

Current Concerns

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Reason for hope, but also for vigilance

The Minsk Agreement

Interview with Willy Wimmer



Willy Wimmer
(picture ma)

Willy Wimmer was the spokesperson for the defense policy of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Parliament, the Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Ministry of Defense, and has been a CDU Member of Parliament for 33 years. From 1994 to 2000, during the period of the Yugoslav wars, he was Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. For many years he has criticized Western policy that no longer respects international law. In his new book, "Wiederkehr der Hasardeure: Schattenstrategen, Kriegstreiber, stille Profiteure 1914 und heute" (ISBN 978-3-943007-07-7) (Return of the gamblers: shadow strategists, warmongers, silent profiteers 1914 and today) he analyses together with the historian Wolfgang Effenberger the path leading to the First World War and its consequences for today. In our present time he sees a number of dangerous parallels with the former path to the disaster of the century. Wimmer does not elaborate this in an abstract and theoretical manner, but on the basis of a genuine treasure of foreign policy experience with exciting background reports about numerous journeys to the scenes of world politics. We asked Willy Wimmer about the negotiation results in the Belarus capital Minsk.

Current Concerns: After a long night of negotiations, the Presidents Hollande, Poroshenko, Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed on a joint declaration in Minsk. Is it already possible to formulate a surface impression of this agreement and statement?

Willy Wimmer: The outcome of the negotiations is the necessary consequence of the actual situation in Ukraine and the events occurring since last year's spring. The Eastern region of the coun-

Declaration by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements" adopted on February 12, 2015 in Minsk

The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Angela Merkel, reaffirm their full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

They firmly believe that there is no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement. They are fully committed to undertake all possible individual and joint measures to this end.

Against this background, leaders endorse the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements adopted and signed on February 12, 2015 by all signatories who also signed Minsk Protocol of September 5, 2014 and Minsk Memorandum of September 19, 2014. Leaders will contribute to this process and will use their influence on relevant parties to facilitate the implementation of that Package of Measures.

Germany and France will provide technical expertise for the restoration of the segment of the banking system in the conflict affected areas, possibly through the establishment of an international mechanism to facilitate social transfers.

Leaders share the conviction that improved cooperation between the EU, Ukraine and Russia will be conducive to the crisis settlement. To this end, they endorse the continuation of trilateral talks between the EU, Ukraine and Russia on energy issues in order to achieve follow-up stages to the gas winter package.

They also support trilateral talks between the EU, Ukraine and Russia in order to achieve practical solutions to concerns raised by Russia with regards to the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU.

Leaders remain committed to the vision of a joint humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific based upon full respect for international law and the OSCE principles.

Leaders will remain committed to the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. To this end, they agree to establish an oversight mechanism in the Normandy format which will convene at regular intervals, in principle on the level of senior officials from the foreign ministries.

Source: http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2015/2015-02-12-ukraine-erklarung_en.html?nn=709674

try is the centre of economic power in the Ukraine, but it has no determining authority over the money that is earned there. Kiev spends the money that is earned in Donetsk. There is no country in Europe that would work under these circumstances. Since the events on the Maidan, those who have the power in Kiev, ignore the interests of those in the country who speak Russian. And they declared war against them, even though they are part of their own population. If the Kiev government wants to preserve the country's territorial integrity, it must recognise this reality as well as the suffering it has caused.

Last year there have been several attempts to attain a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. What is now different?

So far, always experts or Foreign Ministers were mandated with such negotiations, who attempted to assume responsibility. But now the Presidents and the German Chancellor are responsible, and this gives some hope. Now Merkel, Putin, Poroshenko and Hollande are personally liable, this gives a complete new quality. Since basically Hollande, Putin, Merkel and Poroshenko endorse the agreement now, it will be easier to reach an agree-

“An encouraging sign”



Hans Köchler
(picture ef)

The conflict in the eastern Ukraine region can only be resolved at the political level: on the basis of (a) recognition of the right to self-rule, (b) federalism, and (c) an international status of neutrality of the Republic of Ukraine.

Agreement on a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy arms and on a demarcation line between the warring parties can only be a first step towards a broader political settlement. In order to achieve durable peace, all parties will have to agree on the right to self-rule of the people in the conflict zone. In modern international law, self-determination is the core principle that is at the roots of democracy and legitimacy of any political system. National (state) sovereignty is ultimately based on the right of the people to decide, as citizens, on the

political identity of the territory they are living in.

Because the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine is also the result of unconstitutional and violent change of government in the Republic of Ukraine, confidence among ethnic groups on the territory of Ukraine can only be restored on the basis of a federal system that provides for genuine autonomy of the territories in Eastern Ukraine.

In view of the international dimension the conflict has acquired, the security interests of neighboring countries, including Russia, will have to be considered. This means that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) can have no role in the ongoing conflict, and that the Republic of Ukraine should commit itself to a status of permanent neutrality (similar to the status the Republic of Austria committed itself to in 1955, during the time of rivalry between the era's two superpowers). The Ukraine must not be part of a geostrategic plan that is aimed at the so-called “containment” of Russia. This

would not only endanger peace and stability in Europe, but at the global level. A lasting solution will also require that the member states of the European Union refrain from using the instrument of economic sanctions, which are part and parcel of a violent approach, not of a political strategy aimed at a negotiated settlement.

It is to be hoped that the European Union (EU) will eventually be able to act independently of United States influence, and that its member states will seek a consensus with the Russian Federation in the common European framework. The negotiations of the “Normandy 4” in Minsk (comprising the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine) that have this morning [12 February 2015] led to a ceasefire agreement are an encouraging sign in that regard.

Prof Dr Hans Köchler, President of the “International Progress Organization”, on Ukraine peace talks in Minsk, Vienna, February 12, 2015

“Reason for hope, ...”

continued from page 1

ment on the important technical details. The regulation of these details and the practical implementation of the Minsk Agreements must be considered very carefully. Otherwise there is the danger that those players keep the upper hand in Kiev and Washington, who want to wage a next great war on European soil, 70 years after the Second World War.

This means that there is reason for hope, but also for vigilance.

One must realise that opposing forces continue to operate. On the one hand some are targeted at changing the political nature of Ukraine. On the other hand – that is the American idea – there are forces that want to use the Ukraine to do away with the political leadership in Moscow. Certainly both objectives are pursued, and therefore, the four leaders are challenged in a special way.

If the East is to remain part of Ukraine, Kiev must be induced to act with regard to the East of the country in the future. Pen-

sions and wages for people in Eastern Ukraine must be paid, and the institutions there should work as is expected on site.

Prior to the meeting in Minsk, the Ukrainian President Poroshenko announced that he will declare martial law, in case the negotiations fail. What would this mean? Of course, this means that the rights of Ukrainian citizens would have been reduced to zero. This statement clearly shows what has been unleashed in Ukraine, after starting the experiment on the Maidan a year ago, to modify the internal structure of the Ukraine in such a way that the Russian-speaking minority in this country should not have a future.

Why was a success possible now?

The success of Merkel and Hollande lies in the fact that they have broken the embargo on dialogue imposed by the United States. This meeting in Minsk made it clear that they want a dialogue in Europe. The heads of the self-proclaimed republics Donetsk and Lugansk had also arrived to the meeting of the Ukraine-contact group in the morning. The fact

that even people participate in these discussions, whom nobody wanted to have there in the first place, or who should not have attended, is due to the negotiating progress.

The package of measures adopted in Minsk grants a greater role to the OSCE for the future. Is this to be welcomed?

International monitoring organisations have to be watched extremely carefully. These organisations have emerged as instruments of the United States in the past. Activities went on in the American interest.

The OSCE must revive their contractually fixed possibilities that have been stifled by the war of aggression against Yugoslavia by the US. The OSCE should not be abused again as a cover for clandestine operations, aiming at taking further steps towards a next war, this time against the Russian Federation.

Mr Wimmer, thank you very much for the time you granted us. •

(Interview Karl Müller)

For a new policy towards Greece and Russia

by Karl Müller

On 12 February, the Presidents of Ukraine, France and Russia, together with the German Chancellor, agreed on signing a joint declaration containing a package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk Agreement (cf. box on page 1). They put into words very important statements which might initiate a turning point in the current relationship between East and West. The declaration points out that all signatories "firmly believe that there is no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement." The signatories "share the conviction that improved cooperation between the EU, Ukraine and Russia will be conducive to the crisis settlement." To this end, they support "trilateral talks between the EU, Ukraine and Russia in order to achieve practical solutions to concerns raised by Russia with regards to the implementation of the [...] Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU", and they remain committed "to the vision of a joint humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific based upon full respect for international law and the OSCE principles." All those involved but likewise all other responsible persons in East and West are called upon to let deeds follow words. In this context it is important to look at the situation in Europe as a whole.

Also in week 7 of 2015, the best seller list in the German *SPIEGEL* contains a book that many politicians in the EU states and many responsible journalists in the leading European media will not be pleased with. The book's title is "Wir sind die Guten. Ansichten eines Putin-Verstehers und wie uns die Medien manipulieren". (We are the good ones. Views of somebody who understands Putin and how the media are manipulating us ISBN 978-3-86489-080-2). Authors are the journalists and publicists *Mathias Bröckers* and *Paul Schreyer*. The book is battled by the main-stream media. But apparently this takes no longer effect. The book which appeared in September 2014 is now in its fourth edition. Those who read the book – and it is very readable, plausible and well documented – wonder once again what is going on in Europe. How can it be that so many EU politicians and those in responsible media positions are so irresponsibly dealing with the truth, like gamblers driving the whole continent into a highly dangerous political and economic power struggle with Russia?

And what about the EU policy towards Greece?

Here the record is a sobering one, too. On 25 January, after five years of "Help for Greece" by the EU and its institutions,

the Greek voted down – in rarely-observed markedness – those politicians who negotiated and supported this "help" in the past. They voted for a party that was insignificant until only a few years ago. Now the majority of the Greek population is placing their greatest hopes on it.

