

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*

Giving priority to the sovereignty of the state

by Thomas Kaiser

This year Switzerland and all inhabitants of this country are facing a central question: Do we want to be “a nation of true brothers, never part in danger or in death! We swear we will be free, as were our sires, and sooner die than live in slavery!” (Friedrich Schiller: Wilhelm Tell, act II, scene II) Those words, spoken on the Rütli meadow by Pastor Rösselmann, express what is basic and has therefore a generally valid significance. In 1804, *Friedrich Schiller* wrote this classical drama and thus gave literary form to historical substance. The request of the three forest cantons for freedom and self-determination is in the focus, long before the right of self-determination of the peoples, formulated by US President *Woodrow Wilson* in his 14-point plan to end the First World War, became a principle of international law. Since Schiller drew upon the Confederates’ tradition of freedom in his work,

the play was prohibited by the Nazis. Although the drama was created more than 200 years ago, it hasn’t lost its topicality in terms of content and message. Today as well as in those days country and people are facing the question: Do we want to remain a sovereign and independent state or do we want to become dependent on other countries and their laws?

In a *Current Concerns* interview last year’s President of the National Council *Ruedi Lustenberger* clearly expressed that he considered these questions the crucial point of Switzerland’s future (cf. *Current Concerns* No 31, 31.12.2014). Do we want to be controlled by foreign judges, and accept a supranational jurisdiction in the style of the *European Court of Justice* in Brussels or the *European Court of Human Rights* in Strasbourg and literally be subject to the rule of law given by “foreign judges” in future? The result would

be the end to direct democracy and the parliament would lose significance, since national legislation would be subjected to supranational regulations. Not just randomly, *Daniel Kübler*, Professor at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zurich, speaks of the era of “post parliamentary democracy”, which is mainly controlled by the executive. The actual sovereign in the democratic system, namely the sovereign people, does not play any political role in such a “democracy”. The legal standards given by Brussels or Strasbourg would be cast in national law and implemented by the executive. That’s already bitter reality in the EU. In the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, 80 per cent of the laws are decided on in Brussels and waved through by the German “Bundestag”.

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How states regain their monetary sovereignty

by Francis Gut

Russia’s economic situation is confusing. The western media paint a sombre picture of it relying on alarming figures. The price of oil, one of Russia’s main resources, decreased from about 110 US dollars per barrel at the end of 2013 to about 60 US dollars at the end of 2014, and this has been reflected dramatically in the rouble price. In the same period, the dollar gained about 95% against the rouble. However, sources outside the western media come to a more optimistic analysis. In particular, an article by *Dmitry Kalinichenko*, published on 26 December on *Global Research* shall be discussed here considering its essential ideas.¹

Putin sells oil and gas ultimately only in exchange for physical gold. If he accepts US dollars as payment, he exchanges it immediately for physical gold. In addition, it is to be observed that in the 3rd quarter of 2014, the net purchases of gold by the central banks rose for the 15th time in a row. Of the total amount of 93 tonnes in the third quarter Russia alone bought 55 tons. Thus, the international monetary system is beginning to change.

The petrodollar, which arose primarily from the sale of oil from Saudi Arabia and was previously regarded as a reserve currency is no longer of such vital importance. The West is, however, not only depending on oil from Saudi Arabia, but also on the energy supplies from Russia. And in the end these are going to come only for payments in physical gold. In addition, Russia has agreed to pay its necessary import goods with gold reserves.

In 1971, president *Richard Nixon* shut the “gold window”. For when *de Gaulle* in 1971 wanted to exchange dollars, which had accumulated in the *Banque de France*, for gold at Fort Knox – which the United States had guaranteed in the Bretton Woods Agreement 1944 – he experienced a rebuff.

In 2014, *Putin* opens the “gold window” again. The West is now using all possible means to push down the price of crude oil, natural gas and gold.

Putin’s strategy is likely to derive from Dr *Sergey Glazyev*, his economic adviser, believes *Dmitry Kalinichenko*, which would explain why *Glazyev* is to be found

on the list of those Russians who have been sanctioned by the West.

Another event has not yet been sufficiently interpreted: China has decided not to increase its currency reserves denominated in US dollar. China will of course continue to accept US dollars as payment, but will immediately exchange them for other values – most notably gold.

In addition, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), led by Russia and China, are also helping to change the role of the US dollar in the international monetary system. The dollar, the currency of the United States, thus loses its function as a definitive means of payment instead it becomes a temporary one in an intermediate period, which will ultimately be replaced by the gold.

So the future scenario looks like this: Russia buys goods from China for gold at current price while China buys energy products in Russia for gold at current price. In this trade the US dollar is missing; it disappears from the scene.

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"Giving priority to ..."

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Thus the sovereignty of a state has been lost. The parliament which represents the people in a representative democracy and has the legislative authority in the state is deprived of its duty. What is granted by the United Nations Charter, namely the right to self-determination of the peoples, is ignored by politicians with an elitist mindset while not even asking the affected people. Resistance is coming up; new parties are founded in the respective EU countries which aim at a withdrawing from the EU or the Euro. In Austria, a referendum was issued, which requests the country's withdrawal from the EU. The dissatisfaction of the people is becoming more and more noticeable.

Also Switzerland is affected by the loss of sovereignty. Since the adoption of the *Schengen Agreement* by the referendum in 2005, there have been over 100 law amendments that were waved through meeting with more or less opposition by the two chambers of the parliament. At that time, nobody mentioned that with the

approval of Schengen all the other laws adopted by the EU, had to be taken over, as well.

This year a further decision is on the agenda. What is euphemistically called "clarification of the institutional question" means: What law is to be applied in Switzerland in the future? Who will administer justice, when there are disagreements between Switzerland and the EU?

For the EU this is no question: It is the European Court of Justice. However, for Switzerland this would mean to delegate the judiciary to Brussels. What it takes to change agreements in individual cases, when it comes to considering the Swiss point of view is proven by the quarreling about the mass immigration initiative, which is not accepted by the EU. It threatens Switzerland with consequences. Now at the latest, everyone should have realised how much direct democracy will be possible when subjected to the EU's thumb.

The year 2015 is an election year in Switzerland. It is true that the election of the two chambers of parliament in contrast to representative democracies plays a less important role in our state, because the people's rights such as initiative and

referendum still offer the possibility for political correction. However, it will be important, whether the majority in the parliament sees a priority in the state's sovereignty or whether it is increasingly willing to serve the EU or other powerful states. Here we are called upon as citizens. What are we aiming at and where are the representatives of the people, who defend our national sovereignty in the sense of National Councillor Ruedi Lustenberger, defend our federalism, direct democracy and neutrality as irrefutable foundations of our nation? That must be the guiding political principle, if we want to contribute to peace in the world and have stable conditions inside our country. Outside our borders Switzerland is very thoroughly being watched by the friendly nations how it is maintaining its position in the international context and is keeping direct democracy as a model for the future. Favoritism, opportunism and egoism as Schiller shows, lead to oppression and dependency. What we need are upright citizens and citizens who engage in the preservation of our nation and do not submit to foreign powers. This is perceived positively also by the other peoples in the world. •

"How states regain ..."

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It should be emphasized that the global market for physical gold is very small compared to the world market for energy products and extremely small compared to the world markets for all goods. There is thousand times more paper money in circulation than physical gold.

We are talking here about "physical gold" because the sale of "physical energy products" allows Russia to draw "physical

gold" from the market. In its own sphere China acts in a similar way. The problem of the West is that its gold holdings are not unlimited.

In order to yet preserve the role of the US dollar as a reserve currency, Washington had applied two methods so far: that of the "coloured" revolutions and, as a substitute, military attack. After *Navalny*, whom Washington had supported as Putin's challenger, has himself completely discredited in the eyes of the Russian population by his relationship with Senator *McCain*, a leader of the coloured revolution is presently lacking. And concerning a military attack it is to consider that Russia is neither Afghanistan nor Iraq, but a nuclear-armed country.

And yet before this background, several questions need to be answered for us:

- Who will be the successor of *Navalny*?
- Will Germany undertake anything serious against the lust for power of generals like *Lothar Domröse*?
- How is the war in Ukraine to be assessed in this context?

¹ Dmitry Kalinichenko: Grandmaster Putin's Trap: Russia is Selling Oil and Gas in Exchange for Physical Gold, *Global Research*, 26.12.2014. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/grandmaster-putins-trap-russia-is-selling-oil-and-gas-in-exchange-for-physical-gold/5421567>

² cf.: Christoph B. Schiltz: "Nato plant Elitetruppe gegen Bedrohung aus dem Osten" (Nato plans elite force against threat from the East). In: *Die Welt* of 7.11.2014. <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article134072231/Nato-plant-Elitetruppe-gegen-Bedrohung-aus-Osten.html>.

More gold reserves for the Swiss National Bank

thk. In his article from 31 December for "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" professor of economics *Peter Bernholz* argues that the "current composition" of Swiss National Bank (SNB) capital reserves with a share "of 508 billion Swiss francs is extraordinarily" high but not ideal. "In view of the low gold price", according to Bernholz, an increase of the gold reserves of merely 7.7 per cent included in the above sum, would be "desirable", although he nominally concedes that those would not generate interest income. However, while the dollar has dropped from 4.11 to 0.97 Swiss francs since 1971, the value of gold has increased within that same period of time at an annual rate of 4.3 per cent. Unfortunately, the biggest part of National Bank reserves is being held in dollar and euro.

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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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, , Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

Account: Postcheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

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Scrutinise your contract partners at first!

Or: What does “Erasmus” have to do with the mass immigration initiative?

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

In this country there have always been student exchanges, because Switzerland has always been and still is a cosmopolitan country. In previous centuries, many Swiss did all their studies in one of the neighbouring countries and even completed their university degree there. In Switzerland, students who come from French-speaking Switzerland or Ticino, spend one or two semesters at a German Swiss university and vice versa. Today there is no difference: The student exchange takes place as ever. The only difference is that now the EU bureaucracy has taken up the matter and got a tremendous organisation going; with billions of euros that flow from one country to another and flow back – after leaving a considerable amount in the cash register of the headquarters in Brussels. Under the ambitious name “Erasmus” a programme that actually contains nothing else than promoting the exchange of students between countries, with the ulterior motive, “in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty to ‘encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe’”.¹ Or in other words: to uproot the young people of their home countries and make them particles of a unitary centralised state. “Erasmus” is short for “European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students”, i.e. a mobility grants programme. The reference to the great humanist is well-intended, if rather presumptuous.

