

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*

“We are a world of equals, and we should let nobody take this from us”

by Willy Wimmer



Willy Wimmer
(picture uk)

On 24 and 25 November 2015, an international scientific conference entitled “Yalta, Potsdam, Helsinki, Belgrade. How can we build a more secure world order?” met at the Serbian capital Belgrade. The gathering of scientists, diplomats, politicians and

public figures from over 20 countries of Europe and the world was dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Conferences of Yalta and Potsdam (1945). The organisers were the Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals and two Russian organisations, namely the Center of National Glory and the Fund of Saint Andrew. The following text presents Willy Wimmer’s address to the Conference.

*Mr President,
Mr Deputy Prime Minister Dacic,
Gentlemen Co-Chairs,
for the Serbian side, Mr Jovanovic,
for the Russian side, Mr Yakunin*

There is no doubt. The world is on the move. Neither is there any doubt that the name of the city of Belgrade is connected to this change. Perhaps Belgrade is even the first signal for this transition which is European and thus visible for us. It was Belgrade that became a target of NATO bombing in the midst of peacetime. Belgrade was chosen to become the key to a unipolar world.

And today? We are meeting in Belgrade. We must ask ourselves whether Belgrade gives us hope or answers to our questions. Or is our meeting in Belgrade only an intermediate step on the way to an even greater disaster for us in Europe and beyond?

It would almost seem as if there was some kind of hope. Whether we like it or not, this hope has something to do with the appearance of the Russian Federation

on the scene of the Syrian conflict. For time reasons I shall not go into the causes of this terrible civil war with millions of victims. Before Syria could be completely wiped out as a country, the Russian Federation decided to intervene in the conflict in accordance with all applicable rules of international law. It has intervened on the side of the legitimate government, and for the first time since more than four years the civil war does not seem to be boundless. The powers are talking to each other.

We already saw this resolute Russian approach along the lines of “this far and no further” after the coup in Ukraine, which other powers supported. Looking back at the development in Ukraine of more than two years past we see that the Russian Federation has saved us all, in Europe and perhaps even beyond that, from a great war.

It was obvious that others wanted to take the opportunity of the putsch to further their own targets in relation to the Crimea, also and especially because of the role of the Crimea in connection with the development in Syria. Since this has – in accordance with the applicable rules of international law – led to a referendum and the subsequent inclusion of Crimea the Russian Federation, we should ask ourselves why Ukraine was driven into the putsch.

In this context we need to keep an eye on Belgrade and we should hope for the Russian Federation’s success in Syria, without which the world will become a very dark place for all of us. It does not only have something to do with the generally accepted rules of international law. Those were to be definitively eliminated with the war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in the course of which the *United Nations Charter* was deliberately targeted with the aim to destroy it, just as the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was deliberately destroyed by an alleged “lone bomber” just before the foreseeable end of the war in Yugoslavia.

That was not just any event. The aim of bombing a peaceful city was to destroy everything – from the *United Nations Charter* and the *Helsinki Final Act* right

up to the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* – which had made it possible for us to reach the end of the Cold War and – I say this as a German – also the end of the division of our country. At no time in our European history have we had so many rules generally accepted in international law to deal with small and large difficulties. Get rid of them! – was the motto from overseas.

Whereas we could still think of the “common European home” in 1990 and were of the opinion that we would be spared from a war for good, that hope did not last long. With the attack on a founding member of the United Nations and a pillar of the Helsinki movement, war became a bitter reality. If *Francois Hollande*, *Vladimir Putin* and *Angela Merkel* had not been there in connection with Minsk II, we would probably already be involved in a total war. The message is clear. Only respect for the prevailing rules of international law and the peaceful resolution of conflicts will safeguard our survival and give our children a future.

This conference here draws a long line all the way back to Yalta. Thus one is of course tempted to dig deeper, and so come up with places associated with earlier dates like 1914 or 1919. But even that seems to be no solution. We must think of the year 1871 and the founding of the German Empire. We have all heard it this spring: Since that time, it has by all accounts been the goal of American policy to thwart a fruitful cooperation between Russia and Germany. We would all be well advised to think about the end of the Napoleonic wars. After the murderous developments in the Thirty Years’ War and the *Napoleonic* campaigns in Europe nothing of the sort was to ever happen again. This was the aim of an idea developed by the Russian *Czar Alexander* and the Austrian Chancellor *Metternich*, namely to resolve conflicts peacefully on the basis of a “Holy Alliance”. This was an early Helsinki. Of course, I will never forget what was said to me at the White House in 1988, namely that even the So-

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The uncontrollable Turkish watchdog of the United States

by Prof Dr Albert A. Stahel, "Institut für Strategische Studien, Wädenswil" (Switzerland)



Albert A. Stahel
(picture ma)

On 24 November, a Turkish F-16 interceptor shot down a Russian Su-24 fighter bomber. According to the Turkish air defense, the crew of the Su-24 were warned 10 times during 5 minutes, saying that they had penetrated Turkish air-

space with their fighter aircraft above the Province of Hatay.¹ The Russians deny that there had been an intrusion by the Russian fighter-bomber. Fact is that the Su-24 crashed on Syrian territory.² This crash site was also shown and as well commented on Russian television on 24 November 2015 (in Moscow). Both the pilot as well as the weapons officer managed to save their lives by means of their ejection seats. While the weapons officer could be saved by Syrian troops, supported by Russian *Spetznaz*, the pilot was shot and killed by Turkmen "irregulars" with infantry weapons.³ Subsequently, some Turkmen forced a Russian Mi-8 transport helicopter to land, which was on its way to the battle area in order to rescue the crew. They did so by bombarding it with infantry weapons. Thereby, a Marine was killed. Then, they destroyed the helicopter with American guided anti-tank missiles TOW.⁴

Merely because of the site of the crash of the fighter bomber, the Russian version must be regarded as the correct one. Furthermore, it should be noted that Turkey

has supplied political support and probably also weapons especially to the Turkmen opposition against the *Assad* regime in the area of Jabal al-Turkman in the Syrian province of Latakia.⁵ Ankara has repeatedly protested against the Russian air-to-ground attacks against the Turkmen, and *Erdogan* has publicly claimed the defense of the Turkmen by Turkey. At that time Russian President *Vladimir Putin* noted that the crew of the downed fighter-bomber Su-24 had had orders to attack the fighters of this area.⁶ Russian President *Vladimir Putin* has called the shooting down of the fighter bomber "a perfidious stab" and the Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* "a planned provocation".⁷

What are the immediate effects of the aircraft's downing? According to the orders of the Russian defense minister, from now on all fighter-bombers will be protected by Su-30 interceptors.⁸ That the downed Su-24 had no such protection, must be regarded in light of the situation in the war zone as imprudent. Furthermore, as the Russian television showed on 25 November, a battery of modern air defense system S 400 will be moved to the Russian war airfield Hmeimim in Latakia. In the future, every fighter plane that threatens a Russian fighter-bomber, is likely to be shot down by Su-30 or by S 400.

Putin has demanded an apology from *Erdogan*. The latter refused by demanding Russia to apologise for the intrusion into the Turkish airspace.⁹ As an immediate measure, Russia has stopped the import of Turkish foodstuffs. Furthermore, the visa requirement for Turks to Russia has been re-introduced. The Russian financing of the construction of a nuclear power plant in Turkey is likely to be frozen. Maybe Russia will take further economic measures against Turkey.

Barack Obama has so far carefully commented on the downing of the Russian fighter-bomber and in a kind of Nibelungen loyalty to his ally he emphasised Turkey's right to protect and defend its own airspace.¹⁰ Given the fact, that in the near future the tensions in the war zone along the Syrian-Turkish borders could increase even more, the US and its allies would be well advised to revise their relations with Turkey. To avoid a further escalation of

military air war actions, the United States should chain their watchdog up again, since it (Turkey) has hitherto always been loyal to perceived US interests in the Middle East. But this will not be easy, in view of the apparent disinterest of *Erdogan* in defeating the Islamic State (IS). •

¹ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, *Turkey's Downing of a Russian Jet*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, CSIS, Washington DC, 25 November 2015, p. 1

² Stratfor, *Russia, Turkey: Two Versions of the Same Story*, 25 November 2015, 20:18

³ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, p. 1

⁴ Stratfor, *What to Expect After the Downing of a Russian Fighter Jet*, 24 November 2015, 19:47

⁵ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, p. 2

⁶ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, p. 2

⁷ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, p. 1

⁸ Oliker, O. and J. Mankoff, p. 2

⁹ Ostroukh, A., Dagher, S., Abdulrahim, R., Alakraa, M.N., Lubold, G. and J. Barnes, *Turkey Downs Russian Jet; Ankara claims fighter violated airspace; Moscow says it was over Syrian territory*, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 November 2015, p. A1/A4

¹⁰ Stratfor, *US, France: Presidents Respond to Downed Russian Fighter Jet*, 24 November 2015, 18:14

Source: Institut für Strategische Studien, www.strategische-studien.com from 29.11.2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Who with whom against whom?

On the occasion of the press conference with President *Hollande*, President *Putin* made it clear once again that Russia is going to inform the Americans regarding the routes and destinations of all flights scheduled for attack in Syria as agreed: "The US-led coalition, which includes Turkey, was aware of the time and place where our planes would operate. And this is exactly where and when we were attacked." The propaganda flood over 17 seconds, "airspace violation" should therefore now really come to an end: The downing of the aircraft was an ambush, which *Erdogan's* air force could not have laid without US support. The fact that the US-Syria Coordinator General *John Allen* (*Obama's* enemy and neocon) approved the hit, is likely.

Source: www.broeckers.com/tag/syrien/ dated 29.11.2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"We are a world of equals ..."

