

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

The Twilight of the War

The undermining of the right of peoples to self-determination by transnational financial elites will come to an end

by *Thierry Meyssan**, Damascus (Syria)



Thierry Meyssan
(picture wikipedia)

If we consider the war in Syria not as a singular event, but as the culmination of a world war which has persisted for a quarter of a century, we have to ask ourselves about the consequences of the imminent end of

hostilities. Its completion marks the defeat of an ideology, that is to say globalisation and financial capitalism. The people who have not understood this, particularly in Western Europe, are defining their own exclusion from the rest of the world.

World wars do not only end with a winner and a loser. Their termination defines the contours of a new world.

The First World War ended with the defeat of the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The cessation of hostilities was marked by the elaboration of an international organisation, the *League of Nations* (LN), tasked with abolishing secret diplomacy and settling any conflicts between the member-states by arbitration.

The Second World War ended with the victory of the Soviet Union over the Nazi Reich and the Japanese Empire of hakk' ichiu^{1,2}, followed by a frantic chase between the Allies to occupy what was left of the vanquished Coalition. It gave birth to a new structure, the United Nations Organisation (UNO), tasked with preventing new wars by establishing international law around a double legitimacy – the General Assembly, where each state has a voice, irrespective of its size, and a directorate composed of the five main victors, the Security Council.

The Cold War was not the Third World War. It did not end with the defeat of the

“The side which will be the victor of this long war defends, [...] the idea that in order to chose their destiny, people must organise themselves into clearly-defined Nations, based either on a land or else on a common history or project. Consequently, it supports national economies rather than transnational finance.”

Soviet Union, but by its collapse in and onto itself. It was not followed by the creation of new structures, but by the integration of the states of the USSR into pre-existing organisations.

From Yugoslavia to Syria – the Third World War as a fight for ...

The Third World War began in Yugoslavia, continued in Afghanistan, Iraq, Georgia, Libya and Yemen, and ended in Syria. Its battle-grounds were confined to the Balkans, the Caucasus and what we now call the „Greater Middle East“. It has cost the lives of countless Muslim and Orthodox Christian populations, without spilling over too much into the Western world. It is in the process of drawing to a close since the *Putin-Trump Summit* in Helsinki.

... a shift in power in favour of transnational “elites”

The profound changes which have transformed the world over the last 26 years transferred a part of the power of govern-

ments towards other entities, both administrative and private – and also vice versa. For example, we saw a private army, Daesh, proclaim itself a sovereign state. Or again, we watched General *David Petraeus* organise the most voluminous arms traffic in History when he directed the CIA, and then continue it after his resignation on behalf of a private company, the hedge fund KKR³.

This situation may be described as a confrontation between, on the one hand, a transnational ruling class and, on the other, the governments responsible to their people.

War propaganda obfuscates real causes of war

Contrary to the imputations of propaganda, which attribute the causes of war to immediate circumstances, the true causes are to be found in rivalries and in deep-seated, ancient ambitions. States take

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Seymour Hersh: “There’s zero evidence”



(picture wikipedia)

“Don’t think the Russians were to blame [for Donald Trump’s election victory]. That’s crazy. We are very good at intelligence. We know who it was, and if it had been the Russians, we would have made that clear. But there’s zero evidence.”

Seymour Hersh in an interview with the “Neuen Zürcher Zeitung” from 25 August 2018

* Thierry Meyssan is political consultant, President-founder of the Réseau Voltaire (Voltaire Network).

"The Twilight of the War"

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years to challenge one another. Often, it is only with the passage of time that we are able to understand the conflicts which devour us.

For example, very few people understood what was happening during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931) and waited until the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Germany (1938) to understand that it was racist ideologies which provoked the Second World War. Identically, rare are those who understood that by the war of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992) the alliance between NATO and political Islam opened the way for the destruction of the Muslim world⁴.

And today, despite the work of journalists and historians, many people have still not understood the enormity of the manipulation of which we have all been victims. They refuse to admit that NATO coordinated its Saudi and Iranian auxiliaries on the European continent. And yet this is a fact which is impossible to contest⁵.

Similarly, they refuse to admit that *Al-Qaida*, accused by the United States of having perpetrated the terrorist attacks of 9/11, fought under the orders of NATO in Libya and Syria. And yet this is another fact that is impossible to contradict⁶.

The initial plan, which was intended to set the Muslim world against the Orthodox world, became transformed as it unfolded. There was no "war of civilisations". Shiite Iran turned against NATO, which it had served in Yugoslavia, and allied with Orthodox Russia in order to save multi-confessional Syria.

We must open our eyes to History and prepare ourselves for the dawn of a new world system in which certain of our friends of yesterday have become our enemies of today, and vice-versa.

In Helsinki, it was not the United States which drew up an agreement with the Federation of Russia. It was the White House alone. Because the common enemy is a transnational group which exercises authority in the United States. Since this group considers itself, and not the elected President, to be the representative of the USA, it did not hesitate to immediately accuse President Trump of treason.

Neoliberal distraction theories to erode state power

This transnational group has succeeded in making us believe that ideologies are

dead and that History is finished. It presents globalisation, in other words Anglo-Saxon domination by way of the extension of the US language and lifestyle, as the consequence of the technical development of transport and communication. It assures us that a single political system is the ideal for all humanity – democracy (in other words "government of the People, by the People, for the People") – and that it is possible to impose this ideal by force on all humanity. Finally, it presents the freedom of circulation of people and capitals as the solution to all problems of labour and investment.

However, these assertions, which we all accept in the course of our daily lives, do not stand up to a minute of thought.

Behind these lies, the transnational group has systematically worn down the Power of states and amassed fortunes.

The right of peoples to self-determination resists transnational financial governance

The side which will be the victor of this long war defends, on the contrary, the idea that in order to chose their destiny, people must organise themselves into clearly-defined Nations, based either on a land or else on a common history or project. Consequently, it supports national economies rather than transnational finance.

We have just experienced the World Football Cup. If the ideology of globalisation had won the war, we should have supported not only our national team, but also the teams of other countries according to their membership of our common supra-national structures. For example, the Belgians and the French would have had to support one another mutually by waving the flag of the European Union. But this did not occur to a single supporter. This fact shows the chasm which separates the propaganda with which we are force-fed and which we repeat, and our spontaneous behaviour. Despite appearances, the superficial victory of globalism has not modified what we are.

It is obviously no coincidence if Syria, where the idea of a state was first imagined and developed several thousand years ago, is the land upon which this war will end. It is because they benefited from a true state which never stopped functioning that Syria, its people, its army and its President were able to resist against the most gigantic coalition in History,

constituted by 114 member states of the United Nations.

¹ *Hakk' ichiu* (the eight corners of the world under one roof) is the ideology of the Japanese Empire. It claims the superiority of the Japanese race and its right to dominate Asia.

² The Soviet armies overrun Manchuria on the assumption that Tokyo would then surrender to Moscow. But President *Truman* launched the second atomic bomb in Nagasaki, forcing the Japanese to surrender to General *McArthur* so that the Pentagon could occupy the country.

³ "[Billions of dollars' worth of arms against Syria]", by Thierry Meyssan, Translation Pete Kimberley, *Voltaire Network*, 18 July 2017.

⁴ *Les Dollars de la terreur* : Les États-Unis et les islamistes, Richard Labévière, Grasset, 1999. English version : *Dollars for Terror*: The United States and Islam, Algora Publishing, 2000.

⁵ *Wie der Dschihad nach Europa kam. Gotteskrieger und Geheimdienste auf dem Balkan*, Jürgen Elsässer, Kai Homilius Verlag, 2006.

⁶ *Sous nos yeux. Du 11-septembre à Donald Trump*, Thierry Meyssan, Demi-Lune 2017.

(Translation: *Pete Kimberley*)

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Peace chances for the Middle East have increased

A ParsToday interview with Willy Wimmer



Willy Wimmer
(picture uk)

cc. The following interview with Willy Wimmer, former German State Secretary at the Ministry of Federal Defense, aired by the Iranian broadcaster ParsToday on 12 August, elucidates the complexity of the situation in the Middle East as

well as the dangers and the opportunities of a new Middle East policy coordinated between the US and Russian Presidents.

ParsToday: Mr Wimmer, Russia's Foreign Minister and its Army Chief of Staff recently were on a secret mission in Israel. Then they travelled on to Germany. The media reported little about the first travel station of these two Russian leaders. They talked about Syria; so much could be learned. I should like to hear your opinion about this.

Willy Wimmer: Mr Shahrokny, I have long believed that we are living in a very exciting time, with great dangers to world peace, but also with great opportunities affecting precisely this same world peace. And I have already, also publicly, expressed this opinion in connection with the election of the American President Trump. I was of this opinion already in autumn 2016, because – as the saying goes – you can put two and two together, even if you are not directly involved in the political process but only assess it attentively.

