

# 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

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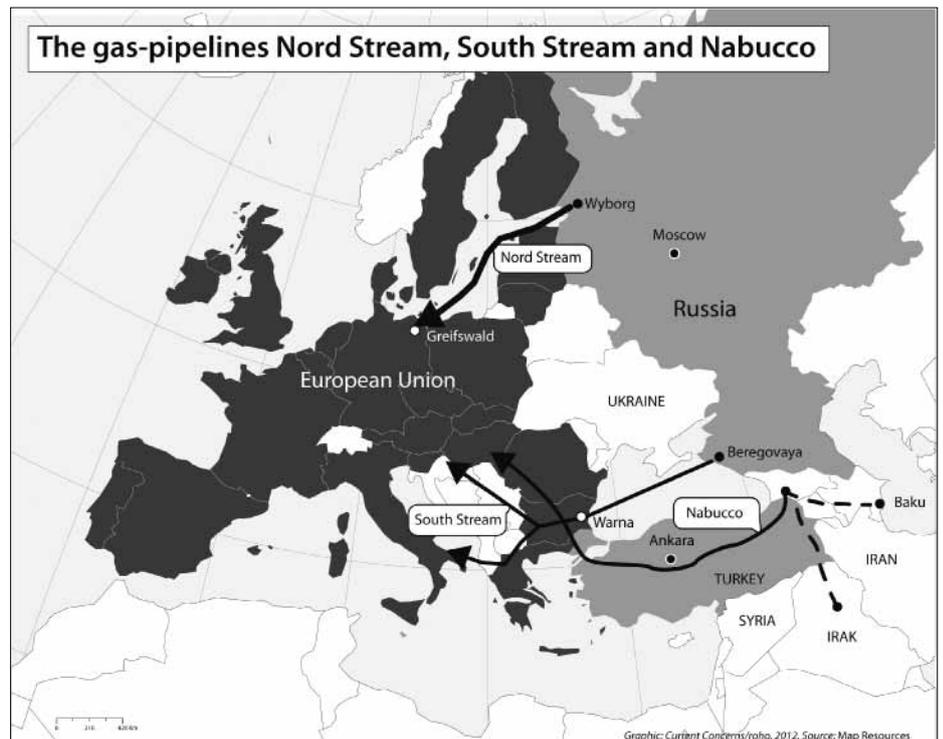
## Syria is at the centre of the war about gas

by Imad Fawzi Shueibi, Head of the Centre for Strategic Studies and Documentation, Damascus

Targeting Syria has never been far away from the struggle over gas in the world in general and the Middle East in particular. At a time in which there seemed to be a collapse in the Euro Zone accompanied with an extremely crucial economic crisis which led the U.S to be indebted for \$ 14.94 trillion; i.e., 99.6% of the GDP, and at a time in which the global American influence reached a minimum in encountering emerging powers like China, India and Brazil, it has been so clear that searching for the potential of power no longer exists in the nuclear and non-nuclear military arsenal. That potential lies there, where energy harbours. This is the point which clearly manifests the Russian-American struggle.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians began to feel increasingly that the struggle for armaments had exhausted them, especially in the absence of the necessary energy sources needed by any industrial country. The American presence in the oil zones had for some decades enabled them to grow and have control over international political decision-making. Therefore, the Russians turned toward energy sources, oil and gas. Since the international apportionment does not bear much competition in oil sectors, Moscow sought to manipulate gas in the areas of gas production, transportation, and marketing on a large scale.

The starting point was in 1995 when Putin set the strategy of *Gazprom Co.* to move within the area in which gas exists starting from Russia through Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran (for marketing), and the Middle East. Certainly, the projects of the "Nord Stream" and "South Stream" will be a historical order of merit given to *Vladimir Putin* for his efforts in bringing Russia back to the international arena and for tightening the influence on the European economy which will depend, for decades, on gas as an alternative for oil or gas as well as oil, yet with prioritizing the first; i.e., gas. At this point, it was a must for Washington to hasten to create its project, "Nabucco", to compete against the Russian project as to gain an international apportionment on the basis of which a po-



litical and strategic dominance would be enabled for the next one hundred years.

Gas will be the main source of energy in the twenty-first century either as an alternative for diminishing oil reserves worldwide, or as a source of clean energy. Therefore, having control over the zones of gas reserves in the world is considered to be, for the old as well as modern powers, the basis of international conflict in its regional manifestation.

Obviously, Russia read the map well and learnt the lessons well, for the lack of world energy resources that are needed to inject industrial institutions with money and energy, and which were not under the control of the Soviet Union, was the reason behind its collapse. Therefore, Russia learnt that the source of energy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was gas.

### History of the great gas game

An initial reading of the gas map reveals that gas locates in the following areas, in terms of quantity and access to consumption areas: 1. Russia: beginning with Vyborg and Bregovaya. 2. Annexed to Russia: Turkmenistan. 3. The near and further roundabouts of Russia: Azerbaijan and



(pictures voltairnet.org)

Iran. 4. Captured from Russia: Georgia. 5. Eastern Mediterranean: Syria and Lebanon. 6. Qatar and Egypt. Moscow hastened to work on two strategic lines; the first of which is setting up a long-term Russian-Chinese project based on the economic growth of the Shanghai Bloc; the second axis being the control of gas resources. Thus, Moscow set the grounds for two projects: the "South Stream" and the "Nord Stream" in an attempt to face the American "Nabucco" Project which was supported by the European Union and aimed

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at transporting the gas of the Black Sea and the gas of Azerbaijan. There was, then, a strategic race between two projects so as to have control over Europe and the gas resources.

**For the Russian Federation:**

The "Nord Stream" Project directly links Russia with Germany, across the Baltic Sea to Weinberg and Saßnitz without penetrating Belarus.

The "South Stream" Project starts in Russia and leads across the Black Sea to Bulgaria, then it splits up between Greece and Southern Italy on the one hand, and Hungary and Austria on the other.

**For the United States:**

The American "Nabucco" Project centres in Central Asia and the Black Sea and its surroundings. Its storage places are in Turkey where its path starts; it leads across Bulgaria, and moves through Romania, Hungary, arrives in Austria and from there continues to the Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. It was due to pass through Greece, but this idea was dropped for the sake of Turkey.

The Nabucco Project was supposed to compete with the two Russian projects, but due to technical problems the project was delayed until 2017 though it was scheduled for 2014. This resolved the race in favour of Russia, but both parties are still in search of new areas enlarging either project:

On the one hand, this refers to the Iranian gas which the US insists on making supportive of the Nabucco gas pipeline and which they want to transport to the assembling point in Erzurum, Turkey; on the other hand it refers to gas of the Eastern Mediterranean: Syria, Lebanon, and Israel.

Iran took a strategic decision, the result of which was signing a number of agreements in July 2011, to transport gas through Iraq to Syria. These agreements make Syria the centre of assembly and production in conjunction with the reserves of Lebanon. This is a space of strategy and energy that geographically extends from Iran to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Though it was banned and was not allowed for many years, it now shows the degree of struggle over Syria and Lebanon at this phase, and shows the emerging role of France that considers the Eastern Mediterranean as a historical region of influence and everlasting interests. The French role now goes along with a long phase of strategic French absence ever since World War II. In other words, France wants to have a role in the world of (gas) from which it has gained a "health insurance"

in Libya and now wants to gain a "life insurance" in both Syria and Lebanon.

Now, Turkey feels it is going to be lost amid the struggle for gas as long as the Nabucco project is late. Since the "Nord" and "South Streams" exclude Turkey, Turkey knows quite well that the gas of the Eastern Mediterranean has become distant from Nabucco, and thus beyond Turkey's influence.

**The Moscow-Berlin axis**

For the *Nord* and "South Stream" Projects, Moscow established the company of *Gazprom* in the early 1990s. Remarkably, Germany who wanted to escape, once and for all, the repercussions of the World War II, prepared itself to be an active party to the project, whether in terms of establishment, monitoring of the "Nord-Stream" pipeline or the storage places of the "South Stream" in the Germanic roundabouts, especially Austria.

The German *Gazprom* subsidiary *Gazprom Germania* was founded with the cooperation of *Hans-Joachim Gornig*, Moscow's German friend, who was a former deputy minister for coal and energy in the GDR and who had supervised the construction of the gas pipeline network of GDR. The one who headed *Gazprom Germania* until October 2011 was *Vladimir Kotenev* who was a former Russian ambassador to Germany.

*Gazprom* signed a number of transactions with German companies, especially with those cooperating with the "Nord Stream", e.g. the giant *E.ON* Company for energy, and *BASF* for chemicals - where *E.ON* gets preference to buy gas when gas prices go up. This is considered to be a kind of "support policy" of the German energy companies by Russia.

Moscow benefited from the liberalization of the European gas markets monopoly when the distribution networks were separated from production facilities. After a time of clashes between Russia and Berlin started a new phase of cooperation on the basis of economy as well as repudiation of a heavy weight put on Germany's shoulders; i.e., the heavy weight of enormous debt, which they owed to the US. Germany considers that the Germanic Group (Germany, Austria, Czech and Switzerland) is determined to become the heart of Europe, but it should not bear the consequences of the aging of a continent nor the fall of another superpower.

*Gazprom's* German ventures include its *Wings* joint venture with *Wintershall AG*, a subsidiary of *BASF* which is Germany's largest oil and gas producer and controls 18% of the gas market. *Gazprom* has sold its top German partners considerable stakes in its Russian assets. *BASF* and *E.ON* each control almost one-quarter of the *Yuzhno-Russkoye* gas fields that will

provide most of the supplies for "Nord Stream" at a time, which is not a mere coincidence or simulation, when the subsidiary of *Gazprom* in Germany, *Gazprom Germania*, expands to own 40% of the *Austrian Centrex Co.*, which is specialized in gas storage and is due to expand into Cyprus - an expansion with which Turkey may certainly not be content.

Turkey dearly misses assuming the now delayed role in the "Nabucco" Project whereby it is supposed to start storing, marketing, and transferring 31 billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas which can go up to 40 billion m<sup>3</sup> at a later stage a year - in a project that makes Ankara more and more subjugated to Washington and NATO decisions without having the right to insist on joining the European Union which has been refused to Turkey several times.

The strategic ties through gas become even more strategic in politics where Moscow lobbies effectively on the Social Democratic Party of Germany in North-Rhine Westphalia, the major industrial base that is home to the German major companies *RWE* and *E.ON*.

Such an influence is recognized by the head of energy policies in the Green Party, *Hans Joseph Fell*, that four German companies related to Russia play a role in formulating the German energy policy through a very complicated network that lobbies ministers and manipulates the public opinion via the *Eastern European Economic Relations Committee* that represents German companies and has close business relations in Russia and countries of the Former Soviet Union Bloc. Therefore, there is an indispensable silence on the part of Germany vis-à-vis the accelerating Russian influence. This silence is based on the necessity to improve the so-called "energy security" in Europe.

Remarkably, Germany now considers the policy suggested by the European Union to solve the Euro crisis, will hinder the Russian-German investments for a long time. This explains, together with other reasons, the German dawdling in saving the Euro laden with European debts, although Germany and other countries in the Germanic bloc could bear those debts alone. Every time Europeans oppose Germany and its policy regarding Russia, Germany asserts that the utopian plans of Europe are unenforceable and may push Russia to sell its gas in Asia which could threaten the energy security in Europe.

This Russian-German engagement was not unstressed when Putin took over the legacy of the Cold War regarding the presence of three million Russian-speaking people living in Germany who comprised the second largest group after the Turks.

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*"Nabucco" is permanently delayed by missing sources of supply and without identified clients*

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Putin was also adept at building a network of Eastern German officials who had been recruited to look after the interests of the Russian companies in Germany, let alone recruiting a number of ex-Eastern German State Security Service agents [Stasi]. This includes *Gazprom* Germania's director of personnel and its director of finance or else the director of finance of the "Nord Stream" Consortium, *Matthias Warnig*, who the *Wall Street Journal* reported as having helped Putin recruit spies in the eastern Germany City of Dresden when Putin was a young KGB operative. To be fair, Russia's employment of its former relations did not cause any harm, because both parties' interests were attained without having one dominating the other.

The Nord Stream Project, the major link between Russia and Germany, has been inaugurated recently with pipeline costing 4.7 billion Euros. Although the pipeline links Russia and Germany, other European state recognize that this project contributes to their energy security and they made France and Holland hasten to declare it a European project. In this regard, it is good to mention that Mr *Lindner* of the German economy's Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations said without hesitation that it was "a European not a German project and that he would not lock Germany into greater dependence on Russia". Such a declaration indicates the apprehension of the expanding Russian influence in Germany. However, the fact is that "Nord Stream" Project, in structure, represents Moscow's plan not the EU's.

Russians can cripple energy distribution to Poland and other countries the way

they like and will be able to sell gas to whoever pays most. However, the importance of Germany to Russia lies, practically, in the fact that it constitutes a platform from which to launch its strategy across the continent: *Gazprom* Germania has stakes in twenty-five joint projects in Britain, Italy, Turkey, Hungary, and other countries. These facts actually lead us to say that *Gazprom* will – in the near future – become one of the largest companies of the world if not the largest.

### **Outlining Europe's and – later – the world's map**

Not only did *Gazprom* leaders build this project, they also tried to interfere in the "Nabucco" Project that will – as aforementioned – be delayed until 2017, taking into consideration that the latter constitutes a serious challenge. Therefore, *Gazprom* – which owns 30% of a project designed for building a second major huge pipeline that reaches Europe roughly along "Nabucco's" route; a project even *Gazprom* supporters call a merely "political" project – began a political auctioneering to show its muscles by stopping "Nabucco" or crippling it. Nevertheless, Moscow hastened to buy up gas in Central Asia and the Caspian in a bid to starve "Nabucco" and at the same time ridiculing Washington politically, economically, and strategically.

