

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Lebanon, a deployment zone for the war in Syria

Beirut, 5 July 2012

cc./ga. In recent weeks, the conflict in Syria has escalated to a war. A global war has become more likely. We cannot speak of a war in the interest of people and their rights.

The background, current status and future prospects shall be discussed from the perspective of the neighboring country Lebanon.

In Syria, the fourth stage of Middle Eastern war adventures is raging: Iran-Iraq war (1980 – 1988), two wars against Iraq (1991 and 2003) and the Israeli war against Lebanon (2006). The wars in Afghanistan, Libya and Serbia complete the picture of the extended circle of post-colonial interests.

All these wars were started by the Western world and their deputies. The number of deaths exceeds the million range by far.

Justifications for wars such as elimination of weapons of mass destruction, fight against terror and protection of human rights are neither covered by the principle of proportionality nor by an international charter still less by Christian principles.

Those who forget the proportionality of the used means and feign causes of war, act viciously and criminally.

May the West still be called “Christian” at all, if its governments permanently break the Basic Law and the Christian commandments in the key areas of politics? Even the political parties with a “C” (Christian) have forgotten the commandment: “Thou Shalt not Lie, Steal, Kill”. Today, they conduct covered wars with computers, drones, partisans and the media – always under the guise of selfless humaneness.

Multi-confessional Lebanon is being misused again to support foreign war interests in Syria. After the liberation movements (Arab spring) in Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain and Egypt the Lebanese felt left out of the central political interest, which was very unusual.

With the increasing war on its northern border with Syria, Lebanon is suddenly back in a dangerous center of tension.

Lebanon’s North

The North, starting from Tripoli across the Aakaar Mountains down to the Syri-

an border has become an exceptional area, which is no longer controlled by the regular Lebanese army.

According to reliable information, it is this area, by which the majority of arms supplies are delivered by ship or air freight (airport *Koleyat*), destined for the “human-rights-groups” fighting in Syria (and – not unexpectedly – dominating in most Western media reporting) are delivered. The Turkish and Iraqi borders are also likely to have a certain degree of permeability.

Currently there are no useful insights about the Jordanian border.

The actors in Lebanon’s North

A majority of Sunni fundamentalists (such as Salafists), which originate from the Wahhabi/Saudi faith, live here. They are also financed by the respective region.

Al-Qaeda is virtually only one action group within the Wahhabi/Salafi community. Like the *Taliban*, these Salafists adhere to an Islam which had been practised by earlier generations. Since 2007 the Salafists have increasingly been supported by Palestinians who want to escape their inhumane camps. In discussions the Salafists frankly emphasize their right to establish a Sunni-led government in Syria. The Sunni population of 70% is not to be dominated by 7% *Assad*-Alawites.

To comparisons with Bahrain – where Sunni/Saudi tanks had crushed the mainly Shiite opposition – they react with strong vilification of the Shiites. The information that the Sunni majority in Syria (according to a survey) does not want a fundamentalist government was not commented on. Such a hint often results in the breaking-off of talks.

Western mercenaries in quite a number and particularly well qualified are said to support the activists on both sides of the border. Does such a coalition not reveal the Western war on terror as an opportunistic spin?

Peacekeeping in the North of Lebanon is entitled to the same importance as in the South. Why do the locally active UN peacekeepers not prevent arms transfers to Syria via Lebanon?

Why do the United Nations not react to names and origins of Western mercenaries taken prisoner in Lebanon and Syria?

Lebanese activism

It results from great political wisdom and equal selfishness of social groups.

Somebody who has known this country for more than a decade and has never heard the term “we Lebanese” in any New Year’s address from any group representative is not surprised about the many ways to destabilize Lebanese politics by external powers. Two new failed assassination attempts on Christian politicians indicate the attempt to involve the so far passive Christians in the Syria war.

France, the former protective power

France as a special connoisseur of Syria/Lebanon and the Islamic world, completed a turnaround. Whereas the French Foreign Minister *Kouchner* in 2006, next to the radioactive bomb crater in Southern Lebanon (*Khiam*), made a name for himself with the remark: “C’est la guerre”, and *Sarkozy* secured the Libyan Human Rights along with a little oil for himself by means of extended bombing in 2011, the new French President *Hollande* and his Foreign Minister *Fabius* are going new paths. Together with *Saad Hariri*, son of the in 2005 assassinated former Prime Minister *Hariri*, they reflected on how the Sunni extremism in Lebanon could be contained.

This intention may be based on experiences: In 2007, the revolt of Sunni Palestinians in the camp *El-Bared* (north of Tripoli) was painfully crushed by the religiously mixed Lebanese army. At that time the Christian General *Hajj* was given the full backing of his Sunni Prime Minister *Saad Hariri*. *Hajj* was killed in 2008. *Saad Hariri* has withdrawn from the political front. He is still searching for the real killers of his father, probably with growing success. A lot of unpublished information is held by French authorities.

French citizens are increasingly raising the issue of NATO involvement in war preparations, “if this goes on, the defense community will be finished and *de Gaulle* was right. It seems that in Germany, only a poet with the last drop of his ink must put down on paper the German citizens’ majority view.”

"Lebanon, a staging area ..."

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Processes in international context

The following aspects clarify the dimension of the war in Syria.

- a) The shooting of a Turkish jet fighter by the Syrian air defense has raised questions about the intentions of that NATO member:
 - Vassal within the NATO does not correspond to the Turkish self-confidence.
 - There has been a reduction in genuine interest for the entrée to the EU.
 - Building a Sunni association of Turkic peoples is noteworthy.
- b) Russia, China and Iran are planning a great maneuver in and with Syria. More than 100,000 soldiers are to be called into action.
 - Chinese and Iranian warships passed through the Suez Canal.
 - Has a new powerful alliance come into being?
- c) The Russian President visits Israel and Palestine. He is considering the recognition of the Sunni Palestinian state.
- d) In Israel the German President challenges and corrects *Merkel's* unconditional submission under Israeli policy.
- e) *Obama* is nearing the Syria concept of the Russian President.

- f) The elected President of Egypt, *Mursi* is denied democratic rights by the pro-Western Military Council.
- g) Saudi Arabia advises its citizens not to spend the summer in Lebanon.
- h) Representatives of Western countries in Lebanon are planning evacuations of their citizens under three scenarios.
 - A new conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.
 - The outbreak of a civil war, triggered by the masses of unemployed young people (particularly Salafists and Palestinians).
 - Expanding of the war in Syria, at first to Northern Lebanon ...

Assessments and measures

The Western policy and that of its representatives in the Middle East has failed. It has brought the West only disadvantageous prosperity and power shifts. It has laid the coil that may lead to a world war. The credibility of Christian ethics and democracy have got lost. Fantasies of a free yield of Middle Eastern raw materials in both Iraq and Iran have had a drug-like effect. The masses of culturally barely educated West-warriors regard the Muslims as "sand niggers" and are incapable of any human cooperation. Of the three scenarios of war in Lebanon, a new Israel/Hezbollah conflict is considered unlikely. In the meantime the Shiites in Lebanon are considered an important

stabilizing factor. Can we expect the leaders of Hezbollah, Israel and Iran to fervently hug each other for fear of the Salafists?

The second scenario, "War due to dissatisfaction of the youth" is considered highly probable. Extensive action at national and international level must immediately be taken. Projects creating employment and prosperity are sufficiently available. They are also cheaper than war.

Looking into this scenario in more detail, it becomes evident that a systematic solution to the Palestinian conflict has a key function. This key is still lying in the hands of Israel and the Sunni states. As soon as 200,000 angry fighters can be recruited from the camps of the Palestinians in Lebanon by the Salafist movement, the power balance will shift in favor of the fundamentalists. The first victims will be Jordan and Israel, as there will soon arise further Salafist/Palestinian activities soon. Also the ruling houses in the Gulf, today funding the rope that they may be hanged with later, are unlikely to survive unscathed.

The prevention of the third scenario, the "expansion of the war beyond Syria," is still in the hands of the UN and the Western world. It is only the delivery that must be prevented.

Compared with fundamentalists – does the realization that Assad is the smaller problem, come too late? •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Rules for the export of arms from Germany: Are German submarines allowed to be delivered to Israel?

rr. The export of weapons, especially weapons of war is regulated by Article 26 (2) of the German Constitution and specified in the War Weapons Control Act (WWCA) and in some implementation regulations.

Sec. 17 (2) No. 2 in conjunction with Sec. 16 WWCA prohibits Germany from delivering and developing parts, equipment, etc. intended for nuclear weapons to non-NATO countries. (That the delivery to NATO countries since the 1990 reform of the Act is allowed is criticized quite strongly.)

Since according to the response to the request of the representative Angelika Baer in 1999 BT Drs 14/1777 and BT Drs 14/1576 the submarines are apparently equipped with means for launching nuclear weapons and the recipient state is not a NATO member, Sec. 17 (2) in conjunction with Sec. 16 WWCA is probably applicable, with the result that Germany is prohibited from supplying and developing them.

Moreover, the supply of submarines without launching devices for nuclear weapons to Israel is prohibited in accordance Sec. 6 (3) WWCA. According to this provision, the federal government is forbidden to permit the delivery of weapons of war if there is a danger of disturbing peace measures or a war of aggression. The assessment whether such a risk exists is – in contrast to A-, B- and C-arms – however reserved to the Federal Government and not a priori prohibited on grounds of the weapon type (Sec. 8 and Sec. 11 (4) WWCA).

Submarines – even without nuclear weapons – are, under Part B, Section III, second indent, of the War Weapons List (Annex in accordance with Sec. 1 (1) to WWCA) amongst the weapons of war that cannot be delivered without the approval of the Federal Government, which the Federal Government may not grant if there is the danger of peace-disturbing measures or of a war of aggression.

