

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*

Self-determination – a human right

by Erika Vögeli

The argumentation against the popular initiative “Swiss law, not foreign judges” (Self-determination Initiative) has – once again before a referendum – reached an unspeakable degree of alarmist unobjectivity. The opponents of the initiative are conjuring up the downfall of Switzerland, its “encapsulation” and “isolation” in economic areas, the decline of legal certainty and even our moral decline in the area of human rights. Since the initiative was launched by the SVP (Swiss People’s Party), the ban on thinking “This comes from the SVP” should already have an effect on many people.

It is obviously no longer a question of facts, but of creating a mood among voters with arbitrarily inflated arguments. This is the real threat to democracy. Because democracy can function only honestly, if all bases of a decision are present objectively correct. Threats and scenarios of economic downfall are not part of it. Just one thought in advance: Switzerland already existed before 2012. As is well known, the reason for the initiative was a federal court decision in

2012, which turned the previously observed principle of the primacy of the constitution upside down and which the initiative is only intended to bring back. We were not doing too badly six years ago. The economy also was performing quite well back then.

International law – what is it all about?

The initiative demands that the Swiss federal constitution take precedence over non-binding international law. The prohibition of violence, the prohibition of torture, the provisions of international humanitarian law and procedural rights are therefore not affected by the initiative. However, the majority of international agreements are agreements that have nothing to do with such fundamental agreements: These include agreements on diplomatic relations, technical agreements and much more. But also more far-reaching agreements on trade relations. They are concluded by the “Federal Council, the departments, groups or federal offices”, like the Federal Council writes.

Thus the Federal Council listed in its “Report on the international treaties concluded in 2016” to the federal assembly a total of 526 such international treaties for 2015 and 461 treaties for 2016. In addition, 346 treaty amendments are mentioned for 2015 and 352 for the following year (cf. BBI 2017, p. 4594f.). In addition, there are further agreements that the Federal Council does not have to list, as they are subject to ratification by parliament and are therefore known to it.

Why all this should be above the federal constitution is incomprehensible. The fact that the federal offices and the Federal Council want to seize a constitutional right that is contradictory to any separation of powers, over and above the legislative and sovereign, contradicts any basic democratic understanding.

Bogy of “isolation”

In other countries, it is a matter of course that their own constitution takes precedence

continued on page 2

Accepting the self-determination initiative means strengthening direct democracy

by Dr phil. René Roca, Research Institute for Direct Democracy (www.fidd.ch)

The initiative “Swiss law, not foreign judges” (“Self-determination Initiative”) formulates a constitutional principle that makes sense to every democrat. The constitution of one’s own country is the foundation of the rule of law, both internally and externally. Acting as part of the sovereign, you do not conclude any international treaty that contradicts your own state constitution.

The reason for the initiative is that our Federal Supreme Court has for some time now no longer been willing to fully observe this principle.

The Swiss Federal Supreme Court paradigm shift

Since the European Enlightenment, the separation of powers has been a central foundation of a democratic state under the rule of law, alongside popular sovereignty. In 2012, the Swiss Federal Supreme Court carried out a grave para-

digm shift by declaring that in the future international law would take precedence over Swiss national law, i.e. the Federal Constitution. The Federal Supreme Court states: “If there is a genuine conflict of laws between federal and international law, Switzerland’s obligation under international law takes precedence; this even applies to agreements that do not concern human rights or fundamental freedoms”.¹ Without discussion and federal vote, the Federal Supreme Court thus disregards the principle of the separation of powers and places itself autocratically above the people, parliament and government.

Passage on “international law” smuggled into the new Federal Constitution

Former Federal Councillor *Arnold Koller* still describes the last total revision of the Federal Constitution of 1999 as a “mere

tracking” to this day. However, shortly after the new Federal Constitution was adopted, distinguished lawyers predicted that “no stone will remain on the other” with regard to our political system. Article 5 of the current Federal Constitution states: “The Confederation and the Cantons shall respect international law”. Nowhere is there a qualification of exactly what is meant by “international law”; there has never been a clarification about the relationship of the Federal Constitution to international law nor a debate on it. The clique of judges now wants to autocritically tell us how Article 5 of the Constitution should be interpreted. The aim is to subject Switzerland to international standards, some of which are ideologically determined. And all of this is just “tracking”...?

continued on page 2

"Self-determination – a human right"

continued from page 1

edence over international law. In most countries, international agreements first have to be converted into a national law and, as such, remain subordinate to the constitution, which always overrides legislation.

The "supplementary report of the Federal Council to its report of 5 March 2010 on the relationship between international law and federal state law of 30 March 2011" also states that the Federal Council assumes the primacy of more recent constitutional law – i.e. amendments to the federal constitution, for example by a popular initiative – and justifies this "with Article 190 of the federal constitution, which prevents the courts from substituting their own weighing of interests for the consideration of the legislature". If the decisions of the legislature are already binding on the courts, this must apply all the more to the decisions of the constitutional legislature, which are democratically even more strongly legitimised". (www.admin.ch/opc/delfederal-gazette/2011/3613.pdf BBI p. 3658)

The lawyer *Katharina Fontana*, long-time federal court rapporteur for the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", today at *Weltwoche*, also points this out: In 2012, the federal office of justice was still quoted as saying: "In conflicts between a new constitutional provision and international law 'in the view of the Federal Council the more recent constitutional provision

prevails', the office wrote. And he continues: 'This means that [...] contradictory obligations under international law must be renegotiated whenever possible or, if necessary, terminated. That is exactly what the self-determination initiative demands and what for a long time was the dominant opinion.'" (Fontana, Katharina. Tutoring from the director. *Weltwoche* from 26 September 2018)

As the Federal Council itself writes in 2011, it is unacceptable that the basis of our state coexistence should be determined by a few individual judges. Judges are in principle bound by the law – they should ensure that it is observed. Legislation, especially at the constitutional level, is reserved for a different power.

What the self-determination initiative demands was therefore customary practice in Switzerland until 2012. Until 2012, when five judges of the federal supreme court turned this previously valid order upside down with a majority of one vote – three to two – (see also *René Roca's* article below).

The argumentation of the opponents, obviously relying only on scaremongering, is unobjective, because everyone knows what fact is: Switzerland has neither been isolated under international law nor economically endangered, nor has it been shunned because of legal uncertainty. On the contrary.

On the other hand, it should go without saying that international treaties can always be reconsidered. The world is developing, the problems are changing, the solutions must be adaptable accordingly.