What has “Erasmus” to do with Switzerland, you might ask; Switzerland is not at all a member of the EU. You are right – but you do not know our federal administration! Of course, Switzerland had to join “Erasmus”. In specific terms, this means that Switzerland has so far spent many millions to ensure that our students could study for one semester at a foreign university with a scholarship, and at the same time (considerably more) students from EU countries could study in Switzerland. Until the abrupt end.

Contracting parties as equals?

On 26 February 2014, the *State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation* SERI announced that the European Commission had excluded Switzerland from participation in Erasmus+. In 2014 (that same year), Switzerland had lost its status as “programme country”, but could only participate “with third-country status”.² A rather rude action against a state which so far has always paid its bill on

time. Legally qualified people refer to this as “termination without notice” and this is only permissible for a more serious offense of the contractor. What serious legal breach is Switzerland guilty of as “Erasmus” partner? Justifying its decision, the EU Commission specifies according SBFI: “Negotiations with the EU with regard to association have been suspended following adoption of the initiative against mass immigration; the EU cites the principle of the free movement of persons as a key element of the bilateral agreements.” This means that the EU Commission responded extremely fast to the Swiss referendum on 9 February 2014 and announced Switzerland its imaginary new rules of the game only two weeks later: The free movement of persons is explained as an essential prerequisite so that Switzerland may continue to participate in “Erasmus”. Hence the government is required to first sign the free movement agreement with Croatia, which has nothing to do with the “Erasmus” programme. This is a strange behaviour between contracting parties against the sovereign state of Switzerland, isn't it? What the old Trotskyist *Cohn-Bendit* let lose by the end of February, – “The Swiss will be on their knees and come back to us and realize that they do need Europe”³ – is so stupid that we do not need to pay attention to it. Just a side note here: If that is what the EU-rulers require of a sovereign contracting party, we prefer to drop the whole thing.

We understand a bilateral agreement between equal partners to be negotiated by both parties as equal partners, that is *before* the treaty comes into effect. In addition, on 9 February 2014, Switzerland has in no way violated the bilateral agreement on the free movement of persons. The Swiss people have only decided to try to settle this issue anew in the future. As everyone knows Switzerland is a very reliable contractor and keeps, of course, the contractual termination clauses, if it wants to terminate an agreement.

Annual Review 2014: Switzerland will be better off without “Erasmus”

Ten months have gone by since the adoption of the initiative against mass immigration and the resulting consequence of Switzerland being eliminated from “Erasmus”. Some interesting facts have emerged during this time.

First, the Federal Council has discovered that it can as well pay the money,

which it previously had to pay into the “Erasmus” coffer in Brussels, directly to the Swiss students. For the students willing to exchange no disadvantages were entailed;⁴ it is even an advantage for our Federal Treasury, because the scholarships cost less of course without going via Brussels.

Incidentally, the foreign students who wish to study for one semester at a Swiss university, do not go empty-handed, because they receive grants from the federal government – despite its being sacked from “Erasmus”. Switzerland, as always, is also generous here: While 2,970 Swiss students participated in the “Erasmus” programme in the years 2012 and 2013, 3,897 foreign students studied in Switzerland, which is about 1,000 students more.⁵

In addition, in early March 2014 it turned out that the Federal Council did not seem unhappy about the breakdown of the Swiss participation in the new “Erasmus” stage 2014–2020, since after the National Council and the Council of States had already approved the agreed 185 million CHF, the EU suddenly demanded more than twice as much.⁶ Federal Councillor *Schneider-Ammann* will therefore be very happy to allocate federal funds in the context of an independent solution.

Personal contact rather than computer programme

After a year without “Erasmus”, we note: We really do not need a monster agreement from Brussels, so that our students can do a semester abroad and foreign students are able to study in Switzerland vice versa. According to the daily press at the end of the year the Swiss universities negotiated bilateral agreements with individual universities abroad last year. Under the new Swiss name “Swiss-European Mobility” Programme over 200 individual agreements have been settled with other universities, which required an enormous “communication effort”.⁷

Perhaps in times of unencumbered and unlimited communication in the virtual network it causes no harm to humanity, if we rely on the direct relationship uptake by phone from time to time and if government officials and the students involved have to deal personally with Mr A. or Mrs B., rather than clicking on a number in a bureaucratic grid and being a number themselves.

And as for the effort of Brussels, to achieve more “mobility” among European

EU's free movement of persons is no humanitarian project

A contribution to the discussion about the vote of 9 February 2014

by Dieter Sprock

With their 'Yes' to the popular initiative against mass immigration the voters have expressed their will that they want to determine and regulate the immigration into Switzerland again autonomously. Nothing more and nothing less! No great effort is needed to understand that an influx of one hundred thousand immigrants per year is difficult to cope with for a small country like Switzerland with a population of eight million. In comparison, Germany with its 80 million inhabitants should accept one million immigrants, while it already reaches its limits with the current four hundred thousand immigrants. And similar problems exist in other EU countries surrounding Switzerland.

Therefore, the Swiss vote against mass immigration was observed in the EU with great interest, and there is good cause to believe that the consent would have been even higher there, if the citizens had had the opportunity to vote on this issue.

The vote took place in February last year. Since then, hardly a day has passed where the Swiss voters' Yes was not made a topic in any of the major leading media in the country and abroad, frequently in conjunction with the Bilateral Agreements and the free movement of persons. This included diatribes and absurd allegations. The Yes voters, who, after all, represent the majority, are placed in the right-wing corner and accused of being far right, xenophobic or even racist, and

our country is said to be isolationist and misanthropic.

The free movement of persons is by no means a humanitarian project. It is among the "four fundamental freedoms" of the EU single market such as the free movement of capital and the free movement of goods and services. All four "freedoms", which are in fact dictates of the financial world, contribute to the realization of a barrier-free single market within the EU in particular and not to the increase in the individual citizens' level of freedom. On the contrary, they severely restrict the possibilities of citizens to determine their domestic policy and the structure of their economy and lead to a massive reduction in democracy. This also applies to Switzerland that paid for the participation in the European internal market with the bilateral agreements.

Impact of the free movement of persons

In the economically weak countries, freedom of movement leads to a migration of the strongest and best trained forces who then lack in the development of their country's economy and infrastructure. And vice versa the wages can be massively reduced in the richer countries, because they can use new workforce almost unlimitedly. It becomes apparent nowadays that this development leads to professional training being criminally neglected

in some countries. A vicious circle from which we can hardly find a way out without changing the system.

After the Swiss Yes to the mass immigration initiative the EU, however, insists on the compliance of the free movement of persons, despite or perhaps precisely due to the fact that already several EU countries do no longer want to adhere to it. Apparently, with its stubborn attitude towards Switzerland the EU wants to set an example to maintain the principle of the free movement of persons within its borders.

Questions to the Left and Greens

One can understand that some representatives of the financial and economic world are campaigning for the preservation of the free movement of persons, since all this is finally about money, lots of money and power. However, the Left's and the Greens' campaigning for the free movement of persons raises some questions because they usually claim to represent the interests of working people.

It is indisputable that in this system, in which the free movement of persons is an important component, the gap between rich and poor opens further. Seen from this angle, the initiative to stop mass immigration should actually come from the Left and Greens. Why do they make such an effort against the interests of their own electorate? •

"Scrutinize your contract ..."

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students, it is already common knowledge: Neither "Erasmus" nor "Bologna" are mobility-compatible, even though they were supposedly invented for this purpose. Because the credit transfer at the host uni-

versity is still very uncertain.⁸ But as I said: The main objective of the exercise is a very different one: to train many academics to lead the United States of Europe someday. •

¹ European Commission, *Erasmus + Guidelines*, http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/guide/index_en.htm, p. 9

² SERI, *Adoption of the initiative against mass immigration and its impact for Switzerland*, www.sbf.admin.ch, Erasmus+ of 19.9.2014

³ www.swissinfo.ch of 27 February 2014

⁴ www.swissinfo.ch of 27 February 2014

⁵ www.moneycab.com/mcc/2014/03/07

⁶ "Was über Erasmus verschwiegen wird", *Basler Zeitung* of 6 March 2014

⁷ "Austausch auch ohne Erasmus", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 29 December 2014

⁸ "Partysemester für Elitekinder", *Weltwoche* 10/2014 of 5 March 2014

“Curriculum 21 – cementing unspeakable reforms”

“Introducing an additional radical reform called constructivism, if possible unnoticed”

Interview with National Councillor Verena Herzog



National Councillor
Verena Herzog
(picture thk)

The Curriculum 21 is giving the people much cause for discussion, mainly because the many initiatives demand a broad debate among the population. This is also urgently necessary, for this curriculum was ordered without

any necessity or democratic legitimacy. There is neither a political nor an educational reason for this monster curriculum, which aims at introducing a fundamental change of school and education. It actually is a paradigm shift.

In the following interview, the school politician and SVP National Councillor Verena Herzog comments in detail on the meaning and impact of Curriculum 21.

Current Concerns: What should a good elementary school provide especially in our direct democracy?

National Councillor Verena Herzog: The elementary school's mandate is to provide children with a solid foundation for the basic skills. On the one hand, these include the purely cognitive subjects such as mathematics, German language and science. The purpose is to provide knowledge that later can be applied. On the other hand, the arts education and craft skills should be promoted. For me, the teaching of values is crucial, since they get increasingly lost in our society whereas they are so important for a person's whole life. Enjoyment of performance and competition, care, precision and endurance are also included. Sufficient time must be provided for persistent practising. Performance is to be graded. Evaluations of students' performance must be understandable and comprehensible for instructors. In addition, the school should also help our children to become mature and responsible citizens who take on their responsibility by actively shaping our direct democracy.

Does Curriculum 21 provide these important components of a comprehensive education?