Since the Schröder government in 2000, the political principles of the Federal Government, which are legally binding, also apply to the export of weapons of war and other military equipment. Accordingly, as a matter of principle, no permits for the supply of military weapons to conflict areas are to be authorized.

By virtue of Article 26 (2) of the German constitution, given concrete form by the WWCA, the delivery of submarines to the "threatened" nuclear power Israel is unlawful and unconstitutional.

The self-serving assertion by politicians that submarines are weapons of defence or response is dumbing down the people. In World War II, submarine fleets carried out attacks almost exclusively! Today, they can easily reach the Persian Gulf, stay on the sea ground and wait for commands.

The question why the people are increasingly lied to by their politicians, is worth very careful analysis.

No Vichy regime in Berne

Swiss fight back against supervisory authority in the service of the EU

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

In March 2012 European Commission President Barroso ordered Federal Councilors Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf and Didier Burkhalter to Brussels and dictated the terms. The EU insist that Switzerland adopt future amendments to EU law in the field of bilateral agreements and apply the EU judicial practice. An “independent authority” is to check the implementation of the treaties in Swiss law, and Switzerland is to accept a higher tribunal (the ECJ – European Court of Justice). In reply to this request given as an ultimatum, the Federal Councilors and their EU integration office sat hastily down and put forward a proposal within one month. On 25 April 2012 the Federal Council presented its results to the media and then carried out a consultation with the Foreign Affairs Committees of the National Council of States and, in the CCG (Conference of the Cantonal Governments) and the social partners. The consultation responses are now available, and the bill was moderately adjusted.

In fact, the Federal Council is attempting to square the circle here: how can it satisfy the EU and on the other hand ul-

imately get the bill through parliament and referendum vote? The Federal Council knows very well that this is not likely to succeed. Why then not just drop it! We have sufficient bilateral agreements with the EU already and we can easily put up with a few years without new treaties.

“On paper it seems that the proposed new institutional architecture [...] will not lead to a loss of political sovereignty for Switzerland. In reality, the weakening of the sovereignty of Switzerland through this institutional construct is rather likely to be expected.” (Consultation response from the Swiss Trade Association *sgv* of 1 June 2012)

No foreign law! Swiss legislative procedure versus automatic adoption of laws

That the differentiated Swiss system of direct democracy does not fit into the undemocratic EU system, is now known. Automatic adoption of the *acquis communautaire* is something the EU member countries know well enough: Brussels sets law, Member States must implement it,

without being allowed to decide whether they like it or not. The consultation right praised by the Swiss-EU turbos is not held by the people, or even the parliament, but only by the heads of state and a few unelected ministers and EU commissioners. Such a thing would never ever be accepted by the Swiss people, that is why the Federal Council proposes that the adoption of amendments to the *acquis* that affect one of our bilateral agreements should be subject to the usual legislative procedure: negotiations and voting in the Council of States and the National Council, followed by the opportunity for an optional referendum, with the granting of the necessary deadlines. (Many will remember that the EU already once, regardless of the Swiss legislative procedure, insisted on the enactment of the agreements even though the referendum period had not expired.) The consultation participants indicate their consent with the proposal of the Federal Council – but whether the EU leaders and their unfamiliarity with democracy will swallow that? Why then not just drop it?

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Conditions for negotiations not very good

In the Council of States “there was a debate on whether it was the right moment to push the negotiations with the EU, since conditions are not very good for the discussion of certain dossiers with Switzerland given the many crises the EU has to deal with at present”.

Media Release Council of States 11 May 2012

Conclusion of the “Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband, *sgv*” (Swiss Union of small and medium-sized enterprises)

“Based on this analysis the *sgv* rejects the proposals of the Federal Council. In our view there is no need to take a proactive stance in institutional issues concerning Switzerland and the EU. It should be noted, that the [negotiation] principles of the Federal Council do not meet our own criteria. The *sgv* regrets – in particular from a national policy perspective – that the [negotiation] principles of the Federal Council would undermine the sovereignty of Switzerland as well as they would endanger the legal certainty of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises).”

Consultation response as part of the consultation of the *sgv* 1 June 2012

SVP demands negotiation moratorium on institutional issues with the EU

“The SVP parliamentary group submitted a motion today, which requests the Federal Council not to enter into negotiations on institutional issues with the EU within the next three years.”

Communiqué of the SVP 14 June 2012

No one, who is quite right in the head...

In an interview with the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* Federal Councilor Ueli Maurer, Head of the Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sports said: “Europe has passed its peak”. In Switzerland, “no one who is quite right in the head would still want to join the EU. This alliance of states has lost much of its credibility”. Furthermore, the Federal Councilor of the SVP (Swiss People’s Party) said: “We are the best economy in the world. People admire our democracy, we are a country with many virtues. Actually, we are the model for the future. The shared responsibility of the people, this is the future. After all, Europe is still in such poor condition because it was thought one could hand over responsibility upwards. But then in the end no one is responsible.”

“Zeit online” 21 June 2012

Features of a colonial contract

“The SVP rejects such negotiations decisively. By them, the Federal Council intends a high degree of subordination of the Swiss legal system under that of the EU. The mandatory adoption of EU law, a submission under the jurisdiction of the EU, a new surveillance authority as well as the possibility of additional sanctions by the EU will lead to a widespread loss of Switzerland’s sovereignty. Switzerland does not need either any new bilateral agreements or any further connection to the EU. The SVP calls on the Federal Council to refrain from such negotiations. For the SVP it is incomprehensible that the Federal Council wants to lead negotiations on a further connection of Switzerland with a EU, which is in a profound crisis.

Furthermore, the approach chosen to specify the energy agreement as the solution for all future institutional questions is wrong and misleading. So, a model agreement with comprehensive scope and the features of a colonial contract is hidden behind a single sector agreement. Once again, the Federal Council wants to sneak through an important agreement by shielding it from the public. This is the only way to explain the fact that the parties were not included in the consultation on a negotiating mandate.”

Communiqué of the SVP of 31 May 2012

"No Vichy regime in Berne"

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By the way, the proponents of institutional arrangements with the EU always behave as if the EU required the adaptation of Swiss law to EU requirements only for future agreements. In reality, everyone knows that the EU Commission would not stop there.

"Autonomy: There is a high political risk that because of these automatic functions in the development of law not only future agreements, but in due time and under pressure from the EU, the current agreements will be affected retroactively. This procedure would subsequently lead to an automatic adoption of the *acquis communautaire*."

(sgv consultation response of 1 June 2012)

No foreign judges! Independent legal application and interpretation by Swiss courts versus the dictates of the European Court of Justice

The Federal Court in its decision making process already includes ECJ decisions in order to ensure the uniformity of application and interpretation of the bilateral agreements. This it does, however, under its own authority. It is free to occasionally decide against the EU judges. The EU Member States are known to be accustomed to being placed under foreign judges, but also for them this has seriously restricted the sovereignty of their nation states.

According to the daily press the Federal Council in its proposed rule is relying "on the 'Dialog of the courts' to establish uniformity." And the journalist comments: "This 'Dialog' already exists, however

Lausanne [seat of the Swiss Federal Court, ed.] has mainly the listening part".

("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" dated 16 June 2012)

"Legal certainty:

Certainty is a fundamental prerequisite for creating a favorable environment for SMEs. The proposals of the Federal Council undermine the legal security of SMEs, since they allow for increased involvement of the EU Court of Justice in Swiss law."

(sgv consultation response of 1 June 2012)

Controversial national supervisory authority

This is the title of the press release of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the National Council (FAC-N) of 31 May 2012: "The focal point of discussions of the Federal Council's new proposal of 25 April 2012 is on the establishment of an independent national supervisory authority to supervise the application of agreements concluded with the EU. The large majority of the Commission was sceptical as to the nature and powers of such authority."

Most consultation participants either shared this scepticism or were entirely negative. A new federal agency, elected by Parliament, which could, in the event of a failure to implement bilateral agreements, bring an action before the federal court ... against the Parliament? Against the people? That's what it is coming to!

The Federal Council noted the rejection of such a highly undemocratic supervisory authority of the democratically elected authorities and changed its proposal. The authority will not set aside or bring an action for breach of treaty or cancel, but can only hold that such has happened.

The fact remains, however, that such an authority would be at cross-purposes with our understanding of the state. In addition, Brussels has so far always rejected a national supervisory authority – the Federal Council knows full well that the EU would only accept an EU supervisory authority.

Where is next?

The Federal Council could sit back and calmly wait, knowing that the next agreement planned with the EU, namely that concerning the electricity market and agriculture agreements, are mainly in the interests of the EU and the large corporations – but not in the interest of our small electricity consumers and certainly not our farmers. Do we have to remind the Federal Council that it is not only the Swiss economy that is dependent on the EU countries as trading partners, but that, conversely, Switzerland is also an important economic partner for the EU? (see also *sgv consultation response*). There is no reason for the Federal Council to impose rules on the EU that the latter will certainly reject. The team in the EU Integration Office will then say: "We have tried to secure our interests, but the EU doesn't agree so now we have to compromise." And finally, we, who are familiar enough with the previous negotiations with the authoritarian superpower EU will be exactly where the EU wants us to be, namely tied ever more closely and more dependently – a dairy cow that the overindebted hulk sinking in chaos wants to milk to the last drop.