*Gazprom* operates gas facilities in Austria; i.e., facilities in the strategic Germanic roundabouts. It also leases facilities in Britain and France. However, the growing number of storage facilities in Austria will be the basis for drawing the new energy map of Europe since it is going to provide Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Germany. Among these facilities is the newly established repository called



*Vladimir Putin and Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller,*

"Katrina", which *Gazprom* builds in cooperation with the German gas supplier *VNG* in Saxony-Anhalt with the aim of exporting gas to the hubs of Western Europe.

*Gazprom* established a joint storage facility with Serbia to export gas to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia itself. Feasibility studies have been conducted on similar storage ventures in the Czech Republic, Romania, Belgium, Britain, Slovakia, Turkey, Greece, and even France. Such a venture on the part of *Gazprom* strengthens Moscow's position as a provider of 41% of Europe's needed supplies of gas. This, undoubtedly, means a substantial change in the relations between the East and the West in the short, mid, and long runs. It also indicates an ebbing in the American influence or a collision being prepared, considering the US/NATO missile shield to establish a new world order where gas is the most essential pillar of its formation. This is a clear indication of the intensified struggle in the Middle East over the gas of the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.

### **"Nabucco" and Turkey in a tight spot**

"Nabucco" was conceived to funnel gas 3,900 kilometres from Turkey to Austria and was designed to carry 31 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually from the Middle East and the Caspian region to markets in Europe. The NATO-US-French coalition's hastening towards decisively ending all matters in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Lebanon, in a way that harmonizes with their interests, lies in the necessity to maintain stable conditions supporting the investment and transportation of gas. Syria responded by signing a contract that aims at transferring gas from Iran to Syria across Iraq. As a matter of fact, it is the very Syrian and Lebanese gas that is the focal point of the struggle that aims at annexing it either to the "Nabucco" gas reserves or *Gazprom* and its "South Stream" project.

The consortium of "Nabucco" consists of several companies: the German *RWE*, the Austrian *ÖMV*, the Turkish *Botas*, the Bulgarian *Energy Holding*

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Company, and the Romanian *Transgaz*. Five years ago, the initial costs were estimated to be \$ 11.2 billion but the costs could reach \$21.4 billion by 2017. This raises many questions about the viability of this economic project, in particular taking into consideration that *Gazprom* has contracts with various countries – in an attempt to encompass "Nabucco" – that would feed on the surplus capacity of the gas of Turkmenistan. Especially when the pursuit of the Iranian gas turns out to be ineffective, it precludes the possibility of achieving the "Nabucco" dream. This is, in fact, one of the unknown secrets of the struggle over Iran that has gone too far into defiance by choosing Iraq and Syria to be part of the routes for its gas transport.

Thus, "Nabucco's" best hope lies in gas supplies from Azerbaijan's Shah-Deniz field which would almost be the only source of a project that seems to be moribund even before it began. This manifests in the accelerating deals and in Moscow's success in buying the sources of "Nabucco", on the one hand, and the hardships encountered in achieving geopolitical changes in Iran, Syria and Lebanon on the other hand.

This comes at a time in which Turkey hastens to claim its share in the Nabucco Project either through signing a contract with Azerbaijan to buy 6 billion cubic metres of gas in 2017 or trying to lay hands on Syria and Lebanon with the aim of hampering the transfer of Iranian oil or receiving a share of the Lebanese-Syrian gas affluence. The race towards occupying a position in the New World Order escalates through gas and other things ranging from the support of military services to hosting the strategic domes of the missile shield.

Perhaps what poses the greatest threat to "Nabucco" is Russia's attempt to ditch it through negotiating over more advantageous and competitive contracts of gas supplies in favour of *Gazprom's* "Nord" and "South Stream's", hampering, thus, any effort to endow the United States and Europe with any kind of influence, political- and energy-wise, whether in Iran or the Mediterranean. Moreover, *Gazprom* could be one of the most important investors or operators of the new gas fields in Syria or Lebanon. The date of August 16, 2011 was not randomly chosen by the Syrian Ministry of Oil to announce the discovery of a gas well in the Area of Qarah in the Central Region of Syria near Homs. The well has the capacity of producing 400.000 cubic metres a day (146 million cubic metres a year). However, the Syrian

Ministry of Oil did not breathe a syllable about the Mediterranean Gas.

The "Nord and" "South Stream's" lessened the importance of the American policy that appeared to be lagging behind. The bad history between the states of Central Europe and Russia has ebbed, Poland is slowly coming round, and the US seem willing to reconsider since it announced in late October 2011 the shift in the energy policies after the discovery of coal mines in Europe which will lessen dependence on Russia and the Middle East. This seems to be a far-reaching or long-term goal due to the fact that there is a number of procedures to be taken before starting commercial production of coal. This coal can be attained from unconventional sources in the rocks found at thousands of feet underground by using the techniques of rock fracturing and the hydraulic fracturing of high pressure water. This issue, however, is coated with environmental risks due to the impacts of the fracturing techniques on water reserves.

**China's participation**

Sino-Russian cooperation in the field of energy is the power orienting the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. This is, in fact, what experts point to as the "base" for the double veto in the UN Security Council that came in favour of Syria. Cooperation in the energy field is what lubricates the acceleration of the partnership between the two giants. It is not only a matter of gas supplies with preferences to China but it is a process that urges China to participate in gas distribution through selling new assets and facilities, in addition to attempting to have joint control over the executive administrations of the gas distribution networks where Moscow currently shows resilience in prices of gas supplies provided that they are allowed to access the local Chinese markets because of the profits there. It was agreed that Russian and Chinese experts could work together in the following domains: "coordinating energy strategies in Russia and China; predicting and outlining prospective scenarios; and developing market infrastructure, energy efficiency and sources of alternative energy."

Despite cooperation in the field of energy, there are other strategic interests that represent in the mutual Chinese-Russian conception of the risks of the American so-called project "Missile Shield." Not only has Washington involved Japan and South Korea in the Missile Shield, but it has also sent an invitation to India in early September 2011 to be a partner in the very project. Moscow's concerns intersect with Beijing's, regarding Washington's moves to revive the Strategy of Central Asia: i.e., the Silk Road. This project is the same as that in-

itiated by George Bush (Greater Central Asia Project) to roll back Russia and China's influence in Central Asia in collaboration with Turkey to resolve the situation in Afghanistan by 2014 so as to arrange for the NATO influence there. There are increasing allusions from Uzbekistan to play host of NATO for such a project. Vladimir Putin estimates what can foil the Western invasion on Russia's back scenes in Central Asia will be the expansion of the joint Russian-Kazakhstani-Belarusian economic space in cooperation with Beijing.

This image of the international struggle mechanisms allows access to see one side of the process of the New World Order Formation based on struggling for military influence and on holding the backbone of age; namely, energy, on top of which comes gas.

**The gas of Syria**

When Israel started oil and gas extraction in 2009, it was clear that the basin of the Mediterranean had entered the game and that Syria was either to be attacked or that the whole region was going to enjoy peace since the twenty-first century was said to be the century of clean energy.

What we know about this issue is that the Mediterranean basin is the wealthiest in gas and that Syria would be the wealthiest state, according to the *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (WINEP, the think tank of AIPAC) which also speculates that struggle between Turkey and Cyprus would heat due to Ankara's inability to bear its losses of the "Nabucco" gas (despite the contract Moscow signed with Ankara on December 2011 to transport part of the "South Stream" gas via Turkey).

Embracing the secret of the Syrian gas will let all know how big the "game over gas" is. According to China, who controls Syria could control the Middle East, grip on the gateway to Asia, possess the key to Russia' house (as *Catherine II* put it), and could set foot on the Silk Road. Most importantly, they who could penetrate Syria for gas have the ability to dominate the world, especially since the coming century will be the Century of Gas.

With the contract Damascus signed to transport Iranian gas to the Mediterranean through Iraq, the geopolitical space would open and the gas space would close on the scene of "Nabucco" that used to be Europe's and Turkey's lifeline. Syria, undoubtedly, would be the key to the coming epoch. •

Source: [www.voltairenet.org](http://www.voltairenet.org)

## Photo of 27 March taken in Iraq should now have been taken in Houla?

Is it the same trick to impose war on a country that has already been used in 1990 in Kuwait (photos of babies) and in 1990 in Racak?



This image - which cannot be independently verified - is believed to show the bodies of children in Houla awaiting burial

Source: www.rt.com

Screenshot from BBC News website (www.bbc.co.uk)

With the shock of the Houla tragedy ringing across the world, the *BBC* has released a story with a harrowing picture of rows and rows of children's bodies awaiting burial ... But isn't that post-Saddam Iraq?

Photographer *Marco di Lauro* who took the shot grabbed by the *BBC* says he nearly "fell off his chair" after finding the picture on the network's website with a caption reading: "Photo from activist. This image - which cannot be independently

verified - is believed to show bodies of children in Houla awaiting funeral."

The picture was actually taken on 27 March 2003; it depicts an Iraqi boy jumping over dozens of white body bags containing skeletons found in a desert south of Baghdad. The image, which is published on Marco di Lauro's website, is part of his story "Iraq, the Aftermath of Saddam".

Marco di Lauro takes photographs for *Getty Images* picture agency, his works have been published across Europe and the US. But the indication that the *BBC* picked his image from the internet, not from official stock worries him somewhat. "What I am really astonished by is that a news organization like the *BBC* doesn't check the sources and it's willing to publish any picture sent it by anyone: activist, citizen journalist or whatever. That's all," the photographer told "The Daily Telegraph."

"Someone is using someone else's picture for propaganda on purpose," he

added. A *BBC* spokesman says the picture, illustrating Sunday night's story "Syria Massacre in Houla Condemned as Outrage Grows," was taken down "immediately" when the source was identified.

"We were aware of this image being widely circulated on the internet in the early hours of this morning following the most recent atrocities in Syria. We used it with a clear disclaimer saying it could not be independently verified," he added.

These words about information "which cannot be independently verified" have become a trademark of media coverage of the 14-month conflict in Syria. Before UN special envoy *Kofi Annan* brought his peace plan to the troubled Arab country, the Syrian government had remained reluctant to open borders to most international journalists.

Source: www.rt.com/news/bbc-iraq-syria-houla-400/

### Russia warns Kosovo for training Syrian opposition groups

United Nations: Russia has warned Kosovo against allowing the training of Syrian opposition rebels on its territory, with its UN envoy saying it could cause international friction.

Russian ambassador *Vitaly Churkin* condemned what he called "disturbing information" that Kosovo authorities had been "establishing contacts with the Syrian opposition to train insurgents" in Kosovo.

Diplomats and media reports said that at least three exiled Syrian activists have been in Kosovo recently for talks with the former Kosovo rebels who fought a separatist war against Serbia in 1998-99.

Churkin told at an UN Security Council meeting on Kosovo that any training of Syria rebels would "run afoul" of the peace mission by UN-Arab League envoy *Kofi Annan*.

"Moreover turning Kosovo into an international training center for insurgents of various armed units could become a serious destabilizing factor, one going beyond the Balkan region," he said.

Churkin called on the European Union and United Nations which have missions in Kosovo to act to prevent a presence by Syrian rebels. Kosovo's Foreign Minister *Enveer Hoxhaj* told reporters that there had been "some diplomatic contacts" with the Syrian opposition. "We are supporting very much their cause," Hoxhaj said. But when asked if there would be training [for the Syria rebels], he replied: "Not at all."

The ethnic-Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army started fighting for independence from Serbia in 1997. President *Slobodan Milosević*'s strong-arm response led to a NATO bombing campaign in 1999 that ended the crackdown and brought Kosovo under UN administration until it declared its independence in 2008.

Russia strongly supports Serbia in insisting that Kosovo remains a Serbian province. Ninety countries have recognized its independence, including most of the European Union and the United States. (AFP)

Source: GEO TV, FOCUS News Agency, 15.5.2012

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Address: Current Concerns,

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Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

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## US soldiers abroad disguise as businessmen

Many speak of the American Special Forces who are in action in many places around the world. But who knows that they are currently in action in more than 100 countries (!)? The Pentagon now wants to go one step further and deploy soldiers abroad under "commercial cover", that is for example as business people. Pentagon's motto is, "to expand and protect positions". This will not only include intelligence activities, as has been the case so far; military operations should also be performed under the cover of economic activity. Staff of the Pentagon, not only of intelligence, should therefore be planted in some companies or establish and operate their own companies in order to be able to work inconspicuously.

In a draft bill, it is clearly stated, that in order "to prepare the grounds for mili-

tary operations against terrorists and their supporters", the military powers are to be greatly expanded. "In order to protect the lives of soldiers, it is necessary to allow the Pentagon to carry out commercial profit-oriented activities to cover such operations and support them. For US armed forces that carry out dangerous missions abroad, this is an important safeguard."

It is interesting that the Pentagon requested the commercial camouflage to be no longer controlled by the secret Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), but directly by the Secretary of State for Defense and the under-secretary for the intelligence community. One of Pentagon's main arguments was the costs. "The commercial camouflage does not entail costs, since the money that is earned can be used to fi-

nance it." However, there are major concerns among the intelligence committees' members in Congress. The commercial activities of the camouflaged soldiers are likely to be quite uncontrollable, as has often been the case with intelligence officials. Corruption and profiteering on their own will increase considerably, blurring the boundaries between intelligence agencies, military and economy or civil society. Already, the 66,000 men/women in the special units of "SOCOM" are provided with a budget of more than \$ 10 billion (!). This was confirmed by the commander, Admiral William H. McRaven, on the occasion of a recent congressional committee meeting. •

Source: *Vertraulicher Schweizer Brief* (Swiss Confidential letter) No. 1322 dated 11/05/2012  
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Iraqi mark on Houla massacre?

