion on the parliamentary initiative is running. But if the counter proposal of the Federal Council is accepted, we have a clause in our constitution that the markets are to be opened up and the import restrictions reduced. In that case the doors will be opened, our domestic production will get under severe pressure and will probably no longer be able to keep up the high standard of quality.

Would this initiative also have an impact, if the counter proposal was accepted?

In case the parliamentary initiative is accepted and is taken into the agricultural law and if at the same time the proposal of the Federal Council is included in the constitution, we will have a situation that

Counter-proposal to the Popular Initiative "Für Ernährungssicherheit" (For food security)

The Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation regarding Article 139, paragraph 5 of the Federal Constitution, after inspecting the Popular Initiative "For food security" filed on 8 July 2014, and after having considered the message of the Federal Council ..., decrees:

- I The Federal Constitution is amended as follows:

Art. 102a Food security

To ensure the supply of the population with food the federal government constitutes frameworks that support sustainability and are good for:

II

- a. the securing of the bases for agricultural production, especially of cultivated land,
- b. a locally adapted and resource-efficient production of foodstuffs;
- c. a competitive agriculture and food industry;
- d. the access to international agricultural market,.
- e. a resource-friendly consumption of food.

the constitution overrules the law and the agricultural markets will be opened with all disastrous consequences for our country and our agriculture.

So, one has to summon the utmost efforts to prevent further opening of the agricultural market with all political means.

In the association for producing agriculture are as well discussing to launch another people's initiative to complement the food safety initiative so that rules on the import of food will be inscribed in the constitution. But it is also important to keep up the pressure against the Federal Council's counter-proposal. Only this way will there be a chance to continue to having a sovereign agricultural production oriented at high food security. With an independent agricultural production, the elimination of farmers could be countered, and we could maintain a part of our cultural and national heritage.

Mr National Councillor Joder, thank you very much for the interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

Counter-proposal to the popular initiative “food security” – a sham

by Dr phil Henriette Hanke Güttinger

The Federal Council abused its direct counter-proposal to the popular initiative “food security” to implant a free trade agricultural project in the Constitution.

Last summer, the *Federal Popular Initiative for Food Security* has been submitted. In just three months, 147,812 signatures were collected. This shows that there is a real need “to supply the population with food from diverse and sustainable local production,” as required by the initiative. The initiative also includes “effective measures particularly against the loss of agricultural land, including the summer grazing areas”. Next, the federal government is to ensure “that the administrative effort in agriculture is low and the legal certainty and adequate investment security are guaranteed.” With this initiative from the midst of the population our agriculture regains the necessary political and economic support.

Now the Federal Council has submitted a counter-proposal to the popular initiative “For food security” to the consultation process. The 25-page accompanying the counter-proposal aims at selling it as the best way to food security. A closer look at the text of the draft, however, shows that this is pure manipulation (Neuro Linguistic Programming).¹ The counter-proposal is indeed subtitled “Art. 102a Food Security.” “Food security” turns out to be merely an empty word that has nothing to do with the people’s initiative for food security – on the contrary. The counter-proposal wants to implant “a competitive agriculture and food industry” under “c” and under “d” the “access to the international agricultural markets”. With this our producing agriculture should be forced to go on the global market, where it will be neither competitive nor viable. How should our farmers with an average farm size of

17 ha withstand the US industrial agriculture with average farm sizes of 190 ha?

This is a targeted shot in the back of the population and the agriculture. The initiative calls for “food security” in the truest sense of the word: “to supply the population with food from diverse and sustainable local production”. Therein is not a word about free trade to be found. The local agriculture as base of a solid country supply should be strengthened. The counter-proposal is limited to “a site-adapted and resource-efficient production of food.” No more talk about domestic and local.

And where – if you please – should the production take place? For the vegetables may be in Spain? Since there the vegetation period begins earlier and human resources resp. drudges from Africa can be fobbed off more efficiently – i.e. cheaper? Feeding on foodstuffs from US industrial conglomerates, allegedly because of resource-efficiency? It is no coincidence that the *Swiss Association for a Strong Agricultural and Food Sector* (SALS Switzerland) denotes the counter-proposal of the Federal Council as a Trojan Horse which hides “an agricultural free trade project” under the guise of food security.²

Counter-proposal as a preparation for docking on to TTIP?