This my opinion is becoming more and more pronounced, above all because obviously, beyond political awareness, Russian President Putin and US President Trump are conducting such an in-depth dialogue on all issues that we are concerned about, that we may perceive also this visit in Israel of Foreign Minister Lavrov and Chief of Staff Gerasimov almost as normal in the context of the intense negotiations ongoing behind-the-scenes. I would be surprised, if that did not provide results.

What do you mean when you say that talks have been held behind the scenes?

Of course, you do hear a lot in such a situation, even if you do not hear everything. But that makes it clear that, on the one hand, we have normal government activity, and that the ministers involved, such as foreign and defense ministers and others, are fulfilling their international obligations.

“I have long believed that we are living in a very exciting time, with great dangers to world peace, but also with great opportunities affecting precisely this same world peace.”

But in connection with the situation in the Middle East, we also hear that informal discussion channels are being used intensively, in order to achieve results. For example, we have long since realised that for example President Trump's son-in-law Mr Kushner has special duties in connection with the Near and Middle East. But we also hear about relevant initiatives coming from the leaders of the Russian Federation.

Against this background, I assume that, even with all the fuss we are experiencing, a peace-related solution in the Middle East may be the outcome. Of course that is a lot to hope, but there are reasons, for instance also this visit by Lavrov and Gerasimov to Berlin. After all, the reasons for such visits may be imagined. Usually they are related to international financial expenses. That would not be so very bad, if we could arrive at a situation where it would be possible for the Syrian migrants now in Germany to return to their home country. Of course, that would have to be financed.

Mr Wimmer, the two gentlemen from Russia were first in Israel and then in Germany. Did they have two different missions in the two countries, or was it one single mission?

I assume that there is really the one crucial question in connection with these travel efforts, namely that after decades of clashes in that part of the world – and the misery due to these conflicts is palpable – there will be an effort to come to an all-embracing peace solution in the Middle East, including all those countries which are now affected in one way or another.

You can see from every statement made by the American President Trump that he – I am going to say that in my own words now – is less concerned with the big war than with the big sales market for his industries. And I see all these efforts of talk and travel to come to a peace solution that deserves this name and will not blow up in our faces again at the next moment, against this background. However, in those states, as well as in the United States, there are also many forces that have no interest in such a solution.

Mr Wimmer, but what we are currently observing in the world is a little different

from what you have just stated. We hear threats from Washington almost every day, I mean, we as Iranians, and the tone keeps getting more caustic.

I agree with your perception of public statements and statements made public, in particular those of President Trump. After all, in connection with questions of international security he behaves – if I may put it a little crudely – like a rowdy hooligan. I freely grant you that. That is something one might be seriously disturbed about.

On the other hand, we have had experiences with American presidents over the past few decades. They did not go on the rampage as American President Trump does. They started wars at once. And that is something that has not been done so far by US President Trump, despite all the danger that results from his approach to international security. I freely admit that I have questions concerning the predictability of both Presidents Putin and Trump, and that I currently see that also in Israel there are obviously further thoughts about a Greater Israel and about “setting fire” to the entire region, but also that these forces have experienced limitations in the person of Prime Minister Netanyahu. And that is something that I would assign to this area of hope. But you have described correctly the dangers that still exist.

Mr Wimmer, you have just touched on a problem that may also result in an escalation of the situation in the Middle East, namely the recent decision of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. That has only caused trouble within the Palestinians and in the Middle East, and that certainly does not contribute to peace in this region.

This is of course a very important point, because it must indeed be seen as giving an edge to the conflict, if by a decision that has been highly controversial in Israel itself, right up to the president, you tell 25% of your own population, which should and must be able to live with equal rights in this country, that they are second class citizens. Of course this will add to tensions, and that will be noticed in Israel as well.

What does the meeting between Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin signify?

De-escalation and concentration on problem solving are the order of the day

by Karl Müller

The idea that it is not only possible, but also better for human nature, if the people and states of the world live side by side and together peacefully on an equal footing, if they cooperate instead of fighting each other, has been challenged many times in recent years – even though it is the anthropological, natural and ethical basis of the UN Charter and international law. But perhaps the current upheavals in the world will give this idea a new chance.

Although US President *Donald Trump* is constantly being bludgeoned, he has shown: “It is possible that previously hostile state leaders will once again come into conversation with each other. At his meetings with North Korean *Kim Jong Un* in Singapore on 12 June 2018 and with Russian *Vladimir Putin* in Helsinki on 15 July 2018, he showed that it is possible to take the first steps in this direction. All the hostilities which have therefore been directed against the US President do not prove that these steps were wrong, but that, in addition to the idea of an equal and peaceful co-existence, which is beneficial to all, there is still another powerful but demonstrably false world view – may it now be put forward out of conviction or to conceal pathological greed for power and money. This worldview is in principle the old social Darwinian model and assumes that the human being is a wolf, that life is a struggle for survival in which everyone stands against everyone and in which everything is just a zero-sum game, where the advantage of the one is always the disadvantage of the other. Tough battles of

distribution and even wars are therefore unavoidable.

Common tasks for Germany and Russia

The fact that, after Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* and Russian President met on 18 August 2018 in Meseberg, Brandenburg, and talked for three hours, that a picture of two politicians sitting at one table in a beautiful park talking seriously to each other made the rounds in the world, and that the results of the talks were kept secret for the time being, has probably not only a connection to the Trump-Putin-meeting, but also gives cause for hope. It would be a blessing if the German Chancellor would also strive to correct the confrontation with Russia’s President step by step and to focus more on cooperation – even if her motivation for this may be competition with the US President for future markets and future political relations.

Preceding their talks, the German Chancellor and the Russian President spoke to the press about the common tasks. The Russian President emphasised in particular, the improving economic relations between the two countries. Despite all disruptive manoeuvres *Nord Stream 2* is to be built. For Ukraine, both politicians stick to the Minsk agreements. They also want to work together on the situation in Syria. On 18 August 2018, the German government’s website merely stated that Germany “as a member of the so-called ‘Small Group’ (Germany, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and the USA) wants to get a political process under

way”. On the night of 19 August, Russian presidential speaker *Dmitry Peskov* said that together with Germany, France and Turkey, Russia wanted to make a new attempt in order to stabilise the destroyed country.

“Sense of reality and rhetorical disarmament”

The German media response to the meeting of the two politicians was not exuberant, but the tone has changed noticeably compared to previous years. It has become more objective. There were only a few sharp critical tones against the Russian President. And the Russian news agency *Sputnik*, which is close to the government, wrote on 21 August 2018: “Following the latest working meeting between Chancellor *Angela Merkel* and President *Vladimir Putin* at Schloss Meseberg near Berlin, the German side seems to be making an effort to bring a sense of reality and rhetorical disarmament into German-Russian relations. [...] Despite all their differences of opinion, the Meseberg meeting is generally seen as a signal that Berlin and Moscow are determined to cooperate more intensely and come to an agreement on the international stage. This is one of the few points on which the German people fully support their government, as surveys have shown for years”.

Remembering incidents – without making accusations

Since 1991, most governments of NATO and EU countries had done much to

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“Peace chances for the ...”

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Has the chance for peace in the Middle East region now receded into the distance?

These are perhaps the two different levels we are dealing with. For I have dealt with the question of whether there are international preconditions for finding a peace solution, and in my view they are better than ever. This concerns the global political situation and the regional political situation. Because of the fact that Iran and the Russian Federation have, on the basis of existing international law, sided with the legitimate Syrian government in connection with the civil war, there are now

indeed opportunities for discussion and for action, which have not existed for decades. That this Iranian-Russian action has contributed substantially to the fact that the sky is no longer the limit for the Israeli-Americans, the British, French, and Saudis, and that, given all the problems, it is now obviously necessary to be prepared to reach a settlement. Otherwise global war will threaten, and obviously nobody wants that.

Mr Wimmer, so you are you optimistic concerning the chance for peace in the Middle East?

I am certain in a percentage of 70 to 30%. I am 70% inclined to think that the settlement will come, and for the other 30%,

there is the uncertainty. But I believe that the Tehran-Moscow-Damascus Battle Line, which is complementary to Washington, strange as it may sound, will contribute to peace and lead to peace in the foreseeable future, unlike other efforts in recent decades. I assume that Presidents Putin and Trump want more than the Nobel Peace Prize, and so they should get it.

Thank you very much, Mr Wimmer, for these assessments. •

Source: http://parstoday.com/de/news/world-i42624-interview_mit_willy_wimmer of 12 August 2018 (with a slight linguistic adaptation); the interview was recorded on 28 July 2018.

Framework agreement with Brussels or self-determination of Swiss citizens?