**Former British Intelligence Officer Alastair Crooke:**

**This type of killing is alien to the culture and traditions of Levantine Islam, to Syria and Lebanon. It happened in the Anbar province of Iraq**

While the investigation into the Houla massacre is ongoing, former British intelligence officer Alastair Crooke told RT these attacks are not characteristic of the cultural region to which Syria belongs.

"This type of killing, beheadings, slitting of throats (of children too), and of this mutilation of bodies, has been a characteristic not of Levantine Islam, not of Syria, not of Lebanon, but what happened in the Anbar province of Iraq. And

so it seems to point very much in the direction of groups that have been associated with the war in Iraq against the United States who have perhaps returned to Syria, or perhaps Iraqis who have come up from Anbar to take part in it," he says.

Crooke believes the Al-Qaeda connection is misleading, as the massacre has its tactical and ideological roots in the Iraq war.

"I think the attack is more close to Musab al-Zarqawi [who declared an all out war on Shia in Iraq], than Al-Qaeda as we know it,

in the sense that Zarqawi and Iraq gave birth to this very strong, bigoted, anti-Shia, anti-Iranian rhetoric. Much of that came into Syria when fighters from Anbar returned to their homes around Homs and Hama.

"So yes, we're talking about Al-Qaeda like groups that are at the very end of the spectrum of the opposition. They may be a minority in terms of the numbers of the overall opposition, but they are defining the war," Crooke maintains.

Source: *Russia Today*, 29 May 2012

## Lavrov: Certain countries are exploiting the tragedy in order to trigger off a war

**Pointblank massacre: Massive fallout from Houla killings**

Western states are expelling Syrian diplomats amid accusations government-backed militias were behind the Houla massacre. The majority of the victims killed in the bloody attack were executed at close range, the UN's human rights office said.

The UN High Commissioner for Human rights *Rupert Colville* said Tuesday that "under 20 of 108 killed in the attack can be attributed to artillery and tank fire," Reuters cites him as saying:

"What is very clear is this was an absolutely abominable event that took place in Houla, and at least a substantial part of it was summary executions of civilians, women and children," Colville told reporters in Geneva. "At this point, it looks like entire families were shot in their houses," the agency reports.

Survivors told UN monitors at the scene that the score of door to door killings which left 49 children and 39 women

dead, were carried out by pro-government Shabbiya militia forces.

Other eyewitnesses have pinned the blame on rebel fighters, claiming the attacks were retribution for those who refused to take up arms against government forces.

Damascus has denied any involvement in the massacre, blaming "armed terrorists" attempting to destabilize the peace process for the killings.

On Tuesday, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Australia all announced they would expel their Syrian ambassadors in response to the weekend's massacre.

UN-Arab League Special Envoy *Kofi Annan* spoke with President *Bashar al-Assad* "to convey the grave concern of the international community about the violence in Syria...in particular the recent events in Houla."

He further said his six-point plan had to be fully implemented, and "this is not happening."

Speaking with Annan by phone on Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister *Sergey Lavrov* reiterated his call that both sides in the conflict should halt all violence.

Lavrov had previously warned that some countries are exploiting the tragedy in order to push a military solution to the Syrian conflict.

He also condemned calls by Syrian National Council chair *Burhan Ghalion* to carry on fighting until the Security Council "agrees on military intervention." The Russian FM said such talk was a direct provocation for civil war and directly contradicted the spirit of Anna's peace plan.

Following talks with his British counterpart on Monday, Lavrov said it was "clear both sides had a hand in the Houla incident." •

Source: *Russia Today*, 29 May 2012

# Syrian opposition sets up summer headquarters in Miami

**New: CIA now organizes arab spring in Havana as well**

by Jean Guy Allard, Cuban newsagency

The CIA is implementing a device to sabotage the *Annan* plan and any attempt at peace in Syria. Reverting to its Cold War methods when it created subversive groups in the Eastern Bloc to infiltrate international combat fronts, the CIA organized a joint training seminar in Miami for members of the Cuban and Syrian armed opposition.

By using the Cuban-American community acting under their auspices in Miami, as well as Syrian opponents living on their territory, the US Intelligence Services are aiming to associate Cuba with the current unrest in Syria, according to a dispatch from the Spanish news agency EFE “revealing” that “Syrian dissidents and Cuban in Miami created a front to fight *Castro* and *Al Assad*.”

“Syrian and Cuban resistance created a united front for the freedom and democracy of both peoples fighting against the ‘dictatorial regimes’,” reported the Madrid agency correspondent in Miami, considered to be the base of all anti-Cuban plots in the US.

Representatives of the “main Syrian opposition organization” and members of the so-called Assembly of the Cuban Resistance (CRA) of Miami, signed an “agreement to coordinate their efforts” and give Cuba an image of instability.

“Syria has been caught in a spiral of violence since 15 March 2011, when thousands of people took to the streets,” added EFE.

“This offers an extraordinary opportunity: a united front bringing the peoples of Syria and Cuba together to fight for freedom and democracy,” said *Silvia Iriondo*, the “president” of *Mothers and Women Against Repression* (MAR Por Cuba), in her interview with the EFE Miami correspondent.

*Silvia Iriondo*, whose real name is *Silvia Goudie*, is the daughter of a mercenary who took part in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. She is Miami where she lives off her lies and her “brainchild” M.A.R. Por Cuba, graciously funded by USAID. When Cuban 6-year-old *Elian Gonzalez* was kidnapped by his relatives in Miami, this lady and the members of her organization declared they would prefer to see him die rather than return him to his family in Cuba.

The State Department and its “subsidiaries” have invariably employed her in their “foreign service” to participate in their meetings against Cuba, Europe and Latin America.

In March 2004, *Robert Ménard*, the former secretary general of *Reporters Without Borders*, and *Frank “Paquito” Calzon*, CIA officer and director of the Center

## Document

### Cuban-Syrian Joint Declaration of Agreement

We, Cubans and Syrians, in resistance against the tyrannies which deprive us of our God-given, inalienable rights, proclaim:

That human rights and dignity are universal and intrinsic to the human condition, and that all humans are created equal in obedience to same;

That in defense of these rights, the Cuban Resistance and the Syrian Revolution agree to unify our struggles in order to accelerate the hour of liberation;

Therefore: The Cuban Resistance recognizes the Syrian Revolution as a legitimate expression of the highest aims and ideals of the Syrian people; The Syrian Revolution recognizes the Agreement for Democracy as a legitimate expression of the highest aims and ideals of the Cuban people; The Cuban Resistance joins those nations, which have recognized the Syrian Revolution as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people; The Syrian Revolution adopts the Vilnius Resolution of the Parliamentary Forum of the Community of Democracies in recognizing the Cuban Resistance as a legitimate representative of the Cuban people;

Therefore, with said moral authority, the Cuban Resistance and Syrian Revolution jointly agree: To coordinate all of our political, diplomatic, logistic and humani-

tarian efforts in pursuit of the liberation of Cuba and Syria; hence constituting a United Front for Freedom and Democracy;

Therefore, the Cuban Resistance and the Syrian Revolution jointly declare: The people want the overthrow of the dictatorial regimes of Assad and Castro.

Signed at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables this 8th day of May, 2012.

For The Assembly of the Cuban Resistance<sup>1</sup>: *Bertha Antunez*, *Laida Carro Raul Garcia*, *Luis Gonzalez Infante*, *Orlando Gutierrez Boronat*, *Sylvia Iriondo* For the Syrian Revolution: *Khaled Saleh* (General Commission for the Revolution), *Mohamed Kawam* (Syrian Emergency Task Force – SETF), *Yahia Basha* (United for a free Syria – UFS), *Bashar Lufti* (American Syrian Public Affairs Committee – AMSPAC), *Imad Jandali* (Syrian American Council – SAC), *Maher Nana* (Syrian Expatriates Organization – SSO – and Syrian Support Group – SSG).

<sup>1</sup> The ACR included *Movimiento Feminista por los Derechos Civiles Rosa Parks*, *Coalición de Mujeres Cubano Americanas* (Coalition of Cuban American Women), *Proyecto Pro Cambio*, *Jóvenes Cubanos en Acción* (Cuban Youth in Action), *Presidio Político Histórico “Casa del Preso”*, *Directorio Democrático Cubano* (Cuban Democratic Directorate), and *MAR por Cuba* (Mothers Against Repression).

for a Free Cuba (CFC), appeared with her in public during a meeting with European MPs organized by friends of former Spanish Prime Minister *Jose Maria Aznar* at the European Union.

*Robert Ménard* became famous after having replenished his “Cuban” bank accounts in Virginia with money from USAID, whereas at the CFC, *Felipe Sixto*, *Calzon*’s right-hand man, was arrested and convicted of embezzling half a million dollars.

In 2007, the International Society for Human Rights – an openly anticommunist, CIA-run organization which organized a seminar on the “Cuban Problem” at the Dresden Bank Communications Center in Frankfurt, Germany – invited and seated *Silvia Iriondo* on the podium next to *Calzon*, *Pedro V. Roig* (Director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting and responsible for the emission of *Radio Martí* and *TV Martí*, which was then under investigation for fraud), the “traitor Commander,” *Hubert Matos*, who is linked to drug trafficking, and *Angel Serrano Francisco de Fana*, a

member of *Alpha 66* (arrested in California in 1995 in possession of an arsenal of weapons slated to be deployed in a terrorist attack against Cuba).

In November 2009, *Silvia Iriondo* together with the head of *UnoAmérica*, a fascist organization ideologically akin to *Operation Condor*, and *Alejandro Peña Esclusa*, currently on trial in Caracas for terrorism, was among the group of “observers” who legitimized the general elections held under the dictatorship of *Roberto Micheletti* in Honduras.

On that occasion, she again rubbed elbows with *Matos* and other “figures” of the anti-Cuban mafia, such as the “anti-Castro” millionaire *Orlando Gutierrez Boronat* who is currently sharing her company at the “Cuba-Syria” fanfare.

A recipient, like *Ms Iriondo*, of generous dollar injections from USAID, *Gutierrez* anointed himself National Secretary of the Cuban Democratic Directorate (*Directorio Democrático Cubano*), and has even

## On the eve of the talks the Afghanistan aid divides the NATO

**“We were told, ‘You punch above your weight,’ and we said, ‘Yes, but we don’t want to pay more than our share.’”**

by Alissa J. Rubin

There are few certainties for Afghanistan as the NATO troop withdrawal moves into high gear, but one of them is this: the Continental Europeans have a grimmer prognosis for what can be accomplished than do their American and British counterparts.

As they assess Afghanistan, the Europeans see an economic depression looming as Western aid and military spending evaporate; corruption, already endemic, is escalating dangerously as Afghan power brokers milk the war economy for every last penny before it dries up; security remains elusive – not only because of the Taliban, but also because ethnically based militias are reactivating across large parts of the country.

The American and British, however, emphasize potential: the Afghan security forces are improving; President *Hamid Karzai* has pledged not to run again, making it possible that there will be a credible election; and the Taliban appear open to peace talks, just not right now.

These disparate outlooks, laid out in interviews with foreign officials here over the past week, are more than a matter of semantics. They are fundamental differences in the allies’ conclusions about how much has been achieved and how much more should be spent on Afghanistan.

That question will be front and center at the NATO summit meeting in Chicago that starts this weekend and is focused on getting commitments from NATO member countries and others to finance the Afghan security forces for 10 years after the NATO mission ends in 2014.

“We have a lot of European countries that are in economic crisis, that are facing elections and whose citizens are fatigued with the war after 11 years. So for us coming up with substantial money for the Afghan National Security Forces, it is not so clear a priority for us,” said one European diplomat here. Like others interviewed for this article, the diplomat spoke about the aid discussions on the condition of anonymity.

Everyone believes that at the end of the day – in fact by the end of the conference – the aid pledges will be there to fill out a goal of \$4.1 billion a year, over the next 10 years, to help Afghanistan maintain its security forces. The Americans plan to provide roughly two-thirds of that.

Still, for many European countries, the money is being given reluctantly, most of all because they would prefer to spend on health clinics and schools rather than armies. And even as they are agreeing to commit the money for security help at the Chicago conference, they worry that doing so will make their parliaments reluctant to give more at a Tokyo conference in July that will focus on future Afghanistan reconstruction projects. And in more candid moments, some wish aloud that the money could stay available for countries with more chance for success than Afghanistan.

“What dominates the agenda of Karzai and the United States is security – the military strategy, the night raids, detention and the rest,” another European diplomat said. “So no matter how much we are going to push the Afghans to address issues of governance and corruption, it’s not going to happen. But these are things we care about and the capitals care about.”

Though the Americans and British insist that they do not want to end up slighting development spending, their clear priority in Chicago is to ensure there is enough money for the security forces to avoid a repeat of what happened in 1991 when the Soviet Union withdrew financial support for the military under *Najibullah*, the Communist ruler they had left in Kabul after they withdrew in 1989. When the money stopped, his government collapsed in a matter of months.

“Everybody has economic problems but this is serious business,” said a senior American official. “Security forces cannot be under-resourced without grave danger to the state.”

Yet for all that the Americans wanted a broad Western coalition, they did themselves no favors in the prelude to Chicago by sending around a list in January with the amount they expected every country to give. Canada was assessed for \$125 million; Finland for \$20 million; France, \$200 million; Sweden, \$40 million – among others. Only Greece, whose government is in default, was given an exemption.

The list made other countries feel they were trapped in a carpet bazaar in which the store owner sets the price above what he knows he will get. (The list was even called “Target Asks.”)

“It was a bit blunt as an approach, and we thought, ‘Right, why weren’t we involved in the exercise to come up with the numbers?’” one European diplomat said.

Another country’s diplomat looked at the list and wondered why his country was asked to pay more than another country of similar size. “We were told, ‘You punch above your weight,’ and we said, ‘Yes, but we don’t want to pay more than our share.’”

