

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

“American dominated NATO is building a new wall straight through Europe” “Germany does not send the signals that only Germany can achieve”

Interview with Willy Wimmer



Willy Wimmer
(picture ef)

Current Concerns: Your last book “Die Akte Moskau” (the file Moscow) will be published in June. What about its contents, and why did you write it? Willy Wimmer: The book covers a whole generation, to be based

on a 25 years period. This is a big enough time period, so as to assess political development. And this is necessary in the case of questions which could be of crucial importance for a country in particular, or even for a whole continent. Several years ago, confronted the background of massive American propaganda and the progressive demonization of the Russian Federation and of its president, one had to face the justified impression of a propaganda-machine being set in motion towards Russia, which should lead compulsively to war or “unconditional surrender” of Russia. From an objective point of view, mechanisms involved replicated the action carried out against Imperial Germany by former *Stratfor* chief *George Friedman*, to reach strategic objectives against a power soaring economically and socially in Central Europe. The Treaty of Versailles was the answer to German expectations, President *Wilson*’s 14 points, its reference criteria – and nowadays the world is still suffering from the consequences of the process which was engaged back then.

Widespread throughout the world by Western propaganda, Moscow’s image does not correspond to reality

Nevertheless, the question is: Why then war, or why war again, when in Moscow those in charge of decisions are rational politicians who think in terms of peaceful exchange and good-neighbourly relations? As for some years Moscow’s image widespread throughout the world by Anglo-

“What the West did to the image of the ‘Common European House’ is actually unbearable. These ‘muscle contests exercises’ dating back to the past cold war are just for political military child-like minds. If they are those who should determine our future, we could only be pessimistic. The ‘Charter of Paris’ of November 1990 is our only chance to achieve peace and not to end in a kind of ‘Hedge funds-camp’.”

Saxon propaganda does not correspond to reality at all. Everyone can be convinced about it, when going this way. Even concerning the Ukraine crisis, all there is to say is that Western Hybris has set the cascade in motion, and the Ukraine has fallen into this Hybris.

In my book, I refer to some issues, which are important as regards assessment of what’s being done. However, all this has also a previous history which allowed me to build my own judgment, particularly in the direct contacts I had with both major powers, USA and Russia – which at the time was still the Soviet Union. The experience that I gained while in charge of the integration of the armed forces in reunified Germany and in my relationship with Soviet armed forces in Germany during these years shows it very clearly as well nowadays: with Russia, even in the difficult times, one can reach a successful conclusion to problems. We have the jurists, they have the word of honour of high-ranking officials, and this is excellent. Why should we again go to throats, as Mrs *Nuland* from the USA advised us, on whatever grounds?

There is also currently, at a time when atomic shelters are being renovated, a real opportunity for the book. The celebrated, both within and beyond Germany, outstanding “House of history of the Federal Republic of Germany “ in Bonn, with other seats in Berlin and Leipzig, will present on 5 July 2016 a big exhibition dedicated to the “Army of Unity “. Due to my political and administrative function of that time within the ruling team

of the Bonn ministry of defence and due also to my participating, together with my GDR colleague Dr *Bertram Wieczorek*, in the draft concept for integration – which meanwhile became a basic requirement for the armed forces on both sides government in Germany, I have been very closely associated to the preparatory works of this exhibition.

NATO tanks in the outskirts of St. Petersburg

The new cold war against Russia is now being felt almost daily. Sometimes, it’s all about politics, sometimes about sport, it may even be that the original purpose of a European singer’s contest is abused. For more than 2 years, since the coup d’état supported by the West in Kiev and the ensuing Russian reaction, for example, such as the support to the referendum on Crimean peninsula, Russia is pulled to pieces by us in the west. What’s the point of it?

All this fuss on our side determines for years and since *Hillary Clinton* our lives. It looks like a slogan: West’s way of acting is legitimate, just because the West did it. This is a reminder of the darkest times, and we Germans are government-sided again, in a very near future participating in the NATO summit conference in Warsaw. There is a consistent American attitude in the NATO against Russia. Although there is still no sign of war, Western Europeans are nevertheless being at least pulled away from Russia, with the help of Poland

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"American dominated NATO is ..."

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and the Baltic states. American dominated Nato is building a new wall straight through Europe. A perverse symbol of our policy: NATO tanks in the outskirts of Saint Petersburg. If pictures could speak, the West ruthlessly leaves no doubt what should be offered to its Russian neighbour.

German people do not agree with this war policy

One gets the impression that in Germany the voices are lowering, which criticize the new cold war and want normal relations with Russia. What's your impression about that? Have we already got used too much to the "new situation"?

We miss *Helmut Schmidt*. We miss him so much. Now and then, we hear from *Helmut Kohl*. Both would have been strong enough to address the nation in difficult times, and the overwhelming majority of Germans would have trusted both statesmen and can trust as well. Both major Christian churches totally did fall out on this matter, otherwise the Federal President's speeches, nor would the Federal Lady Chancellor's actions with respect to questions of the European peace have been allowed. But German people do not agree with this war policy, and the government knows that. Here remains, on the German side, the underlying cause for Minsk II. The government stands on razor's edge, and not only concerning this issue.

Many people fear that the cold war could turn hot. Are there any indications giving way to such a fear? Can anyone imagine the West preparing for war against nuclear powered Russia? And what about the present military manoeuvres in Estonia ("Springstorm"), Poland ("Brilliant Jump") and planned for next June, military exercises, again in Poland ("Anaconda"), as well as the number of other military exercises programmed this year in Central and Eastern Europe, are they preparing such a war?

These are all brutal signals provided to a proud nation that again, could be done in a different way – and this time in the combination of the world war proponents and

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The sanctions against Syria and the Syrians must be lifted immediately

Appeal of Christian dignitaries from Syria

In 2011, the European Union launched sanctions against Syria, presenting them as "sanctions against certain figures in the regime", which imposed an oil embargo on the country, along with a block on all financial transactions and a prohibition on trade in a large number of goods and products. This measure continues today, although in 2012 the oil embargo, through some inexplicable decision, was removed from armed and jihadist opposition-controlled areas in order to provide economic resources to so-called "revolutionary and opposition forces".

In these five years, sanctions on Syria have helped to destroy Syrian society and sentenced it to hunger, epidemics and poverty, encouraging the activism of fundamentalist and terrorist militia fighters who now strike in Europe too. And all this has been added to the casualties of a war that has already caused 250,000 deaths, six million displaced persons and four million refugees.

The situation in Syria is desperate, with food shortages, widespread unemployment, the impossibility of providing medical care, and the rationing of drinking water and electricity. And this is not all. The embargo also makes it impossible for Syrians who settled abroad before the war to send money to their relatives or family members left behind. Also non-government organizations engaged in assistance programs are unable to send money to their workers in Syria. Companies, power plants, aqueducts and hospital departments are forced to close because of the inability to procure spare parts or gasoline.

Today Syrians have the possibility of a better future for their families only by fleeing from their homeland. But, as we see, this solution also encounters many difficulties and causes intense controversy within the European Union. And escape cannot be the only solution that the international community can propose to these poor people.

So we support all humanitarian and peace initiatives that the international community is implementing, in particular through the tough negotiations in Geneva. But while we are waiting and hoping that such expectations might find concrete answers, after so many bitter disappointments, we ask that the sanctions affecting the daily life of every Syrian be immediately removed. The search for the desired peace cannot be divorced from a concrete concern for those who today are suffering because of that embargo whose weight falls on the entire population.

Furthermore, the rhetoric about refugees escaping from the Syrian war appears hypocritical if, at the same time, Europe goes on starving those who remain in Syria, preventing them from receiving medical care and denying them drinking water, work, security and dignity.

Finally, we appeal to the parliamentarians and mayors of every country so that the inequity of the sanctions on Syria be made known to the citizens of the European Union (who are at present totally unaware of them) and that they should finally become the subject of serious debate and consequent resolutions.

*Georges Abou Khazen,
Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo*

*Pierbattista Pizzaballa,
Custos of the Holy Land emeritus
Josef Tobji,
Archbishop of the Maronites of Aleppo
Boutros Marayati,
Armenian Bishop of Aleppo
The Sisters of the Congregation
of St. Joseph of the appearance of the
hospital "Saint Louis" of Aleppo
Congregation of the Trappist in Syria
Dr Nabil Antaki,
physician in Aleppo of the
Congregation of the Society Maria
The Sisters of the Congregation
of Perpetual Help – center for minors
and orphans of Marmarita
Father Firas Loufti, Franciscan
Jean – Clement Jean Bart,
Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo
Jacques Behnan Hindo, Syrian-Catholic
bishop of Hassake – Nisibi
Mtanios Haddad,
Archimandrite of the Catholic –
Melkite Church
Hilarion Capucci,
emeritus. Archbishop of Melkite
Greek Catholic church
Ignaz Youssef III Younan,
Patriarch of Uniate Syrian Catholic.
Church of Antioch
Georges Masri,
Procurator to the Holy See
of syrian-catholic church
Gregory III Laham, Patriarch of the Melkite
Greek Catholic church*

*Original:
"Basta sanzioni alla Siria e ai Siriani"*

Source: <https://cooptv.wordpress.com/2016/05/30/appeal-of-christian-dignitaries-from-syria-the-sanctions-against-syria-and-the-syrians-should-be-lifted-immediately/>

world war opponents. If people in Moscow hear the sounds of German generals with these maneuvers in Moscow, they only need to seek into the disk rack. What the West did to the image of the "Common European House" is actually unbearable. These "muscle contests exercises" dating back to the past cold war are just for political military child-like minds. If they are those who should determine our future, we could only be pessimistic. The "Charter of Paris" of November 1990 is our only chance to achieve peace and not to end in a kind of "Hedge funds-camp". In all fields, Germany gets gradually rid of its key governmental functions.

Just last year in February the strategy analyst George Friedman has called Germany a "questionable wind vane" for its part in the front against Russia. And as for Minsk II, in which the German chancellor was also involved, was certainly not in line with the American interests. Is this also still on today? Or are the troops, which the German government wants to send to Lithuania, signs for a German "American dominated NATO is ..."
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war course completely within the line of the United States? Recently German general Egon Ramms stood with martial formulations out. And he is not the only German talking tough.