Human rights – Federal Constitution guarantees more than ECHR

Human rights are not affected by the initiative, because the provisions of the ECHR are fully contained in the federal constitution. *Luzius Theiler* (GPB-DA), a long-time Green politician, writes in *Europa-Magazin*, which sees itself as critical of the EU, ecological and social: "Incidentally, it is a fact that not only all the principles of the ECHR are also contained in the catalogue of fundamental rights of the Swiss federal constitution, but that the constitution goes beyond them in important respects." (Theiler, Luzius. Switzerland and international law. *Europa Magazin* from 9 October 2017)

It is also a fact that fundamental human rights, such as equal participation in decisions on coexistence that directly affect everyone, have been realized to an extent that is unparalleled in direct democracy in Switzerland. It is precisely this freedom that constitutes human dignity.

This right also justifies majority decision-making. The fact that majorities can also be wrong is not an argument against it. "As an argument against majority decisions, this objection only makes sense if one is of the opinion that there is a minority that cannot be mistaken. That is obviously nonsense. [...] Majority decisions are quite simply the result of the human right to equal participation in decision-making processes. Majority decisions take into account the opinion of more people than decisions

continued on page 3

"Accepting the self-determination ..."

continued from page 1

The Swiss Federal State has not only respected human rights and international law, but also promoted them

The fact that the self-determination initiative endangers human rights is absurd. On the contrary, the initiative restores the legitimate relationship between national law and international law. This discussion is necessary and finally concretizes the aforementioned Article 5 of our Federal Constitution.

The whole development towards a Swiss federal state would not have been possible without the observance and implementation of human rights, even if not everything was perfect from the outset and the women's right to vote was introduced far too late. Until the last total revision of the Federal Constitution in 1999, human rights were at best mentioned individually, but not in their entirety. This did not mean that they were not the basis of the state, they were "implicitly" part of the constitution. The constitutional lawyers knew this at the time, and the Federal Supreme Court in-

terpreted the constitution and laws accordingly.

Without human rights, Switzerland would not have developed such a unique and impressive model of state in the 19th century, especially with direct democracy, that is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Switzerland's model is admired abroad by all political camps precisely because of its codetermination rights, and the Swiss Confederation regularly serves as a role model when a country struggles for more participation.

That the self-determination initiative negates international law is equally absurd. Switzerland continues to make decisive advances in international law, for which there is no need for an article in the Federal Constitution. It has established international *humanitarian law* (*Red Cross, ICRC*) and is still a signatory state and thus guardian of the *Geneva Conventions*. As a neutral state, Switzerland has a vested interest in ensuring that countries adhere to general international law (e.g. the *UN Charter*) and humanitarian law, but this is repeatedly sacrificed to power politics. However, Switzerland is not involved in this.

Disregard for the will of the people has to stop

Direct democracy also serves to uncover and, if possible, remedy wrongs and shortcomings. This includes raising awareness of state policy principles such as the requirement that national law – i.e. the constitution – be above international treaties.

The events surrounding the "Mass Immigration Initiative" and the sellout in the form of "Priority for Swiss Nationals Light" have made it clear that the disregard for the will of the people is taken into consideration by a part of our political elite. This example clearly showed that certain politicians now act in accordance with the Federal Supreme Court and give greater weight to international law (in this case the free movement of persons) than to the Federal Constitution and thus to a referendum.

Such processes must in future be prevented with the adoption of the initiative, as otherwise our direct democracy and the will of the people will be laid to rest. •

¹ Federal Court decisions 2012, judgement 2C_828/2011 of 12.10.2012 (www.servat.unibe.ch/dfr/dfr_bger2012.html)

Politics going over everybody's head

With its hasty approval of the UN migration pact, the Bundesrat is losing its grip on reality

rt. The Federal Council approved the UN Migration Pact. The interested reader was informed of this on the FDFA's homepage (10 October 2018)¹. It states that the interdepartmental IMZ structure [international migration cooperation] had previously been commissioned to continue the analysis of the domestic and foreign policy effects. This analysis had shown that the migration pact corresponded to Switzerland's interests in the field of migration. The treaty is not binding, but it will be adhered to politically. Now, domestically, there is resistance to the detached approach of the Federal Council.

Orwellian Newspeak

For anyone who reads the treaty² wonders what "interests of Switzerland" the Federal Council actually meant when it speaks of "interests of Switzerland". If one omits the diplomatic wording, almost reminiscent of Orwellian Newspeak, when reading the treaty, it becomes clear that the treaty aims at an unhindered right of immigration for all people from all countries. Not only for refugees or asylum seekers, but for everyone, worldwide. Migration movements should be actively supported by all states. Immigrants and those passing through should be cleared of obstacles and their arrival should be accompanied positively by

the media. There should be a right to settle wherever one wants.³

Democratic rights are ignored

For reasons of state sovereignty, Austria, Australia, Poland, the USA, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia and many other states have already signalled that they will not sign such a treaty. The treaty interferes too deeply with the democratic rights of the population in the individual countries. It is no longer the population that determines the laws of their coexistence, but the laws are predetermined by a "review forum on international migration and other relevant fora".⁴

continued on page 4

"Self-determination – a human ..."

continued from page 2

by minorities." (Ruppen, Paul. Democracy and international legal order. *Europa-Magazin* from 9 October 2017) With direct democracy and the primacy of the constitution above all the possible, the population nevertheless has the opportunity to become active itself and to correct any undesirable developments. Abolishing this corrective cannot serve the common good.

Bogy of legal uncertainty

Above all, it is the representatives of certain economic interests – by no means "the" economy, which also includes numerous local companies such as SMEs, etc. – who loudly argue with the danger of a loss of legal certainty in international affairs. It would disadvantage Swiss companies who wanted to plan for the long term and who would no longer be able to guarantee compliance with international treaties if the initiative were adopted. There was even a threat that more than 600 contracts would have to be renegotiated. After specific questioning and repeated digging deeper in an interview with a journalist, Federal Councillor *Simonetta Sommaruga* finally referred to the moratorium on genetic engineering, which would be incompatible with the WTO rules of international free trade agreements (see "Basler-Zeitung" from 2 October 2018). – The moratorium is supported by broad sections of the population; it has been in force since 2005 and was only extended again in 2017 (!).

This is, after all, a clear indication of what it is really about. Free trade at any price cannot, in any case, be the motto. From a point of view oriented towards the common good, there are certainly reasons to restrict international trade. Incidentally, this would be a concern that is not SVP-

specific at all. *Paul Ruppen*, president of the Forum for Direct Democracy, who has already been quoted, continues: "Most opponents of the initiative are less concerned with human rights than with being able to conduct their international business as unhindered as possible by democratic influences and to be able to shape the corresponding international rules according to their own interests as far as possible without too much democratic interference".