We ask the Federal Council to represent Swiss interests and not those of the EU! •

Agreement for a European Dialog or how to make the cantons march in step

mw. Virtually synchronously with the push towards an "institutional provision" with the EU by the Federal Council, the latter has created a new type of legal entity – this can hardly be accidental. "The Federal State and the cantons sign an agreement for a European Dialog" – that could be read in the 5 June press release of the integration office. In reality there was no contract between the Federal State and the 26 cantons: signees were the Federal Councilors *Didier Burkhalter* (Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs) and *Johann N. Schneider-Ammann* (Head of the Department of Economic Affairs) and, as a "representative of the cantons" *Regierungspräsident* (Head of the Cantonal Government) *Pascal Broulis*, President of the Conference of the Cantonal Governments (CCG). The substance of the agreement is not just a lit-

tle "exchange of information between the Federal State and the cantons in European issues" but the erection of a "permanent political guiding body" (Article 1 of the agreement) which is to bring forward the integration of Switzerland into the EU. To this purpose this body is to include the KdK president and some more members of the cantonal executive. This would allow the EU hotheads in the integration office to counter the anticipated protest from the cantons with the remark: "Well, you have been involved in the European Dialog [...]". This is what they call a "participative process" in Brussels – we however call it "introducing a new administrative level into the state at the expense of the cantons' sovereignty."

"Due to the fact that the relationship between Switzerland and the EU is be-

coming closer and closer and that the bilateral route has to be extended and due to the institutional challenges in the bilateral relationship between Switzerland and the EU, the importance of a cooperation between the Federal State and the cantons on European issues is increasing" (Source: Introduction to the Agreement).

Note, this is the context of our country's planned subordination to foreign law and foreign judges!

"Contribution to an efficient decision-making process in European politics"

The integration office's "political guiding body", supported by a KdK delegation, is designed to "contribute towards an efficient decision-making process in

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"Agreement for a European Dialog"

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European politics" (Art. 1), in plain language: The plan is to establish a second body with the purpose of paving the way towards Switzerland's accession to the EU, this time by influencing the cantonal administrations. The "guiding body" is meant to be a forum for the "exchange" on "strategic questions" and on "current and planned negotiations with the EU" and – also really remarkable! – "on questions regarding inner reforms in connection with the development of the relationship between Switzerland and the EU". (Art. 1)

What kind of "inner reforms" do they have in mind? That is what we, the citizens would like to know. For example the introduction of the supervising organ planned by the Federal Council which of course would also interfere with the competences of the cantons "since the cantons are affected in their competences by numerous bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU" (Introduction to the Agreement).

**"European Dialog"
is a secret administrative body**

"3.6 Confidentiality

Consultations in context with the European Dialog and consultation documents in written form are confidential in principle.

Deviations from the principle of confidentiality require mutual consent and have to be agreed on based on the prin-

Obligation of the Federal Administration to grant the principle of public access

Art. 6 Principle of Transparency
(Federal Law on the principle of transparency in the Federal Administration)

- 1 Any person has the right to inspect official documents and to obtain information about the content of official documents.
- 2 The documents may be inspected in situ or a copy thereof may be requested. The legislation governing copyright is reserved.
- 3 Where an official document has already been published by the Federal Government in paper or electronic format, the rights under paragraphs 1 and 2 above are deemed to have been fulfilled.

mw. By the way, the secretiveness has already begun when the document was agreed upon. After looking in vain for it on the internet, the author has requested the document by mail. It should not be so easy, however. The contact person from the integration office first wanted to know why she was interested in the document, if she was a journalist and if she wanted to write an article about

it. Only after all these questions were answered, the agreement text was sent by mail. The author's question why the document was not published on the federal homepage was answered by the official with the statement that the document was "not important enough" for this.

Are the "public servants" in the Federal Administration now deciding which texts are "important enough" so that every interested citizen can read them? They definitely decide – as we have experienced – which information from the secret "European Dialog" we may read. This leads to another discomforting question: What else is withheld from the public? In the 19th century the population of various cantons has successfully fought for the right to have access to the protocols of their parliaments. Today the internet would have sufficient space for all public protocols, documents and other records. We insist on an access to all documents for all citizens, without any previous control of who wants to read what and why.

ciples of the federal law on the "Access to official documents in the Federal Administration.

3.7 Informing the public

The parties decide case by case and in mutual agreement whether and how the public is to be informed."

Isn't it indeed a friendly act by the new secret administrative authority that it informs the dumb populace about their doings in handy titbits. •

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7 July 2012: Day of Cooperatives

Cooperatives – global opportunities for self-help, self-responsibility and self-government?

by Josef Zolk, Mayor of Flammersfeld (Germany)

The United Nations have made 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives (IYC) to raise awareness about the worldwide significance of cooperatives and to emphasize their role in the economic and social development of many countries. UN Secretary General *Ban Ki-moon* based this decision on the strong link between economic viability and social responsibility, which is shown as an example by the cooperatives to the international community. On Saturday, 7 July 2012 the *International Day of Cooperatives* will take place. This should be reason enough to have a focus on the issue of “Cooperatives” in Raiffeisen country.

In Germany, the Cooperative Group is by far the economic organization with the largest membership. With its 26 million members and more than 800,000 employees in more than 7,500 cooperatives, they are a driving force for both economy and society. Cooperatives exist on many fields and in a lot of sectors:

1. Cooperative Banks

Closeness to customers, responsibility in the region and partner of the SMEs – these are the principles that the 1,138 German Volks- und Raiffeisenbanks and affiliated companies of the cooperative banking group adhere to.

2. Housing Cooperatives

With its approximately 2.2 million homes the approximately 2,000 housing cooperatives offer housing for more than 5 million people. The share of cooperative apartments in the rental sector of 24 million rented apartments in Germany is about 10%.

3. Raiffeisen Cooperatives

More than 2,000 agricultural cooperatives and service cooperatives with 1.7 million members refer to the ideas of *Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen*. A lot of farmers and winegrowers are members of rural cooperatives.

4. Commercial Cooperatives

At the beginning of 2012, there were about 1,600 commercial goods and service cooperatives in Germany, with around 300,000 members and a total annual turnover (combined sales of all goods and service cooperatives) of about 103 billion euros.

5. Consumer Cooperatives

The Cooperatives Act of 1889 defined consumer cooperatives to be “associations

for the common purchase of necessities of life or economic necessities”. In this context, “purchase” does not mean to conduct more business. Producing their own goods is traditionally part of the consumer cooperatives’ approach.

Cooperation is not a new invention. In the history of mankind people have cooperated in all cultures, in all world regions and at all times for common purposes. Hence different forms of cooperation have emerged: ad-hoc groupings, long-term scale cooperations and informal or traditional forms.

The emergence of the modern cooperative movement in the 19th century and the role of the pioneers Raiffeisen and *Schulze-Delitzsch* are rightly emphasized in this International Year of Cooperatives.

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, son of the Westerwald (a low mountain range on the right bank of the River Rhine), initially followed his Christian convictions under the motto: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”. His original ideas were based on a charitable approach.

Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, Prussian politician, businessman, lawyer, thought, however, that the people must first help themselves in order to solve their economic problems. Raiffeisen also soon realized that a charitable approach alone could not provide a lasting solution for people in need. People must have the desire and get the chance to help themselves. Self-help, self-responsibility and self-government, the “three Ss” hence became the cornerstones of cooperative activities.

Today cooperatives are important elements of economy and society in many countries. They establish and secure market access, economies of scale and independent market positions. Their foundations are stability, trust and reliability. The social and economic structure of a country is positively affected by cooperatives. Cooperatives in the financial sector, in trade, crafts and agriculture are the backbone of economic activity in many countries. They are based on local initiative and economic power and contribute significantly to the development. They are regionally based in their structures, they are manageable and they are not subject to anonymous creations of globally active financial groups.

Cooperatives need good partners

Successful cooperative systems include several levels: local cooperatives and regional and national centers and associations. They are built in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity which puts autonomy before state action; however, they must be checked and controlled. In 1872 Raiffeisen wrote: “This organization is the only means by which the Loans Associations can be maintained for the whole future; thereby the individual associations are no longer isolated or subject to the coincidences and vicissitudes of the time.” Savings and credit cooperatives must be licensed and subject to regulation and supervision by state authorities. Even the smallest savings deposit must be safe; this is why a deposit insurance system plays an important role here apart from banking supervision. A key success factor in modern cooperative systems is the comprehensive cooperative review and control.

It is precisely due to globalization that the significance of local and regional economy as one of the foundations for economic development increases, depending on various factors such as resource supplies, technical know-how, infrastructure, existence of an efficient financial sector and efficient markets. Allowing people to participate in the development means that they must be given the chance to help themselves. The state sets the (economic) policy framework within which “development” can take place.

Self-determination rather than instrumentalization

To this day, cooperatives have been assessed very differently in the debate on development policy. On the one hand there is a complete overrating of cooperatives as “instruments” for development; on the other hand, there is undifferentiated rejection. There have been frequent attempts to transfer this type of organization that has organically developed for example in Europe, without regard to the specific conditions of each developing country or the people’s needs, or even to use it as a tool of government or donor organizations. Specific conditions in the respective country, such as social cohesion and economic aspects as a basis for entrepreneurial activities, have been ignored to the

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Cooperatives – “We are part of them”

Cooperatives used to be ridiculed; now they are more relevant than ever. The example of Zürcher Baugenossenschaft Sonnengarten (Housing Cooperative Sun-Garden in Zurich) and its member Carmen Moser Nespeca.

Everything is well-cleaned, keys have been handed over, now boxes need unpacking. *Carmen Moser Nespeca* has moved to a larger apartment with her family. With the birth of the twins *Elena* and *Dario* 1½ years ago, the terraced house from the 40's in the *Housing Cooperative Sonnengarten* (HC) in Zurich had become too small. *Carmen Moser Nespeca* and her husband would have never considered moving with their four children into an apartment outside the housing cooperative. “You wouldn't easily give up your membership of a housing cooperative,” says *Carmen Moser Nespeca*, who is not only a member, but also

actively involved in the board. Whoever has become a member usually has a good chance of another suitable and affordable place. In Zurich, this cannot be taken for granted.