The fulcrum and pivot for everything is the famous alliance issue. Therefore, the

requirement of parliamentary approval was another de facto occurrence, and now for the Bundeswehr, there is a German general acting as an American chief of staff with the US armed forces in Germany practically under the responsibility of the US president. In all fields, Germany gets gradually rid of its key governmental functions and in military issues as well. Germany gets rid in all fields gradually of the key governmental functions, also in military questions. One can hope that everything does not go really wrong, but this is only hope.

You personally are very much appreciated not only by the supporters of peace in Germany, but on the Russian side as well. That, a few weeks ago, president Putin personally ensured the translation of your statement in Saint Petersburg, is a clear signal. What value do you give to this signal?

The event in Saint Petersburg with the translation into Russian of my speech by the Russian president has met world-wide attention and ensured full accountability of the situation. Further to the question of a Russian journalist asked to president Putin with reference to a speech that I had delivered the day before, it was important for me not to have any misinterpretation of the points I had treated then. Therefore, I have taken the floor, and then, to my great surprise, it was not my usual efficient conference interpreter, but the president himself who was translating individually. Previously he had discussed some two and a

half hours with the 500 present journalists. For three days I could participate in this press conference. There, through committed journalists, I could have a true and gloomy picture of Russia. The attending government members had to face and answer critical questions, in a way I had never experienced beforehand. *Should I then address these people and this country with hate? Just because it has been so decided in Washington or somewhere else? The Germans should make up their mind by themselves on this issue, should they wish to learn from history.*

"A democratically constituted nation is and remains the key"

Historical experience shows that when the sound of war drums gets louder, then freedom, democracy and rule of law suffer within the country. How does this look today? How is it in Germany?

Unfortunately, this period of upheavals makes it again very clearly. I could experience it in Saint Petersburg and I can see it in Scotland. People trust democratic practices. In Saint Petersburg, president Putin and the members of his government have met local and regional journalists from all Russia and took them seriously in a way that I would like to experience here. The Scottish National Party does not only win elections, but it does so because it takes its constituents seriously. In Saint Petersburg, and beforehand in November in Moscow, I have experienced the grass-

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What happens in eastern Ukraine?

cc. End of July 2016 a new EU decision on sanctions against Russia is due. Actually, no one on the continent likes a policy that inflicts serious damage not only to Russia, but also to the countries of the EU itself. The EU has repeatedly emphasised that the abolition of their sanctions against Russia depended on whether the agreement "Minsk II" will be implemented. However, this can only mean that the EU wonders whether Russia contributes the part of the agreement that it has in hand, because more than Russia others have an obligation, for example, the Government of Ukraine.

Now, the German Foreign Minister Steinmeier has proposed gradually to lift the sanctions against Russia if there is recognisable further progress in the Minsk II process. According to the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" on 2 June, this has caused sharp protest by Foreign Minister of Ukraine Klimkin. He considered it "unproductive to ease sanctions gradually".

Klimkin, as the German newspaper continues to cite, "pointed out that Kiev adhered to the Minsk Agreement, but Russia did not do anything for its realisation. In the recent days, there had been repeatedly violations of the cease-fire. Seventeen soldiers of the Ukrainian army had been killed; another twenty were injured. There was heavy fire from heavy weapons, which Russia should have deducted already according to the Minsk Agreement."

Thus, it is interesting to read what the Russian side puts forward. Its permanent representative to the OSCE Lukashевич has held a speech on that on 26 May at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on the situation in Ukraine and the implementation of the Minsk Agreements (www.mid.ru/de/foreign_policy/news/-1_asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2293032). In this speech, it is said, for example: "We have lately seen Kiev recur to all kinds of pretexts to torpedo the implementation of

political steps stipulated in the Package [of 'Minsk II'].

First, tensions are built up along the contact line. The consistent and systematic advancement of Ukrainian troops to the demilitarised territory is a blatant deliberate action aimed at escalating tensions." Or else: "We also see the consistent build-up of weapons in the security zone and military training for offensive operations." Or: "The presence of Ukrainian military equipment is reported in the security zone nearly every day in violation of the 'Minsk Package'." One might continue the series of quotations.

Here in the West the mainstream media do not report about such speeches. One wonders: Who is right, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister or the representative of Russia to the OSCE?

However, one can also ask: Who is interested in the fact that the conflict between the EU and Russia continues to cook over high heat? Russia does surely not want it, the EU rather not, too.

"American dominated NATO is ..."

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roots of Swiss democracy. A democratically constituted nation is and remains the key, and these are the signals sent from Edinburgh and Saint Petersburg to an increasingly lost and confused world. Germany does not send the signals that only Germany can achieve.

In this context, how do you assess the result of presidential elections in Austria? Now everyone in unison deplore this slide towards the right-wing in Austria and in the countries of European Union. However, all that covers a central question: What has actually driven the Christian and Social Democrats in Austria – and not only there – to distance themselves miles away from the citizens and the constituents in such a way, that the latter are storming in droves towards those which does no one actually know? What entitles the established parties to offset their own failure by political slanders directed at the upstarts? This seems to be the last card left for the failed parties to play. Citizens who complain about this failure and denounce the deplorable state of affairs are at best appointed as "scums", at worst scolded as "Nazis". The failure itself is then legitimized by "campaigns against right" directed at those who actually just demand to be governed properly and being taken seriously as citizens.

One should take a look at the German Liberals, who have been punished by their constituents as representatives of the Anglo-Saxon turbo-capitalism, therefore evicted from the Bundestag. This can also apply to the former people's parties if, after Vienna - and regardless of election result – they don't draw any conclusions. Nevertheless, the Scottish National Party demonstrated it. This party goes invariably after the people, takes them seriously, listens to them, before the increasingly questionable NGOs are wreaking havoc, and it is successful. People want a democratic government, the one which has been dismantled and brought into discredit by the traditional old parties.

**"The 'Austrian Model'
could also very well happen
in other European countries"**

And what could be the consequences for the future?

Presently, everyone in Austria is devoted to the new Federal President, and it would be outwardly fair to grant him the celebrated hundred-day state of grace. Should we take his words seriously, so he would have us believe, regarding the necessary

internal reconciliation in Austria seriously, then he has enough on his plate to do with.

Outwardly every political observer is well advised to keep an eye on the "clash of cultures" and to look closely at its various implications on the party landscape. The "Austrian Model" could also very well be happen in other European countries. For all of us abroad, accessible information makes it clear that in Austria all traditional parties, losers in the first round, have then gathered in majority behind the new Federal President to get him to the office. And in this instance the big question will only be whether with it the previous "political mess" should be extended and developed or if in the combination with the new chancellor a general new beginning should be ventured.

It is therefore obvious that the old political gangs backing the new Federal President are in no way homogeneous or that they only want to provide in the matter the corresponding impression. Further to this unique show of strength they will also call after their rights and chances as independent political groups again, and this will result in a major split inside the political formations standing behind Federal President *van der Bellen*. The differences have not disappeared with this alliance between the respective parties. They will become keener, particularly if you look at the *Hofer*-camp. Here the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) is the politically emerging formation, which has, as the far strongest Austrian party, magically attracted constituents from other parties – even if not yet sufficiently – without involving the parties as such in its formation. Otherwise than in *van der Bellen*-camp the egoisms will not increase and the centrifugal forces will not dominate. Through the results of this presidential election the FPÖ now appears as a prevailing force to the Hofburg, while the supporters of the newly elected Federal President will again aim at their respective political arrangements.

It can be anticipated that with the results of this election, all or most political formations will plumb their chances at a future FPÖ alliance in Austria. Today the election winner is *Pr van der Bellen*, but the actual winner's name is *Strache*.

**"In Brussels,
masses are gradually sung"**

What does that mean for Brussels, the EU and the NATO?

Scotland, France, Poland and other countries make it clear that even without British fuss the "masses are gradually sung" in Brussels. While European big shots

Juncker and Schulz advocate as mandatory for European nations to favour an externally determined Brussels empire, citizens determine the fair value of their own country by their responsibility as citizens and reiterated value as such. Meanwhile, "European values" have deteriorated as much as NATO did in its part of as a "Community of transatlantic values". Nevertheless, the former Prime Minister of Luxembourg, *Jean-Claude Juncker*, knows best, to which extent the tax legislation has been designated as a "licence to plunder" in favour of American major corporations and that the whole system is maintained by NATO. And nowadays NATO should be seen as a "peace community"? In modern history there has never been a defensive alliance such as once was NATO, which became so shamelessly involved in a global attack formation to people and parliaments.

Mr Wimmer, many thanks for this interview.

(Interview *Karl Müller*)

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Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

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EU vote in Great Britain

Brexit opponents paint a picture of doom for the country

But there is an alternative to the EU

by Karl Müller

On 23 June, the British will decide if their country will remain in the EU. For the British exit from the EU, the term “Brexit” has become commonplace. The opponents of Brexit are countering this with an almost Manichaeian picture of the EU.

It is interesting to see that the Brexit opponents have mobilised all the big names – from the world of the “elites”. Prominent figures like US President *Obama* and the director of the IMF, *Lagarde*, have pleaded against Brexit, painting a realm of economic darkness for a United Kingdom outside the EU. Since then, scientists are also speaking out. For example *Stephen Hawking*. His “argument”: “Gone are the days when we could stand on our own, against the world. We need to be part of a larger group of nations, both for our security and our trade.”

“Historians for Britain in Europe”

More than 300 British historians have also addressed the public with a short text in the *Guardian*, which earned their spokesman an invitation to speak at the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s office. These 300 historians who call themselves “Historians for Britain in Europe” are opposed to the “Historians for Britain”, who urged an exit from EU or at least a renegotiation with the EU. The “Historians for Britain in Europe” claim, that if Britain remains in the EU, it would “strengthen the cohesion of our continent in a dangerous world”. History teaches that “Britain’s future is in Europe”. The country would be stronger if “we look outside and become involved in the world”. An exit from the EU, however, would mean isolation, but not a splendid one – of course an allusion to the idea of Splendid Isolation which characterised the imperialist politics of Great Britain before World War I.

Now one might ask, how are the claims of Stephen Hawking as well as the British historians connected with being a part of the real EU? Have these “scholars” forgotten that the EU is equivalent with Europe? Have these historians thought carefully about the fact that this construct of a supranational apparatus of authorities and power which is today called EU, with its permanent infringements on sovereign states, is contradictory to past lessons learned from European history? The lessons are: The absolute striving for freedom, law and democracy and for a life in political entities which are able to support these – that is sovereign, liberal and democratic nation states of law.