The "rescue" of Greece so far through the EU states' governments, through EU institutions and the IMF had been coupled with programmes and restrictions of sovereignty which have become unbearable for the people in Greece, just like they would be unbearable for any other people. In all areas relevant for a good quality of life, things have gone downhill in the past five years: less and less jobs, less wages and pensions, less social security, decreasing economy, increasing total state debt, no money for visits to doctors and medicine, no money for necessary food, increasing suicide rate etc. etc. In November 2014, 50% of the Greek between 15 and 24 were unemployed, that is, every second young Greek.

The financial institutions [banks, hedge funds etc.] which had lent money to the Greek state were not willing to accept a Greece that would no longer be able to pay its debts. In that case they would have had to bear themselves the risk of their continuously inconsiderate manner of credit extension. This is why they wanted Greece to remain depending on credits and the European states, that is, the European tax payers, to take over the banks' receivables, that way becoming Greece's new creditors. Since 2010, the financial institutions have been very successful in this manoeuvre.

What was the reaction of those responsible for EU policies? "Pacta sunt servanda" was the common theme of the statements. That means: Agreements that have contributed to ruin the country must still be fulfilled. Here we obviously have another case of double standards: The Maastricht Treaty, which has formed the basis of the Euro regime, was broken some 80 times – a CDU parliamentarian in the German Bundestag worked this out. And we need to add: The new Greek government has not announced that it intends to break existing agreements. It wants to renegotiate because the existing agreements are no longer bearable for the country.

Weeks ago, the new Greek Prime Minister *Alexis Tsipras* addressed the German people, pointing to the irrationality of the current "aids" (see page 4).

What are the possible steps towards a recovery of the European politics' credibility with respect to Greece?

A lot could be gained if those responsible for past years' policies in the EU states would concede that things cannot continue this way and that now the time has come to re-think and re-adjust direction. Moreover: if they stopped once and for all presenting their policies as "without alternative" and instead invited all citizens to enter into a dialogue on equal footing to search for ways out of the crisis. And: if they opened up for the idea that direct democracy and the recognition of the citizens as the sovereign would provide a magical cure and offer a sustainable future perspective.

The same is true for Russia.

How much would we all wish that our politicians would listen more to the citizens. How much would we all wish that those in responsible political and media positions would only once be responsive to what the Russian side has put forward over and again. A recent example is Foreign Minister *Sergey Lavrov's* speech at the Munich Security Conference (see page 5).

How much would we all wish that a halt would be put to demonizing Russia. And how much that also the unjustified economic sanctions fatal for both sides would be stopped. It is good if European politicians like the French President and the German Chancellor declare that the conflict in Ukraine cannot be solved by military means that arms shipments for the Ukrainian military are not an option. And it is a silver lining on the horizon that there is now an agreement negotiated by the Presidents of France, Ukraine and Russia and the German Chancellor which calls for an armistice in eastern Ukraine and makes very important fun-

continued on page 4



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“German taxpayers have nothing to fear from SYRIZA”

An open letter to Germany by Alexis Tsipras



Alexis Tsipras
(picture reuters)

cc. In an open letter, published by the German newspaper “Handelsblatt” in its print edition on 13 January about two weeks before the general election, the party leader of SYRIZA and current Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras,

turned to the German public. The following text has been taken from the website www.griechenland.blog, which translated Tsipras’ letter from the original Greek (into German) once again. The text printed below has been slightly corrected.

Dear readers [...] I am aware of the fact that most of you have already formed an opinion about what you will read in this article. I call on you, however, to read it with an open mind. Prejudices were never a good counsellor, especially in a period in which the economic crisis reinforces these prejudices, fuelling intolerance, nationalism, obscurantism and violence. With my open letter today I want to give you a description that will differ from whatever you normally hear about what has been happening in Greece since 2010. And mainly I want to honestly explain what the party SYRIZA proposes and seeks if they will constitute the elected government of Greece on 26 January.

In 2010, the Greek state was not able to service their loans any longer. Unfortunately, the official Europe decided to pretend this problem could be overcome with the largest loan in the history of mankind

“For a new policy towards Greece ...”

continued from page 4

damental statements. But it would also be good if western politicians would counter the demonization of Russia and help our media to a more realistic presentation of events and contexts.

This year, Europe is observing the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. European people still possess an active knowledge and awareness that peace in Europe is indispensable and that for this peace, international understanding and equality between states and peoples is a prerequisite. This is not only true when dealing with Greece or Russia but also for the interaction between and within all countries. •

under the condition of budgetary measures which led with mathematical precision to the situation that the national income, meant to pay off both the new and the older loans, would shrink. A bankruptcy problem was addressed as if it was a liquidity problem.

In other words, they assumed the mentality of a bad banker who does not admit that the credit assigned by him to a bankrupt company has burst but lends even more money, and so acts as if the old loans would continue to be served, delaying the bankruptcy forever.

Nothing but common sense would have predicted that the implementation of the dogma “extend and pretend” in the case of my country would end in tragedy; that instead of stabilising Greece this would result in a self-powered crisis that undermines the foundations of a united Europe.

Our party and I personally did not agree with the loan agreement of May 2010, not because Germany and our other partners did not give enough money, but because they gave us a lot more money than they should have done and we were entitled to accept. Money that would not help the Greek people because it disappeared into the black hole of debt and could not stop the steady inflation of the public debt, which our partners would have been forced to prolong forever under great cost to their citizens.

And this truth was well-known to the German governments, but has never been exposed to you.

In fact, not even a year passed and our predictions were confirmed in 2011. The combination of huge new loans and hard cuts failed not only to tame the debt, but punished my most vulnerable fellow-citizens by rendering modest people with jobs and homes unemployed and homeless, who above all lost their dignity. The collapse of their income drove thousands of companies into bankruptcy and thus increased the oligopoly-like power of the surviving companies. Prices fell less than income, and the – private and public – debt rose. In this scenery in which the lack of hope was greater than all other deficits it did not take long until the “Serpent” hatched – the neo-Nazis who began to patrol neighbourhoods and planted hatred.

Despite its obvious failure, the logic of “extend and pretend” is even today systematically being implemented. The second loan agreement of 2012 added another huge amount of debt on the worn shoulders of the Greek state, “circumcised” insurance funds, fed the recession with new

food and financed a new kleptocracy with loans from our partners.

Recently, serious commentators have talked about stabilisation, even an economic recovery of my country and thus “proved” that the implemented policies would finally bear fruit. No serious analysis supports this chimerical “reality”. The recent increase in real national income by 0.7% does not signal the end of the recession, but its continuation, since this increase was achieved in a period with an inflation rate of 1.8%, which means that – in euros – the national income further decreased, while the debts increased. This attempt to touch up the “Greek statistics” so that it seems as if the policy of the Troika in Greece is of any use is an insult to all European partners who have a right to finally learn the truth.

And the truth is that the public debt of Greece cannot be serviced as long as the Greek economy is drowned under a regime of “fiscal waterboarding”. Stubborn insistence on this hopeless and misanthropic policy, the denial of simple arithmetic, cost the German taxpayer a lot and at the same time condemns a proud people to indignity. And the worst: this way the Greeks turn on the Germans, the Germans get at the Greeks, and the idea of a democratically united Europe is brutally affected.

Germany and especially the hard-working German taxpayers have nothing to fear from a SYRIZA government. On the contrary, our goal is not confrontation with our partners. Our goal is not more credits or the right to new budget deficits. Our goal is stabilisation and a balanced budget and – of course – that the bloodletting of the taxpayer of the last four years may cease, caused by an impracticable credit agreement both in Greece and in Germany. We are asking for the end of the dogma “extend and pretend” not against the German citizens but to the benefit of all.

I know, dear readers, that behind the demands for a “faithful implementation of the agreements” anxiety lies: “If we allow the Greeks to do what they want, they will do the same again”. I understand this concern. However, it was not SYRIZA who built the regime of corruption and kleptocracy in my country, which now pretends to be worried about our compliance with the “agreements” and reforms because these people were not hit by them, as was the case with the

continued on page 5

“Stability has long been undermined by actions of the United States and its allies”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov delivers a speech at the 51st Munich Security Conference on 7 February 2015



*Sergey Lavrov
(picture thk)*

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Wolfgang Ischinger has included the issue of the collapse of global development on the agenda. One has to agree that events have taken a turn, which is far from optimistic. But it is impossible to

agree with the arguments of some of our colleagues that there was a sudden and rapid collapse of the world order that had existed for decades.

To the contrary, the last year's developments confirmed the correctness of our warnings against profound, systemic problems in the organisation of European security and international relations in general. I would like to remind you of the speech delivered by Russian President *Vladimir Putin* from these stands eight years ago.

The structure of stability, based on the UN Charter and the Helsinki principles, has long been undermined by actions of the United States and its allies in Yugoslavia, which was bombed, as well as in Iraq and Libya, NATO's expansion to the east and the creation of new lines of separation. The project of building a "common European home" failed because our western partners were guided by illusions and beliefs of winners in the Cold War rather than the interests of building an open security architecture with mutual respect of interests. The obligations, solemnly undertaken as part of the OSCE and the Russia-NATO Council, not to ensure one's own safety at the expense of others' remained on paper and were ignored on practice.

The problem of missile defence is vivid evidence of the powerful destructive influence of unilateral steps in the development of military capabilities contrary to lawful interests of other states. Our proposals on joint operation in the anti-missile field were rejected. In exchange we were advised to join the creation of global US missile defence, strictly according to Washington's templates, which, as we underlined and explained based on facts a number of times, carries real risks for Russian nuclear deterrence forces.

Any action undermining strategic stability will inevitably result in counter measures. Thus, long-term damage is inflicted upon the entire system of international treaties dealing with control over armaments, the feasibility of which directly depends on the missile defence factor.