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viet Union's military build-up in Europe is nothing but the effort of this country to draw the consequences from the proceedings of *Napoleon* and *Hitler*.

What is it that prevents us from loving our own country and at the same time respecting our neighbours? *Belgrade* says it with the motto of the *Belgrade Forum*: We are a world of equals, and we should let nobody take this from us. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

War in Syria – what for?

by Karl Müller

On 4 December of this year, only three days after the German government's decision, the German "Bundestag" voted yes on another "Bundeswehr" commitment in a war region, this time in Syria. All members of the faction of *Die Linke* and most parliamentarians of the faction *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* voted against it.

The official rationale for the war commitment is that Germany, after the Paris attacks on 13 November and on the basis of the "mutual defence clause", invoked by France according to Article 42, paragraph 7 of the EU Treaty, also wanted to act their part, to join the global coalition of more than 60 states against the IS terror in Syria and in particular to support France in its fight.

The "Bundestag's" decision, however, is leaving many questions unanswered which are to be addressed in the following:

- Why did the German government and the "Bundestag" not wait for a decision of the UN Security Council if there would be a resolution according to chapter VII of the UN Charter permitting the usage of military means against the IS? Russia has been working towards such a resolution since end of September. Is there no real interest in working together with Russia? Is it more about enforcing separate political goals in Syria and the Middle East? Goals directed against Russia?

The background of the downing of the Russian fighter jet by the Turkish Air Force is unclear. One theory is that the downing was done in agreement with the US, by forces that make every effort to prevent a joint effort with Russia against the IS.

Why are the German government and the German "Bundestag" again willing to ignore all concerns with respect to the constitution and international law, only to join helter-skelter in that war?

- The highly moralising language of German politicians in their reasoning for this new military commitment is conspicuous. One example is the German Minister of Defence *Ursula von der Leyen*. In an interview with the *Deutschlandfunk* on 1 December 2015, she declined cooperation with the Syrian government and the Syrian president because "we will not cooperate with responsible persons who have blood on their hands". Such wordings are grotesque, considering with whom the German government has gone to war in the past and now is about to go again.

No to the "Bundeswehr's" deployment to Syria

Experiences in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Libya and also in Iran in former times should have initiated some thinking processes. However, to date there has been no realistic analysis of the causes for the conflict, the causes for the utter failure of the policies of intervention and intrusion, nor has the social and political situation after the ending of the authoritarian regimes been analysed. Nobody asks for the causes and resources of the ongoing support of the IS; they are not clarified and consequences are not drawn.

The "Bundeswehr" deployment to the Middle East which reaches far beyond Syria that has been planned

now by the German government, is a political mistake. It will be very hard to correct that mistake; since neither can there a military or political objective be identified nor a limitation of time and place. By means of my rejection today I am voicing my hope that the German government is going to point the way to a clear correction of course.

Source: Extract from the statement of Member of Parliament Klaus Barthel (SPD) on 3 December 2015 on the planned "Bundeswehr" deployment in Syria. (<http://klaus-barthel.de/meldungen/nein-zum-syrien-einsatz-der-bundeswehr>)

(Translation Current Concerns)

It is now generally known that there are masses of blood on the hands of the US government. Statements like that of the German minister arouse suspicion: Are we told the truth? Or are we deceived once again, like so many times about the war missions of the past 20 years?

- Which are the true political goals and stakes of waging the war in Syria? Since a couple of years there have been numerous analyses regarding the geopolitical and energy-political interests and conflicts concerning Syria and the whole Middle East. On 21 March 2014, even the US Forces' *Armed Force Journal* published an article by an army major, *Rob Taylor*, under the title "Pipeline politics in Syria. You can't understand the conflict without talking about natural gas" and reporting on corresponding facts. Major Taylor is instructor at the US American *Command and General Staff College, FT. Leavenworth*.
- Also in Germany, many people are doubting the purpose and the meaningfulness of the "Bundeswehr" mission. Nobody denies the necessity to do something against the IS and to stop its bloody actions. But the German government's strategy is still not comprehensible for many people. In an interview with the newspaper "Main-Echo", *Jürgen Rose*, ex-Lieutenant Colonel of the "Bundeswehr" and long-standing critic of German missions abroad, did not principally exclude military action against the IS, however, he stressed in view of the attacks of November 13: "First it should be stated that the attacks were committed by French and Belgian citizens. And as a rule, I would say: They were acts of organised politi-

cal crime. And it is not the military but the legal system, the police and possibly secret services which are responsible for their control. In previous cases, these means have been most successful. Military actions, however, have always increased terror risks. In this context, the CDU politician and author *Jürgen Todenhöfer* speaks about 'terrorist incubators'. On 1 December, the German magazine *stern* writes in an article headed "Why war for peace does not work": "14 years after the beginning of the Afghanistan mission, history seems to repeat itself. Has nobody learned from the errors?" On 2 December, *Spiegel Online* titles: "Anti IS coalition: 'There is no exit strategy'." The article states: "A cooperation of the hostile Syrian factions [is] not more than a vague hope; western ground troops excluded; a military victory against the IS thus far from a realistic hope: Why did the West start its air raids, why is Germany now willing to join in and when should the mission be considered a success and ended? Critics think that the responsible persons simply do not have an answer to these questions. 'The air strategy is pure actionism for the sake of action', NATO insiders say. 'There is no exit strategy; there is not even a decent starting strategy. Actually there is no strategy at all.'"

Then we would be dealing with gamblers who will, without hoping for success in fighting IS terrorism, achieve only destructions, human victims and even more terror in our countries.

There is no self-empowerment in international law

Interview excerpt with international law expert Prof Dr Hans-Joachim Heintze at Ruhr-Universität Bochum with Deutschlandradio Kultur

Prof Dr Hans-Joachim Heintze: It is a great achievement of international law that violent acts between states have been outlawed by the United Nations Charter. There are only two exceptions when states are entitled to use force: one is the classical case of self-defense after an armed attack against the state and the second scenario is that the UN Security Council would empower the respective state to use force because a grave threat to international security or international law needs to be prevented. In these two cases the state may be allowed to use force. However, such a resolution empowering the Federal Republic of Germany or France or the United States to use force in Syria does not exist.

Deutschlandradio Kultur: But if I am not mistaken the UN Security Council ruled that after the terrorist attacks in Paris all measures to stop the so-called Islamic State had to be taken. How far is one allowed to go in order to take all measures? This is absolutely correct, we have a resolution of the Security Council which records that the terrorist attacks and activities of the IS are a threat to world peace, however, there is no consequence. This resolution is no legally binding docu-

ment. Such a legally binding document requires an explicit reference to the UN Charter and especially to chapter 7. This resolution, as it is written, is a political document which condemns the terrible events in Tunis, in Paris and other terrorist attacks and it empowers all states to do within their boundaries whatever they can to fight these terrorist activities, however, it is no license to use force against another sovereign state, and Syria continues to be a sovereign state, a member of the United Nations and therefore protected by the UN Charter in her territorial integrity and political independence.

You mentioned in the beginning that there is this case of legitimate self-defense and that is exactly what the French claimed, since they had been attacked by IS terrorists in Paris, although not by a foreign state (although the IS carries the term "state" in its name). The French have proclaimed the case for European Union joint defense measures – what is your view on that from an international law perspective? Are the French arguments sufficient?

This is somewhat problematic since for the definition of a foreign attack against

my own territory, committed by another state or a non-governmental organisation like the IS, has to have taken place first – in any case an attack has to be waged first against my territory. The problem in France is that the perpetrators who committed these acts all had French or Belgian citizenships and insofar it is hard to see where the dimension of a foreign actor attacking France comes in.

Moreover, the question of the case for European Union mutual defense measures – yes, it has been emphasised that a terrible attack against French law and order has been committed and the Member States convened and concluded, yes, France is entitled to defend herself. This depends on the political mechanisms within the European Union, of-course they can agree on this, however, this decision of the European Union is not equivalent to a legally solid foundation for military action against Syria from the standpoint of international law. •

Source: www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/bundeswehr-in-syrien-einsatz-in-rechtlicher-grauzone.1008.de.html?dram:article_id=338445 vom 1.12.2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Security policy on the wrong track!

The fight against terrorism cannot be won by military activism

Critical soldiers urge the coalition government not to repeat the well-known mistakes of past military interventions. The working group *Arbeitskreis Darmstädter Signal* demand the members of the "Bundestag" to vote against the proposed mandate for the "Bundeswehr" (German armed Forces) deployment in Syria.

The planned contribution of the "Bundeswehr" to the fight against Islamist terrorism in Syria has no military bene-

fit. To defeat an asymmetric enemy in a civil war, air strikes without forces on the ground are not advisable from a military point of view. An un-coordinated international coalition which relies merely on regional combatants with diverging interests is doomed to failure from the start. Arms sales to civil war parties do not result in the desired military success.

It is without strategic vision that Germany is once again engaging in a military adventure with tactical dubiousness. Again the armed forces follow a politicking that neither defines the target and planned ending scenario nor clearly regulates the political framework; and they do so without warning their political authorities from a professional perspective. The terrorist groups cannot be defeated this way, and Germany will merely lose credibility with respect to its foreign policy.

A UN Security Council mandate under Chapter VII does not exist that would be strictly necessary – in terms of international law – to get involved militarily in a non-international armed conflict (in everyday language: civil war). The horrific attacks in Paris are not to be attributed to

any state, they would enhance the IS per se and therefore do not provide a reason for war, in which the United Nations can be bypassed. A legally unclear mandate, as proposed by the Federal Government, damages the international community and our soldiers in the field.

It is absurd to assume that a political end to the conflict can at all be achieved without a political security agreement between the Security Council members and with major players such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the rest state of the *Assad* regime. The unstable and violent situation in Syria and northern Iraq remains a diplomatic Herculean task for all participating States, including Germany at the side of France.