“Europe is in need of a new foundation that is moving into the future. The simple recourse to pre-EU times is no perspective. Nobody can seriously want to go back to the times before 1945. Why not work on a ‘Charter of Europe’ – similar to the UN Charter? A reformed Council of Europe could be the institutional framework. The ‘Paris Charter’ of November 1990, formulated after the end of the first Cold War, would be a good basis.”

EU against freedom and democracy

No reputable opponent of the EU objects to an equal and peaceful cooperation of European states or to a cooperation of all states in the world and the associated contractual agreements between sovereign partners. For this, the Charter of the United Nations has created the foundations which are still valid, even if some powerful states are not adhering to them. The EU, however, has, starting from its roots in the European Coal and Steel Community, decided deliberately against freedom and democracy and for an executive top-down approach including an obtrusive control of sovereign states and peoples. This did not happen because the peoples of Europe desired it, but because Western Germany was to be permanently contained and the part of Europe that did not belong to the Soviet sphere of influence, was to be kept under control and established as a bulwark in the Cold War. The driving and dominating force in this was the USA. The rest is embellishment and historical misrepresentation. The EU member states have in fact never been “masters of the treaties”. This has been attested in this newspaper and in many essays and books. And now, the goal is to position the 28 EU states once again in a cold and potentially even hot war against Russia.

Sometimes it is really surprising to see how we citizens are to be taken as fools. And it is even more surprising to watch who is willing to participate in this attempt at stultification – including more than 300 “historians”.

Cooperation in Europe is not the same as EU

It is true that Europe should not be a continent of isolated states which are busy with rivalry and competition. But does

the real EU look like? Isn’t it such that the neoliberal principles dictated by the European single market and the Treaty of Lisbon and the euro have converted EU-Europe into an assembly of dog-eat-dog states which are disciplined collectively as soon as they want to strike out on their own – as it happened with Austria and now Greece? Isn’t it because of this EU that more and more people in Europe are searching for alternatives? Not because they want to isolate from Europe and the world, but because they finally want to live in freedom and democracy – equal to and in peace with all other peoples on the continent and the world!

Europe is in need of a new foundation that is moving into the future. The simple recourse to pre-EU times is no perspective. Nobody can seriously want to go back to the times before 1945. Why not work on a “Charter of Europe” – similar to the UN Charter? A reformed Council of Europe could be the institutional framework. The “Paris Charter” of November 1990, formulated after the end of the first Cold War, would be a good basis. It should be enriched in view of the cultural traditions of the continent. The US should not have a say in this. But within Europe nobody should be excluded.

The popular claim that the EU was the only possible form of structure for Europe that otherwise it would be threatened by decline and war, is absurd and recalls times bygone when the main goal was the retention of power. Thus the German baroque philosopher *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz* was trying to present his world of absolutist rule as the best of all worlds. Don’t our current dominant politicians speak similarly about the EU – as the best of all worlds in Europe? And was absolutism in Leibnitz’ times without alternative? One thing is for sure: There are alternatives to today’s EU. •

Van der Bellen wants to raise EU submission to a dogma that supersedes democratic decisions

Non-party Persons Committee to exit EU: Abolish postal votes again!

As in the OTS release from 30 May already shown (see www.ots.at/presseaus-sendung/OTS_20160530_OT0018), the first public statements of the newly elected President of Austria – he had a razor thin margin of 0.23% (15 000 votes) – rings alarm bells with many citizens. Van der Bellen's declaration, he is not appointing an "Europe-hostile" government, even if this would be legitimized by a democratic electoral majority, contradicts unabashedly against the supreme construction principle of Austria's Republic construction, namely put down in the first sentence of our Federal Constitution: "Austria is a democratic republic. Its law emanates from the people" (and not from the Federal President)!

"On behalf of 261,056 officially confirmed signatories of the *bipartisan EU exit referendum* in July 2015, we hereby protest in the strongest terms against such dictatorial Office conception. Van der Bellen obviously needs to thank those politics and the media whose spiritual authority lies with USA/NATO/EU. This time it was clearly recognizable as it was in its extremely manipulative EU accession campaign before the referendum of 06.12.1994," explains *Inge Rauscher* today, spokeswoman of the non-party persons committee to exit EU."

Yes to Europe – no to the EU!

The persons committee to exit EU rejects to be referred to as "Europe-emies". There can be no question that this is a classic case "defamation" in the political context. No wonder why many citizens speak only of "van der Brussels" when referring to the new President. Many Austrians want to be in a Europe of free and independent States in which the citizens have a say and are not a colony of "Brus-

sels", "Washington" or any other patronizing center anywhere in the world.

Limiting the constitutional rights of the Federal President is not a solution!

"Only shortly in power, van der Bellen wants to abolish the constitutional right of the President to dismiss the government for particularly serious breaches of law, which is in force since 1929," says Inge Rauscher. "He is about to legitimize indirectly – even in retrospect – the severe and persistent breaches of law which to a large extent has brought massive social and economic consequences by the red-black government in connection: Such as mass entry and transit of unregistered migrants last year in Austria. These were even declared by the government, months after the damage has occurred, as being illegal. A President, who does not cowardly tolerate such (and other, lasting and serious) illegalities and intervenes would be prevented in the future by the united political and media front – after the Soviet."

It is obvious that his proposed "Constitutional Convention" is designed for the situation of a possible electoral victory of *Norbert Hofer* at the next presidential election. Constitutional rights are only accepted as long as Federal power is in the "right hands". True to *George Orwell*: "All are equal – only some are more equal!" The probably for all times unsurpassed definition of *dictatorship*!

The questionable absentee ballot should be abolished again!

Van der Bellen's very thin election victory was also not won at the ballot box, but exclusively by questionable absentee votes, which reversed the actual electoral vote. The potential for abuse in the absentee ballot system ranges from direct inter-

ference in filling the absentee-voting card within the family, homes, mosques and so on (a de facto violation of the secrecy of voting) to double voting, propagation of invalid ballots by (unintentional) errors when sending the envelopes and betrayal when counting the votes.

Inge Rauscher concluded: "The absentee ballot is to be further expanded, as the Head of the elections and referendum in the Interior Ministry, ministerial secretary *Robert Stein* hinted in a television interview in "Zeit-im-Bild": As in other EU countries the number of polling stations will be centralized in Austria, i.e., reduced, which automatically will and should increase the absentee votes! All "learned Austrians" can draw only one conclusion: We demand the abolition of absentee ballot before it is too late for a democratic Austria!

Questions & contact: Party independent EU exit persons committee, Inge Rauscher ihu@a1.net, www.eu-austritts-volksbegehren.at



Natural Law – the foundation of justice and peace

Urs Knoblauch, cultural journalist, Fruthwilen TG

On behalf of the John Messner society the anthology “Das Naturrecht – Quellen und Bedeutung für die Gegenwart” [Natural Law – sources and relevance for the present] by Herbert Pribyl and Christian Machek (Be & Be-Verlag Heiligenkreuz 2015) was published at the Institute for philosophical and theological studies Heiligenkreuz in Austria. This is highly praiseworthy, as the subject matter is extremely important given the growing relativization and violation of law in the various social and governmental areas. The contributions illustrate that Natural Law is a crucial basis for a generally accepted legal culture and for a peaceful and friendly coexistence of all the human family. It forms the basis of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and for international law as a whole.

The clear position of the writers is a great advantage as they expound the basic principles of the Christian humanistic cultural tradition without trying to keep abreast of the Zeitgeist with its postmodern arbitrariness, its love of deconstruction and economism. Natural Law has a central position in Catholic social science, ethics and teaching and deserves greater attention again.

Cardinal Schönborn writes in the short welcoming text: “Natural Law belongs to Europe’s cultural heritage of many centuries. [...] In his address to the German Bundestag of 22 September 2011, Pope Benedict XVI. Championed the Catholic tradition of Natural Law against the now widespread legal positivism.” (p. 11)

Natural Law is a right of humanity

“Natural Law is one of the most important issues in modern philosophy and theology. Especially the universal human rights are founded on the basis of Natural Law. In as much as human rights are rights of all people, they can only be justified with respect to the common nature and the resulting equality of all people and on the basis of Natural Law to which every positive right is subordinated.”

“Natural Law can be defined as ‘human knowledge of law and justice as a demand of true humanity, at the same time as the knowledge of human dignity as a fundamental obligation of an absolute kind.’ Therefore Natural Law is that which is evident to all human beings. This law is engraved in the heart of mankind [...]. To express this in other words and to follow up on it: Natural Law results from the claim of every person to a dignified life. In this way, the definition of what human dignity (humanity) is, is withdrawn from any individual or collective arbitrariness. A way of life that is dignified and worthy of human beings always has reference to basic values and highest moral standards and rights.”

“Man recognizes Natural Law by his experience together with his conscience of right. The family, where the child experiences its first legal relationships and legal obligations as well as its own rights, is of great importance in conveying this. His own nature with its knowledge concerning these rights and its instincts or hereditary factors according to which he will realize his life, informs the human being about these rights and obliges him to live in agreement with them. This Natural Law as right of mankind or human rights can be understood by everyone even without any explicit knowledge of God. Natural Law is that law of human behaviour, that is, regardless of the positive Christian revelation, recognised by means of reason.”

Herbert Pribyl: *Das Naturrecht als Quelle der katholischen Soziallehre heute; in: Pribyl, Herbert und Machek, Christian. Das Naturrecht. Quellen und Bedeutung für die Gegenwart, Heiligenkreuz 2015, pp. 18, 20. and 23*

(Translation Current Concerns)

In their introduction the editors also suggest that Natural Law is inherent in human nature. *Saint Paul* says (ROM: 2, 14-16): Natural Law “is inscribed in all our hearts.” (p. 13)

The contributions of the anthology here presented were to a large extent presented at the 2013 *Johannes Messner Symposium* in the Scottish Abbey of Vienna. The great Catholic priest, teacher of Natural Law, social scientist and ethicist *Johannes*

Messner (1891–1984) said: “What is ‘naturally right’ can be identified with the idea of Justice”. “Because: ‘Natural Law is enquiry into and explication of the essence and the criterion of law and justice’ [...]” Catholic thinkers claim that principles of Natural Law can be recognized by human reason.” (p. 13)

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Aspiring to a life giving economic system

“Because it is the human, who engage, in economic activity, the anthropological question of what man is in his essence needs to be asked especially before one starts drawing economic conclusions. All Natural Law consideration about the extent and objective of any economic activity thus presuppose the existence of a human nature, which is removed from people’s disposability. [...] By virtue of his free will man [...] is the only being that can act in relation to its nature.