Urban architecture

More than 1,000 homes belong to the housing cooperative, the majority of which are at the foot of *Uetliberg* (a mountain at the western side of Zurich). The flagship of *HC Sonnengarten* is the latest development *Triemli*. After completion last autumn the development was praised in architectural circles, and now the greenery has been planted: a fountain, a children's playground and a spacious meadow for

“We cooperative members are well being looked after.”

Carmen Moser Nespeca

playing should help enliven the park between the two residential blocks.

The building complex *Triemli* has symbolic value: In 1945 the first houses of the *Sonnengarten Cooperative* had previously been built on the ground of the now erected modern houses: three storeys, with badly insulated, badly soundproofed apartments, most with three bedrooms and less than 70 square meters. “We wanted to create something new, something contemporary and renovation would not have been worthwhile,” says *Urs Erni*, president of *HC Sonnengarten*. The architect, who was not allowed to build for “his” cooperative himself, has been president of the cooperative for 25 years.

More room in the same space

On the same space, the building complex offers 50 more apartments than before, almost all larger than the previous ones. Energy consumption meets modern requirements: therefore the 200 apartments, mainly family homes, use much less energy than their predecessors. 80 percent come from renewable sources, some from geothermal energy. Something on a larger scale had been planned, but the geothermal drilling by the public energy supplier in Zurich had not been successful, but became a much debated topic in the city.

Loyal cooperative members

Most residents have remained loyal to the cooperative for many years. “We have fewer changes than other landlords,” estimates *Urs Erni*. And when someone moves it is often within the cooperative – such as the *Moser Nespeca* family. “This is definitely in our interest,” says *Erni*. These personal ties

2012: The United Nations Year of Cooperatives

The United Nations have declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives. Thereby, the UN wants to draw attention to the global importance of cooperatives and emphasize their role in the economic and social development of many countries. “Cooperatives show that it is possible to combine economic success with social responsibility,” writes the UN.

Achieving goals better in collaboration than single-handedly, that's the basic idea of each cooperative. That was also true in 1826 when *Mobilier* was founded based on the principle of solidarity: resulting from the idea that many will help when an individual suffers damage. This is still relevant today.

Together with other cooperatives in the *IG Genossenschaftsunternehmen* (coop-

erative enterprises) *Mobilier* is committed to strengthen this form of society. It is one of the founding members, along with *fenaco*, *Raiffeisen*, *Mobility* and the *Allgemeine Baugenossenschaft Zürich* (General Housing Cooperative Zurich). Other members are *Coop* and *Schweizerische Verband für Wohnungswesen* (Swiss Association for Housing). By declaring International Years, the United Nations intend to draw world attention to the pressing issues of our time. 2012 is also the UN Year of renewable energy for everybody.

Source: *Mobirama*. Das Magazin für Kundinnen und Kunden der *Mobilier*, issue 1/2012, p. 9

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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“Cooperatives – relics of ...”

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same extent as the country's own necessary legal framework.

Cooperatives cannot replace government action. If they want to live up to their actual requirements they are: A business for their members, working for them, and sustained, financed and controlled by them.

The decisive factor is the situation on the spot

Worldwide, there are many examples of successful cooperative structures that have emerged on their own initiative or that have been promoted from the outside very “cautiously”. An essential condition

for this was and still is that the cooperatives are oriented towards their members' goals and needs.

One of the key lessons for the development of cooperative structures: Each country is different, every culture is different. Therefore, there can be no standard model. But there are experiences that can be made use of:

- Each cooperative must be efficient and attractive for its members. This will require consistent economic orientation, adequate internal organization and well-trained managers and employees in the individual cooperative. The cooperatives must be part of a subsidiary established network, because they can then benefit from the

services of specialized central companies and associations. Cooperatives provide the opportunities for people to have their share in regional value added, to make regional value added possible and to stabilize it.

- The state has “only” a duty to provide the adequate legal and regulatory framework for cooperative action. Cooperatives cannot replace government action and have no public mandate. They are businesses for their members, working for them, and sustained, financed and controlled by them. Hence cooperatives differ fundamentally from financial corporations.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Quo vadis, Germany?

Behind the politicians' call for a new constitution there is a frontal attack against the German democracy

by Karl Müller

In his 25 June issue, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* has published an interview with the German Minister of Finance, *Wolfgang Schäuble*, in which – referring to a hint taken from the German Constitutional Court's sentence on the *Lisbon Treaty* – he states that his proposals regarding extended EU powers would require a referendum on a new German constitution.

In its sentence, the Constitutional Court explained that the principle of democracy laid down in the German constitution demanded a core of national sovereignty rights in essential political areas. The transfer of further national powers to the European Union would endanger this core and, hence, German democracy.

The principle of democracy is part of the unalterable core of the Basic Law and is subject to the “eternity clause” of Article 79, paragraph 3. Hence, democracy cannot be abolished by national parliaments making a constitutional amendment with the help of simple majorities. In fact, according to the Constitutional Court, this would require a new German constitution. The only constitutional procedure would be the application of Article 146 stipulating that the Basic Law is valid until the German people decide for a new constitution. – Although it is obviously grotesque to let the people decide on the abolishment of democracy.

Article 79, paragraph 3 is called the “eternity clause” of the German Basic Law because it stipulates: “Amendments to this Basic Law affecting the division of the Federation into states, their participation on principle in the legislative process, or the principles laid down in Articles 1 and 20 shall be inadmissible.”

Article 79, paragraph 3 was the deliberate decision of the Parliamentary Council to prevent a new “legal” pathway towards a dictatorship as was the case in the Weimar Republic. Articles 1 and 20 are the essential constitutional barriers against a new dictatorship in Germany.

Article 1 declares human dignity as inviolable, the respect for and the pro-

Former President of the Federal Constitutional Court: Constitution rules out loss of sovereignty

“Our ‘Grundgesetz’ (German Basic Law) precludes that Germany loses its own state sovereignty due to permanent transfer of sovereign powers to the European Union and becomes part of a European federal state. [...]

At present I absolutely see no readiness of the German people to give themselves a new constitution instead of their established Basic Law and to integrate themselves into a new European federal state. The same goes for the other European peoples. The Basic Law is certainly not to blame for the present crises in Europe. These crises can and must be solved on the basis of our established Basic Law. [...]

It currently lacks important preconditions for an effective democratic system at the European level. For example there is no European nation, not an European media publicity and no European landscape of political parties.

I therefore warn against compromising the constitutional political and constitutional stability of Germany by demanding a new constitutional order.”

Source: Interview with “Bild Zeitung” dated 28.6.2012 with the former president of the Federal Constitutional Court, Hans-Jürgen Papier
(Translation Current Concerns)

tection of human dignity as a duty of all state authority; it contains the German people's acknowledgement of the inviolable and inalienable human rights and binds the legislature, the executive and the judiciary to the basic rights as directly applicable law.

Article 20 declares that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and social federal state; that all state authority emanates from the people and is exercised through elections and other votes, as well as through specific legislative, executive, and judicial bodies subject to the principle of separation of powers and authority control. Moreover, Article 20 guarantees all Germans the right to resistance.

Talking about the application of article 146 in connection with a further shift of national authorities from the nation-state to the European Union level, i.e. a referendum on a new German constitution, this equals the confession that a further transfer of powers to the EU would violate the eternity clause of the Basic Law, implying a violation of Article 1 and/or Article 20.

In this light, the demand for an early application of Article 146 of the Basic Law, picked up after Schäuble's initia-

tive by many among the German classe politique is therefore not a glimmer of hope for more direct democracy in Germany at all but the public announcement that central values of the Basic Law are challenged. To put it differently: The German people is expected to approve of the planned coup d'état.

The interview with the German Finance Minister was part of a cover story painting a nightmare scenario in case the euro zone would break apart. An example of psychological warfare.

The conclusion suggested to the reader is the following: If you are not ready to give up all your current basic political rights, if you cling to the fundamental sovereignty of your country, to democracy and political freedom, then you have to face disaster. Is this how German democracy is to dig its own grave?

In this context, *Der Spiegel* also quoted the Green politician *Joschka Fischer* with an advice for Brussels and Berlin to “just decide what is necessary. So far, (the Constitutional Court in) Karlsruhe has always stated: This far and no further, but there was always a way to proceed further”. That is the chutzpah of a lawbreaker who has come to office. Quo vadis, Germany? •

“Cooperatives – ‘We are ...’

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encourage carefulness. This is something *Mobiliar*, the insurance company of *HC Sonnengarten*, does not mind either. The bond has a price: cooperative membership costs range between several thousand and tens of thousands

of francs, depending on the size of the apartment. Whoever leaves the cooperative gets the money plus interest back. For *Carmen Moser Nespeca* the new 6-room apartment is the fourth within the cooperative. The apartment is not in the building complex *Triemli*, but in another modern one in the same neighbourhood. At first she and her husband

Roberto Nespeca lived in a 2 bedroom apartment. Then the size of the place has been gradually adjusted to fulfill the current needs and family size. •

Source: *Mobirama*. Das Magazin für Kundinnen und Kunden der *Mobiliar*, issue 1/2012, p. 6f.

(Translation Current Concerns)

Call for protest

The open letter of the economists

cc. In an open letter to the citizens meanwhile 272 economics professors from German speaking countries protest against the decisions taken at the latest EU summit. Below we print the declaration in its wording.

Dear fellow citizens

The decisions Chancellor Merkel saw herself compelled to approve at the recent EU Summit were wrong. As German-speaking economists, we are deeply concerned about this move towards a banking union and the implied collective liability for all bank debts in the Eurosystem. In the five countries most affected by the crisis, bank debt amounts to several trillion euros, almost three times the size of government debt, and taxpayers, pensioners and savers in countries with still solid economies should not be held liable

for these, especially since massive additional losses are looming from financing the Southern European countries' inflationary bubbles. Banks must be allowed to fail. If borrowers are unable to repay their debts, there is only one group that can and should bear the consequences, their owners and creditors, who were fully aware of the risks involved in their investment and own the assets required to sustain potential losses.