Germany would be well advised not to squander its international credibility as a mediator in the diplomatic process, but it must now more than ever, by military restraint, strengthen its own voice across the conflict lines. The aim must be to prevent financial flows, weapons supply, new fighters and covert support from the region. •

Source: Comment of the Working Group "Arbeitskreis Darmstädter Signal" from 2.12.2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"War in Syria – what for?"

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Or are the true motives hidden from our sight? Just like the true interests and goals are not disclosed?

- Why are the claims of the German peace movement ignored again?

It is, however, a sign of hope that the peace movement has joined forces in a "Coalition for action: No "Bundeswehr" mission in Syria" which came together on 3 December at the Brandenburgertor in Berlin under the motto "No German military in Syria! For a political solution!" •

Setting the course for the sovereignty of the European nation states

No overthrow of national law by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

Interview with Ruedi Lustenberger, former President of the National Council

With their motion of 20 March 2015, Ruedi Lustenberger and 34 co-signatories from different parliamentary groups of the National Council wanted to entrust the Federal Council to set barriers to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in its case law. In recent years the Court has overridden law and legal understanding of the Member States in many cases with its very wide interpretation of some articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). By doing so, it violated the fundamental principle of subsidiarity (see box: "For a greater focus on the national legal systems of the European Court of Human Rights").

The Federal Council requested parliament on 8 May 2015 to adopt the motion, but at the same time the Council claimed they had already worked sufficiently in this direction. Indeed, the Member States of the Council of Europe, with active participation of Switzerland, pasted the subsidiarity principle in the preamble of the ECHR (Protocol No. 15 to the ECHR of 24 June 2013). Although a preamble has great importance as an expression of the ethical and moral content of a treaty or a constitution, however, it has no substantive legal effect.

The authors of the motion therefore request that the Federal Council commits to a legally binding requirement of the principle of subsidiarity in the ECHR.

The motion was adopted by the National Council on 19 June 2015. The Committee for Legal Affairs of the Council of States advocated it on 8 October 2015 with 7 to 3 with 2 abstentions. On 15 December, the Council of States will decide about it.

For a stronger consideration of national legal systems at the European Court of Human Rights

(Motion 15.3335 of 20 March 2015 submitted by National Councillor Ruedi Lustenberger)

Submitted text

The Federal Council is mandated to intensify its efforts with all the competent bodies, and particularly with the European Council, for the compliance with and enforcing of the subsidiarity principle and the taking account of the national legal systems by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in its jurisprudence.

Reasons

It is largely undisputed that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) represents an important achievement of the post-war period in Europe. That is why the Confederation has been a member of the ECHR since 1974. Among the general principles of the Convention, there is the principle of subsidiarity. This means that the legal protection mechanisms of the ECHR only intervene in a subordinate way to national protection of fundamental rights. The proceedings before the ECtHR should only be a safety net and secure a minimum standard.

In recent years, the judgments of the ECtHR in Strasbourg gave increasing rise to broad criticism. In some parts, judgments attacked the longer, the more disproportionately historically grown, democratically legitimate discretion of the Member States. The respect for state sovereignty, the idea of subsidiarity and the greater proximity of the national authorities to their matters were thus losing their importance. Thus the judgments sometimes do not only meet with a lack of understanding by the sovereign but also by legislators and the judiciary.

The explicit mentioning of the subsidiarity principle in the preamble to the ECHR, which was initiated by the 15th Additional Protocol should be a matter of course in itself and represents a step in the right direction. The subsidiarity principle in the jurisprudence of the ECtHR will therefore in future be taken into greater account. The ECtHR should punish overt discrimination, but not undermine the national legal system and jurisdiction.

The Federal Council is therefore mandated to work towards such an amendment of the ECHR at the European Council and its institutions.

(Translation Current Concerns)

Current Concerns: Mr Lustenberger, with your motion you want to achieve that in its judgments the ECtHR takes increasingly into account the national law of each defendant. Would a withdrawal of Switzerland from the ECHR be an option for you?

National Councillor Ruedi Lustenberger: No. Despite my criticism of the practice of the European Court and the defensive attitude of the Federal Council so far, I do not believe that Switzerland should withdraw from the ECHR.

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Ukraine

ds. Reports on developments in Ukraine have now pushed taken a backseat and are replaced by reports on the refugee flows to Europe and by the Paris assaults. But the danger emanating from the events in Ukraine and threatening peace in Europe has not become less.

On 20 and 21 November 2015, attacks on high-voltage pylons in South Ukraine were carried out, which brought electric power to the Crimea to a near blackout. The water supply, public transport and mobile phone networks were affected.

The Crimea obtains 70 to 80 per cent of their electricity from Ukraine.

It is likely that Crimean Tatars and representatives of the nationalist right sector were behind the attack on four power lines that supply the Crimea with electricity from the Ukrainian mainland. Since September they have blocked the land route to the Crimea with road blocks for trucks. It seems that Kiev has already been stopping the trains since the end of 2014, as the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" reports on 24 November and continues: Indeed "Poroshenko con-

firmed that criminal investigations have been initiated. A clear condemnation and distancing from the violence, which has left a large proportion of the 2.3 million Crimea inhabitants without electricity since the weekend, however, was not heard from Kiev.

Anyway, it does not seem to matter in Kiev that the Crimean Tatars together with the right sector and other radical groups in a sinister alliance are undermining the state's monopoly on legitimate use of force by their actions. The road blockades were tolerated.' •

"Setting the course for ..."

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Why is your motion necessary?

In the "dynamic jurisprudence" of the ECtHR I find a creeping and inappropriate interference in national affairs. The goal of the judges in Strasbourg is clear: They want to create a uniform European law bypassing national legislation. So whole Europe will become a state of the Strasbourg judges' grace. For Switzerland with its direct democratic instruments, this fact represents more than just a wasteful nuisance. From the point of view of the separation of powers, such a judicial intervention is basically unacceptable. In addition, it leads to a loss of sovereignty, whose extent we can still not correctly estimate. Ultimately, the national competence to make law by the legislature is shifted onto an international panel of judges which themselves presume to make national law via court judgments in the Member States. Former federal judge *Martin Schubarth* put it like this a year ago: "The accession to the ECHR 40 years ago didn't take place in order to introduce constitutional jurisdiction through the back door."

In the summer session the Federal Council requested the National Council to adopt the motion and explained that Switzerland has been committed for the strengthening of the ECtHR ever since and will continue doing so. Does the Federal Council take your concern into consideration with this response?

Only partially. The Federal Council's proceeding is too defensive. The Council will have to engage much more in "my" direction just in terms of the upcoming popular initiative "National law before international law". Otherwise, a defeat in the vote of historic proportions is threatening.

The Federal Council finds it "neither appropriate nor realistic" to engage more

Motion**Parliament Act****Art. 120 Subject matter**

- 1 A motion instructs the Federal Council to submit a bill to the Federal Assembly or to take certain action.
- 2 If the Federal Council is responsible for taking action, it shall do so or submit to the Federal Assembly the draft bill by means of which the motion may be implemented. [...]

Art. 122 Procedure for approved motions

- 1 If a motion is still pending after two years, the Federal Council shall report to the Federal Assembly each year on

what it has done in relation thereto and on how it intends to deal with the mandate. This report shall be submitted to the committees responsible.

- 2 A committee or the Federal Council shall request the abandonment of a motion if its mandate has been fulfilled. [...]
- 5 If a request for abandonment is rejected by both Councils, the Federal Council must fulfil the mandate contained in the motion within one year or within the period fixed by the two Councils on rejecting the request. [...]

Source: www.admin.ch

for the principle of subsidiarity at the European Court. But what your motion requires is an additional commitment of the Federal Council. What's next in case of the adoption of the motion by the Council of States, especially if the Federal Council declares already in advance it won't do more than before?

The implementation of the motion is clearly outlined in the Parliament Act [see box "Motion"]. The two Control Committees of the National Council and the Council of States are in charge of it. But, again, the Federal Council must be interested in anticipating the political climate and adopting the input of my motion, and then change its uncritical attitude towards the ECtHR. I hope that the newly elected parliament will assist in favour of my motion and remind the Federal Council of its responsibilities in this matter. It doesn't make sense for the Swiss Confederation to speak fine words at international conferences and at the same time ignore the general lack of understanding about incomprehensible judgments of the ECtHR on a national level.

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

(Interview *Marianne Wüthrich*)

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Introduction of Curriculum 21 – in many cantons ever more doubtful

cc. Meanwhile in 13 of 21 cantons popular initiatives have been launched against the planned introduction of Curriculum 21. It is obvious that this resistance cannot be allocated to any political camp, but that it has come about across all political parties and associations. Initiatives against the curriculum were already submitted in Aargau, Schwyz, Thurgau and Zurich. (See press releases below.) In the Canton of Basel-Land a referendum is already being held on the basis of a cantonal decision. In St. Gallen one has first to vote on a withdrawal from the HarmoS Agreement, before it is possible to decide on Curriculum 21. In Schwyz, the initiative was declared invalid because it illegally violated “superordinate law”. But the Schwyz initiative committee will go on (See. “Initiative Committee goes on”).

Sonntagszeitung: “That won’t work”

On 29 November the *Sonntagszeitung* reported in detail on an initiative by 20 renowned educationalists, journalists and doctors who object to Curriculum 21. The 20 member team of authors of the brochure “Objection!” include – beside the Biel teacher *Alain Pichard* also the Basel Councillor of States *Anita Fetz*, the education scientists *Walter Herzog* and *Roland Reichenbach*, but also the publicist *Beat Kappler* or the pediatrician *Remo Largo*. The brochure aims at sparking a broader debate on the curriculum, also in the left-wing camp, among others it is intended to point out the low-achieving pupils’ disadvantage that are associated with the curriculum by many critics.