However, human freedom is always bound to the truth. Therefore we have to speak of a content-specific understanding of freedom. [...] In a narrow economic point of view, it is immediately apparent that the constant increase of the supply of goods cannot be the ultimate goal of human existence [...]”

“There is a kind of economic activity which aims at the achievement of this

goal and altogether accepts the natural destiny of man to fully develop his natural talents towards virtuousness. This is indispensable for the development of life in accordance with nature. Then the institutional stabilisation and support of those framework conditions, which are equally the expression of a society striving for virtue as also a support for this endeavor, should be described as a life giving economic system. Among other things this is reflected by the fact that such an economic structure is oriented towards and not away from catering to the needs of families who are responsible for passing on the gift of life in its strict sense.

An economic system, however, which either intentionally accepts the physical, cultural or spiritual death of a person or condones it, so that justice no longer rules, whether outwardly or in the souls

of men, kills, as it subordinates the superior good of physical integrity and the eternal salvation of the soul to efficiency enhancement and increase in prosperity.

In other words, any economic theory, any economic practice and any economic system that either fails to recognize the holistic nature of man, see and treat it ideologically one-eyed or even deny the existence of an immutable nature of man in general, bring material or spiritual death to us sooner or later.”

Hochreiter, Gregor. *Zur naturrechtlichen Stellung der Wirtschaft: Dienerin einer ganzheitlichen Entfaltung des Menschen (About the Natural Law position of the economy: serving a holistic development of man)*, in: *ibid*, pp 194 and 202.

(Translation Current Concerns)

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For better understanding, the Johannes Messner Society and the work of Johannes Messner and *Rudolf Weiler* will initially be briefly acknowledged here.

The work of Johannes Messner and Rudolf Weiler for Natural Law and the Catholic Social Teaching

In 1935 university lecturer DDr *Johannes Messner* was appointed to the Chair for Social Ethics and for Catholic Social Doctrine at the University of Vienna faculty of Catholic Theology. In 1934 his voluminous early work "Die soziale Frage" ["The social question"] was published. After *Hitler's* invasion in 1938 Johannes Messner was immediately dismissed; he fled to England via Switzerland in order to escape imminent arrest. In England he was able to continue his work and research until 1949. Later, he returned to Vienna to write his work of 1,300 pages "Das Naturrecht" ["Social Ethics: Natural Law in the Modern World"] which appeared first in English in 1949 and then in

German in 1950. In 1954 his comprehensive work "Kulturethik" ["Cultural Ethics"] was published. In 1949 Messner was able to resume his work at the University of Vienna, which he continued until 1966.

In addition to his lectures, presentations and to his pastoral work, he edited numerous writings in several editions. These were widely spread and translated into several languages. A memorial mass was celebrated on 16 February 2016 in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna on Johannes Messner's 125th anniversary of birth.

Rudolf Weiler became Johannes Messner's successor at the Vienna faculty of Catholic Theology in 1966. In addition to his doctorate in theology in 1954 he had also studied political science and was awarded the doctorate for this in 1961. In 1964 he had a teaching assignment at the Chair of Ethics and Social Sciences he received a lecturing qualification from Johannes Messner with his work "Economic cooperation in a pluralistic society". In the same year Rudolf Weiler founded the "Institute for Ethics and Social Sciences" in continuation of the Vienna School of Christian social doctrine. In addition to his successful teaching and pastoral care, he published numerous writings on Cath-

olic social doctrine, social-ethical topics and Natural Law.

In the early 70's, he affiliated the association "University Centre for Peace Research", where the "Wiener Blätter zur Friedensforschung" (Vienna papers for peace research) were published, to the Institute. Rudolf Weiler learned the Russian language in order to enter into the important constructive dialogue with the East. His extensive work "Herausforderung Naturrecht – Beiträge zur Erneuerung und Anwendung des Naturrechts in der Ethik" "The challenge of Natural Law – Contributions to the Renewal and Application of Natural Law in Ethics" (1996) contains valuable contributions about Natural Law, about Catholic social teaching, about individual and social ethics, international and business ethics. In 1991, Weiler founded the Johannes Messner Society, together with other Messner students. Rudolf Weiler retired in 1996, the year of the *Pontifical World Day of Peace*.

The renaming and reorientation of the Vienna School for the ethics of Natural Law and consequently the termination of its beneficial work, was a shameful devel-

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"Natural Law – sources and significance for the present"



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Herbert Pribyl: Legal Conscience

uk. Since 2007 Professor DDr *Herbert Pribyl* is full Professor and Chairman of the Institute for Ethics and Social Sciences at the Higher School of Philosophy-Theology Benedict XVI in Heiligenkreuz. He studied Catholic theology, religious education studies, philosophy, political science, history and law in Vienna and Rome, and is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in Salzburg. In his contribution "Das Naturrecht als Quelle der katholischen Soziallehre

heute" (Natural Law as a Source of Catholic Social Teaching Today) the author draws attention to the growing interest in Natural Law, which has especially been enhanced by the work of Pope *Benedict XVI*. Pribyl refers to the social encyclical "Caritas in veritate", where it is shown that there is a "universal moral law", providing "a sound basis for all cultural, religious, and political dialogue" under the conditions of today's "multi-faceted pluralism". (p. 18) The author addresses various foundations and contexts of Natural Law: "The human being recognises Natural Law from experience in combination with his legal conscience. Of crucial importance for the imparting process is the family, in which a child experiences the first legal relationships, legal obligations and personal rights. [...] Every human being can grasp this Natural Law qua right of human beings or as a human right, even without any explicit knowledge of God." (p. 23)

Karl Heinz Peschke: Against injustice

Emeritus professor and priest *Karl Heinz Peschke* is well-known throughout the world for his moral theological work and contributions and especially for his publication "Christian Ethics", which has been translated into many languages. He lectured in many countries of the world. In his contribution "Das letzte Ziel als orientierende Norm für das Naturrecht" (The last aim as orientating norm for the Natural Law), he pays tribute to the

people who fought against injustice, against inhuman laws in "totalitarian systems", even to "the sacrifice of their lives". "They were acting on the basis of a higher law, the law of naturally inherent human dignity, which is Natural Law". (p. 72) Peschke also points out that "in ethics and moral theology the concept of Natural Law in its full comprehensive sense signifies that moral order which is founded on human nature". (p. 72)

Josef Spindelböck: The family as the place to experience moral requirements

Dr *Josef Spindelböck* is a theologian, priest, and professor for moral theology at the Philosophical-Theological University St. Pölten. In his contribution he addresses the important theme of "The Family in the Natural Law Theory of Johannes Messner". Resorting to the fundamental question of Greek philosophy "What is man?" he stresses the importance of human dignity that today is being threatened and disregarded in many respects: "The 'natura humana' as the essence of man is, as it were, the constant that makes us all belong to one human family and unites individual human beings in equal dignity. This dignity belongs to every human being, simply by being human, and it exists regardless of whether the concrete human being can realise specific capabilities or is prevented from doing so, either temporarily or permanently, by illness or disability." (p. 88) It is precisely the family,

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opment exemplary of our time. The explanation offered for this was that today we live "in a positivist epoch that views all universal concepts of ethics with fundamental scepticism", and that a "paradigm shift from the traditional classic Natural Law to a progressive development of ethics according to the modern way of thinking was needed in order to be understood." (Rudolf Weiler, *Wege zum Weinberg des Herrn*, ("Paths leading to the Lord's Vineyard"), Graz, 2013, pp. 28.)

It is becoming more and more apparent where this "progressive", opportunistic attitude, the deconstruction of valid ethic positions of human science and the "tyranny of relativism" (Pope *Benedict XVI*) is leading.

It is a blessing that Rudolf Weiler is even at his high age still able to hold guest professorships at St-Pölten and at the Institute for Philosophical and Theo-

Appeal instance against unjust and biased laws created by human authorities

"Man can only really strive for a goal if he has first somehow experienced it as being good and worthwhile, i.e., he has to feel joy and a sense of fulfilment in realising it. He has been equipped with both joy and inner fulfilment as a spontaneous sense as well as a criterion to recognise what is of value; simultaneously, they serve as a motivation to strive for its realization. Moreover, joyful appreciation is so substantially linked to any type of value that without this sense of appreciation a value simply cannot be striven for, because it is not even understood and recognised as such."

"The theory of Natural Law is of fundamental importance most notably in

two respects: first, Natural Law provides the foundation for a moral order which is characterised by its universality as it is based upon a reality that is shared by all people – their humanity and their existential state of mind. Second, it is the only adequate protection against the arbitrary use of political and legislative power. In fact, it constitutes the last appeal instance against unjust and biased laws created by human authorities."

Peschke, Karl Heinz, Das letzte Ziel als orientierende Norm für das Naturrecht, in: ibid., p. 81 and 72

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

logical Studies at the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz, which is encouragingly thriving with more than 200 seminarians and religious. This magnificent Cistercian abbey, which is nearly 900 years old, is situat-

ed in the Wienerwald and was called a "spiritual haven and a place of energy"

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where "the personal and social nature" of the human person can develop to the full. Drawing on *Messner's "Kulturethik"* (Cultural Ethics) Spindelböck formulates an educational theory that is more and more lacking today: "Thus the human family, founded upon marriage between a man and a woman, proves to be the primal place of learning and experience for man in his personalisation and socialisation. From the beginning the child depends on the loving acceptance by other human beings (normally and ideally, in the first place by the parents) in order to be able to flourish and unfold. In the family, children learn to grasp essential moral requirements – as a way to their own self-realisation, to be sure, but not in a selfish manner, but as a gift of self, motivated by love – that is, precisely in relation with other human beings, both inside and outside their own family." (pp. 90.)