So far the result is that countries are offering about 60 percent of the amount the Americans asked them for. Britain has already announced it will spend \$110 million – barely more than half the \$200 million it was asked for. France was asked for \$200 million, but with the election last week of a staunchly antiwar Socialist president, *François Hollande*, no one is expecting they will give that much. Several diplomats said they doubted that Mr Hollande would come to the Chicago meeting empty-handed.

A senior United States official said that the Americans recognized the European reluctance, but that as a practical matter what was most important was that the United States remain out front in helping Afghanistan – in part because of a sense of responsibility that the past 11 years of war cannot be allowed to come to nothing, but also because it encourages other countries to contribute.

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### “Syrian opposition sets up ...”

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been accused by some of using his subsidies to travel around the world.

Hailed by EFE, a news agency founded by the Franquist grandfather of Aznar, this „agreement“ is not the first attempt to „associate“ Cuba with Syria, in which Ms. Iriondo has been involved.

A few weeks ago, this „activist“ in the pay of the State Department participated in a briefing to Congress organized by a so-called Association of Cuban-American

lawyers (CABA), centered on the theme of „The Arab Spring in Cuba,“ in the presence mafia legislators Mario Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and David Rivera.

Among the signatories of the „agreement“ acclaimed by EFE also appears Horacio Garcia, Council for the Freedom of Cuba (CLC) and a former director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). It should be noted that this gentleman was publicly portrayed by Cuban-born terrorist Luis Posada Carriles as one of the major „financiers“ of his criminal activities.

For the „Syrian side,“ EFE mentions Mohamed Kawam, of the so-called Syrian Emergency Task Force, and Niman Shukairy, affiliated to United for a Free Syria - doctor and dentist respectively - who seem to have more of a taste for easy money than to exercise their profession. Two Syrian activists based in the United States, whose right-wing positions enabled them to be closely associated with the State Department propaganda and destabilization mechanisms.

Source: <http://www.voltairenet.org/Syrian-opposition-sets-up-summer>

# What is the meaning of the new agreement between the USA and the Islamic Republic Afghanistan?

by Professor Dr Albert A. Stahel, Institute for Strategic Studies, Wädenswil

On 2 May Barack Obama as President of the USA and Hamid Karzai as President of the Islamic Republic Afghanistan signed an agreement that should be valid until 2024<sup>1</sup>. The agreement is divided into eight sections. The first section, the preamble, begins with the statement that both states have been partners since 2001. The objective of this partnership is “to respond to threats to international peace and security and help the Afghan people chart a secure, democratic, and prosperous future”. This sentence of general nature is complemented by the note that Afghanistan now is on the way to an assured independence in the security field, with regard to governing actions, the economic and social development and at the regional level to a constructive partnership.

It is said that in November 2011 the traditional *Loyal Jirga* approved the agreement. It is not mentioned why the Afghan parliament has not been consulted for the approval to the agreement, whereas it volubly points to the beneficial importance of the Afghan constitution that was put into force nine years ago<sup>2</sup>, to women rights and freedom of expression. The strategic cooperation with the USA is emphasized. Starting with the resolutions of the conferences of *London 2010*, of *Kabul* and of *Bonn 2011*, the USA has taken long-term responsibility to continually support Afghanistan for economic and social development and regional partnership.

In the second section with the title “*Protecting and Promoting Shared Democratic Values*” the importance of the Afghan constitution is again emphasized. Afghanistan takes responsibility to protect human and political rights. The democratic institutions are to be strengthened. Discriminations of citizens must be prevented and women rights must be preserved. In principle this second section is a repeating of the preamble and somewhat superfluous.

The third section “*Advancing Long-Term Security*” may be the kernel of the agreement for the Americans. Since 2001, the presence of the US troops was meant to fight al-Kaida and affiliated groups. Both states<sup>3</sup> would agree with this objective and at the same time would remember the sacrifices the American people have made in this conflict so far. For the upkeeping of security and stability of Afghanistan both states will start a closer cooperation in the future. Therefore on one hand negotiations are underway for a Bilateral Security Agreement on the basis of the partnership agreement. With the conclusion of this supplementary agreement (within one year) the previous agreements on the presence of US troops in Afghanistan will be suspended. On the other hand the actual military operations will be continued on the basis of the previous agreements until the conclusion of the bilateral security agreement.

The USA grant Afghanistan the status of a “*Major Non-Nato Ally*”. Contrary to the expectations of defense minister *Wardak*, who has had full support from the USA up to now, Afghanistan will not become a NATO state and must be satisfied with lower status. Both states support the peace efforts of Afghanistan. They demand from the opposite side<sup>4</sup> to cut relations to al-Kaida, renounce violence and acknowledge the Afghan constitution including the protection of all women and men.

For training and equipment of the Afghan security forces beyond 2014 the USA will



Afghanistan with its provinces.

take an effort to mobilize financial funds<sup>5</sup>. But who will provide these funds is not mentioned. Within the framework of the agreement a “*US Afghanistan Working Group on Defense and Security*” will be established. This group will continuously assess the threat towards Afghanistan and will formulate recommendations for the *Bilateral Commission* to be created. The Afghan security forces should reach the standard of the NATO forces<sup>6</sup>. Both states ask the NATO states on the basis of the Lisbon summit 2011 to support Afghanistan beyond 2014.

Until 2014 and beyond – given the *Bilateral Security Agreement* will be concluded till then – the US troops be granted the right to use the Afghan facilities (bases, airfields, etc.) in the fight against al-Kaida and for the training of the Afghan security forces. Thereby it is noted that the USA do not strive for constant military presence in Afghanistan and that they will not plan attacks against other states from Afghan

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## “On the eve of the talks ...”

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“What it really takes is us,” said the official, referring to the United States.

The strategic partnership agreement signed on May 1 by President *Obama* and Mr *Karzai* in Kabul committed the United States to support Afghanistan for the next 10 years in economic development, rule of law and security, among other things.

The European reluctance to spend on security is not born of a lack of interest in Afghanistan. Many European countries have had development and humani-

tarian efforts here going back more than 25 years. But after years of development programs that have fallen far short of the West’s hopes, they are wary of the prospect of pumping more money into defending an Afghan state that many Europeans have dwindling faith in.

They are put off by a troubling record of corruption and human rights abuses, and daunted by the prospect of a collapse into civil war after NATO pulls out. They say the Americans base their projections on best-case plans.

“The major goal now is to avoid a cross-country conflict that moves into a

regional conflict,” a European diplomat said. He added, “We have low expectations for 2014.”

Another European diplomat, who has spent years in the country, described how Afghanistan has fallen out of his country’s consciousness.

“Our media is not even mentioning Afghanistan now,” the diplomat said. “We are Europeans at the end of the day; we have to care about North Africa – it is closer; we can explain why it matters. We have to care about Belarus, it is nearly a neighbor. But Afghanistan is very far away.”

Source: *International Herald Tribune*, 17.5.2012

**"What is the meaning ..."**

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territory.

Both states will intensify the exchange of their information concerning terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime and money laundering. Apparently this has not been the case until now. This sheds a strange light on the previous presence of the US troops in Afghanistan. Both states also will improve the regional cooperation on the elimination of production, trade and consumption of drugs.

In the fourth section "*Reinforcing Regional Security and Cooperation*" the regional co-operation in fighting terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and money laundering is again mentioned, interestingly enough. Is this a concession that organized crime in Afghanistan as well as drug trade to central Asia represent the real threats in Afghanistan, rather than terrorism? Why does this insight come only now?

The fifth section has a title very important for the future of Afghanistan: "*Social and Economic Development*"! The USA want to keep their commitments, which they submitted at the occasion of the Bonn Conference concerning the economic development of Afghanistan in 2011. Despite the present budget deficits of the USA Afghanistan shall become "*self sustaining*" in the future. The USA want to support Afghanistan within the following areas: in agricultural production, in building up the transport system, in trade and transit, in water supply, energy infrastructure, in establishing the management of the natural resources' exploitation and in the structuring of a functioning financial system. The USA will motivate the following institutions for stimulating private investments in Afghanistan: *Overseas private Investment Corporation, US Export/Import bank, U.S. Trade and Development Agency*. Both states express the desire that Afghanistan shall profit from its natural resources itself.

Within the social area both states want to ensure improvement of the access to and the quality of education, as well as higher education and further fields of qualification.

The fight of all kinds of *corruption* is stressed in this section as well. Afghanistan shall strengthen its institutions for the fight against corruption. At the same time the country shall follow the advice of the "*Financial – Action Task Asia Pacific Group (FATF/APG)*" concerning money laundering and financing of terrorism. Note here that corruption is not new in Afghanistan and that it even increased due to the glut of money supplied by international aid agencies. On the other hand the money laundering is directly connected with organized crime in Afghanistan, which

started from 2001 onwards – that is after the American intervention – and penetrates and controls all political and safety-related sections of the country today.

The USA want to support Afghanistan socially and economically further on. To this end the USA want to find and collect the money in the sense of "*fundraising*" – this presumably from states, which have not been involved in this war. After 2012 fifty per cent of these collected funds shall go directly into the treasury of Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> The "*Bilateral Commission*" established by the present agreement shall supervise the "events" periodically. It is stressed that the financial means of development aid are placed under the supervision of the Afghan state from now on.<sup>8</sup>

The sixth section "*Strengthening Afghanistan Institutions and Governance*" refers to the necessary improvements of the executive, legislative and judiciary of Afghanistan. This includes removal of parallel structures like the *Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)* and the *District Stabilization Teams*.<sup>9</sup>

The seventh section "*Implementing Arrangement and Mechanisms*" again mentions the establishment of different committees, which are to supervise the process implemented by the present agreement. The Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of the two states and/or their assigned subordinates shall chair the bilateral commission that will meet half-year in Kabul and/or Washington. The "*Bilateral Security Consultative Forum*" is to become part of this organization. Moreover a "*Joint Steering Committee*" with working groups shall report to the responsible Secretaries of State on the progress in the security area, in economic and social development and on the improvements concerning the national institutions.

In the eighth section "*Final Provisions*" the duration of the agreement is specified. The time horizon is given until 2024, but the agreement can be terminated at any time by agreement of both states or after an announcement by one of the two states with a one year notice period.

**My assessment:**

The decision of the Obama administration is certain: By the end of 2014 the USA will have taken off almost all their armed forces from Afghanistan. There are two important reasons for that: Due to the deficit of the state budget and the condition of the national economy the USA can no longer finance this war. In addition there is the political and economic challenge coming from the rising power China. For too long the USA have neglected the Western Pacific area. This region is now in the center of the USA's geopolitical interests. Therefore the American armed forces have to be oriented increasingly to

the Western Pacific to support the allies and friends militarily and politically with regard to the ambitions of China. Hence the geopolitical and geostrategic value of Afghanistan clearly decreased for the USA.

Withdrawing the troops however must not result in an impression that the USA lost the war. Until the end of 2014 it is therefore important to the USA that they and the NATO-allies can execute their military operations against the Taliban and that Karzai and its government do not obstruct these. This demand is in the center of the agreement. The rest of the agreement contains promises, which are either very vaguely formulated or which the USA cannot or do not want to fulfill at all in the future. This concerns above all the future financing of the Afghan security forces of over 300,000 men (and women). Already today the financial need for the security forces exceeds the possibilities of the country. Also in the future the national budgets of the USA and most European states will remain in deficit. It is not conceivable therefore that in these budgets financial means for the Afghan security forces could be conceived.

The joined fight against drug trade and thus organized crime of Afghanistan is a lip-service. One could have exterminated the rampantly growing crime already more than ten years ago.

The agreement must be judged as nearly worthless. For the USA the agreement is a conglomeration of confessions, which they will have forgotten at the latest after 2014. Remember here the example of South Viet Nam [that took care of their own military defense according the Nixon-Doctrine] with the Vietnamization of its armed forces. In 1975 with the conquest of Saigon by North Vietnam all American promises vanished into thin air. For the Afghans face facts of life with this agreement, valid since the year one: Again they will be sold down the river by a protecting power. •

Source: [www.strategische-studien.com](http://www.strategische-studien.com), 14.5.2012

<sup>1</sup> Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2 May 2012

<sup>2</sup> The constitution has been in force for nine years (2003).

<sup>3</sup> In the agreement the two states are called parties.

<sup>4</sup> The Taliban on the opposite side, are nowhere explicitly mentioned as such in the agreement. The Taliban are mentioned shadowy only.

<sup>5</sup> Presumably Non-NATO states shall come up with these funds.

<sup>6</sup> This is a very challenging goal, which can be never achieved most probably.

<sup>7</sup> Thus the corruption in Afghanistan will grow further.

<sup>8</sup> The corrupt in the state could become even more owing to the access on these honey pots.

<sup>9</sup> The PRTs of the USA and NATO are judged as the most efficient means for the development of Afghanistan until today. Since Karzai cannot control them, they are a thorn in his side, and therefore they must be eliminated.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# Impressions from a visit to Iran

by Elias Davidsson

*Ellen Rohlf sent us the following report of her Jewish friend Elias Davidsson, saying that "He wanted to get his own idea about the situation in Iran, after all these threats of war".*

From 19 to 29 April 2012 I had the opportunity to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran together with a group of German intellectuals and journalists. I try to summarize my various impressions.

## Antecedents

In 2011 I was invited by Dr *Yavuz Özuguz*, who manages the Muslim website "Islam-Market" (which conducted an interview with me three years ago), to participate in a trip to Iran with a group of non-Muslims. An Iranian foundation would host us but we had to pay our airfare.