The question arises whether the counter-proposal is to be understood in connection with the proposed free trade agreement TTIP/TAFTA between the US and the EU, which has been negotiated in greatest secrecy for some time. In the Swiss Parliament an interpellation was filed with the question, “Does the transatlantic trade and investment partnership between the EU and the US, endanger the Swiss food standard?” Not that in the Federal Council’s response of 15.5.2014, there is talk of concrete “options” in relation to the “competitiveness of the Swiss economy” and “the attractiveness of the business location Switzerland”. “Part of these options might also be the opportunity to negotiate an FTA with the United States or a docking on to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)” – says the Federal Council.³

It can be assumed that the “docking” on to TTIP in agriculture is to be prepared with the counter-proposal in anticipatory subservience.

Dump the counter-proposal

Agricultural policy affects everyone, whether he is engaged in farming or whether he comes to enjoy the fruits of its labor. What is needed is that all stand together, determinedly. Everybody can contribute to the consultation concerning the counter-proposal of the Federal Council in a short and concise or detailed manner. Electronically to schriftgutverwaltung@blw.admin.ch or by paper mail. The consultation runs until 14.4.2015. The participation makes sense. For certainly, the Federal Council will have to withdraw its counter-proposal when there is appropriate contrary wind. •

¹ Since the late 1990s, the Federal Council uses this manipulation method to enforce its interests bypassing the people. Cf. Judith Barben, *Spin Doctors im Bundeshaus. Gefährdungen der direkten Demokratie durch Manipulation und Propaganda* (Spin Doctors in the House of Parliament. Hazards of direct democracy through manipulation and propaganda.) ISBN 978-3-033-01916-4

² *Schweizer Bauer* of 14.1.2015, counter-proposal: SALS speaks of a Trojan Horse

³ Interpellation 14.3111 by Thomas Böni from 18.3.2014

What kind of competitiveness is the Federal Council talking about?

[...] In the name of competitiveness the Federal Council might take very questionable decisions for agriculture. [...] Our working conditions are not comparable with those of our colleagues in the EU; we must accept this. Who aims at similar costs and prices, is deceiving himself. Our costs are corresponding to the standard of living in Switzerland, there is no alternative. [...] Even today, we have to struggle with the consequences of the outwardly innocuous sentence of Article 104 of the Constitution: „The federal government will ensure that agriculture ... through a sustainable production aligned to the market....“ It would have been enough to include sustainability into the Constitution because this is by definition a system which focuses on the ecological, social and economic balance. But no, the production had to be aligned to the market to satisfy certain political and economic circles. The result: Since this article came into force in 1996, about 24,000 farms (-30%) and 60,000 jobs in the agricultural sector (-27.5%) have disappeared in Switzerland.

Valentina Hemmeler Maïga, *Uniterre. Die unabhängige bäuerliche Zeitung*, February 2015

“Animal-friendly” milk production?

In Italy, the dairy farmers’ protest against falling prices and the abolition of milk quotas in the EU are scheduled to end of March. [...] They followed a call of the agricultural association *Col-diretti*. It worries about heavy losses for the Italian dairy farmers. [...] With prices of 0.35 euro per liter one will not even be able to cover the feeding costs for the cows.

Schweizer Bauer from 24.1.2015

Iceland withdraws from application for EU membership

cc. The Icelandic Government decided not to resume accession negotiations with the EU and officially withdrew from its application for membership. Therefore, Iceland has no longer the status of a candidate country and requests the EU to respect this fact from

now on. "The majority of the insular state's people had always spoken out against the membership", the "Handelszeitung" wrote on 12 March. And as it is not different in Switzerland, it would be also an option for the Swiss Government.

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ICELAND

Reykjavík, 12 March 2015

Latvian Presidency of the Council
of the European Union
H.E. Edgars Rinkēvičs

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy
& Enlargement Negotiations
Mr. Johannes Hahn

Dear Edgars, Dear Commissioner Hahn, Since taking office in 2013, the Government of Iceland has implemented a clear new policy on the EU accession negotiations.

This policy has been reiterated at the meeting of the Government on 10 March 2015 with the adoption of this letter containing further clarifications.

Core elements of that policy were, as a first step, to put the accession negotiations on complete hold, to dissolve the negotiating structures and to commission an assessment of the accession process as well as of developments in the EU. In addition and in line with putting the accession process on complete hold, the Government decided to refrain from participating in all activities related to its candidate status.