Marie Raphaela Hölscher: Natural Law as a restraint on the exercise of power

Dr Marie *Raphaela Hölscher* worked for charitable institutions and as a religion teacher in Vienna. In her contribution "Das Naturrecht bei Joseph Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI." (Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on Natural Law) she reminds us of the fact that, "governing in the constitutional state is not simply the exercise of power, but the safeguarding of the rights of every individual and the well-being of all people [...]." "In a secular and pluralistic society" Natural Law makes it possible to agree on fundamental ethical legal principles". (p. 106) Already as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith it was a matter of crucial importance to Cardinal *Joseph Ratzinger* to make a contribution to a universal

Natural Law ethics, respected by all cultures regardless of their professed religion. The author draws attention to Ratzinger's publication "A Turning Point for Europe?" and his article "The Significance of Religious and Ethical Values in a Pluralistic Society" (first published in German in 1991), in which he strongly objects to contemporary relativist positions, relying on the concepts of the true and the good. According to Ratzinger, those concepts are deliberately excluded by the media and by politics, and Natural Law is "rejected because it reeks of metaphysics. And this makes it possible to maintain a consistent relativism". (p. 102)

Wolfgang Waldstein:

Natural Law as foundation of European legal development and democracy

From 1965 to 1992 *Wolfgang Waldstein* taught as Full Professor of Roman Law and Legal Philosophy at Salzburg University, and later at the Pontifical Lateran University. Since 1999 he is a member of the "consiglio direttivo" of that academy. He writes about the Natural Law tradition, which has shaped the European legal development as a whole for more than 2000 years: "Out of this tradition in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe emerged the so-called "Natural Law codes", the *General State Law for the Prussian States* of 1794, the *French Civil Code* of 1804 and the *Austrian General Civil Code* of 1811. The Austrian General Civil Code still remains partly in force to this day, especially in the parts concerning Natural Law. Natural Law is, therefore, a reality in European legal development, which no theory can eliminate. The European legal culture is unintelligible without this Natural Law reality" (p. 121) Professor Waldstein also presents some of the key messages in Papal encyclicals such as "Caritas in veritate" by Benedict XVI, and points

out that "justice and the common good" are necessary Natural Law „standards of orientation" for the development of society on its way towards globalisation. (p. 125) Waldstein warns against the danger of legal disintegration and against the current misuse of the valuable commodity of democracy. He refers to Pope Benedict XVI, who speaks of a "tyrant state, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenceless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of a public interest, which is really nothing but the interest of one part." (p. 137)

Rudolf Weiler: A tribute to Herbert Schambeck

In his contribution "Charismen im Dienst der evangelisierenden Gemeinschaft" (Charisms in the Service of the Evangelising Community) Professor Emeritus DDR *Rudolf Weiler* pays tribute to Professor *Herbert Schambeck*, who published his book "Kirche, Politik und Recht" (Church, Politics and Law) in 2013. In this volume one can read numerous papers *Schambeck* wrote after becoming an emeritus professor in 2002, which are highly topical. For *Herbert Schambeck*, as for *Johannes Messner*, good relations between church and state are at the heart of a democratic body politic. Also acknowledged are his political and ethical activities and "his lived Christian convictions", which have also led to "good relations with the Holy See in Rome". (p. 238) *Herbert Schambeck* has been a member of the Pontifical Academy since 1994.

The book contains further contributions, the reading of which is also highly recommendable. This substantive volume inspires us to reflect anew on the essential issues of our living together and makes it clear that Natural Law "is written into our hearts".

Justice is the basis for the coexistence of people within a state

“The struggle over moral convictions is not an issue to be dealt with by politicians alone, but one that concerns every citizen. Courage based on justice is required in order to advocate moral values in politics. Justice, a just social order, is the basis for the coexistence of people within any state. An order of this kind cannot be achieved without taking into account the compliance with moral values. According to *Ratzinger*, two basic points of view can be distinguished today, generally speaking. On the one hand, there is a radically relativistic approach, seeking to eliminate the concept of good – and even more so that of truth – from politics entirely. Here the term “Natural Law” is rejected for suspicion of being metaphysical, and also in order for the argument to be consistently relativistic. [...] Law can only be interpreted purely politically, i.e. law consists

of what authorised institutions declare it to be.” [...]

This school of thought is opposed by the theory that truth is not a product of politics or of the will of a majority but precedes and enlightens it. Politics is just and helps to foster freedom if it upholds a framework of values and rights which have been shown to man by his reason. [...] This insight called Natural Law constitutes the basis of a liberal state governed by the rule of law. Normative issues cannot be solved by majority decisions; they require a foundation for their answers, they are based on Natural Law.”

Hölscher, Maria Raphaela. Das Naturrecht bei Joseph Ratzinger / Benedikt XVI (Natural Law as seen by Joseph Ratzinger/ Benedikt XVI), in: ibid., pp. 113.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

written eternal law of the gods”. She wants to bury her slain brother Polynices with dignity despite the ban issued by the ruling King Creon. Therewith she obeys her conscience, internal ethical commitment and the unwritten eternal rule of Natural Law.

In the Scholasticism of the 13th century, *Thomas Aquinas* considered Natural Law as a divine and eternal law that is part of human nature. It enables man to organize a natural order of life. Various philosophical schools, such as the “School of Salamanca”, connected the Christian heritage with modern Natural Law (Spanish Natural Law school, *Grotius*, *Spinoza*, *Pufendorf*, *Thomasius* and others). Natural Law became the basis of modern human rights and international law. It was also crucial to the development of democracy. In his research Swiss historian Dr *René Roca* has repeatedly referred to the importance of Natural Law and of Catholicism for the development of direct democracy in Switzerland.

The renewed focus on classical Natural Law was essential for the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This is especially evident in Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Modern personal human sciences and especially psychology have confirmed these basic anthropological facts of what is right and of the *bonum commune*.

In *Alfred Adler's* (1870–1937) Individual Psychology, the social orientation forms the core of a theory of personality and personal development. Consequently, social and political institutions and especially schools should strengthen and further the humane nature and the dignity of man.

We all are responsible for this. Pope Benedict XVI made it very clear in his address to the German Parliament of 22 September 2011: “Where positivist reasoning reigns exclusively - and this is widely the case in our public consciousness - classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are suspended. This is a dramatic situation and it affects everyone. Public debate is necessary. It is an essential purpose of this address to invite urgently to this debate.”

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by Pope Benedict XVI in his book in 2007.

On the importance of a personalistic conception of man based on Natural Law for a peaceable coexistence

Natural Law starts from the premise of man’s innate nature. Man is by his very nature a creature endowed with reason and spirit and the bearer of human dignity from birth on. The individual and social nature of man includes the principle of mutual aid, the ability to connect socially and to feel empathy for others and their world. Man is an emotional being and has the mental capacity for transcendence. Likewise, Natural Law includes the universal principle of good faith that is crucial for living together.

These fundamental anthropological constants are independent of time, place and culture. They are valid regardless of whether a person is religious or not. Natural Law (*lex naturalis*) is superordinate law and therefore independent of any governmental legislation as well as of all human legislation in the course of time.

In contrast, positive law has other sources besides its basic elements taken

from Natural Law, such as Roman Law. It is always made by man and therefore dependent on time, habits, history and political balance of power. The concept of Natural Law can be traced back as to ancient philosophy. For example, in *Aristotle* and *Cicero* we find it as a moral attitude of man in society, which is incor-

Recognition of Natural Law is an existential question of humankind

“After all this, it has become obvious that the true recognition of Natural Law and thus of human rights is a matter of life and death for a human society. And we don’t even have to first search for Natural Law. Its existence and perceptibility has been attested for more than two thousand years.”

Waldstein, Wolfgang. Zur Frage des Naturrechts (On the question of Natural Law), in: ibid., p. 138

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

porated into the laws of nature. In many examples taken from literature and the history of civilization we can find wonderful examples for ethics and orientation in life based on Natural Law. In ancient Greece, in the fifth century BC, *Antigone* relies on her conscience and on “the un-

Agriculture and direct democracy (Part 1)

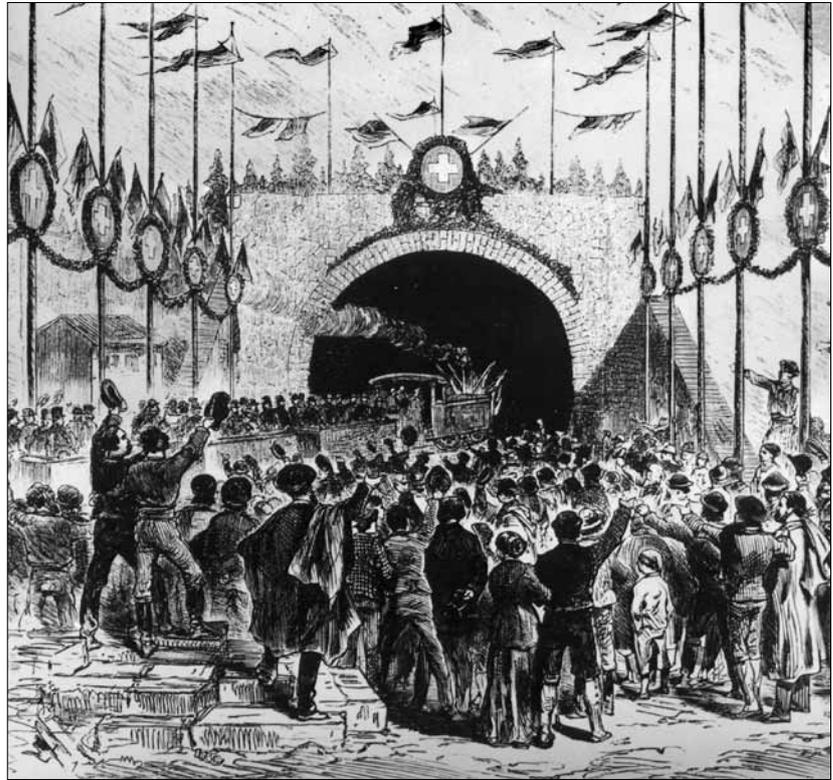
From the beginning to First World War

by Dr rer publ Werner Wüthrich

In the last two years signatures were collected for three federal popular initiatives all affecting fundamental questions of agriculture: “For food safety” by the Swiss Farmers’ Union, “For food sovereignty” by ‘Uniterre’, the Farmers Union of French-speaking Switzerland, and “Fair Food” by the Green Party. By their initiative the Swiss Farmers’ Union SBV wants the Federal Government to strengthen the supply of the population with domestic food and to take effective measures against the loss of cultivated land (being at the disposal of agriculture). The initiative of Uniterre, a farmers’ union of French-speaking Switzerland, has the same objective as the farmers’ association, but goes further and proposes a number of concrete measures. This includes that the Federal Government encourages domestic production by applying duties and by increasingly regaining the regulation of import volumes. The initiative wants “fair prices”, and thus the farmers would again earn their income more strongly via prices. Compensatory payments should only complement it. With their fair-food initiative the Greens mainly aim at imported food, which in future is to increasingly meet higher environmental and social standards. – All three popular initiatives are submitted and currently they are before the Federal Council or before the Parliament. The National Council recently approved the Farmers’ Union’s initiative.