No, not at all. I expect a curriculum to include basic, mandatory annual objectives in the core subjects. The number of binding full year learning objectives is still too

high even after the so-called revision of Curriculum 21. With its radical competence orientation it has overstated its case. There is too little time to provide basic education so that students can understand and apply the fundamental educational content. This will result in the known hustle and bustle of “going through” as many competences as possible. A curriculum should be a practical tool in the hands of the teacher, which can actually be applied and creates transparency for parents and students, as well.

Curriculum 21 does not only cement unspeakable reforms such as the full integration of all children into the regular mainstream classes. Simultaneously, Curriculum 21 wants to introduce an additional radical new reform, constructivism, if possible unnoticed. With its questionable primacy of capability versus knowledge and the swappable educational contents Curriculum 21 establishes a highly complex system on a shaky foundation. This curriculum launched an education reform that is a high risk factor both materially and financially. An order to do so was never given. The previously common targeted way of teaching educational contents by the teacher, is meant to disappear. The energy that teachers had better used for teaching and working for the children must now be invested in additional post-graduate education in order to enable the teachers to acquire the new teaching and learning philosophy. The student's school rucksack will not be filled by one more microgram that way!

What do you consider an important cornerstone of teaching?

For me, the backbone of a good school is the teacher who guides the children and the class. The Swiss elementary school owes its internationally recognized quality to the teacher who comprehensively knows and assesses the class and students. He knows the development potential of his students best because at the primary school level he taught them in most subjects. He thus knows both the strengths and the weaknesses of the students and is therefore able to promote them in their strengths so that they learn how to compensate their weaknesses and overcome them with the help of their strengths, hence develop optimal motivation – an invaluable experience for their future existence in their lives and their work.

Constructivism and competence orientation require a type of school in which the class teacher is more or less abolished

and replaced by mere learning coaches. Such a system demands too much, particularly of the weaker students. Children finding out for themselves what is important to learn at what time and having to do so without specific instruction and supervision by the class teacher, is going to lead to predictable, great education cuts. Learning coaches for the elementary school are a totally wrong approach passing the child over.

The aim of Curriculum 21 was to increase equal chances ...

... No, the opposite is the case. In order to provide equal opportunities, clearly defined objectives, which the child should achieve, and the closest possible attention by the class teacher would be required. It has always been the teacher's task to start from where the children are at with respect to their achievement. But even this has its limits. We cannot compile a program for each child individually. It is crucial to consider the developmental stages of children. At primary school level, it would be important to pay special attention to the gross and fine motor skills, develop the craft skills and arouse the curiosity of children in addition to teaching the basic subjects.

Is the mixed-age group learning, touted as something progressive, part of the same wrong path as the competence orientation?

The term “Altersdurchmisches Lernen” (AdL, mixed-age group learning) is in part a fraudulent labeling. AdL does not mean the classic comprehensive school with its division into age groups in classes, but it means individualized instruction, regardless of the child's age in a group, hence with children of different ages and different levels of performance. This type of teaching represents a huge additional burden on teachers and demands too much of those many students who already have the greatest difficulties to concentrate. The handicapped child will be completely lost and will not be able to follow and join up. This is a disaster for the child's self-esteem. Precisely for this reason teaching in age groups was introduced in the first place! Hence, AdL means a giant step backwards.

You said earlier that some poor reforms, which we have already had, are going to be cemented by Curriculum 21.

“Curriculum 21 – cementing ...”

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For me, the most radical reform in recent years is full integration. According to this reform, any child including those with mental handicaps are to be taught in regular classes. This devours an awful lot of the teachers' energy on the one hand, it generates increasing uneasiness in the classroom and an enormous potential for distraction. On the other hand, experience shows that the full integration of the child with a disability is beneficial actually only in the rarest of cases. We now know that the suffering of having to realize every day that you are not able to keep up with other students is greater than the profit in a regular class. In a small, specialized class children with handicaps can be encouraged much more specifically, which is more promising ...

... *That is actually logical ...*

Indeed, and moreover the system of headteachers neither provides the expected potential – for example a better human resources management – merely in the least cases. Headteachers are often used to make new education reforms popular among the teachers, implement and control them. In addition, the introduction of Curriculum 21 is supposed to finally cement the educationally unconvincing language concept with the model 3/5, without having wasted one critical sentence about it.

To what extent do other areas, such as the teaching of learning contents, matter?

Of course, the teaching of contents should play a central role. By doing so, imagination and the ability to think and criticize are practised and trained. During childhood and adolescence learning aptitude is higher than ever. Each lesson should be used wisely. A systematic introduction not only to our body of knowledge, but also to our culture takes place in those years. Finally, our parents leave their children to the state in full trust that it makes use of these years of life for the benefit of the children and not to perform experiments on them.

A criticism of the curriculum is that in addition to the great factual and educational weaknesses it interferes into the private lives of parents and children. How must we understand this?

This includes, for example, the whole gender ideology. With respect to this topic the curriculum makers made amendments, they say. However, only singular words were exchanged in fact. Add to that the sex education. Teaching this topic is only justified from year 7 on. In preschool, sex education has no business. This is not part

of the school's business but of the family's.

But other areas that are adopted through various subordinate UN bodies in Switzerland, for example certain radical aspects of our lifestyles, are irrelevant in a curriculum, at least not without broad public discussion. How should one, for example, check whether a child is “self-competent”? What should be included and what not? Who sets the benchmark?

Curriculum 21 bypasses cantonal sovereignty. How should we understand the behaviour of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)?

The SVP favours the abolition of the German-speaking Swiss EDK or at least the reduction of their funds. The German speaking Swiss EDK has no legitimacy. Because the *HarmoS* project failed. Cantons that have not signed the concordat, remain and are independent. The EDK in Eastern Switzerland has its place in certain areas. If the cantons agree on annual objectives for learning, this would make sense especially regarding the mobility of families.

That means, if there is no democratic legitimacy, we really have an exceeding of authority.

That's right. Our elementary school must remain federal. In addition to the enforced conformity there is also competition, and competition is good. The cantons should aim at good schools and ensure that children are fully instructed. In addition, not all cantons have the same financial means. A rural canton has other conditions and requirements than an urban one. It makes sense to solve certain topics at the community level. The need for supplementary childcare or day schools is dependent on the location. Curriculum 21 wants to take over tasks, which have nothing to do with a curriculum. Thus, for example, they are trying to introduce day schools through the back door after the latter have received little attention politically.

The EDK has clearly signaled that Curriculum 21 is going to be implemented. Would it not be imperative to widely discuss it among the population before?

In the first place it is important that the teachers are being involved. They did not have a say in the development of Curriculum 21. And second, the population should be able to decide on something that is so essential, especially since Curriculum 21 does not only introduce annual learning objectives, but includes a comprehensive school reform including a new educational philosophy and significant financial impact with its constructivism and competence orientation.

So too few teachers from the field have been involved in the preparation of Curriculum 21. The population is completely left out, although it is our children that will suffer later on.

Major criticism from the grassroots and the economy were not considered, neither in the consultation nor in the revision of Curriculum 21. It is therefore not surprising that some 1,000 teachers got together in a group to critically scrutinize Curriculum 21 in detail. Even after the third revision in which a certain slimming down is visible, those in charge of the curriculum do not at all abandon the actual reforms, constructivism and the competence orientation, while mandatory annual objectives are still missing and Curriculum 21 is anything but user-friendly.

After your assessment one has the impression that it was clear the Curriculum 21 must now be implemented as quickly as possible without discussion and against all opposition.

Yes, that is indeed the case. The German-speaking Swiss EDK did not reckon with such resistance. They rashly said that only the *HarmoS* opponents and especially the SVP exponents would oppose Curriculum 21. But that was a fatal error. In the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” we could read several times that resistance and criticism came from various social and political movements. Several representatives of business and educational scientists queried the new reforms, its constructivism and competence orientation.

There is resistance in the population. In various cantons signatures are being collected. Is that not a sound reaction to the authoritarian approach of the curriculum makers?

Yes, of course. In some cantons parliamentary initiatives have been launched and signatures for popular initiatives are being collected, which aim at Parliament or the public having a say on the introduction of Curriculum 21.

This means that individuals must make an enormous effort to achieve something which is actually one of the fundamental pillars of our democracy, namely a say on such important issues. Add to that the costs of creating and implementing the curriculum in addition to the useless educational concept. And the taxpayer is charged the costs, the citizen who was not even asked beforehand. What will each canton have to contribute in terms of funding?

In order to be able to introduce constructivism and competence-based learning, at least 120 multipliers are trained solely

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“This self-organized learning consists of endless trial and error procedures”

What students think about self-organized learning

by Susanne Lienhard

The introduction of Curriculum 21, highly controversial even at its development stage, is now the responsibility of the German-speaking cantons. The curriculum meets with wide opposition. In various cantons citizens have launched initiatives demanding that the introduction of Curriculum 21 must be decided by Parliament rather than by the education authority. Citizens will thus be given the opportunity to call for a referendum opposing the decision, if necessary. Curriculum 21 follows the OECD model of a standardized education. Subject-specific goals regarding content that must be achieved at the end of the school year are no longer defined; instead learning contents are cut up into thousands of singular competences, which are to be checked by extensive testing. The competence orientation is associated with the dissolution of the previous subjects in favor of collective topics such as “Nature, Man and Society” and with the introduction of cycles instead of yearly grades, that way abolishing the previously fixed yearly learning objectives. Classroom teaching where the teacher together with all the children of his class strives at achieving the age-appropriate yearly learning targets, would definitely belong to the past, as the heterogeneity of the classes would increase significantly and individualized forms of learning, such as “self-organized learning” would become compulsive.

On 17 November, the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” reported on two schools that are al-

ready based on individualized learning. These examples show how the so-called “self-organized or self-discovering-education” is being implemented there in “Lernateliers” (learning studios) or “Lernlandschaften” (learning environments). The class structures are partially or completely dissolved, each student working alone at his own desk, which is provided with a privacy screening in the front, at the right and the left side, so that everyone is able to concentrate and to execute his own individual learning program. In the classroom, which resembles an open-plan office, absolute tranquility is the rule. Teachers have to restrain themselves, they are not allowed to give other than clues to the students where and how to find answers to their questions, for example, on the Internet, but they should not provide complete answers and should certainly not explain the learning material. They are reduced to so-called “learning guides” or “learning coaches”. This way students are to arrive at more discipline, motivation and sense of responsibility, skills that are in high demand by the economy. An interesting detail: Counselling is provided to both schools by a private company from Germany which sells its ideas of self-organized learning as a trademark and is obviously able this way to finance itself on the advanced training market.