Direct democratic freedom of choice as a red line

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

Amazing developments are currently taking place in Swiss EU policy. For years politicians and entrepreneurs from various political factions have been calling for an institutional framework agreement with Brussels in order to have allegedly more legal certainty in their business relations and cultural exchange projects. So loud were their voices that some EU bodies believed that "Switzerland" really wanted such an agreement and could therefore be put under pressure in many ways. For years, too, critical contemporaries have drawn attention to the incompatibility of such an agreement with the direct democratic rights of the citizens, without being noticed by the mainstream so far.

Thus it is a pleasure that some trade unionists and social democrats come to realize that the obligation to take over EU law and the decisions of the European Court of Justice are not abstract ideas that we would somehow manage, but that social partnership and the entire state structure would be quite shaken up.

After the Federal Council had not revealed for years what he was actually negotiating in Brussels, head of FDFA¹ Ig-



nazio Cassis recently tried to address the growing discontent in the population by attempting to draw different "red lines" towards the EU; however, it reacted without any accommodation.²

Now finally movement has come into the matter. Paul Rechsteiner, President of

the Swiss union federation (SGB) and SP member of the Council of States, has set out the markers by declaring the current *accompanying measures to the free movement of persons agreement AFMP* to be a real,

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"What does the meeting ..."

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make life difficult for Russia and its governments. There is no need to reiterate the many proofs of this here. As the "loser" of the Cold War, Russia should subordinate itself to the hegemonic aspirations of the Western world and its supremacy, the USA, and leave the wealth of its natural resources to Western interests, for example. The term "end of history" (Francis Fukuyama) was used and meant the final victory of US politics. Brzezinski's book of 1997, "The Grand Chessboard" was paradigmatic for this policy. Non-governmental organisations tied to the West were supposed to help bring Russia into Western line or to correct an unpleasant Russian policy, as it had been manifested since 2000 under Presidents Putin and Medvedev, if necessary even with a regime change. The Russian government, which had regained its self-confidence, reacted accordingly within the country and in foreign and defence policy, probably

not always in the best manner, as understandable in a new Cold War with hot war zones.

Which windows have opened?

Until a few weeks ago one could rightly speak of a permanent escalation in the relations between the NATO and EU states on the one hand and Russia on the other. But even within the EU not all governments agreed with this course. Neutral Austria, for example, which the Russian President visited prior to the meeting with the German Chancellor, shaped relations with Russia differently than Germany or even the Baltic States and Poland. Because the Western hegemonic power USA almost unanimously held on to its confrontational course until January 2017, this did not yet lead to any political change.

Despite all setbacks, despite all contradictions and despite the still very great influence of the "war faction", with Donald Trump there still is the chance that this will change, even if it is still open who will prevail in the inner-American

conflict. Donald Trump has also opened a window of opportunity for the other states of the world, including the European states. If the meeting of the German Chancellor with the Russian President is a signal that this time window is being used in the sense of peace and Angela Merkel is no longer acting as the executor of the will of the "war faction", there really is reason for hope.

No longer the wish to undermine Russia's sovereignty

It is indispensable that Angela Merkel and all other Western governments let the Russian government clearly know that they no longer intend to undermine Russia's sovereignty and that further steps to weaken the country will not be taken in the future. What is needed are honest negotiations and cooperation on an equal footing. Political poker is not the way forward. De-escalation and concentration on problem solving are the order of the day. There are enough tangible problems in the world, which cause suffering among the affected people. •

"Independent, innovative and open..."

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that is, inalienable, red line. Shortly thereafter, the presidents of the major parties SP, FDP and CVP followed suit (the SVP is against a framework agreement anyway) and all of a sudden they unanimously demanded a provisional stop to negotiation with the EU. But now one thing at the time.

Controversial red line:**Accompanying measures to the Free Movement Agreement AFMP**

As a reminder: The 1999 Bilateral I were supported by the Social Democrats and the Swiss union federation only under the condition that the immigration of workers from EU countries would be accompanied by measures to protect domestic workers. Because it is well known that Switzerland has the lowest unemployment rate and the highest wages. The immigration was then also much larger than the Federal Council claimed in advance, a great burden especially for the border cantons, which are attractive especially for cross-border commuters (currently more 300,000). Therefore, the *accompanying* measures are indispensable for the domestic workers in today's design.

They have been in force since 1 June 2004 and "allow the monitoring of compliance with minimum or usual conditions of work and pay at the place of work". These controls mainly take place on construction sites and in the catering and hotel industry and are working more or less. There are also additional measures and sanctions.³ What could not be foreseen: since the first days after Bilateral I became operative, a flood of so-called self-employed people poured into the border cantons. In order to curb abuse, the Confederation laid down in the Posted Workers Act(4) that service providers have to prove their independence on request (Article 1a) and have to comply with a notification period of 8 days (Article 6 (3)).

The EU lays down the law, the Federal Council knuckles under...

The Swiss accompanying measures have already been a thorn in the side of the EU for a long time, because they are much stricter than the EU regulation in several respects. For example, according to the EU, the 8-day rule is discriminatory for foreign companies. Furthermore, the EU makes the strange demand that Switzerland is allowed to control a maximum of 3 percent of companies and self-employed persons from the EU. An open invitation to take a chance on infringements? According to the daily press, today the Swiss inspectors check approximately one third of the companies and question the wages of one sixth of them, With 7 percent of the

Former Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey changes her compass

mw. The former SP Federal Councillor has never made a secret of her support for Switzerland's accession to the EU. Today it sounds quite different: "If the bilateral path comes to an end, accession to the EU would be possible. But the EU currently has no unified foreign policy, difficulties in financial and economic policy, no migration policy. I am therefore more cautious than before about this alternative."

And continues: "The EU demands: We're supposed to take over their regulation."

Former Ambassador Paul Widmer: Major loss of sovereignty

In the *Echo der Zeit* of 14 August 2018² Paul Widmer, former Ambassador and Lecturer for International Relations at the University of St. Gallen, commented in fundamental terms on Switzerland's loss of sovereignty due to an institutional framework agreement with the EU:

Paul Widmer: First and foremost, a nation always defends its own interests. And of course you have to try to get as close as possible, but you also have to know where your limits are.

SRF: Where would you say are these own limits?

Paul Widmer: In my opinion, our own limits are in a very great loss of sovereignty,

Do we want the protection of our wages to be governed by European law? That the accompanying measures are subject to the *European Court of Justice (EJC)*? The European Court of Justice has so far placed freedom of competition above the protection of workers. If the Federal Council now considers exactly this, I understand the resistance of the trade unions."¹

Does this objection to Micheline Calmy-Rey's adoption of EU law also apply to other issues? Let's hope so!

which consists of Switzerland automatically having to adopt EU law in certain areas, and we would have nothing more to say about it. That is the real core problem and not the accompanying measures." And further: „[...] the loss of sovereignty affects our whole nation. We cannot continue to exist as Switzerland if we allow ourselves to be too restricted in our democratic rights."

¹ "I understand the resistance of the trade unions", in: *SonntagsBlick*, 12 August 2018, interview: Florian Wicki and Simon Marti

² "How to proceed with the EU Framework Agreement?" *Radio SRF, Echo der Zeit* from 14 August 2018

self-employed, they suspect bogus self-employment. Should we promote fraud and corruption henceforth? Finally, the EU is bothered by the fact that the legality of the accompanying measures is controlled by Swiss administrative authorities and courts and not by its own.⁵

In a nutshell: as in many other areas, the EU wants to impose its own rules and jurisdiction on Swiss worker protection. After all, that is the purpose of the framework agreement! In any case, Federal Councillor Johann Schneider-Ammann, head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) has understood the message from Brussels: he wants to shape the accompanying measures in "an EU accepted form", which has to withstand "a possible assessment by the *Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)*".⁶ Savvy?

... and SUF President Rechsteiner is in opposition

SUF President Paul Rechsteiner: "It would be naive to assume that the EU Commission is only concerned about the pre-registration period of eight days. Much more, the Commission wants a lever to influence Swiss wage protection as a whole, in order to weaken it."

Responding to the EU having substantially tightened its Posting Directive: "The level of protection of the EU and Switzerland is not comparable. Our

country needs independent and strong wage protection because we have the highest wages by far. The European trade unions are warning us not to make concessions. Ask the Austrians how glad they would be about our options for wage protection."

On the warning against further reprisals by the EU: "The EU has just as much an interest in good relations with Switzerland as vice versa. I'll keep calm."

And more fundamentally: "If Brussels makes the framework agreement conditional on wage protection, then we make do without it. When negotiating, it is useful to keep calm anyway. Otherwise, our interests cannot be defended effectively."⁷

Remarkable tips for Swiss Federal Councillors and negotiators in Brussels!