We do not even understand what the United States' obsession with creating a global missile defence system can be connected with. With aspirations to indisputable military supremacy? With faith in the possibility to resolve issues technologically, whereas these issues are in reality political? In any case, the missile threats did not become weaker, but a strong irritant emerged in the Euro-Atlantic region, and it will take a long time to get rid of it. We are ready for this. Refusal of the United States and other NATO members to ratify the Agreement on Adaptation of the *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*, which buried this treaty, was another destabilising factor.

At the same time, our US colleagues are attempting to lay the blame on Russia in each complicated situation they themselves created. Let's take the discussions, which have revived recently, on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (the INF Treaty). Specialists are well aware of

the United States' actions, which are in conflict with the spirit and the letter of this document. For instance, as part of the creation of a global missile defence system, Washington commissioned a large-scale programme of creating target missiles with characteristics similar or close to land-based ballistic missiles, prohibited by the aforementioned treaty. Unmanned fighting vehicles, widely utilised by the US, fall within the treaty's definition of intermediate-range cruise land-based missiles. The treaty directly prohibits ABM launchers, which will soon be deployed in Romania and Poland, because they can be used to launch intermediate-range cruise missiles.

While refusing to acknowledge these facts, our US colleagues assert they have some "substantiated" claims against Russia with respect to the INF Treaty, but diligently avoid specifics.

With due account of these and many other factors, attempts to narrow down the current crisis to last year's developments, to our mind, means falling into dangerous self-deception.

There is a pinnacle in the course pursued by our western colleagues in the past quarter of a century on preserving their domination in world affairs by all possible means, on seizing the geopolitical space in Europe. They demanded of the CIS countries – our closest neighbours, connected with us by centuries economically, historically, culturally and even in terms of family ties – that they make a choice: "either with the West, or against the West." This is a zero-sum logic which, ostensibly, everyone wanted to leave in the past.

The strategic partnership of Russia and the European Union failed the test of strength, as the EU chose a path of confrontation over the development of mutually beneficial interaction mechanisms. We cannot help remembering the missed opportunity to implement Chancellor *Merkel's* initiative put forward in June 2010 in Meseberg, to create a EU-Russia Committee on Security and Foreign Affairs at the level of foreign ministers. Russia backed that idea but the European Union rejected it. Meanwhile, this constant dialogue mechanism, if it were to be set up, would allow for solving problems faster and more effectively, and for resolving mutual concerns in a timely manner.

As for Ukraine itself, unfortunately, at each stage of the crisis' development, our American colleagues, and under their in-

“German taxpayers have...”

continued from page 4

reforms of the Troika and the government *Samaras* in the last four years.

We are ready to collide with this system so that we can promote drastic reforms in the functioning of the state and in public administration, transparency, meritocracy, tax justice and the fight against black money. These reform proposals are left to the judgment of our citizens in the coming elections.

Our goal is – in the context of the euro zone – a new agreement for the whole euro zone, within which our people can breathe,

create and live in dignity. With a socially bearable debt, with a funding of growth; because that is the only way out of the crisis, in contrast to the failed recipe – recession recycling austerity. With a more cohesive society. With more solidarity and democracy.

On 25 January, an opportunity for Europe is born in Greece. Let us not squander it.

Source: www.griechenland-blog.gr/2015/01/deutsche-haben-von-syriza-in-griechenland-nichts-zu-befuerchten/2134194/

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

continued on page 6

“Stability has long been ...”

continued from page 5

fluence, also the European Union, have been taking steps leading to escalation. This happened when the EU declined to involve Russia in the discussion of the consequences of implementing the economic block of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, which was followed by direct support of a coup d'état, and anti-government riots prior to that. This also happened when our western partners kept issuing indulgences to the Kiev authorities, who, rather than keeping their promise to launch nation-wide dialogue, began a large-scale military operation and labelled “terrorists” all those citizens who defied the unconstitutional change of power and the rule of ultranationalists.

It is very hard for us to explain why many of our colleagues fail to apply to Ukraine the universal principles of settling internal conflicts which presuppose, above all, an inclusive political dialogue between the protagonists. Why do our partners in the cases of Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Mali and South Sudan, for instance, urge the governments to talk with opposition, with rebels, in some cases even with extremists, whereas in the Ukrainian crisis, our partners act differently, in fact, encouraging Kiev's military operation, going so far as to justify or attempt to justify the use of cluster munitions.

Regretfully, our western colleagues are apt to close their eyes to everything that is said and done by the Kiev authorities, including fanning xenophobic attitudes. Let me quote: “Ukrainian social-nationalism regards the Ukrainian nation as a blood-race community.” Which is followed by: “The issue of total Ukrainisation in the future social-nationalist state will be resolved within three to six months by a tough and balanced state policy.” The author of those words is *Andrey Biletsky*, the commander of the Azov regiment, which is actively engaged in the military activities in Donbass. Some other activists who gained a position in politics and power, including *Dmitry Yarosh*, *Oleg Tyagnibok* and the leader of the Radical Party in the Verkhovna Rada *Oleg Lyashko*, publicly called a number of times for an ethnically clean Ukraine, for the extermination of Russians and Jews. Those statements failed to evoke any reaction in the western capitals. I don't think present-day Europe can afford to neglect the danger of the spread of the neo-Nazi virus.

The Ukrainian crisis cannot be settled by military force. This was confirmed last summer when the situation on the battlefield forced the participants to sign the Minsk Accords. It is being confirmed now as well, when the next attempt to gain a military victory is failing. Yet regardless of all that, more loud calls are being made in some western countries to step up support of the Kiev authorities' vector towards militarisation of society and the state, to “infuse” Ukraine with lethal weapons, to drag it into NATO. There is hope in the increased opposition in Europe to such plans, which can only make the tragedy of the Ukrainian people worse.

Russia will continue strive for establishing peace. We are consistently calling for the cessation of military activities, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and the start of direct talks between Kiev and Donetsk and Lugansk on practical steps to restore the common economic, social and political space within the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Numerous initiatives by President Putin were dedicated to exactly that within the Normandy format, which helped launch the Minsk process, and our further efforts on its expansion, including yesterday's talks in the Kremlin between the Russian, German and French leaders. As you know, these talks are ongoing. We believe that there is every possibility we will reach results and agree on recommendations that will really allow the parties to untie the knot of this conflict.

It is crucial that everyone should be aware of the real magnitude of the risks. It is high time we abandon the custom of considering every problem separately, unable to see the forest for the trees. It is time to give a comprehensive assessment of the situation. The world is now facing a drastic shift connected with the change of historical eras. The “labour pains” of the new world structure are manifested in increased proneness to conflicts in international relations. If short-sighted practical decisions in the interest of the nearest elections at home will prevail with politicians over a strategic global vision, the risk will emerge of losing global management control.

Let me remind you that at the onset of the Syrian conflict many people in the west advised not to exaggerate the danger of extremism and terrorism, stating that the danger will somehow dissipate by itself, while attaining the regime change in Damascus was a key priority. We see what has come out of it. Huge areas in the Middle East, in Africa, in the Afghan-Pakistani area are dropping out of legitimate government control. Extremism is spill-

ing into other regions, including Europe. Risks of WMD proliferation are intensifying. The situation with the Middle East settlement, and in other regional conflict areas, is acquiring an explosive character. No adequate strategy on curbing those challenges has been worked out so far.

I would like to hope that today's and tomorrow's debates in Munich will bring us closer to understanding the level of efforts on searching for collective answers to threats which are common for all. The talk, if we want a serious result, can only be equal, without ultimatums and threats.

We are still confident that the overall complex of issues could be resolved much more easily, if the largest players agreed on strategic landmarks in their relations. Recently *Hélène Carrère d'Encausse*, permanent secretary of the Académie française, whom I hold in high esteem, said that a real Europe may not exist without Russia. We would like to see if this perspective is shared by our partners, or if they are inclined to keep deepening the split in the common European space and setting its fragments in opposition to each other. Do they want to build a security architecture with Russia, without Russia, or against Russia? Of course, our American partners will also have to answer that question.

We have long been proposing the creation of a common economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, based on the principles of equal and inseparable security that would encompass both members of integration unions and those nations that are not part of them. Setting up reliable interaction mechanisms between the EAEU and the EU is especially topical. We welcome the emerging support for this idea by responsible European leaders.

On the 40th anniversary of the *Helsinki Final Act* and the 25th anniversary of the *Charter of Paris*, Russia calls for infusing documents with real life, for preventing the substitution of the principles they contain, for ensuring stability and prosperity in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic space based on true equality, mutual respect and consideration for each others' interests. We wish success to the OSCE-formed “Group of Wise Men,” which should reach a consensus in its recommendations.

As we mark the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, one should remember the responsibility each of us bears.

Thank you for your attention. •

Source: www.mid.ru/bdcomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/4e7cddd252fdef1f43257de60031e493!OpenDocument

"Let's stop to judge the Russians on the basis of our own criteria"

Interview with Dr Hélène Carrère d'Encausse*, "Secrétaire perpétuel" at the top of the "Académie française"



Hélène Carrère d'Encausse (picture ma)

Le Figaro: President Hollande and the German Chancellor meet President Poroshenko in Kiev and President Putin in Moscow. What is to be expected from these meetings?

Hélène Carrère d'Encausse: François Hollande and Angela Merkel, have taken the only reasonable

path, seeking a political solution, avoiding the return to a climate of the Cold War in Europe. They do it now, when the question of arms supplies to Ukraine has come up, a development which would be extremely dangerous and counterproductive. We have seen the consequences of arms sales in the Syria conflict and the Libyan intervention, an uncontrollable distribution of weapons to all camps. Arms sales, above all from NATO countries can only worsen relations with Russia. The Minsk Agreement may be reinstated as a basis for the search for a compromise. It provides for the release of all prisoners of war and hostages. For the separatists, lacking the federal status, it is to open the way to a "special status" for the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, where a significant proportion of Russians or of the Russian-speaking population lives. The Ukrainian government refuses to even only talk about such a status. Don't let us not forget that the fire was lit in February 2014, when the new Ukrainian parliament, the Rada, wanted to refuse

the Russians and the Russian-speaking inhabitants of these regions the use of their own language. This decision stirred up the Crimea and offered Vladimir Putin the opportunity to capture it.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko continues to express his wish of wanting to join NATO, which is like a red rag to Vladimir Putin. He objects that Gorbachev when he accepted the reunification of Germany in 1990 to which no great power had pressed him had been given the assurance that NATO would not move up to the borders of his country in the future. Ukraine's joining NATO would mean to create a long shared border between Russia and NATO. Putin's position is supported by Germany and France.

