

Current Concerns

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Germany's role in the Syrian conflict

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Dr med Salem El-Hamid (picture ma)

cc. The basis of the following text is a lecture given by Dr Salem El-Hamid in the early autumn of 2016 at an international Syria conference in Bad Sooden-Allendorf, Germany. The latest developments (change of government in the USA) are not yet included. Nevertheless, the text is a valuable analysis giving a more accurate picture of Germany's role in the Syria conflict. This is all the more important since Germany is claiming a leadership role in Europe and wants to follow in the footsteps of the established US policy. In view of the renewed negotiations in Geneva, the text is highly topical.

Shortly after the start of the conflict in Syria it became clear to every observer that this was not a people's uprising but a "proxy war". It was also not difficult to see which forces were – and are – involved in this murderous conflict.

There are, however, two states also participating in this sad concert whose roles are hardly discussed in public. These are Israel and Germany. Both are close allies of the United States. Israel is acting according to its own interests and has a clear plan which it pursues, while Germany is acting selflessly, sometimes even against its own interests, just only because it wants to demonstrate its loyalty to the alliance with the US. There-

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He specialised in several areas of child and adolescent medicine and became a senior physician at the municipal hospital in Hildesheim in 1981. Shortly afterwards he was appointed senior consultant. He is the head of the children's hospital in Kirchen / Sieg. He is also the secretary general of the *Deutsch-Syrische Gesellschaft e.V.* (German-Syrian Society) in Bonn, which he co-founded. The society was founded in 1994 by, among others, Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski (SPD). Its main objective is to promote international understanding amongst the peoples and to strengthen cooperation between Germany and Syria.

"In Germany in public, the German attitude and commitment is declared to be within the meaning of a defense of human rights, of the introduction of democracy and the fight against all dictators who kill their own people. Basically, these are slogans intended for the masses that have little or no knowledge of the details and peculiarities of the conflict. This task, of course, is taken over by the state-controlled mass media."

fore it submits to the will of US policy. In this article Germany's role is discussed in detail.

In the wars and conflicts provoked by the US, some countries have to undertake the cleaning-up operations. One of the most important states to do this is Germany.

In fulfilling this task, German policy tries to convey the impression that it acts voluntarily and on its own authority. It makes its actions out to be humanitarian or in aid of development and it ostensibly helps the civilian population of the affected countries. The history of the construction of girls' schools in Afghanistan is by now known to everyone.

In the Syria conflict, Germany has not shown itself up as "humanitarian", as it usually does, but from the outset, it appeared progressive in and greatly committed to carrying out all the destabilisation measures against the Syrian state.

What did Germany do in detail?

Germany was one of the initiators of the so-called "Friends of Syria", a network of many Western and Arab states under the leadership of the US, which have a single goal: to overthrow the Syrian government of *Bashar al-Assad*. These countries have different notions and agendas, particularly as regards the further development of Syria after the fall of its government. Until recently, attempts were made to hush up or to simply ignore these distinctions and conflicts of interest, but we are currently experiencing serious differences between the individual participants in this artificial network.

In the context of its activities as a member of the "Friends of Syria," Germany has made an important contribution to destabilising the Syrian state, and has given massive support to the insurgents.

A) *Destabilisation measures aimed against the Syrian state. Here are some of the sanctions and restrictions that concern the following fields:*

- crude oil and petroleum products, including air-turbine fuels
- Equipment for the oil and gas industry
- Power plant construction
- Equipment for internet/telecommunication
- Financial transactions and financial services of the Central Bank in Syria
- Freight control
- Flights of the Syrian airline

B) *Support of the opposition:*

- Logistical support
- Military support
- Medial support

Logistical support:

The then German Foreign Minister, *Westerwelle*, was one of the leading brains in the organisation and formation of the so-called "Friends of Syria", newly called the "Syria Contact Group", the most important aim of which is to overthrow the Syrian government. Since this group has been unable to implement its plan militarily, as had been the case in Libya, it decided to take a bundle of measures aimed at achieving the same goal.

Let us remember that *Westerwelle* was under pressure of a campaign artificially inflated by the media on the grounds of his alleged "wrong decision" in the UN Security Council's Libyan resolution. He was accused of having weakened the Western alliance by his abstention from the vote. That is why he wanted to show determination and loyalty to the alliance in his Syrian policy and to demonstrate severity against the Syrian state. So to speak, he

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wanted to make up for his "sin". Of course Westerwelle did not make these decisions alone and independently, but in consultation with Ms *Merkel!*

In their verbal and demonstrative support of the opposition, German politicians and their mainstream media gave strong impetus to the opposition parties in Syria, and moreover, above all else, to the radical forces in Germany itself. These were able to move about freely; they collected donations for the rebels; they were able to go to battle in Syria and to return to Germany without being prosecuted. They felt they were supported by the German government. They believed that they were forming a common front with the German government against a common enemy, a dictator who had – and still has – to be removed.

Up to the end of 2013, the Americans and their Western allies, the "Friends of Syria", had the upper hand in the Syrian conflict. Until then, the opposition hoped that the Americans would intervene and overthrow the Syrian government. They wanted to bring about a so-called "humanitarian intervention," but this hope was deceptive, as the later developments showed.

Medial support:

In Germany in public, the German attitude and commitment is declared to be within the meaning of a defense of human rights, of the introduction of democracy and the fight against all dictators who kill their own people. Basically, these are slogans intended for the masses that have little or no knowledge of the details and peculiarities of the conflict. This task, of course, is taken over by the state-controlled mass media.

As a person concerned, who occupies himself intensively with the Syrian conflict, I follow the news, reports and discussions of the various news broadcasts by the international agencies in English, Arabic and German every day. This information is so confusing and contradictory that, in my opinion, no normal person is in a position to get a clear picture and to form his or her own judgment.

However, as I have a good knowledge of the situation on the ground and receive direct and accurate information about the details by way of many relatives, friends and acquaintances in Syria, I try to get a more or less clear idea of the situation and to form my own judgment from the abundance of divergent messages.

When looking at the media reports, I have observed the following peculiarities:

- It is interesting to note that the radical forces of the opposition express themselves quite differently in the Western

than in the Arab media, a fact which is completely kept secret and hushed up here. The statements in the Arab media are often drastic and difficult to bear for Western tastes.

- From the beginning of the events in Syria I already noticed that the overwhelming majority of the German leading media give out their information coincidentally with Arab broadcasters such as *al-Jazira*, *al-Arabia* or western broadcasters like *BBC* or *France 24*, i.e. those stations that are involved in the Syrian war actively and in a biased way. These broadcasters take their information exclusively from the opposition and from various dubious sources such as "Reports of Eyewitnesses", activists, "The Human Rights Observatory" based in London, and the like. Luckily there were also some objective accounts reported by a few independent media.
- It is striking how reports of allegedly particular atrocities and massacres coincide with certain important events and occasions, such as meetings of the UN or peace negotiations or the like. Many German journalists travel illegally across the Turkish border to Syria to report on the rebels' "myths" and the alleged cruelty of the Syrian government (see *Marcel Mettelsiefen* "Heimlich in Homs" – Secretly in Homs). Such reporters even get prizes and awards for their largely polemical and one-sided reports.
- For me it was paradoxical and difficult to understand that the liberal, as well as the leftist, politicians and their media represented the war in Syria as a popular uprising and called the radical, salafist and religious forces "freedom fighters", that they solidarised with them and that they oppose the secular government, which is more or less oriented towards the West.
- It is very difficult to understand why the Federal Government takes a position like this in such a dirty war. In addition, it is difficult to bear that the public-service media such as *ARD*, *ZDF*, *Deutschlandfunk*, *WDR*, *NDR* and almost all other broadcasters also "dutifully" participate in the dissemination of this kind of disinformation and war propaganda.

Even after more than five years of war and destruction in Syria, consciously or unconsciously politicians and media are still telling the same untruths and "fairytale tales". They are still reporting on the "revolution" and on "moderate rebels," trying to convey a false and distorted picture of the Syrian conflict. Obviously, they still have not understood or are still in denial about the fact that if this policy is pur-

sued, Germany will also be drawn into the Syrian chaos.

Many media and politicians now talk about the failure of the West in the Syrian conflict, meaning that an early intervention by the West would have prevented the current development in Syria and caused the Syrian government to have long since fallen. As the development now shows, this belief is erroneous.

Despite all attempts at obfuscation and disinformation, a survey has shown that only 13% of the German population advocate a Western intervention in Syria.

The development of the Syria conflict has shown that the many so-called "Syria experts", government advisors and leading media in Germany and their reports, articles and commentaries of the past five years have almost consistently been unrealistic and unsubstantial. It is therefore advisable to review their earlier reports. You will realise that none of their analyses and forecasts has come true, and that everything they have written or portrayed was pretty much only an illusion and a mirage. Unfortunately, many of them persist with their mistakes and continue with their propaganda.

Moderate or temperate rebels

These terms are misleading. Those who invented them cannot or do not want to define them exactly because they themselves do not know who these groups are. But just only the names such organisations give themselves, their slogans, the look and the faces of their representatives promptly tell those in the know who these people really are.

Although these actors hate and disregard all Western values (democracy, human rights, women's rights, freedom of the press, homosexual marriage, separation of state and religion, etc.), local media and politicians call them "moderate" or "temperate" rebels.