Radical change of course of the party presidents

Half a year ago, it still has sounded like this: "Move on with the institutional framework agreement!" SP party president *Christian Levrat* and CVP foreign affairs politician *Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter* announce the timetable desired by their party leaders: The referendum on a package deal including the Bilateral III, and the framework agreement, is to take place before the federal elections in

“Framework agreement with...”

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October 2019. (“Neue Zürcher Zeitung” from 6 January 2018)

Today, FDP President *Petra Gössi*: “In my opinion, the Federal Council must now break off negotiations with employers and the cantons.” Without trade unions, “a solution based on social partnership would be hopeless”. In this way, “no majority can be found in Parliament for a framework agreement.” Gössi concludes: “If the Federal Council does not reach an agreement on the contents with Brussels, negotiations with the EU should be suspended for the time being.”

SP President *Christian Levrat* and CVP President *Gerhard Pfister* also call for the suspension of negotiations and the negotiation of a “standstill agreement” with the EU in order to avoid further reprisals on the part of Brussels.⁸

The red line for us as citizens

Just electoral tactics, to lose not too many voters to the SVP, which has always been against a framework agreement? Will the suspension be cancelled immediately after the parliamentary elections in October 2019 and will we continue on the one-way street to Brussels? If only the gentlemen don’t miscalculate!

The consequence for the vast majority of Swiss citizens is clear: we draw the red line where our direct democratic freedom of choice would be curtailed.

¹ Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

² see “Institutional Framework Agreement Switzerland-EU – Strategy or Confusion?”, In: Current Concerns Nr. 14, 29.6.2018

³ Swiss Confederation, Free movement of persons, Accompanying Measures (https://www.personenfreizuegigkeit.admin.ch/fza/de/home/aufenthalt_und_arbeitsmarkt/flankierende_massnahmen.html)

⁴ Bundesgesetz über die flankierenden Massnahmen bei entsandten Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern und über die Kontrolle der in Normalarbeitsverträgen vorgesehenen Mindestlöhne (Entsendegesetz, EntsG) of 8 October 1999 (as of 1 April 2017) (Federal Act on the accompanying measures for posted workers and on the control of the minimum wages stipulated in standard employment contracts)

⁵ “Es geht um mehr als um die 8-Tage-Regel” (It’s about more than the 8-day-rule), *Tages-Anzeiger*, from 10. 8. 2018

⁶ “Kampf um Lohnschutz. Von ‘Verrat’ und ‘Vertrauensbruch’” (Struggle for wage protection. On

Federal Referendum of 25 November 2018

«Swiss law instead of foreign judges» (Self-determination Initiative)

mw. The self-determination initiative addresses the very question raised here: How can Switzerland’s sovereignty vis-à-vis the EU and other powers be preserved as far as possible? The initiative requires in no way that Switzerland should “be in breach of contract” or that it should no longer respect the human rights of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – which are, incidentally, also contained in the Federal Constitution. (Thought-terminating cliché used by the opponents!) Instead, it is about the provisions of the Federal Constitution, ie the decisions of the People and the cantons, being implemented by legislation, and applied by administration and justice, which should actually be a matter of course in any democratic constitutional state. However, ever since the majority in the Federal Council, in parliament and the Federal Court has increasingly been focussing on the EU and other foreign powers, it bypasses

and violates the constitution wherever it gets in the way of “international law”. For example, international law also includes bilateral treaties with the EU.

Here only this much: The dilemma between Switzerland’s obligations under international law and the sovereignty of the People and the cantons will have to be discussed and resolved anyway, as Federal Administrative Court Judge Simon Thurnheer points out in a remarkable and clarifying guest commentary in the Swiss newspaper *Federal Referendum of 25 November 2018*

per “Neue Zürcher Zeitung.”¹ A closer examination of the self-determination initiative will follow in one of the next issues of *Current Concerns*.

¹ “Landesrecht und Völkerrecht. Die EMRK und die Selbstbestimmungsinitiative (Federal state law and international law. The ECHR and the self-determination initiative)”, guest commentary by Simon Thurnheer. “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” from 18 July 2018

Text of the initiative

The Federal Constitution shall be amended as follows:

Art. 5 (1) and (4)

1. All activities of the state are based on and limited by law. The federal constitution is the highest legal source in the Swiss Confederation.

4 The confederation and the cantons shall comply with international law. International law is subsidiary to the federal constitution, subject to the mandatory provisions of international law.

Art. 56a obligations under international law

1 The Confederation and the cantons shall not enter into any obligations under international law that are contrary to the Federal Constitution.

2 In the event of conflict, they shall ensure that the obligations under international law are adapted to the prescriptions of the Federal Constitution,

if necessary by termination of the relevant international treaties.

3 This is subject to the mandatory provisions of international law.

Art. 190 Applicable Law

Federal laws and international treaties subordinated to the referendum for the decision on approval are binding for the Federal Supreme Court and other law enforcement authorities.

Art. 197 (124)

12 The transitional provision for Art. 5 (1) and (4) (Principles of the rule of law), Art. 56a (International law obligations), and Art. 190 (Applicable law)

With their approval by the People and the cantons, Article 5 paragraphs 1 and 4, 56a and 190 shall apply to all existing and future provisions of the Federal Constitution and to all existing and future obligations under international law of the Confederation and the cantons.

‘betrayal’ and ‘breach of trust’), *St. Galler Tagblatt*, from 9 August 2018

⁷ “Wir werden die Demontage der Löhne stoppen”, Interview mit Paul Rechsteiner (Stefan Schmid) (“We will stop the dismantling of wages”, interview

with Paul Rechsteiner (Stefan Schmid)), *St. Galler Tagblatt*, from 9 August 2018

⁸ “Drei Bundesratsparteien blasen zum Rückzug”, (Three parties of the Federal Council are sounding the retreat) *SonntagsZeitung*, from 12 August 2018

Not only Switzerland has much to lose

by Dieter Sprock

The EU is urging Switzerland to conclude an institutional framework agreement. In essence, the issue is that Switzerland should automatically adopt developments in EU law in the future. A *Joint Committee* would monitor compliance with the agreement and, in the event of disputes, the *European Court of Justice* would have the final say, which would be equivalent to the incapacitation of Switzerland.

In order to reinforce its demand, the EU is making access to the electricity market for Switzerland dependent on the conclusion of the framework agreement. It reserves the right to deny Switzerland's *stock exchange equivalence*; this would cut off traders from the EU area from the Swiss trading centre. And the EU is threatening to exclude this country from research programmes. The fact that the EU also does not want to accept the accompanying measures that protect Swiss workers from wage dumping also fits in with the EU system.

The EU system ...

Trade relations between Switzerland and the EU are regulated in bilateral agreements. There is no legal uncertainty that would make a framework agreement necessary. Trade works in both directions, with clearly more goods flowing from the EU to Switzerland than vice versa. So why does the EU still insist so stubbornly on concluding this treaty?

The EU has set itself the task of creating a borderless internal market for capital, goods, services and persons and of dissolving national borders. This means that capital should be able to move freely and settle where it can make the greatest profit. Goods are to be produced where wages are low and then sold at top prices. Services - including public services built up with taxpayers' money, such as water, electricity, education and health-care - are to be privatised and marketed for profit. And last but not least, people should be at the free disposal of the capital; here we are talking about topics such as wage dumping or recruiting fully trained specialists from low-wage coun-

“In Switzerland, citizens control the legal development of the country. With the optional and mandatory referendum and the popular initiative, they have at their disposal strong direct-democratic instruments that make the highest degree of self-determination possible”.

tries. The framework agreement serves to enforce these so-called “freedoms” and to strengthen Switzerland's integration into the EU.

It is no longer a secret that under the EU system the economically weak countries are becoming poorer and the strong ones richer and richer.

The EU has developed into a bureaucratic juggernaut, patronising the member states in all political matters and no longer allowing them to pursue their own policies. Meanwhile, most laws applied in EU countries are determined by Brussels. But more and more countries are defending themselves against Brussels' paternalism, in which they no longer see the interests of their citizens represented.

... versus Swiss direct democracy

Switzerland is a sovereign country in which the cantons have voluntarily joined together on a cooperative basis to form the *Confederation*. The smallest canton has the same rights in the federal state as the most populous.

Consideration of regional particularities, federal structure and the independence of the cantons have enabled the peaceful coexistence of different languages and cultures and strengthened cohesion.

In Switzerland, citizens control the legal development of the country. With the optional and mandatory referendum and the popular initiative, they have at their disposal strong direct-democratic instruments that make the highest degree of self-determination possible. The people have fought for the right to self-determination.

Swiss direct democracy in its kind is probably unique in the world. In no other

country the population has such far-reaching opportunities to determine the political events themselves, and not only at the municipal level.

Of course, global development - the pursuit of money and power - has not stopped at Switzerland either. And those who are prepared here to surrender sovereignty and freedom rights must explain themselves. The fact is that many Swiss companies have already been acquired by foreign investors. Others are largely controlled by international corporations, including large Swiss banks.