In meetings between the Prime Minister of Iceland and the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council in July 2013 this new policy was explained. On those occasions it was made clear by the two leaders of the EU institutions that clarity regarding the application process would be welcomed. Furthermore, extensive contacts took place between Iceland and the EU in relation to IPA projects in the latter part of 2013.

Since then the assessment of Iceland's accession process has been finalized and the issue discussed at length in the Icelandic Parliament. Contracts on IPA projects have been terminated by the Commission.

Recently we held consultations with you on the state of play of the accession process.

With reference to the above, the Icelandic Government wishes to clarify further its intentions. The Government of Iceland has no intentions to resume accession talks. Furthermore, any commitments made by the previous Government in the accession talks are superseded by the present policy.

In light of the above it remains the firm position of the Government that Iceland should not be regarded as a candidate country for EU membership and considers it appropriate that the EU adjust its working procedures accordingly.

Let me reiterate the importance of continued close relations and cooperation between the EU and Iceland based, in particular, on the EEA Agreement. The Government is committed to close relations independently of any accession considerations.

Furthermore, the Government wishes to emphasize the importance it attaches to unity and cooperation at difficult times in European history when basic elements of security and economic prosperity are being tested.

Sincerely yours,
Gunnar B. Sveinsson
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Nobel Prize for Peace for Merkel?

by Prof Dr Eberhard Hamer

The signatory criticized *Merkel* during the financial crisis because she assumed the liability for debts of hundreds of billions of euros at the expense of her German voters and tax payers to rescue international banks that had gambled their money away and the European countries that were indebted to them. She did so in order to obey the orders of the international big finance and to a phone call with *Obama* when he had shouted at her. What she called "without alternative" then and what *Schäuble* did not understand ("Warranties are not payments") is now being turned into German debts and payments that generations will have to stand up for in the case of Greece.

What, however, *Merkel* has undertaken in the Ukrainian crisis, commands respect. The chancellor knows for sure that Maidan as the Orange Revolution and the Ukrainian crisis are consequences of the USA's seizure and their military endeavor to cut Ukraine out of Russia's sphere of influence of and to incorporate it into their own Empire. The prey is already being distributed.

Half of Ukraine's black earth soils are being appropriated by American food industries (*Monsanto*, *Syngenta*, *Dupont*), prime minister *Yatsenyuk* and the finance minister are US citizens and three more ministers engaged from abroad are CIA agents, and all of them are listening to the orders of *Nuland*, US administrator for the East.

The arms industry in the US and many leaders of the US Republican Party have been demanding for long that the US help Ukraine directly by means of arms deliveries and that the US step in later because the arms industry in the US is underemployed and since they make up as much as 70 percent of the productive economy of the USA they are indeed relevant.

That *Merkel* was able to wrest the agreement for a peace mission from President *Obama* in a four hours' talk in spite of those US interests, operations and politics, was more than a masterpiece. That she then engaged also the French president and achieved an agreement which prevents the war which many US circles want to be waged in Europe, for the time being at any rate, cannot be rated highly enough, prized highly enough and deserves the Nobel Prize for Peace. At any rate she has made it more difficult for both of the world powers to grab for Ukraine, and in a credible way has represented the

Russian sanctions: The front of the proponents is disintegrating

cc. A top-ranking EU official – as reported by the *Deutsche Wirtschaftsnachrichten* on 13 March – expressed to Reuters that more and more EU countries are turning against a prolongation of economic sanctions against Russia. Besides Hungary, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, Spain as well apparently takes an outspoken stand against the sanctions. The magazine quoted the Spanish Foreign Minister *José Manuel García-Margallo* with the words: “The sanctions have inflicted great damage to the Spanish economy. [...] We have big losses, especially in the agricultural sector.” As did Italy’s Prime Minister

Matteo Renzi during a visit to *Putin*, also the Minister of Foreign Affairs, would now welcome a diplomatic solution, while taking into consideration the interests of Russia as well.

According to the Italian media (“*Corriere della Sera*” and “*La Repubblica*”) Russia wants to work closer together with Italy in the energy sector, in the machine industry field, with respect to space and nuclear industries, but also to actively cultivate the political dialogue, a plan positively emphasized by *Putin*. With regard to the Ukraine crisis, *Renzi* as well as *Putin* had expressly advised the necessity of preserving the ter-

ritorial integrity of the country. In this respect *Matteo Renzi* referred explicitly to the positive experience of Italy with decentralised solutions to regional problems. Possibly *Renzi* had South Tyrol’s Statute of Autonomy in mind, that might serve as a model for the eastern Ukraine.