Here is a small "selection" of the great collective of these organisations:

- *al-Nusra Front (Jabhat Ahrar al Sham)*
- *Free Syrian Army FSA*
- *Farouq brigades*
- *Islamic Front*
- *Khorasan*
- *Liwa al-Islam*
- *Liwa al-Tawhid*
- *Liwa al-Umma*
- *Liwa al-Haqq*
- *Suqour al-Sham*
- *Khaled ibn al-Walid*
- *Syrian Islamic Front*
- *Syrian Islamic Liberation Front*

Refugee policy/Humanitarian tasks

When the plan of the West failed in Syria and all that was left was a pile of shards,

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Germany had to take over its traditional role as a "humanitarian helper" again and so committed itself intensively to the refugee policy.

Refugee policy

The Federal Government takes advantage of the enormous willingness of the German population to help people. With each tsunami or in the case of other environmental catastrophes, the Germans donate unimaginable amounts and get involved with all their strength to help those affected. That is why there are nowhere as many aid organisations as in Germany. This moral and praiseworthy willingness to make sacrifices is, in my opinion, being instrumentalised, yes indeed, it is abused by politics and the media, in order to enforce their own refugee policy. A "welcome culture" has been spoken of – here are some examples of many:

Some journalists proudly reported in September 2015 that the migrants now prefer coming to Germany to going on pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

One politician even smuggled a refugee into Germany (*Diether Dehm*, member of parliament of the Left Party).

The Green politician *Kathrin Göring-Eckardt* travelled to Greece (of course with media support) to save a refugee (!) and to welcome him. If it were up to her, she might go and distribute the German citizenship to all migrants at once.

The refugee policy has developed its own momentum. There are many actors on this stage, and they all have different visions and motivations. They all assert they want to help the refugees, but their own calculations are always a factor.

Who supports the Federal Government's refugee policy?

- "Party troopers"
- Trade unions
- Employers' associations
- Churches
- Benevolent and helpful people
- Foundations,
- Non-governmental organisations, etc.
- Profiteers
- Media

The role of the individual groups mentioned here can be discussed in detail. It will be noted that they are all after their own benefit.

What is not properly expounded is the fact that this hypocrisy ultimately leads to the opposite effect and to the creation of tensions and unrest in our society.

The United States play the Kurds card

Since the beginning of the events in Syria, the Kurds, in their overwhelming majority, stood on the side of the Syrian government, which in turn financed and armed the Kurds to fight against the radical forces. There was strong cooperation between both sides, because both sides fight against Turkey/*Erdogan*. The Syrian government gave the Kurds control over the northern parts of Syria to live there in some kind of "autonomy" and to also control this part independently.

In the course of the Syrian war, the Americans made a great deal of effort to find their own allies whom they would bring to power after the intended overthrow of the Syrian government. At the end of 2013, they realised that they could not find any forces they could truly rely on.

There is mistrust between the numerous fighting groups, but especially against the Americans (see *Obama's* interview with *al-Arabia* in 2015). At long last, there was nothing left for the US but to play the Kurds card.

But in my opinion, the Kurds card will not work in the long run. All the regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) will vehemently fight the emergence of a Kurdish state in Syria, using all means available. The strongest resistance is to be expected from NATO member Turkey, as for Turkey/*Erdogan*, this is a vital issue.

The current situation

After the Russia's direct intervention and the changes in Turkey after the coup attempt, the situation has changed fundamentally. Aleppo is under the absolute control of the Syrian state. And in the meanwhile Russia is dictating the process and development in Syria.

Turkey no longer appears to be an active member of the so-called "Syria Contact Group" (formerly "Friends of Syria"), but is rather cooperating with the Russians and Iran to find a solution in Syria. Now that Turkey has sheered off, the former group has become toothless and is no longer able to control the events. The most important member of this group is the US.

The attitude of the US

The US

- have a deal with Iran (nuclear agreement),
- have no allies among the so-called rebels any more,
- have only the Kurds as allies,
- have no economic interests in Syria,
- are not ready to sacrifice its soldiers in Syria, and

- are not willing to risk a direct military confrontation with Russia without a serious reason.

The other allies, ie Saudi Arabia, Qatar, England, France and Germany, have divergent interests and are unable to achieve anything without the US being involved.

In my opinion, there are two big losers in this conflict: the first loser is the people who are losing their lives in Syria, and the second loser is Germany (refugees will eventually destabilise the country).

Unfortunately, the federal government is not seriously seeking a solution to the conflict in order to protect Germany from these serious consequences. German policy continues on its wrong track, on the grounds that Germany is part of the Western alliance. It unrestrictedly provides arms to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and these continue to sustain this murderous war.

What has Germany so far "accomplished" in the Syrian conflict?

Germany

- has no agenda of its own,
- does not have its own strategic, national or other vital interests in the region,
- unconditionally follows US policy,
- is so far the largest loser of the conflict (refugees).

What can and should Germany do?

Germany can

- serve as a mediator,
- stop the supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia and Qatar,
- together with the other EU countries, urge the US to end the war,
- play an important role in the reconstruction of Syria after the end of the war.

If the conflict continues, Europe and especially Germany will be destabilised in the medium term.

One has to ask what German parents would want to send their own children to the swamps of the dirty Syrian war, so that they would lose their lives there. An inconceivable thought.

Concluding remarks

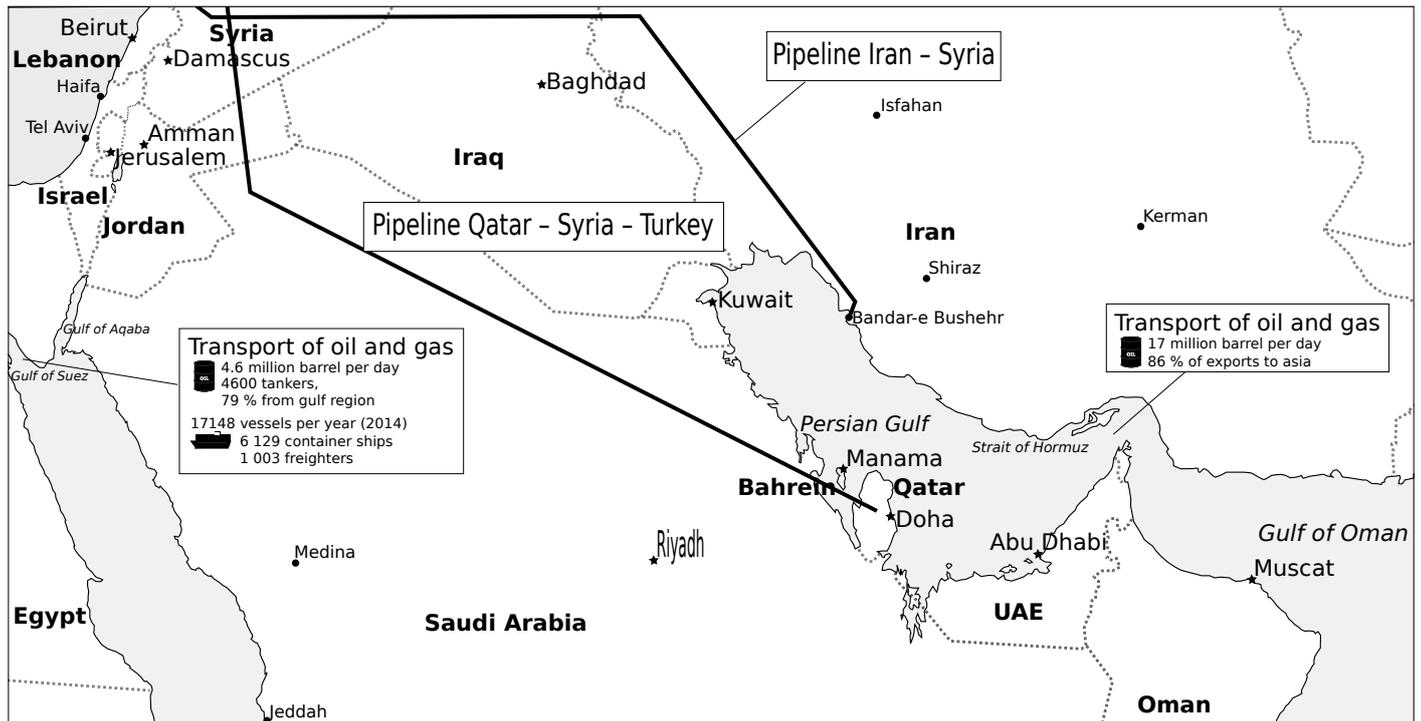
As it now appears, there are various reasons why the US obviously have no interest in ending this war in the foreseeable future.

In my opinion, the US policy in this conflict will ultimately fail. The tensions in the region will continue to grow, entailing the threat of a regional war.

It is clear – the longer this conflict persists, the more dangerous it is for Germany. Germany, the exemplary student of the US, will be one of the biggest losers. •
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Syria – between civil war and world war

by Wolfgang van Biezen



The reason for the five year lasting proxy war in Syria: The country chose a Russian-Iranian pipeline variant instead of the US-American-Qatari one. (map: Current Concerns©wgr)



Our media still spread dis-information. Is it really true that Turkey is taking steps towards Russia, although it is an important NATO member? Is it in fact true

that Turkey combats and curries favour with the Kurds at the same time? ... Do we after all still know why there is war in Syria?

The book “Der Nahe Osten brennt (The Middle East Burns)”, edited by Fritz Edlinger in the Viennese Promedia Verlag – with contributions from renowned Syrian and Middle East experts, clarifies.

The interested reader is recommended to start with the chapter “Erdogan’s Syrian Adventures”, since the highly differentiated articles on the Kurds, the Christians, the Alawites and other minorities in Syria, the chapter on the German media or the one that illuminates the (international) legal aspect.