If corporate managements are now obliged to foreign capital owners and, in their eyes, democratic achievements such as self-determination only hinder borderless business, this poses a great threat to democracy, and not only in Switzerland.

In his article “Sovereignty, Law and Democracy versus Power Politics,” published on 21 August 2013 in *Current Concerns*, the US American international lawyer and former UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order, *Alfred de Zayas*, pays tribute to Switzerland's direct-democratic model and calls on Swiss citizens to fight to preserve it.

Alfred de Zayas: “The only democracy I know is the Swiss democracy. It is not perfect. But it is the only one in which there is some correlation between the will of the people and the actual politics. [...] I must say to Swiss citizens: you must fight for the preservation of Swiss direct democracy. It's not just for yourself, but it's also a model for the world.”

Letter to  the Editor

“There is reason for hope”

Well, it's to fly off the handle. *Jean-Claude Juncker* makes a boozy pilgrimage visiting *Donald Trump*, negotiates toughly and fiercely in favour of Europe's economy, with the result that we are allowed to purchase fractured, then liquefied natural gas from the states and that we should renounce *Nord Stream 2*, thereby endangering good neighbourly relations with Russia and trade with China and putting considerable strain on our wallets and the environment. The boozy mood seems, the longer the more, to have also embraced the media of our latitudes. Like Professor Dr *Eberhard Hamer*, I am very concerned about the political situation in Europe, especially in Germany (cf. *Current Concerns* No 19 of 21 August), but since last week I see light on the horizon.

Many people around the world are concerned about how things should continue on our planet in times of transition. Much is said about the end of the “unipolar world” and the necessity of a “multipolar world”. I wonder, however, whether the “multipolar world” still corresponds to the current state of political awareness. Multipolarity as we know it stems from the idea of the Congress of Vienna, when Europe dominated the thinking of the world and was influenced by the idea of balancing powers or of power centres (under British supervision, of course). Even if a multipolar order is based on the interests of more than one state, it has so far failed to take into account the interests of smaller states such as Switzerland. I don't think that's fair.

But from the east of the Eurasian continent, to which we belong geographically, especially from China with its project “Belt and Road Initiative”, supported by Russia, valuable approaches have been coming towards *multilateralism* for some years. I recently realised that multipolarity and multilateralism are based on different but very significant approaches, which are sensible for the citizens. The essential difference between multipolarity and multilateralism is, it seems to me, that “multilateralism” is based on a balance of interests rather than on a balance of power.

Last week it could be read in the daily press that after some twenty years (!) of

“From the east of the Eurasian continent, to which we belong geographically, especially from China with its project ‘Belt and Road Initiative’, supported by Russia, valuable approaches have been coming towards multilateralism for some years.”

negotiations the countries bordering the Caspian Sea have concluded an agreement on how the five states concerned – Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran – intend to use this sea and above all what lies under the sea in terms of oil and gas. Yes, it can take such a long time, and in this case much longer, if negotiations are serious, honest and sustainable. What is special about this treaty is that Kazakhstan, which firmly planned to establish a military base on its shores in order to be protected by the US, has dispensed with this request. The five states have agreed that they are able to protect themselves. The fact that something like this works well is visible in our neighbourhood concerning Lake Constance. This is not about oil or gas, but about water. After all, some 5.5 million people on the German side alone are supplied with drinking water. The water quality is excellent thanks to wastewater treatment. The amenity values are great on all banks. The three riparian states have arranged everything perfectly, and so far there is no need for an American military base at Lake Constance to protect anyone.

The fact that Kazakhstan refrains from the protection of the United States is remarkable because, for example, Qatar, where the world's largest gas field was discovered in the 1970s, has gone under the protection of *Shell* and the United States, with the result that this country has given up its independence, has to host the largest American naval base in the Middle East and must liquefy its gas, because the routes for pipeline transport have been blocked for political and geographical reasons until today. Since it soon became clear that a third of the gas field was under Iranian soil, Qatar had two options at the time: either to share the gas proportionately with Iran, as is usual among good

neighbours, or to exert pressure “protected” by a major power, in this case the USA.

If the countries bordering the Caspian Sea succeed in agreeing on the exploitation, if an agreement is reached between Qatar and Iran, then it is possible that the Qatar/Iranian gas could be fed directly into the European market through the Caspian Sea pipeline through Russia and Nord Stream 2. For the benefit of all. Moreover, President *Trump* could remove the largest American base in the Persian Gulf and use the money thus freed up for his “America First” project.

On the other hand, the fact gives cause for hope, that Chancellor *Merkel* met President Putin last week and, as if she had read Professor Hamer's statements in *Current Concerns*, she did not seem so reluctant when it came to Nord Stream 2. I also hope that Chancellor *Merkel* knows what role *George Friedman* has assigned Germany, namely to once again take the lead in the next major battle, and what devastating consequences this would have once again for Central Europe. I also think that the Chancellor's advisers are keeping an eye on the huge Russian market, which reaches as far as the Pacific. There is reason to hope, because it is now generally known that Russian and Chinese diplomacy are working continuously on what I have outlined. The world would become a little more peaceful. The entire Nord Stream project is an intelligent solution.

Well, it all crossed my mind when I read Professor Hamer's article in *Current Concerns*, “Trump-Juncker deal: The big bluff”, and I am already looking forward to the next remarks on the problems of time. His articles stimulate thought and action. Thank you so much.

Wolfgang van Biezen, Schwarzenbach

“Fair-Food-Initiative” and “Food Sovereignty”

In the issue Number 19 of Current Concerns from 21 August 2018, the questions of agriculture were analysed in a meaningful combination in a debate of principles by Professor Wohlmeyer and, with reference to the forthcoming votes in Switzerland, by Dr Marianne Wüthrich.

Small-scale agriculture, which is “ruthlessly sacrificed to the great world market rulers”, is under pressure worldwide, but also in Switzerland. Fortunately, Swiss citizens have the opportunity to react against precisely these forces, against free trade in agriculture and against a dying condition of Swiss agriculture in the forthcoming vote on the “Fair-Food-Initiative” and on “Food Sovereignty”.

It is troubling that the Federal Council’s agricultural policy considers access to the international market and compliance with the rules of international free trade as the only valuable success. The focus is not on supplying the population with local, seasonally and regionally produced, high-quality food and ensuring the supply of the population in times of distress.

It has often been told in my family that the grandparents in Germany, they were small farmers, put a basket of potatoes at the front door in times of distress in the 1920s. When people from the distant city came to the remote village to “hamster” and beg for food, then everyone knock-

ing at the door was given 2 or 3 potatoes out of the limited supply. People were very grateful even for this little donation. On the basis of such experience, my mother spoke all her life of “the poor people living in towns” who had no possibility of self-sufficiency. In these times of distress, one could count on small farmers, and we cannot be sure that such times will not come again, as Professor Wohlmeyer warns.

We now know that small farmers produce 70% (!) of the world’s population’s food on a quarter of the world’s land.¹ In contrast, the balance sheet of industrial agriculture is negative if one considers not only the financial success but also the environmental damage caused by monocultures, the loss of biodiversity and the overuse of resources that is taking place.

It is to be hoped that the debate on the subject matter of the two initiatives will remain objective and that real arguments, as also presented in the articles, will be included in the electoral vote.

Dr.-Ing. Ernst Pauli, Zurich

¹ GRAIN and La Via Campesina (2014). Hunger for land: small farmers feed the world with less than a quarter of all farmland. <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/4929>

(Translation Current Concerns)

Sovereign states as the basis of globalisation

Remarks to the article: “The sovereign state is indispensable – especially in a globalised economy” (*Current Concerns* from 12 August 2018).

I agree with the considerations of *Beat Kappeler, Dani Rodrik* and *Marianne Wüthrich*.

I would like to be even more clear with my thesis: “A humane globalised civil society and economy can only survive based on the foundations of sovereign states”.

In the true sense of its definition, globalisation does by no means mean the abolition of sovereign states; rather, the sovereign states are the fertile breeding ground for globalisation. Globalisation must work in the interest and for the welfare of civil societies and their people, which calls for partnership, not self-abandonment of sovereign states. Thus the model of the Swiss Confederation is and remains the model according to which the EU should also orient itself in its own interest, if it does not want to break up and sink, even faster than one seems to imagine today.

Hans-Jacob Heitz, MLaw UZH, Männedorf

(Translation Current Concerns)

Biovision on the Fair-Food-Initiative

Why I’m going to vote yes



On 23 September, Switzerland will vote on the Fair-Food-Initiative. Our President, Hans Rudolf Herren, explains why he will vote yes.

Hans Herren (picture www.biovision.ch) What is the Fair-Food-Initiative about?