Can Putin maintain his ground for long, when the economy of his country is harmed (reduction of GDP, capital flight, price reduction of oil)?

The economic sanctions mean much trouble for Russia already. But things could be worse. The worst measure is the reduction of oil prices organised by the US and Saudi Arabia. In 1984, shortly before the inauguration of Gorbachev, Russia was already exposed to such a measure. The reduction of oil revenues is going to weaken the Russian economy, which is already on the brink of a recession, above all it would weaken the active and educated middle class that has emerged in recent years and forms the backbone of modern Russia. Raising its form of life to question would have a negative impact on Putin's popularity, or even destabilise him. Another risk is the West's disdain for Russia, as perceived by the Russians. It hurts their national pride. This might induce Russia to be more oriented towards Asia. For Europe, it would result in distancing itself from Asia, where international life is happening now, because Russia is the link. Russia is the necessary bridge between Europe and Asia.

Can Putin really count on China, which has abstained from voting on Russia's annexation of Crimea in the Security Council?

China and Russia have many common interests, especially the alliances in which both countries are involved, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). The next meeting of the G-20 summit is held next year in Beijing and elsewhere in Asia. Both countries also complement each other in the economic field and have opportunities to

function in the world. The Far East of Russia forms a bridge between the two countries, where the lives of the peoples are mixed. Thus, it constitutes a real platform for the development of Eurasia.

Why does Putin not use his historical influence in the Middle East to prove beneficial in the fight against terrorism and this way reconnect with the West?

We could turn the question around. Why does the West not ask Russia for help regarding the situation in the Middle East, since it is not able to solve it on its own? Why is the West fighting at two fronts simultaneously, in Ukraine and in the Middle East? Would it not be easier to reduce the pressure in Ukraine and give a guarantee that NATO does not spread there, an then ask the pacified Putin for help in the Middle East, in the Syrian and Iranian question and in the fight against extremism? The Russian President is afraid of radical Islam, even more than we are. At the gates of Russia there is Afghanistan. Its future is more than disturbing due to the withdrawal of Western military

continued on page 8

* Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, born on 6 July, 1929, is a French historian specialized in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. Since 1999, she has been in the vanguard of the "Académie française" as "Secrétaire perpétuel". In the 350-year-old-history of this prestigious French learned society based in Paris, Hélène Carrère is the first woman in this leadership function. From 1994 to 1999 she was a member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy. In 2011 she was awarded the Grand Cross of the "Légion d'honneur". In the last 40 years she has written a number of non-fiction books and biographies on Russian history.

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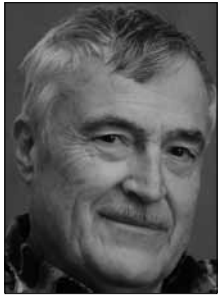
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Regime change – endless failures by the United States

by Professor Dr Albert A. Stahel



Albert Stahel
(picture thk)

According to the prevailing political orientation in the White House be it that of Republicans or Democrats, right-wing neo-conservatives or left liberals in the respective administrations regularly call for the overthrow of inconvenient rulers all over the world and for their replacement by democratic governments. The US-propagated and boosted regime change of more recent times has started off with the overthrow of the Afghan President *Mohammad Najibullah* in April 1992. Yet the result was no democracy in Afghanistan, but a civil war between the various Mujahideen parties, which led to the destruction of Kabul and later to the seizure of power by the Taliban, who eventually murdered Najibullah in Kabul on 27 September 1996. This was followed by other regime changes along the same lines:

In December 2001, the Taliban regime in Kabul was eliminated after the US air war and the advance of the Northern Alliance. The result was and is that the war continues unabated and drug production

and trafficking has become downright flourishing.

On 5 October 2000, the Serbian president *Slobodan Milosevic* was forced to resign by mass protests in Belgrade. Serbia continues to be an instable state.

When the US and its coalition of the willing attacked and occupied Iraq, *Saddam Hussein* was overthrown on 9 April 2003 and later executed on 30 December 2006 by the new rulers. The consequences continue to this day. The removal of Saddam Hussein's regime has strengthened the power of Iran in Iraq and given rise to the emergence of an Islamic State in western Iraq.

By means of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the country's president, *Eduard Shevardnadze*, was overthrown on 23 November 2003. Under his successor, Georgia oriented itself towards the US. In 2008, he indirectly instigated a war against Russia, which led to a division of the country.

On 14 January 2011, the Tunisian dictator *Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali* was driven out by means of demonstrations and fled to Saudi Arabia. The result is that in Tunisia, Islamists and Ben Ali supporters are still vying for power, Tunisia is still regarded as an unstable state.

On 11 February 2011, Egypt's long-time ruler *Hosni Mubarak* was toppled by mass protests. Subsequently Muslim

Brother Mursi was elected as president, only to be overthrown on 3 July 2013 by a military coup led by Field Marshal *Abdel Fattah el-Sisi*. The latter was elected president in 2014. His security forces are being worn out in a war of attrition against Islamists in Egypt and on Sinai.

In March 2011, mass protests against the regime of *Bashar al-Assad* were triggered in Syria. They were sponsored by Neocon organizations in the United States as well as by Turkey and by Saudi Arabia. Today civil war is raging in Syria, and it is dominated by, amongst others, the Salafist organizations of the *Islamic State* and *Jabhat al-Nusra*. Syria is considered to be destroyed. There are millions of refugees.

Supported by US air war, by the UK and France, militias seized power in Libya and on 20 October 2011 first castrated Libyan strongman *Gaddafi* on the hood of a car and then killed him. Today Libya is considered a state in disintegration where a brutal civil war is raging.

On 22 February 2014, the elected president of Ukraine, *Viktor Yanukovich*, was degraded by his Parliament after mass protests in Kiev. He fled to Russia. The Russian president *Vladimir Putin* exploited the subsequent destabilization of Ukraine for the annexation of the Crimea. Separatists have

continued on page 9

"Let's stop to judge ..."

continued from page 7

forces. In addition, Russia faces 20 million Muslims on its borders, united in mighty small states such as the Tatar and Chechen republics that feel solidarity with Muslims. The risk of infection by extremism must certainly be taken into consideration. In the face of the challenges of terrorism which our world is currently exposed to, it would be high time indeed that Europe and the US would arrive at an overall view of the current crises and classify them according to severity. Is it not much more important to fight extremism and restore peace in the Middle East than contain Russia's importance in Europe?

Does Putin not destabilise Europe with his rapprochement of Greece and its new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras?

This is quite questionable. First of all, it is *Alexis Tsipras* who tried to get in with Putin. Furthermore, Greece can provide some excitement, but it is not really in a position to effect a lot in the current crisis. Putin is a very clever man who takes

advantage of opportunities as he has demonstrated in Crimea. Nonetheless, he has absolutely no interest in contributing to the collapse of the euro, as some would like to see. Moreover, he knows that his own people would not like this.

What is really going on in Putin's head? Does he want to create a Grand Russia, which is in complete contradiction to the West and is based on the Orthodox religion?

Putin is presented as a dictator, as chauvinist, characterised by extreme ideas, such as Eurasianism along the lines of Dugin¹. That is totally exaggerated. The Russian President has completed university education. He is fascinated by history, particularly that of the early Russia which was discovered after the dissolution of the USSR. He wants his country to be recognised in its great history and culture as such, which is not always the case. Basically, he is not opposed to the West. His only question is whether, in order to modernise a country one needs to copy the West by all means. For the Russians, this is a very old debate. In the 19th cen-

tury, this question divided the "Westerners" and "Slavophiles" who were neither "fascists" nor prospective dictators, but very important Russian intellectuals. On the road to modernness, Putin insists on his right to have Russian culture involved. Here, also religion must have its place. This seems all the more necessary to him as in the 1980s the long persecuted Orthodox Church played a key role in the revival of Russia and the collective consciousness in the 1980s. If we stop to judge the Russians on the basis of our own criteria, this will help to revive solidarity and a peaceful climate in Europe. This will facilitate the rescue of the unity of Ukraine, which is vital.

Source: *Le Figaro* of 6.2.2015, © Marie-Laetitia Bonavita

¹ Eurasianism is a geopolitical ideology formulated by Russian emigrants in the 1920s. It represents that Russia stands as a continental power in a fundamental opposition to the Anglo-Saxon Western world. *Alexander Dugin* is a current representative of Neo-Eurasianism, who, in 2002 founded a Eurasian Party in Russia. (Translator's note)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

The importance of state sovereignty concerning the energy issue

by Thomas Kaiser

The formation of nation states was a major advance in modern history. Since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, it has been known that the rule of non-interference in foreign territories effected a decisive contribution to the establishment of state sovereignty and independent development of defined territories and ultimately gave a framework to stop the envy of other states. As a result of this insight, the Swiss Confederacy became independent from the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation which enabled its development into a federal state and was the prerequisite for direct democracy and an independent federal state.

At that time, the peoples and their rulers in Europe had learned their lessons of the terrible slaughter of the Thirty Years' War. Over a third of the population perished from disease, starvation, murder and manslaughter. At that time the people wanted to stop this for the future. The findings of the Enlightenment and the demand for separate statehood with a national population and a state territory, as well as an own constitution laid the foundations for today's nation-states and the state system of democracy.