Substantiated criticism

Criticism of the curriculum is now broadly based and seems to more and more raise its

practical implementation to question. Both from the academic community as well as from the practical side some serious deficits have repeatedly been pointed out. The planned introduction of a “competence”-oriented teaching with simultaneous dissolution of class-based teaching increases the likelihood of another fall in quality at Swiss primary schools, with simultaneously additional costs at cantonal and municipal level. (*Current Concerns* has repeatedly covered the criticism of the curriculum and its political background.)

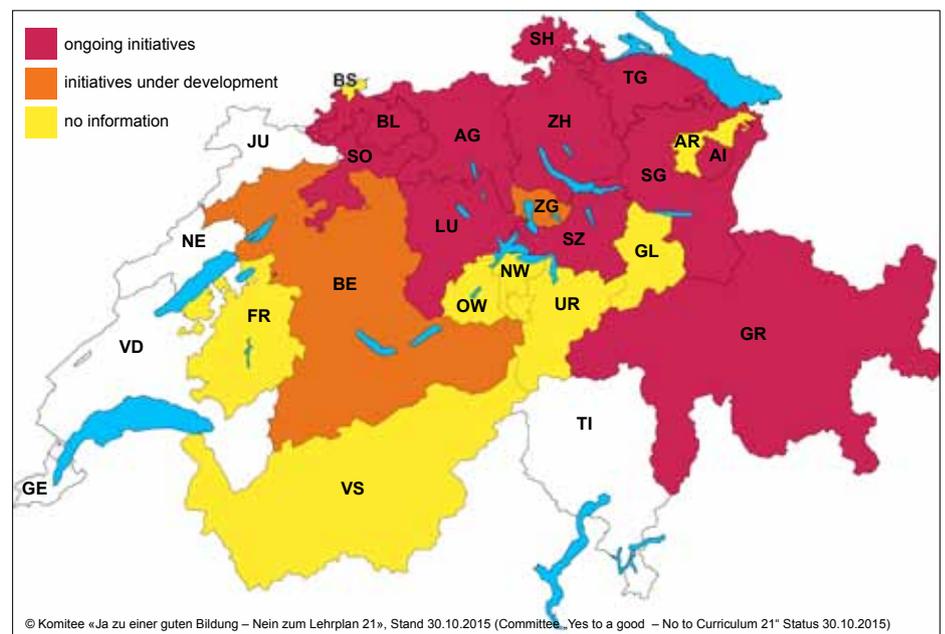
A curriculum relying on the fact that parents will take over the school’s tasks at home – as it is increasingly the case already today and as it will be cemented with Curriculum 21 – is clearly discriminating so-

cially disadvantaged families since being insufficiently academically educated, they will not be able to afford expensive tutoring besides the school for their children. One should especially consider working parents, especially shift working parents, single parents or migrants. The social side of school is just passed by Curriculum 21. This curriculum is miles away from what could be called a “People’s School”.

To create a Swiss school of tomorrow and base it on an already failed American educational concepts (competences), is doomed to failure.

The brochure “Objection!” can be obtained from E-mail: arkadi@bluemail.ch

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



Media Release

Zurich: “Referendum on Curriculum 21” submitted

On Friday, 27 November 2015, the initiative committee submitted the cantonal popular initiative “Lehrplan vors Volk” with more than 12,000 signatures – 6,000 are necessary for a realisation. The initiative demands that in future the cantonal parliament will have to decide on the curriculum and that the people will have the opportunity to vote in a referendum. Such a change means a greater say in education policy, which will increase the acceptance of the curriculum by the population. By the planned implementation of “Curriculum 21” elementary school will be radically rebuilt, a procedure that must be democratically legitimised – accordingly the curriculum’s implementation has to be postponed in the Canton of

Zurich until the decision on the initiative has been taken.

Anita Borer, representative of the initiative committee and SVP (Swiss People’s Party) member of the Cantonal Council, is pleased with the positive signature result: “We were able to far exceed the required number of signatures and to submit more than twice as many that required. It shows that the population needs to have a say in important changes in education policy, and that the introduction of the new curriculum must now be delayed until the decision on the initiative.”

The Curriculum 21, which is to be introduced soon in the Canton of Zurich, will change the school system radically.

With the Curriculum 21 instead of learning contents countless circumstantially formulated “competences” are to be imparted. Various tried and tested structures such as the class teacher system would slowly disappear and the way would be paved for controversial reforms such as self-directed learning at the “Grundstufe” (elementary level), which has already been rejected by the people of Zurich, would be introduced, i.e. without participation of the people.

In addition, the constitutionally granted educational sovereignty of the cantons is undermined. *Andri Silberschmidt*, deputy of the initiative committee and president

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Media Release

Thurgau people vote on Curriculum 21

The initiative “Yes to a good Thurgau Elementary School – without Curriculum 21” has been accomplished with almost 5000 signatures – only 4000 would have been necessary. On Tuesday, 3 November 2015, representatives of the initiative committee presented the signatures in style to the secretary of the canton in “Schüelertheks” (school satchel).

The initiative aims for a good Thurgau Elementary School

The initiative wants that not just the government alone but the State Council and if necessary the people can decide on the objectives and the content of the curriculum of the elementary school. In addition, annual goals are to be set so that teachers, parents and students will know again what the students should be able to know at the end of the school year. The Curriculum 21 provides learning objectives only for the three cycles (steps) of the elementary school without binding fixation on the corresponding school years. Thus a real harmonisation across

“Zurich: “Referendum on ...”
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of the Young Liberals in Canton Zurich, attaches great importance to a federal education system: “It has proven successful in the past that the cantons had a curriculum tailored to their situation. There is no acute problem, justifying the centralisation of the curricula and this egalitarianism of the cantonal educational policy.”

For Borer it is clear: “We do not want a bureaucratic monster that administratively absorbs teachers even more through its comprehensive form, its unclear wording and involving further vocational training. We want a good, understandable curriculum, which is a mainstay for teachers in class and with which the contents are taught that prepare our children for social life in the best possible way. The Curriculum 21 points in the wrong direction. It is based on reforms that are highly controversial in the population. It is therefore clear to us that the people must have the last word.”

*Anita Borer, member of the Cantonal Council, SVP,
Representative of the Initiative Committee*

*Andri Silberschmidt, President JFZH,
Deputy of the Initiative Committee*

(Translation Current Concerns)

the cantons will not at all be possible with the Curriculum 21. Finally, the initiative demands that all students should learn to read, write and calculate properly again and that a positive attitude towards work should be promoted.

Thurgau voters enjoyed signing

Handing over the signatures the initiators reported that many people enjoyed signing, after having heard all about the Curriculum 21. Many thanked the committee having taken the initiative to put forward the referendum on this absurd curriculum.

For the first time parents and grandparents heard, just by the signature collectors that pupils should learn primarily “self-regulated” and “individualised”, according to the Curriculum 21 which means to be left to themselves. Class lessons in which all pupils work together are obsolete, because the teacher only provides the material and each pupil must develop the subject material essentially by himself. Consequently each pupil works on his or her individual program. Our signature collectors met ready listeners with the parents hearing that now already many parents often have to sit together with their children for hours every afternoon to work up the subject material, because nowadays it is no longer taught properly at school, instead of practicing their knowledge again at home.

Teachers want to be educators, not facilitators

Many teachers of all ages support the concern of the initiative with their sig-

nature. Some of them have been pressurised by superiors if they spoke critically against the nonsensical education reforms and Curriculum 21. By submitting the initiative for a good Thurgau elementary school the ground for a democratic debate is prepared now. All citizens have the right – even teachers and members of school boards – to engage openly and critically in the forming of opinions before the vote.

In the course of signature collecting it became evident that many fellow citizens, especially parents, have realized a general education debasement in our elementary schools for some time. It would be cemented with the Curriculum 21. Also many training instructors have often experienced that young people are no longer able to meet the demands of professional life, and this is mainly because they are no longer firm in the necessary basic. The training instructors are afraid of a intensification of that trend by Curriculum 21. Therefore, they hope for a stop of the constant reforms.

The initiative committee counts on an open, honest, objective and democratic discussion with the whole population of the canton.

*Frauenfeld, 3 November 2015
“IG für eine gute Thurgauer Volksschule”
(Community of interest for a good Thurgau elementary school)
Felix Huwiler (Spokesman)*

(Translation Current Concerns)

The Initiative Committee goes on

Schwyz: No school reconstruction from above and outside – the people are to decide on the elementary school

Although the introduction of the Curriculum 21 is further “promoted” by the Education Department and the Cantonal Council has declared the initiative as “invalid”, the Initiative Committee remains active. The people must be given the opportunity to vote. It is not only directly affected by the dismantling of our elementary school, but it must also pay the bill. The initiators reject the legal justification of the initiative’s annulment as untenable. The Initiative Committee’s goal is not off the table – neither by the Education Department’s large-scale “information campaign” nor by the formalistic justification of the alleged invalidity of the initiative.

The criticised contents and system changes follow the dictate of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). So they are controlled from outside and have not emerged from the requirements of our elementary school; with changes in legislation, regulations and instructions that cause a gradual deterioration of the educational levels at the end of the school time and enormous costs and bureaucracy.