That European autonomy encounters transatlantic displeasure is not surprising. Apparently the US Secretary of State *Victoria Nuland* is supposed to bring the countries on US line of stricter sanctions by bilateral talks. Her infamous EU quote will rather not facilitate her diplomatic entry.....

Birth hour and obstetricians of the Taliban

by Dr phil *Matin Baraki*

In April 1978, the *People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan* overthrew the feudal *Daud* regime and implemented fundamental reforms. Immediately afterwards the strategic centers of the West decided that this Afghanistan must not become a precedent. If it did, the entire region would be revolutionized and would endanger the West’s oil supply. The Iranian February revolution of 1979 confirmed the fears of Western strategists. Subsequently, the elimination of the government in Kabul was determined. It was labeled communist, and Islamism was invented to combat it. That was the birth of the *Mujahideen*, *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda*, the same Islamists we do now observe worldwide.

The Taliban were orphans of Afghan refugees as well as Pakistani children of poor families. The latter could not pay for their children’s education. They were taught for

free in Islamic schools built around Peshawar, as well as ideologically trained and later they were militarily trained and equipped. The CIA and Pakistan’s ISI provided for their organization and military training and the Gulf Arab monarchies for the financing. Thus, the US, Pakistan and the Arab sheikhdoms were actually the obstetricians of Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Since 1980, the Pakistani ruler General *Zia Ul Haq* had a large number of new Islamic schools built, probably approximately 50,000 as estimated by today’s experts. Even if only a single Taliban from each school joined the fighters, the Taliban would annually have recruited 50,000 fighters. In addition there are Afghan, Uighur, Turkmen and Arab Taliban or voluntary jihadists. One can therefore indeed speak of an Islamist International.

Only after 11 September 2001, the United States declared their former pupils to be terrorists. For the last thirteen years, they have led a merciless war against them. Many of their old and weary commanders, tired of the long lasting fights, were eliminated, even though they had finally signaled their willingness to compromise, but the movement could not be destroyed. The young Taliban commanders are uncompromising. Due to the CIA drone operations and their many civilian casualties, relatives of the latter join the Taliban as volunteers, accommodate them and make donations. Thus the Taliban can move in the tribal areas like fish in the water. They continue to receive funds from the booming Islamist parties in Pakistan as well as from Arab sources. They purchase weapons on the black market or capture them during attacks on the convoys that supply US forces in Afghanistan from Karachi via the Khaybar Pass. Since the Islamist parties of Pakistan consider them as freedom fighters against the United States, they are

politically supported by them, personally and financially.

About four years ago the NATO strategists began to make a differentiation of the Taliban movement. A distinction was made between the domestic and the international Taliban. The locals were said to have no international agenda as opposed to al-Qaeda. They just wanted to expel the foreign soldiers from their country, which is why one might negotiate with them. The aim of the Western strategists was to integrate the Taliban into the colonial-like structures in Afghanistan and neutralize them this way. When the Pakistani government then tried to apply the same NATO strategy and negotiated with the Taliban a cease-fire, the USA exerted massive pressure on the government in Islamabad and ultimately demanded to continue the fight against the Taliban. The Pakistani army conducted several operations, most recently in the Spring of 2013, in which civilians were killed. As a result, the Taliban took cruel revenge when their suicide bombers attacked a school for children of the military in Peshwar on 16 December 2014 and killed over 140 students or teachers and themselves. “You must feel what it is like when children are murdered,” said a Taliban spokesman, addressing the military to justify this vendetta.

There is no alternative to negotiations with the Taliban to solve the conflict in and around Pakistan. The Western countries, especially the United States, should stay out of the conflict. It has been proven more than once that external factors do not solve the problems, but rather worsen them. The US has long been not only part of the problem, but the main problem preventing a solution of the conflict in and around Pakistan. They have become an obstacle to a peaceful resolution of internal conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. •

“Nobel Prize for Peace...”

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desire for peace prevailing in Europe that is opposed to those endeavors.

Her courage is even the greater if you bear in mind that not only the corrupt oligarchs in Ukraine itself, but also the separatists and above all the American military and finance industry (*Soros*) would like nothing better than a war and that they tried to prevent the success of the negotiations by giving directives to their man of confidence *Porochenko*.