As at the beginning of the 1970s, the Shell company discovered a huge natural gas deposit in exploration drilling in search of oil in Qatar, even the experts did not realise that it was the largest natural gas deposit in the world. What the experts knew, however, was the fact that a little more than a third of this deposit lay under Iranian soil and that this circumstance was almost bound to result in a tremendous potential for conflicts.

Instead of splitting up this treasure of nature for the sake of the two peoples of Qatar and Iran, as usual among good

neighbours, secret diplomacy began its unfortunate hustle and bustle. The then Qatar Emir Ahmad ibn Ali Khalifa ibn Hamad did not like to divide and pondered about how this natural gas deposit would be most cleverly exploited for his own benefit and the Iranian neighbour. He stake everything on the Anglo-American card and hence accepted the extreme case for both parties involved, the casus belli.

Although Qatar was a little sheikhdom at that time, it did not fear Iran. The second Gulf War threw Iran decades back in its funding opportunities for oil, and when the UN imposed an economic embargo against Iran, everything seemed to run perfectly for Qatar. When the US set up its headquarters for wars in the Middle East in Qatar in 1998, Qatar began to bustle on the world political stage.

For the US, the huge Qatar natural gas deposit seemed to be the opportunity to throw the energy supplier Russia out of the market via the “North Stream” pipeline exclusively with Germany and thus to Europe.

However, although Qatar had good relations to their Sunni neighbour Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Jordan, although there was an Anglo-American alliance, and, for many incomprehensible, the support of Israel, and above all a geopolitically most favourable position, Qatar faced a grave problem. Due to its geographical location on the Persian Gulf and the fact that Qatar did not own a pipeline, which would initially transport the gas to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan

and from there to Europe, it was forced to ship the (Qatari-Iranian) natural gas in its own facilities on ships. Beforehand they had to liquefy the gas, which was relatively expensive, slow, and it was quite expensive to offer the gas on the world market. The agreement of Bashar al-Assad was necessary to use a pipeline to quickly exploit the natural gas storage and to reach the Turkish port of Ceyhan via Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria.

He refused his approval of solidarity with Russia, which he, as the elected President of the Republic, was perfectly well-informed in international conventions and international law. When it became known that Assad also wanted to allow Russia a planned pipeline to Iran to transfer the gas transport of both countries across Syria to Turkey, Bashar al-Assad crossed the plan, carefully developed by the US, to upgrade Qatar and in turn supply the market with favourable natural gas.

Immediately after the announcement of the Syrian-Russia-Iran natural gas supply axis, Sunni minorities in southern Syria, the city of Daraa, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were instrumentalised with a logistical help from the USA for a (international) civil war, then “Arab Spring” called. This, like its predecessors in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, well camouflaged and media-effective for the world public, should expand to a field fire.

Dialogue instead of hysterical information wars

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's address at the 53rd Munich Security Conference, 18 February 2017



Sergey Lavrov
(picture ma)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten years ago, President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed this conference with a speech that many in the West saw as a challenge and even a threat, although what his message emphasised above all was the need to renounce unilateral action in favour of honest cooperation based on mutual respect, international law, joint assessment of global problems and collective decision-making. Unfortunately, the warnings he sounded then about the negative consequences of attempting to obstruct the emergence of a multipolar world have become reality.

Humanity stands at a crossroads today. The historic era that could be called the post-Cold War order has come to an end. Its main result, as we see it, was the complete failure of the Cold War institutions to adapt to new realities. The world has become neither "Western-centric", nor a safer and more stable place. This is evident in the results of "democratisation" in the Middle East and North Africa, and in other places too.

NATO expansion has created a level of tension in Europe unseen in the last thirty years. Yet this year marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act in Paris, and 15 years since the Rome Declaration on a new quality of

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A brand that today deals with all its implications, such as the impending war of Western Europe with Russia and the immeasurable fugitive.

From this point of view, the subtitle of the book by Fritz Edlinger "Between the Syrian Civil War and the World War" becomes clear because basically the war in Syria has become a proxy war between the USA and Russia. The frontline of Ukraine is continuing in the Persian Gulf. The "Kurdish Question", which is also dealt with in detail in the book, now contains the necessary explosives for the next wars. If the Kurdistan favoured by Hillary Clinton were to come about, the US could control Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran from there. Israel, which is also dependent on the pipelines running through Syria (Golan heights) due to natural gas foundations in the eastern Mediterranean, and how Qatar has a transport problem, has an existential interest in the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Saudi Arabia wants to set up a loading

Today, more than ever, we need a dialogue on all complex issues in order to find mutually acceptable compromises.

Russia-NATO relations was adopted. These documents' basic premise was that Russia and the West took on a joint commitment to guarantee security on the basis of respect for each other's interests, to strengthen mutual trust, prevent a Euro-Atlantic split and erase dividing lines. This did not happen, above all because NATO remained a Cold War institution. It is said that wars start in people's heads, but according to this logic, it is also in people's heads that they should end. This is not the case yet with the Cold War. Some statements by politicians in Europe and the United States seem to confirm this particularly clearly, including statements made here yesterday and today during this conference.

I mentioned NATO expansion just now. We categorically reject the allegations of those who accuse Russia and the new centres of global influence of attempting to undermine the so-called "liberal world order". This global model was pre-programmed for crisis right from the time when this vision of economic and political globalisation was conceived primarily as an instrument for ensuring the growth of an elite club of countries and its domination over everyone else. It is clear that such a system could not last forever. Leaders with a sense of responsibility must now make their choice. I hope

port in Yemen in the port of Al Makalla and is already bombing the way.

After reading this extremely differentiated and carefully compiled book, it is to be desired that humanity recall the experiences of two world wars and to seek the negotiation table, for the benefit of its peoples, before and not only after a new world war. •



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that this choice will be made in favour of building a democratic and fair world order, a post-West world order, if you will, in which each country develops its own sovereignty within the framework of international law, and will strive to balance their own national interests with those of their partners, with respect for each country's cultural, historical and civilisational identity.

Russia has never hidden its views, and has always been sincere in advocating work based on equal footing in order to create a common space of security, good-neighbourliness and development from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The tensions of recent years between North America, Europe and Russia are unnatural; I would even say they go against nature.

Russia is a Eurasian state with a variety of cultures and ethnicities. Predictability and goodwill in relations with all countries, primarily, its neighbours, have always been inherent to our policies. This line of thinking underlies our close work within the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States], the Eurasian Economic Union, the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization], the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization], and BRICS.

Good-neighbourliness and mutual benefits underlie our relations with Europe as well. We are part of the same continent, we wrote our history together, and we were successful when we worked hand-in-hand to achieve prosperity for our peoples.

Many millions of Soviet people gave up their lives for the freedom of Europe. We want to see Europe strong, independent in international affairs and taking good care of our common past and future, while staying open to the world around it. We are appalled by the fact that the EU is unable to muster enough strength and give up its Russian policy based on the least denominator principle where fundamental and pragmatic interests of its member states are being sacrificed to Russophobic speculations out of sheer "solidarity". We look forward to seeing common sense take the upper hand.

What kind of relationship do we want to establish with the United States? We want relations based on pragmatism, mutual respect, and understanding of our special responsibility for global stability. Our two countries have never been in direct confrontation with each other. Our history is steeped in friendliness more than confront-

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Munich Security Conference

Germany's sinister role in global politics

by Karl Müller

The first time I wrote about the Munich Security Conference was 15 years ago, on 11 February 2002 (“Der Weltkrieg ist geplant [The World War is planned]”). Already then US Senator *John McCain* was a speaker at the conference and it was clear that he was one of the hawks.

For the US Senator the war against Afghanistan, which had started only a few weeks before, was only the first front in a global war. McCain's goal at the time was to “forge a new world”. The USA and their military allies, he told the conference, “stand now before history with this mission”.

John McCain has remained true to his old plans, also this year. He has still not realised that the US government's old plan has become impracticable, that the world has changed since then and that the hawks, still at the height of their own power in early 2002, have left behind such a wreckage of victims and destruction in so many places of the world in the past 15 years that their global reputation has been ruined. Nevertheless, people like McCain still believe in an “ultimate victory”, maybe also by the use of “wonder weapons”.

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tation. Russia did a lot to support the independence of the United States as it proceeded to become a united powerful state. Constructive Russia-US relations are in our common interest. Moreover, America is our close neighbour, just like the European Union. We are divided by just 4 km of the Bering Strait. The potential of our co-operation in politics, the economy, and the humanitarian sphere is enormous. But, of course, it has to be tapped. We are willing to go ahead and do so inasmuch as the United States is prepared to do so on its part.

Today there is no shortage in evaluations of the genesis of global challenges such as terrorism, drug trafficking, or the crises that engulfed territories from Libya to Afghanistan, leaving countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen bleeding. Certainly, the Munich debate will provide an opportunity to review in detail all these issues, as well as the continuing conflicts in Europe. Most importantly, a settlement cannot be achieved by military means.

This fully applies to the internal Ukrainian conflict. There's no alternative to complying with the Minsk Package of Measures through a direct dialogue between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. This is a firm position adopted by Russia, the

John McCain praises Angela Merkel

But something has changed with Senator McCain. He, the strident voice of the hawks, had a special “praise” for the German government and its Chancellor *Angela Merkel* ready at hand: “Not every American understands the absolutely vital role that Germany and its honourable Chancellor Merkel are playing in defence of the idea and the conscience of the West. But for all of us who do, let me say thank you.”