Since in the course of my German lessons I had just worked out the differences between objectively informing and commenting text types with a high school class (10th grade), there was an opportu-

nity to present to the students the above-mentioned “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” report about “self-organized learning” and to make them write a commentary on the article. The results send a clear signal.

Maria writes: “I doubt that children will become more independent that way. In particular social interaction in the classroom is extremely restricted. A living classroom atmosphere motivates children more than a situation in which they are left to themselves for the further work on the topic, especially in case they have only partly understood a problem, after the short input of the so-called learning guide. In traditional classroom instruction, understanding the course material is already facilitated by the fact that about 20 other students might have the same question, or perhaps other questions which every student may benefit from. However, if the topic has to be worked on independently, only the individual questions can be clarified. If my sister had to learn in a self-organized way, I would see no chance for her, because she would possibly despair, in case she does not understand a point. She would probably almost be ashamed to ask a question, because she might think that the other students understand everything.”

Lukas shares *Maria*’s concerns when he writes: “Self-organized learning deprives shy students, who do not dare to ask questions, the opportunity to hear the fellow students’ questions and the respective an-

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“Curriculum 21 – cementing ...”

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in the canton of Thurgau, which respectively should train their school teams and support them in their work. Transferred to all German-speaking cantons enormous costs in the amount of at least double-digit millions will have to be paid. In addition to the costs of training, costly and time-consuming administrative tasks are generated which will devour the energy that should be better used by the teachers directly in the classroom. If we work out the costs for the development of Curriculum 21, for which 5,000 competencies were developed involving

more than a hundred people in the making, everyone can imagine what the costs have amounted to only up to this day. Not to mention the evaluation and review ... The decision on these payroll expenses without any democratic legitimacy must be submitted to the people.

After your observations, I conclude that there is no room for the child – who should actually be at the center of attention – in this curriculum. How do you see that?

Looking at Curriculum 21, which I have so far examined in detail, I must say that it entirely neglects the child. It is a bubble of competencies that have been formulated in detail, but the child, who should be at the center, is completely neglected. It

is all about ideologies that were written by some bureaucrats and school reformers without ever having had a public debate on them. The first version of Curriculum 21 included over 570 pages that have meanwhile been reduced with the help of some cosmetics. But neither the basic concept nor the targets have changed. As a comparison, the new, detailed and user-friendly proposal for a primary school curriculum written by the SVP contains specific annual objectives on 97 pages. As a wise proverb says: Less is more!

National Councillor Mrs Herzog, thanks for the detailed interview.

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

“This self-organized learning ...”

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swers of the teacher, which might have helped them understand things better in the former whole-class teaching.”

Anika says: “For me personally a good class community has always been very important for a good learning atmosphere. This can not come about if each student performs his individual program on his own. The interpersonal values are rationalized away by self-organized learning.”

Michael adds for consideration: “For compulsory education this form of teaching is not a good solution, since the differences in performance will be very great.”

Niki asks himself: “What is more valuable with respect to education, a class community or learning in isolation? How can children who have to learn in a self-organized manner acquire social skills? When I ask my parents and grandparents what they remember positively about their school, they always relate experiences with their classmates. So the social environment during the school days has a great influence on the experience of school, after all. During self-organized learning these social bonds are not completely abolished, but greatly reduced. This will very likely have an impact on the students’ later social life.”

Theo tells of his younger brother, who attends the first grade of secondary school and must learn in a “self-organized” manner in a learning environment: “Luc is quite a good and ambitious student, but has trouble to develop topics himself. Precisely this is the Achilles’ heel of self-organized learning. Before each test Luc has no idea of the subject, although he has completed several corresponding practice sheets. Now my father or I sit with him night after night to work on the learning material that he did not understand. We do what actually would be the teacher’s job. For me this is not a problem, because I learned the material, recently. However, if parents do not have time to learn with their children, or simply do not have the necessary skills, the children are lost. And this

in a period of their lives that will shape their future.”

Katharina addresses contradictions in the argumentation of the proponents of self-organized learning: “In the NZZ report ‘Learning to learn’ it is often repeated that self-organized learning would benefit the weakest members of the class as the teacher will have more time for them. However, it is also said that the teachers are not really allowed to help them, but only give some clues on how to manage the work on their own. This is like giving a rope to a layman on the high seas and telling him: ‘If you fasten it with a knot and pull it, a sail will be hoisted.’ The man will try to attach the rope at various places. Ideally, he may find the right place by chance. But if it does not work, he will be discouraged and loses interest. This self-organized learning consists of endless trial and error procedures.”

Sarah confirms this demotivating effect: “My own experience as a student shows that the motivation level drops in case of a monotonous instructional design and that failure when trying to solve tasks in isolation, depress rather than encourages further efforts. However, failures are guaranteed, due to lack of explanations during self-organized learning. This in turn decreases the interest of the students, a process which will ultimately lead to a deterioration of their educational achievement.”

Reto adds for consideration: “For many teachers, this concept is certainly not desirable, as they enjoy teaching. Some teachers are bothered by just giving hints for individual work, especially since they are asked to help in subjects which they do not teach themselves. The running of the school is supposed to become more flexible, but will this really happen, if the teachers are not supporting the new ideas? Probably not, because unmotivated teachers can hardly generate motivated, independent and responsible students.”

Julia finally says: “How can you learn something without being actually taught? Indeed, you do not put a learner-driver just behind the wheel hoping he will be able to teach himself how to drive a car. An accident is predictable. Therefore, the learner-driver takes a class first, obtains explanations and performs practice with the teacher. It should be just the same in school.”

The comments are coming from young people who have experienced traditional classroom instruction before, who have had studied that way for several years and were then confronted with the concept of self-organized learning. Their comments express a keen sensorium for the conditions of successful learning: a good class community as a prerequisite of a good learning climate, communication of knowledge and guidance by the teach-

Cantonal education articles

The jurisdiction in educational matters in federal Switzerland is up to the cantons. Reading the different cantons’² educational articles, each expresses in the typical own wording that school’s business is much more comprehensive than drilling children on test-conform “competences”. School’s most distinguished business is to prepare children and adolescents for the future tasks as fellow human beings and citizens of our direct democracy. To consider just one example we print the current valid educational article of the canton of St. Gall here:

Education Act of 13 January 1983

The Grand Council (Parliament) of the Canton of St. Gall in application of Articles 2 to 8 of the Constitution on 16 November 1890 decrees as law:
Educational mission

Article 3

- 1 Elementary schools support parents in the upbringing of the child toward a life-affirming, efficient and socially responsible person. They are run according to Christian principles.
- 2 They promote the different and diverse talents and natures of students. They teach them the basic knowledge and skills, provide access to the various areas of culture and guide them toward independent thinking and acting.
- 3 They educate the students to be responsible persons and citizens according to the principles of democracy, freedom and social justice within the constitutional state.

er, motivated teachers, working out the subject matter together in the classroom community, encouragement by the others’ questions, social justice, etc..

Lino Gutzella, President of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH), confirms the high school students’ statements: “Creative, critical, independent thinking is something that you have to practise like playing the violin. And this practice does not take place via internet, but especially by direct contacts with other people. Learning at a high level, real learning, learning to think – this is a process that is determined socially and emotionally. [...] The moment when ideas arise, the moment of awareness, is something of the most beautiful that a person can experience. And this experience only takes place in interpersonal exchange. Learning is a communion between master and pupil, spoken in a pathetic way. [...] It

Put Curriculum 21 also in Aargau to the vote!

At the end of December in Aargau the popular initiative “Ja zu einer guten Volksschule – Nein zum Lehrplan 21” (“Yes to a good elementary-school – No to Curriculum 21”) was launched. The Aargau committee was able to inform the public that after only four months over 3,000 eligible citizens voted for a cantonal referendum that opposes the tacit implementation of Curriculum 21.

Source: www.lehrplan21-nein.ch

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Russia and the West

The other Europe

by Karl Müller

Various media quoted or provided a forum for a number of European voices who do not agree with the confrontation policy with Russia.

Here is a small selection:

"I cannot overlook the fact – and that it is not a coincidence – that *Henry Kissinger*, *Helmut Schmidt*, *Hans-Dietrich Genscher*, and even of course *Helmut Kohl*, not to mention *Mikhail Gorbachev* – all of them old men – hold the same view: There is no stability in Europe without Russia, only with Russia. And I feel very comfortable in their company." This is what *Egon Bahr* said in an interview with *Compact* magazine, issue of January 2015. 92-year-old Egon Bahr is one of the fathers of the German policy of détente during the sixties and seventies and up to this day, his words still carry weight internationally.

On Hungarian television ("German-Russian Business News" dated 12 December 2014), Hungary's Prime Minister *Viktor Orban* again expressed his view and his criticism of the US role in Europe. Orban accuses the US of "interfering at an unacceptable degree in the domestic politics of Central European countries." About the scheduled agreement TTIP he said: "It is obvious that in the matter of trade and energy policy it is about definite American interests." By means of the Ukraine-conflict the

US wanted "us to be drawn into a conflict that is harmful to us. A cold war has started between Russia and the United States in which we do not want to have a part."

As well interesting is what the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" reported from France on 20 December. Admittedly, the subtitle is rather pejorative: "The French Right reveres Russia as a defender of Christian civilization," but in the text itself voices from other political camps also get a chance to be heard. "One of the most outspoken critics of the policy of sanctions [against Russia] is the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) deputy *Thierry Mariani*. The former Minister of Transport has good contacts within the business community and makes use of these to maintain relations with Russia in spite of the sanctions. 'What happened in *Yanukovych's* downfall in Ukraine is nothing other than a putsch supported by NATO and the West', Mariani said."