The initiative aims to promote food from near-natural, environmentally friendly and animal-friendly agriculture with fair working conditions. In concrete terms, this means: diversity instead of uniformity in the farmland and on the dining table, more regional and seasonal food and less waste of food. We called for this in the 2008 World Agriculture Report.*

Why do you and Biovision support this initiative?

A change of direction is urgently needed. Only agriculture that conserves resources and adapts to climate change can ensure the long-term nutrition of the people. Sustainably produced food should no longer be disadvantaged compared to environmentally harmful products and become more attractive for consumers. And farmers must be rewarded for their efforts accordingly with a fair price – completely in the sense of the cost-benefit ratio: services to the environment and society should be compensated. This initiative brings us one step closer to our vision: a world with sufficient and healthy food for all, produced by healthy people in a healthy environment.

What are the advantages for farmers in Africa?

The Fair-Food-Initiative explicitly addresses Switzerland’s cross-border trade relations. Many developing countries are net importers, i.e. they are “flooded” with surplus food from industrialised coun-

tries that are produced more cheaply due to product subsidies. The initiative tries to improve these unequal trading conditions: Increased demand for sustainably produced food from developing countries – especially tropical fruits, vegetables, coffee and cocoa – has a positive impact on the living conditions of small farmers. They achieve a higher price for their food and produce under fair working conditions. They also take care of the fragile environment. The initiative is therefore holistic in its approach and, in line with the UN Agenda 2030, combines economic reason, social justice and ecological responsibility.

* Hans Rudolf Herren contributed in his responsible position to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) [note: *Current Concerns*]

Further information: www.fair-food.ch
Source: *Biovision.ch* from 13 August 2018
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Visit to a Russian children's home

by Maria Koch

In some media it is repeatedly alleged that bad conditions prevail in Russia's children's homes and social institutions. We want to know for ourselves and visit a large children's home in St. Petersburg. We chose it ourselves. We are a group of teachers, teachers for special education and a social pedagogue from Switzerland and Germany.

A dance to Russian music, perfect choreography with well-known Russian dance elements as well as great acrobatic interludes, performed by children in colourful costumes tailored according to Russian tradition – this is how we are welcomed in the *Children's Home No 1* in St. Petersburg.¹ The children perfectly master the choreography, they dance joyfully and with beaming eyes, they proudly laugh at us. The special thing about it: The children are mentally handicapped, most of them are affected by Down syndrome.

This demonstration is an example of the spirit prevailing in this children's home: All children and young people are disabled, but all are proud of what they can do, of the fact that they are an important part of this community and make their contribution to it.

There are children with severe multiple disabilities who can hardly move themselves, who have sensory impairments, who are severely mentally handicapped and severely limited in their ability to communicate, up to children with slight learning disabilities and young adults. All of them are supported according to their abilities, everyone is enabled to participate as much as possible in social life.

About 200 children and 100 young adults are living in Children's Home No 1. We drive towards a large bright complex in Peterhof, divided by many windows. This is a place one hour away from St. Petersburg, where the tsars had their summer residence. In St. Petersburg everything is still icy in April, the outdoor facilities are therefore not animated, nevertheless we notice gardens, greenhouses and sports fields on the way to the home's entrance.

Openness, transparency and cordiality

Valery Asikritov, the home's director, and some of his staff welcome us very warmly. They took a whole day to show us their facilities and to explain their work. Mr Asikritov is a professor of special education and psychology, sports teacher, member of the City Council and holder of various orders such as the State Order of Merit as an educator of Russia.



A proud artist. (picture mk)

The children's home has been in existence for 45 years and is a model facility. Delegations from all over Russia come here to learn.

Today we are here to see how people work here. We are guided through the whole home, all doors are open, we can take an insight everywhere. We see simple but lovingly maintained bedrooms and living rooms designed with personal attributes, bathrooms to modern standards, dining rooms and kitchens. Corridors and staircases on our way through the house are designed with carefully framed and beautifully presented artistic products of the children. Nowhere do we see signs of disorder, vandalism, neglect. The doors are open everywhere, and we meet active and mostly cheerful, often proud looking children and young people, who also like to get in contact with us and want to have themselves photographed with us.

Support of severely multi-disabled persons

In medical and physiotherapeutic facilities with special baths, therapeutic exercise equipment and sports rooms for the physically handicapped and spastic, we experience how several caregivers, educators, physiotherapists and social educators are each lovingly looking after the children and the young people. We know many comparable institutions in Switzerland and Germany and we notice: The care key is comparatively high. In a large, bright room there are some beds with chil-

dren who are so severely handicapped that they can hardly move, cannot speak and can only make contact on their own with their eyes and hands. They are in bed, and they cannot turn around on their own. These children are also cared for with love and sensitivity: the educators touch them, move them, speak to them. We gain insight into rooms where children are cared for psychomotorically and logopaedically.

School and workshops

The weaker children with learning disabilities are supported in the internal school, the stronger ones attend the public special school in Peterhof. In small classes of 5 to 8 children, in some cases also in individual/one-to-one lessons, the children are encouraged/supported in cultural techniques. The classrooms are bright and furnished in a modern style, there are many learning materials, games, *Montessori* materials. We also see students working in computer rooms and in various workshops for wood, metal and textile work. Blinis (Russian pancakes) are being baked in a school kitchen, a schoolgirl offers them to us, we eat them hot out of our hands. In the pottery there is a photo on the wall showing *Putin* pottering with the handicapped on the potter's wheel. In the textile workshop everyone is busy at the sewing machines. We, the guests, are offered a small basket with small objects made by the handicapped. We are told to

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choose one, a heart, an arrow or a dolphin, everything made of fabric or leather and stuffed. When one of us has chosen an object, the manufacturer of the work of art is called to the front. Full of joy and pride that the guest has chosen the object he has made, the student embraces him and looks proudly into the camera. In the workshops for older teenagers, simple items such as ballpoint pens, firelighters, etc. are produced for sale, as is also done in our workshops for the disabled. Young people work here who have completed compulsory schooling but are not up to the demands of the free labour market. I would like to come back to this later.

Physical education

We are far from finished with the tour through the home and its facilities. For example, there are numerous modern sports facilities: sports halls and gymnasiums with all kinds of equipment for the physically handicapped and physically healthy persons, a ballet hall and even a large swimming pool. Some of the kids are working out right now. They are not splashing around, but are engaged in professional competitive sports. What these activities lead to, we see then in a large room, which is equipped all around with showcases: cups, badges, certificates, photos of sporting competitions, residents of the home with famous sports stars and politicians like Putin and *Medvedev*. Children's Home No 1 athletes regularly take part in the *Paralympics* and bring home victory trophies. There is hardly a sport in which the Peterhofer do not participate, up to tournament riding and dancing. And everything at the highest level. We get an ever better impression of why the children and young people living here are proud, proud of their own achievements and those of their community, proud of being able to take effect in the world.

Art and Culture

In a studio we watch artists at work and admire impressive artistic works, including figurative painting. There is a hall, equipped with an Orthodox church with an iconostasis, as it must be in Russia. Worship services are also held here on a regular basis. We enjoy a performance by the church choir, also consisting of residents of the home, dressed in festive white robes. Later we receive a video with the famous Ukrainian singer *Valery Malyshev* singing the most beautiful Russian songs with this choir.

Ukrainian drum dance

Highlight of our visit was the performance of a Ukrainian drum dance. It was

a great choreography with impressive acrobatics. The dance had been instructed and rehearsed by *Alla Kaskadeur-Vorobyeva*, a famous Russian choreographer and circus artist who practises voluntarily once a week with the young dancers and also performs the dance together with them. She made the impossible possible: three of the young men are deaf, so that they cannot hear the drums. Nevertheless they managed to dance in step. An incredible performance! Alla has already been working for 20 years with children.

After we had been allowed to see and experience everything we were served a nice lunch, a four-course-menu, for as soup and salad are always part of it in Russia, then the main course, mostly of meat or fish and vegetables, and finally a sweet dessert. By the way, we are served the same food as the residents of the home. We are entertained in a friendly and courteous manner. During the meal and the finishing coffee, we had the opportunity to ask further questions and to discuss them. On the same day, an article is published in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* according to which a Bremen grammar school should be forced judicially to integrate mentally disabled children. One of our participants refers to this topic, causing head-shaking with our Russian conversation partners. Indeed, they are familiar with this discussion in their country, as it is also up-to-date. An interesting discussion on the topic of inclusion emerges. Mr Asikritov and his staff presented their views on the subject: There are children who need special support. They cannot get it in a normal class and therefore will get lost. In Children's Home No 1, integration is understood in the sense that every child is supported as much as possible in order to be able to participate in life.