It is not that easy to classify the three popular initiatives in their political and historical context. In a series of articles in five parts *Current Concerns* will show, how direct democracy works in the field of agriculture. In no other area the processes are so realistically expressed. Diet, task and welfare of farmers and their families and a cultivated land were and are of great importance to the population. For several generations in numerous votes the voters have repeatedly set the course and the cornerstones. This will again be the case also today. – This will be shown below.

Since the founding of the federal state in 1848, Swiss agriculture has undergone a tremendous development and experienced again and again revolutionary changes, to which politicians have responded. There are multiple reasons for this. Some of the keywords are: Simple machines facilitated the work and let the yields grow. Gradually, the machinery has been modernised, so



The inauguration of the Gotthard road-tunnel in 1882 changed the landscape in Switzerland. Due to cheap crop from abroad, many farmers shifted to milk production. Switzerland became “green”. (picture keystone)

that the farmers could more and more do without horses. Today the use of computers on the farm is a matter of course. The farms became larger by area, and their number decreased continuously. The number of workers decreased, too. The fertilizers bettered. The cows give more milk today. Also world politics with their many wars always cause upheavals. World trade and globalisation, GATT and nowadays WTO were and are a constant challenge. The standard of living has increased significantly, so that consumers today are in a different situation than a few decades ago. Today Swiss families spend an average of only six percent of their income on food. After the Second World War this were still 30 per cent. – There is just one thing that has not changed: For more than a hundred years, the voters – and since 1971 also the female voters – via numerous votes were actively involved in shaping agricultural policy towards modern Switzerland.

Beginning of the agricultural policy

Already in the second half of the 19th century approaches in politics could be seen to support agriculture. But there can be no question of an actual agricultural policy existing. For a long time, the rules of

free trade were effective in the field of foreign trade, that is, the borders were largely open – for most goods and for people. In the second half of the century, the railways changed the face of Switzerland. The opening of the Gotthard Tunnel brought a fundamental change for agriculture. About the port of Genoa ever larger quantities of cheap crop came into the country, for the time being from countries such as Ukraine or Russia, later, with the advent of large transport ships, from the United States. The result was that crop prices fell by more than half. Agriculture got into crisis, and the farmers were looking for new ways. Switzerland turned “green”, that is, the green meadow became a symbol of cattle breeding and milk production in the mountains such as in the Swiss Plateau.

Free trade or not?

The advent of protectionist tendencies in the late 19th century – namely on the part of the great powers, especially Germany – marked another turning point. In Switzerland, previously mainly the booming textile industry had sup-

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ported free trade because it was heavily oriented towards world trade. The numerous factories throughout the country had to purchase their raw materials (mainly cotton and silk) almost entirely from abroad, and they exported most of their products to the whole world. So they were in favour of an unimpeded exchange of goods and a reduction of tariffs. Before the establishment of the federal state in 1848, tariffs were an important source of financing for municipalities and cantons. The duties were not collected at the external frontier as today, but within the domestic territory – on roads, bridges, at municipal or cantonal borders or even on mountain pass roads that crossed the Alps. There were hardly any duties at the border, partly because the confederation of cantons lacked a superior authority that could have led the customs stations.

Financial structure in the Federal State

In 1848, the situation changed fundamentally. The Federal Constitution of 1848 specified in Article 23: *The customs is a federal matter*. The municipalities and cantons had to eliminate the many duties within the territory gradually. More and more they obtained their money about income and property taxes then (as is the case today). The federation established customs stations at the border that levied tariffs on imported goods and transferred the revenues to the federal treasury. The tariffs were generally low, so that the Federal Council had only a budget of a few million francs in the early years.

The following arrangement arose from this situation: The tariffs were the main income of the Federation, while citizens paid income and wealth tax in the municipalities and cantons. This dichotomy continued to exist for a long time. In extraordinary times like the First World War or in the great economic depression of the 1930s, the Federal Government introduced a temporary income tax to finance the additional costs. Even then it was voted on. But even today: The federal tax of the Federation is still provisional and must be periodically renewed by the people in a vote.

Duties, taxes and rights of the people

As mentioned above, the Federal Constitution gave the exclusive right to impose tariffs to the Federal Government. The National Council and the Council of States enacted a tariff in an implementing act, the so-called *general tariff*, which – over time – consisted of several hundred positions and performed a specific duty amount for each imported product. How-

ever, the Federal Council had the opportunity to make exceptions. It could negotiate free trade agreements with individual countries and reduce the customs duties on certain products or in whole.

The people's rights were expanded in the constitutional revision of 1874. The citizens were given the right to launch the referendum with 30,000 signatures against any federal law and to demand a referendum – including one on the tariffs and taxes. The federal law with the general tariff was to be one of the first federal laws against which citizens took the referendum. In the following decades referenda were voted on tariffs more often because individual population groups and regions had different interests. The consumers were bothered by the tariffs on import products because they were usually added to prices by the merchants (in stores) and thus the customers' purchase became more expensive. However, the duty was helpful for the trade geared to the domestic industry – including the agricultural sector – as it protected from competition of cheaper products from abroad. Whereas for the export industry it was a hindrance because the factories bought their raw materials often almost completely from abroad and the tariff made their production more expensive.

At that time there existed also politically motivated tariffs in Europe. Especially the great powers such as the Empire Germany used tariffs and import bans as a weapon within their imperialist policy at the end of the 19th century. They sat mostly smaller countries under pressure to make them compliant. A classic example of politically motivated customs barriers applies to the "Continental Blockade" imposed by *Napoleon* in 1806, which forbade those countries controlled by him to buy goods from England. Such tariffs or import bans can be compared with sanctions of today imposed by great powers against recalcitrant countries that do not submit to their will. Today politically motivated tariff increases or import bans are no longer possible within the WTO framework – in contrast sanctions are, where by the question of the difference remains.

First referenda show the way

As the tariffs generally rose in Europe towards the end of the century, Parliament decided a new general tariff with higher rates in 1890. This federal law was the reason for a referendum, a popular initiative and two groundbreaking referenda: The "League against the rising prices of food" launched the referendum. This included parts of the export industry (which fought against trade barriers), Social Democrats (fearing higher prices in stores) and also farmers fearing not being able to export their cheese quite as well. It is also

striking that especially the French-speaking Switzerland refused to accept/reacted against the degradation of free trade, as more than half of the 51,000 signatures were collected in Neuchatel and Geneva (30,000 were required). On the other hand, commercial circles and parts of the textile and machinery industry wanted higher tariffs to protect their products from competition from abroad. The defenders of the customs tariff organised themselves in the "Olten committee" and fought the "Food League". It was an almost classic initial position that should often be repeated in tendency – up to this day.

In 1891 the first referendum on tariffs took place. The voters said yes to the new tariff with 58.1 percent. – For this ballot, new questions arose: What will happen to the additional income that flow into the Federal Treasury by the new tariffs? Circles from Central Switzerland became active and launched a federal popular initiative with the following proposal: The Federal Government will have to transfer two francs per inhabitant to the cantons out of the additional tariffs. (In 1891 the people had decided that citizens with at least 50,000 – today 100,000 – signatures can suggest concretely, to modify one or several articles in the Constitution or to reformulate entirely). This popular initiative was the prelude to a long series of referenda on questions of tariffs, taxes and federalism. Nearly three-quarters of the voters went to the polls in 1894 and gave a clear no to the popular initiative. That was remarkable. The people held on to dichotomy, the tariffs should exclusively go to the Federal Government and the income and property taxes should go to the municipalities and cantons. The majority of the voters renounced their own financial benefit and voted for the public interest of the country.

At that time referenda were not only established on tariffs but also on all questions of taxes. On their amount in particular, has to be voted compulsorily in the Federal Government – until today. This is a matter of course in the communes and cantons, anyway. Thus, the maximum rates for the federal tax and the tax rates for Value Added Tax (VAT) are firmly established in the Constitution today, so that the people must vote compulsorily on even the slightest increase. – All these votes since 1894 have repeatedly shown that the voters do not only pass on personal benefits but that they show a high sense of responsibility for the country at all political levels.

Protectionism at the end of the 19th century

The more politics of the great powers became imperialistic, the more protectionism increased at the borders. In 1901, 10

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"Agriculture an direct democracy ..."

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years after the first customs regulation, the National Council and Council of States developed a new customs tariff with higher rates. Again the citizens called a referendum and for the second time there was a vote. The opponents of the law joined to the "league against the tariff". This time, the *Swiss Farmers' Union*, founded in 1897 with its charismatic secretary *Ernst Laur*, belonged to the defenders. He played a central role in the referendum debate, so that the new tariff was also called "Laur-tariff". – Again, the interest was high, and the polling at the ballot box was 71 per cent. With 59 percent, once more the sovereign said yes to the new rate and gave green light for an increasingly protectionist commercial policy. A clear majority wanted to protect domestic production and accepted higher prices. Today, higher prices – especially for the food – are accepted in the interest of the country.

However, not only the individual industries, but also the regions of the country voted very differently. Already, at that time one thing was clear: The opponents and advocates were often confronted irreconcilably in the vote fight and did not give in to each other. However, referendums prevent divisions, so that the losing party accepts the solution in a higher degree, than is the case in a purely representative democracy, where the government and the parliament take landmark decisions on their own and the people can often only fight with street protests against it. In direct democracy, every citizen must weigh between two solutions, and he also bears the responsibility for it.