Indeed, with the change of the administration in the USA and after the “briefing” by former US President *Barack Obama* at the end of last year, the German Chancellor is in the front row of the hawks, seconded chiefly by her [Defence] Minister *Ursula von der Leyen*. The SPD – this was clear from the speech of German Foreign Minister *Sigmar Gabriel* – is playing only a minor role. Apparently, its task is to calm the waves. In fact, it seems to be without any power in foreign politics.

Ursula von der Leyen is setting the agenda

In Munich the tone was set by Ursula von der Leyen. The Minister's hymns of praise for the German military missions

West and the UN Security Council. Importantly, the Kiev authorities should embark on that path and honour their obligations.

Today, more than ever, we need a dialogue on all complex issues in order to find mutually acceptable compromises. Actions based on confrontation and the zero-sum-game approach will not cut any ice. Russia is not looking for conflicts with anyone, but it will always be in a position to uphold its interests.

Our absolute priority is to use dialogue to achieve our goals and mutually beneficial consensus. It is appropriate to quote a directive which Chancellor *Gorchakov*, back in the times of imperial Russia, sent to Russian Envoy in the United States *Eduard von Stoeckle* in July 1861: “there are no such divergent interests that cannot be reconciled through zealous and hard work ... in the spirit of fairness and moderation.”

If everyone could subscribe to such an approach, we'd be able to quickly overcome the post-truth period, to reject hysterical information was imposed on the international community and to proceed to keep up the honest work without being distracted by lies and falsehoods. Let this be a post-fake era.

Thank you.

Source: www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2648249

all over the world, though, do not stand up to critical scrutiny. Plainly embarrassing was her praise for Lithuania and the German military mission that has just started there.

Why did the Minister not say a single word about the discrimination of the Russian minority in the country? This would have been an honest word and could have done more to the promotion of peace than complacent pretensions. Ms von der Leyen was quite presumptuous. She tried to tell the new US administration what it had to do: no foreign political decisions by the new US administration without herself (and the Chancellor), neither in the war against terrorism nor in the relations with Russia. *Ms von der Leyen was not doing this on behalf of or with the backing of the Germans. Her sponsors are somewhere else.*

The German Chancellor is playing soft ...

The German Chancellor assumed a different role in Munich. Angela Merkel was playing thoughtful and soft. She pleaded for “multilateral international structures”, by which she meant the EU, NATO, the UN and the G20. But, interestingly, she did not mention the institution that most helped to surmount the East-West division before 1990, the OSCE. Instead she supported her Minister: “We will also do more in the field of defence policy”. But there could be no real European independence, she said, because “European defence capability” should “never be seen as an alternative to NATO, but must always fit in with NATO's capabilities”. We can guess that this is what she promised Obama for the permission to “lead Europe”.

Angela Merkel addressed again the situation in Ukraine, expressing her commitment to the hawks: “NATO became even more important for what I would describe as a very sad reason that is because of the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine where, as we know, Russia is supporting the separatists.” This development caused “such a great concern” and led to “such uncertainty, because it violated the principle that brought us peace and security in Europe after the Second World War, namely the principle of territorial integrity.”

... but she is taking the people for fools

One wonders about the effrontery by which people in Europe are to be fooled – in these statements nothing is correct.

You will recall that, after 1990, borders in Europe changed several times, also with

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Media – Europe part of an intra-American conflict?

rl. Is Donald Trump a monster? Is everyone who speaks skeptically on immigration policy, “right-wing”? Is Putin a “dictator”? Are messages contradicting the official political guidelines all “fake news”, or “post-factual”?

Certainly not. And anyone who uses a bit of his own mind has noticed early that there is a powerful cheap propaganda going on. Almost impertinent for some time.

Before political decisions that intervene in people’s lives, – but often contradict their actual interests –, blatant lies must be applied as you know. Let’s think of prewar times or – more common – election campaigns.

Without targeted propaganda, without running down the “enemy”, without cheap propaganda, no drastic measures could be carried out. That would not work without active participation of leading media and public figures.

For the citizens, the sovereign, it is more and more demanding to form a point of view in the jungle of opinion-mongering: messages are often unobjective, or they have a spin. The reader finds himself increasingly in a swamp of emotive messages on the same topic, especially if a so-called “opinion carpet” is created. The media as a fourth power in the State.

Of over 3,000 different newspapers only a handful of publishing houses remain in Switzerland. The pluralism of opinion has become narrow. Also, these newspapers are under economic pressure. The readership figures break down massively. Ads appear less. Profits are decreasing. The dependence of each advertiser is stronger. The knowledge that due to financial dependencies, reports can ap-

pear or not doesn’t increase the seriousness nor the fact that editorial offices have been merged, editors saved away or messages are taken over from news agencies and monopolies as *ap*, *afp*, or *Bloomberg without question*. “Investigative” journalism only takes place if topic and political alignment are “correct”. Due to its political connections, the state-owned radio channel SRF (Swiss Radio and TV) rarely

offers a real alternative. On the contrary. So it is no surprise that citizens increasingly rely on the internet.

With Brexit and the election of Donald Trump the influence of leading media was questioned. They didn’t manage to push through “their” position. Now, they are continuing on the “outdated” positions –

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What role could Europe play?

rl. The influence of US elites in Europe has never been so strong. Even the domestic power struggle after the election of the new president finds its fierce expression in the European media, as if we were an American federal state. It is argued with the hardest bandages, slandered and lied. We could not vote there, but we will continue to be most closely affected by the political decisions of Washington.

The states of Western Europe could scarcely determine their own destiny since 1945, only comprehend what was planned on the other side of the Atlantic. Over the past six decades, Western European societies have given up much of their cultural identity in favour of the widely propagated, but questionable, American society model (American dream). However, behind the slogans of consumption, mass-democracy, or Hollywood, hides – as is well known – a superficial culture, linked to a social Darwinist ideology, a human uprooting, and a predatory capitalism impoverishing its own population. The situation in the US themselves has become so acute that one third of US citizens are at risk of poverty, many do not receive any medical care, jobs are migrating abroad, and the state

is involved in endless wars, financed by the money printing press (at the expense of the population and the world).

Where do the European states want to find themselves in the coming years? What role can they play? Will they, as requested, dutifully raise their military budget in order to attend to the military adventures of a US administration and their “military-industrial complex”? What constructive messages can be sent from the long history of the European states across the Atlantic to provide building blocks for a better American policy? From the long history of Christian-occidental culture, one could think of the social welfare ideas in all its forms, such as the welfare state idea, the social market economy, the commons, the cooperative ideas, the services of general interest, or the popular school movements. In addition, the cultural heritage of the classical antiquity, of humanism and of the Enlightenment, has produced pioneering achievements for human coexistence, for example, civil rights or differentiated democratic models of self-determination. Europe as a cradle of democracy and human rights has a lot to offer. (See “Manifesto for Europe”, published in *Current Concerns*, No. 24, 23 September 2015) •

“Germany’s sinister role ...”

continued from page 6

intensive German (war) participation: The violent breakup of Yugoslavia since 1990 (Germany was one of the first to recognize the “independence” of Slovenia and Croatia). Between late 1991 and early 1992 the Soviet Union also dissolved, which led to the creation of new states in Europe: the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. All this happened without any referenda, and none of those involved cared about international law; it was simply the political will of those who were in power.

For centuries, the Crimean peninsula was part of Russia until it was “given” to Ukraine in 1954 – without consulting the people living there. In a referendum after the coup in Kiev in spring 2014 the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of

the Crimea voted for leaving Ukraine and for joining the Russian Federation. There are divergent assessments of the events in spring 2014 with regard to international law. At any rate, experts in constitutional and international law such as *Markus Merkel*, *Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider* or *Alfred de Zayas* came to different conclusions than Mrs Merkel did.

The situation in eastern Ukraine is highly complex. Local OSCE experts say that each of the parties directly involved in the conflict (the Kiev government, local mercenaries and the so-called separatists) are mainly involved in propaganda, trying to achieve their “war objectives”. The Russian Foreign Minister’s very specific depictions in response to a question in Munich are worth reading and show a differentiated picture not corresponding to the “western” view. The Chancellor’s statements, however, are merely cheap propaganda,

which does by no means help to achieve what would be most important: to silence the weapons and to give people the chance to make their own decisions on how they want to live.

When will Mrs Merkel stop to add fuel to the fire?

In conclusion: It would be a great benefit and blessing for an international understanding if Mrs Merkel (and her government) would differentiate and strive for the truth. She consciously chooses not to do this, but continues to add fuel to the fire. There can be only one conclusion: Angela Merkel is one of the hawks. A German contribution at the Munich Security Conference would have been much more valuable if it had expressed a sincere quest for what all people in East and West should actually desire to achieve: a road to a just peace. •

CETA – fait accompli against democracy

by Natacha Polony, France



Natacha Polony
(picture Wikipedia)

The day that the elites decide to meet the expectations of the people rather than to pocket the praise of the multinational companies, then the elites will no longer have to fear the rage they are so afraid of today.

“One million indicatives never produce an imperative,” said the mathematician *Henri Poincaré*. With this statement, he clarified that law should not be determined by the *Fait accompli* – the accomplished fact –, but by common good and by the will of the sovereign people in the republic. Already for decades, the supporters of free trade ideology have been trying to impose accomplished facts on us – which in France already led to the destruction of one million industrial jobs.