However, this development was unfortunately no guarantee for eternal peace, which the people were so much longing for. Although the sovereign nation-state provides some protection against the envy of other nations, this sovereignty must be actively protected until today against any intervention from outside.

"Regime change – endless ..."

continued from page 8

been fighting against militias and the army of Kiev in the eastern part of Ukraine ever since. Ukraine has been split into two parts.

On the basis of these various examples it can be concluded that nowhere at all the US policy of regime change has brought about democracy. On the contrary – in almost all these countries civil war and chaos are now reigning. The US would have done better to spend the money used for this purpose to solve their own problems. They should have invested in and fixed their own crumbling infrastructure, their inadequate educational and health care systems and their languishing pensions system.

Source: "Institut für Strategische Studien" (Institute for Strategic Studies), www.strategische-studien.com from 17 January 2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



This miniature hydroelectric power plant supplies 70 households with electricity. (picture thk)

This requires a state government that firmly wants to preserve and defend sovereignty. In addition, it includes a powerful and deployable army. Even if Switzerland as a neutral state could play a special role compared to other states, including small states, this is not enough to protect against the ambitions of the powerful of this world who want to do with Switzerland what supports their interests of power. Today military violence is not immediately used; things run more finely, less spectacularly, as long as they are successful from the point of view of the more powerful.

In addition to a good military defense, whose employment should always be ultimo ratio, a state needs an efficient agriculture which is not adjusted to the export, but mainly to the supply of its own population, enabling the country to get through times of crisis without importing. It is a fact that nothing is easier than to starve a country in order to make it compliant. The argument of the Swiss Federal Council that a worldwide system of agricultural free trade would guarantee food security is naive and is not based on the experiences of history.

A sustainable experience for Switzerland after the First and Second World Wars, the Suez Crisis or also the Yom Kippur War is the aspect of the stand-alone power supply. In the Second World War Switzerland had to make painful concessions to get the coal that it so badly needed. Imagine a harsh winter without enough

heating material and you know what that would have meant for the population.

This is why in the 1950s Switzerland began to pay much more attention to the production of electric energy. It began to build hydroelectric power plants to increase the supply level of electricity wherever the technology allowed it in harmony with nature. Thus Switzerland reached the fortunate position to generate a very important part of the energy production in its own country. The country must keep this independence. However, with the Energy Agreement, the EU is trying to make the countries more interdependent and thus break a part of the countries' sovereignty. With cheap electricity imports it undermines Switzerland's energy supply. In a liberal market, the small power plants but also the larger ones will not have enough financial reserves to survive against the electricity multinationals in the EU if we do not protect and support them financially. This will be highly problematic without the state control of the energy sector. In an open and globalized power market, the major providers will do everything to swallow the small ones. If prices are continually under pressure, it is economically no longer worth building new power plants. But the preservation of the independence in energy supplies must be one of our state priorities. If we look at the energy issue without considering the importance of state sovereignty it might have fatal consequences in the future. •

“An important contribution to our power supply and to the independence of our country”

On the importance of small hydro power plants

Interview with National Councillor Jakob Büchler, President of the “Interessenverband Schweizerischer Kleinkraftwerks-Besitzer” ISKB



National Councillor
Jakob Büchler
(picture ma)

National Councillor Jakob Büchler is the President of the “Interessenverband Schweizerischer Kleinkraftwerks-Besitzer” (ISKB, Association of Swiss Small Hydro power Plant Owners), which has also a section in the French-speaking

part of Switzerland with the name Association des Usiniers Romands (ADUR). This association was founded in the German-speaking part of Switzerland in 1982, and seven years later in the French part of Switzerland. It is a stated aim of the ISKB to work together across the language border. So two representatives from the French speaking part have are members of the board. The ISKB is not a small association, with 1,200 members and when looking at the annual power output of these small hydro power plants, one is impressed. In sum the power is higher than the one of the Mühleberg nuclear power plant, and this one is certainly not a minnow. The more incomprehensible is the intention to contain governmental funding in the Energy Strategy 2050, in this segment. The Swiss Parliament has the opportunity to prevent that. The importance of the small hydro power stations in our energy landscape and the difficulties the individual power plant owners face is explained in the following interview with National Councillor Jakob Büchler, President of the ISKB.

Current Concerns: For how long have we had small hydro power stations in Switzerland?

National Councillor Jakob Büchler: Already for hundreds of years. In former times, they served as a mechanical drive of mills, sawmills and spinning mills and at the beginning of the 20th century those were increasingly electrified. At that time there were still over 7,000 small hydro power stations in Switzerland. The small hydro power stations disappeared more and more with the expansion of the electricity grid and the construction of large power plants. In the middle of the 1980s, the trend could be stopped – since then the number

is growing slowly again. Today, there are about 1,200 installations in Switzerland.

They are actually seldom visible in the landscape.

Yes, often they're integrated in the landscape in such manner that they are barely visible. If you hike through the area of Toggenburg from Wildhaus to Wil, you pass a myriad of hydro power stations which all produce electricity reliably and simultaneously protect the environment, and they directly contradict the reproach of not protecting the environment.

Where do the environmental associations put their emphasis?

It is about the minimum water flow requirements, to keep the way open for fish in both directions. Today you cannot just dam up the fish, they must have a possibility to pass installations. We must address that. If we don't, we get stuck.

What is particular about a small hydro power plant?

It is decentralized, power is delivered directly from the production site to the consumer, you don't have to build huge networks. That makes perfect sense. If we have a factory nearby and can directly feed the electricity in, it is best. The slogan “from the region, for the region” applies fully here. It's applicable as well to power production. The risk of clustering is much smaller.

How must I understand this as a layperson?

Our nuclear power plants are important. They produce a lot of power, but they carry a certain risk. Our small hydro power stations are decentralized, and the electricity is consumed on site, where it is produced. That is our advantage and we have no waste to dispose of.

What kind of waters does a small hydro plant need to be successful?

Hydroelectric power plants are planned where there is enough water throughout the year and where there are certain differences in altitude. The turbine can handle varying flows to a certain extent. But it takes a certain minimum load to drive a turbine. There is a lower limit for us; we don't want to dam every little creek and hang in a water wheel to produce a little bit of power. It must have a certain size. Certainly above 300 kW, less under cer-

tain conditions only. The waters must be suitable for this.

What role do small hydro power plants take in the Swiss Energy Strategy 2050?

During the debate in Parliament there was an antagonism between the various types of renewable energies. Although there is an organization AEE Suisse, which is the umbrella organization of the economy in the area of renewable energies, the ISKB is also a member. A look into the statistics shows that the significance of the small hydro power plants is many times bigger compared to solar energy, wind power and bio-gas. The biomass power plants often have a problem with the supply of their substrates. Wind power is unreliable. If there is no wind, nothing runs in the truest sense of the word.

To what extent does the Energy Strategy 2050 take the small hydro power plants into account?

The National Council as the first Council has voted and agreed on the compensatory feed-in remuneration, the so-called “kostendeckende Einspeisevergütung”, KEV, for new installations, and for existing installations there is a partial contribution to the investment costs. Everybody producing renewable energy wants to be supported by KEV. It was decided in article 19 to only fund installations bigger than 1,000 kilowatts. Smaller installations would be supported only under certain conditions. These installations account for about 25 percent. In an unjustified way one has concentrated on the small hydro power plants with respect to making cuts.

Why that?

The reason is that environmentalists and landscape protectionists fear, that with this funding of the hydro power plants the last free-flowing waters will be obstructed and the ongoing restoration of the waters will be slowed down.

Is that comprehensible?

The anxiety is understandable, the reality is a different one. There are many projects thought of in secluded waters, but the present funding will never be sufficient to build very small installations in such unspoiled places. Very small installations can only be operated economically, where

“An important contribution ...”

continued from page 10

building installations have already existed and these can be re-used.

Is there a reason why the Federal Government does not want to promote the small hydro power plants any longer? Hydroelectric power is something that perfectly fits our topography, our tradition and our industrial development.

Yes, that's right. The following is to be noted: the whole energy strategy is a huge package. The economy is generally opposed to the Energy Strategy 2050, also the cantons are dissatisfied.

Why that?

The reason is that the large hydro-power is owned by the cantons. A battle for the share has arisen among the renewable energies and unfortunately also between large and small hydro power. Large hydro power plants such as Linth-Limmern also want contributions to the investment in buildings and would like to obtain funding from the Federal Government. You can't reproach the large-scale hydro power for this. It is the result of the battle for the share between wind power, solar energy, biomass and whatever is around and hydro power. That we have increased the KEV rate from 1.5 to 2.3 cents is also controversial. We will have to have a referendum concerning this issue. Are we willing to pay a surcharge for renewable electricity? We pay the KEV-surcharge as consumers to the Federal Government, which then redistributes the money again out of the big pot.

How did this KEV come about?

There are big industrial sectors running their own power plants and thus producing electricity which they consume themselves. Later on electricity production was redirected, so that they could feed electricity into the grid. Then the electricity lobby came up and said: You may supply us electricity, but we'll pay you nothing. Then the federal government introduced the KEV, the compensatory feed-in remuneration, an actual sales guarantee. It partially went so far that the major electricity plants said, the power production is fine, but actually we don't really need your electricity. This is the background for the distribution battle.

Why don't we need the electricity?

Electricity production in Europe is infinite. A lot of electricity is being produced. Federal Councillor *Leuthard* said, I get enough electricity, the table is richly covered, I can choose what electricity I want to take.

But that is electricity from abroad?

Yes, if we purchase electricity from abroad, no one knows exactly how it has been pro-



*This small hydro power installation provides 1,300 households with electricity.
(picture thk)*

duced, possibly from brown coal power stations heavily polluting our environment. It might even be nuclear power? This is not honest, we are closing our nuclear power plants down and purchasing electricity from nuclear power plants abroad. You cannot manage economy that way.

From what you have told so far, one can conclude, that you aren't satisfied with Energy Strategy 2050 either.