The Frenchman Mariani is by no means alone with his analysis. Amongst other things, it should be recalled here that in his detailed analysis "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault" (*Foreign Affairs* from September/October 2014), US political scientist *John Mearsheimer* comes to the conclusion, that "Washington [...] evidently supported the putsch in Ukraine."

Mariani, the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" continues, achieved much support for his position from his party, particularly of those still committed to the policy of former President and General *de Gaulle*, who had urged a "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals". From the French left, former Defence Minister *Jean-Pierre Chevènement* spoke out. Chevènement promotes a strategic partnership with Russia. The spokesman of the French Left Party, *Jean-Luc Mélenchon*, was also clear in his message when he criticized the official policy. According to his statement, France reacts to Moscow "only as America's vassal."

A report by the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" of 27 December shows that the President of the Czech Republic, *Milos Zeman*, is also among the critics of Western policy towards Russia. His statement is quoted with the words that the truth about the situation in Ukraine might be learnt rather from the Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* than from the NATO intelligence services, that a "civil war" was taking place in Ukraine and there could be no talk of a Russian aggression and that the sanctions against Russia were going contrary to the "dialogue of civilizations".

Also interesting is what the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 27 December reported from Germany. Right at the beginning it states: "The German Social Democrats find it increasingly difficult to support the sanctions against Russia. [...] Intimates of the Foreign Minister [*Frank-Walter Steinmeier* of the SPD] are in favor of relaxing the sanctions."

Internally, the newspaper continued, "it is pointed out in the SPD that there are powerful forces in other EU countries such as Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia pushing for a rapid lifting of sanctions." Also, the German foreign minister had opposed the Chancellor when she had taken a tough stance against Russia in Sydney, Australia. One should refrain from making any public statements "which compromise all chances of easing the tension and de-escalating the conflict."

A meeting of German and Russian media representatives in Sochi, Russia, on 18 December points in the same direction. The meeting took place in spite of or because of the strained relations and was organized by the "Petersburg Dialogue". The following brief resolution was adopted unanimously, ie. supported by the German and Russian journalists:

"The Media Task Force of the Petersburg Dialogue held a meeting in Sochi on 18 December 2014. After a passionate and controversial discussion about the state of German-Russian relations both sides demanded the continuation of the Petersburg Dialogue as a civil society dialogue between the two countries. In this tense times such a forum is more necessary than ever. *The participants aim at playing a part in objectifying the public debate. It is exactly the journalists who must contribute to verbal disarmament.* Their performance of this important task must not be interfered with. *For mutual understanding it is beneficial to focus on still existing commonalities.* The upcoming 70th anniversary of the end of WWII and the liberation of Germany from National Socialism will offer a good occasion for this. Exercising this responsibility, the Media Task Force of the Petersburg Dialogue will continue their work, with which they expect assistance from the governments of both countries." (Emphasis added by the author)

The German coordinator of the meeting, the Director of the *Central German Broadcasting Channel*, MDR, *Johann Michael Möller*, was quoted by the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" on 29 December as follows: "Like other guests, MDR-radio

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is an illusion to believe that reading a text or looking at a website is enough to understand its meaning. In my opinion this does not work. Learning is a process in which students and teachers participate mentally and physically. It requires the genuine, not something canned."¹

The contradiction to the program postulated by Curriculum 21 could not be a greater one. The education of creative, critical and independently thinking individuals, who will be able to help shaping our direct democracy responsibly as citizens, will not succeed with this curriculum. It does not fulfill the educational mandate of the elementary school, as it is defined in the cantonal legislation.² •

¹ "Lernen ist Magie" (Learning is magic), interview with Lino Guzzella. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung on Sunday* from 28 December 2014. <http://www.nzz.ch/nzzas/nzz-am-sonntag/lernen-ist-magie-1.18451751> (1.1.2015)

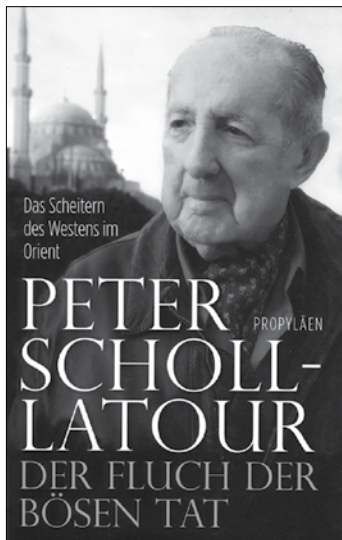
² See *Current Concerns* No. 6 of 11 February 2013. In this issue, the articles of education of all cantons were collected.

Peter Scholl-Latour: “The Curse of the Evil Deed”

“The West’s Failure in the Orient”

by Rainer Schopf

Just before his death, *Peter Scholl-Latour* wrote a new book, published in the fall of 2014. It is his thirty-third book, in a long row of excellent publications during the last 70 years. In Germany, his 1980 book “Death in the rice fields” on the Indochina War has been the most published non-fiction book since 1945. In “The Road to the New Cold War” (2008), he analysed the years 2001–2008, especially the consequences of 9/11 for global politics. Now we can finally read “The West’s Failure in the Orient” with the latest analyses of the battle fields in the Orient and Ukraine. It is the legacy of a German-French great European, a lover of people and places,



ISBN 978-3-549-07412-1

from the Levant to the Gulf and beyond. Peter Scholl-Latour was a true cosmopolitan.

Biography

Peter Scholl-Latour was born on 8 March 1924 in Bochum. His parents were from Alsace-Lorraine. Because of his Jewish mother, *Mathilde Nussbaum*, he was considered a *half-breed of 1st degree* according to the Nuremberg Race Laws. His mother's brother, *Robert Nussbaum*, was killed in Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen. Peter Scholl-Latour was baptized Catholic and from 1936 to 1940 he visited the Jesuit College *Sankt Michael* in Swiss Freiburg. Then he had to return to Germany and passed his Baccalaureat in Kassel in 1943. In 1944, he wanted to serve as a volunteer in the French army fighting Germany. When this failed, he tried to join *Tito's* partisans. But he was caught right away in Styria and kept in prisons in Graz, Vienna and Prague by the Gestapo. After his liberation Peter Scholl-Latour served in the French paratrooper unit *Commando Ponchardier*.

From 1948, Peter Scholl-Latour studied language, literature and politics at the University of Mainz and the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1954, he took a doctoral degree with a thesis on the German author *Rudolf G. Binding*. In addition, he obtained a diploma in Arabic and Islam studies from the University of Beirut in 1958.

In his professional career, he worked for many German and French newspa-

pers, German radio and TV stations (*ARD*, *WDR*, *ZDF*, *RTL*, *UFA* film studios) and the weekly magazine *Stern*. Since 1988, Peter Scholl-Latour mainly worked as a free-lance writer. He held both the German and the French citizenships and valued *Charles de Gaulle* and *Konrad Adenauer*. He died on 16 August 2014 in Rhöndorf and is buried on the forest cemetery there.

Two features are characteristic for his journalistic career: the question *cui bono* and his constant struggle for authentic and true first-hand information. He was always on site and risked his life many times because he did research for his books by himself. He had a strong distaste for press spokesmen, spin doctors and think tanks. In dialogue with his partners he formed his own picture of the situation and made a number of enemies. The more enemies, the more honour. For decades, he worked against the current of western mainstream. In choosing his words he never simply repeated the transatlantic propaganda theses. He was a friend of many high-level politicians, however, always keeping a critical distance in his comments. In his speech at Scholl-Latour's 90th birthday, former Chancellor *Helmut Schmidt* said: “Scholl-Latour always checked his writing critically, it is the well-considered truth. And this is a crucial criterion for friendship: To be able to rely on the fact that the friend is saying what he believes is the truth, truth and nothing but the truth!” (p. 344)

For western readers, his book is much easier to read than the analyses on Asia by *Kishore Mabubani* or *Pankaj Mishra*. Most cited persons come from the Western and Oriental cultures. Interested contemporaries will have heard about a number of them. The register is listing some 300 persons and it is thrilling to read what they have to say on the Curse of the Evil Deed.

The Curse of the Evil Deed

Peter Scholl-Latour has preceded his book with a citation from *Friedrich Schiller's Wallenstein*:

“This is the curse of every evil deed that, propagating still, it brings forth evil.”

On its inner linings, the book has a map with the *Sykes-Picot Line*. This secret agreement [concluded in 1916] split up northern Iraq, Syria and south-eastern Turkey between France and Great Brit-

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director Johann Michael Möller, the coordinator on the German side, also complained about the alarmingly aggressive tone, reminiscent of assessments of attitude and ethos, taken by German media, when it comes to the issue of Russia and Ukraine.

It needs to be added here that all these voices are showered with polemical accusations in those European media that are committed to the official US policy. However, those individuals who are undeterred by this continue to exist. The struggle will continue in the year 2015. For us as citizens, the question arises of what we can do to ensure that the weighting of this other Europe will grow.

Perhaps what the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” referred to as “prag-

matism” in the British “security establishment” on the last day of the year, on 31 December, will help. *Tony Brenton*, Britain's former ambassador to Moscow, is quoted at the end of the article in question, with the following words: “In the days when foreign policymakers thought in the long term, there would have been real discomfort at the prospect of Europe permanently landing itself with an embittered, nuclear-armed neighbour, with fast growing links with China [...]. Isn't now the time to start engaging with an undoubtedly weakened Russia on a way out in Ukraine in which everybody's concerns are taken into account?”

(cf. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11302151/Nows-the-time-to-shake-hands-with-Vladimir-Putin.html>)

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ain. In 1917, the revolutionary Russia published this secret agreement, thus exposing the evil deed of the Entente powers which were not amused. In seven chapters, Scholl-Latour describes centuries of the West's political and military interventions between the Levant and the Gulf.