If the agreement of Minsk is more or less sustainable *Merkel* will have prevented war in Europe for the time being by her courageous peacekeeping step.

That, however, Germany and Europe have to finance the new US province of Ukraine after Greece now, has been probably the price we must pay for peace. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Competence orientation under fire

by Rainer Werner*

In the last week of February 2015, the results of the primary school tests “Vera 3” were published in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The spelling performance of third graders was tested. The result was shocking: More than a third of the students (37.4 %) did not even meet the minimum standards determined by the Standing Conference of Education Ministers. Another 25.9 % has only just reached this minimum. One can therefore assume that more than half of the primary school third-graders in this state do not or insufficiently master spelling in German. A shattering result. Education Minister *Brodkorb* (SPD) accordingly displayed contrition when he had to present and comment on the results. He ascribed the failures to a didactic method, which in the course of several years has found its way into the elementary schools: the “pronunciation-true” writing. In order to overcome the children’s writing block, they are allowed to write without rules for two years. They write phonetically just as they hear the sounds. The resulting text gibberish can often hardly difficult be understood (“Rehnade hatt a bunde Bluhse an.”= Renate hat eine bunte Bluse an.). Experts have always warned against this method, because the wrong spelling is first solidified in the minds, and afterwards has to be painstakingly adjusted to the rule-oriented spelling – a nonsensical detour. A *Spiegel Online* commentator described the learning method “writing down what is heard” as “denial of assistance” (see 5.3.2015).

The Minister of Education ascribed the students’ poor spelling performances yet to another cause: to competence orientation, which by now is competing with learning contents in curricula at all types of schools. The Minister said, that his country will “again prescribe subject matter in the teaching subjects, including a German literature canon”. The Minister will no longer accept “the relativization of specialist subject contents by competence descriptions”. As a teacher, you rub your eyes in amazement. In recent years, teachers, who said that the dominance of competences in subject lessons are leading astray, were denounced as “unprogressive”, “old-fashioned”, “living in the past”. Now there is evidence that they were right, because one can no longer hide the students’ knowledge gaps and deficiencies. The Minister’s behavior reminds me of *Roland Beier’s* caricature, showing *Karl Marx* in remorseful pose after the collapse of Communism (1990): I’m sorry, guys! Was just only an idea of mine ...



(picture caro)

Priority of competence over subject content has caused much damage. I have experienced student teachers being under constraint to execute the competence grid to such an extent that they neglected the subject content. One student teacher asked me for a suitable text for an examination lesson in a 10th high school class. I said, that with a text by *Franz Kafka* – “An Imperial Message” or “Before the Law” – he couldn’t go wrong. With these famous parables students can put their art of interpretation to the test and increase their linguistic intuition. The young man looked at me sadly: This was impossible, because the technical seminar leader wanted to see the method “learning circle (learning at stops)” and the competence “self-organization of learning”. I agreed. It would not be possible to teach Kafka “at stops”, for that one would need a solid train station. Such absurd formal (!) guidelines give priority to the method of teaching and an abstract competence over the wise choice of subject content. Furthermore, the thing about the currently circulating “student centred teaching methods” is, that difficult issues cannot be taught with them. Sophisticated authors such as *Friedrich Hölderlin*, *Franz Kafka*, *Georg Büchner* and *Heinrich von Kleist* then are falling through the cracks. They could only be taught using the method, that is arrogantly labeled old-fashioned by modern didactics, – the classroom discussion directed by the teacher, the most effective teaching and learning method I know.

In a report in a well-known national newspaper, teaching at the Franz-Stock-Gymnasium in Arnsberg, Westphalia, was portrayed. Equipped with digital learning resources the school is rated as exemplarily. Since available the expensive laptops and iPads have to be used of course. In

the German lessons (grade level was not mentioned) the students make a film about *Schiller’s* ballad “The Glove” using their iPads. The students transform the historical plot in a contemporary context: They fight with *Star Wars* swords. Again, it can be observed how a technical tool determines the principle of teaching of the lesson. Breaking down this challenging and by no means easily intelligible ballad to the level of a Hollywood blockbuster does certainly not meet the requirements of its intellectual content. I think it would be interesting to know, whether the students penetrated the difficult content of the ballad about the abuse of love (“But he threw the glove point-blank in her face: ‘Lady, no thanks from thee I’ll receive!’ And that selfsame hour he took his leave.”) mentally before they acted as film directors.