I am sceptical about Energy Strategy 2050. In my opinion, Doris Leuthard was a bit too fast and dashing in her acting. We are indorsed by a popular initiative “without nuclear power in Switzerland”. Next year we have to vote on it. The initiative demands that nuclear power plants are to be closed down two years after adoption of the popular initiative; the latest nuclear power plants 45 years after commissioning.

What does that mean?

The initiative adopted, the last nuclear power plant would have to be closed down in 2029. This is a hard cut. If the initiative is accepted, we will have a genuine problem. I believe in research and technology and that we are able to develop new techniques and methods in the next few years, but we will not be able to cope with drastic remedies. If at the end, we in Switzerland have no more nuclear power and are not able to replace it in our own country, we will be totally depending on abroad.

I would like to seize upon this issue of dependence. Small hydro power plants, as well as micro-hydro power plants make a very important contribution to the self-generation of electric power. The fact that, at the moment, there is a lot of electric power on the market, could make us say, what the hell, in that case, we'll take the

electric power from abroad. That would be devastating. Do we not have to follow the path that brings us genuine energy security?

In any case. We need to be as self-subsistent as possible in terms of energy. We will neither achieve this in the oil nor in the natural gas sector, but in the electric power sector we should achieve this to the greatest possible degree. Switzerland is a water castle, this is also known in Europe. Electricity from hydro power is absolutely clean energy. It would be paradoxical if now we simply went and disconnected hydroelectric power. This is absolutely short-sighted and must by no means happen.

Electricity, cheaply produced abroad, is an attack on our energy sovereignty. If electric power abroad is so cheap, we are barely able to build new plants in Switzerland, because they will no longer pay for themselves and no one will build a hydroelectric power plant, if, at the end, it will only operate at a loss. Must we not give top priority, politics as well, to the protection of domestic energy supply?

In the present situation, it will be difficult to obtain understanding that one wants to support hydro power with large funding. We have a current surplus. The operators of big systems, such as Linth-Limmern who have invested 1.5 billion in the project, are struggling with the fact that with the fall in electricity prices they can no longer operate in the black. It's devastating. It is perhaps comparable to a farmer who has expanded his stable so that he can greatly increase the number of cows, and suddenly the milk price drops to 50 cents. This is a disaster. He is deeply indebted and is not able to earn enough. We

continued on page 12

“An important contribution ...”

continued from page 11

are currently not able to produce electricity at cost-covering prices. That is our problem. When they began to build Linth-Limmern, no one could expect electricity prices to decrease to such an extent. One year ago, we did neither expect the price of oil to decline as extremely as it does now. A current example is also the euro or the dollar. These are strategies that must be seen in a global context. There is a high production of electricity. Many have considered this as a way to make money. We have introduced a quota regime for the quantity of milk for the farmers, which, of course, is difficult for electricity. Under any circumstances we now must avoid the error to rely on cheap imports. This will have devastating consequences. There will be other times to come, for sure.

What is politically possible at the moment?

I hope the Council of States will bring further corrections. I am not satisfied with respect to our small hydro power plants. The plan not to support the 300-kilowatt power plants, but only the larger ones is wrong. Our power plants have been around for decades, we have produced electricity continuously and reliably, have fed the electricity into the grid, because it was used directly in the region, and have always protected the environment.

The environmentalists should also recognize that after all, shouldn't they?

Yes, of course, but with every project we have a dispute with the environmental organizations. Once again we're in the midst

of such a project. It's a real fight until you can open a power plant. That is not so easy to cope with.

According to their opinion, is there still too little attention paid to the environment?

This reproach can be immediately rejected. The ecological enhancement of water is always a very important requirement: we take into account that the waters will not be obstructed for fish, which must be granted. We are planning a well enough residual water so that the streams do not dry out, etc. We take absolute care that everything meets the requirements, so there will not be any additional delay.

Are there still places where you can build small hydro power plants?

We have already taken a lot of good places with small hydro power plants. But I am absolutely against the creation of a law which prohibits the further expansion of sites. It is not our intention to dam every brook, but where it makes sense, we must have the opportunity to build small hydro power plants.

Who are the operators of small hydro electric power stations?

Many of these works have been family-owned for generations. For decades they have looked after them with a lot of passion, cherished and cared for them in many hours without payment of any kind. They give everything to preserve this tradition. The plant was built by the grandfather, then it was bequeathed to the father, from him to the son and will later be left to the grandson, and this should continue. They know they make an important contribution to our electricity supply and our national sover-

eignty, because if we continue making us dependent on foreign energy supplies, we will be vulnerable to blackmail in an emergency.

This must be avoided by all means.

Yes, sure. Add to this that some power plants of ISKB hardly produce surplus. The owners do not get rich by it, but they contribute to the common good. They have made their profession a hobby. Should we punish them now? Investment in a small hydro power plant, which is continuously monitored, are not small. It requires a new water wheel or extensive renovations or adjustments at the inlet. These are fairly large investments. Of course, the operator of such a plant may earn something as well. The cost is calculated after all, because the life of these systems is very long. What's more, the technology of these power plants is tested and successful, concerning wind power we have very little experience and also wind is something very capricious. Subjectively, you have the feeling that there is wind, but for the operation of a wind turbine, which has the corresponding capacity, there are not many places in the country. With the hydro power this is quite different. The owners of a small hydro power plant will not be millionaires, but they contribute significantly and passionately to our power and thus for the autonomy and independence of our country.

National Councillor Büchler, thank you very much!

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

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Water supplies in the Valais in danger

The power supply is a joint effort – it is important to take care of them (Part 1)

by Dr rer publ Werner Wüthrich

Water and the water rights have always played a central role in the Valais. Those who explore the Valais on foot will inevitably come across the irrigation channels in many places. These artfully designed irrigation channels made it possible for the population to live and cultivate the ground high above the valley on the sun-drenched terraces where there is only little water. The “Suonen” (irrigation channels) transport the water from often distant mountain streams – along steep slopes in beautifully constructed mains. They disappear in tunnels and are sometimes hung on vertical walls to direct the water to where it is urgently needed for survival. The cultivated land is especially affected by the drought, because the high ridges retain the rain clouds. In the mountains it rains more often, and huge amounts of water are stored in glaciers. In the valleys, however, the water must be used and distributed judiciously.

The irrigation channels criss-cross the landscape like blood vessels the human body. Finally, the “Rüüsä” (rivulets) take the water of the irrigation channels down to the meadows. The “Schrapfjini” (distributors) distribute the precious liquid on the cultivated land in fine basins and branches. This centuries-old irrigation system is still used today and should be protected as a World Heritage Site by *UNESCO*.

The irrigation channels are the population's joint effort. In spring, the damage of winter must be repaired. Residents meet in “community work” which was often dangerous in former times. The water rights are cooperatively supervised by the communes. Everyone knows when and how long he can direct the water onto his fields. An arbitration court settles the disputes. Today, new materials, pipes and new techniques have made the work easier and less dangerous. Many of the artistically constructed irrigation channels, which have long been working well, are still in operation and direct their water onto the fields and pastures day by day. The irrigation channels have become the source of life for the Valais mountain villages – until today.

Hydro power makes Switzerland more independent

About a hundred years ago the water in the Valais had another very different meaning. The Industrial Revolution had changed Switzerland's appearance significantly in the 19th century. The energy problem had to be solved. The factories were working mostly with coal – and coal had to be imported at a one-hundred-percent

level. During the First and Second World Wars, people found out that this dependence could definitely reach alarming levels. Electricity could replace coal and later also partly the oil. It could be generated by turbines that were powered by water. The railways, too, were working on coal, and it was reasonable to electrify them as well. In 1917, the *Swiss Federal Railways* decided to electrify the operation of the railway. The Gotthard route was one of the first tracks that benefited from this innovation. In 1939, the National Exhibition Switzerland proudly presented the most powerful electric locomotive in the world which was able to pull eleven fully loaded wagons along the slopes and bends of the Gotthard route. Many industrial plants quickly switched to the new form of energy. The electrification of the railway, industry and households was to become a major task for the whole country and was one of the conditions for Switzerland's impressive industrial development. Already in the last decade of the 19th century, the first river power stations were built. Soon the first reservoirs were added, which collected water from the glaciers. This development reached its peak in the 1950s and 60s, with the construction of numerous large-scale systems.

The construction of the Grande Dixence dam is to be described as an example. The 2012 deceased *Hans Wyer*, a longtime State Councillor in the Canton of Valais and President of the CVP Switzerland, published a large, comprehensive work entitled “The use of water power in Valais”. In it he describes the events of that time in great detail.

Grande Dixence – a project of the century

In 1950, construction began in the Vallée des Dix. The plan was bold. The concept was visionary and beat everything ever seen before in terms of size and estimated sums. The 285-meter-high dam – until recently, the highest dam in the world – is 200 meters thick at its foot. It collects water from 35 glaciers and countless waterways. 80 water intakes and 100 kilometers of tunnels take the precious liquid even into remote regions such as Zermatt and direct it into the artificial lake, there. In 1960, after a construction period of ten years, the dam was finished. A further five years were spent on the work until the electricity production could be fully incorporated. In recent years, the facilities were renovated and expanded so that the electricity production was almost doubled.

About 3,000 people were involved in this project, often working under difficult conditions. But it was a great adventure. It was sometimes cold and stormy, and the great height caused the workers and engineers some trouble. Initially they worked almost under war conditions. However, the working conditions soon improved. By the end of the 1950s, the shifts were reduced to 8 hours and they did no longer have to work on weekends. In the valley a barrack village was built for the workers with shops, a restaurant, a kiosk, a cinema and a sports field, where football matches against teams from the surrounding villages took place. During leisure-time, the workers met in gymnastics clubs or choirs. A bank branch helped them to transfer their salary to their families, especially in Italy. Life was supposed to proceed as normal as possible, which it did successfully, as witnesses reported.