Thus now a more extensive initiative is being prepared, which can also push a stop to the gateways for the curriculum 21

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Opposition parties in Baden–Württemberg criticise the Green-Red government’s education policy

by ‘Arbeitskreis Schule und Bildung in Baden-Württemberg; www.arbeitskreis-schule-und-bildung.de

On 13 March 2016 a new parliament will be elected in Baden-Württemberg (state in the south of Germany). Roughly four months prior to these elections, all opposition parties with the due prospect of winning seats in the new parliament, have by now published their election programmes. The striking fact: An outspoken criticism of the Green-Red educational policies of the past four and a half years unites these three parties – it is the CDU (the Christian Democratic Union which according to an INSA survey of 9 October 2015 may obtain 40% of the votes), the FDP (the Liberals with 5% of the votes) and the Alternative for Germany (AFD with 8% of the votes). These facts may also be interesting for Swiss citizens, since the educational policy of the Green-Red government in Baden-Wuerttemberg is in many aspects identical with what can be observed about Swiss educational policy – in particular with respect to its Curriculum 21.

We are not in the position to decide how honestly the party strategists believe in their own criticism. It will become obvious as soon as these parties will be assuming governmental responsibility. What is even more important: this criticism expressed by the opposition parties reflects the citizenry’s widespread rejection of Green-Red education policy. And to take the current opposition parties on their promises then is the right and duty of all citizens.

Core of the criticism of all three opposition parties is that the Green-Red government wants to overturn a proven and successful school system without any evident necessity. In its place they plan to

“The Initiative Committee ...”

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via teaching materials and teacher training, conversion of the teacher’s role as coach, control and monitoring system and ideological influence-taking at the school and so on. You will hear again from the Initiative Committee.

Irene Herzog-Feusi

President of the Initiative Committee

Source: Initiative for changing the Public Schools Act – Stop the curriculum 21, Communiqué, 24 November 2015

The opinion of the initiators for the attention of the Cantonal Council can be read on the website www.gute-volksschule-schwyz.ch and can be requested from the initiative committee in paper form.

(Translation Current Concerns)

install a highly questionable new system which is ideologically motivated and serves merely individual interests.

Its central project are the so-called “Gemeinschaftsschule” and its teaching and learning strategies (“new learning culture”): Disintegration of the previously well-proven tripartite school system in Baden-Württemberg, replacing it by a “standard school” for all pupils, minimising the teacher’s role to that of an “advisory” learning coach, dissolution of shared learning in a classroom community, mixing of ability groups (“heterogeneity” according to the propaganda formula “diversity makes clever!”), enforcing individualised learning (“self-directed learning”) with worksheets and computer programmes, no marks and no opportunity to repeat a school year, etc., etc. Swiss citizens know all of this as well.

The first educational policy decision of the Green-Red state government was to abolish the binding character of the primary school’s recommendation for the individual pupil’s further school career. Until then, the primary school teacher had given a recommendation for each of his or her pupils, telling the parents what secondary school would be appropriate for them. The aim was to recommend each student to a school that suited him best. This recommendation was binding and had proved to be very successful. The Green-Red education policy, however, regarded this regulation as a “selection tool” like in a “medieval feudal society”. Political objective of the Green-Red education policy was to force greater performance differences out of the classes of all (!) types of school (more heterogeneity) and thus to dissolve the differentiated school system in favour of a comprehensive school system. Logically, the next Green-Red educational step was the introduction of the “Gemeinschaftsschule”, which was to replace all other general types of schools in Baden-Württemberg in the long term.

What is the opposition parties’ response?

Christian Democratic Union CDU: Green-Red government has applied the axe to our successful school system

In its election manifesto the CDU finds that the Green-Red government “by an ideological, completely hasty and not well thought out introduction of the “Gemeinschaftsschule” and the hasty abolition of the mandatory primary school recommendation [...] did apply the axe to our successful threepartite school system”. Since the

abolition of the mandatory primary school recommendation “the transition figures from primary school to “Hauptschule” or “Werkrealschule” suffered a severe setback from 25 per cent to just seven per cent in just four years. Simultaneously, the numbers of pupils who had to repeat a school year due to bad grades have increased significantly in “Realschule” and “Gymnasium” (like the British Grammar School).

However, not only the latter are affected: “Teachers realise more and more that many pupils are unable to understand the lessons and experience unnecessary and harmful stress in a very important phase of their development. In addition to the failing of their own learning achievement the success of the whole class is at risk, as well.”

The result: “Our children are the primary losers of the radical restructuring initiated by the Green-Red administration [...]”.

The CDU also criticizes the fact that other types of school are to adopt the teaching and learning methods of the controversially debated “Gemeinschaftsschule”: “Green-Red wants the Realschule and Special Needs schools to be dissolved in the Gemeinschaftsschule which they favour and clearly privilege. The educational concept of the Green-Red administration to further develop these types of schools clearly show that.”

“The Gemeinschaftsschule has failed”

The “Gemeinschaftsschulen” are much criticised: “We consider the Green-Red ideology tending towards the all-including “Gemeinschaftsschule” to be wrong. [...] Although the Green-Red state government one-sidedly favours their prestige object of “Gemeinschaftsschule” with greater teacher resources, the learning objectives are not achieved. The educational concept cannot be upheld despite abundant resource endowment and numerous overtime lessons of teachers. It harms the development of the pupils in learning. Many local authorities, who have spoken out for the “Gemeinschaftsschule”, have not done so out of conviction, but to maintain their school site.”

A section in the election program of the CDU even bears the headline: “The Gemeinschaftsschule has failed”. It reads: “A school where all children are taught in one group, from a special needs pupil to the gifted one, in which the teachers are just learning coaches, a school without marks and without ‘re-

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"Opposition parties in ..."

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peaters' is totally overloaded and quickly over-challenged. We will not set up new Gemeinschaftsschulen, neither will we close the existing 271 Gemeinschaftsschulen. We want to offer these Gemeinschaftsschulen to develop and to work with performance-differentiated educational programmes. The financial preference of the Gemeinschaftsschule will be reduced."

The CDU wants to reshape the existing Gemeinschaftsschulen. There should again be "classes with similarly achieving students". The party wants to "evaluate the performance again by marks" and "give the students a chance to repeat the year". The illegal interference of the Green-Red education policy into the teacher's pedagogical freedom must have an end. The CDU calls for "freedom in the pedagogical concept".

FDP (Liberals): the Green-Red state administration caused considerable unrest in the education system

The FDP (Liberals) stresses the importance of quality education and criticise the Green-Red attack on it: "Our prosperity, but also the life chances of every individual depend decisively on the quality of our education. This educational system has been in a state of considerable unrest in recent years caused by the Green-Red state administration." The current "financial privileging of the Gemeinschaftsschule" is to be terminated.

Like the CDU, the FDP criticises the abolition of the mandatory primary school recommendation: "The hasty and unprepared abolition of the mandatory primary school recommendation has not only considerably tightened up the situation in some communes with regard to the existence of their Hauptschule/Werkrealschule site, but may also be responsible for the sharp rise in repeaters' quotas in Gymnasien (grammar schools) and Realschulen (middle schools)."

"The future of the Realschule is threatened"

The FDP places great importance on the preservation of Realschulen in Baden-Württemberg. Without any need, the Green-Red state government wants to transform this proven type of school into a "Gemeinschaftsschule light". The FDP objects: "The unique performance-enhancing pedagogy and the sophisticated level of teaching justify the impressive success of the Realschule. The economic businesses in Baden-Württemberg like to conclude training or employment agree-

ments with Realschule graduates because the Realschule diploma stands for quality. In this way the Realschule offers true life chances and career prospects to many young people. The Realschule is also the school of educational promotion prospects. It is due to the Realschule that the principle 'Bridging the Gap!' is a living reality in the Baden-Württemberg education system. The Realschule plays a decisive role in ensuring that about half of the university and higher education qualifications in Baden-Wuerttemberg are acquired by way of vocational schools. [...] In a two-pillar school system that knows only Gemeinschaftsschule and Gymnasium, the future of the Realschule would be threatened. We Free Democrats do not only determinately reject the two-pillar structure, but also fight for the Realschulen to prevail and continue their successful work without being forced to take over the pedagogical concept of the Gemeinschaftsschule."

AFD (Alternative for Germany): "We reject a reduction of education to the buzzword 'competence'"

The *Alternative for Germany* (AFD) approaches even more fundamentally its criticism of the Green-Red education policy and also refers back to the years before the Green-Red administration. In its election manifesto the party states: "The AFD is concerned about an erosion of the performance principle, which leads to a loss of the studying and training abilities among young people. By the educational reforms of recent years, uncertainty about the goals of education has developed among parents, teachers and pupils. To make education sustainable, it is essential to stop the ongoing deterioration of our educational system."

Therefore, the AFD calls for "a performance-oriented and differentiated school system with clear profiles and with clear learning objectives", a "termination of the experiment 'New Learning Culture' [these are the new teaching and learning methods of Gemeinschaftsschulen, which are now being imposed on all types of schools]", a "knowledge transfer and performance orientation without ideological indoctrination", "teacher-centred learning in classes" and "an ideology-free education". Even more than the CDU and FDP, AFD refers to the concepts of *Wilhelm von Humboldt*: "We can confidently refer to a unique educational tradition in Germany and do not have to follow any educational en-vogue ideas. Instead, we need to remember our principles that have made us a leading science nation". As a result the AFD demands: "We call for an education policy that is based on the educational ideal of German intellectual histo-

ry. We reject a reduction of education to the buzzword 'competence' with the objective of a purely economic employability." Therefore the AfD also calls for "an immediate withdrawal of the Green-Red curriculum. School is a place of learning and performance. The ideological indoctrination of the Green-Red curriculum is to be quitted immediately." The party adds as an explanatory remark: "We are against the approach of the Green-Red curriculum, in which ideological indoctrination has a higher priority than performance and learning. Moral qualities can unfold only by means of a healthy development of the whole personality and by the existence of role models. Sex education should be age-appropriate, the current early sexualisation is to be counteracted."