These concerns not only come from the "left" side, but are also shared by liberals and business personalities such as *Rolf Dörig*, president of the *Swiss Insurance Association* and chairman of the boards of directors of the *Adecco Group* and *Swiss Life*. In 2002, for example, in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", he expressed the same opinion about "many, too many business leaders": "Uncontrolled globalisation, the neo-liberal market and competition as the only valid maxims were their desired objectives". And in a text based on a speech at the EDA Ambassadors' Conference on 2 May 2018 he warned in connection with a framework agreement: "It's not just about the economy and market access, it's about our society and thus about the foundations of our country. It is about central values such as freedom, independence, direct democracy and federalism. In these sensitive areas we not only have a few thin red lines, but double red security lines. [...] We all know that we enjoy two advantages in this nation of will: more personal freedom and more political participation and self-determination." (cf. guest commentary in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 18 May 2018)

The tendency to curb the influence of the citizens of the states and restrict basic democratic rights in favour of control over the financial power of transnational corporations and the financial "in-

dustry" is a development in the wrong direction. The economy should serve the people – not the profit maximization of a few. Nor is it intended to use financial power to steer votes. The fact that *economiesuisse* is now distributing 2.2 million voting newspapers throughout Switzerland, i.e. in practically every household, is something it can of course do. At least, it is clear which interests are really involved here. But ultimately it is not necessary or sensible for the majority of the Swiss economy either.

Contrary to all objections to this initiative, we actually know: It is the realisation of the self-determination of our community that comes closest to respect for fundamental human rights and human dignity. And it is precisely for this reason that direct democracy has given our country a degree of inner peace and legal security that many envy. Let us take care of it. •

ev. With all due understanding for the concerns of the economy, the developments of recent years and decades are indeed heading in a direction that is neither conducive to life nor compatible with the common good. The 2018 distribution report of the *Swiss Federation of Trade Unions* lets you pause and ask yourself: Is that supposed to be Switzerland's way? It lists, for example, how Switzerland's wealth has developed in recent years, and unfortunately it is following the global trend towards concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. According to this report, the richest one per cent of taxpayers in Switzerland had more than 41.9% of private net assets in 2014. Ten years earlier, the figure was still around 35%. Shouldn't development tend in the opposite direction?

"Politics going over everybody's ..."

continued from page 3

In addition, the treaty intervenes very extensively in domestic policy areas that are subject to the shaping of the population in the respective states (social legislation⁵, criminal law provisions on freedom of expression⁶, data protection⁷, etc.). *Andreas Büchi*, Editor-in-Chief of the "Beobachter", is not wrong to state that "waving through such a far-reaching agreement without the consent of at least Parliament or even the people is dangerous ideological coercion. Fears are growing in many European countries, but also in Switzerland, that the state will soon have too few resources to fulfil social agreements with its own people. In this situation signing a treaty where the implementation lacks realistic implementation plans and broad-based approval in the target countries is water on the mill of furious populist movements."⁸

"Advantages of regulated migration"

What are "Swiss interests" in such a contract supposed to be? Who exactly has an "interest" in it? We do remember: Right at the beginning, the mass immigration in 2015 was very much welcomed by a leading member of the *Deutsche Bank* as well as the Prince of Liechtenstein who is actively investing. From the point of view of a globalised economy, of course, this treaty makes sense. Young and/or trained workers can easily be headhunted from abroad without bearing the training costs incurred. At the same time wages and working conditions in the country of production can be reduced by a targeted influx of labour, and the state, i.e. the taxpayer, pays the resulting social costs of migration movements.

Migration is not voluntary

The other side of the coin is blanked out from the debate: Most rarely, "migration" is not voluntary but caused by war, eco-

conomic hardship, or political oppression. Statistics show that migration itself affects almost one per cent of the world's population.⁹ It is not a human need. For the people affected, it is a hard fate, as you can see if you take a closer look at the causes.

- Many wars and civil wars that lead to migration are caused by Western states and have partly destroyed societies that had high educational and social standards (e.g. Iraq, Syria, Libya), or are rich in natural resources (e.g. Congo, Sudan), or are simply of strategic interest (e.g. Afghanistan).
- The economic causes of the migration include the increasing land grabbing by foreign corporations or states with the help of corrupt local elites. Local farmers or shepherds are expelled. In the meantime, the area "stolen" in this way has grown to the size of Europe. Much of the land is in Africa.
- The destruction of domestic economies by so-called "free trade agreements" (globalisation). The independent development of different branches of the economy is prevented through various treaties.
- The plundering of resources (e.g. raw materials or fishing grounds, for example off the coast of Africa) without the local population having a share of the profits.
- The so-called brain drain: the costly trained young workers and university graduates are coaxed (e.g. doctors from Ukraine, Belarus, etc.). They are missing in the development of their own country.¹⁰

Why not tackle the causes?

These causes are covered up in the UN global migration pact with beautiful general phrases. Concrete steps to combat the above-mentioned causes are not mentioned. The reader stands under the impression that it neither was the focus of the pact

formulated by high officials from the UN apparatus. Instead of channeling uprooted people through foreign countries and cultures to become cheap labourers, the causes of wars could be fought or the negative effects of globalisation be limited so that people can live in peace in their own countries.

It is not surprising that the treaty is, inter alia, supported by the active multi-billionaire and stock market speculator, *George Soros*. We do remember that offshoots of the *Soros Foundation* had welcomed the mass immigration via the Balkan route in 2015 and called for a new immigration policy.¹¹

In Germany, the wave of illegal mass immigration in 2015 led to greater social upheaval, uncertainty in the legal culture, political radicalisation and increased criminal assault.

Now, what are Switzerland's "interests" supposed to be? How did the Federal Council repeatedly agree to international treaties (international law!) without public discussion, treaties obviously contradict the concerns of the population? •

¹ cf. <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/aktuell/informationen-deseda.html/content/eda/de/meta/news/2018/10/10/72452>, download 10/25/2018

² Source: www.un.org/depts/german/migration/A_CONF.231.3.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1n1FJx5rvoOZCt0qehR3M-iqF42W2W23_ixmXtnojXyGbls3xxQNk9h-FQ, as of July 30, 2018

³ loc. cit. para. 21, 22, 23

⁴ loc. cit., par. 48.a-e.

⁵ loc. cit., para. 31a-f

⁶ loc. cit., para. 33a-g

⁷ loc. cit., para. 17, para. 19

⁸ cf. "Beobachter" <https://www.beobachter.ch/migration/migrationspakt-nicht-voreilig-unterschreiben> of 10/19/2018

⁹ Hofbauer, Hannes. Criticism of migration. Who profiles and who loses. Vienna 2018, p. 18

¹⁰ cf. Hofbauer, loc. cit.