CETA, the EU’s free-trade agreement with Canada, has recently been ratified by the EU Parliament. Thereby the parliament once again proves to us that its members are no longer representing the population in the Western countries. On the crucial issues, they hastily make decisions opposing their voters wish, who have entrusted them with the mandate. (Remember: the Lisbon Treaty was ratified by 90% of the French parliamentarians, although it was, so to speak, a copy of the constitutional treaty rejected by 55% of the voters.) This time the Walloon resistance allowed the high priests of free trade, to present the hypocrisy of a re-negotiated contract. The Walloons only received a safeguard clause for their agriculture, as well as the promise that the European judges of the arbitration courts would be appointed by the Member States. This does absolutely nothing to alter the fact that the number of candidates for this task is far too small to prevent them from being subject to

“The day that the elites decide to meet the expectations of the people rather than to pocket the praise of the multinational companies, then the elites will no longer have to fear the rage they are so afraid of today.”

a market logic that is diametrically opposed to the interests of the peoples.

Of course, this ratification by the EU Parliament is not yet sufficient. The parliaments of the EU Member States and certain regional parliaments must also give their consent. However, it already permits the provisional application of various provisions. So, we already have the famous *Fait accompli*. When all farmers have committed suicide because they have been being ruined by the flood of 80,000 tons of beef and 75,000 tons of Canadian pork, it will be time to suspend the treaty. But the automobile manufacturers, the pharmaceutical laboratories and the large service providers are expecting high profits. What do some peasants matter, even if they are part of the country’s history and culture?

Ideology

Behind this choice there is an ideology: the increase in trade itself is a benefit for mankind. Imagine! It has been explained to us, that CETA will increase trade between the EU and Canada by 25%. What kind of trade? What is the quality of the traded products? Will they lead to a standardization of production and consumption between the participants? None of that matters, to trade, that is good. Producing what you consume is “outdated” and bad. The idea is alien to them, that many gradations exist between absolute self-sufficiency and the global division of labor, which these happy supporters of distortions of competition obviously care about. Either this ideology or chaos will ensue.

Blackmail

In short, they no longer allow themselves to be blackmailed. The most important freedom for them is not to be dependent on others for their basic needs. Because the worst fraud is to call it “encapsulation” or “isolation” when someone prefers to buy a product that allows his brother or neighbor to live off his work, that respects certain legal standards imposed by the state and thus by the people, instead of systematically looking for the cheapest, regardless of the ecological and human cruelties hiding behind this lower price. And since the poorest scarcely have this choice, protectionism gives to the state the opportunity to make this choice possible for them by compensating the different production conditions by taxes, standards and customs duties. This does not mean at all that there is no trade going on, but only that the conditions are freely chosen in order to be able to preserve one’s own identity with its peculiarities and its knowledge.

The day the politicians understand that all this is the transcription of their actual task, the day they decide to meet the expectations of the citizens instead of courting the approval of the media clergy and the praise of the multinational companies which they are busily servicing, then they will no longer have to fear the citizens’ anger, which scares them and which is stirred up by their cowardice.

Source: *Le Figaro* of 18.2.2017

• (Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Media – Europe part of ...”

continued from page 8

with even greater vehemence. Why? Are they so dependent on specific lobbying groups as *Uwe Krüger* has worked out in a scientific study (“*Meinungsmacht. Der Einfluss von Eliten auf Leitmedien und Alpha-Journalisten – eine kritische Netzwerkanalyse.*” Cologne 2013, ISBN 978-3-86962-070-1)? In a large-scale analysis he has proven that editors and publisher are closely involved in transatlantic networks. He demonstrates this through the membership or participation in the “*Atlantik-Brücke*” or the “*Bilderberger*”. Here he examines the staff of

“leading media” as *Die Zeit*, “*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*”, or *Der Spiegel*. In 2014 the journalist *Udo Ulfkotte* who had worked for ten years as a journalist for the “*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*” confirmed this close connection to stipulations, in particular from the US-policy (“*Gekaufte Journalisten. Wie Politiker, Geheimdienste und Hochfinanz Deutschlands Massenmedien lenken.*” Rottenburg 2014. ISBN 978-3-86445-143-0). It is now known that there is a specific group of power within the United States that sets the tone in the media. The European “*Transatlanticists*” are obviously part of this power struggle and actively bring this conflict into the countries of Europe.

“Post-truth” – a big deception

by Jacques Perrin, Aubonne VD

A new terminological gadget is born: the *post-truth*.

The editorial staff of the *Oxford English Dictionary* chose “post-truth” as “the international word of the year 2016”. They define this term as follows: “neologism relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. The online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* [french version, translator’s note] teaches us that the post-truth age “describes a culture in which the leaders escalate discussions on emotions by using a variety of linguistic elements while ignoring the facts – as well as the need for their argument to be pitted against these facts – consciously or unconsciously, for election tactical reasons.”

This term seems to have emerged in 2004. The panic haunting the “authorised commentators” on the occasion of the Brexit and the successes of Messrs *Orban*, *Putin* and *Trump*, brought them to the idea of using the post-truth as a weapon for a counter-attack.

We expect journalists to inform us truthfully. That they are frightened by the post-truth era and therefore want to help to honor the truth, should rejoice us. However, the scorn is closer to us for the following three reasons: First of all, we are stating that tales telling and lying to the counterpart, not keeping promises and evoking emotions, as well as defending a cause with flimsy arguments, are not only to be found since the election of Donald Trump to the President of the US. In the 5th century BC, the sophists of Athens rang in the age of post-truth. The philosopher and rhetoric teacher *Gorgias* boasted about triumphing injustice by means of his unbeatable argument. In the 21st century, the sophists are called “communications consultants”. The PR consultant must not only tell untruths – as long as the truth brings in something, he is interested in it. The PR agencies promote the interests of the person who pays them, and treat the opinions with deep going emotional means. The democratic politician who wants to get votes from a certain “clientele” must pursue communication. In other words, he must multiply the promises he will not be able to hold. He arranges himself with the truth, also due to the fact that the electors do not necessarily appreciate it. They often prefer to live in the illusion, except in some very dangerous situations

as in 1940, when the British agreed with *Churchill’s* announced “blood and tears”.

Furthermore, as we know, the political-media elite at the end of the 20th century were only moderately interested in the concept of truth. It has restricted itself to reduce its effect, or, rather, to negate it under the pressure of the deconstructivists. Our so “versatile” press has spoken little of the philosopher *Jacques Bouveresse*, who criticised the pseudo-Nietzsche aberrations of the deconstructivists, above all *Michel Foucault*, with great practicality.

What has not permanently been heard concerning truth: “Each one has his specific truth”; “True is, what is useful”; “Objectivity is inaccessible”; “Truth is the expression of power”; “The power relations prevailing in a certain era determine the content”; “There are no facts, there are only interpretations”; and again and again the saying of the French mathematician and physicist *Blaise Pascal*: “Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on the other side.” [“Vérité en-deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà.”]

Suddenly, the concept of truth is “re-discovered” because of Trump’s and Putin’s misdeeds: *Colin Powell*, *Hollande*, *Sarkozy*, *Juncker*, *Barroso*, and *Hillary Clinton* have never, of course, played with the truth, nor the beautiful *Barack!*

Finally, the renaissance of the concept of truth is connected with the rehabilitation of diplomas. There have never been so many researchers and academics who leaped at the “deciphering” of the smallest “populist” demand. All these “highly-graduated” persons have long-standing lists of articles, publications and specialist books. They should be infallible when reviewing facts – apology, “fact checking”. We can rejoice that a fundamental intellectual activity will take place again, but we nevertheless allow ourselves to express some doubts about these activities, which are performed by a camarilla, which has incessantly dragged school, university, culture, logic and civil sciences through the mire so far.

Reality is more prosaic

For the first time in decades, the liberal-socialist intellectual power has been questioned. Differing opinions are coming to light increasingly, partly because of the social networks. Perhaps we will see a replacement of the media professionals. Social positions are at stake. The previous

staff is shying away: its first reaction is to retire into the university sphere, just as the historian *Patrick Boucheron*, professor at the Collège de France, “committed” author of an allegedly “disturbing” world history of France, who refuses to appear in a *broadcast of the TSR (Western Suisse Radio/TV)* to stand up to his opponents *Eric Zemmour* and *Alain Finkielkraut*, under the pretext that he does not need to go down to the level of two essayists without “academic” education. The applause of the “elites” was not long in coming ...

Inventing the term “post-factual” does not increase the concept of truth. Truth is hardly of interest to the professionals of knowledge, because they have no time to deal with it. The fight against Trump, Putin and *Marine Le Pen* binds all their forces. •

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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A cultural heritage of humanity

by Dietmar Berger*



Dietmar Berger
(picture ma)

Should the cooperative be proposed as an intangible cultural heritage of *UNESCO's* humanity or rather not? In addition, if so, what should become a cultural heritage? The legal form – or the cooperative movement...? These and other questions came to my mind in 2013 when I wanted to suggest to the board of the *Deutsche German Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft* that such a project should be tackled.

By most people also in Germany, the *UNESCO World Cultural Heritage* is linked to monuments, historic buildings, entire cities or neighbourhoods such as Quedlinburg or the Naumburg Cathedral. An economic form such as that of the cooperative had not yet occurred to anyone. So are we to put the cooperative practically under “monument protection”? The cooperative was, is, and will continue to be something alive in the future, a construct that always attunes to the different challenges of time. One cannot really pull it over the cover of the “unchangeable”.

Intangible cultural heritage, however, is what is directly borne by human knowledge and skill. It is transmitted from generation to generation, thereby constantly created, and changed anew. The concept of intangible inheritance also takes into account the ideas of sustainability and alternative economic concepts. In addition, the Federal Republic of Germany only ratified the UNESCO Agreement on the Intangible Cultural Heritage in May 2013.