How will a demanding teacher do his selection of texts for the teaching of literature? Let us take the poem “To the Moon” by *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* (“Bush and vale are filled by thee with a silver haze ...”). For me, this poem would be always the first choice. On the one hand, it is one of Goethe’s most valuable poems from his classic period (challenge); on the other hand, its beauty is immaculate, it is perfect in content, form and linguistic form (aesthetics); thirdly it has a message that can convey something important to young people even in our modern times: There is a fulfilled life, even beyond the great turmoil of the world (“Blessed the one who can, without hatred, close herself off the world ...”) (meaningfulness, orientation). Would it really be justifiable to allow such a treasure to be dropped from the agenda because it resists the “student-centred teaching methods” because of its

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"Competence orientation..."

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difficult accessibility? It is important to realize: Just that what makes the quality of the classical (canonical) texts, proves to be an obstacle to address them in modern teaching. In his criticism of the "Education Plan 2015" of Baden-Württemberg the Stuttgart history teacher *Eberhard Keil* summarized this misguided path in just one sentence: "It seems that a certain knowledge is no longer important, that cognitive abilities and skills can be trained without any content or by using some arbitrary, random content." (*Eberhard Keil, "Reform in Permanenz"*, 2014).

Until the beginning of the competence euphoria in the PISA year 2001, the priority of the learning objective teaching was definitely the contents of what one taught. Hence, it was not irrelevant which texts the pupils were made familiar with in German lessons. The focus was on reliable (canonical) texts of high quality, even if they were linguistically unwieldy and lay outside the experiential world of the pupils. In history lessons the understanding of the great wealth of historical events was emphasized by teaching the pupils a chronological and structural frame of orientation. Thereby no reasonable teacher has ever neglected, what is called competences today, the "instrumental learning objectives". Even in the "old days" pupils had to highlight texts, to summarize them in the form of propositions and to give short talks about them. However, the teachers always appreciat-

ed that the understanding of the contents had priority. This has nothing to do with "rampant fact-checking" as this teaching method is now often called denounced. It has rather got to do with the postulate of Goethe's drama "Faust": "Man usually believes, if only words he hears, that also with them goes material for thinking." – ("Faust", verse 2565f.). If the surface – the technique of presentation – is being given priority to the substance – the understanding of the subject matter – one can not exclude the possibility that the pupils 'present' something they have mentally not penetrated or only half-way so. At the beginning of the 20th century the philosopher *Martin Heidegger* warned of taking the illusion of words for the thing itself: "Talk is the possibility to understand everything, without the prior appropriation of the thing" (*Martin Heidegger, "Being and Time"*, 1927). To him this "talk" is an evidence of half-education. Can we really want that at school?

In the history of German literature, there is an extreme example of how writers – definitely knowing the words – from the surface of a text – i.e. its lecture – let themselves be blinded, so that they did not recognize and blatantly misunderstood its substance. In 1952, the Jewish writer *Paul Celan* declaimed his poem "Death Fugue" at a meeting of the "Group 47" in Niendorf on the Baltic Sea. The poets convened were very much irritated by his expressionist charged lecture style, interspersed by Yiddish speech sounds, so that they said, "He reads just like Goebbels." They had not noticed that

they had just heard the best poem in German language about the Holocaust. Lack of competence (of lecturing) beats content (substance of the poem) – one could say sarcastically.

It remains to be seen whether the self-criticism of the Minister of Education of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania remains an isolated case or whether the curriculum-makers of all federal states will soon correct their curricula that are loaded with competences. Thereby critical feedback from the schools could be helpful. Until then, the teachers should use the freedom that are left to them by these curricula to teach essential contents by all means. In the schools this could be supported by the schools' subject departments deciding internal curricula which determine such contents. As a teacher of German, I would welcome, for example, if each school would issue a literary canon adequate for their pupils. No high school graduate should leave school without having ever read Goethe's "Werther", his "Faust", Schiller's "Räuber" (or another one of his plays), and a novel by each Heinrich von Kleist and *Thomas Mann*. They should follow the well-tried motto: A good text looks for and finds its method by itself. •

Source: <https://guteschuleblog.wordpress.com/2015/03/>

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

* *Rainer Werner* taught German and history until his retirement at a Berlin grammar school. His book "*Lehrer machen Schule*" (Teachers make schools) was published in Spring 2014. He runs the blog, the above text is taken from.