Vocational preparation

Those who are able to do so are prepared for a profession. In the home there is a special system of aptitude tests, which does not require written tests. According to the results, the pupils are already supported in suitable workshops in the home. There is even a fully equipped hair salon in the home where young ladies can learn to do the hair. Thus trained in the workshops, the pupils are optimally prepared for their apprenticeship. The companies are legally obliged to train disabled pupils in simple professions. They like it because they gained good experiences with them.

Study apartment – preparation for self-employment

The home provides a study apartment where young people can learn to live independently in their own apartment.

After dinner we are allowed to visit the apartment. There is everything a normal small apartment needs: Living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom with washing machine etc. The pupils learn how to manage a household, plan the budget, cook, clean and take care of the laundry. This makes them fit for independent living. We engage in a conversation with one of the occupants of this apartment. She proudly tells us what she can already do herself and when she plans her own future.

But there are also severely disabled people who will never be able to lead an independent life. The home has made a special agreement with Mr *Medvedev*. Such residents may remain in the home after the age of 18, up to the age of 40.

Cooperation with parents

The child stays with the family up to the age of 4 and receives separate early intervention if required. If someone of the family can help with the encouragement of the child, it will stay longer in the family. From the age of four or later, parents can decide whether or not they want to place their child in the institution step by step. 70% of parents would do so. Parents are welcome in the home, they can visit their child every day or help with the care. On weekends or during holidays the children are allowed to join their family. Parents are advised individually or in groups.

Cooperation with the Diakonia in Stetten, Baden-Württemberg

With great respect Mr Asikritov told us about the cooperation with the *Diakonia Stetten*, Baden-Württemberg. There the Diakonia runs a large institution for disabled people. Their employees have been supporting the Children's Home No 1 for decades with advice and assistance. Mr Asikritov explains that many beautiful and pedagogically valuable things in this home would not have been possible without the support of the Diakonia Stetten.

Every week he has at least half an hour of telephone exchange with his colleagues there. From his descriptions it became clear to us that a warm-hearted, sustainable friendship has been developed between the staff of both institutions, which cannot be harmed by the turbulences on the political stage.

We are overwhelmed by the level of the institution, the work done there and the loving efforts of the staff. According to our experiences, the picture often drawn in the media is completely wrong. The next day our impression will be confirmed by

"Visit to a Russian children's home"

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a visit of a large public special school in Peterhof².

Those in charge of the home are well aware of the importance of their work. One of the founders of the home, an elderly lady, accompanies our group of visitors all day long. In the final discussion she says that there once was a time in Germany when such children were treated differently... We know exactly what she means. And isn't there another discussion in our countries today as to whether people whose lives are "not worth living" should "be helped to die"?

We assume that not all institutions are as good as Peterhof. There is certainly still a lot to be done and in many places there is still a need for development. The support of the disabled is high on President Putin's list of priorities. The visit of the two Russian Presidents to the Children's Home, which can be seen in the photos, sets an example. Numerous participants of the Paralympics in Sochi, who came from all over the world, reported how excellently and barrier-free the sports facilities and homes were furnished and organised for them.

We will continue to seek the opportunity to get to know educational and so-

cial institutions in Russia with our own eyes and ears. Last but not least, it is a great pleasure to experience the hospitality, openness and warmheartedness of the Russian hosts. We feel a bit more at home in this world because of the solidarity with our colleagues in Russia in

the shared educational concern and the realisation of humanity. •

¹ On *youtube* you can see a video about the Children's Home, Russian with German subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2vIz8PCAaM>

² A report on this visit will follow in a later edition.



First-graders learn at the school of the children's home. (picture mk)

Burnout in schoolchildren takes on alarming extents

mk. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has already noticed an alarming increase in burnout symptoms in young schoolchildren in Switzerland. According to the study, every third pupil suffers from burnout symptoms such as headaches, stomach pains, sleep disorders, anxiety attacks, dizziness, and depression.

How can this be explained? Switzerland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, where everyone contributes to prosperity, not just an élite. Health and education systems are well developed. Hardly anyone has to suffer great hardship.

There is no indication that there are greater problems in the families than there were a few years ago. As a rule, parents educate their children lovingly, and a good family life is important to them.

Let us look at the part that makes up a great deal of the lives of children and young people beyond the family: school. To prove oneself in school, to survive is the "profession" of children and young people. Has anything changed here? Thank God the corporal punishment and degrading treatments have been abolished. The schools are usually bright, friendly, clean, warm, and excellently equipped. Not all this was always a matter of course. The teachers are well trained (or at least

they should be), they are well paid, so there should be no lack of motivation. There is so much support in the form of curative education, remediation, various therapies as never before. The pupils are usually well nourished, dressed and supported by their parents. So what is missing, or what is wrong?

Let us look at how the teaching processes in many schools actually work today. In more and more classes, the students have to work on the material themselves. They get a short oral introduction by the teacher. Then they work alone on a programme, often on paper, increasingly on the computer. Already primary school pupils, yes, sometimes even pupils in the kindergartens get weekly schedules, which means that they have to work independently for the whole week. They have to work out almost everything themselves, both in terms of subject matters and in terms of content. They are isolated and left alone. If they do not make any progress, they ask a school colleague. Maybe he is just busy with something else or he does not "getting it" either. Well, then there is the teacher. Numerous pupils report that they often wait a long time, until the teacher finally has time. And the five minutes they then spend with the pupil do not come close in quality

to 20 or 30 minutes of classroom instruction, in which everyone works together in the whole class teaching, inspiring, encouraging, and prompting each other. Since that is missing, many give up and despair. However, there are also many students who are reluctant to ask the teacher; there is a lack of confidence not to be embarrassed if you do not understand something or do not understand anything at all. So the problem is postponed home. Parents are to help. They are the last hope. Nevertheless, they often do not "get it" either, because today's teaching materials are often very complicated, a structure of the subject that would be comprehensible is often not offered. So the student goes back to school with the experience "I am unable", "I do not understand it". It is enough to drive one to despair. The next exam, however, will certainly come – the programme is scheduled inexorably. The students know that. The exam has already been announced. Is anyone still surprised that children and young people cannot sleep at night, lose confidence in themselves, and their social environment, and go through their lives depressed and with stomach pains?

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“Food, Education and Health for everyone”

An inspiring book for family and school



Im. Urs Knoblauch is a concept artist, culture publicist and former grammar school teacher at the Literargymnasium Rähmibühl in Zurich.

His contributions on societal and cultural politics in this newspaper are well known to the readers.

The book being introduced here “*Nahrung, Bildung und Gesundheit für alle*” (Food, Education and Health for everyone) illustrates – as the subtitle shows – ways to humanity, responsibility, the common good, social justice and peace. Designed with care, there are four issues compiled on 190 pages and useful practical answers are given on many questions.

The contributions are presenting, in a generally understandable fashion, facts about highly meaningful topics for society such as “agriculture and the World Agricultural Report” (IAASTD), “state, economy and the common good”, “Swiss humanitarian services”, “reflections on the history and function of the UN and UNESCO” – taking the point of view of ethics, cultural and educational science, as well as history and cultural anthropology.

Furthermore relevant areas from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *UN Charter* are being brought to mind. It is from these rights in particular

that tasks and obligations for the individual person and society do follow concerning our living together in a shared world, in nature and civilisation.

Important economic and civic foundations – in particular the “direct democracy” – are constituting a subject in itself. The workings of the *Red Cross*, the tasks of UN and UNESCO and the activities of various international humanitarian organisations are presented in this book in a concise and clear way. Valuable relief organisations and examples such as *Albert Schweizer* and *Beat Richner* are explored. Also interesting are informative contributions on a diverse number of international organisations like the OECD or WTO. It becomes apparent just how unduly their activities are interfering into sovereign national states.

The great societal tasks we are facing ask for responsible solutions in terms of the common good. This book is aiming to appeal not only to young people, but also to their families, to contribute herein.