According to my motto “It won't work is impossible” and with the energetic support of the Lord Mayor of the large district town of Delitzsch, in July 2013, I proposed to the board of our company only founded in 1998 to consider the possibility of applying for the World Heritage Title in an ad-hoc working group. In July 2013,

we already sat together and decided to do so. We are going for this application. We were right to look for further allies.

On the one hand, this was the *Deutsche Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft. Schulze-Delitzsch* and *Raiffeisen* are probably the most prominent cooperative pioneers. However, they are not alone: *Victor Huber*, for instance, was the father of the housing cooperative movement, which with more than 2,000 cooperatives makes an important social contribution to our society. To attract the chairman of the *Marketing initiative of the Housing cooperatives, Dirk Löhner* from Berlin, was not only appropriate, it was also a very success bringing decision. The “Raiffeisen people” were instantly ready to cooperate. With Mayor *Josef Zolk* from Flammersfeld, we had found an active combatant.

Our cooperative museum at *Delitzscher Kreuzgasse 10* – at that place the first commercial cooperative was founded by *Schulze-Delitzsch* on 1 December 1849 and today the principal office of the company, became the headquarter of the working group since September 2014. Still today, I hold in high regard the commitment of my employees at the time, *Enrico Hochmuth, Carola Loose* and *Claudia Ramisch*.

What had to be done? First, we had to clarify what we would like to propose as “cultural heritage”. At the end of August, we had long discussions in Dresden: Is the cooperative a legal structure? That might be seen as to German. Is it a movement? This seemed little to be comprehensible. Of course not only *Schulze-Delitzsch* and *Raiffeisen* represent the whole! And it seemed absolutely unsuitable to reduce it to the city of *Delitzsch*!

We decided upon the “cooperative idea”. It best comprises what our concern was and still is. The cultural heritage of humankind is the equitable economic togetherness and constitutes the mutual advantage of the parties concerned, where the interest of the community and of each individual is the goal and not the profit of a few. It is secondary, whether this is carried out in a registered cooperative with its promotion task, or in an African village of women in the very individual small trade with joint marketing in the next city based on the community agreement and the mutual trust.

This idea had already a tradition prior to the modern cooperative pioneers. It exists today worldwide in many forms and rules and it adapts to the developments of the societies. And this always, or almost always with the mission to promote the interest of all members or stakehold-

ers and not to meet the maximum profit orientation for a few. Thereby, cooperative idea means also that not only all will participate, but also all decisions are made (should be) on a democratic basis according to the principle of one person – one vote. This is, as far as I am concerned, the decisive feature of a cooperative. Any renunciation from that, there are also attempts in Germany, is a renunciation from this idea. It is a horror vision for me, if at any time in the future the cooperative came along as a disguised capital company.

The application had to be formulated and voted on with the involved. The German UNESCO Commission had to be allowed to express its opinion as well. We needed photos, we needed supporters. It certainly has been unique for such an application. Hence, we asked about 500 personalities in the Federal Republic to support our application and to sign a support certificate. There were about 220 supporters – from the patron, Prof Dr *Rita Süßmuth*, Federal Minister a D *Norbert Blüm*, Presidents of the State Parliaments, deputies of Federal and State Parliaments, Ministers of State, Lord Mayors, to today's Prime Minister of the Free State of Thuringia, *Bodo Ramelow*, and many other personalities attached to the cooperative idea.

At the end of November 2013 the Mayor of Flammersfeld, in his capacity as deputy chairman of the *Raiffeisen Gesellschaft* in Mainz, and I, as chairman of the *Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft* in Dresden, handed over our joint and thus transnational application to the responsible state ministers. Thereafter, waiting was called for. In the name of the *Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft*, I had arranged for it that no kind of lobbying whatsoever be started. Either the application is convincing or not. Hence, we all felt confident that the application was convincing.

12 December 2014, 2 pm. I was just trying to drive my car through the wintery Dresden accompanied by the mood of the so-called *Striezelmarkt* towards the motorway, when it was reported on the radio that the German UNESCO Commission had placed the cooperative idea on the German list of intangible cultural heritage and that this was the first and only German proposal to be passed on to the UNESCO.

The joy was great. We were convinced that the German application would also be successful at the UNESCO Head Office. This meant, however, that the German UNESCO Commission's require-

* *Dietmar Berger* was chief executive officer of the *Raiffeisenverband Sachsen eV* (Raiffeisen-Association of Saxony) from April to November 1990. From December 1990 to April 1991 he was chief executive officer of the Association of Cooperatives of Saxony eV, and from May 1991 to August 2003 head of the *Genossenschaftsverband* (Raiffeisen/Schulze-Delitzsch) (GVS). When the association was renamed *Mitteldeutscher Genossenschaftsverband* (Raiffeisen/Schulze-Delitzsch) (MGV) in September, he was, until May 2012, first director and then president of the association. Since his retirement, he has also been holding numerous public functions, including that of city councillor in Chemnitz.

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ments for the international application which had to be placed under the responsibility of the German Foreign Office were high. It meant a new extended text, a film, all in English, compliance with all specifications with regard to length and marks of the individual sections and the demands on all concerned of the German Commission, for whom such an application was well new ground and for the cooperatives a rather unknown matter. On 16 March 2015 in Berlin, the recogni-

tion certificates for the German list were handed over to 26 applicants from formerly 127. We knew that the cooperative idea is a global idea, which is of such particular importance for the emerging markets as well as for the Third World countries, as is no longer imaginable today in Germany and the German-speaking world.

On 30 November 2016, UNESCO has registered the cooperative idea in the table of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. What is important is the success of this great idea, according to which millions of people in the world

work together economically. This way the individual in the community can create and safeguard their economic basis of life equally – if possible independent of those whose sole content is money, making more money. On this basis, the cooperative idea is to have influence in the region, the country, or in the world. For us, the European cooperatives and our organisations, the title should be an incentive to give the cooperative idea a further boost in its originality. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



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"Cooperative idea" belongs to the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

First German nomination for inscription on the Representative List was successful

The cooperative idea belongs to the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. This was announced by the *International Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO* in Addis Ababa. It is the first proposal from Germany for inscription on the Representative List. In 2015, the German UNESCO Commission submitted its first international nomination with the exact title "Idea and practice of organising shared interests in cooperatives".

Inscription is an appreciation of the heritage of Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch

Josef Zolk, deputy chairman of the *Deutsche Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft*, explains the decision: "We are very pleased with the fact that the fathers of the cooperatives in Germany, Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch and Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, are hon-

ored in this way – for the foundation of an idea that is more relevant than ever before. In Germany alone, more than 20 million people are organised in cooperatives."

Dr Manfred Wilde, managing director of the *Deutsche Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft*, says: "The inscription equally appreciates the image of the Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch heritage: the concept of a model of self-help, self-administration and self-responsibility open for everybody interested and over-confessional, based on cooperation."

Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch laid the foundations for cooperative idea

The *Deutsche Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft* and the *Deutsche Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft* had jointly advanced the nomination of the cooperative idea for inscription on the Representative List. In

the mid-19th century, Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch and Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen developed crucial foundations for the cooperative idea that now operates around the world, and founded the first modern cooperative organisations in Germany.

The Representative List is intended to ensure a better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage, as well as to raise awareness of its importance and to promote dialogue while respecting cultural diversity. It lists a wide range of intangible cultural forms from all regions of the world. In 2013, Germany joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which came into force in 2006.

Source: Press release of the *Deutsche Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft e.V.* and the *Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft*, December 2016

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Cooperatives – more than a legal form, more than a mere cultural heritage

by Dr Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

The inscription of the idea of cooperatives on the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* on the annual meeting of the UNESCO in December 2016 in Addis Ababa has completed a process which began in the year 2013 (*Current Concerns* reported). At that time the *Deutsche Hermann-Schulze-Delitzsch-Gesellschaft* (located in Delitzsch, Saxony) together with the *German Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen-Gesellschaft* (located in Hachenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia) submitted the idea of cooperatives for nomination. In her letter of December 2014 to the initiators, the Saxon State Minister for Science and the Arts, Dr *Eva-Maria Stange*, commends the chairmen of these two cooperative associations, *Werner Böhnke* and *Dieter Berger*, inter alia with the following words: “Congratulations to you, who have, though situated in a Western and an Eastern German Federal State, yet successfully and jointly submitted this nomination, contributing to understanding between all states and nations and based on the fundamental values of solidarity, soundness and sustainability. As the Saxon State Minister for Culture I feel pleased and even proud that a proposal for nomination in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage is reported in which Saxonian initiators have a large share.” Already since 2014 the idea of cooperatives has been registered in the German inven-

tory of Intangible Cultural Heritage [see box]. In 2015, the German Commission for UNESCO then submitted its first international nomination titled: “Idea and practice of organising shared interests in cooperatives”.

By the international recognition of the cooperative idea as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the legacy of *Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen* and *Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch* is honoured: They created the fundamental basis for the idea of cooperatives in the mid-19th century and founded the first modern style cooperative organisations in Germany. Protection and cultivation of the idea of cooperatives will be associated with this inscription.

Today the roughly 7,500 cooperatives in Germany have over 21 million members. Switzerland has over 12,000 cooperatives, France over 20,000, and Italy more than 70,000. Already in 2012 the UN proclaimed the “Year of Cooperatives” and thus shown appreciation for the cooperatives with their worldwide 800 million members in over 100 countries. Cooperatives act against poverty, create jobs and promote social integration, thus delivering an important contribution to social peace.