At that time I was already aware that what Western mass-media reported about Iran was tendentious and partly untrue. I knew that Iran was a relatively modern state which strongly emphasizes people's education and science; in which the majority of university students are female; where the largest Jewish community in the Middle-East (outside Israel) lives (about 30 000), and where excellent films are produced (which I have been watching for years). I was also aware that Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was neither anti-Semite, nor a Holocaust denier or a dangerous person, but – as I discovered by reading his addresses to the General Assembly of the United Nations – was among the progressive statesmen in today's world. I was also aware of the accusations levelled by Western governments against Iran, particularly in the field of human rights. It was obvious to me that if I were to accept the invitation to Iran, Iran's enemies would tar me after my return as a friend of a "dictator". I decided nevertheless to accept this invitation.

Before we left, we were invited to the home of Dr *Özuguz*, who introduced us to Shiite Islam and to the country and people of Iran. This meeting provided me with the opportunity to meet him and his lovely family as well as my travel companions. This coming-together was by itself an unforgettable event for me, due mainly to the warm personality and friendliness of Dr. *Özuguz*.

## The trip

On April 19, 2012 we all met at the Hamburg airport. After an unexpected customs check, in which German officials searched in our handbags for "secret technological documents", we embarked and enjoyed a trip with Iran Air.



(picture uk)

After our arrival at the airport outside Tehran in the late evening, a delegation of our hosts met us and invited us to refreshments before bringing us to a hotel. Our hosts accompanied us throughout the visit in Iran and tried to accommodate all our wishes as much as they could.

It is, evidently, impossible to get a thorough impression of a country such as Iran in nine days. It would require more than one lifetime to do so, if at all. Our hosts were, of course, committed to show us aspects which they considered as valuable. To learn about the down side of Iran there was no need to travel. It would have sufficed to read German and other Western newspapers, which systematically vilify and demonize the Islamic Republic and its leaders, year in, year out.

On the way from the airport "Imam Khomeini" to the hotel we experienced our first impressions. All of us were surprised by the modern infrastructure we perceived along the way and the cleanliness of the streets. These sights unwittingly called forth in my memory the first trip I made to the USA in 1960. Arriving to New York, I felt so depressed by the shabbiness and dirt that I saw from the bus bringing us to Manhattan that I wanted to return immediately to Europe. The contrast to Tehran 2012 could not be greater.

I find it difficult to summarize my Iran impressions in the requisite compactness. A mere listing of our meetings, visits and lectures would not communicate the depth of these impressions. A couple of my co-travellers of the "Arbeiterfotografie" (labourer photography) described Iran as "The land of love". The word "love" was repeatedly pronounced by those we met. They neither used that word in the commercial sense as abused by Western business people nor in the hypocritical sense

used by numerous preachers, but in relation to Iran's policies. Who would imagine that Western politicians talk of God's grace and the love of God to justify their worldly policies? Everywhere we went, we experienced natural friendliness, hospitality and human thoughtfulness also when meeting strangers in the streets. Iranians are indeed known for their high regards for politeness and thoughtfulness.

Our hosts of the Foundation Ebn Sina (Avicenna) emphasized repeatedly the Islamic character of Iran. As most of us were secular people or non-Muslims such emphasis was rather obnoxious. But it would be unfair to blame our hosts for their insistence because it is impossible to understand today's Iran without considering its religious basis and knowing something about Shiite Islam. We also found out that numerous Iranians found the constant barrage of religious messages, as well as the quasi obligatory hijab that all women in Iran wear and the separation between women and men highly irritating. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of the Iranian people is deeply religious. Religion plays a major role in the daily lives of Iranians. Young people's religious indoctrination combines piety with the promotion of scientific knowledge, as reflected in the high standards of education. Thus, it cannot be compared with the condemnation of modern world as for example done by the Taliban. We experienced many times that people take religion seriously. A secular government in Iran, i.e. the secularization of the state would likely be resisted by considerable parts of the population. Many Iranian could not fathom that most of us were non-believers. They assumed that we all practiced Christianity or Judaism and addressed us as believers.

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### "Impressions from a visit to Iran"

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Our hosts attempted to make us acquainted with Shiite Islam on the occasion of numerous events. An Islamic scholar, Ayatollah al-Shirazi, was invited to talk to us. He told us about Holy Mary, Jesus' mother, who is also revered by the Shiites. He did so in order to convince us that Islam was no adversary of the Christians. Our discussion partners emphasized that Muslims also revered the Jewish prophets, beginning with Abraham. Emphasizing the close connection between Islam, Judaism and Christianity they apparently wanted to counter the alleged inflammatory propaganda of the West. Again and again they tried to explain and defend their culture, religion and politics. Due to our pre-knowledge we need not be convinced of that.

One lecturer explained to us the principle of Imamate, namely the attributes a person must possess in order to be eligible to become an imam and which role they play in social and religious life. A special feature of the Iranian state is that its highest authority is not an elected politician but a cleric who has not only to meet strictly ethical requirements but also must lead an austere life.

After the death of Imam Khomeini, the father of the Islamic revolution, an "expert" commission of 85 Islamic scholars (elected by the population) elected his successor, Imam Syyed Ali Khomeini, who is currently the supreme spiritual leader in Iran. This commission's mandate is also to monitor the Supreme Leader and ensure that he abides by Islamic law. In parallel, the population elects the parliament and the president in direct, secret, elections.

Remarkable to Iran is that not the State President but the Imam Ali Khamenei is the supreme commander of the Iranian armed forces. In the context of his powers he repeatedly stated that Iran will not and cannot acquire nuclear weapons because these are inhuman and incompatible with the principles of Islam. He has repeatedly urged the states of the world to abolish their nuclear weapons and he called for the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle-East. Western media do not relish reporting these facts, preferring to allege hypocrisy. Western political leaders have a hard time to believe that Imam Khomeini is honest and bound by religious and ethical norms.

We visited also the Iranian parliament, where we attended a debate about the status of teachers and met a few members of parliament. Among them were MPs representing the Jewish and the Christian communities. According to the Iranian constitution, each of these minorities is entitled

to at least one member in parliament. Unfortunately we were not able to have discussions with them as time was short. We also had the impression that some of them were not really interested in talking to us.

One of the highlights in Iran was for me the visit to the National Library in Tehran. The library, whose facilities are free for researchers and students, houses over 1.5 million books, a huge collection of old manuscripts, mostly in Farsi (Persian). I discovered an astonishing number of scientific journals in Farsi from each scientific field; from economy, politics, natural sciences and the law. For each field there were dozens of journals, even for very specific subjects. Unfortunately the titles were only in English. Drawing conclusions from the titles, I found that the level of scientific research was rather high.

Our hosts surprised us by organizing an audience with Iran's President, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which has already been commented by Iran's adversaries in Germany. Unfortunately we had too little time to ask him questions or engage him in a lengthy talk, as the time for our meeting was too short. His demeanor confirmed his natural self-confidence with simultaneous modesty and moderation. I was told that he also led a modest private life. Even when he mentioned in his lecture the threats and attacks leveled by the United States and Israel against his country, he never demonstrated any hatred or anger towards those countries or their peoples.

Apart from my main topics I did not manage to inquire sufficiently about social and economic policies nor about the situation of human rights. We had, however, an opportunity to meet representatives of women's organizations, among them the President's advisor for women's affairs. She informed us that there are approximately 8,000 women's associations (NGOs), organized into several national federations. Due to their networking, women can exert political pressure. It became apparent to me that Iranian women do not need the assistance of their "emancipated" Western sisters to defend their rights. Their self-confidence convinced me that they are capable to defend their rights themselves.

We were also told about the level of Iranian labour law and the Iranian legacy law; however, there was not enough time to go into more detail in the discussion. A lot of what we hear about Iranian family law in the West is now much more differentiated to me than before the journey. Allegedly the working week in Iran is 30 hours; women and men receive equal salaries for equal work. If this is really the case, Iran would be in advance over Western countries in this matter.

An interesting insight into Islamic criminal law emerged as a result of my question regarding the death penalty. As an opponent of the death penalty I expressed my concern regarding the number of death sentences in Iran. What I did not know is that most death sentences in Iran are not carried out because the families of the victims can and do "forgive" the attacker. If they do so, the state renounces his claim to inflict punishment. This means that most death penalties are not enforced. According to Islamic law, judges are bound to explain to the victims or their families that if they renounce from a punishment of the offender they can plead for a compensation. Forgiveness instead of revenge. Forgiveness plays an important role in Islam. I have never heard of such practice in the US, where most death penalties are enforced.

When the United Nations imposed economic sanctions against Iraq in August 1990, these measures hit the population especially hard because Iraq at the time imported 2/3 of its food needs, a great deal from the United States. The Islamic Republic of Iran however produces most of its own foodstuffs and most medicines in their own country. Western sanction policy strengthened Iran's efforts to become economically independent by producing their own goods. This is primarily the aim of domestic scientific research and technological innovation. Today Iran not only produces a substantial portion of its own motor vehicles but develops latest technologies in many technical areas.

Does the Islamic Republic of Iran represent a threat to world peace? Enemies of Iran do not tire to demonize the country. I often asked myself whether such accusations are based on lack of knowledge or on malice.

Iran has – contrary to the United States and Israel, or Germany – Iran has not attacked any country for 300 centuries; the country also hardly knows anti-Semitism which was widespread in Germany before 1933. The Shiite Islam is not even a nationalist denomination but has a universal claim just like the Christianity. German fascism was based on the worship of nationalism and the rejection of God, while the Islamic Republic Iran is not based on nationalism but deduces its politics from the commandments of the common God of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The political system of Iran is in some respects unique in this world. It can be regarded – with some reservations – as an experiment following the theology of liberation that was so opposed by Pope John Paul II. The Islamic revolution is celebrated by many Muslims in a similar way as communists celebrate the Octo-

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# NATO pursues its plans contradicting national and international law

by Karl Müller

On the occasion of its meeting in Chicago on 20 and 21 May, NATO presented plans for the restructuring of its armies. In accordance with the concept of the so-called Smart Defence, they argued in favour of throwing overboard the principle of deciding on the national level about co-operation in case of military actions operated by NATO. In future, the individual NATO states – with exception of the USA – should not cover the entire spectrum of a classical army, but they are intended to “specialize”. At the same time, the individual states are to be obligated to supply their necessary part with coming military actions of NATO. The consequence: NATO member states will then not be able to refuse a participation in a NATO war any longer – as half of the NATO states did in the attack against Libya.

The official final declaration of the NATO summit of May 2012 (“Toward NATO forces 2020”) added in a quite encoded way, “The development and deployment of defence capabilities is first and foremost a national responsibility. But as technology grows more expensive, and defence budgets are under pressure, there are key capabilities which many Allies can only obtain if they work together to develop and acquire them. We therefore welcome the decisions of Allies to take forward specific multinational projects, including for better protection of our forces, better surveillance and better training. These projects will deliver improved operational effectiveness, economies of scale, and closer connections between our forces. They will also provide experience for more such Smart Defence projects in future.

The “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” of 21 May wrote somewhat more clearly: “NATO questions one of its politically most

delicate principles: It wants to begin a discussion about national operational restrictions in order to prevent that individual allies could block the access to weapon systems and units jointly used during deployments abroad.” The newspaper continues: “Diplomats report that, above all, we have to talk about national deployment restrictions, because in the future NATO increasingly wants to make joint use of weapon systems because of financial bottlenecks of its members.”

## Tricky savings

In fact NATO headquarters have been trying for some time, to lure the member states into giving up an essential part of their national sovereignty and their right to self-determination guaranteed by international law – with the help of the term “Smart Defence”. As early as in February 2012 a promotional text for “Smart Defence” was to be found on NATO’s website: “In these times of austerity, each euro, dollar or pound sterling counts. Smart defence is a new way of thinking about generating the modern defence capabilities the Alliance needs for the coming decade and beyond. It is a renewed culture of cooperation that encourages Allies to cooperate in developing, acquiring and maintaining military capabilities to undertake the Alliance’s essential core tasks agreed in the new NATO strategic concept. That means pooling and sharing capabilities, setting priorities and coordinating efforts better.” In plain English: the NATO countries, above all the European states, should only be the “service” – for Washington’s war operations – incompetent for any autonomous defence.

The US is spending 20 times more than Germany or France on their military services. Half of the world’s military expenses are spent by the United States. The consequences for the US economy and the Americans are devastating. Why does the US not level down their military budget to that of the other NATO states, i.e. about 5 percent of the previous level? Hence the US could be more concerned about their civilian economy and perhaps even return to being a real economic engine of the world’s economy and bestow tax revenues on other countries in the world. This is, however, not on their agenda. The remainders of sovereignty in European NATO countries cause trouble. They are to provide more vassal services for the military power across the Atlantic, whose aim is still to become the only world power.

## Violation of the constitution in Germany

For a country like Germany the new NATO plans mean a clear violation of the constitution. On 12 July 1994 the Federal Constitutional Court had stated in a groundbreaking decision that the German Basic Law obliged the federal government to obtain the German Bundestag’s consent prior to an armed deployment of the Bundeswehr abroad. More than 10 years later, on 24 March 2005, the German “Parliamentary Participation Act” came into effect. In its paragraph 1, it clearly states: “The deployment of German Armed Forces outside the area of application of the German Basic Law requires the consent of the Bundestag”. Moreover, the German Parliament has a right of call-back, which means that

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## “Impressions from a visit to Iran”

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ber 1917 revolution, namely as an act of liberation from oppression. The Iranian experiment is young; it is not even older than 33 years. Iran is certainly no paradise and I did not experience it as such. The Iranian leadership cannot change negative traditions and habits in due time, even if they want to. Accordingly they cannot completely prevent corrupting influences from the West (individualism, drug abuse, pornography). Would it not become us well if we were a bit more modest and critical to ourselves in view of the manifold crimes that the so-called Christian west committed among the peoples of the “third world”?