Letter to the Editor

Competences instead of knowledge according to Curriculum 21

"Mum, I have an English task. I have to answer 6 questions about an English text, each with a tick, available for selection is: Yes, no, and I do not know." Completely surprised I noticed that my son had not even read the text in English. He tries directly to answer the 6 questions, I therefore ask him: "Don't you have to read the text before you answer the questions?" My son: "No, I've learned it this way at school. I just have to see if the question occurs in the text. If so, I have to tick 'yes', if the question does not appear in the text, I must tick 'I do not know'. If the question occurs in the text in the negative, I have to answer 'no'." So my son has done his English task in no time, without actually having

read, understood and translated the text. All solutions were already in the text of the task, he only had to use his reading competence, the knowhow in English was not necessary here. In Early English taught at the third grade of Primary School, grammar and learning words play a minor role, anyway. It is quite sufficient if the pupil can order a hamburger in English in the holidays (action competence). Whether the student makes grammatical mistakes, does not matter, the child did get what it wanted and the teaching of English as well, thus in the "St. Galler Tagblatt" from 27.9.2013 "Wörtli fürs Real Life". To ensure that our children achieve such a level of English, we spend millions of taxpayers'

money and when you consider how much teaching time is spent on what is missing in the timetable of the basic subjects such as mathematics and German, this result is more than embarrassing! The opinion to spoil the children's joy of learning with grammar and learning words is wrong. Quite the contrary, the children see through the humbug, they no longer feel taken seriously and so they don't take school seriously anymore. The children want to be challenged and taken seriously. The competence-based learning according to Curriculum 21 is a step in the wrong direction.

*Dr med Gabriella Hunziker,
Mühlrüti*

“Herzroute” – the world’s most beautiful panoramic tour

A picture book cycling tour through Switzerland

by Heini Hofmann

This is it now: the new gem in cycling-country Switzerland, the trans-Helvetica “Herzroute” from Lake Constance to Lake Geneva is finished and – No kidding! – will be officially launched 1 April in the Circus Museum of Rapperswil. Far away from the hustle and bustle it leads heart-warmingly through beautiful landscapes and towns, and is heart-protecting as well because of the e-bike.

Activity holidays in cycling country Switzerland is much in trend. But the modern outdoor tourist does not seek the sweat, but the advancement gentle to the heart. He does not want to be tortured, panting, with eyes downcast and acidic legs, but while comfortable cycling give the eyes time to discover the beauty of the roadside. He wants to have a rest at pleasant country inns, taste local products from direct manufacturers and eventually stay overnight far from main roads.

It began with a vision

Because the “Herzroute” does not take the unattractive direct way from A to B, but on carefully evaluated high-altitude trails with promising views, it is the dream route for the growing community of electric velocipedes. According to Switzerland Tourism, it is the “gem” in the already excellent SchweizMobil route network, in short, the most attractive panoramic route for e-bikes worldwide. It passes 17 historic cities, 20 lakes and a whole string of pearls of cultural sites, natural wonders and power stations. Even “The New York Times” was moved to a major report.

How it came about. A good 25 years ago, at the beginning there was the vision of utopia specialist Paul Hasler (son of success writer *Eveline Hasler*). He brought the idea back from Route 66 in the US. He transferred it to an e-bike route right across Switzerland and thereby made the number 66 headstand. Route 99 was



From Thun to Laupen – protected by the Alps. (picture “Herzroute” AG)

born! And because it stirs the heart with its scenic beauty it was baptised Heart Route.

In 2003, the first test road could be

the last six stages from Zug to Rorschach can be launched by 1 April 2015. This way there is a proud 720 km hiking bike



Best of landscape between Willisau and Burgdorf. (picture “Herzroute” AG)



Sightseeing on two wheels in the old town of Altstätten
(picture “Herzroute” AG)

opened from Willisau to Lützelflüh in the Gotthelf country of Emmental, still with road markings at the time. Professionalisation in infrastructure, organisation and promotion had the result that in 2012 the track was already realised between Lake Geneva and Lake Zug that means the seven stages connection between the points of Lausanne and Zug.

Dynamic characters with enthusiasm

Meanwhile, one worked hard on the completion of the ambitious project. Thus,

trail available between Lake Geneva and Lake Constance with 12,000 vertical meters, easy to handle thanks to e-bike. The “Herzroute” is divided into 13 exciting day stages which are all accessible by train and lead through 11 cantons.