The AFD, too, expresses significant criticism of the new Gemeinschaftsschulen: "We are opposed to the ideological approach of egalitarianism, as it has become programmatic in the Gemeinschaftsschule program. There will neither be start-ups nor forced conversion of Realschulen to Gemeinschaftsschulen. It must be ensured that the traditional types of schools, in particular the Realschule and the Gymnasium, also exist in rural areas within walking distance."

Finally: The AFD also rejects the Green-Red policy of mixing performance levels in the classes of all types of schools. "The mandatory elementary school recommendation is to be reintroduced. This does not mean to determine the pupils' future life forever. The transition from one type of school to another is possible if there is the appropriate performance level."

This "governance" must be stopped

As I said: Those, who travel around in Baden-Württemberg and talk to their fellow citizens, will know that the criticism by the opposition parties well reflect the citizens' criticism. This became obvious in all the local referendums on the educational policy of the Green-Red state government over the past four and a half years. It leaves a serious question as to why the state government of Baden-Württemberg intentionally passes the people by on purpose in its ruling.

The Green-Red style of politics in the state of Baden-Württemberg is similar to the so-called governance of the German government. Wherever you look, the will of the citizens is being disregarded. The consequence is that the discontent among citizens increases. We can only guess where this may lead. This "governance" must be stopped. In education policy, too, the honest dialogue, the equal dialogue of all citizens is required – and politicians are nothing but citizens. •

The presidential elections in Belarus

Confirmation of the independent way

by Prof Dr Peter Bachmaier*

Nowadays about no other country in Europe, the western media have reported in such a biased way as about Belarus (White Russia). The non-reporting is almost as bad, as thus the impression is created that the country was a "white spot" on the map, to write about it is not worth it.

Belarus is not that well known in the West, also because there has never been a state Belarus or White Russia and the Belarusians have therefore not left such broad traces in history. The Belarusian nation-building started only at the end of the 19th century and did not include all segments of the population.

Nation and history

In the 10th century the East Slavic Principality of Polotsk with the cities of Minsk and Vitebsk became part of Kievan Rus, then part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where the old White Russian language served as official language, as well as of the Union Poland-Lithuania and finally in the wake of the partition of Poland part of the Russian Empire. In the Soviet Union, the Belarusians got their own Republic - the *Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic* (BSSR), which acted in a guerrilla struggle against the German occupation during the Second World War. They are patriotic, but don't want to completely separate from Russia and Russian culture.

They see themselves as a Christian country and maintain their cultural tra-

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ditions. They are sceptical towards the trends of the global pop culture. The Orthodox tradition and the historical circumstances created a special sense of community and a belief that only by staying together they could overcome difficulties.

In the USSR the Republic was a model country, completely integrated in the Union, highly industrialised, urbanised, and with a high standard of education. The Belarusian nomenklatura promoted - similarly as the Ukraine - in the 1980s in the time of perestroika and in the early 90s the movement for national independence, because they wanted to catch up with the west.

On 24 August 1991, the BSSR declared its independence. In December 1991 it became a founding member



Minsk Independence Square. (Bild pb)

of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at the Conference in the government owned Datcha Wiskuli in the Below Heathland close to Brest, chaired by *Michail Gorbatschow*. In 1991 Belarus was admitted to the IMF and the World Bank pursuing a pro-Western course until 1994. However, in 1994, *Alexander Lukaschenko* won the presidential election. He, formerly an ordinary head of a collective state farm, hasn't been a member of the former nomenklatura as the only president in all the successor republics of the Soviet Union - and he did not advocate those interests. In 1991 in the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR he had voted as the only member against the dissolution of the Soviet State. He retained many social institutions of the Soviet system, but took all power away from the emerging new oligarchy.

In November 1996 with the help of a referendum, Lukashenko gave the country a new Constitution, which delegated significant power to the President and provided for a Union with Russia. At that time, 70% of voters favoured the Presidential draft of the Constitution. His program was a social economy in contrast to the neo-liberal reforms of the neighbouring countries and provided for gradual reforms without destructions.

Belarus, since the referendum of 1996, is a presidential Republic with a strong "vertical line of power", in which the President sets up the Government and determines the basic lines of inner- and foreign policy. But the President is elected every five years, and on 10 July 1994 in the pres-

idential election Alexander Lukaschenko has already received a majority of 81% of the votes against the then Prime Minister, *Wjatscheslaw Kebitsch*.

The socially oriented people's state

Since then Belarus has been able to point to growth, stability and social security. In the year 2005 it was the first former Soviet republic to recover its gross domestic product of the era before the collapse of the Soviet Union, i.e. 120% of the level of 1990, compared to 85% in Russia and 60% in Ukraine. Belarus is among the leading exporting countries of the world in the field of potash fertiliser, trucks, tractors and construction machinery.

Special attention was paid to the villages. Collective and state farms were not closed like in other ex-Soviet republics, but reformed. "Agriculture is the area from which depends the welfare of the country," Lukashenko said. The state programme of renewal and development of villages for the periods 2005-2010 and 2011-2015 had the objective of promoting, above all, the social development in the country. The production of food and raw materials now exceeds the demand of the internal market by double the amount, and the surplus goes to Russia and other neighboring countries.

According to official statistics, between 2009 and 2013 immigration (from neighboring countries) was by 55 000 persons higher than emigration from Belarus. In the years 2014 and 2015 about 150 000

"The presidential elections ..."

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refugees from the Ukraine were accepted and integrated into Belarusian society.

In his remarkable speech before the UN General Assembly on 27 September 2015 President Lukashenko championed the right of every people to choose its own way against a society of division between the rich and the common people, against destabilisation "in the Ukrainian style" and against the destruction of the traditional family.

Economic development

From 1998 to 2008 the gross domestic product (GDP) of Belarus rose by 8-10% annually, the unemployment rate decreased to 0.9% in 2010. The economy is export-oriented – tractors (7% of the world market), and other engineering products and fertilizer (9% of the world market) are exported.

Belarus is the only country in the post-Soviet space which has retained the scope of industrial and agricultural production as well as the system of gratuitous education and healthcare. Today it has a per capita national income more than twice as high as that of Ukraine or Moldova, and also higher than that in Russia.

However, the international financial crisis of 2008 contributed to an unsettling of the Belarusian economy. Since 2011 Belarus has been struggling against the negative effects of changes in foreign markets, which have led to unstable prices and a sharp decline in demand for Belarusian products in certain sectors.

Due to the high involvement of national production with foreign markets the crisis phenomena in the Russian and international economies caused an analogous decrease of 3.3% in GDP (in comparable prices) in the first half of the year 2015, in relation to the same period of the previous year. Lately the country's economy has been working under the terms of a deterioration of the external economic situation.

The national culture as the cornerstone of independence

In the cultural sphere, the government targets a spiritual renewal based on the Belarusian folk culture and the classical Russian and European culture. "The national culture is the cornerstone of independence", as Lukashenko said. In the 1996 referendum more than 70% of the citizens answered in the affirmative to the question whether Russian should be raised to the position of a second official language beside Belarusian. The government attaches a high value to the education system, and this finds expression in a – compared with other CIS countries – above-average share of the state budget (about 7%). The

subject "State ideology", a kind of civics taught in the upper classes, serves to instill the love of country, state and family. The patriotic education is also an object of the *Belarusian Republican Youth Union* (BRSM). When young people reach the age of majority, they are presented with the citizenship certificate by representatives of the state at an official celebration.

The churches are "partners of the state." This does not only concern the orthodox church, to which 83% of the population belong, but also the Roman Catholic Church (12% of the population), which has been able to quadruple the number of its priests since the proclamation of independence. In 2009, Lukashenko visited Pope *Benedict XVI*, Who sent a nuncio to Minsk. "The education of a true citizen and patriot begins in the family – it is here that spiritual values, the basis of personality and the country's future will be formed," the president explained.

Relations with Russia and the CIS

In the year 1998 Belarus decided to form a union with Russia. The relations between the two countries are very close, but negotiations on the formation of a Union State are not yet concluded. Belarus is the largest trading partner of Russia. Russia accounts for 60% of its trade and supplies 90% of its energy needs. Early in 2015 the Eurasian Union was formed between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia, and this is practically a common economic zone.

The pro-Western Russian liberals, who still have a strong position in the nouveau riche oligarchy, the opposition parties and even in the government of Russia, are enemies of the politics of Belarus. So for example *Boris Nemtsov* repeatedly expressed himself critically about Lukashenko.

Since Soviet times Belarus has had close political, economic and cultural relations with Ukraine. The Belarusian gov-

ernment opposed the Maidan revolution and the coup in Kiev as well as the secession of the Crimea and their return to Russia, as it opposes any border changes in Europe, including the secession of Kosovo from Serbia. It advocates the integrity of Ukraine and therefore negotiated the ceasefire agreements of September 2014 and February 2015 in Minsk. This led to an improvement in relations with the EU.