Ukraine

In the first chapter, the author reviews the questionable western politics towards Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989: "The most absurd territorial conflict is happening in the Ukraine and the bloodshed is most severe in precisely the same region which was among the bloodiest battlefields in World War II." (p. 9) After *Napoleon*, *Wilhelm II* and *Hitler*, the Ukraine is again to be misused as a deployment zone against Russia. "The silliest expression that came to the mind of the German commentators in the last months in order to vilify those voices that are calling for a minimum of objectivity in the assessment of Russian diplomacy is 'Putin-Versteher' [somebody who understands Putin]" (p. 18) They include the former chancellors *Helmut Schmidt*, *Helmut Kohl* and *Gerhard Schröder*, German top managers and intellectuals. And the current chancellor, *Angela Merkel*? Peter Scholl-Latour calls her the *Tsar from Uckermark*, who arrogates a right to criticize the *underdeveloped* Russians for a lack of democracy and freedom of opinion. (p. 31) Just one remark: In World War II 150,000 Ukrainian nationalists had volunteered for the "Waffen-SS" who killed 600,000 Russians, Poles and Jews and fiercely fought against Russia until 1950. (p. 26f.) Their leader, *Stepan Bandera*, is still a national hero in Ukraine, even today. He and his SS militia, rather than being indicted and convicted in the Nuremberg Trials, were transferred to the US and Canada. His successors, trained by the US secret service, started the Maidan, toppled the elected president and placed four of their fascists as ministers in the new government. If German politicians are now playing the role of watchdogs and pontiffs of a free order, Peter Scholl-Latour says: "A bit more reserve would have been desirable." (p. 31)

Peter Scholl-Latour is aware of the fact that this introduction makes him likely to be charged with Anti-Americanism. But since the second Iraq campaign, if not earlier, we have been subject to a broad disinformation campaign which is performed by the US, Great Britain and Israel through perfectly organized institutions and in fact should be taken as serious as the ubiquitous surveillance by the NSA. Once again Helmut Schmidt, the most re-

spected elder statesman in Germany, is playing the lone voice in the wilderness when he expresses surprise in the newspaper 'Bild', that *some western politicians and many media are currently writing very differently from the way the Germans think. The Germans, Schmidt says, are far more peaceable than the columnists of the 'Welt', the 'FAZ', 'Bild' and also [...] the 'Zeit'.*" (p. 18) And Peter Scholl-Latour goes on: "The global disinformation campaign by American propaganda institutes which has succeeded in manipulating the European media landscape completely may seem justified when the goal was to deceive the enemy. It may even be useful when coordinating allies. But it turns out disastrous if their authors get entangled in their own web of lies and obsessions, if they are victims to their own fantasies." (p. 37) This exactly is the curse of the evil deed.

Turkey and Syria

Peter Scholl-Latour left for Anatolia in the spring of 2013 in order to visit a unit of the (German) military stationed there. Their *Patriot* missiles were pointed at Syria and were brought, commissioned by the Ankara government, to this place from NATO's German field commando in Geltow near Potsdam, in order to demonstrate solidarity with the Turkish alliance partner. But everyone was aware that it was a quite superfluous gesture of support. "The superiority at the disposal of Ankara's General Staff was so enormous that the Turkish army [...] could move its division up to the City of Damascus in the shortest time. In the course of a systematic disinformation campaign, the politicians and the media of the West had agreed upon the version that any anti-civilian attack could only occur because of terrorist intentions of the Syrian *Assad* regime. The more believable hypothesis, in which the rebels, supported by the West, would have an even greater interest in staging such occurrences in order to influence international opinion, in addition and above all, to set the *Erdogan* government against the ostracised government of Damascus, was obviously not seriously considered in NATO circles. The elementary question *cui bono* – who profits from it? – was not asked." (p. 47f.)

Peter Scholl-Latour went again to Syria in May 2014, as the war was already in full swing. His observations and analyses are embedded in narratives of his experiences from earlier journeys which partially were undertaken 60 years back. His newly acquired insights are integrated in the context of these past experiences and of his profound knowledge of history from ancient to modern times. His descriptions of the people and countrysides, whom he encountered on his trips and who accompanied him, are literary valuables and con-

firm his profound commitment to the welfare of people all over the world.

Peter Scholl-Latour is familiar with the history of the Sunnites, Shiites, Alevi, Christians, Jews, Kurds etc. between the Levant and the Gulf. He makes connections between the actual occurrences and their historical beginnings. Concentration is needed in order to follow his complicated thought patterns, if needed, using a cheat sheet and being patient and courageous, in order to work one's way through the crevices of the many-sided and intricate connections. As a reward, there is nothing less than an explanation and recognition of the facts, hidden by our media. The reader is pleased when Peter Scholl-Latour himself asks, who could ever find his way through this thicket. Regarding the situation in Syria, he writes: "There are no clearly defined territories in which friends and enemies stand cleanly separated from each other. A sort of leopard skin pattern has emerged, as in the late phase of the American involvement in Vietnam, where the pattern constantly changed." (p. 89) In a similar way, my father described the situation in Europe at the end of the Second World War as millions of people were fleeing being at risk to become the senseless victims of a widely exercised expulsion.

Today, there are no organised chains of command and the people are now fleeing by millions. Peter Scholl-Latour didn't even try to get a realistic picture of the military balance of power in Syria, nor a strategic analysis. For him, more important than the daily political skirmish, were the war mongering forces in this "war by proxies". (p. 91f.)

What are the great lines of policy in Syria, which, according to Peter Scholl-Latour is "in a state of anarchy"? (p. 94)

- The Syrian rebellion is not at the centre of a megacity as in Cairo or Tunis, rather at the edge of the Syrian state.
- The war is brought in from the outside, up to that point, a stable state formation, the single stable state formation in the Orient.
- The revolutionary *Free Syrian Army (FSA)* was built up by means of massive financing of the Saudi-Arabian and Qatar Emirates.
- The structure of the FSA command was provided by Jordan by instruction of the CIA.
- Under the CIA's direction, the Syrian rebels were equipped with modern arms.
- In Washington, Riad and Jerusalem, one was convinced, that the rebellion against Assad would cause an irresistible uprising of the people which would make the Assad- and Alevi Clans surrender within a short time. "Once again

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"Peter Scholl Latour: 'The Curse of ...'"

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- as happened in Iraq, in Libya, in Tunisia, in Egypt, tomorrow maybe in Iran – the western secret service became victim of their own wishes and utopian mismanagement." (p. 96)
- The thousand-kilometre-long border to Turkey was opened under the Erdogan government for the weapons arsenal from Saudi Arabia and Qatar along the entire line.
- The warriors of the Islamic State always succeed in capturing the weapon deliveries, which with the help of the CIA and the dubious *Contract workers*, were intended for the FSA.
- The total fiasco of the western subversive strategy in the Near East is shown by the support of those organisations which want to establish an Islamic State in Syria.
- Peter Scholl-Latour gives a deserted FSA major from one of the regular troops of Assad the opportunity to speak: "You might wonder why I report on our helpless situation so frankly ... But today we know that we are only pawns in a *great game*." (p. 99)
- The Syrian President Assad will be supplied new war material by Russia

and Iran and this way can avoid the victory of the rebels.

- The French and the British were located, as in Libya, at the top of the western military operations against the Syrian airport and military bases, and were provided with munition and logistics from the Americans.

Only when the warriors of the Islamic State started to organise systematic massacres among people of other faiths, *Barack Obama* allowed the military attack by his air force with the argument that a genocide of the Christians and Yeziden must be avoided.

- "The regime change in Damascus or the splitting up of Syria was the intention of the USA, Israel and Saudi Arabia which primarily served to counter the influence of Shiite Islam [...] and to show the Tehran mullacracy where the limits are." (p. 99)

In the continuation of his book Peter Scholl-Latour describes in depth the confusion of ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts of the peoples between the Levant and the Gulf. At the same time he emphasises the century-long political and military interventions of the West which are responsible, to his mind, that these people cannot live in peace and respect with each other. Peter Scholl-Latour was

For Peter Scholl-Latour's 90th birthdayby *Helmut Schmidt*

Journalists can comment on the way of the world in very different ways. For example out of the comfortable perspective of domestic home offices. Or else, they travel by themselves to foreign countries and obtain their own impressions. No doubt *Peter Scholl-Latour* obviously belongs to the latter.

For decades Peter Scholl-Latour has impressed by his expertise about other continents and cultures. It is based on countless personal encounters and experiences. His reports are not only knowledgeable observations, but also impress by their clear geopolitical view.

Source: *Greeting from Federal A.D. Helmut Schmidt on Peter Scholl-Latour's 90th birthday.*

familiar with the Orient for decades. Only recently he travelled there. His last book is like a legacy. It sharpens the view on reality and blows away the fog of disinformation and manipulation of western power politics.

Organised crime – trafficking human beings – crime scene Germany

by *Dr Barbara Hug*

A rich class is profiting from the poverty of many. This class knows to perpetuate poverty and make as much money out of it as possible. Poverty means

persistent distress, worry, pain, suffering, despair. One of the most reprehensible forms of exploitation of poverty is done by promises, for example, the promise to create wealth for poor women and their families if they prostitute themselves in wealthier countries.

Germany is a rich country, it has become, according to *Manfred Paulus*, a center of the perverse trade with women and children. Women and children trafficking has its place as an industry of organized crime, it is also one component of the enforced migration of hundreds of thousands of people from poverty, it is the beneficiary of wars and the related chaos in the respective countries. Orphans from refugee camps, women with no income and no family breadwinner, but also the lucrative removal of organs from healthy young people to the purpose of selling – who wants to extend the list of misery?

During his work as First Detective Chief Superintendent M. Paulus has gathered many years of experience in the field of red-light crime, of trafficking women and children, and pedophilic crime. His elaborations grant a deep, though very unpleasant insight into this scene. The scene works covertly, it is intertwined, brutal, ruthless, and it benefits from a society that is looking sideways. Paulus thoroughly clears up the prejudice that the young prostituting women from Southeast Europe, for instance were participating voluntarily in the business. Who still believes this after reading this book, is a victim of the targeted deception mechanisms of organized crime, that obviously does not act in a vacuum.

Those who want to see, can see, and those who don't want to see, don't see, or they only see, when their neighbour's lovely little son fails to come home from school one day ...

The facts and examples described by Paulus mirror real events. They are individual stories as they could be related by the thousands. The dirty lucrative business continues worldwide. It is to be questioned whether there is a way to stop it

other than the economic improvement in the impoverished countries.