The power team of the “Herzroute” is the already mentioned founder Paul Hasler, who has also evaluated the routes, the CEO of Herzroute AG in Burgdorf, the Pontresina-born paragliding pilot and

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"Independent, innovative and open..."

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tourism manager *Simon Brülisauer*, and the Swiss electric bike pioneer and "Flyer" manufacturer *Kurt Schär* from Bernese Huttwil.

The e-bike success story did not begin, as one might expect, in the Dutch polderland, but in the mountains of Switzerland. By its topography it is virtually predestined as e-bike country. *Hanspeter Danuser*, the experienced tourism director and former spa director in St. Moritz is the inspiring advisor to the "Herzroute" team. In brief, in a short time and with great verve the motivated team has already achieved cult status for its baby.

Public Private Partnership

Even more so, today, the "Herzroute" is considered the model of a joint project of the cantons, regions and private initiators. As public private partnership project it runs on a sound basis. The public sector does the signalling, the private promoter ("Herzroute" AG), in cooperation with a non-profit network (Friends of the "Herzroute") is dedicated to marketing and quality assurance. The "Herzroute" is part of the cycling country Switzerland (www.veloland.ch). But it is not a bike tour of the large crowd. It addresses the pleasure-oriented audience that wants to explore the beauty of the country away from the everyday hustle and is interested in local food. It is a real win-win instrument as it takes sustainable tourism to rural areas with decelerated guests who, as surveys show, double the expenses compared to the rest of the network of cycling country Switzerland, which in turn many local partner companies are pleased with.

Each heart route-guest obtains a free guidebook (German/French) that shows the tourist attractions, cultural and culinary gems. It can also be booked ahead (www.herzroute.ch). More-than-one-day guests can also book travel packages and

luggage transport (Swiss Trails). More than half of the guests are 50plus, and 80 percent use public transportation.

The journey is its own reward

Sporting people can ride their own bike on the heart route. For all others, e-bikes are recommended. Therefore, in all 14 town stages Flyer e-bikes can be rented from Partner for Rent (Rent a Bike) at 64 francs per day, with half tax for 59 francs and with easy return at the destination. Reservation under www.herzroute.ch is strongly recommended. Helmets are available free of charge.

The service is also very well organized along the way. Over 3000 wine-red-coloured signposts with the magic number 99 show in both directions on the heart route, equipped with 25 battery exchange stations, because an e-bike with an empty battery, i.e. without motor support would be hard to go.

The completion of the "Herzroute" comes in just dead right now, because Switzerland Tourism gets ready to internationally push the charm of the diverse Swiss landscape. While cycling routes in other countries extend along rivers and valleys, the ridge way "Herzroute", where the journey is its own re-

**Inauguration party in Rapperswil-Jona**

The six new stages of the "Herzroute" going from Rorschach to Zug will officially be opened in the presence of some celebrities on 1 April from 2 – 4 pm at Circus Museum Rapperswil (Fischmarktplatz 1, near the harbour).

The event is free and open to the public ("Herzroute"-Flyers will also be available for test driving).

ward reward, is unique in its kind and, therefore, also internationally attractive. But most probably even many Swiss will be amazed of what may be discovered in their own country, away from the mainstream!

(Translation Current Concerns)

Need-to-know facts about E-bikes

HH. Electric bikes, capable of operating at a maximum speed of 25 km/h, are categorised as a light motor vehicle and as such are factually treated as regular bicycles. Wearing a helmet, having a licence plate or even liability insurance is not required in order to operate them. 14 to 15 year olds have to obtain the driving licence M to be allowed to use them.

E-bikes, however, operating at a maximum speed of 45 km/h are classified as motor cycles. Having a driving licence M is mandatory for all of those operating an e-bike as well as having to wear a helmet and having a (yellow) licence plate. Road sections with a three-part driving ban must not be driven on.

While operating an electric bike, the rider still has to pedal. Being fed through electricity from a battery, the motor only enhances the work done by the leg muscles. This pedalling help can be dialled up and down as needed by the rider.

Due to the recent increase of bicycle accidents – to which riders of the "Herzroute", where only flyers of the "velo" variety are available, certainly didn't contribute in any substantial way –, some politicians are calling for stricter rules for those devices. The Federal Roads Office (ASTRA), however, has declined to take new measures as of yet, citing the lack of past experience.