Politicians may hope to limit the size of the implied liability and to prevent any abuse through common banking supervision. This will, however, remain difficult as long as the structural majority of debtor countries prevails in the Eurozone. If economically sound countries share liability for bank debts elsewhere, they will be exposed to constant pressure to widen the limits of this liability or to soften the requirements for its provision.

This is bound to lead to additional strife and discord in the European Union. Extending liability to all banks will not save the euro or the European idea; it will mainly help Wall Street, the City of London – as well as some investors in Germany and other Eurozone countries – and enable a number of ailing domestic and foreign banks to continue to do business at the expense of the citizens and taxpayers of other countries that bear little responsibility for any of this.

The socialisation of debt will not provide any lasting solution to our current problems; instead, under the guise of solidarity, it will subsidise certain groups of creditors and distort important economic investment decisions.

Please relay these concerns to your constituent member of parliament; our elected representatives should know about these risks.

Volker Abel (München), Hanns Abele (Wien), Werner Abelschäuser (Bielefeld), Klaus Adam (Mannheim), Hanjo Allinger (Deggendorf), Niels Angermüller (Wernigerode), Thomas Apolte (Münster), Gerhard Arminger (Wuppertal), Lutz G. Arnold (Regensburg), Ludwig von Auer (Trier), Phillip Bagus (Madrid), Ulrich Baßeler (Berlin), Hanno Beck (Pforzheim), Sascha Becker (Warwick), Tilman Becker (Hohenheim), Gerard J. van den Berg (Mannheim), Annette Bergemann (Mannheim), Volker Bergen (Göttingen), Peter Bernholz (Basel), Norbert Berthold (Würzburg), Thomas Beißinger (Hohenheim), Martin Biewen (Tübingen), Charles B. Blankart (Berlin), Ulrich Blum (Halle), Eckhart Bomsdorf (Köln), Silvio Borner (Basel), Gregor Bräutigam (Düsseldorf), Michael Bräulke (Osnabrück), Friedrich Breyer (Konstanz), Gerrit Brösel (Hagen), Jeanette Brosig-Koch (Duisburg-Essen), Wolfgang Buchholz (Regensburg), Martin-Peter Büch (Saarbrücken), Walter Buhr (Siegen), Carsten Burhop (Köln), Sigrun C. Caspari (Witten-Herdecke), Volker Caspari (Darmstadt), Dieter Cassel (Duisburg/Essen), Norbert Christopeit (Bonn), Christian Conrad (Heidelberg), Erich Daunenauer (Landau), Manfred Deistler (Wien), Gerd Diethelm (Trier), Alexander Dilger (Münster), Klaus Diller (Koblenz), Ulrich Döring (Lüneburg), Jürgen B. Donges (Köln), Axel Dreher (Heidelberg), Hilmar Drygas (Kassel), Peter Egger (Zürich), Wolfgang Eggert (Freiburg), Jürgen Eichberger (Heidelberg), Patrick Eichenberger (Zug), Alexander Eisenkopf (Friedrichshafen), Winand Emons (Bern), Eike Emrich (Saarbrücken), Alfred Endres (Hagen), Mathias Erlei (Clausthal-Zellerfeld), Hans Fehr (Würzburg), Ulrich Fehl (Mannheim), Stefan Felder (Basel), Cay Folkers (Bochum), Reto Föllmi (St. Gallen), Andreas Freytag (Jena), Jan Franke-Viebach (Siegen), Bruno Frey (Warwick), Michael Fritsch (Jena), Markus Frölich (Mannheim), Wilfried Fuhrmann (Potsdam), Michael Funke (Hamburg), Werner Gaab (Bochum), Günther Gebhardt (Frankfurt), Gerhard Gehrig (Frankfurt), Robert Götz (Nürtingen-Geislingen), Egon Görgens (Bayreuth), Volker Grossmann (Freiburg/Schweiz), Joachim Grammig (Tübingen), Wolf-Heimo Grieben (Würzburg), Thomas Gries (Paderborn), Josef Gruber (Hagen), Erich Gundlach (Hamburg), Andreas Haaker (Hagen), Hendrik Hakenes (Bonn), Gerd Hansen (Kiel), Hans Hartwig (Münster), Andreas Hauffer (München), Harry Haupt (Bielefeld), Nikolaus Hautsch (Berlin), Burkard Heer (Augsburg), Peter Heil (Mainz), Maik Heinemann (Potsdam), Christoph Helberger (Berlin), Florian Heiss (Mainz), Olaf Henkel (Mannheim), Henner Hentze (Münster), Thomas Hering (Hagen), Carsten Herrmann-Pillath (Frankfurt), Matthias Hertweck (Konstanz), Helmut Herwartz (Kiel), Hans Hirth (Berlin), Stefan Hoderlein (Boston), Stefan Homburg (Hannover), Guido Hülsmann (Angers), Klaus Jaeger (Berlin), Jürgen Jerger (Regensburg), Uwe Jirjahn (Trier), Thomas Jost (Aschaffenburg), Martin Junkernheinrich (Kaiserslautern), Leo Kaas (Konstanz), Peter Kappelhoff (Wuppertal), Alexander Karmann (Dresden), Michael Kastner (Heidelberg), Wolfgang Kessler (Freiburg), Frank Keuper (Hamburg), Gebhard Kirchgässner (St. Gallen), Oliver Kirchkamp (Jena), Guy Kirsch (Freiburg/Schweiz), Dieter Kirschke (Berlin), Roland Kirstein (Magdeburg), Václav Klaus (Prag), Eckart Klingelhöfer (Pretoria), Martin Kloyer (Greifswald), Rainer Knigge (Berlin), Michael Knittel (Stuttgart), Andreas Knorr (Speyer), Ulrich Koester (Kiel), Kai Konrad (Berlin), Dietmar Krafft (Münster), Walter Krämer (Dortmund), Tim Krieger (Paderborn), Hans-Martin Krolzig (Canterbury), Jens Krüger (Darmstadt), Walter Krug (Trier), Jörn Kruse (Hamburg), Rainer Künzel (Osnabrück), Bert Küppers (Bremen), Hermann von Laer (Vechta), Franz Peter Lang (Braunschweig), Martin Leschke (Bayreuth), Roman Liesenfeld (Kiel), Frank Lobigs

(Dortmund), Andreas Löhr (Frankfurt), Otto Loistl (Wien), Jürgen Löwe (St. Gallen), Bernd Lucke (Hamburg), Helga Luckenbach (Gießen), Helmut Lütkepohl (Berlin), Ernst Maug (Mannheim), Friedrich W. May (Münster), Stefan May (Ingolstadt), Georg Meran (Berlin), Peter Mertens (Nürnberg), Matthias Messner (Mailand), Dirk Meyer (Hamburg), Georg Milbradt (Dresden), Gertrud Moosmüller (Passau), Karl Mosler (Köln), Georg Müller-Fürstenberger (Trier), Heiner Müller-Merbach (Kaiserslautern), Holger Mühlkamp (Speyer), Marc-Andreas Muendler (San Diego), Renate Neubäumer (Koblenz-Landau), Günter Neubauer (München), Bernhard Neumärker (Freiburg), Werner Neus (Tübingen), Klaus Neusser (Bern), Dirk Niepelt (Gerzensee), Volker Nitsch (Darmstadt), Peter Oberender (Bayreuth), Walter Oberhofer (Regensburg), Michael Olbrich (Saarbrücken), Ingrid Ott (Karlsruhe), Henning Ottmann (München), Wolfgang Pfaffenberger (Bremen), Hans-Georg Petersen (Potsdam), Diether Petzina (Bochum), Wilhelm Pfähler (Hamburg), Eva Pichler (Wien), Michael Pickhardt (Cottbus), Winfried Pohlmeier (Konstanz), Matthias Polborn (Urbana-Champaign), Olaf Posch (Aarhus), Birger P. Priddat (Witten-Herdecke), Susanne Rässler (Bamberg), Bernd Raffelhüschen (Freiburg), Olaf Rank (Freiburg), Stefan Reitz (Kiel), Hans-Eggert Reimers (Wismar), Hayo Reimers (Gießen), Franco Reither (Hamburg), Til Requate (Kiel), Rudolf Richter (Saarbrücken), Wolfram Richter (Dortmund), Paul Ridder (Konstanz), Marc Oliver Rieger (Trier), Klaus Ritzberger (Wien), Gerhard Rösl (Regensburg), Roland Rollberg (Greifswald), Gerd Ronning (Tübingen), Horst Rottmann (Amberg-Weiden), Gerhard Rübel (Göttingen), Ralf Runde (Siegen), Dirk Sauerland (Witten-Herdecke), Wolf Schäfer (Hamburg), Christoph Schaltegger (Luzern), Klaus-Werner Schatz (Kiel), Malcolm Schauf (Essen), Horst Schellhaas (Köln), Bernhard Scherer (London), Jörg Schimmelpfennig (Bochum), Burkhard C. Schipper (UC Davis), Ulrich Schittko (Augsburg und Friedrichshafen), Karl Schmedders (Zürich), André Schmidt (Witten-Herdecke), Dieter Schmidtchen (Saarbrücken), Michael Schmitz (Gießen), Gunther Schnabl (Leipzig), Hans Schneeweiß (München), Ronnie Schöb (Berlin), Klaus Schöler (Potsdam), Siegfried G. Schoppe (Hamburg), Jürgen Schröder (Mannheim), Wolfgang B. Schünemann (Dortmund), Matthias Graf von der Schulenburg (Hannover), Christian Seidl (Kiel), Franz Seitz (Weiden), Friedrich L. Sell (Neubiberg), Gernot Sieg (Braunschweig), Hans-Werner Sinn (München), Sybille Sobczak (Bad Mergentheim), Peter Spahn (Hohenheim), Georg Stadtmann (Frankfurt/Oder), Joachim Starbatty (Tübingen), Thomas Steger (Leipzig), Victor Steiner (Berlin), Martin Steinrücke (Greifswald), Erich Streibler (Wien), Wolfgang Ströbele (Münster), Dirk Stroeder (Stuttgart), Hans Gerhard Strohe (Oppeln), Bernd Süßmuth (Leipzig), Tymon Tatur (Bonn), Jobst H. Thalenhorst (Münster), Theresia Theurl (Münster), Stephan Thomssen (Hannover), Karl-Heinz Tödter (Frankfurt), Stefan Traub (Bremen), Siegfried Trautmann (Mainz), Dieter Tschulin (Freiburg), Harald Uhlig (Chicago), Stefan Voigt (Hamburg), Andreas Wagener (Hannover), Gerhard Wagenhals (Hohenheim), Adolf Wagner (Tübingen/Leipzig), Martin Wagner (Graz), Klaus Walde (Mainz), Martin Wallmeier (Freiburg/Schweiz), Gerhard Wegner (Erfurt), Joachim Weimann (Magdeburg), Thomas Wein (Lüneburg), Rafael Weißbach (Rostock), Heinz-Dieter Wenzel (Bamberg), Robert K. von Weizsäcker (München), Peter Westerheide (Münster), Frank Westermann (Osnabrück), Hans Wielens (Münster), Otto Wiese (Münster), Thomas Wilke (Wismar), Michael Wolf (Zürich), Elmar Wolfstetter (Berlin), Klaus F. Zimmermann (Bonn), Achim Zink (Karlsruhe/Wien)