I ask myself what are the deep reasons for the West’s alleged fear from Iran, for the military intervention and the economic punishment that find so many promoters in the west. Is it because the Iranian experiment does not correspond with the predominant liberal bourgeois and free-capitalist ideas and the rulers oppose hegemonic ambitions? Does Iran represent a challenge to the capitalist system and western predominance? Is it not among the few countries in this region that may oppose these aggressions?

No one we talked to in Iran believed that his or her country would be attacked. Calmness was palpable everywhere. Iran is an economically booming country – construction can be observed everywhere. Tourists are most welcome and photo-

graphing is allowed virtually everywhere – with the evident exception of military and security installations. Has any journalist ever tried to take photos of Israeli or US nuclear facilities?

For a humanist such as myself, Iran was a real discovery. I would gladly visit the country again. I hope that Western governments will lift the embargo on Iran and instead build up a fruitful cultural and economic cooperation with the Islamic Republic for the benefit of the people. •

Source: [http://www.international.to/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5939:impressions-from-a-visit-to-iran&catid=97:breaking-news&Itemid=119](http://www.international.to/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5939:impressions-from-a-visit-to-iran&catid=97:breaking-news&Itemid=119), slightly adapted to the German version.

Vote on 17 June

## “International treaties before the people” “Common sense would have saved us millions in expenditures and a further loss of sovereignty”

Interview with National Councilor Pirmin Schwander,  
president of the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS)



National Councilor  
Pirmin Schwander  
(picture thk)

thk. On 17 June, the citizens of Switzerland are going to vote on the popular initiative “International treaties before the people” (cf. website of the FDA). This initiative requires submitting international treaties to the

mandatory vote of the people, whose contents have effects on Swiss legislation and are thus as significant as constitutional amendments. This will prevent solo runs of the Federal Council, as we frequently experienced them in the past. The recent appearance of Didier Burkhalter at the NATO headquarters in Chicago shows how little our Federal Councilors are oriented towards the fundamental principles of our democratic constitution. As a neutral state, we have certainly no business in a military alliance, which mainly serves the power and economic interests of the United States and which has been active as a primarily offensive alliance for more than a decade. No one knows what role Federal Councilor Burkhalter played there, and nobody knows what promises he has made to NATO which has recently run into financial trouble.

By such a mandatory referendum on international treaties solo runs of our Federal Councilors will be subjected to the people’s democratic control. Hence direct democracy also plays a role in this sensitive area.

In the following interview with the President of the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS), National Councilor Pirmin Schwander spells out the arguments for an adoption of this initiative

Current Concerns: Why did AUNS de-

### 83 percent of the Swiss against EU membership

According to a recent survey by the FIT Zurich, only 17 percent of the Swiss people are in favor of an EU membership. That means 83 percent are against it.

side to launch the initiative “International treaties before the people”?

Pirmin Schwander: The AUNS has noted in connection with the Bilateral Agreements I and II that treaties with the EU or with Germany and France on a bilateral level dominate domestic politics increasingly. We have almost no leeway in domestic policy, because we have to implement at home what is in the treaties and may not change a single word. This has prompted us to launch the initiative. If we

sign a treaty that requires us to adjust our laws, the treaty is on the same level as a constitutional amendment. If we have a constitutional text, which requires the adjustment of laws, the people and the cantons must approve. And a treaty that forces us to adjust national laws is at the same level as the Constitution, so the people and the cantons must vote on it. With a constitutional amendment, we do not ask ourselves if it is necessary that the people vote; that goes without saying. In recent years, it turned out that more and more treaties are at the constitutional level. The Federal Council recognized this and shared the concern to strengthen the rights of the people in these cases.

### For example Schengen-Dublin

What treaties, adopted by the Federal Council, have had such far-reaching implications?

The Schengen-Dublin agreements is the clearest case that has been concluded in recent years. We realized that we must constantly adjust our laws. Not even the Federal Constitution requires us to constantly adjust laws. *The Schengen-Dublin agreements forced us to make over 130 adjustments since 2005. We have not been allowed to change a single word.* As parliamentarians, we were not allowed to make any amendment if we did not agree with an article in the treaty. The motto has always

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it may withdraw its consent at a later point. The deployment must then be stopped, and the soldiers are to be brought back.

The ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court was responding to a controversial deployment abroad of the Federal Armed Forces in Somalia in 1993. The then Federal Government pressed for foreign assignment in salami tactics.

Unfortunately, the Federal Constitutional Court was not willing to stop this trend. However, it has all the more reminded that the Bundeswehr is not supposed to be a “state within a state” segregated from democracy – which had led to dictatorship in the Weimar Republic. However, it should be an army anchored in democracy – with soldiers who con-

sider themselves as “citizens in uniform”. This basic national policy and constitutional considerations have already been ignored when the Bundeswehr soldiers were to become “archaic fighters”. Even more as the German army was changed from a mandatory service force into a professional army.

The German governments of the past 20 years have wanted German war missions and are planning further German war operations. They also make every possible effort to lever out Germany’s sovereign rights. The current Merkel government has indicated its willingness to follow the NATO agenda. The “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” writes: “According to accounts received, the Federal Government is thinking about a revision of the German Parliamentary Participation Act. [...] In the Federal Government has been considering for quite some time how

German formations, serving in multinational federations, can participate in NATO missions without requiring an involvement of the Bundestag.”

Considering such power-political ignorance towards right and law, we should also recall a report of the German *tagesschau.de* of 21 May? There was to be read: “It is not by ‘Smart Defence’ that the greatest savings effect for NATO will be achieved; it will, however, be achieved by the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. The USA pays about 90 billion US Dollar annually for their currently 90,000 soldiers at the Hindu Kush. After the withdrawal only 4.1 billion dollars will be due for the pay of the Afghan security forces.”

No wars would save a lot more money than any “Smart Defence”. If the whole issue is about money at all ...

### Expansion of people's rights will lead to a better foreign policy



On 17 June 2012, we will be voting for the people's initiative "International treaties before the people". The people should be the highest authority to decide on important foreign policy issues. The aim is to balance the current shift of emphasis towards international law by extending direct democratic participation. Constitutional jurisdiction, EU framework agreements, rejection clause for people's initiatives: elitist-minded politicians are trying to disenfranchise the annoying people, following the example of EU-Brussels. Especially in a time of continuous attacks on our direct democracy

such an initiative sets an important counter accent. Referenda reveal discrepancies between politicians and voters. As a result diplomats will make more efforts to incorporate the concerns of citizens. If they ignore the voters' will, a negative referendum will follow. International agreements which are not in the interest of Switzerland or promote a slow EU membership may be prevented. Transparency will be increased. Signing international treaties with large implications for the country behind closed doors will not work any longer. Even within the EU it becomes obvious that small states with direct democratic elements (such as Denmark or Ireland) have fought for favorable exceptions. The ACTA agreement led to violent protests around the world, because civil rights were being attacked through draconian surveillance. The initiative "International treaties before the people" will provide the people with the

unique chance of voting on ACTA, which would have a highly regarded signal effect and could deliver the death-blow to the agreement. The initiative requires that one-time expenditures exceeding a billion and recurrent expenditures of over 100 million francs must necessarily be voted upon by the people. Direct democratic elements in fiscal policy lead to lower government spending. Especially the IMF-billion-euro rescue funds impressively demonstrate that certain elites want the people to "keep silent and pay". The Federal Council annually expects three additional voting proposals that run along with the existing referenda. So there will not be an additional burden for anybody. The expansion of people's rights and the improvement of foreign policy towards a policy for the benefit of Switzerland should be worth the effort.

Source: [young4fun.ch](http://young4fun.ch)

(Translation Current Concerns)

## Nation-wide "Managed Care": Evidently bad – a glance beyond the ocean

by Prof Dr med M. Maassen, Präsident PULSUS, and Dr med Marco Bianchetti

*cc. The American model of "Managed Care", a system of compulsory basic health insurance for all citizens – which has per se been a questionable compulsory body since the obligatoriness in Switzerland – was introduced so silently that it takes some effort to unravel the scheme. "Managed Care" must not be confused with integrated advisory and/or service networks. Such networks respect the principle of voluntariness as well as the citizens in his or her personal rights. "Managed Care" on the other hand would intervene in the citizens' health issues and therefore in integral personal matters in a way reminiscent of totalitarianism.*

Since there have been no nationwide experiences with "Managed Care" in Switzerland as yet, all empirical examples have to be studied in the American context. Resist the first advances: Once fallen acutely ill, it's too late to launch a trial before the European Court of Human Rights to avoid being sold off to the HMO's interest yield. The following text was taken from "Swiss Doctors' Bulletin":

Unfortunately little is known up to now about how a nationwide "Managed Care"-System would affect practical health care. Since there is no widespread "Managed Care"-System in Switzerland at hand to demonstrate practical experiences, these are very limited and should not be confused with a nationwide network of health service providers. Looking for a life example one therefore has to glance beyond the ocean to widen one's horizon.

That a fight for free choice of doctors is worthwhile was impressively proven by the referendum against the "Managed Care" draft.

Over the last decades a nationwide "Managed Care" network has been introduced to the health care system of the USA. Main issues of this widespread "Managed Care" system include that the insured chooses a health insurance company and pays a reduced rate provided the care is managed by a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). The insurance aims at withholding a capitation fee with expenditures per insured being budgeted as low as possible. This is achieved by restricting the free choice of doctors. Choosing a specialist is forbidden for patients with only basic insurance coverage. So-called guidelines serve as very explicit treatment recommendations. Access to medical care is hampered by administrative measures. As a consequence, HMO's gained "superpower status". It doesn't lack a certain piquancy if the hopeful aspirations towards quality improved medicine are supposed to be achieved by encouraging doctors not to prescribe anything nor refer the patient.

When introducing this system the same tactical maneuvers had been employed as nowadays in Switzerland. Salary differences between specialists and basic care providers were utilized to lure the latter into hoping for higher incomes in "Managed Care" at the expense of the specialists. Higher incomes are achieved for sure, but certainly neither for basic care providers nor specialists, but for the "Managed

Care" insurances. However it is not just the whole medical profession, suffering now from a new daily routine of 3 minute sessions with their patients, but the patients themselves, too. Two first hand experience accounts from an American professor at Newark university, New Jersey:

Professor Zarbin: "A patient with a hole in his retina came to see one of my colleagues. He saw the indication of an immediate laser treatment and phoned the insurance company of the patient at once to ask for coverage of the treatment costs. After some time waiting he finally got through to the right person and received an authorization code for the lasering. Some weeks later though, the insurance company refused to pay for the treatment costs despite the authorization code. The doctor had called the wrong number. He had been supposed to call the number for emergency treatment. A Swiss colleague of mine at the university had to arrange for an operation of his son. The declared specialist for this kind of procedure was not registered with the 'Managed Care' insurance he was under way at the US. The colleague flew back to Switzerland with his son to have the operation performed there. I was thinking to myself what a great health system Switzerland has, with free choice of all doctors."

Professor Zarbin suggested: «Fight for free choice, because despite all those quality indices allegedly proving the contra-

**“International treaties ...”**

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been either to accept the whole treaty or leave it. If the Federal Constitution requires making a revision of the law, you can make amendments to each article of the law. The Federal Council cannot say that it is impossible. But an international treaty may force us to adopt rules exactly as written in the treaty, without proposing any amendments.

**Si tacuisses – if only you had kept silent ...**

*Actually, the initiative has a historical tradition. In the history of Switzerland there has always been a struggle to enforce more political rights against the rulers. How did the Federal Council respond to this initiative?*

When we presented the initiative to the State Affairs Committee of the National Council, it actually acknowledged that we should do something at this level. The direct counter-proposal of the Federal Council was regarded as a viable option. The Federal Council did not want to go as far as the initiative, but in its proposal the Federal Council suggested the parliament to draft a direct *alternative concept* including the wording that *all treaties on constitutional level must mandatorily be submitted to the vote of the people and the cantons*. The Federal Council discussed this version actually very early but later dropped it again. Again and again it has found good reasons why the people should not be asked. However, in its *message of 1 October 2010* it indicated in several passages that *it would be good to enlarge the rights of the people*. The National Council

as the first chamber at first backed the motion, but the Council of Cantons rejected it against the opposition of the SVP, but unfortunately the National Council approved this decision. It surprises me very much that now some Federal Councilors do no longer keep up their original position, but fully take the opposite position, now. Of course they have to – the law determined them to represent what was decided by Parliament. I would not be able to act this way: simply accept the opinion

status. In Parliament there was a discussion about what is actually constitutional. I have not yet come across legal or practical reasons neither in the National Council nor in the Council of States why the initiative should be a problem. The reasons for the refusal were that the existing rights of the people were sufficient; Parliament did not want to burden the people even more; or the referendum could promote political disaffection; however there were no substantial reasons. The citizens

**95 percent of the Swiss for maintaining the neutrality**

According to a recent survey by the FIT Zurich, 95 percent of the Swiss people want to maintain neutrality and oppose any further rapprochement of NATO.

of Parliament; I would rather prefer to remain silent.

*What was the difference between the AUNS initiative and the proposal of the Federal Council?*

In its direct counter-proposal the Federal Council wanted treaties, which are to be settled on the same level as the Constitution, to be submitted to a mandatory referendum. There is of course room for interpretation. The implementation of the initiative must give you some leeway, which we have tried to include. Now we are blamed exactly for that.

But the Federal Council has seen that the treaties, in particular the future ones, will have much more influence on our legislation, as it was the case twenty years ago. Therefore, the Federal Council wanted to hold a new mandatory referendum for treaties with constitutional

reject this argument.