Despite the complex issues, they have been successfully covered in a distinct and perfectly understandable language. Especially the clear-cut structure will enable students e.g. to pick out singular aspects, and as the case may be, to read it together with others, to discuss it and to internalise it, in keeping with the terms of a humane living

together. In this sense, this book is contributing an urgently needed ethics of the common good and peace. The linguistic presentation itself is offering students an example for their own writing style, be it for compositions, letters or other correspondence. A special attraction of this book are the more than 100 coloured linocuts, drawings and pictures, created by the students of the author, illustrating every topic.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



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It is actually only surprising that this is not noticed in public. The “*Verein Ostschweizer Kinderärzte*” (Association Eastern Switzerland’s Pediatricians) has long pointed out the connection between the increasing somatic afflictions in children and the overextension caused by individualisation. Individualisation is the worst sin of recent school reforms. It not only leaves

children who would otherwise like to and joyfully learn in relation to their teachers and school colleagues, who would have success in learning, alone, but also pushes them into despair and hopelessness. Why is the wrong track not recognised and left again? Nothing would be easier than to reintroduce whole class teaching. It would be a rest and a satisfaction for pupils and teachers (and a relief for parents). This change would not even cost money. Only the teacher-students, who have to be

trained anyway, would have to be reasonably prepared again for classroom-management, for lessons proceeding in small steps and a method of developing by questions, for an attitude in which every pupil is kept in sight, to take pleasure in every child and its manifestations of life, to involve each into the class community – prepared for a culture, in which learning and not-knowing-yet contribute to a common enrichment.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Vintners' cooperatives in the Ahr valley (Germany) – a success story

“We do not have any generational or sales problems here”

by Gerda Reuter

When the queen of wine and wine god *Bacchus* parade through the narrow streets of Dernau, accompanied by musical processions and fancyful themed groups, the entire village population is active: they serve the densely standing visitors on wine and food stands or present themselves to the cheering guests in decorated floats and parades. They generously pour wine to the visitors who line the road, usually red wine which is traditionally cultivated here in the Eifel. Visitors come from Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf, the Ruhr area, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg. Also, Scandinavian buses are to be seen.

History of Ahr wines and the vintners' cooperatives of the Ahr

The Ahr valley is a side valley of the Rhine, south of Bonn. The Ahr region is one of the northernmost wine-growing regions in Europe. We know that the Romans brought viticulture to the Ahr. It seems, however, that even the Celts learned viticulture from the Greeks and practiced it. In the middle of the 19th century, the Ahr region - it belongs to the barren Eifel - was heavily impoverished. Phylloxera and climate spoiled the harvest, large parts of the population emigrated to America. A solution had to be found in this emergency. In 1873, the history of the *Vintners' Cooperative Dernau* according to the *Raiffeisen* model began, after the neighbouring municipality *Mayschoss*, Germany's oldest vintners' cooperative, had made a start some years before.

In an interview, *Mr Friedhelm Nelles*, Managing Director of the Vintners' Cooperative Dernau, explains the structure: “Today, 600 vintners are members of the Dernau vintners' cooperative, who grow wine here at the Ahr on 155 hectares. The Ahr has a total vineyard area of 525 ha, which is why Dernau has become the largest cooperative on the Ahr through mergers. The vintners participate financially with business shares that are based on centners (quintals/hundredweights). A business share costs 1000 euros per 100 centners of grapes. The tasks in our cooperative are distributed as follows: The vintners grow their grapes, harvest them in autumn and deliver them to the cooperative. The employees of the cooperative are responsible for the maturing, production and marketing. The vintners receive from us a “grape money”, which depends on the level of the Öchsle values



Vintners' cooperatives Dernau. (picture www.dagernova.de)

(weight of the unfermented grape juice = sugar concentration). When the winegrower has tipped his grapes in autumn and the cellar master has accepted delivery, usually everything has been done by the winegrower. The grapes are processed here, then matured into wine, and we are then responsible for marketing of the wine. We advise our vintners regarding cultivation, give cultivation recommendations, i.e. which grape varieties are in vogue, etc. Viticulture is a long-term thing. Areas have to be cleared and the vines replanted – this is a time-consuming job, and the gain from newly cultivated areas is achieved only after quite a few years.

How was the success brought about?

Asked how the cooperative's success was achieved, Mr Nelles explained: “In the eighties there was a glut of wine, which prompted the vintners' cooperative to restructure the work in the vineyard along the lines of the large wineries. The state government and the EU then considered how to curb the glut. The vintners of the cooperative have changed their work in the vineyard, in the style of the large vintners. They have cut off the superfluous grapes, they have also done the foliage work differently, in this suction the cooperatives have come in. A model was then developed which allows 130 kg to be achieved over an area of 100 m².

There's a contingent. For example, if the winegrower has harvested 20 centners too much, he does not get paid for it. What exceeds 130 kg cannot be marketed.

But since the cooperative is seen as *one* business, this can contribute to the balance with other vintners. There are individual vintners who are much lower, harvesting only 100 centners and not 130, and then we can market the whole as a cooperative. What we get for the 30 kg will then benefit the general public.

So we have 155 hectares times 130 centners, which is the total marketable quantity that we can market in one year. We can store everything that is above and market it the following year. Other large wine-growing areas are forced to distill their grapes – industrial alcohol is made from it.”

Today, Mr. Nelles said, there were no generation and sales problems at the Ahr, as for example at the Moselle. There, there were generational problems, problems with the payment price, there the vintners would leave the cooperatives and look for other wineries. The Ahr with its area of only 550 hectares is manageable, but for example the municipality of *Leiden on the Moselle* for itself, is as large as the entire Ahr area. Both areas have steep slopes.

For two years in a row, Dernau presented the German queen of wine, an indication for the good know-how of this region.

Advantages of the Business Model Cooperative

“We have employed a total of 32 people here, including the salespeople. Two members of the Management Board and one honorary Supervisory Board manage the

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"Vintners' cooperatives in ..."

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business. Among our vintners there are about 12 full-time winefarms, the others are also active in sideline businesses.

It is the vintners who determine what will become of the cooperative. As board members, we are always under the pressure of the associates, if our work is not successful and the associates are not satisfied. Of course, the payout price is the decisive criterion for the vintners. Our vintners are satisfied, otherwise we could not keep 600 vintners in line. If every winegrower had to develop his own wines, he would need the technical facilities and the know-how, he would have to be in possession of the sales channels. The best example of this problem can be seen on the Moselle, where red wine was first cultivated years ago. But behind red wine stands a completely different cellar philosophy than behind white wine, the vintners there have taken years to produce a decent red wine. The winemaking facilities are different from those for white wine."

The cooperatives cannot have worked that badly then. Let's take the joint stock company for comparison.

The business model of the joint-stock company has suffered greatly in recent years, as speculations with the share capital was performed. This is not possible with cooperatives because of the strong control. The vintners identify with their company as if it was their own family business.

The tasks of the management

"We hold our meetings at regular intervals to discuss all these matters with the Supervisory Board. Once a year, we hold a general assembly with our vintners directly, and otherwise we are available for the cooperative members by telephone and personally. We always have enough people who volunteer as supervisory board members. The new generation is already in the starting blocks.

We can assess the economic situation, we even have to. We know the sales channels into which we pass our wine. This allows us to adjust our prices accordingly in advance. Of course, this may change in the course of the year, for example, the banks' crisis has also affected us. The consumer no longer had that much money in his wallet. In principle, the payments we make to the vintners are based on the success of the year. Our members are paid in six instalments. We start on 1 July. Then the first instalment is due."

Marketing

"We have changed our marketing strategy, our name too. We have been making red wine for a long time, but now we also make excellent white wine. We have developed a different cellar technology. Approximately 15 years ago, it all started with the white wine boom here. There was not enough white wine: Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris. These are the varieties you can find here. In 2003 we started a cooperation with the Mittelrhein cooperative. They deliver the grapes from 4 ha of vineyards to us on the Ahr. We cultivate and mar-

ket the wines here in our cellars. We have purchased cooling tanks to ensure that the white wine ferments as slowly as possible so that the fruit remains in the wine. We have a strong demand for white wine. Already in August/September we are no longer in a position to deliver.

About 50% of the harvest goes to the direct sales at the sale's point and to the online shop here, the remaining 50% go to the food trade, the specialist trade and to the local gastronomy. Export is a negligible factor.

Our goal is, of course, to sell directly to the end consumer, because then the revenues are better."

Tourism and festivals

Today, the Ahr valley is very much influenced by tourism. The main catchment area comprises the Cologne-Bonn area as well as Düsseldorf, Aachen and Mönchengladbach. You'll be here in an hour by car. Mr Nelles explains: "Unlike in the sixties and seventies, when people came to the Ahr with special trains and buses – we called this the visitors with the skittles club atmosphere – today young families come, but also seniors who hike and stop in. We have here the red wine footpath, also the cycle path along the Ahr, from there meanwhile a completely different clientele has gathered here.

We also organise wine festivals and other events, such as the wine spring or seminars. Its organiser is the tourist office 'Winzerdorf Dernau'. The local associations also take part in the parade, they build the wagons, for example, and there is a great deal of idealism. The cooperative and the large vintners take part. The cooperative also supplies its wine, but the festivals are not so relevant to sales. Every week, several wine tastings take place in our newly designed sales halls. Sundays is also open and we are pleased about the numerous visits of the guests." (cf. <https://www.dagernova.de/>)

Future

Commenting on the future prospects, Mr Nelles said: "We have no generational problems here. The youth stands by their cooperative. As far as the cooperative idea is concerned, we have considered, together with the local *Volksbanken* (cooperative banks) and the schools, to bring the essence of the cooperative system closer to the pupils again. The history of our cooperative is a success story that must be passed on to future generations."

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



Dernau (picture ma)