Source: Manfred Paulus. *Organisiertes Verbrechen – Menschenhandel – Tatort Deutschland. Frauenhandel, Kinderhandel. Zwangsprostitution, Organhandel, Handel von Arbeitskräften* (Organised crime – human trafficking. German crime scene – woman, child trafficking, forced prostitution, organ trafficking, trafficking of workers). Klemm + Oelschläger, Ulm 2014



ISBN 978-3-86281-70-3

About the necessity to consider the ethical and cultural dimensions in the education debate

Thoughts about “Witching Hour – The Practice of Non-education”, a book worth reading by Konrad Paul Liessmann

by Urs Knoblauch, cultural publisher and high school teacher, Fruthwilen TG

Parents and teachers' organizations, but especially representatives of the business world keep complaining about the lack of necessary values, when schooling, education and teaching curricula are discussed. In some instances the required skills, commitment and enthusiasm for a cause are also missing. In these discussions the central tasks of schools and parents are always put to consideration: Why do we actually need a good education? Parents and professional representatives ask political questions, too: What are all those millions of tax money spent on?

Especially with regard to the on-going discussion about the centralistic *Curriculum 21*, which is being planned for 21 Swiss cantons, the book “Geisterstunde» (Witching hour) by Prof. Konrad Paul Liessmann¹ makes a valuable contribution to this important debate of democratic and state-political opinion formation. The author teaches at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Vienna, he is an essayist and cultural publisher. In 2003, he was awarded the *Honorary Price of the Austrian Book Market* and in 2010 the *Donau-land Non-Fiction Book Price*. He is the editor of the book series “Philosophicum Lech”. His two most recent publications were entitled “Das Universum der Dinge” (The Universe of things) (2010) and “Lob der Grenze” (Praise of the boundary) (2012).

Thinking about the meaning of education

It is most welcome and necessary that another public figure voices his opinions here, a man who is familiar with and actually teaches the values and issues of European, humanistic and Christian-occidental educational culture in their significance for our present and future times. His book offers important stimulations when thinking about the essentials of education, learning and culture. “Nobody seems to know any longer what education means, but everybody demands to reform it”, Professor Liessmann states, “an entire market has emerged where education researchers and experts, agencies, test institutes, lobbies and last but not least educational politicians of all parties perform their business and sometimes their mischief”. In separate chapters the author presents practical examples in easily understandable language: “Current trends in classrooms and lecture halls, in semi-

naries and editorial offices, in the virtual and real-political worlds” are scrutinized with a sharp, pointed and urgently necessary criticism.

The reader can draw valuable conclusions about on-going debates in the schooling and educational sectors as well as about the culture business in general. All this shows the necessity to comprehend and to clearly define issues and facts and to weigh them carefully from a culture-historical perspective instead of surrendering them to arbitrariness or even worse to the lobbyists. Liessmann describes the developments of “Pisa and Bologna” as an “educational catastrophe” accompanied by the educational experts: “It is creepy: Whenever national educational systems are evaluated, PISA results are published, each time when the annual OECD ‘Education at a Glance’ report repeats its dire prognosis for Germany and Austria, scolding the low academic rate and the inequality of chances in schools, he or she will most certainly pop up out of nowhere: the educational expert. Nobody can tell what qualifies him or her to be called an expert, being in most instances a graduate of the very educational system that is criticized on national television screens [...]” (p. 30)

A lot of valuable achievements were carelessly thrown over-board in Switzerland when the well-proven cantonal teachers' seminars and schools of applied arts were transformed into universities. Theory-biased academicians (often from Germany) were put in charge without sufficient practical experience. Many seasoned school practitioners on the other hand were marginalized despite their being well-versed in Swiss school tradition, now it becomes more and more apparent that they left a void behind them.

The great achievements of our Swiss technicians, engineers, farmers, craftsmen, artists and scholars were possible with the old traditional school, with simple means, big classes and without any education expert industry. (see “Eigenständig, innovativ und weltoffen – dem Ausbildungs- und Arbeitsplatz Schweiz Sorge tragen” in *Current Concerns* No. 37/38 of 20.12.2013)

Valuable concepts and ideas in the same direction are summarized by Prof. Liessmann in the chapters “Competent non-sense – the disappearance of knowledge” and “Twilight of the subjects”, where he analyzes the new tendency to

lump various distinct subjects together into a “new indiscipline”. The subject “history” for instance is supposed to disappear in Switzerland. Another Chapter entitled “PowerPoint-karaoke” shows the inflationary consumerist attitude in classrooms towards pre-fabricated diagrams, figures and effects with ever growing and often absurd use of computers and the internet in schools. The pupils are left alone and abandoned to the electronic media.

Konrad Paul Liessmann describes a situation in the fictional “Zentralen Intelligenz Agentur” (resemblance to the “central intelligence agency” is not totally coincidental) as of 2006: “It is creepy; on a screen a wild cluster of pictures, texts, diagrams and objects can be seen, arrows pop up, point at something and disappear again, speech bubbles grow and burst, and in front of the screen a young fellow with a microphone in hand or a headset on his ears keeps talking and talking [...]” (p. 78) Useful as it may be for certain special tasks, the tool of *PowerPoint* has overwhelmed all other traditional ways of presentation in schools and universities. Now many teachers and lecturers demand individual presentations again with simple tools such as blackboard or overhead projector. Liessmann points out that quite often there is no substantial learning effect associated with the new presentation techniques. “PowerPoint is the symptom of a development which goes hand in hand with technization and medialization of the education system from the beginning, and culminates in the conviction that all deficits may be compensated by new technical devices.” (p. 79) This shows that we are all in danger of becoming “slaves” of this booming technology. What about our human dignity? “De-celeration”, restraint and less consumerism is what should be encouraged here. Calm perseverance when working at a project, without constant assessment pressure, is crucial in all areas. That way the learning process strengthens the whole personality of the pupil. Methodological multiplicity is maintained. Orientation towards reality is certainly more sustainable and culturally more valuable for the students than the current practice. Liessmann summarizes: “Non-education is practiced at its best, where competencies are conveyed, tests are filled in, where team-teaching, modular teaching and international comparisons are in.”

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"About the necessity ..."

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Schools and curricula don't have to be streamlined to suit the Zeitgeist

Readers of this book will start thinking. How did all this come about? Values, ethical foundations and orientation towards norms are just disappearing and are not taught any longer at school. Religion and the Church are losing influence. Society defines itself as modern and secular but ignores its own educational and cultural foundations. This creates a dangerous vacuum which may be targeted for exploitation by certain interest groups. Consumption of images and movies has reached alarming levels. Especially schools are flooded by electronic imagery, stimulus satiation, hectic and activism which have to be pushed back.

After the 1960/70ies had seen the destruction of basic social values and standards, the French anti-humanists joined forces with the so-called postmodern philosophy in the 1980ies. Especially in the area of culture, deconstruction has been practiced ever since, for decades now.

Works and masterpieces, universal values, standards and morals are dissected into fragments in theatres, art and literature, and these fragments re-interpreted and reframed. Cultural-historical contexts are getting lost and all holistic views of culture and human dignity are also intentionally being lost. Orientation towards objective reality is being rejected, theories and explanatory models are leading lives of their own. Logic, reason and a careful guided progression from simple to more complex matters in teaching are neglected on purpose. This dogmatic laissez-faire and relativism eventually lead to nihilism, in which no values are to be universally respected any longer. Even historiography is deconstructed and this tendency has even entered school curricula by now. Pre-fabricated internet fragments are more and more the basis of work at school and enhance the detrimental developments, which need to be reversed and corrected urgently.

In various chapters of the book "Geisterstunde" it becomes apparent, that what is supposed to be implemented with the current school curricula reforms is obviously the EU and OECD agenda, although not openly declared! Teachers and students are forced into an economic, "operationalist" way of learning which must be regarded as alien to schools. With "individualisation" and "self-organized learning" pupils are left alone and can rarely benefit from the thinking of their classmates. That way the intended "competencies" may easily degenerate into pseudo-competencies and professionalism into dilettantism.

This obvious transformation of our schoolsystem into Anglo-American models, which are by no means any better, must not be tolerated. Our youths just deserve better. Our country needs an ambitious school and education system. To this day we still have one of the lowest youth unemployment rates. It's just impossible, that after nine years more and more pupils lack the skills to absolve a training course in our dual professional training system envied world-wide, and to contribute responsibly to social life in their communities.

Necessary reflection on the essentials in school, at home and in society

The interpersonal relationships between teachers and pupils, in the class communities, mutual trust, good didactics and participation in the working process are of utmost importance and have to gain more influence again. The traditional canon of subjects has to be the fundament. Once again, ethical and moral values and norms have to be taught, inspired and exemplified in daily life. There are golden rules of the Christian-occidental culture, imperatives and universal values, which are necessary pre-conditions for living together. All cultures have established such values. They are based on the social nature of man and natural law and are supposed to serve both the common and personal good. In interpersonal relations in the families and later at school these values shape the development of personalities from early childhood on. In the Unesco, the UN charter of human rights, several conventions, state constitutions and school laws these cultural and ethical basic values have been laid down. In Article 1 of the *Universal Decla-*

ration of Human Rights the peoples of all cultures have agreed on the necessity of an education towards peace and the basic values of liberty, equality and fraternity, after the horrors of two world wars in 1948: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." This defines the ethical aims and common goals of all subjects, in all institutions of culture, schooling and education. Children and youths should leave school well-equipped for their later tasks in family, professional and social life. That way schools fulfill their cultural and state-political obligations in our society. •

Literature: Konrad Paul Liessmann: *Geisterstunde. Die Praxis der Unbildung. Eine Streitschrift*, Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna 2014



ISBN 978-3-552-05700-5

Letter to  the Editor**Bound or basic handwriting?**

Our children can't learn any longer and the teachers can't teach any more since Curriculum 21 has been introduced stepwise.

The bound handwriting ("Schnürlirschrift") which always allowed for fluid writing is planned to be replaced by the so called basic font ("Basisschrift"). It is argued that the latter was contemporary and child-friendly. The basic font is nothing more than a self-production by the Canton of Lucerne. It is bound only in some aspects and can't be written without interrupting the flow.