Economic situation before the First World War

In Switzerland, decades before the First World War, there was a special time for the private sector and for private initiatives. In comparison to today, the state activities were relatively modest. The national quota (expenditure of the municipalities, cantons and alliance in percent of the gross domestic product GDP) amounted to about 10 percent (today 36 percent). In cooperation with the municipalities and cantons, private stock com-

panies built the today's railroad network in relatively short time. In 1896 and 1898, – after two popular votes – the Federation nationalised a little more than half of it and founded the *Swiss Federal Railways SBB*. The rest remained "private", the municipalities and cantons mostly holding the majority of the shares. Quite alike, the Swiss national bank was founded at that time, it was established at that time after several popular votes. It was also founded as a corporation in which the cantons held the majority, citizens could participate – but not the Federation. Today one can only be amazed. The pioneer's mind of the societies at that time was impressive – even vertiginous. They built a dense railway system over whole Switzerland. Their tunnel builders broke through the Gotthard with simple tools and machines.

The rails of the Rhaetian Railway led over the Bernina pass at more than 2,000 metre height, the Jungfrau Railway led through the Eiger (with a view window in the middle of the Eiger Nordwand) and led further high to the Jungfraujoch – an ice world in nearly 3,500 metre height. No pass was too high to be mastered, no ravine too deep to be bridged, and no mountain massif too mighty to be tunnelled.

It was the Belle Epoque in which everything seemed feasible. Switzerland was in a phase of the economic impetus. Industrialisation was in full development. Textile factories of most varied kind exported their valuable products into the whole world.

Most of today's great corporations were founded in this time – mostly in a small workshop. In the health resorts, the newly built hotels resembled to real palaces. Tourism boomed. The Federation, the cantons and the municipalities were widely free from debt. In Switzerland, the gold supported monetary system functioned without central bank and without overheated money printing press, as we experience it today. There were no bank crises. It was a relatively ideal world in which almost everything seemed possible. And it was also a relatively peaceful world. The few wars in the second half of 19th century. like the German-French war of 1871, only lasted a few months and caused hard-ly damage for the civil society.

As already mentioned earlier, the milk economy became more and more important in the field of agriculture. Numerous cheese dairy societies were founded who united to national milk associations organising the cheese export. In 1907 the central association of Swiss milk producers ZVSM was founded.

Before the First World War, approximately one quarter of the dairy products went into export. *Henry Nestlé* invented the condensed milk and founded the first factory of condensed milk and milk powder on Lake Geneva, that soon found many imitators. In the course of the century, *Nestlé* became the biggest Food company in the world .

Structural change in agriculture

As well as the dairy business increased the cultivation decreased. The cereal cropping in Switzerland collapsed so that with the beginning of the First World War barely 16 per cent of the requirements were covered. This situation was neither unusual nor upsetting then – understandably enough. Switzerland was then more integrated into world trade than today and it was used to export and import many goods – not only raw materials. Today Switzerland is said to earn every second Swiss Franc abroad. Then it was more than every second franc. The external trade, as measured by the added value, was more than 60 per cent. Switzerland was then, after the Netherlands, the country which was most integrated into the world trade, although it did not have sea access or colonies (Halbeisen, 2012, p. 347). For that reason after a long period of peace no one really thought about how Switzerland should pull through, when the neighbours are at war. •

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Letter to the Editor

Continued adherence of the Federal Council to the thousand franc note and to the new banknote series

Contrary to the belief of the EU states to suspect anyone paying more than five hundred euro cash of tax evasion and to therefore skip five-hundred euro note, the Swiss Federal Council has fortunately a positive attitude towards the honest citizen who may once pay with a thousand franc note, without suspecting him of tax evasion. Recently, the Federal Council confirmed this in his response to an interpellation by SP National Councillor *Kiener-Nellen*. The Government shows slightly less courage as it allows for the removal of the portraiture on the new series of banknotes. I appreciate the importance of anti-counterfeiting, which the Swiss

National Bank praises the new series of banknotes for. But I wonder why Switzerland now – as the euro countries – waived depiction of heads of pioneering personalities from their banknotes and replaces them, as in the case of the fifty notes, by a blossom of dandelion? I wonder as an artist and retired teacher for artistic expression, how this imagery is supposed to represent values such as sovereignty, stability, neutrality and independence? Artists with an international reputation such as *Sophie Thaeuber Arp* represented a clear anti-war stance, at least with their Dadaist art and *Alberto Giacometti* saw human beings at the centre of his art – values, which cer-

tainly express the neutrality and humanity of Switzerland! I can't get it into my head that the Swiss National Bank is voluntarily giving up to depict heads on its bank notes and is ingratiating on the already "headless" euro notes. This in contrast to leading world currencies, as for example the dollar bills where the depiction of heads still has a meaning! Do we really have to give up on depicting "heads" on the upcoming Swiss banknote series, to be economically, socially, politically and culturally up to date?

Matthias Elmiger, Ebnat-Kappel

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Sign the referendum against "Development of the Swiss Armed Forces" – for preserving Switzerland

Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer* stated in July 2014 in an article "With the development of the Swiss Armed Forces to more security" the following: "The army's mission is to ensure the security of the country. We were not in a position to do this." Nevertheless the Parliament agreed to the "Development" of the Swiss Armed Forces (WEA), in fact an abolition of the army in form of a reduction from 220,000 to 100,000 troops. Of those only 24,000 man are combat troops. How should the army now comply with the mission of the Federal Constitution to ensure the security of the country with these small remainders? This is a mission impossible for "the best army of the world".

Referendum against the "Development of the Armed Forces"

In the issue of 10 May 2016 *Current Concerns* reported on the urgently needed referendum against the further reduction of the Swiss Armed Forces. With the enclosed signature form of the referendum, Swiss voters have the opportunity now to contribute, enabling people to put a stop to this reduction at the ballot box.
Referendum deadline: 7 July 2016

The Swiss people want to adhere to the neutrality and general compulsory military service. They are aware that se-

curity is a prerequisite for freedom, independence and prosperity. A credible militia army guarantees security also in times of crisis. We want to provide the human and financial resources for national defence to the army – so that all can live in security and freedom. The SVP (Swiss People's Party) is committed to a modern armed and well-trained militia army to preserve an independent, free and neutral Switzerland. There is barely a month time to sign the WEA referendum. Signature sheets are available at www.armee-halbierung-nein.ch/.

Peter Aebersold, Zurich

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Who's playing with fire here and why?"

The world has got accustomed to the permanent crisis. One hopes for good news, but instead of sustainable containment we have to realise an expansion towards Western Europe. Last but not least the refugee crisis should open everybody's eyes, to see that the players having the ball are merciless with everyone.

Recently the Russian Foreign Minister *Lavrov* spoke of neo Ottoman intentions of the *Erdogan* government. Is *Lavrov* right in saying this? The conflict with Turkey could also expand into a regional/supraregional war. With regard to Syria, the Turkish Government proved to be a generous supporter of the terrorist militia IS. Russia requests Turkey to close the border to Syria – but obviously this does not happen. A little further to the East, the "frozen" Nagorno-

Karabakh conflict flares up again. Freeze and thaw as needed, just as fine food. Armenia is a Christian country, Azerbaijan is Islamic, Islam is practiced there rather moderate. Who is playing with fire and why? Already in 2013, *Xi Ping* announced that China strives for the development of the Silk Road, via Baku to Armenia, also to the South of Iran, as an additional connection through the South Caucasus. Are the intentions of the instigation hidden here? Still a little further to the East, we find Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is a part of the ancient Turkestan, and *Erdogan* wants to bring back all Turkic peoples of the region under his rule. China will not put up with this.

During our recent stay in Montenegro, we saw with amazement that the CRBC, a Chinese state-owned company, builds

a formidable highway from the seaside town Bar through several tunnels through the Dinaric Alps, up to the border-station with Serbia, Boljare. Also, we could find out that the renewed "unrest" in Macedonia against the Government is "created" by the same forces as the Maidan in the Ukraine. Also here there are connections believed to the Silk Road – and development of Energy supplies – both intended to be blocked. Although the Government in Montenegro is firmly in Western hands, the opposition is allowed to install large posters at the main roads claiming a "No to NATO". Is it a reason to hope?

Dr Barbara Hug, Tobel

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Elephant of Murten – 150 years anniversary – a tragicomic lesson

“Executed” with an artillery cannon

Heini Hofmann*

The drama about the elephant of Murten that was killed by a cannonball in 1866 is now – 150 years later – being restaged by the media and at the same time criticized in a smart-alecky manner. If you look back objectively, you come to a different conclusion.

At the time of the first stationary and moving menageries (= later zoo and circus), the handling of caged and tamed wild animals was a learning process, which demanded its dues, sometimes including tragic events. Such an event happened on 28 June 1866 in Murten in the canton of Fribourg

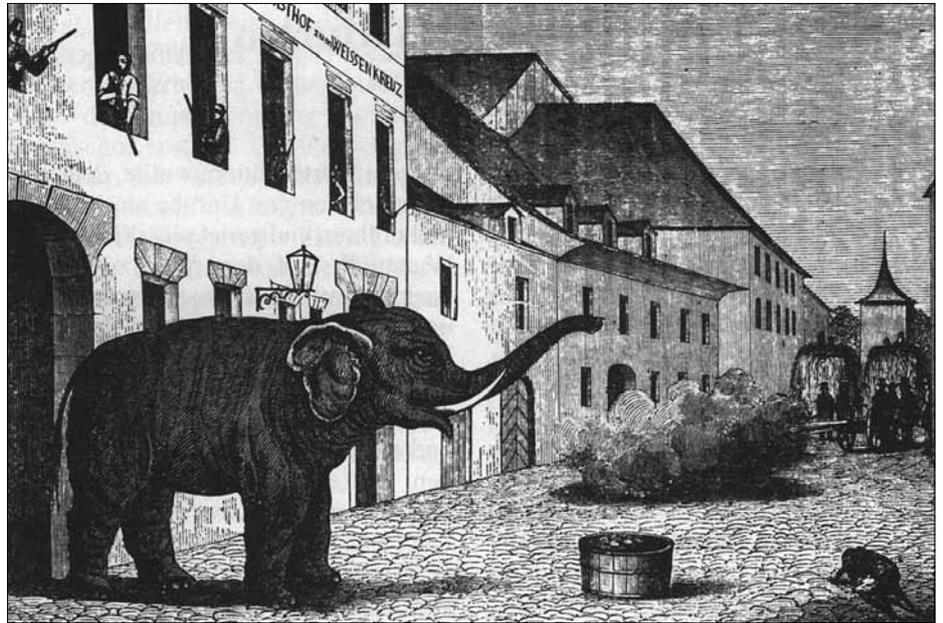
The appeal of otherness

The market town of Murten then housed almost 2,300 inhabitants, industrious provincials whose lives evolved around family, home and crafts inside the town walls. There was not a lot of variety and entertainment, except for some travelling people such as jugglers, acrobats and comedians now and then, whom “the Council and Clergy allow to perform restrictively” so as to give the settled people a taste, but not too much of a taste, of “the charm of otherness, exotic and supposedly wicked”, as the annalist *Hermann Creator* tells us.