Switzerland applauds

The Swiss *IG Cooperatives Organisation* (IGG) applauds the inscription of co-

operatives on the Representative List of UNESCO. “Cooperatives are committed to the benefit of their members all over the world and in all kinds of areas”, says IGG president *Werner Beyer*. “Cooperatives have been firmly fixed in Switzerland – as similarly also in Germany – for centuries. Traditional forms are the alp or dairy cooperatives [...]. The Swiss people trust the cooperative companies very highly, namely in comparison to listed stock corporations. Only family owned companies enjoy an even greater confidence.” (Media release IGG, 2.12.2016)

Also the “*Wohnbaugenossenschaften Schweiz*” – Housing Cooperatives Switzerland (umbrella organisation of non-profit housing developers) welcomed the UNESCO recognition: “By the recognition of cooperatives as a cultural value, appreciation is shown not only to the importance of the cooperative as an economic model, but also to the social contribution of cooperatives”, says director Urs Hauser.

Also in Switzerland

Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen and Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch did not invent the cooperative idea. The cooperative principle was and is fundamental for the Swiss political culture (Swiss Confederation). The Swiss historian *René Roca* writes about this: “the real cooperative principle might probably be as old as the human race, but written sources are missing.” In an article in *Current Concerns* No. 10 of 5 March 2012 he describes the historical development of cooperatives since late antiquity and the early Middle Ages: “In the middle ages, the commons were an important element of the foundation of present-day Switzerland community work and with their rules they made for order and security in the geographical area of what is today the state of Switzerland. Up to the 18th century, it was usual for all agricultural villages to have a common. In addition to the commons, special cooperative forms were created, serving distinct purposes.” These included the alpine cooperatives as well as cooperatives on water engineering and irrigation.

Cooperatives were a key foundation for the development of the Swiss Federal State with its bottom-up structure. “The cooperatives were of great political importance for the later federal development in Switzerland. They developed a community-building force, without which Switzerland might

The cooperative idea

Extract from the German Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2014)

The idea of a cooperative is that of an open-ended, over-confessional model of self-help, self-administration and self-responsibility based on cooperation. The fathers of the cooperative idea, *Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch* and *Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen*, founded the first modern cooperative organisations in Germany in the mid-19th century. Based on ethical values such as solidarity, honesty and responsibility, they designed the basic legal framework for the cooperative idea: an association with an open membership and a joint business operation that strengthens individual commitment and self-confidence and enables social, cultural and economic participation. In the statutes of a cooperative the respective purpose is defined, which can serve social, cultural and economic interests. Members become co-owners by acquiring cooperative shares. Their voice, independent of the number of shares acquired, assures them co-determination and the possibility of active participation.

The cooperative idea was quickly taken up by other actors, and soon captured large social circles and found its application in various areas of life such as labour, finances, nutrition or housing. [...]

Through the cultural form of the cooperatives, dedication of citizens in the social, economic and cultural areas is expressed beyond private and state economic forms. The cooperative idea proves to be very dynamic and influential, opening new opportunities for social participation to less privileged population groups. It draws on fundamental principles of the cultural self-understanding of human community and transfers them into economic practice. The cooperative idea helps to overcome societal challenges and is always adapted to modern conditions by creative changes.

Source: German Commission for UNESCO. *German Nationwide Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, The Idea and practice of Cooperatives* (Translation Current Concerns)

Events of the “cooperative Zeit-Fragen/ Current Concerns” at the Leipzig Book Fair



**Leipziger
Buchmesse**

Leipzig liest
March 23 – 26, 2017

Once again, *Zeit-Fragen* will be present at the Leipzig Book Fair this year. The booth is located in Hall 4, stand A 105. In addition, *Zeit-Fragen* invites within the framework of “*Leipzig liest*” to 3 events at the fair and to 3 evening lectures with discussion.

Education for common good – parents are participating in the dialogue

Speakers: Marlies Klesse (CH), Urs Knoblauch (CH), Dr med Friederike Kramer (D), Josef Nyari (D)

Numerous “school reforms” of the past years have led to an enormous reduction in education. More and more children and adolescents cannot even read properly, nor can they write or calculate. Parents in different European countries are not inclined to accept this any longer. They therefore formed parents’ initiatives to stand up for good schools. This is based on an education, linked with what was successful in European educational tradition. All these considerations are based on a personal conception of man and consider man as a social being, which needs education. Thus, education is not a mere instrument for maximising a *Homo oeconomicus*, but the concern to fulfill the requirements of an ethics based on reason, social connectedness and common good. Young people should have the possibility to develop their

personality according to their dignity and so be able to contribute in profession, family and state. For that, children and young people need educators and teachers which introduce them into reality and the knowledge about it. The best way to do this is by learning together in a class community. There, compassion and social interest can be developed and deepened.

Thursday 23 March 2017, 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm Library Wiederitzsch, Zur Schule 10a, 04158 Leipzig (Nord).

This event is repeated on Friday, 24 March 2017, 11 am – 12 noon Congress Center Leipzig (CCL), Seminarraum 13

More than a legal form – the idea of cooperative – cultural heritage of humanity

Speakers: Dietmar Berger (D), Dr Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller (CH), Prof Dr Richard Werner (GB), Prof Dr Markus Hanisch (D), Jean-Paul Vuilleumier (CH)

In November 2016, the “cooperative idea” was declared part of the Intangible Cultural World Heritage of *UNESCO*. By inscribing this idea to the Representative List, it shall be protected and at the same time, it shall be promoted as an economic model. Therefore, we want to appreciate the potential of the cooperative idea in an event. Participants of the panel discussion: Dietmar Berger, president of the Mitteldeutscher Genossenschaftsverband for many years, Dr Eva Föllmer-Müller, psychologist, editorial staff *Zeit-Fragen*, Prof Dr Markus Hanisch, owner of the Raiffeisenprofessur Humboldt University Berlin (“Economy of rural cooperatives”), Jean-Paul Vuilleumier, president of the

cooperative *Zeit-Fragen*, Prof Dr Richard Werner, Economist. The ethical foundations of the cooperative idea are valid since 150 years and still relevant today. They should be preserved and enhanced for generations to come. UN already announced 2012 as the “International Year of the Cooperatives” and thus appreciated the cooperatives with their 800 million members worldwide in over 100 countries. Cooperatives do something against poverty; they create jobs and promote social inclusion. Reason enough to deal with cooperatives and their historical, social-ethical, economic and practical foundations. *Friday, 24 March 2017, 10:30 am – 12:30 am Congress Center Leipzig (CCL), Vortragsraum 11*

This event is repeated on *Friday 24 March 2017, 6 pm– 7 pm Leipziger Stadtbibliothek, Wilhelm-Leuschner-Platz 10-11, 04107 Leipzig, Grassisaal*

Being able to give hope in difficult times, wherever you live and wherever you are needed – but how?

Speakers: Moritz Nestor, psychologist (CH); Wolfgang van Biezen, graduate remedial teacher (CH)

We already discussed it last year: Not every person with a difficult childhood and/or adolescence will suffer a terrible fate. People are not marionettes of whatsoever kind of destiny. Many children develop unforeseen life energy, despite negative living conditions, or even because of these bad conditions, if they are able to overcome them with the help of valuable confiding relationships. However, what exactly are we supposed to do if children are already antisocial, sexist, and the like, so that we almost grow desperate? If they live out what our time offers them in terms of perverted role models for their already weakened self-esteem? What do helpers need? Are courage, determination, and outrage against “this society” enough? How can one give love and hope in our time? How can we be a “companion for life in difficult times”?

Friday, 24 March 2017, 7.30 pm– 9.30 pm Die Brücke, Begegnungshaus Leipzig, Zollikofer Strasse 21, 04315 Leipzig (am Volkmarksdorfer Markt)

Reading – a royal road to an education of heart and soul

Speaker: Dr Peter Küpfer (CH)

Reading is not just an elementary cultural technique. Reading enhances imagination and empathy to an extent no other medi-

“Cooperatives – more than a form of ...”

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not have grown into a nation created by its own will.” (René Roca, loc. cit.)

Cooperatives in Switzerland today

A study of the IGG on the perception of cooperatives in Switzerland in May 2016 comes to the conclusion that the paradigm of unfettered economic growth is now outdated. Today, the majority of respondents do not consider economic growth as a desirable target any longer. 58% of respondents are of the opinion that it is sufficient to maintain the present level.

More than 70% of the Swiss population are customers of cooperatives, and nearly half of them are members of at least one cooperative. Swiss people see the long-term reliability, social responsibility and region-

al rootedness of cooperatives as important characteristics and as an advantage. So it is clear that the most important reason to prefer cooperatives lies in their values and attitudes. [...] Cooperatives enjoy a very high level of confidence in the population, a level that is on the average only a little lower than that of the family businesses, which are trusted the most.” (gfs. berne. *Kurzbericht IG Genossenschaft 2016*, p. 45 of the text in German)

A recent survey of the *communications consultancy Brunswick* with 2039 people has also shown that small, local banks are becoming ever more popular. Thus 55% of the people in Germany prefer small, local banks in comparison to mayor and foreign banks. In the US it is 65% of the people, in France and Great Britain 47%, and in all countries there is an upward trend. More than half of the respondents want banks that do not seek profit maximisation. •

Against rural depopulation of the younger generation – a vegetable garden for the family

by Philippe Randin, head of "Nouvelle Planète", Lausanne



(picture www.nouvelle-planete.ch)

In the north of Burkina Faso vegetable gardens are springing up like mushrooms. They offer many people a basis to survive and therefore have become the most important economic activity of the region. This counteracts the country's rural exodus of the young generation and helps combatting the desertification of the country for the region is very dry, and it is rarely raining. The desert and drought constitutes a great threat.