It had been planned to prescribe the basic font with the Curriculum 21. Due to the fact that the Curriculum 21 now stands in the crossfire of criticism they are now trying to introduce the changes by "salami tactics". Now the base font shall prematurely be introduced merely by "recommenda-

tion" of the D-EDK's*. Curriculum 21 will be revised until 2017 and some aspects have already been changed. But nevertheless, the schoolbooks which are actually being used, hastily implemented the concept of competence training – one hallmark of the the Curriculum 21. It seems as if the Curriculum 21 is being introduced in a piecemeal way. What will be the next step?

Why are we, the citizens, not asked about all that? Don't we have direct democracy and co-determination? Our educational system is our only natural resource and our economy is depending on its high quality for the chance to maintain our position on the world market.

Doris Stutz, Zurich

* German Speaking Swiss Conference of State Ministers for Education

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Grant the right of return to the Sahrawi people

Impressions of a trip to the Sahrawi refugee camp

by Dr phil Henriette Hanke Güttinger, historian and psychologist

In October, I met *Jose Louis* by chance when staying with friends in Asturias. With heart and soul he commits himself to the *Amigos Sahrawi* and frequently stays in the refugee camps. He reported that traditionally six to eight thousand children from these camps spend the hot summer months in Spanish families, from where they return fed and freshly dressed to their parents. The 2008-crisis had unfortunately led to a collapse. Not because solidarity had been lacking, but because of lack of funding.

A week later, on the plane from Algiers to Tindouf we came to talk to a young Sahrawi woman. She had been accepted as a seriously ill child by an Italian family, where she had spent her childhood and youth. At present she was working in Italy. She stayed, however, a Sahrawi and visited her family in the camps as often as she could.

This experience of solidarity with the Sahrawi people as it is expressed in many camps projects from various countries deeply impressed me, just as much as the work of the *Swiss Support Committee for the Sahrawis* SUKS. Solidarity is the support which is vital in difficult situations. Hence, the situation of the Sahrawis stays difficult. The international community bends to power-political interests and thus evades its obligation to perform the referendum on the future of the Western Sahara upon which it has itself agreed. This makes the solidarity of the civil societies all the more necessary. The cordiality and friendly bond which showed in the encounters between *Elisabeth Bäschlin*, President of the SUKS and the leaders of



(picture hhg)

The Western Sahara conflict

hhg. For a long time Western Sahara with its huge phosphate deposits and rich fishing grounds off the coastline was Spanish colonial territory. In 1960, in the wake of decolonization, the General Assembly of the UN agreed on resolution 1540, which awarded "all peoples the right to self-determination". In 1966, the UN called on Spain to hold a referendum on the independence of Western Sahara. Furthermore, the International Court of Justice in The Hague determined the right of the Sahraoui people to their independence. How-

ever, in 1975 Spain concluded an agreement with Morocco and Mauritania. While Spain withdrew from Western Sahara, Morocco and Mauritania occupied the territory against the armed resistance of the Sahraouis. Part of the population remained in Western Sahara and part fled to the Algerian Sahara, where since then the Sahraouis have been living in refugee camps near Tindouf.

Until now the right of the Sahraoui people to self-determination has not been realized – a task to be resolved by the global community.



(picture hhg)

the camps show how much this solidarity is appreciated.

The seriousness, determination and perseverance with which the Sahrawis carry out their duties in the camps, is moving. After studying in Algeria, Cuba, Libya, Syria and Spain they have returned to the camps to make their knowledge available to their people and for the preparation of their return to Western Sahara.

The same is the case with the agronomist *Taleb Brahim*. He showed us one of the allotments at the beginning of the growing season where you can already see the first seed leaves of carrots, beets, zucchini or cucumbers. They are carefully watered from thin plastic tubes that emit droplets of water, and thus ensure a successful culture. Harvesting takes place from December to June. Thereafter the glowing summer heat paralyzes everything. By origin Nomads, the Sahrawis had no experience in the cultivation of food. Gardens were new ground to them, *Taleb* explained. But this way they would have the opportunity to learn from the very beginning how to grow plants biologically without having to make the same mistakes as the Europeans had made with chemi-

cals and artificial fertilizers. Setting up a family garden means also that the family must be willing to provide for the garden by supplying some of the water assigned to them to the garden. At first the family has to put up a two-meter high wall, a border of self-manufactured modules as protection against goats and sandstorms.

Many Sahrawis are born in the camps. All of them receive the same ration from the international organizations. In the early days of the refugee camps all were very active. By time, a dependency has set in associated with inactivity. This would have to change, *Taleb* emphasized. We need to show the children that the future lies in their hands. They would have to be educated in the mentality, "we have to find out how we can satisfy our needs on our own." With great resolution and inner determination he says, "one day we shall return. There, we do not have anything and we have to create everything with our own hands. Agriculture and gardens are important at that."

In another garden the most rampant basil is blooming. In his hands *Taleb* holds

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"Grant the right of return ..."

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proudly some humus which he has enriched with compost. It is soft and sandy. Here, too, the cultivation is organical. This results in a large number of microorganisms that provides for a good quality of the soil. Besides fig trees there are also Moringa trees. They grow rapidly and the leaves are edible and rich in vitamins, a welcome nutrition supplement.

Wherever we pay a visit, be it in a nursing school, the regional hospital, at schools or in the centre of drinking-water preparation plants, we meet impressive personalities. They have not given up. Their will of return to the homeland the preparation of which is unabated – despite adverse circumstances and the perfidity of the international community. Another example is the director of the regional hospital who studied pharmacy in Algeria. He shows us the sparse central pharma-

cy for the entire Wilaya¹, 40,000 people. There is lack of medication, especially for children who often suffer from bronchitis, cough and ear problems. In the consultation room of the expert on endocrinology, who was able to study in Cuba and Spain and who has been operating for 25 years in the regional hospital, we learn that goiters are very common, because there is no iodine in the drinking water. Diabetis, is also quite incidental, especially type 2, as a result of unbalanced diets and lack of exercise. Just as much engaged is a paediatrician who studied in the Spanish colony of Sahara and later in Cuba and who is a specialist in France and Italy now. He actually works with the Ministry of Health, practises, however, regularly at all regional hospitals at the same time. He has a free day only on Friday. Proudly he shows us an ultra-sound machine. There are currently 50 beds at the hospital. He explains that pregnant women and children are given special care. Their weight



is preventively reviewed between the age of 1 and 5. For school children up to 14 years there are regular health checks. In addition, there is one nurse responsible for one school. There is vaccination against Hepatitis B, Polio, Tetanus, Whooping cough, Diphtheria, Rubella and Measles, yet not against Meningitis and Rotavirus. Although the UNHCR and WFP (*World Food Programme*) provide additional food for toddlers and pregnant women, however, the shortage of food and its poor quality leave their impact on people's health. With a balanced and sufficient diet many diseases wouldn't even exist.

Later, we are sitting in a large circle with the poet *Khadra Mint Laameiri*. Unbroken, and with great expressive power and inner participation, she recites some poems. Our Sahrawi driver as well as the guide and attendants are deeply moved, there are tears in their eyes. Khadra is a great poet and highly appreciated by the Sahrawis, who love poetry. After the 1975-expulsion she began writing poetry. Her poetry with rhythms and rhymes are kept in strict Arabic meter and is not written down. She recites all by heart. It is living history: "You have come as colonizers to us, but others were here before you and you have no rights here." In another poem she describes how she as an already somewhat elder woman, fought in the army, together with young soldiers. The Sahrawi soldiers had been very young and had fought like lions, without fear of death. In this poem she expresses the great pride of the young Sahrawis.

Against all odds, this unbroken dignity, the Sahrawi identity and the desire to return to their home country are still there today, and among all generations. This is also inscribed in large Arabic lettering on a huge sand dune in the background of the nursing school: "Either return or death". It is this right of return which must be finally granted to the Sahrawi people. •

Being a Sahrawi family's guest

hhg. Being the guests, we sleep in the nicest room of the house. Four small windows without glass, covered by lattice wire and wooden shutters. A pillar in the passage light violet on the top and bottom, an unusual color combination, but pleasant to the eyes. On the left and on the right of the pillar there is a curtain of tulle, during the day (in the daytime) gathered by a ribbon, letting the passage free. Three crossbeams bear the corrugated iron roof. Colored cushions leaning against the wall on which you can sit comfortably and sleep well at night, the floor covered with colored carpets. I woke up because a little child is crying for his mother. A look at the watch shows it is nearly seven o'clock. Outside it is not yet quite light.

Our host, her sister and the smaller children come from the adjoining sleeping-room and prepare breakfast for us. Soon we are sitting on the cushions in front of the small table, drinking coffee and eating baguette. *Selem*, the housewife, is sitting in front of her tray and is preparing tea, a ceremony that can take far more than an hour. The tea is brewed, after having been washed at first in the teapot, and then it is poured out down from far above into the glasses, until there is enough foam on it. Then the first round of tea is passed around and is drunk. After the third round, the glasses are rinsed off in a small bucket, are dried with a piece of cloth, the tray is rinsed off, too, and the whole is covered with a piece of cloth.

The guests who are polite do not get up before the ceremony is finished. "The first tea is as bitter as life, the second as sweet as love, the third as peaceful as death," *Selem* says with a smile.

In the meantime, the two sisters who live in the neighbourhood have joined us dressed in their coloured melhfes and are sitting cross-legged (tailor fashion). There is also a six-month-old boy who is already bravely pulling himself up to be able to stand on his own feet. The baby is alert and is looking at the visitors in a friendly way. The three sisters are looking after him in a loving and quiet manner. It is only when one of the three sisters gives him the breast it is clear for us who is actually the mother. *Irene*, my travel companion, fortunately speaks Spanish very well and thus there are a lot of suggestions, of questions, answers and of chatting. Yes, yes, there was a lot of work to be done here with the little children and with cooking the meals. The somewhat older children are present, too, a bit shy, but all the same very interested. It is with a lot of patience that *Selem* educates her three-year-old *Hama*. She demonstrates – something which is lacking to many mothers in Europe today – a loving and at the same time firm directive. She loves him, but in a definite way she sets limits to him. As he wants to take a biscuit from the small table, she puts it aside in a very decisive manner – and *Hama* takes her very seriously.

¹ The refugee camps consist of four wilayas (provinces).