No wonder that artists belonging to such nomadic troops, among them the circuses *Nock* and *Knie*, attracted much sympathy among the inhabitants of that time. However, menageries were not yet taken along, except for occasional wild animals like dancing bears or a tamed wolf. It was therefore a sensation when huge placards announced a gala performance of the American equestrian society *Bell rums Myers* in 1866, because this *Circus Bell & Myers* had with it not only many horses but also two Asian elephants, one bull with huge tusks and cow. Such outlandish giant animals one previously knew only from hearsay or from books, as status symbols for crowned heads or as tragic heroes in *Hannibal’s* crossing of the Alps, would now perform in the flesh in the small country town. The excitement rose noticeably!

Quarters at the White Cross

When the circus entered the town on 27 June 1866, the streets were lined with an audience of visitors of the weekly market registering astonished disbelief. The two colossi following their longtime caregiver (mahout) like sheep, hosed the road dust off their bodies at the town hall fountain to the amusement of their audience, which also got sprayed a bit by the shower. Quarters



*The final coupe de grâce in the Rathausgasse Murten: In the background the artillery cannon in gun smoke, in the foreground the bull elephant (tusker) before it slumped down and at the windows of the “Weissenkreuz” the preventively positioned carbine marksmen.
(Wood engraving of Antoine M. de Gottrau, 1887) (picture museum of Murten)*

were taken up at the hotel “Weisses Kreuz” and in its spacious stables.

The unique, sold-out guest performance took place in a corral enclosed with tarpaulins near the shooting association’s clubhouse on 27 June and lasted till 11 pm. The audience marvelled at the feats of the gray giants, laughed heartily at them and gave them great applause. The two elephants obeyed their mahout’s every word. A capable trio reliant on each other – or so it seemed! Everyone went home delighted, and the summer night settled over the town.

The mahout is dead!

But then, on the next morning, followed the gruesome awakening. An eyewitness, the locksmith *Johann Frey*, was torn from sleep at dawn by a great commotion; the whole town was in an uproar. The bull elephant had broken loose. He had totally freaked out and smashed up everything that came in his way. It had taken the circus people some time to push the excited animal back into his stable.

Only now it became clear what had happened: The bull elephant had killed his mahout, who had cared for him during 14 years. With his powerful trunk he had twice thrown him into the air, then pressed him to the ground with his tusks and finally kicked him with his feet. It had taken the unfortunate man a whole agonizing hour to die. Murten was in shock and unexpectedly at the same time affected by

a terrible problem that everyone felt to be weird and strange. Still action had to be taken immediately.

Six-Pounder Artillery Cannon

From the secure port of present knowledge it would be easy to retrospectively deride or criticise the Murteners’ dilemma in the face of such a sudden, totally unpredictable threat. But we should, on the contrary, attest to them that they acted, correctly, quickly and even successfully within the scope of their options and thus prevented further disaster.

The local council and the circus manager agreed that the no longer controllable animal had to be killed. But how? The methods of poisoning or a firing squad were discarded because of they would possibly not be fast enough. One wanted to play safe and so ordered a six-pounder artillery gun from Fribourg. This arrived at 11 o’clock a.m. The local artillery captain *Daniel Stock* took command.

The Rathausgasse was cordoned off and – to narrow the “elephant-perimeter” – barricaded with loaded hay wagons. Due to the expected pressure wave the windows of all the houses had to be opened. As a precaution, the fire brigade was called out. Children were “consigned” to the schoolhouse. Bait was deposited before the stable door and then this was opened. The bull approached the food

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"Elephant of Murten-150 years ..."

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carefully, but withdrew again right away. Only on stepping out for the second time he remained standing for a moment with his side turned to the cannon.

Thunder and lightning

The captain shouted "fire", a thunderbolt shook the town and the gray giant toppled to one side on the spot and lay still while the blood flowed from the bullet hole. The bullet had entered by the shoulder blade and fully penetrated the massive body, as well as ruining the staircase of the inn "Adler", before it got stuck in a hay wagon as a ricochet. Sharpshooters who had been positioned as a precaution fired a – completely unnecessary – carbine salvo into the bargain. The danger was over; but now other tasks were waiting.

Shortly after noon, the mahout's assistant led the female animal towards Fribourg. Several times, the elephant cow stopped to watch out in vain for her longtime companion.

In the afternoon the killed elephant keeper, an Englishman named *Moffet*, was interred with great sympathy of the population. His wife put two coins on his eyelids – as a tribute to the god of the dead. The Murten male choir sang a poignant grave song, and out of compassion for the widow and her infant, there was an impressive collection.

Elephant stew

After the elephant had lain in the sun (though covered with straw) till the following day, 29 June, he was only then skinned and cut in place by the butchers *Riesenmey* and *Fasnacht* and the meat was sold completely to the population at 20 Cts. the pound. Even apart from the

delay this "home-slaughtering" did not quite correspond to today's hygiene regulations, because the animal was also bled insufficiently. No wonder the Murten housewives managed the exotic goulash differently well. But it was praised everywhere. To be sure, an order of the Lords of Neuchâtel for several quintals of meat at a good price arrived too late ...

One can understand that even such a suddenly accumulated meat mountain was at that time recycled to the last kilo instead of being destroyed, but probably it was also a matter of the exotic factor.

Appetite for different varieties of meat

In our part of the world meat consumption is now marked by extreme waste. Whereas previously virtually everything belonging to a carcass was used, today almost half is thrown into the bin. We are satisfied only with the best pieces. – Who would eat anything like lung or udder? Switzerland only imports fillet, sirloin and pointsteak anyway. And with respect to enclosure animals: It was previously common practice in Berne to prepare meals with the meat of surplus bears originally meant for the bear pit in the old town inns – despite their emblem status. This too is history. Only the *Tierpark Lange Erlen* in Basel still sends around an annual invitation to a meal of venison; here a tradition of hunting in close touch with nature prevails.

Post-mortem odyssey

Back to Elephant of Murten: The death of the gray giant was also the beginning of a new challenge. After the unpredictable danger had been mastered and the colossus had been eaten, pity for the elephant that had been "executed", veneration for its powerful stature and natural history interest became the focus. The authorities and the public agreed unanimously that

The stuffed casing and the mounted skeleton should be preserved for posterity.

But because the bull elephant "reconstructed" by taxidermist *Daniel Zahnd* was too big for the Murten natural history collection and because the implementation of a specially planned, custom-made exhibition pavilion in the Swiss style would have been too expensive (for the city fathers cost reality took precedence over the waves of emotion overflowing the population), the elephant ultimately landed in the *Natural History Museum Berne* that had – seen retrospectively – manoeuvred more cleverly.

In the 1930s, however, on the occasion of the museum's relocation in the new building on Berna street, the Murten Elephant preparation was disposed of quietly ...

Things were different for the skeleton, which had at the time gone directly to the Institute of Anatomy of the University of Berne, but there eked out a miserable existence. Therefore, it was also later brought into the new Natural History Museum, where it has been exhibited since 2001 and where it even obtained a new, honoured place a few years ago. In 1866 probably no one would have dared to think of such an odyssey for the elephant of Murten.

The moral of the story

The ominous cannonball, in addition to some documents, still reminds visitors of the Murten Museum of the elephantine episode. Yet the fact remains: In the year 1866, the authorities and population of Murten mastered a calamity that had hit them like a bolt out of the blue and could not be assessed properly with the knowledge of the time with cool reason in the best possible manner. There was no punishment or even "execution" it was simply necessary to protect the population. Therefore from today's perspective (see. box "The answer") not malice but respect is appropriate.

A commemoration ceremony was staged quite to this effect in 1992 by the current operator of the small theatre *Herzbaracke* which floats on Lake Zurich, *Federico Emanuel Pfaffen*. With the production "The elephant comes" (in analogy to what is still highly relevant: "That what is strange and foreign coming"), he toured over the Alps to the Engadine, along with the elephant Dunja and a four-masted chapiteau depicting Murten.

And now, in 2016, we have the 150-year anniversary with events, media coverage and souvenirs. The Murten Elephant along with the "goulash cannon" has definitely become immortal, and this is happening now, because we have exiled the elephant from the circus in Switzerland. The dead live longer!

* The author is a former zoo and circus veterinarian. For more information: www.nmbe.ch (Natural History Museum Bern) and www.museum-murten.ch (Translation *Current Concerns*)

The key to the mystery: The bull elephant was in the musth!

hh. Already before the tragic incident in Murten in 1866 freaked out bull elephants had been shot with cannons in London, Venice and Geneva, because a fact we know well today was unknown at that time: From the age of 15 bull elephants can come into musth, which is a state of heavy arousal in a rut phase, visible by the secretion of the temple gland between eye and ear. In the wild, this exceptional state turns them into a "dominant male" avoided by rivals and chosen by females as a partner for mating.

Because one still had no explanation, people protected themselves by sawing off bulls' tusk tips and by connecting the ends with a metal bridge (also visible in the existing historical pictures of the dead elephant, while the museum preparation glosses it over). Because this same bull is said to have already overthrown a wagon and killed a horse on

his journey. Today safety precautions can be taken when a rut phase with musth occurs. Nevertheless, the dramatic incident of Murten is still repeated from time to time today. For example, six deaths lately occurred in Thailand in connection with bull elephants experiencing a testosterone boost, the latest in February 2016.

Even in the technical institutes of today misinterpretations happen, e.g. when the public relation crew of the Natural History Museum of Bern makes the elephant of Murten (the skeleton of which it possesses) its main topic of advertising this year and calls it a "bolting". Flight animals like horses react to a scary situation by trying to flee. The bull elephant of Murten, which snapped, was in the musth and therefore he did not run away but asserted himself on-site.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)