Here are two excerpts from the above-mentioned work of Hans Wyer:

- “Many mountain farmers [...] and workers who came from all directions, spent several years in the strange and hostile environment of mountains wilds. They hollowed out the rock, drove tunnels and shafts and blasted caverns: the underground control rooms. They put their health at risk and often their lives – fatal accidents were nothing out of the ordinary.”
- “The mountain farmers welcomed the establishment of the construction site as a godsend. Finally the long awaited opportunities to earn money were there. They accepted the job straightaway because they did not have to leave their village and were able to continue their homestead. The burden of poverty that before had pushed them to the ground, became easier.”

Such descriptions are representative of many building sites in the Alps, where people worked on similar projects. A large number of dams was built at that time. Switzerland tried as soon as possible to refrain from coal as an energy source, which had brought the country into dangerous dependence on Nazi Germany in World War II. However, Grande Dixence was the biggest project by far. A black day for Switzerland was the 30th August 1965. Several hundred workers worked in the Saas Valley – near the Grande Dixence – on the dam of Mattmark, when a glacier crash of the Allalin Glacier buried 88 construction workers under half a million cubic meters of ice. A memorial commem-

continued on page 14

"Water supplies in the Valais..."

continued from page 13

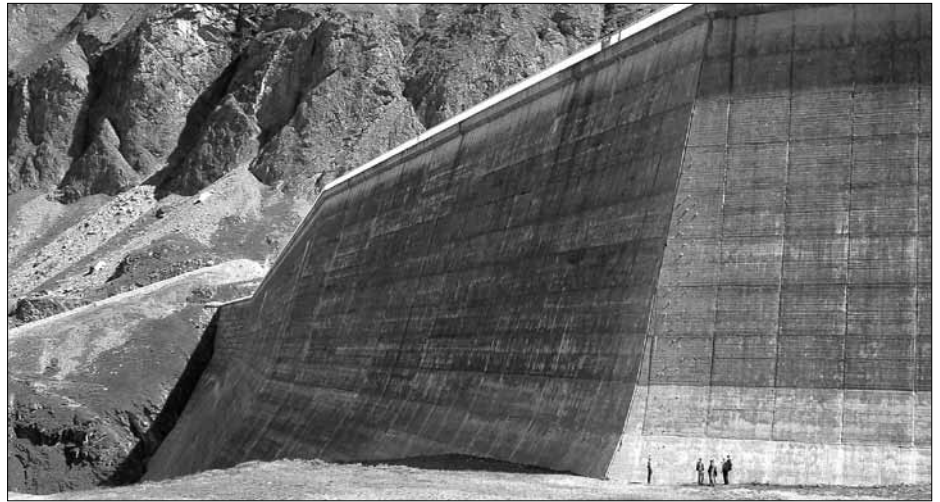
orates this probably biggest disaster in Alpine tunnel and power plant construction.

Careful handling of nature is now playing a more and more important role. In Valais, environmental organizations, the Cantonal Department of Energy and power plant companies confer at a round table to solve the problem of residual water by mutual agreement. Drained and very little water-bearing streams will soon be an issue of the past. ("Walliser Bote", dated 6.6.2013) Recently, the *Electricity Company of Canton Valais* announced to dam the Rotten (the Rhone) in its upper reaches to run a power plant. The project comprises part of the river water at Gletsch below the Rhone glacier, leading it through a gradient of 280 meters to Oberwald. Pipes, turbines and control rooms are created exclusively underground. The plant is intended to supply 9,000 households with electricity. The output is just under a tenth of the Grande Dixence. – But this is only one side. At the same time the Rhone, which is still heavily built up, is being renatured. It should meander again in the large protected floodplain between Gletsch and Oberwald, i.e. it should seek its course freely again. Thus, this nature reserve is upgraded. ("Walliser Bote", dated 23.5.2013)

Who owns the Grand Dixence?

The *Grande Dixence SA*, based in Sion is now the owner of the largest power plant in Switzerland. It is now the market leader for electricity from hydro power in Switzerland and in Europe. The Grande Dixence SA in turn belongs to *Alpiq* by 60%, a company formed in 2008 after the merger of *Atel (Aare-Tessin AG)* and the *EOS (Energie Ouest Suisse)*. The *Axpo* (formerly *Nordostschweizerische Kraftwerke NOK*), *BKW (Berner Kraftwerke)*, *IWB (Industrielle Werke Basel)* each hold a $13 \frac{1}{3}$ per cent share. 17 cantons are involved directly or indirectly. The Valais, however, is itself hardly involved. For two years, a man from Upper Valais has been the director of this company for the first time. Alpiq and BKW are public limited companies whose shares are traded at the stock exchange. However, more than 80 percent belong to the public sector. Axpo is wholly-owned by the Northeast Swiss cantons. Therefore the Grande Dixence belongs almost entirely to some cantons and large cities, especially in German and French speaking Switzerland.

The Grande Dixence is just one of many power plants. Altogether, there are about 50 larger power plants in Valais, including three of the four largest reservoirs in Switzerland. They supply a third of the electricity in the country. 80 percent of the Valais hydro power is, however, predominantly



The dam wall of Grande Dixence, one of the biggest hydro power plants in Switzerland. (picture wikimedia/Paul Kordwig)

in "foreign" ownership. According to experts' report only about 170 million Swiss francs flow into public funds of the Valais nowadays.

Escheat is imminent

The sovereignty over the waters of the Rhone is with the canton. The communes are responsible for the tributaries that flow into the main river. This division gives the mountain communes in the side valleys a strong position, because almost all power plants are located on their territory. On what terms have the communes given away their water right concessions?

The big electricity companies in Switzerland use the local water power at an annual water interest. However, the Welsh were clever people. In the first half of the 20th century they tied the use of hydro power to an important clause. After the expiration of the 80-year concession period the so-called escheat comes to pass. This means that a large part of the power plants (80 percent) fall back without compensation to the commune that once issued the license. In practice this means: The commune, in most cases some mountain communities, can take back the "wet systems" of a power plant, i.e. the dam, the pressure pipes and turbines as their property at no cost. At the same time, the communes can purchase the "dry parts", i.e. the electrical equipment for a reasonable compensation from the previous operator. Plants worth many billions of francs might change hands that way. The Valais media speak of assets totaling about 20 billion francs. Small mountain communes in the valleys of the Rhone profit mostly, which is, however, hotly debated in many communes.

The water rights treaties that the communes and the canton of Valais once settled with the big electricity companies in Switzerland look similar. They also provide that the equipment "escheats" at end of the concession period.

In the first half of the 20th century, the use of hydro power with large storage facilities was as new as the large wind farms are today. No one really knew whether the enormous efforts would "pay off" and would be of long-term use. No one could say whether it would be possible to operate the industry and railways throughout Switzerland efficiently and cost-effectively with electricity. Nobody knew whether the expensive equipment would one day be standing about uselessly in the countryside. – The "escheat" in the treaties of the Valais communes was a kind of insurance for an uncertain future. For the current generation the escheat is a piece of good fortune. They can benefit from the foresight and caution of their grandparents and great-grandparents – all the more so because the hydroelectric power is considered more and more valuable in today's energy debate.

How to proceed?

As an extreme example, the communes Eisten and Zwischbergen are often covered by the Valais media. In case of an escheat of the power plants *Mattmark* and *Acker-sand I* they would obtain assets per inhabitant of approximately 1.5 million francs. There has already been a recent example: the SBB recently purchased the escheat rights from six communes in the Trient valley and paid 343 million francs for the license renewal of *Barberine* power plant. Of these, the commune Finhaut with its 367 inhabitants obtained 112 million francs. Although the commune's council wanted to realize expensive tourist plans with the money, the voters showed once again the prudence that is on the agenda in direct democratically organized Swiss communes: They rejected the project in the communal assembly.

There is also another example: In 1945, the commune of Bagnes voluntarily re-

continued on page 15

"Water supplies in the Valais..."

continued from page 14

nounced the escheat law in its concession contract for the *Drances de Bagnes*.

In case the escheat will be exercised completely and according to contracts in the near future, the great power plant operators in Switzerland will not only lose the title to the equipment, but also the right to use the water with which they produce the electricity. From 2030 on the big power plants – including the Grande Dixence – will start to escheat. About 80 percent of the plants will become the property of communes without any compensation. In reality, this will have to be settled much earlier. Today's operators have – understandably – announced that they will only invest and repair the equipment, if they can be sure to become involved in the Valais' electricity production in the future, as well.

Jürg Aeberhard, head of hydraulic production at Alpiq, visited the Valais a few years ago and remarked, thereby displaying a lowlander's not very insightful view: "The communes are the happy winners in escheat cases." They did, however, not own the prerequisites to successfully operate a large power plant, he said. Neither would they be financially capable of responding to all kinds of disturbances, industrial accidents and replacement investments. Moreover, they would also have to have access to the European electricity market. Aeberhard then suggested finding a – as he called it "good Swiss compromise". Today's operators and communes might share "fifty-fifty". ("Walliser Bote", dated 26.3.2011) Understandably this proposal met with little positive response in the Valais. The well-known journalist *Luzius Theler* wrote in "Walliser Bote" of 29.3.2011: "Alpiq wants to claim half of the escheat values for power plant operators. This is either naive or blatant – or both."

Neither did Councillor *Jean-Michel Cina*, a member of the Valais government, accept Aeberhard's arguments: "What the Central Plateau cantons can do, the Valais can also do: Why should we not also establish a power company, ourselves", he asked. Zurich and Geneva were the financial centers, Biel was the competence center of the watch industry. The Valais could become the energy canton, a center of excellence for hydro power. The first steps had already been taken. Skilled jobs would be created. By 2015, the ETH Lausanne will build an institute with eleven professorial chairs in Sion, capital of the canton of Valais. Seven of these are reserved for the energy sector.