¹¹ Beck, Friederike. The secret migration agenda. 2016, p. 253

Draft outcome document of the Conference Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" on 10 and 11 December 2018 in Marrakech (Morocco) – excerpts

cc. The following excerpts from the draft of a "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" (as of 30 July 2018) are an attempt to give a first impression of the content and language of the planned UN document. The document tries to meet different, even conflicting demands. However, the fact that this important document has so far hardly been publicly discussed, let alone fully acknowledged, is a scandal for democratic states. It will have an impact on the daily lives of each and every one of us. The document contains so many important details that require

a broad debate. These excerpts too can only give a first impression and call for the whole text to be studied and discussed.

"Our vision and guiding principles

[...] Migration has been part of the human experience throughout history, and we recognize that it is a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalized world, and that these positive impacts can be optimized by improving migration governance. [...]

Common understanding

[...] We learned that migration is a defining feature of our globalized world, connecting societies within and across all regions, making us all countries of origin, transit and destination. [...] We [...] must provide all our citizens with access to objective, evidence-based, clear information about the benefits and challenges of migration, with a view to dispelling misleading narratives that generate negative perceptions of migrants.

continued on page 5

"Draft outcome document of ..."

continued from page 4

Shared responsibilities

[...] This Global Compact aims to mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin, and so compel them to seek a future elsewhere. It intends to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities migrants face at different stages of migration by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights and providing them with care and assistance. [...] It strives to create conducive conditions that enable all migrants to enrich our societies through their human, economic and social capacities, and thus facilitate their contributions to sustainable development at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Unity of purpose

[...] Our success rests on the mutual trust, determination and solidarity of States to fulfil the objectives and commitments contained in this Global Compact. We unite, in a spirit of win-win cooperation, to address the challenges and opportunities of migration in all its dimensions through shared responsibility and innovative solutions. It is with this sense of common purpose that we take this historic step, fully aware that the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is a milestone, but not the end to our efforts. [...]

We agree that this Global Compact is based on a set of cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles:

[...] The Global Compact is a non-legally binding cooperative framework that recognizes that no State can address migration on its own because of the inherently transnational nature of the phenomenon. [...]. The Global Compact reaffirms the sovereign right of States to determine their national migration policy and their prerogative to govern migration within their jurisdiction, in conformity with international law. Within their sovereign jurisdiction, States may distinguish between regular and irregular migration status, including as they determine their legislative and policy measures for the implementation of the Global Compact, taking into account different national realities, policies, priorities and requirements for entry, residence and work, in accordance with international law; [...]

The Global Compact aims to leverage the potential of migration for the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the impact this achievement will have on migration in the future; [...]

By implementing the Global Compact, we ensure effective respect for and protection and fulfilment of the human

rights of all migrants, regardless of their migration status, across all stages of the migration cycle. We also reaffirm the commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance, against migrants and their families; [...]

Objectives for safe, orderly and regular migration

- [...] Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin [...]
- Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation [...]
- Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work
- Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration [...]
- Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral [...]
- Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle
- Provide access to basic services for migrants
- Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration [...]

[...] We commit to eliminate all forms of discrimination, condemn and counter expressions, acts and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, violence, xenophobia and related intolerance against all migrants in conformity with international human rights law. We further commit to promote an open and evidence-based public discourse on migration and migrants in partnership with all parts of society, that generates a more realistic, humane and constructive perception in this regard. We also commit to protect freedom of expression in accordance with international law, recognizing that an open and free debate contributes to a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of migration.

To realise this commitment, we will draw from the following actions:

- a) Enact, implement or maintain legislation that penalizes hate crimes and aggravated hate crimes targeting migrants, and train law enforcement and other public officials to identify, prevent and respond to such crimes and other acts of violence that target migrants, as well as to provide medical, legal and psychosocial assistance for victims;
- b) Empower migrants and communities to denounce any acts of incitement to violence directed towards migrants by informing them of available mechanisms for redress, and

ensure that those who actively participate in the commission of a hate crime targeting migrants are held accountable, in accordance with national legislation, while upholding international human rights law, in particular the right to freedom of expression;

- c) Promote independent, objective and quality reporting of media outlets, including Internet-based information, including by sensitizing and educating media professionals on migration-related issues and terminology, investing in ethical reporting standards and advertising, and stopping allocation of public funding or material support to media outlets that systematically promote intolerance, xenophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination towards migrants, in full respect for the freedom of the media; [...]
- e) Provide migrants, especially migrant women, with access to national and regional complaint and redress mechanisms with a view to promoting accountability and addressing governmental actions related to discriminatory acts and manifestations carried out against migrants and their families;
- f) Promote awareness-raising campaigns targeted at communities of origin, transit and destination in order to inform public perceptions regarding the positive contributions of safe, orderly and regular migration, based on evidence and facts, and to end racism, xenophobia and stigmatization against all migrants;
- g) Engage migrants, political, religious and community leaders, as well as educators and service providers, to detect and prevent incidences of intolerance, racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination against migrants and diasporas, and support activities in local communities to promote mutual respect, including in the context of electoral campaigns. [...]

Follow-up and review

We encourage all Member States to develop, as soon as practicable, ambitious national responses for the implementation of the Global Compact, and to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national level, such as through the voluntary elaboration and use of a national implementation plan. Such reviews should draw on contributions from all relevant stakeholders, as well as parliaments and local authorities, and serve to effectively inform the participation of Member States in the International Migration Review Forum and other relevant forums. [...]"

Source:
<https://undocs.org/A/CONF.231/3>
as of 30 July 2018

The UN Global Compact for Migration shows the urgency of the Self-determination Initiative

mw. The UN Global Compact for Migration is rather inconvenient for opponents of the Self-determination Initiative, because here the Federal Council wants to sign an international treaty without consulting parliament. The justification that it is actually not an agreement, but a “non-binding” document, misses the point. Experience has shown that the Federal Council, with its administrative staff and the “help” of various NGOs, will rapidly start to implement the document, non-binding or not.

A few weeks before the vote on the Self-determination Initiative, the responsible parliamentary commissions are getting nervous. The process around the UN Compact makes the urgency of the Self-determination Initiative very clear. Despite all attempts of appeasement by Federal Councillor *Cassis*, the Compact can have far-reaching consequences without the parliament having anything to say about it, much less the people.

The aim is to “facilitate labour mobility”

The UN Global Compact for Migration is a 32-page document. Without being able to go into more details here: Its aim is to facilitate the “labour mobility” by calling on the states [which obviously means, above all, the European states] to conclude international and bilateral cooperation agreements in which the right of residence, work permits, family reunification, access to social insurance and much more are to be regulated. Switzerland, for example, has already regulated all these areas in detail in its law. However, the Compact wants to persuade the states to extend the rights of immigrants in their national legislation in many respects. This would include interventions in media freedom [“sensitising” journalists with regards to the use of “migration terms” and the like] or an active promotion of “safe migration” in countries of origin and transit.