Why return to one's own currency?

Some fundamental considerations

by Friedrich Romig*

Monetary policy is more than shaping, influencing and controlling a specific area of market-based technology. The monetary system of a nation reflects everything this nation wants, does, suffers, is. The state of a currency, "reflects the entire social and political life [...] rise and fall, revolutions, foreign policy successes and failures, internal political constellations, strength and weakness of governments [...] the geographical and political situation of a people, the objective and subjective possibilities of its economy, its approach to economic matters and the future, and its morals and energy; all that is covered by the words 'Volksgeist' and 'Volkscharakter' (national spirit, national character). Nothing conveys so clearly what stuff a people is made of, as what it does in terms of monetary policy."

Everybody who reflects or writes about currency, credit and banking system or participates in their formation as a responsible politician, should make an entry of these golden words by *Joseph Schumpeter*, one of our nation's great economists, in their diary. The culture of a nation and its currency go together and cannot be separated!

This has to do with the nature of money and credit. By its very nature, money is a product of the state's law. By enacting the monetary and credit constitution the state as the legislator determines what "is" money on its territory and who is entitled to create money and credit. The monetary authority is one of the inalienable and indefeasible rights of the state. It is one of the absurdities of our time, if the state does not exercise these "sovereign rights" itself, but transfers this power to a "private" or "independent" non-governmental organisation towards which it has no legal duty to intervene and which on its part is not responsible to the state. The so-called "independence of the central bank" has always been and still is only a relative one. Lack of political will to pursue proper state monetary and credit policy makes a central bank powerless, no matter how "independent" it is. The *German Bundesbank* struggled in vain against the abandonment of the DM. And the lack of power is now back at the Fed or the ECB, which both have to rubber-stamp and finance any bailout, "stimulus programme" or "stimulus package" prescribed by the policy makers. Sometimes, however, they virtually force themselves upon policy as "problem solvers" or "saviours" like *Jean-Claude Trichet* in the Greece bankruptcy in early 2010.

Money is a state-accepted means of payment

For the logically irrefutable and therefore uncontested, "State Theory of Money" (*G. F. Knapp*, 1905), money in the narrower sense is the state-approved cash (coins, banknotes). State recognition is the commitment of the state to accept payments in the form of nationally defined "currency units" in order to discharge the debt or from tax liabilities. Thanks to the state recognition this "money" also becomes the "circulating medium" among the citizens. In general, today there are the government-appointed or recognised central banks which issue coins and bills in accordance with the authorisation and under the supervision of the state, and thus "create" money.

All the money, both in the narrower and broader sense, is generated or "created" by credit. Credit means, as the name suggests, "trust". "The state is the money" thanks to the legal system created and maintained by it. If the state law degenerates and the state loses confidence in its continued existence, money loses its value. If the national regime as such collapses, money is no longer accepted as payment by the citizens. After the collapse during the Second World War, the "cigarette currency" was accepted in Germany and Austria, countertrading 'celebrated' its heyday. It is important to realise that actually every kind of disturbance of order and social peace in a country has a damaging effect on trust in the state and its currency, whether provoked by strikes, riots, rebellion, violence, street terrorism, arson, corruption, bank scandals, major fraud etc., and that it leads to a flight into material assets or foreign currencies, which in turn fuel inflation, the external value of the currency ("currency exchange") declines and necessary imports become more expensive. The strength of the DM, the Dutch guilder, the Swiss franc or the Austrian shilling in comparison to the Mediterranean currencies (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece) was based to a considerable extent on the enforcement of an order of peace, on policies of social equality, social partnership and the primacy of factual authority instead of the bickering of political parties. In a monetary union, discrepant perceptions of order lead to loss of welfare and to tensions between the countries, which, if they become large enough, break up the monetary union.

The discrepant order concepts and the loss of sovereignty is probably the reason why the United Kingdom, Denmark and

Sweden, though, "mature" EU countries, stayed out of the monetary union from the outset and refused to introduce the euro, despite the manifold advertised "advantages". Austria has unfortunately not acted alike, it was lured into the monetary union with empty promises by *Schüssel & Co.*, although Foreign Minister *Mock* had solemnly promised the retention of the shilling prior to EU accession.

Money is also a general measure of value

Money is not only a means of storing values, of exchange, payment and circulation, but very significantly, "a general measure of value" through which all goods and services are "priced" and thus related to each other. This money scale will even be applied to people and groups whose work performance or tasks are valued and paid for in the form of wages, salaries, fees, allowances or bonuses. This integration of individuals and groups in the general monetary valuation, money attains a "social" character. It becomes a connecting, or, as *Adam Müller* put it, the "most sociable thing". It allows not only the "exchange of goods for money" is not just "a medium of exchange," but it facilitates in many ways "communication" (*N. Luhmann* and *J. Habermas*) between the members of society in the "subsystem" economy. Precisely because of this contribution to the communication, it is the task and responsibility of the state to ensure the stability and unchanging validity of this value measure and thus to ensure the preservation of the purchasing power of money. If the state does not fulfil this responsibility, or transfers it to non-governmental organisations, namely, the EU Commission, ECB, IMF, troikas or the *Eurofin* group, then this reflects political failure. It loses the impact on its currency and its credit policy.

Preserving the purchasing power

In order to understand the considerable amount of responsibility for *maintaining the purchasing power* of money, it is necessary to keep in mind that money in the form of coins and notes nowadays only plays a minor role for payments. In modern economies, 80–95% of payments are "non-cash payments" i.e. they happen through posting of payments from accounts to accounts from one bank to another. This is crucial for "credit creation". The nature of credit creation is easier to

"Why return to ..."

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understand by the idea that there is only one bank within the national economy and that all payments are carried through as non-cash payments. All the money would be book or "giro money". Through the inter-bank or "clearing system" the practice is very close of this idea. In such an economic system, it is solely the banking and credit system, which "creates" credit, through the granting of overdraft privileges or credit lines used by the debtors (those are the banks themselves, the individual citizens, businesses, municipalities, the state) to pay their workers and suppliers. By any accessed credit the circulating money or credit volume is extended. It is essential to get rid of the naive idea that the banks are merely "intermediaries" who represent the extent of savings available for lending. The real task of the banks is the money and credit creation, they are to a significant extent the creators of the unjustly denounced "fiat money". Savings are a result of credit creation, not the cause of the credit.

Limits of credit creation

This insight is crucial for determining the *limits of credit creation*. Nothing is to be said against the banks creating credit, as long as the enhanced credit volume corresponds with sustainable growth of the national economy; on the contrary this should be welcomed. Credit created in accordance with economic growth will yield interest but never be repaid as an economic aggregate. As long as businesses and states are thriving loans will not be repaid, but extended. This is what credit statistics show in practically all modern states. Decreasing credit volumes are usually due to diminishing dynamics and productivity, misdirections of the credit stream or irresponsible speculations leading to the destruction of bank assets and consequently credit money. If the (credit) money destruction reaches high proportions or even the extent of a "Tsunami", this will result in crises and economic ruin similar to what we experienced again and again in recent years.

In order to avoid crises and ruin it is of utmost importance for the state to secure and actually employ its control of volumes and objectives of credit creation. This control may be exercised by strictly regulating or nationalizing the banking sector, the state holding shares of private banks or appointing regulatory bodies who oversee loan granting. This has nothing to do with "expropriation of banks". The current situation in which the state allows credit institutions to do as they please and makes its own citizens pay for their bad debts or failed

speculations and derivate deals is unjustifiable from the perspective of the citizens and tax payer community. Rather than merely reacting, the state has to implement all necessary measures and regulations well in advance in order to prevent banks going bankrupt. Nothing is more deleterious for the thriving of the economy than the credit stream running dry because of the depositors beginning to doubt the banks' liquidity and the banks to distrust each other. Once the trust has been shaken, getting credit streams running again can become very costly for the state. "Stimulus packages", untimely infrastructure investments and alike are the wrong medicine to cure systemic failures in the credit sector, for sure. All it does is undermining the stability of a currency and "burning" the state's budget assets, as Minister *Steinbrück* put it. Financing consumptive state expenditures by loans is even more irresponsible. It's the surest way to bankruptcy as illustrated by the example of Greece.