Cina continued that it was wrong to disqualify the mountain cantons from managing the power stations themselves. There were also no plans "to oust the previous operators totally". The escheats offer the

chance to directly take responsibility and achieve more income in addition to the water interests. "Will we soon be water sheikhs?", asks Jean-Michel Cina. "I would not mind if the canton of Valais became so rich that it might assign compensation to some other cantons according to the fiscal equalisation scheme. Today it is still the other way round."

(www.1815.ch/wallis/aktuell/sind-wir-schon-bald-wasser-scheichs-49820.html)

Who will reign in the water castle in future?

The following solutions are favoured:

1. The communes cash the bills and renounce to acquire and run the power plants. They grant a concession to today's operators like Alpiq, Axpo or BKW.
2. The commonwealth, i.e. the benefited communes or cantons transfer the power plant facilities that have become their property into a new company. The former operation companies would contribute the "dry parts" (which means electro-technical installations), their know-how, their technical knowledge and their commercial relationships with the European world of power. Both, Valais and Alpiq, BKW and Axpo, would furthermore operate in a joint venture.

Controversial is the percentage of communal participation in the future company. Nowadays the big companies like Alpiq, BKW and Axpo command 80% of the total power generation. This is to be changed. Valais wants to participate directly and targets a percentage of 60% – as against 20% today after the "Heimfall". "Valais must have the say again", says state Councillor Jean-Michel Cina. Power generation would become a joint endeavour in which local inhabitants would act as "head of the household".

With this procedure, however, not all the problems are solved yet. The Valais itself has to work out just solutions but must also consider the interests of whole Switzerland. The wealth, which the small mountain communes are now facing, raises desires. Just one third of the communes in the Valais profit from it. The Upper Valais, where only just one fourth of the population lives, owns half of the water power. Currently this is compensated by transferring the cantonal water power taxation of 60% of the communal water-costs to the communes. "Heimfall" and water right concessions are to be newly regulated. Former Councillor of States (CVP) *Rolf Escher* suggests: The licensing authorities are to benefit from the reversion by one half and both canton and communes by a fourth each.

On 17 January 2013, communes of Upper Valais informed about the decisions by an overwhelming majority that they

wanted to cooperate with a strong partner from the electricity industry who would hold 40% of a joint company. The licensing authorities are to hold 30% and both not licensing authorities and the Canton of Valais each 15%. The political left prefer a solution in which all power plants are run by a single cantonal company. ("Walliser Bote" of 19 January 2013)

Among the cantons there are open questions due to waterpower as well that must be solved at a federal level. Currently the mountain cantons negotiate with some cantons of the Swiss central plateau in which the power plants companies are located. The profits those companies generate by water are to be taxed in the regions where they occur. Today the big companies generate profits with the water of mountain regions that are to a large extent taxed in the lowlands, where the companies are located. The Canton Solothurn (where Alpiq is sited) has stopped negotiations, because points of views were said to be not compatible. The Federal Supreme Court will decide. ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 25.9.2013)

Pumped-storage power plants proven concept

The Grande Dixence SA and her partner, the *Forces Motrices Valaisannes*, have announced that they want to extend the Grande Dixence to become a pumped-storage power plant. At the moment in this region the pumped-storage power plant *Nantes de Dranse* is under construction. The project RhoDix shall have a capacity of 2,000 megawatt and will thereby be even bigger than the huge station *Linthal 2015*, that is under construction in the Canton of Glarus. The water would be taken from the Rhone and would be pumped at two levels from 500 to 2240 metres into the Lac de Dix. To that end there are two huge pumping caverns being planned that can pump up 40,000 litres per second. At a first glance this is a losing bargain, because the pumping costs more power than later can be "turbinised" respectively produced by the station. Anyway it adds up. Water is pumped up when there is abundant power in the market and the prices are low. The power can be produced later straight on the point, when the demand resurges and the prices are high. A storage power plant can produce power to order within two minutes and feed it into the grid. The costs for this undertaking are estimated at 800 Million Francs. Alpiq, Axpo, BKW and the industrial plants of Basle, the owner of Grande Dixence SA, will lance the project, only when the conditions of the "Heimfall" are clear. ("Walliser Bote" of 9 February 2013)

Within the next years many pumped-storage power plants are likely to be built –

continued on page 16

"Water supplies in the Valais..."

continued from page 15

especially in mountain countries like Switzerland, Austria, Spain and Norway. The main reason is obvious. The percentage of renewable energies increases permanently. The big fluctuations in power production, that inevitably emerge with wind-parks and photovoltaic could be compensated by them. But – does it really work?

One-sided focus on solar and wind energy leads to dwindling electricity prices

Recently, however, there is skepticism about the construction of pumped storage plants. The Berne power plants BKW have put the project Grimsel 3 on hold because it could not be operated profitably. *Lucius Theler* states his concern "if pumped storage plants are already yesterday's news?" in his article in the "Walliser Bote", dated 30 March 2013. Big plants such as Lintharena-2015 (for 2 billion) in the Canton of Glarus and Nant de Drance-2017 (Valais, for 1.84 billion Swiss francs) are currently being built and will generate as much electricity as a nuclear power plant. What led BKW to their decision to stop Grimsel 3 which does not fit into the Federal Council's Energy Strategy 2050?

Temporarily there is now a massive excess supply of electrical energy in the European market, and prices have fallen sharply. Germany in particular has massively built up wind farms and photovoltaic parks with huge capacities on the sea and on the land that are heavily subsidized. Even though, the German households still have to pay a high price for their electricity because they have to pay a massive surcharge of more than 50% to cover the subsidies. A household today pays a horrendous average of 35 cents per kilowatt hour, throughout Europe the highest price for electricity. It is expected to rise to 40 cents by 2020. As the former Federal Minister *Altmeier* recently pointed out, by 2040 the energy cost for taxpayers and consumers will be 1,000 billion euros. Today, Germany pays 20 billion euros of guaranteed feed-in tariffs each year that make wind and solar power systems even for small producers a viable business. Critical voices complain that things are going wrong since an overall concept is missing while changes are pushed too quickly.

The main problem is that nuclear and coal power plants cannot be turned off despite surplus production, because there are days when there is no sun and no wind. On sunny and windy days, however, there is – together with the concurrent nuclear and coal power plants – far too much power, which is called "disposable power". The price temporarily drops below zero. This surplus is passed across the free European electricity market to the neighboring countries, pushing down the price there. This in turn means that hydro power – the "old" renewable energy in Switzerland – can no longer cover its cost. On average, electricity is traded at 4 to 5 cents at the European Energy Exchange. This price is below the production cost of existing Swiss hydro-power plants, which are at producing electricity at 7 cents. In new or upgraded plants, according to a study by the *Federal Office of Energy*, these costs are 14 centimes ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 13.12.2013). In other words, existing hydro power plants cannot cover their costs and new investments are not paying off, because importing is currently much cheaper than producing – a dangerous development for the country.

The director of the *Central Swiss power plants* CKW recently made the following statement: "The supply of subsidized energy from solar and wind power distorts market prices by 30 to 40 percent." The BKW is going to shut down the nuclear power plant Mühleberg prematurely – for economic reasons, that is, because even the operating costs are not covered. This way foreign dependence will rise – both on fossil plants as well as on foreign nuclear facilities. BKW has a participation in the German coal-fired power station Wilhelmshaven, which will go on-line soon. The shareholding of BKW is equivalent to two-thirds of the capacity of Mühleberg.

Uncertain future of hydro power

Lucius Theler assesses the prospects of the domestic hydro power stations in the "Walliser Bote" dated 6 July 2013 with great concern: "They are with their backs to the wall. Given the highly subsidized new renewable energies and their rapid development, they are confronted with unpleasant facts. Highly subsidized electricity comes foremost from Germany at prices below the cost of local power plants even including many hydroelectric power plants. Yet

highly profitable plants must live together with sharply reduced margins. In addition, the assessment of future developments in the energy sector is like reading tea leaves. Nobody knows where we are headed – neither in the short nor in the long term. The drop of prices will also lead to a re-evaluation of the values of the "Heimfalls". *Lucius Theler* concludes that hydro power is going through one of its most difficult times in its history.

The concept of delivering peak power at high prices that was well-proven for many years does no longer work. In recent decades, the electricity of pumped storage was required in each case about noon, when stoves were simultaneously switched on across Europe and they were able to provide much additional power within minutes. Recently, the storage plants get competition from photovoltaic power plants that produce most of the power that lunch time (when the sun shines). The pumped storage plants need to re-align themselves to act as "batteries" which store the electric power resulting from the inevitably large fluctuations of wind and solar power. In Germany, wind and sun plants produce less than a quarter of the 8,760 yearly hour's electricity ("Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" from 19 October 2013). The existing capacity of storage power plants falls far too short to close the large gaps. Numerous coal plants take on this task. More are being built. Combined with the remaining nuclear power plants this results in massive surpluses – especially when at the same time the wind is blowing and the sun is shining.

Conclusion: It is time that the hydroelectric power plants in Switzerland again receive the recognition they deserve by politics and business. As the preservation and promotion of local agricultural production is highly important for our food sovereignty, hydro power in our Alps and the Jura is a priority for a high level self-subsistence of electricity supply. In addition to the small hydro power plants, big plants such as Grand Dixence or Linth-2015 must be allowed to sell their electricity at a reasonable price. •

In the second part of this article we will discuss the power supply in the EU in more detail and address the issue of an independent Swiss energy policy.

Alertswiss is launched – help for individual emergency plans

cc. In early February 2015, the Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) launched the system *Alertswiss* in collaboration with various partner organizations. Now everyone who is interested finds information on a website (alertswiss.ch), a smartphone app, Twitter (@alertswiss) and YouTube information about the precaution and the behaviour in disasters and emergencies in Switzerland. In the centre of the newly launched website is an individual emergency plan that every household can create for themselves. In it e.g. family meeting points can be set, important information can be deposited or a list with emergency supplies can be stored. In an emergency, it is essential that the relevant authorities and the population concerned will act as quickly and as correctly as possible, said *Benno Bühlmann*, Director of the Federal Office.