Increasing the area

The inhabitants of the village of Ouindigui have realised the potential of vegetable gardens. The population has already been organised to women's

"Events of the ..."

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um does. In particular, the reading of humanly appealing, literary texts is now crucial. Children and young people who read such texts experience a piece of the world with the eyes of another person. In contrast to films, videos, or comics, plunging into a merely textual story is an indispensable training for brain and soul. For every occurring picture, every event, every emotion has to be reproduced, imagined, envisioned and comprehended by the reader. Matured empathy is not just the result of an intellectual effort; it also is an emotional achievement. Where this elementary training of empathy is nurtured and cultivated, real understanding of, real tolerance towards other people can grow – a challenge for school, parents, grandparents (!) and our cultural public.

Saturday, 25 March 2017, 11 am – 11:30 am Literaturcafe, Halle 4, B 600

groups, including the NAAM association. Over 300 women work together to cultivate and plant vegetables, the success is bound to occur. Throughout the year, they can harvest onions, cabbages, potatoes, etc., which they partly sell in local markets. The rest feeds their families. Thanks to this work, they can earn about 800 francs a year for their household budget. This amount corresponds to an annual wage of a security guard or a salesperson. In view of this success, the NAAM group wants to increase the cul-

tivated area so that further 258 women could participate.

Digging and protecting wells

The residents have already selected the suitable place. It is located in the lower part of the village, near the existing gardens. The point here is to dig wells by hand. The water is located at a depth of about 10 metres. Subsequently the wells are concreted to prevent them from breaking. The surface must also be protected so that the sheep, goats and chickens do not destroy the work they have done. This work is too expensive for the local population. That is why people contacted the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency *Nouvelle Planète* in the hope to receive support. An area of 2 hectares is to be divided into parcels of 77 square metres, which each can be farmed by a woman. Every woman will give a small rent to the group. She may also use its infrastructure and participate in association activities: storage for harvest, purchase of seed, trainings etc.

This project allows improving the life of the population while protecting the fragile environment of the region. Indirectly the schooling of the children and the health of the inhabitants are encouraged and the

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Nouvelle Planète

Nouvelle Planète promotes exchanges between communities, groups, professional associations and school classes from Switzerland and from the countries of the South. It offers advice, provision of expertise, networking and project support in Switzerland and/or in the South.

Missions and travels

Youth, adults, seniors, existing groups, schools, families or companies: Share life with the people of the countries of the South by participating in a development project!

Projects in the South:

Nouvelle Planète supports efficient and sustainable small projects of dynamic local groups:

- Africa: Senegal, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Uganda, Madagascar, Guinea
- Asia: India, Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam
- America: Peruvian Amazon River region, Haiti

The projects mainly comprise the following four areas: support for children and adolescents; promotion of women and

rural development; environmental protection; support for disabled and sick people.

The supported projects have the following characteristics: They aim to meet the basic needs of the disadvantaged population in poor regions. Special attention will be given to the promotion of women and ethnic minorities. They also have a positive influence on the environment.

The projects will be submitted by local partners with whom we are cooperating. *Nouvelle Planète* does not act in place of them. In the end a project thus belongs to the beneficiary.

The local population is involved in the implementation of the project, whether it is in the form of funding, material and/or labour.

The projects are to become quickly independent, so that *Nouvelle Planète* can easily withdraw. *Nouvelle Planète* does not support operating costs of institutions.

Source: www.nouvelle-planete.ch

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Where is our country headed?”

by Moritz Nestor



Paul Hauswirth is a mountain farmer on Mutthöchi in the Canton of Berne. Running his farm takes a lot out of him and his family. They lead a modest but content life. Suddenly, their existence is threatened from the outside: A popular initiative demands to close down remote areas of the canton for cost cutting reasons and wants to displace its population. Hauswirth fights this with all the means at his disposal, but his battle cannot thwart his unjust fate.

Initially, Mutthöchi's farmers cannot believe that such inhumanity could win the majority's vote. Paul Hauswirth and his wife fight their displacement until the end. His wife dies – full of sorrow – of a heart attack and Paul Hauswirth is in need of psychiatric treatment. Several of these harrowingly heavy fates of those displaced from their farms are woven into the novel.

Superficially, the issue at stake is the Swiss fiscal equalisation scheme and the cantonal equalisation of burdens. However, during the course of the story, the underlying ideologies that led to the breakdown of solidarity between the Swiss are revealed: on the one hand, a purely economically focused, cost cutting approach to the detriment of the mountain farmers who are alleged to be cost-intensive and to not accrue a lot of revenue in taxes and who are “advised” by unworldly “development planners” and “environmental engineers”. Though hidden in the background and unexpressed, the rejection of agricultural self-sufficiency and the support of foreign industrial agricultural products by certain circles is markedly showing through.

On the other hand, deep ecological environmental conservationists revel in “winning back nature” and gaining habitat for wolves and lynxes from ten supposedly unprofitable agricultural areas while displacing mountain farmers. They dream about “wilderness” and a “wildlife park” – without humans. Others who are looking to profit as well are not lagging far behind: Enterprising

landflows get counteracted. Nouvelle Planète and the women of Ouindigui would like to thank you for your support.

“Against rural depopulation ...”

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The cost of creating a garden for a woman and her family is 49 francs. If you like to support this project, you can specify “garden” on your deposit note. Donation Account: CCP 18-5792-6, IBAN: CH12 0900 0000 1800 5792 6

Further information on the projects and the organisation can be found at www.nouvelle-planete.ch and Nouvelle Planète, Avenue des Boveresses 24, 1010 Lausanne, Tel. +41 21 881 23 80 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

students of Lucerne University who have studied tourism and event management and who plan trekkings and survival trainings within those overgrown areas. One company seeks to have those old, abandoned farmhouses reconfigured to fit a more luxurious standard and to rent them out to potential clients: private reserves with a unique, intimate atmosphere in a remote wilderness for national as well as international show business, business and finance clients who are equipped with the corresponding cash flow. They displaced the original population and let in “a couple of rich bastards” instead, as a giveaway newspaper angrily puts it.

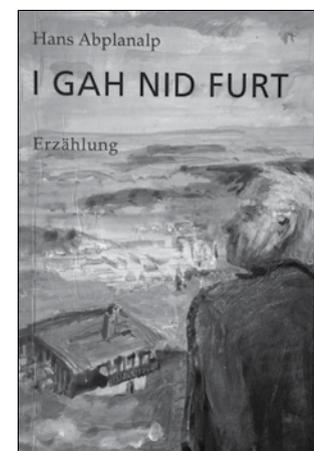
While at Waldau Psychiatric Hospital – where Paul Hauswirth had to be brought to because he wildly fired an assault rifle and suffered a mental breakdown after his wife's death – his life takes a turn. He meets a Bosnian cleaning lady who herself had suffered a tough fate during the Yugoslavian wars. Her compassion and his grandchildren's help guide him back to life.

It is only a small comfort that some book reviews point to the fact that due to the nature of the Swiss Constitution, in reality, the story would not play out that way. The ideological and political underpinnings of that fictional referendum are described all too realistically and, in fact, influence daily Swiss politics in a real and long-lasting way. With this story, the author seeks to spark the debate around the question of where our country is headed.

Hans Abplanalp has dedicated this book to his six grandchildren. And because it is written in Berne dialect, it seems to capture the reader so directly and forcefully.

A retired teacher and former head teacher born in 1947, *Hans Abplanalp* has the rare talent to be able to embed a complicated subject matter within considerably and compassionately portrayed life stories and thus enables readers of all ages to empathise with the highlighted challenges. Each line is brimming with the author's love for Switzerland, with his compassion and solidarity with those producing our daily bread with their own hands.

Abplanalp Hans. *I gah nid furt*. Basel 2016. ISBN 978-3-7296-0914-3



Albert Schweitzer's influence on Nouvelle Planète

Nouvelle Planète has been widely influenced by the “Ethics of Reverence for Life”, which were developed by *Albert Schweitzer* (1875–1965) on the shores of Ogooué river in Gabon. During the interwar period, Schweitzer searched for solutions in a world which he saw as decadent. “I am life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live; I must have reverence for life.” He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

He was more a man of action, rather than a philosopher. He put his thoughts into practice and was often misunderstood by his contemporaries. He announced the “duty to help the hungry in the world” and has fulfilled it, by treating the poorest in the hospital in Lambaréné in Gabon. „Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it's the only thing,” is another important quote of his. He believed in human beings, not things, as drivers of progress. He was a convinced optimist oriented towards the future.

Willy Randin founded Nouvelle Planète in 1986 and based it on the think-

ing of Albert Schweitzer, since he had inspired him during his time as a director of the Lambaréné hospital. He wished to start an organisation for development cooperation that bases its actions on the needs of the local population and accepts them as the only competent decision makers for their own development. The temporary supports of concrete initiatives are the means to give them the necessary push and help people on the ground to improve their situation themselves. Nouvelle Planète does not design the projects, but only supports existing local projects that are relevant in the specific context and belong to the beneficiary groups.

Today, Nouvelle Planète still acts according to these principles, which are inspired by Albert Schweitzer, such as: reverence for life, act with a purpose, search for simplicity, mutual trust and optimism.

Source: www.nouvelle-planete.ch/en/notre-vision/albert-schweitzer