Resistance in the National Council: Federal Council should not approve the Compact

On 2 November, the Political Institutions Committee of the National Council (PIC-N) decided by 15 votes to 9 to discourage the Federal Council from signing the UN Global Compact for Migration. This was on the grounds that Switzerland should “not commit itself internationally to objectives which might be contrary to national law”. (Press release PIC-N from 2.11.2018) The legally non-binding nature of the document is undisputed in the Committee, said PIC President *Kurt Fluri*

Austria says no to UN Global Compact for Migration

As one more state, Austria has announced that it will not sign the UN Global Compact for Migration. From the speech of the Austrian Federal Chancellor to the Council of Ministers:

“After a detailed examination, the Federal Government has considerable reservations in terms of content and objectives of the UN Global Compact for Migration. According to the Austrian Federal Government, state action in the field of migration has to be based on national laws or international treaties to which Parliament has previously given its constitutional consent. Against this backdrop, it is explicitly stated that Austria regards the UN Global Compact for Migration as not binding under international law. In particular, the Federal Government is of the opinion that this compact does not confirm or create a human right to migrate, whether through customary international law, soft law or international jurisdiction. In the future, Austria will consistently declare to a suitable group of addressees that it regards the compact as non-binding under in-

ternational law, and that Austria’s state practice is also to be designed accordingly and that also in the future Austria will not participate financially in the implementation of this compact.

There must not be any dilution of legal and illegal migration, as is to be feared through this compact. The sovereignty of Austria must be preserved at all times. [...]

The Austrian Federal Government considers the adoption of the UN Global Compact for Migration to be unsuitable for dealing with migration issues. Austria will therefore not join the UN Global Compact for Migration and abstain in the UN General Assembly to clarify the concerns.”

Quoted from: Austrian Federal-Chancellor, 31 October 2018, Karin Kneissl [Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs]: Speech to the Council of Ministers https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/1068065/33_11_mrv_Votumserklaerung.pdf/2998648a-b042-4863-b0ee-7a473ff28977

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

(FDP). “But the majority is convinced that the Compact is politically binding and that the included demands will be taken up by politicians and organisations”. (“*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” from 3.11.2018)

Meanwhile, FDP foreign policy expert *Hans-Peter Portmann* called for a popular referendum on the signing of the UN Global Compact for Migration in coordination with the FDP party leadership. Portmann’s initiative has been discussed and rejected in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council (FAC-N) on 5/6 November (Press release FAC-N from 6 November).

* * *

The fact that resistance against the UN Compact is coming up among parliamentarians, proves the need for the Self-determination Initiative. The Initiative would like to correct exactly such questionable procedures, as the Federal Council had intended with its signature single-handedly. It does not ask for anything revolutionary, but merely wants to bring back the direct-democratic rights of the electorate, which have always been written in the constitution. A “yes” to the Self-determination Initiative obliges the national councillors and councillors of states to protect the democratic rights in the future as well as they currently do in an exemplary manner – a few weeks before the voting date.

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli / Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-
for all other countries.

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

The editors reserve the right to shorten letters to the editor. Letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *Current Concerns*.

© 2013. All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

In the interest of all states: work for peace in Syria – now!

by Karl Müller

More than seven years into the war in Syria the Presidents of Turkey, France and Russia and the German Chancellor have agreed on fundamental points for a peace process in Syria. Many commentaries in Western media have mainly searched for flies in the ointment. It is true that critical points are to be considered in further steps. Still, the wording of the common declaration of 27 October 2018 at the end of the meeting in Istanbul, to which they had been invited by the Turkish President, is a ray of hope. Nothing would be more important for the people in Syria, the refugees and displaced persons and all who are affected by this war, directly or indirectly, than concrete steps following this ray of hope.

It would be a blessing if there really was movement in world politics and one of the focal points of this world politics – the events in Syria stand in many respects for the developments in the entire region of North Africa as well as the Near and Middle East – could come more to rest.

Motion in global politics?

There are signs for movement:

- Just one year ago it would have been unthinkable that political representatives of countries who have been on different sides in Syria have met and agreed on fundamental points for a peace process.
- It does not have to be a bad thing that the governments of USA and the United Kingdom which are among the main actors in the Syrian theatre did not participate in Istanbul. Maybe the French President and the German Chancellor acted in close consultation with the US and British governments. And if the French President and the German Chancellor had acted independently, this would be an important political step worth pointing out.
- The attempts of the Russian President to find an understanding with the Turkish President have demonstrated that the Russian politics are more interested in living democracy and substantial progress in substance than in adherence to yesterday's statements. The enlargement to include France and Germany was agreed upon in summer and could be along the same line.

- There are further Russian signals showing a willingness to come to an understanding with the large EU powers and also with EU itself, in order to defuse the current conflicts. An important hint within this Russian political line, albeit hardly noticed in public, may have been a talk of the Russian politician *Veronika Krasheninnikova* at the *German-Russian Forum* of 18 October 2018 in Berlin¹. She clearly denounced a policy of destabilising the EU by means of political forces she called “right-wing extremist”, they might also be called “EU critics”, using the standard argumentation patterns of the EU. The internet page of the German-Russian Forum reports: “In her talk she emphasised that Russia was a multi-ethnic state with various religions – there are Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Buddhists in Russia. For such a state supporting right-wing extremists would bring about enormous risks. ‘We have a responsibility for our country, but also for Europe’, she said. ‘A strong and solidary Europe is very important for us’, Krasheninnikova underlined, pointing to the important role played by Germany and France in the past.”

Syria and the migration issue

It is obvious that a peace process in Syria does not affect Syria alone and not just its immediate neighbour states but “global security and stability”, as the declaration states – not only from a military standpoint.

The Istanbul declaration also touches the issue of refugees and displaced persons. In his new book “*Kritik der Migration*” [Criticism of migration. Beneficiaries and losers], the Austrian publicist *Hannes Hofbauer* chose a fitting title for the question of the causes of Muslim migration: “The driving force: war”. Indeed: The wars of NATO states and their allies against (alleged) dictators and terrorists and the massive stirring of unrest in this region have brought an enormous death toll and vast destructions for North Africa and the Middle East. Here we should also repeat the words of the former parliamentary undersecretary and foreign affairs politician of the CDU, *Willy Wimmer*, cited by *Hannes Hofbauer*: “Between Afghanistan and Mali, the world is reduced to rubble under NATO’s thumb. Millions of people are being bombed out of

their civilisation. A future is no longer possible for these countries, nor is one’s own life. [...] War and unrest between Bangladesh and Nigeria, and economic considerations, too, create refugees.”