Money must serve the national economy

For the sake of national economy banks should grant loans exclusively to domestic credit receivers and only as an exception to foreign ones. Specific exceptions from that rule are countries like Switzerland or Luxembourg who, being viewed as "hoards of trust", cannot find enough domestic investment opportunities for the huge influx of foreign money. For all other states it is true: export loans which the state is ultimately liable for (be it by way of the controlling bank or the reserve bank), have to be bound to conditions and criteria securing amortization and interest. Exports just for the sake of employment are pointless, the era of the "giving economy" (*Bernhard Laum*) is over. One has to always bear in mind: any loan given abroad means productivity being sucked out of one's own national economy.

Financing one's own state budget

It is also detrimental to the common good if the state renounces the right to finance its budget by creating credit. Should the state, by doing so, put itself into a position that it requires to float high interest loans possibly even abroad which then may be purchased by private banks, refinancing themselves by means of low interest (so-called "key interest rate") loans from the reserve banks or the ECB, then the state basically offers a profit to the private banks they are not entitled to, since credit is still created by the state in these cases. The state is the "Lord of money" and of credit: "C'est au souverain à donner le crédit, et non à le recevoir!" It is not up to the state to have it-

self being pulled around on its nose ring by the financial markets or "subordinated" to the banks, quite on the contrary the banks have to obey the state. When *John F. Kennedy* was about to get serious with these principles and do away with the FED system he was murdered. But still these principles are right.

The state is responsible for its currency and credit policies

The state alone is responsible for its currency. Since it is the most important tool of any economic and social politics the state has to take hold of its monetary and credit politics once again. *Surrendering one's own currency and credit politics is a political crime par excellence*. In Germany this crime boils down to Foreign Minister *Genscher* and Chancellor *Kohl*, in Austria it's *Wolfgang Schüssel*, *Ferrero-Waldner* and the politically spineless former Reserve Bank President *Klaus Liebscher*. In Austria the euro was introduced in 1999 despite all assurances of foreign minister *Mock* and the whole government when they told the electorate just before the EU accession plebiscit in 1994: "The shilling will stay!" As every Austrian knows today he has been betrayed and "lied into" EU and euro. This has deeply shaken the trust in the state and severely damaged the political system and party democracy. According to the "Standard" 82% don't trust politicians any longer. In the 1930s the loss of political trust and the bank crash was followed by the political overthrow.

The euro – a weak currency

There is neither a strong state behind the euro nor a political union, which the former chief economist of the *European Central Bank* (ECB) *Otmar Issing* suspects will never materialize as long as the "democracy principle" is respected ("Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 6 December 2008, p.11). However a monetary union without a political one is doomed to fail. Nobel prize laureate *Milton Friedman* made that clear to us just before his death (2006). Accordingly the Harvard economist *Martin Feldstein*, former economic adviser to President Reagan and today President of the *National Bureau of Economic Research*, posed the question: "Will the euro survive the crisis?" in all seriousness ("Presse" of 6 December 2008, p.4). His good arguments for an expected failure may be summarized as the former president of the *Hessian County bank*, national economist Prof *W. Hankel* pointed out in a speech in Vienna (9 October 2008): "State and currency belong together and must never be separated." In his book "Die Euro-Lüge", 2008 ("The euro lie"), Hankel argued that the former "hard

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"Why return to ..."

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currency bloc (Germany, Austria, Benelux) "now "subsidizes" the other euro states with an annual current account surplus of 250 billion euro so that they don't have to devalue their own currency which otherwise would have been necessary. This horrendous "relief cheque" will not show up in any EU budget. "Le Figaro" referred to these tribute payments as "Versailles, without war". Stagnation of growth and real wage in Germany (and Austria) are due to these tributes. They do not only weaken the former hard currency bloc, the "engines", but the whole of Europe. The train will stop when the engines cease to pull it. *The weakening had started with the monetary union, now it expands to include the euro itself.* Its value melts away like snow in the sun. Since its issuing in the year 1999 the gold prize – the only reliable standard in weak currencies – went up three and a half fold. This amounts to an *inflation rate of about 10%p.a.* This on the other hand corresponds well with the daily experiences of housewives doing their shopping, who usually ignore those manipulated indices. Like any reasonable human being she has to come to the conclusion: "The ECB is incapable of efficiently fighting inflation." As a matter of fact the ECB allows the credit volume to grow five times faster than the gross national product. The "stability and growth pact" wasn't worth the paper it was written on as hundreds of economists had predicted. Those stability criteria had been violated when the monetary union was established and have been violated ever since. From the point in time when weak currency countries like Greece joined the monetary union its collapse has been inevitable. Today we have to face it and can't get rid of the heavy lead mantle someone helped us into.

Deformed state of money and credit system

This is exactly why it is high time now to remember the basic principles of what the nature of money and credit is all about. They require a reformation of the current state of the money and credit system and a reintroduction of an independent currency. We should learn from the experience of the financial disaster the European monetary union and globalisation got us into, and promote a reintroduction of an independent currency together with a strengthened regulation of financial markets and the banking sector as quickly as possible. Lacking or insufficient regulation of the banks may easily disrupt the whole economy or even – as we also know from bitter experience – ruin entire states (like Iceland). The very need to control credit creation

forces the state to exert such a regulation of financial and banking services. The transformation of the currencies will be no more difficult than those arising and being solved with the introduction of the euro. Also the strengthening of the currently available tools to control capital and financial flows abroad shouldn't meet with too many difficulties. In any case this is mandatory to prevent Austria being sold out by the "plague of locusts" and stop foreign assets working against the Austrian common good or probably favouring "transfers" of jobs abroad or liabilities from the banks to the state with potentially disastrous consequences. Banks which are too big to fail are certainly too big to be left without regulation.

Summary of hypotheses

Summarizing the main points again for both patient and impatient readers:

- Money is created by credit, and credit means trust.
- "The state is the money", by means of its legal constitution it defines what money is and what is "accepted" to be money trusting the state's "word".
- The state has to justify the trust of its citizens and guarantee their buying power by means of its monetary and credit politics.
- "State and currency belong together and must never be separated" (Hankel). To surrender one's own currency means giving up the state's sovereignty.
- The banks are subject to the state, not the state is subject to the banks. The banks are subject to the state's interests, not the state to the banks' interests.
- "C'est au souverain à donner le crédit, et non à le recevoir!" The very task of the credit system is to maintain the state's monopoly of creating credits and their control. Instead of having to issue national bonds it is the state's genuine right to finance its budget deficits via credit creation of its reserve bank without payment of interest.
- A monetary and credit policy based on the common good requires that we turn away from euro and ECB and return to our national currency.

The author can only hope that our politicians, bankers and reserve bank presidents will not need the helping hand of OWS (*Occupy Wall Street*), Attac or the "Left party" of Mr Gysi for that matter. Good financial monetary and credit theory has produced results in the first half of the 20th century which can be neither refuted nor ignored by policy makers. About 700 national economists warned against the euro before Maastricht. Today's misery does not come as a surprise for them. The politicians who promoted

the euro are responsible for the damage and they should acknowledge its default instead of sinking ever bigger chunks of the national wealth. •

* The author is lecturer for economics and economic policy. As part of the guest comments he has repeatedly taken positions on the vain attempts to rescue the European Monetary Union: www.andreas-unterberger.at/2012/04/der-geplante-verfassungs-putsch-im-mai/?s=Romig
www.andreas-unterberger.at/2011/09/unter-die-eu-finanzdiktatur-mit-neuem-ijenschlussij/?s=Romig
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“You hover above the abyss”

The terraced landscapes in the Valais. Origin – development – perception

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

ab. In his study on the terraced landscapes in the Valais, Raimund Rodewald appreciates the achievement of our ancestors in a touching way and at the same time he conveys it to the reader in a holistic, thorough and systematic manner.

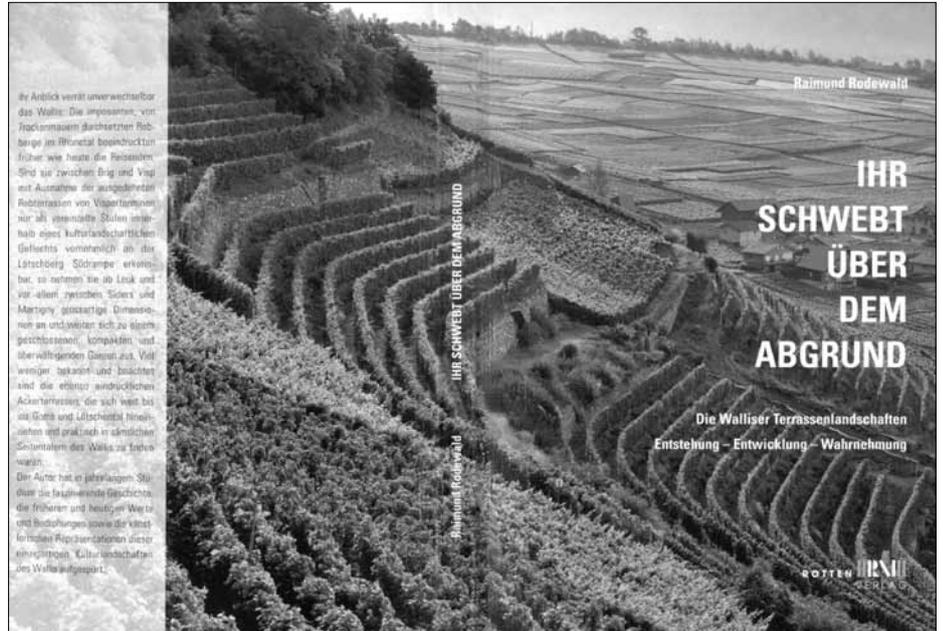
Current Concerns is delighted to introduce the reader at first to the introduction and to one chapter extracted from the work. Examples taken from the book will be presented every now and then, describing how the terraces are being revitalized and made use of in various ways.