*What kinds of agreements would be imperative to be submitted to the people?*

Regarding the past, it is important to remember that the ratification of the ECHR, the *European Convention on Human Rights*, was not even subject to an optional referendum. The people were not allowed to comment, although the impact is massive. Court decisions have to be mandatorily implemented in our country, and the people do not have a say in this issue. The voters could not even collect 50,000 signatures for a referendum. Actually, a democracy does not deserve that. I quote this example because Federal Judges from all political parties have meanwhile criticized the European Court of Human Rights, because it has aban-

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**“Nation-wide ‘Managed Care’: ...”**

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ry, quality of medical care goes down with the insurances being in charge. Both doctors and patients are the losers.»

That the fight for free choice of doctors is worthwhile was proven impressively by the referendum against the “Managed Care”-draft. As the Federal chancery confirmed at 15 February 2012: “The referendum against the amendment of the federal law on health insurance (KVG) (Managed Care) of 30 September 2011 has taken effect, since the 50,000 valid votes required by article 141 paragraph 1 federal constitution were provided. Out of 133,185 submitted signatures, 131,158 are valid.”

Finally the energetic efforts and the great support for the referendum prove that people trust the work of the *PULSUS association*, where 30% of members are general practitioners. Dear colleagues, we would like to thank you all very much.

We thank you – the Swiss Medical association (FMH), the Swiss Surgical Association, the financial management program (FMP), the PSICA association for good psychiatric and psychotherapeutic practice, the association for free choice of doctors and the Swiss association of public servants (VPOD – VSAO), but especially also the cantonal societies of Basle land, Basle city, Schaffhausen, Geneva and Schwyz as well as the professional societies of dermatology, ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology – face and neck surgery – and hundreds of general practices throughout Switzerland – for the support. At the end it was your energetic efforts which made the outstanding result of the referendum possible.

(Table see *Current Concerns* Nr. 22 of 29.5.2012, p.2)

“Objectively the referendum is to be endorsed”, writes Dr *Andreas Keusch* from Pfäffikon (*medvice@bluewin.ch*) in an recent excellent review paper about the “Managed Care”-draft (Promoting inte-

grated health care networks for improvement of quality and efficacy in the Swiss health care system: “economic” bluff package or “decent” quality enhancement?!). Dr Keusch argues convincingly when he states: “Recalling councilor *Prisca Birrer-Heimo’s* and other MC supporters’ above cited statement ‘Integrated doctors’ networks offer best quality at lower costs’ there is actually no substantial foundation to prove the medical quality of services offered by integrated networks.” The study may be downloaded at [www.pulsus.info](http://www.pulsus.info).

Dear colleagues, we are convinced, too, that a compulsory “Managed Care” system, leading to the abolishment of free choice of doctors at the basic insurance coverage level, the alienation of doctors from each other and shifting all powers to the insurance companies, cannot and should not provide the basis for a future Swiss health care system. •

Source: *Schweizerische Ärztezeitung* 2012 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

**“International treaties ...”**

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done the original idea and now engages directly in the legal systems of states. This is criticized. This is the result when you sign something and the people were not asked beforehand. In the past we had, of course, the Schengen-Dublin agreements, which I already mentioned. We could vote on it, but first we had to collect 50,000 signatures. That costs money and time. The individual citizen who does not have the money can hardly perform such a collection. This means that the voters are victims to the caprices of the political parties or organizations. Only the major associations and organizations have both the time and money to take the referendum. An individual does normally not have it. There are individual personalities, who brought about a referendum or an initiative, for example against child pornography or the custody initiative. Fortunately, there were these individuals, but this is the big exception.

**What is Didier Burkhalter up to at the NATO headquarters in Chicago?**

*Since 1996, Switzerland has been a member of the NATO sub-organization PfP [Partnership for Peace] – the people were never asked. Didier Burkhalter took part in the NATO summit in Chicago and supported a rapprochement between Switzerland and NATO. What is the Federal Councilor up to in Chicago? Who gave him the order to go that far? Is this not a similar case in which a mandatory referendum could prevent the Federal Council from taking further steps in direction NATO?*

Here, the initiative would clearly come into effect. A further step towards NATO is a violation of the neutrality provisions of our Constitution. This is certainly a case in which the people must be asked. I doubt whether the Federal Councilor is doing this on his own accord. If he had to submit the issue to the people in a mandatory referendum, he would think twice before taking such steps. The people would certainly put a clear stop to his actions. Basically, the whole process is extremely problematic. What does Switzerland have to do with NATO? We are an independent state, not a member of NATO and we do not want to participate. Even the membership in the PfP has had disastrous effects on our army.

**Dictator EU next?**

*What type of treaties are planned in the future?*

The EU says – and this is very important – that the bilateral approach has come to an end; we could not continue like this. Now they are talking about so-called “frame-

work agreements”. Apart from the EU advocates nobody really knows, what they are actually about. However, they always speak about “institutional consolidation”, which means nothing else than automatically assuming EU laws. We do not want that. Then, there is the energy agreement on the agenda. It is something that concerns every individual if electricity is becoming more expensive or cheaper.

Another important agreement is the agricultural free trade. Do we want our country to have its own agricultural production, which can ensure the country’s supply, or don’t we want it and hence become more and more dependent on foreign countries? It is quite obvious! Due to our special topography, we cannot produce goods at the same low prices as other countries. Then we have the entire truck transit. We must comply with the Alpine Convention, which the Swiss people approved a long time ago. This convention will not only be watered down, but simply not met. The land transport agreement – and they didn’t even tell the people about that – really overrides the Alpine Convention, which means that a constitutional article is overridden by an international treaty. All these are examples of what we will be facing in the future; they are very important and practically placed above our Constitution and thus override our Constitution: We want the decision to be taken by two majorities, the people’s majority and the majority in the Council of States.

*Federal Councilor Schneider-Ammann announced on the radio that in case the initiative will be accepted that would mean an increase in referenda by 30 percent. Is this true and if so, what would that mean?*

If we take the last 12 years as a comparison, there has been an average of 8 referenda a year, distributed to 4 referendum dates. If this number increased by 30 percent, that would mean only one additional referendum per date. According to the message of the Federal Council, there would be 8 to 10 more referenda, which would mean 2–3 additional referenda per polling Sunday. Instead of 2 to 3 initiatives, they would have to vote on 4 to 5 proposals. So, the people are not stupid. In my opinion, they can well judge these proposals. And all treaties that I got to know so far are certainly easier to assess than the “managed care” proposal, which we will vote upon on 17 June.

*In its argumentation, the Federal Council always refers to an optional referendum, which would cause a greater loss of time and effort for the people ...*

Yes, I have to collect 50,000 signatures at first. This is not the point. The Federal Council says in the same message that

many international treaties equaled a constitutional amendment in the past and in the future, because international treaties require that we necessarily adapt our laws. If the Federal Council were consistent in its argumentation, it should start by saying that they generally do no longer want the double majority. But then we would discuss the fundamentals of direct democracy. Then they should not hesitate to say that they want to get rid of the cantons.

*An argument of the opponents, you had mentioned earlier, says that people do not want so many referenda. They assume that it would lead to political apathy among the population. It is quite absurd, but you can hear it again and again.*

Let me briefly analyze the past. When has there been a high voter turnout? Voter turnout was at the highest in the last 20 years – that means more than 55 percent – if there was an issue with foreign countries to be voted upon: In the vote on the EEA, the UN, the initiative “Yes to Europe” or the Schengen Treaty. There has been no such high turnout before. When it comes to issues with other countries, people show a special interest. I believe that the interest will grow in the future, considering the above-mentioned energy or agricultural free trade agreements. Moreover, there has always been a high turnout when many proposals had to be voted upon. The reasoning of the Federal Council is therefore completely amiss.

There was a low voter turnout, for example, with the education article in 2006. None of the parties was against it; there were no major substantive discussions, nor did the people embrace the issue. There was no discussion about it. And that suggests that we need to controversially discuss things publicly in the future. Then the electorate goes to the polls.

*By the end of the 80s it was generally accepted that any submitted proposal was to be discussed by the various parties and associations controversially – in all its aspects. This debate must be made possible again. Another point: Opponents to the initiative always bring up the cost argument. It would be too expensive if the people had to vote too often on single proposals. But if they “move along” with the current ballot dates this argument is wrong. A dictatorship may be cheaper ...*

We must take some fundamental considerations on this point. Raising objections because of the costs would mean that you have to abolish direct democracy in general, and then there would be no costs. Such a discussion leads to nothing, and is absurd. What is it about?

**“International treaties ...”**

continued from page 17

Switzerland spends only half as much for education, infrastructure, for all tasks that are subject to the state, than the surrounding countries, however at the same level of quality. The fact that the people have a say in the nation makes us much more efficient. The more people have a say, the less indebtedness in the state budget. Communal debt has increased over the past 20 years by 20 percent since 1990. At the level of communes, the people have a direct say on practically every issue. The communal budget is presented by the Communal Assembly to the people for acceptance or rejection. At this level, there was only a very slight increase in debt. At the level of cantons, where the people have less say, the debt has doubled. On the federal level, where the people are asked even less, the debt has tripled. The state is the more efficient, the more the people have a say and influence so that debt is less.

If we look at the various proposals and at the fact that we pay 18 billion francs to the IMF, we must admit that this money is to nobody's benefit. The Federal Council and Parliament have determined that and the people had no say.

**Tricky arguments***Would the initiative change it?*

We are facing another problem. When Parliament had to decide on the increase of the IMF's credit line to 18 billion francs, the Federal Council and Parliament said that the National Bank were to decide. But if this argument is right, we must not forget that the National Bank is independent. It requires no federal decision. If so, and if we do not need a decision on federal level and both the people and parliament have no say, the federal government will not be liable. This is a rotten trick with the National Bank. When I asked why we needed a federal decision, I was given the answer that if the money is actually needed, the federal government should pay for it. And as it is only a guarantee obligation of the federation, it will not be subject to the treaty initiative. The trick is that the federal authorities formulated the statement as a unilateral commitment on the part of Switzerland. The other part is thus not officially in

the game. So there is no state treaty. However, as a consequence this means that we have no obligation to pay and the Parliament and the Federal Council could abandon this one-sided obligation at any time. The Federal Council may then never settle an obligation with the IMF, because it will be one-sided.

Another example is the Schengen Agreement. It was always maintained that we needed it for our security; and most important was the *Schengen Information System II*. In 2005, it had not yet existed, but it should be introduced by 2007 to 2008. The SIS II is still not working; its introduction has been postponed until 2013. It was said in 2005, the investment of the system would cost us 7 to 8 million francs; so far we have spent 150 million. These are not the annual costs, but *only the investment costs*. That is money we pay from our tax revenues. Considering that we have already paid 150 million francs instead of 7 million, we might pay for several more voting Sundays. The Schengen Agreement would not have been implemented if the majority of the Council of States had been required which we would have needed in a mandatory referendum. Common sense would have saved us millions in expenditures and a further loss of sovereignty.

**Federal Council must act for the benefit of the people**

*The prevention of rebellion à la Tahrir Square is a careful coordination with the interests of the people prior to a vote. That is democratic spirit. If the people could have a say in foreign policy, what would this mean for Switzerland?*

If the Federal Council knew that it had to justify its actions before the people in any case and not only when 50,000 signatures were collected, it would involve the commissions much more than today and discuss with the parties before negotiations started. It can set the scene a lot better on what should be negotiated or not. I would even go a step further. The federal government would actually try to obtain a negotiating mandate from Parliament, which clearly regulates what it must negotiate and what not. Concerning the negotiations on the flat rate withholding tax and the double tax treaties, the public never knew exactly about the state of negotiations. The committees now have three withholding tax agreements to

hand, but they do not define anything exactly. It is all very watered down and the wording is vague. The Federal Council would be forced to involve Parliament to a higher degree, which requires a behavioral change. Under this initiative, the Federal Council would have to act differently, namely for the benefit of the people. The initiative will also strengthen the negotiating positions. If the Federal Council can tell the negotiator, you will have to make concessions in some parts because we still have to ask the people, Germany or France cannot claim they do not care. Only a dictator could say so. But a democratic state cannot say that it is not interested in the people. I think it will strengthen our position. If once the people have decided something, it will strengthen future negotiations. In case the EU or whoever wants to change something, the people have decided; it is not possible to adjust an agreement after two years such as the Schengen Agreement in the case of which there have been over 130 adjustments so far. In case of adjustments we could not take the referendum. The only possibility would be to launch an initiative for the dismissal of the Schengen Agreement. Then you would have to include in the Constitution that the Schengen Agreement must be terminated. The citizens do no longer have the possibility to comment on it. *The citizens would be at the mercy of Parliament for better or worse* as they could only ask the Federal Council to terminate the Agreement. And what international treaty has ever been terminated? You will have to go far back in history and then find a treaty with Austria-Hungary, which was terminated at the time.

If we want to maintain our direct democracy, we must accept the treaty initiative. This is the only way we can prevent the government and parliament to act arbitrarily, as we unfortunately have to realize from time to time. Especially with the free movement of persons we had to realize that the Parliament illegally and unconstitutionally included the two issues of the continued movement of persons and the extension of free movement to Romania and Bulgaria in a single submission.

*National Councilor Schwander, thank you for the interview!* •

(Translation Current Concerns)

# Concerning Didier Burkhalter, Chicago, Nato-Cyberdefence and unclear agendas

## Why international law, peace politics and direct democracy belong together

me. The plebiscite about a constitutional amendment will soon take place in Switzerland. In case of approval, the Swiss people can vote on many foreign-policy treaties in the future, before the government may bring them into force. Contemporary history shows, how very necessary that is.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of neutral Switzerland has recently made a prominent speech at the NATO summit in Chicago. Transmission pause. Read the foregoing clause once more. Does it startle you?

The Swiss Foreign Minister speaks prominently at a NATO conference, not ICRC or UN, no, at a conference of a war-alliance. At most one would have expected the Minister of Defence, however, he stayed at home.