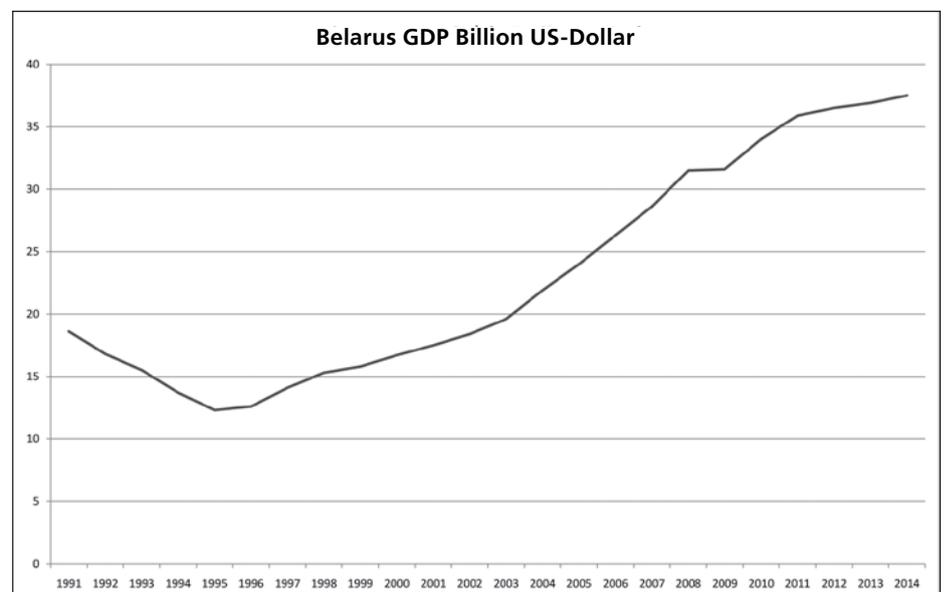
The result of the presidential elections in Belarus on 19 December 2010 was that the President-in-Office Alexander Lukashenko was confirmed in his office with 79.6% of the votes while the nine oppositional candidates together received about 6% of the votes. The rest were abstentions. This result was confirmed by the CIS observers' mission and independent election observers.

The strategy of the West

When Lukashenko began to fight the emerging oligarchy, the EU changed their course. In 1997, the EU Council took the decision to restrict political relations with Belarus until the Belarusian authorities returned to the "path of democracy and rule of law".

The US is still an intransigent opponent of the Belarusian separate path and its sovereignty. In October 2004, President *Bush* signed the "Belarus Democracy Act", which provided that financial assistance to the country should not be of benefit to the government and the state, but solely to the "democratic opposition" and economic sanctions should be maintained. Thus substantial funding (up to 20 million dollars a year) is provided for non-governmental organisations, "democracy projects" and media campaigns. In his speech in Vilnius on 4 May 2006, American Vice President Dick Cheney attacked Belarus sharply and said: "There is no place in Europe for a regime of this kind." In May 2008,

continued on page 13



"The presidential elections..."

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the government in Washington cut off diplomatic relations with Belarus and closed the US Embassy in Minsk. Belarus was invited also to close its embassy in Washington and its consulate in New York.

On the evening of 19 December 2010, more than 20 000 demonstrators pro-tested against the presidential election results and a group of a few hundred radical activists tried to storm the government building to stage a coup as had been done in Kiev. One of their leaders was the presidential candidate *Nikolai Statkevich*, who was later sentenced to six years in prison by a court, but was released together with a number of other ringleaders in August 2015. Due to the crackdown on the violent opposition movement on 19 December 2010 the EU imposed a travel ban on some 150 leading Belarusian officials, judges, prosecutors and journalists in March 2011, as well as blocking the accounts of this group and of 15 leading companies. Nevertheless, Belarus continues to regard the EU as an equal economic partner alongside Russia.

A memorandum of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik* (German Society for Foreign Policy) of May 2011 contains proposals which include supporting the emergence of a west-oriented oligarchy and also the integration of pro-Western parts of the Belarusian young elites, especially students.

Western media, who report on Belarus, focus on the manifestations of the "democratic opposition". But fact is that almost all the opposition members are supported and trained by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the *Soros Foundation*, the *Euro-Atlantic Association* or *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*, the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* or the OSCE observer group. Today most of these NGOs operate from the neighboring countries, as the government commands disclosure of financing. The EU Commission supports radio broadcasts of the BBC, "*Deutsche Welle*" and the Polish Radio that bring special news for Belarus News and rock music.

According to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the opposition parties in Minsk have more than about 20,000 members. These parties have the ability to put up candidates in the parliamentary elections. However, there is a majority vote, and in each constituency, the candidate with the most votes is elected. Opposition members are to some extent also writers, artists and other intellectuals as the editor of the magazine "*Partizan*", *Artur Klinov* (Klinau), and the Nobel Prize winner *Tatjana Alexijewitsch* who had lived in Germany and other Western countries since 2000, but has returned to Minsk recently. Her books will be

printed in Moscow, but can be purchased in the Belarusian bookstores.

Part of the western strategy against Belarus is the project "Intermarium" (Polish "Medzimore", the land between the seas, i.e. between the Baltic and the Black Sea). After World War I, the project was elaborated and supported by Polish President *Pilsudski* who wanted to restore the superpower status of Poland as among the Jagiellonian. Today it is supported by the neo-cons in the State Department in Washington. The aim of the project is a union between Poland and Ukraine and beyond with Belarus, the Baltic countries, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to erect a "cordon sanitaire" between Germany and Russia.

The presidential elections on 11 October 2015

Alexander Lukashenko won the presidential elections in Belarus on 11 October 2015 with 83.5% of the casted votes. The turnout was also very high with more than 80%. The pro-western candidate *Tatjana Korotkevich* from the "People's referendum", which was supported by the EPP-partner party Belarusian Popular Front and secondarily by the Social Democratic Party of Belarus came in second, with about 5% of the votes. Then, the candidate *Sergei Gajdukewitsch* from the Liberal Democratic Party with 3.5% of the votes which was followed by *Cossack Nikolai Ulachowitsch* of the "Patriotic Party" with 1.7% of the votes. "Against all candidates" were 6.5% of the voters. In the capital Minsk, Lukashenko received only 65% of the vote, and 20% were "against all candidates". The Second National Assembly Speaker of Austria, *Karl-Heinz Kopf*, who arrived in Minsk on the second day after the election with Economic Chamber President *Leitl* and a trade delegation, congratulated Lukashenko to the "convincing election victory".

The motives for the big win of Lukashenko's were primarily the "socially and welfare oriented state", security, stability, full employment, free health care and education and a modest but secure and regular income, while on the other hand, the worrying international situation, the migratory crisis, the euro crisis in the EU, the crisis in neighboring Ukraine and the war in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq are looming – as I was able to learn in many conversations with people in Belarus.

As an independent international observer, I could visit about ten polling stations, where everything was in perfect order. The voters went to the polling booth; the ballot was put in a sealed and transparent ballot box. I tried to speak to the electoral observers of the opposition in order to hear their arguments, but they did not raise any serious objections or complaints.

The Austrian political scientist *Christian Haerpfer* from the Institute of Political Science at the University of Vienna, who observed the elections as an independent expert, expressed the opinion that the elections "meet all internationally recognized electoral standards". In a by-election survey (exit poll), which he carried out with western and Belarusian people, he came to almost exactly the same result as the Central Electoral Commission. On the evening of 11 October 2015, about 200 people gathered in front of the Palace of the Republic in order to demonstrate even before the announcement of the election results with the white-red-white flag, which has been used as a national flag from 1991 to 1995, against the "dictatorship" and for the "connection to Europe".

This time, the EU had chosen the tactics not to support the opposition, but to go the path of "soft power" by proposing a loan to the country, which is, however, bound to further steps of the "democratisation". The EU decided after the election, that the sanctions against Belarus – EU travel bans and account lockouts, of which 175 individuals (President Lukashenko and all leaders of the state and the economy) and 14 organizations were impacted – are "suspended" for four months.

Prospects

Belarus tried in recent years to maintain a certain balance between Russia and the EU. The term of the bridge was used to described the Belarusian space in geopolitics. Lukashenko explained: "We are the bridge between East and the West. We cannot ignore this fact. This is our geopolitical allocated position and our heritage."

Lately it can be stated that the Belarusian model exerts a certain attraction to the neighboring countries, while the support for the EU among all peoples of East Central Europe is dwindling. The stable standard of living, full employment, security and especially the sovereign state defending its borders, making an increasing impression on Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, the Baltic nations and others; also, because they were not impacted so much from western nihilism. Since the elections of 11 October 2015, the Serbian president, a Slovakian parliamentary delegation, the president of Azerbaijan, as well as an Austrian business delegation were visiting Belarus. Lukashenko is probably the only president of an ex-Soviet country who has followers in western as well as in eastern Ukraine. Also, among the anti-globalization movements of the West Belarus is increasingly recognized as a role model and it is therefore worthwhile to get to know this beautiful country in person by a study trip.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

If freedom of the press has to give way to higher interests

by Stefan Haderer*

“In war, truth is the first casualty.” – This quotation, erroneously attributed to several authors and philosophers, was presumably said by US Senator *Hiram Johnson* and seems to be more relevant than ever, today. Ground-breaking achievements in communication technology revolutionised the society of the 21st century. But at the same time they illustrate the drawback of this development. What had been described as dystopic science-fiction in novels a few years ago has long since become reality: the control and storage of data and conversations by *Google* and *Facebook* for instance or the monopolisation of knowledge by way of the online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia*.

New social media like *Facebook* and *Twitter* strongly influence the media environment and the consumer behaviour. Coincidentally the censorship of contents severely increased. This becomes obvious, especially in times of the global crises that have been shaking Europe and its neighbours – to come back to Johnson’s quotation. The conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe as well as the refugees’ catastrophe and its effects bring to each rational reader’s mind that the term “liberty of the press” does no longer apply, because a one-sided reporting has replaced each form of diversity of voices in many social media and even quality papers by now.

Prohibition of censorship does not equal prohibition of ideology. Political and economic elites have already realised the power of media discourses, long before the French philosopher *Michel Foucault* dealt with it. And they took advantage of it. By means of a sharp editorial policy media get misused for other purposes, because they

do no longer serve public information and clarification, but devote themselves to cheap propaganda. Beneficiaries in the first place are the elites, the economic lobbies and political parties. The reader is finally left with only few real facts and objective reports.