“Blowback” for imperialist politics

In the book “*Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*” by the US author *Chalmers Johnson* we could read, 18 years ago, that the imperialist US politics has to expect “blowbacks”, as Johnson calls it, and that the US will have to pay for their imperialist politics. This is what the European states experience now. They have supported imperialism and war politics against Africa and the Middle East almost unreservedly and actively; war was also the continuation of imperialist politics by other means. Is a rethinking beginning here and is the course about to change?

Example Germany

To name an example, a wrong policy has destabilised politics and society in Germany. The country of the “economic miracle”, which can rightly be called imperialist, is torn; freedom, democracy and the state of law are seriously endangered; the public debate has become hysterical and the spectre of a “danger from the right” is anaesthetising the freedom, producing a mental conformity. This will lead to escalations. The large shifts in votes during the last years are just the tip of the iceberg. *Angela Merkel’s* announcement that she will stand down as candidate for chairman of her party, the CDU, and also not stand for chancellor again, is a very late but logical consequence of wrong political decisions for which *Angela Merkel* is responsible. So now the German governing parties must all the more be obliged to their word after they announced that they want to concentrate on the factual work.

But they have got to get it right. The agreement for a common declaration towards a peace process in Syria, with France, Turkey and Russia, is a step forward. If the current German government would really contribute to peace in Syria, it would also be a way to atone for wrong political decisions in the past years. •

¹ cf. <http://www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de/forum-im-dialog-am-18-oktober-2018-in-berlin/905768>

Joint Statement by the Presidents of the Republic of Turkey, the French Republic, the Russian Federation and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

President of the Republic of Turkey H.E. *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, President of the French Republic H.E. *Emmanuel Macron*, President of the Russian Federation H.E. *Vladimir Putin*, and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany H.E. *Angela Merkel* gathered in Istanbul on 27 October 2018 for a Quadrilateral Summit on Syria.

The Presidents and the Chancellor,

- reviewed the recent developments regarding the conflict in Syria and expressed their shared concern on the risks and threats emanating from the conflict for regional as well as global security and stability;
- reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations;
- underlined their firm conviction that there could be no military solution to the ongoing conflict and that the conflict could be resolved only through a negotiated political process in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and emphasized, in this regard, the importance of increased coordination among all international initiatives which aim at contributing to a credible and sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict;
- reaffirmed their determination to fight against terrorism in Syria in order to ultimately eliminate DAESH/ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda or DAESH/ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council;
- expressed their determination to reject separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the national security of neighboring countries;
- welcomed the Memorandum on Stabilisation of the Situation in the Idlib De-escalation Area, signed by the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation in Sochi on 17 September 2018;

- commended the progress in terms of withdrawal of heavy weapons as well as radical groups from the demilitarized zone established pursuant to the Memorandum;
- stressed the importance of a lasting ceasefire, while underlining the necessity to continue fight against terrorism, through the full implementation of the effective measures as foreseen in the Memorandum and of the compliance of all relevant parties with its provisions;
- reaffirmed their strongest opposition to the use of chemical weapons by any party in Syria and called for strict compliance by all parties with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction;
- expressed their support for an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process that is facilitated by the United Nations and called for active participation in it of the Syrian parties;
- called for establishing and early convening, considering the circumstances, by the end of the year of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva that would achieve the constitutional reform, paving the way for free and fair elections under the UN supervision and in compliance with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate;
- emphasized the importance of implementing confidence-building measures to contribute to the viability of the political process and a lasting ceasefire, and expressed their support for the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies as well as the identification of the missing persons, as undertaken by the respective Working Group with the participation of the UN and ICRC experts;
- underscored the need to ensure humanitarian organizations' rapid, safe and unhindered access

throughout Syria and immediate humanitarian assistance to reach all people in need in order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, and, in this regard, called upon the international community, particularly the UN and its humanitarian agencies to increase their assistance to Syria;

- reaffirmed their solidarity with the host countries, in particular Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and recalled that they remain committed to the safe and voluntary return of refugees to Syria on conditions consistent with the international law;
- highlighted the need to create conditions throughout the country for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original places of residence in Syria, underlined that the returnees need security from armed conflict, political persecution or arbitrary arrests as well as humanitarian infrastructure, including water, electricity, health and social services, and emphasized the necessity of coordination among all relevant parties, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other specialized international agencies;
- expressed their commitment to working together in order to create conditions for peace and stability in Syria, encourage a political solution and strengthen international consensus in that regard.

The Presidents of the French Republic and the Russian Federation, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany expressed their sincere gratitude to the President of the Republic of Turkey H.E. *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan* for hosting the Quadrilateral Summit in Istanbul.

Istanbul, 27 October 2018

Source: <http://www.elysee.fr/communiqués-de-presse/article/joint-statement-by-the-presidents-of-the-republic-of-turkey-the-french-republic-the-russian-federation-and-the-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany/>

The Silk Road and Israel

by Thierry Meyssan

Beijing continues unceasingly to develop its "Silk Road" project. China's Vice-President, Wang Qishan, has undertaken a tour of the Near East which took him to Israel for four days. According to the agreements which have already been signed, within two years China will control the major part of Israel's agro-food industry, its high technology and its international exchanges. A free trade agreement should follow, and the geopolitics of the whole region will be turned upside down.

The visit of Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan to Israel, Palestine, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates is aimed at developing the "New Silk Road".

In the autumn of 2013, China made public its project for the creation of maritime and especially terrestrial communication routes across the world. It unblocked colossal sums of money and began to realise its plan at a rapid rate. The main axes will cross either Asia or Russia towards Western Europe. But it is also planning routes across Africa and Latin America.

The obstacles to the New Silk Road

The project is going to meet two obstacles, one of them economic, the other strategic.

From the Chinese point of view, this project is aimed at exporting its products according to the model of the ancient "Silk Road" which, from the 2nd to the 15th century, linked China to Europe via the Ferghana Valley, Iran and Syria. At the time, this concerned transporting products from town to town, so that at each stage they were exchanged for other goods according to the needs of the local merchants. However, today, on the contrary, China hopes to sell directly to Europe and the world. But their products are no longer exotic wares (silks, spices, etc.) but identical to those of the Europeans, and often of superior quality. The commercial route has been transformed into a super-highway. While Marco Polo was dazzled by the silks from the Far East without their equivalent in Italy, Angela Merkel is terrified at the idea of seeing her automobile industry destroyed by her Chinese competitors. The developed countries are therefore going to have to do business with Beijing, and at the same time, protect their industries from economic shock.

By massively exporting its production, China will take over the commercial place that the United Kingdom – at first alone, then with the United States – has occupied since the industrial revolution. It was specifically to maintain this supremacy that Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Atlan-

tic Charter and the United States engaged in the Second World War. It is therefore probable that the Anglo-Saxons will not hesitate to employ military force in order to hinder the Chinese project¹, just as they did in 1941 when faced with the German and Japanese projects.