What else do we hear from Chicago?- *Didier Burkhalter* wants to cooperate closely with Nato concerning "cyberdefence" (Is there a word in our national language, too?). Switzerland has been invited to it as one of five "privileged countries". Moreover he appreciates "more flexible formats in the partnership with NATO" according to the English speech text. Furthermore, he wants to sensitise NATO for human rights. Does he believe in that? Does the Swiss want to influence the machinery of power of the USA in direction of human rights? Cute! Rather this is human rights' new-speak. He probably meant the concept R2P (Responsibility to protect), actually a pretext to "protect" the civilian population in order to interfere with civil wars of other states.

However, let us go on reading the Chicago speech: In Afghanistan the Foreign Minister wants to commit himself to "good governance" which means to "good reign". Why for "good reign" and not for "good government", thus for a "good administration and government"?

We should think about the speech, because the close collaboration with NATO in more flexible formats can only mean: a closer alignment with an alliance which carried out an attack on Yugoslavia in violation of international law, the members of which brutally ignored every international law in Afghanistan and Libya and would have to be condemned after the principles of the Nuremberg tribunal. This invitation of NATO is a bitter pill which must not be swallowed by a neutral state. On the question whether

the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) sees this as an abandonment of neutrality and approach to NATO as well a spokesman said: "The opposite is right." Pardon? The opposite would be more distance to NATO – the answer is foul.

The handsome Foreign Minister who feels flattered to be apostrophised as the *George Clooney* of the federal government serves a cocktail with an odd taste to us. It is worthwhile to study the speech text on the website of the FDFA\* exactly and to claim intellectual uprightness and historical competence from the Foreign Minister. NATO with their new concept of "Smart Defence" is on the same path as the EU: Weakening the nation states. But this is taking us too far for now. Anyway, the example shows that foreign affairs must be submitted to the people, otherwise individuals with their shortcomings will mislead us.

### About the history of foreign affairs and arbitrariness

Outsiders wonder that in the country of direct democracy one can vote about many things of which other peoples can only dream, however not about many foreign-policy issues. Thus one can vote on the height of the taxes, on the health insurance system, on nuclear power plants, women's right to vote and genetically manipulated food, even about issues like whether a new fighter aircraft should be purchased. However, one is not allowed to vote on credits to the IMF, treaties with the EU, strange enforced global educational conformities like Bologna and PISA, on tax agreements with extortionate countries or military cooperation agreements like the dubious NATO programme *Partnership for Peace* (PfP).

The reason is a historical one as is often the case. In Switzerland the initiative and the referendum were tried out successively in the cantons in the 1860s as a power controlling function of the people over the government and was adopted in 1874/1891 in the constitution of the confederation. At that time the Viennese congress of 1815 was not long ago at which Switzerland declared the "everlasting armed neutrality". For the neutral nation state the foreign affairs were unimportant then. Before 1887 a foreign minister did not even exist. Annually changing, the federal president was also the foreign minister. The federal

department of foreign affairs FDFA was created as a separate department only after 1887. That's why at that time nobody remembered to enshrine a differentiated voice of the people in the constitution with such "insignificant" issues like foreign affairs. Only quite basic questions, as for example to the full accession to military pacts (NATO) or supranational organisations (the EU, IMF, UN), a plebiscite had to take place.

After the Second World War with the creation of UN etc. and even more after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 foreign affairs rapidly increased in importance.

### Undeclared statements in state treaties will become clear transparent in the course of plebiscites

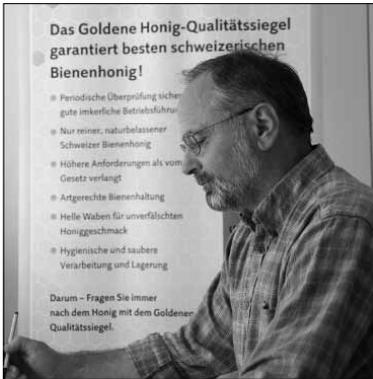
After this time the Swiss government has taken many decisions, which were regarded as unpleasant by wide circles. An example: In the 90s a membership application was deposited single-handedly to the EU in Brussels (in the meantime, EU-accession votes were rejected several times with about 75% "No"). Also Federal Councilor *Flavio Cotti* signed the accession document to the NATO programme *Partnership for Peace* in spite of parliamentary protests at that time. It is hardly compatible with neutrality. In many other dossiers the government negotiated compliantly, was bamboozled and did not completely inform the population.

This is why currently absent participation of the people regarding state treaties is today felt as a loophole. Foreign affairs are one of the last "reserves of arbitrariness for our Federal Councilors": they can act almost without sharing the power with the people. This is no good and should be corrected. State treaties can violate essential principles and positions of the population. An additional approach to NATO will weaken international law. International law is the security of the small states against the power of the powerful ones. Those who want peace policy to prevail in foreign affairs as well, who want the government to explain foreign-policy submissions, who would like to reserve the last word in foreign-policy issues to themselves, those who abhor hidden agendas, should agree to the national initiative. •

\* <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/dfa/head/speech/single.html?id=44626>

# The bee is a fine bioindicator

Interview with Richard Wyss, President of the Association of German Swiss and Romansh Friends of Bees (*Verein Deutschschweizer und Rätoromanischer Bienenfreunde, VDRB*)



(picture mig)

Richard Wyss has excelled as a beekeeper for Swiss agriculture, and was therefore honored with the “Agro-Star Suisse” Award at the “Technology & Animal/Tier & Technik” Exhibition.

Michael Goetz: What made you happy about the Agro-Star Suisse Award in particular?

Richard Wyss: I was totally surprised. I was pleased that the issue “bees” was made public. The bees have actually deserved the prize, but a swarm of bees can hardly be taken onto stage. My part was and is to create optimal conditions for the bees, a work which I perform with my colleagues on the board of VDRB.

How did the environment respond to the award?

As a result I received a lot of e-mails and had good meetings. In particular, it gave new impetus to the “networking”, either with the farmer’s association or with members of the Swiss Federal Parliament.

What fascinates you about the bees, personally?

For me the bee is a wonderful example of how the great is depicted in miniature. On the one hand there is the bee as an individual, on the other hand, as a people, as an organism in which every part has its own task. And the interest of the whole is above the interest of the individual. A role model for us humans: We can not profit from the community without contributing our share to the common good. The bee not only fascinates me, but – as I am dealing with it – it opens my eyes and ears for nature.

Why is the bee important for agriculture?

Bees are vital importance for agriculture, but also the agriculture vice versa for the bees. 80% of foreign pollination are due

to the bees. Without pollination by bees, there would be a very low fruit yield, there would be about 30% of apples, only about 10% of pears, and there would be practically no yield of berries. It is estimated that without bees worldwide 30% less food would be available. We can import honey, but not pollination. Finally, the value of bees for biodiversity can not be expressed in francs.

Why are the bees so important for pollination?

The bee is the only insect that hibernates as a state. All others, including the wild bees, hibernate as eggs or as individuals. For that reason they need very much time until they have built a colony and are able to pollinate efficiently. Second, the bee, unlike other insects, is flower constant. This means that when a bee flies to apples in the morning, it will fly to apples all day. It doesn’t look at anything else, not even at a pear tree. This is a great advantage for the success of pollination, as an apple blossom can not make use of a pear pollen.

“If mower conditioners are used [so-called rotary mowers. Editor’s note] they are to be used compulsively only outside the bee flight otherwise the bees are crushed to thousands.”

[Editor’s note: This request has not been complied with in many areas within the last 2-3 weeks!]

What does it mean: the bee is a bioindicator?

The bee shows us whether our environment is healthy. For it is very sensitive to environmental toxins. Analysing the body of a bee, a variety of pesticides and fungicides can often be verified and scientific studies show that they have a negative impact on health and behavior of bees. Currently there are the neo-nicotinoids, a new species of plant protection products, which bees react to even if they come in almost “homeopathic dosage”. We mustn’t believe that we are excluded. The bee just responds a few years earlier than humans, and shows what may happen to us as well.

What are the objectives of VDRB?

To provide the bees and the beekeepers with the best possible conditions.

What are the challenges the beekeepers have to face?

Without pollination by bees there would be only:

- 30% of apples
- 10% of pears and
- practically no more yield of berries.

Very serious problems arise with the health of bees, in particular because of *varroa mite* but also because of bacteria and viruses. It may come to that a bee colony cannot survive without a beekeeper today. Another challenge is to help the bees to gain greater appreciation. I would like to position them in legislation so that they may receive promotion like our livestock. Because economically speaking the bee is the third most important livestock after the cow and the pig. But compared to the contributions which the federal government spends on the livestock, the State’s support of bees equals “crumbs”.

On what fields can beekeepers and farmers work together?

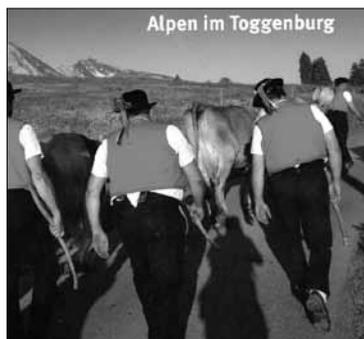
Both must and can work together. The beekeeper provides pollination for free to the farmer but he relies on being able to set up his hives. A lawn should be cut only after flowering. If mower conditioners are used they are to be used compulsively only outside the bee flight otherwise the bees are crushed to thousands. Each farmer is considering twice whether he should use a chemical pesticide. If he sees no other way then he uses it strictly according to regulations and as economically as possible. This is true not only for farmers but also quite explicitly for gardeners in private gardens and allotments.

What can we learn on your website?

All you need to know about bees. The home page of our association [www.vdrb.ch](http://www.vdrb.ch) is mainly addressed to beekeepers. You can not only find information on events and regulations but also on the observation of colonies which are spread over all of Switzerland. Look up for example information about whether at present the colonies are growing or declining. The consumer especially finds information under [www.swisshoney.ch](http://www.swisshoney.ch), for example where he can obtain honey from the region. Those who buy honey should buy Swiss honey and look for the quality seal. This ensures that it is pure natural honey.

Author: Michael Goetz (Dr Ing. Agr.)  
Free agricultural journalist, LBB GmbH,  
Säntisstr. 2a, CH-9034 Eggersriet,  
phone: +41 71 877 22 29  
E-mail: [migoetz@paus.ch](mailto:migoetz@paus.ch),  
[www.goetz-beratungen.ch](http://www.goetz-beratungen.ch)

## Alps in Toggenburg<sup>1</sup>



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ds. "Modern man is a commuter between work and leisure time – the Toggenburg alpine herdsman is a commuter between work and work", says *Markus Hobi*, president of the *Alpine Farming Commission of St. Gall's Farmer Association* in his foreword to the illustrated book "Alps in Toggenburg". A lot of farmers in Toggenburg are also alpine herdsman; they commute between the work on their farm in the valley and the work on the alp. Formerly the alps have already been a profitable supplement of the work on the farm and still today they are an essential part of the livelihood of Toggenburg's farming families. The summering of the animals is essential for the survival of the small farms. The farmer can save the grass in the valley and make hay for the winter because the animals feed on the grass on the alps in summer. At the same time the younger animals get stronger as to their bone structure and to their growth.

What is predominant is dairy farming. In the meantime you also see more and more suckler cow husbandry on the meadows for meat production. Another inherent part of the alp economy is the small do-

mestic animals, the alp lamb, the alp pig and the Toggenburg goat.

Some 50 million years ago, a sea was covering the territory of today's Toggenburg. The enormous sediments left behind were pressed and broken apart several times and shifted upon each other by the pressure of the Alps, until the glacier formed the valleys of Thur and Necker, the two main valleys of Toggenburg. The Toggenburg reaches out along the two river valleys of Thur and Necker from Wildhaus in the South to Schwarzenbach near Wil in the North. It is dominated by the Alpstein massif with the *Säntis* mountain (2502 m) and the mountain chain of *Churfirten*. Typical for the region are of the farmers' dispersed settlements.

Landscape and work have created an autonomous, self-conscious type of people who love being their own masters.

### Birth of alp co-operatives

The book's first chapter deals with the history and the ownership structure: It traces back to the Toggenburg alp farming in the Middle Ages, and it shows that its centuries-old rules and practices are still valid in today's modern economy.

In the Middle Ages, the land belonged to noblemen and the clergy. As early as "in the time of the manorial system cooperatives were developing because the [leasing rights] were vested not to family fathers as in the valley estates, but to groups of farmers who decided upon the use of the alp. They enacted ordinances in order to keep away strangers and in order to protect themselves against illegal acts done by individuals. [...] The alp cooperatives were subject to private law from the beginning, and the conditions

of use could be very different. This paid off for all those who participated when serfdom and manorialism gradually lost their importance and when the so-called hereditary lease was implemented from the year 1400 on. The valley estates and alp shares could now be inherited." (p. 14f.)

The preservation of property was regulated in the statutes. The law of the Alps was linked to the home; the participants of the cooperative on the alp had a first refusal for alp shares that were for sale. The valley farm and the work on the alp were coordinated and the sale of the products was regulated within the cooperative, too.

### A "homage to the landscape and its inhabitants"

Numerous very personal contributions introduce the reader into the life of Toggenburg's farming families, with all their work, their products and their customs. The enjoyment of work, the affection for their home country with its landscape and the love for the cattle is expressed in each article. "What is more beautiful than going to the alp? Just being on the alp ..."

The farmers are suppliers of foodstuff; they care for cultivated landscapes and conserve decentralized settlements, just like article 104 of the Federal Constitution demands. In the book's last chapter the alps and the alpine farms are introduced with very useful maps.

The wonderful photos of the landscape and the expressive faces of the people make the illustrated book an homage to the landscape and its inhabitants. •

<sup>1</sup> Toggenburg is the name given to the upper valley of the Thur River, in the Canton of St. Gall in Eastern Switzerland.

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