The sight of the terraces unmistakably reveals the Valais: In the Rhone Valley then as now, albeit in a different manner, the imposing vineyards interspersed by dry stone walls deeply impress the travelers. Whereas with the exception of the broad vine terraces of Visperterminen between Brig and Visp they are recognizable only as occasional steps within the man-made mesh of landscapes primarily on the southern ascent of Löttschberg, they take on magnificent dimensions from Leuk onwards and especially between Siders and Martigny and widen to a cohesive, compact and overwhelming ensemble. Considerably less known and noted are the equally impressive lynchets extending far into Goms and Löttschental; you can also encounter them in all side valleys of the Valais. They range from the smallest fields with earth slopes to the expansively terraced granaries on the Leuker Sonnenbergen in Iséables to Entremont, and ascend to more than 1.800 m above the sea.

We know landscapes shaped by man from the Andes Mountains, too, where terraced land cultivation reaches up to 4,000 m. Also the Sorghum terraces in the Northern Yemen, most notably the green rice terraces in the Philippines, in China, Bali and in the Kashmir mountains. Equally, the terraced mountain sides of Switzerland convey a touch of exotic and age-old cultures especially in the Valais.

What led in Vaudois Lavaux to the attribute “UNESCO World Cultural Heritage” and what seems to be “civilised” because of the lake’s charm appears to be more expressive in the Valais thanks to the steepness of the terrain against the background of the high mountains.

If the terraced landscapes nowadays evoke feelings of fascination and enthusiasm among most people, that was not always the case in former times. It is relatively late that in written sources and in paintings descriptions and pictures of those imposing structures of landscape



can be found in Europe, although terraced landscapes have been frequently depicted on frescoes and paintings. Later on these forms of landscapes have apparently been judged as not being picturesque or they have been either “overlooked” or knowingly neglected. For their rediscovery in the 19th century, however, the artists, writers and painters are to be thanked to a large part. Thus public appreciation in the Valais is associated above all with the name of *Charles Ferdinand Ramuz*.

The history of how the terraced landscapes in the Valais were perceived is closely linked with the history of the notion of landscapes’ beauty in general. Today’s great appreciation for landscape conservation, however, is in contrast to the increasing decline and depreciation of terraced landscapes. Dry walls and steps built amidst the slopes have been leveled by vineyard meliorations, wall embankments have been replaced by concrete walls, roads have been built, and unused living spaces have been filled up, or slopes have even been selected as building zones. On the other hand, a lot of cultivable terrain is falling into oblivion or increasingly transformed into bush. It is only the recognition of the esthetic, ecologic and cultural historical importance of the terraced landscapes that will open a way leading to their effective protection.

The terraced landscapes look as if created by an artist, and it is just for that reason that they keep enchanting me. They take me into another time. The vineyard terraces that climb upwards in steps in the plain of the Rhone valley near Chamou-

son and the highland Heida terraces near Visperterminen in the evening sun remind me of snapshots of inner Asiatic mountain valleys. The former field terraces of Albinen that shape the mountains by wave-like movements resemble sculptures. The history that you recognize in the shape of the landscape and which is characterized by the former fight for the workable ground that was the basis of human nutrition makes me think of and anticipate my own existential needs; the distance of today’s living world from the former peasant population envelopes this landscape shrouded in myths into a network of mysteries.

Terraced landscapes are to a great extent sensual animation spaces. The Vaud poet *Philippe Jaccottet* described this fascination that he witnessed in Southern France’s Drôme: This country is a country of walls [...] and between the fields, along the paths, around the estates there are still a great number of these small walls made from layered stones, the form of which varies, depending on what you have found on the spot [...] their beauty has remained very mysterious to me, and I am aware that if I had tried to define them any longer and more exactly, I would have been led to place them near the sacrificing stones, and near the Gods: as if it were this which we encounter inevitably on descending; not only back to the dawn of our history; but to that which, as a basic stonework, extends deep below our thoughts and dreams; as something that does not stop determin-

Mountain farming in the Valais

Breaking the field for the cultivation of rye in Goms was traditionally associated with the use of the broad hoe. This technology had the consequence that the small farming plots on a steep slope were always sloping downward, hence were never horizontal to the slope and therefore had only slightly stepped border furrows. The fields presented themselves just like designed “handkerchiefs” around the villages, as *Stebler* put it in 1914.¹ The resulting slight terracing shows mainly irregular and small banks. In the Valais the oldest traces of retaining walls and plowed fields are from the Iron Age.

In *Visperterminen* and between *Leuk* and the *Lower Valais*, the plow was extensively used, leaving behind more pronounced terrace steps which often made stone walls necessary. There the sliding earth had to be carried back up. Towards the end of the 14th and during the 15th century many former agricultural plots on hillsides had already been transformed into meadow and pasture land, primarily for viticulture, since intensified cattle breeding needed more roughage.² As of mid-19th century cereal agriculture in the mountains increasingly lost its significance. This was caused by the shifting of cultivation areas into the drained valley areas, the increase in grain imports and exports of wine and later the construction of safer roads to the mountain villages for the winter. The Swiss alpine land register of 1972 mentioned the progressive abandonment of cereal crops (“Many a hillside, which stood there in its golden splendor in the summer time a few decades ago, is now deserted”), but also that “except for two communes all Upper Valais communes planted rye or barley until after the Second World War”.³ The decline of use was accelerated because “the cultivation of the steep, terraced slopes could hardly be modernized” and required an enormous effort. In 1959, the folklorist *Richard Weiss* wrote, “The agricultural methods will necessarily remain old-fashioned

and backward on the steep and fragmented fields. In view of the enormous technical progress of the great wheat development areas of the world the inner Alpine agriculture seems to be hopelessly outdated as an effort whose continuation can only be justified by ethical reasons, not by such economic practicability.”⁴ This doctrine was perhaps one of the reasons why even the most detailed ethnographic descriptions as that of *Friedrich Gottlieb Stebler* in 1914, hardly commented on the “sunny slopes on the *Lötschberg*” which were considered to be economically uninteresting, although they were widespread and eye-catching in the area. The simultaneous expansion of viticulture on former farmland demanded another terracing with less inclined surfaces, and with dry stone walls that reinforced the slopes. Where viticulture was not possible the conversion of the agricultural terraces into meadows and pastures finally resulted in the steps of the steep slopes becoming fallow land and finally the banks collapsed. The mechanization of farming, which included driving on the lawns with vehicles, or the inappropriate grazing of steep slopes (by horses or cattle) contributed to the destruction of walls and embankments.

Impressive terraced farming areas had existed in *Isérables* and *Erschmatt*: Due to the late opening up of the road *Erschmatt* maintained the cultivation of cereal crops until the 1960s. Today grain can be found on individual terraces again. A garden for the cultivation of old varieties has been established. In *Isérables* numerous terraces are still cultivated as arable land, but also used for apricot cultivation – and even more recently planted with sugar maple trees. These initiatives are only possible thanks to the strong local commitment (see portraits of *Erschmatt* and *Isérables*). The former fields are again used today for the cultivation of herbs again (see portrait of *Orsières*).

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

- ¹ Stebler, Friedrich Gottlieb. *Sonnige Halden am Lötschberg, Monographien aus den Schweizeralpen.* Zurich 1914, p. 74
- ² Rey, Dennis. *Histoire d'eau. Bisses et irrigation en Valais au XV siècle.* Lausanne 2002, pp. 113
- ³ Department of Agriculture of the DEA. *Schweizerischer Alpkataster. Die Land- und Alpwirtschaft im Oberwallis* Bern 1972, pp. 113
- ⁴ Weiss, Richard. *Häuser und Landschaften der Schweiz.* Erlenbach-Zurich 1959, p. 250 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

Ihr schwebt über dem Abgrund –
Die Walliser Terrassenlandschaften
Entstehung - Entwicklung - Wahrnehmung



Ihr Anblick verort unverwechselbar das Wallis: Die imposanten, von Trockenmauern durchsetzten Reoberge im Rhodanal beeindruckten früher wie heute die Reisenden. Viel weniger bekannt und beachtet sind die ebenso eindrucksvollen Ackerterrassen, die sich weit bis ins Goms und Lötschental hineinziehen und praktisch in sämtlichen Seitentälern des Wallis zu finden waren. Raimund Rodewald erntet mit seinem neuen Buch Geschichte und Geschichten der Walliser Terrassenlandschaften.

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“You hover above the abyss”
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ing our lives.”¹ Can you ever grasp the effect of terraced landscapes on the human soul? Does their attraction consist in the phenomenon that they keep escaping our view because of their structural simplicity on the one hand, and their complex forms on the other hand?

Still, these landscapes are very concrete, real and present for the inhabitants who live inside and in front of them. At the same time they are full of person-

al esthetic experiences. That is why I proceeded to search for women and men who have marked these terraced landscapes in the Valais and who have also been marked by them, either because of their work as cultivators, or because of their reminiscences. Twelve portraits of people have been the result, people who confided their relationship with the landscape to me and who allowed *Giro Annen* to take snapshots of them, with a *Hasselblad* camera, at the very place of their work in the terraced slopes, a job which had sometimes taken several decades.

I hope that this history of perception may contribute to work against oblivion and to promote people’s awareness of the conservation and care for these “paysages de mémoire”. Let yourself be enchanted by the beauty of the Valais terraced landscapes and join in helping us to preserve these greatly endangered witnesses of European landscapes’ history!

¹ Jaccottet, Philippe. 1992. *Landschaften mit abwesenden Figuren*, Stuttgart, p. 19f. (Translation *Current Concerns*)