Already in 2013, the Pentagon published the Wright plan, which programmed the creation of a new state straddling Iraq and Syria in order to cut the Silk Road between Baghdad and Damascus. This mission was carried out by Daesh – China therefore modified the layout of its route. Beijing finally decided to build the route through Egypt, and invested in the doubling of the Suez Canal and the creation of a vast industrial zone 120 kilometres from Cairo². Similarly, the Pentagon organised a "colour revolution" in Ukraine in order to cut the European route, and stirred up trouble in Nicaragua in order to prevent the construction of a new canal linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Despite the unprecedented importance of Chinese investment in the New Silk Road, we have to remember that in the 15th century, China launched a formidable navy in order to secure its markets. Admiral Zheng He, "the eunuch with three gems", fought the pirates of Sri Lanka, built pagodas in Ethiopia and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Notwithstanding, on his return, for reasons of interior politics, the Emperor abandoned the Silk Road and burned his ships. China then withdrew into itself. So we should not imagine that, from the Chinese point of view, the current project is a pre-ordained success.

In the recent past, China invested in the Middle East with the sole idea of ensuring its supply of oil. It built refineries in Iraq which were inconveniently destroyed either by Daesh or by the Western Forces who were pretending to combat the Islamists. Beijing also became the main buyer of Saudi Arabia's "black gold". It also constructed in the Kingdom the gigantic oil complex of Yasref-Yanbu for 10 billion dollars.

Israel and the New Silk Road

The links between Israel and China date from the mandate of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whose parents had fled the Nazis in order to settle in Shanghai. Benjamin Netanyahu's predecessor had tried to establish strong relations with Beijing, but his efforts were nullified by his support for one of the Somali pirate groups tasked by Washington with disturbing Russian and Chinese maritime traffic at the exit of the Red Sea³. A scandal was avoided by inches. China was au-

thorised to establish a naval base in Djibouti, and Ehud Olmert was excluded from political life.

China has been negotiating a free-trade treaty with Israel since 2016. In this context, the Shanghai International Port Group has bought the concession for the exploitation of the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, so that by 2021, China will control 90 % of Israeli commercial exchanges. Bright Food has already acquired 56 % of the Tnuva kibbutzim cooperative, and could increase its participation, so that China would control most of the Israeli agricultural market. The founder of the on-line store "Ali Baba", Jack Ma, who came to Tel-Aviv as part of the official Chinese delegation, did not hide his intention to buy up a number of Israeli start-ups in order to recuperate their high technology.

Armament is the only important sector of the Israeli economy still preserved from the Chinese appetite. In September, with the aid of the US Hudson Institute, professor Shaul Horev organised a conference at Haifa university in order to alert the Pentagon's general staff to the consequences of Chinese investment. In particular, the speakers emphasised that these contracts exposed the country to the risk of intensive spying, making it difficult to exploit the port for its nuclear missile-launching submarines, as well as its links with the US 6th Fleet.

The ex-director of Mossad, Ephraïm Halevy, known for his proximity to the United States, pointed out that the National Security Council had never deliberated on these investments, but that the decision had been made solely for reasons of commercial opportunity. This raises the question of whether or not Washington had authorised the rapprochement between Tel-Aviv and Beijing.

We should make no mistake about the reasons which allowed China to implant a military base in Djibouti, and it seems unlikely that Beijing concluded a secret agreement with Washington for the layout of this new Silk Road. Certainly, the United States will not be too worried about an economic collapse of the European Union. However, in the long term, China and Russia are obliged to maintain good relations in order to protect themselves from the Western powers. History has shown that the latter have done, and continue to do everything possible to dismantle these major powers. Consequently, if a China-US alliance would be in favour of Beijing in the short and medium term, it would

The NATO Wall

by Yvan Blot, France*

The Berlin Wall is a sad memory. For a “wall” to emerge, the following conditions must be there at least on one side of the wall:

1. A “hard” ideology determined by oligarchs in the belief of being scientific or of absolutistic logic (human rights = a new dogmatic religion). This is incompatible with freedom. They emphasize on so-called values of which *Heidegger* says that they are an insult to being. In the name of values they attack the being of nations.
2. A willingness to attack dissenters with sanctions and to disregard democrat-

* Yvan Blot was born in 1948 and died on 10 October 2018. He was a senior French civil servant, committed politician and author on historical, philosophical and political issues. He was also president of the association “Agir pour la démocratie directe”.

“The Silk Road and Israel”

continued from page 9

lead thereafter to the successive elimination of Russia and China itself.

The Chinese-Israeli agreements suggest that, as *Lenin* said, “the capitalists will sell us the rope we shall use to hang them”.

- ¹ “The Geopolitics of American Global Decline”, by Alfred McCoy, Tom Dispatch (USA), Voltaire Network, 22 June 2015.
- ² “China deploys in the Near East”, by Thierry Meyssan, Translation Pete Kimberley, Voltaire Network, 25 January 2016.
- ³ “21st century Pirates, Privateers and Filibusters”, by Thierry Meyssan, Translation Anoosha Boralessa, ?dnako (Russia), Voltaire Network, 25 June 2010.

(Translation Pete Kimberley)

Source: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article203672.html> from 30 October 2018

ic positions. This is incompatible with democratic sovereignty.

3. A military and police instrument to apply these dictatorial principles.

NATO fulfils these three criteria. Originally NATO was based on an anti-communist treaty, today it is about defending “Western values” corresponding to a hard fossilised ideology.

Thus, in a great historical paradox, a new type of USSR has emerged, however based on the ideological dictatorship of a market economy dominated by oligarchs.

The European Union is the political-economic version of this oligarchic system, denying the interests of the peoples and wants to suppress their voice.

The EU Commission is a kind of supreme bureaucratic Soviet, without any popular control being similar to the *Metternich Holy Alliance* of 1815: anything but democratic (but overthrown by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848).

The EU Parliament elected by the oligarchic parties is an uncompromising ideological Soviet.

The result is the creation of a “wall” from Estonia to the Black Sea, between the NATO countries on one side and Russia and Belarus on the other. Ukraine is balancing between the two because they do not dare to admit it to NATO for fear of Russian defensive reactions. The Russians and Belorussians are carrying out military manoeuvres against a virtual attacker from the West: *Zapad manoeuvre 2017*.

On the other hand, the West sends troops mainly to the Baltic countries, to Poland and Romania.

If you travel along this fault line, you will find that it takes hours to cross this border, and you drive along barbed wire

fences like in the good old days. This new “Iron Curtain”, or better “Barbed Wire Curtain”, is being extended on both sides.