Euphemistic terms which do not reflect any reality of life are trying to win over the majority of the population to consent to a geopolitical project. Be it the “Arab Spring”, the Ukrainian “Euromaidan” or slogans like “I am Charlie” and “Refugees welcome” are being spread via social media overnight. This way a (pseudo-)moralistic line is being prescribed which is to be pursued by the masses; masses who, nota bene, do not know or are not supposed to know the real facts behind these developments.

On the background of cultural and historical circumstances in Northern Africa and the Middle East, every expert for example was well aware of the fact that the “Arab Spring” would not lead to a flourishing democracy in these countries. It was rather about the disempowerment of unwelcome heads of states who a couple of days before had all the sympathy of Western governments. All of a sudden miscellaneous media reported of “dictators” and “regimes of terror”, whereas armed rebels were hailed as “heroes”.

An additional, maybe essential feature of one-sided reporting and a new kind of press censorship is the defamation of critics who do not fall into line with the prescribed media opinion. Stigmatised as “Putin-understanders”, “Assad-friends” or “conspiracy theorists”, these voices are prevented from being heard. By this means the society is deprived of a crucial freedom – namely of the freedom to approach a topic critically. A new form of censorship, the censoring of free and independent thought, is being introduced.

Since the terror acts in 9/11 and the assaults in Europe, citizens in the US and EU have been watched ever more closely. Data preservation and NSA bugging scandals are being justified by “war on terrorism”. The chaos which has persisted for decades in Afghanistan and Iraq proves that this kind of war – also unreservedly reported by the German government – is a hopeless one.

Barack Obama’s vote for US-president in 2008 led to further cuts in the European media landscape pushing aside those media which beforehand had often reported sceptically about American foreign policy. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Obama sealed not only the close ties between Europe and the US, but also reinforced the consistent pro-US-line of most “quality” papers. In the editorial offices voices that were critical of America were either purposefully removed – or even ridiculed as “conspiracy theorist” and accused of a radical left or right wing affinity. A reflective glance on the political events in the world, which for the most part are determined by the military superpower US, is hence being limited.

Liberty of the press is an essential human right. As a matter of course it has to observe certain rules – like the respect of human dignity and religious tolerance as well as the prohibition of racism and sedition. But if social media in times of crises are abused to spread ideological point of views and split society by one-sided reporting, “liberty” is no longer the right term to use. In this case “liberty of the press” misses the original target which is information and clarification and this way it degenerates into a pure instrument of power, surveillance and control. Social criticism is thereafter nipped in the bud. •

(Translation Current Concerns)

* Stefan Haderer is a cultural and social anthropologist as well as a political scientist in Vienna.

“Man must never cease to be human” (A. Schweitzer)

What does Albert Schweitzer have to tell us in today's world?

by Sigrid Schiller

Due to the award of this year's Nobel Prize in Medicine to the Chinese *Tu*, the Irishman *Campbell* and the Japanese *Omura*, the suffering of millions of men in Africa, South-East Asia and South America has moved back into the focus of public attention again.

The three winners did research in and developed effective drugs against the diseases malaria, river blindness, and the so-called elephantiasis. Thanks to their commitment, each year the lives of around 100,000 malaria patients can be saved and in the near future the river blindness (*onchocerciasis*) and elephantiasis (*lymphatic filariasis*), which leads to horrible distortions, will be eradicated. Both diseases are caused by worms.

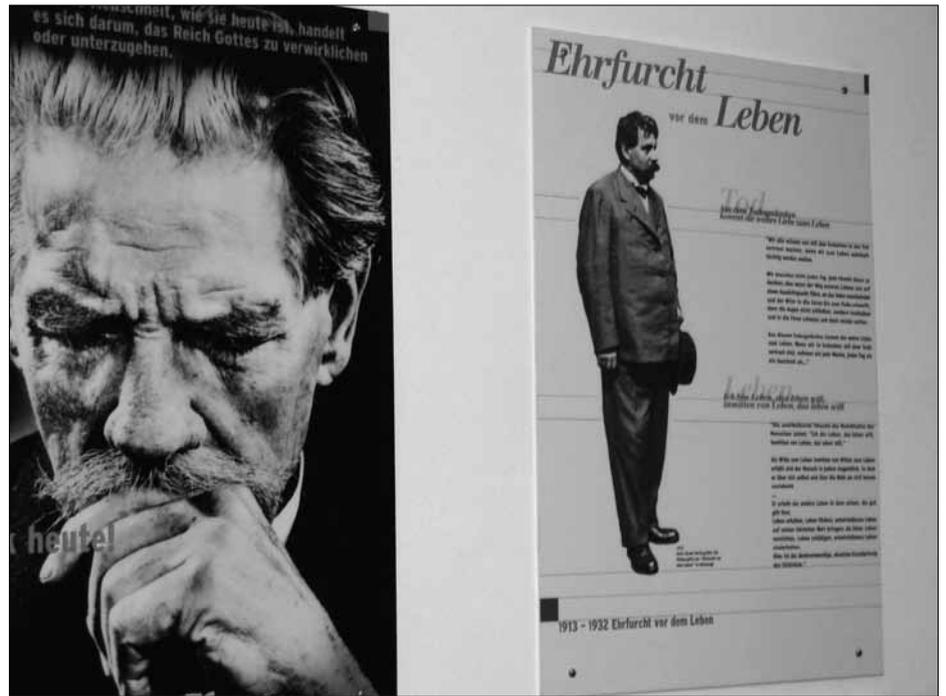
Albert Schweitzer – 12 October of this year marks the 50th anniversary of his death – would be very highly pleased about these medical successes that especially relieve the plight of the poor in Africa, South-East Asia and South America. In 1913, as a young man, Schweitzer went to Gabon to work there as a physician and to provide support for the people.

Every person who has ever been seriously ill can imagine what a doctor means for a sick person. Recovery does not only depend on his medical knowledge, no, a doctor must also give himself to healing the sick as a compassionate fellow human with all his heart and emotional strength. The patient's suffering must also be his own.

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) was a doctor, who dedicated himself with body and soul to the Hippocratic task. He worked not only as a general practitioner but developed fundamental ethical thoughts in addition. His postulate “reverence for Life” expresses all that is required as a basis for a dignified coexistence.

His remarks are sheer balm for the wounds of our tortured souls in light of countless armed conflicts and millions of refugees in the world. Getting to know his life as well as rescuing his comprehensive treatises on fundamental ethical issues from oblivion and making use of them is worth while in today's troubled world.

This concern has been promoted since 2002 by the “Akademie für ethische Bildung” (*Academy for Ethical Education*) in Brunsbüttel established by *Hans Stellmacher* with great personal commitment in the framework of the “Kultur-und Tagesszentrum ElbeForum” (*Culture and Conference Centre ElbeForum*). It was due to his own severe health problems that he began to do good. This educational insti-



Picture plates in the Albert Schweitzer memorial place in Brunsbüttel elucidate his ethical considerations. (picture S. Schiller)

tution aims at telling young people more about the work of Albert Schweitzer, this way preserving and promoting humanistic attitudes. In a separate room of the Elbe Forum important stages of Schweitzer's life, his position on moral issues, his demands on policy makers are documented on large blackboards. This educational institution is supported by the “Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar e.V.” (Goethe Society) and the “Schillerverein e.V. Weimar” (Schiller Club).

To this end a considerable collection of different media mainly about Albert Schweitzer can be found in ElbeForum, beginning with outstanding picture books providing insight into Schweitzer's activities up to original recordings of lectures Schweitzer gave before different audiences and to documentary TV reports about his work in Lambarene. His religious and musical work has also been documented by various media.

Some materials contain direct recommendations and handouts for pedagogues. Every teacher is well advised to look into the homepage www.elbeforum.ch and to select the material appropriate for the particular age group. The team of *Frank Dehning*, assistant director of the cultural and conference centre, sends the desired material as a loan.

I have successfully made use of this offer with several 4th grades myself. For the purposes of teaching religion the subject “Albert Schweitzer” proved to be es-

pecially fruitful. Albert Schweitzer describes in various documents elaborately that he did not acquire his social attitude in the cradle but that his conscience was formed during the first decades of his life. Schweitzer's biography is so lively that even primary school pupils understand his feelings and thoughts and can follow him emotionally. “I am life that wants to live in the midst of life that wants to live”.

As a teacher in a truthful, calm conversation with the students you can open their eyes for their fellow human beings: “My classmate has quite similar needs than I have. He feels like me.” With the help of the collection of material in Brunsbüttel the teacher can purposefully guide the pupils to empathise, for example with the help of a talk that Albert Schweitzer gave to primary school pupils. Herein he impressively tells his young audience about a mother with her child. The child had had most serious burnings caused by an open fire. The mother had to travel two days in a small boat to reach the hospital while the child could not even cry any more, so big was its pain.

The students seriously reflect on how well they are medically provided for today and learn that up to this day this is not the case for a huge number of people in the world. Through discussions guided by the teacher in a sympathetic mood towards the pupils the wish grows in them to grant this relief to other children, as well.

Adolescents also search for workable answers for today's world situation. They can deal with Schweitzer's writings, lectures and his appeals to mankind, for example broadcast by *Radio Oslo* all over the world on 23 April 1957. Against the backdrop of the East-West conflict coming to a head Schweitzer stood up for a peaceful solution of conflicts without ambiguity! Conflicts which divide (whole) peoples could not be decided by wars any longer.

A change of attitudes, however, could not be reached by simple measures or by organisational changes.

Only the intensive moral education of people of all ages and of all social classes as well as adequate role models might be able to bring about an ethics of responsibility and humaneness. Everybody had to begin with himself and – together with like-minded people – reach the public.

With this Schweitzer is in accordance with the European tradition of the Enlightenment which sees man as a creature endowed with reason. Man is capable of distinguishing between harmful behaviour and behaviour which fosters life and of making his choice for humaneness due to his reason and his nature. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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