NATO claims to be defensive but uses aggressive ideological rhetoric and anti-Russian propaganda. It wants to create the same situation in Russia and Belarus as in the Ukraine. Ukraine is ruined. The Gross National Product per head is equal to one third of Russia’s GNP! We must therefore stop believing that Russia is a continuation of the USSR. Who has the greatest ideological similarity with the USSR (plus the economic prosperity) is Western Europe.

In the US, Ms *Clinton* is the best representative of this new totalitarianism widespread among the ruling elites in their fight against *Trump*.

Russia has recently carried out huge military manoeuvres together with China (*Vostok-2018*). Should we really work towards a Russian-Chinese bloc of 1.6 billion people against Western Europe (0.4) and the USA (0.3)? In the long run this is stupid.

Just as the satellite countries of the past stagnated, Europe is gradually losing weight against the three blocs USA/Russia/China.

We must therefore oppose the deadly ideology justifying this new Berlin Wall and admit true freedom of movement with Western Europe. That is why in particular the anti-Russian sanctions must be abandoned. This would provide vital growth percentages for our common European future!

Source: www.bvoltaire.fr/le-mur-de-lotan/?mc_cid=71d3a91e80&mc_eid=4edb9980d5 published on 26.10.2018

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

75 years ago

Push for a direct democratic reform of the economy

The People's Initiative of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland SPS of 1943 and further submittals

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

These weeks mark the hundredth anniversary of the general strike of November 1918. These years at the end of the First World War were difficult. The food supply of the population was poor and badly organised – also in Switzerland. In many countries there were unrest, strikes and also revolutionary coup attempts, as in Munich, Berlin or Budapest. The world was in turmoil. In Switzerland, the general strike of November 1918 was the most prominent event. Quite different was the situation at the end of the Second World War – 75 years ago: The Swiss civilian population was much better cared about. The “Plan Wahlen” and early rationing ensured the supply of food, and above all: as early as 1943, the authorities and parties began to contemplate about the time after the war.

In 1943, the SP presented its new party program “Die Neue Schweiz (The New Switzerland)” (SP Switzerland, 1988, p. 55). This included an undated 16-page information brochure entitled “Reorganisation of the economy – Switzerland’s vital challenge”. The program is embedded in the direct democracy and impressively shows how the SP contributed and integrated itself into political life. In the same year, the SP submitted the popular initiative “Economic reform and labour rights” with 150,000 signatures. Even some spirit of optimism came up, although the war was by no means over yet. The popular initiative was shaped by the experiences of the great economic depression in the 1930s. The SP assumed that after the war – just as after the First World War – there would be worldwide upheavals and a new economic order would be established. Its economic

program of 1943 sets out how it envisioned the future order for Switzerland.

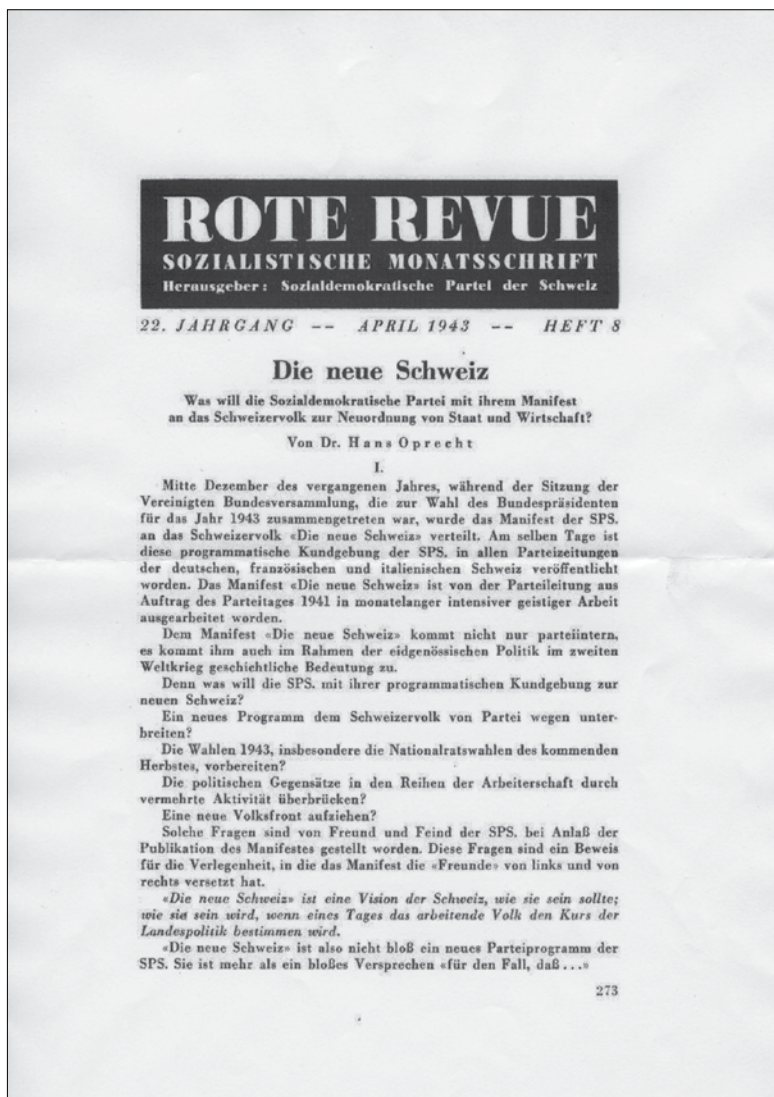
“After the Second World War, the world will look different from what it was before. [...] From this war and from the hardship of this time must emerge what previously seemed unattainable: the working people’s community, which will build the state and economy of a new Switzerland on a socialist basis. [...] The Swiss people are called upon to choose between an economy for the whole of the people or an economy for the benefit of the individuals who until now had occupied their command posts: – the lords of the banks, the monopolies, the large industry and the wholesale trade. The decision determines whether Switzerland takes the path that leads to the beneficial permanent employment of those capable of work and ultimately to the prosperity of all, or whether it should continue to be at the mercy of the crises inseparably linked to the capitalist economic system.”

As cornerstones for the reorganisation of the economy, the SP mentions:

1. Planned order on a democratic basis

The SP is presenting itself to the voters with the message: If you vote for us, we will establish a just economic order: “Yes, the SPS is not shy of addressing the voters with the request: Give us power! Because that is the indispensable prerequisite for us to be able to put into practice what we have identified as our goal in our ‘New Switzerland’ program. [...] ‘The need for a planned order of the economy is recognised throughout the world today. [...] The fact is – as evidence, practical experience and logical reasoning unanimously confirm – that the controlled economy, as we know and experience it to date, is more economical and productive than the unregulated one.’”

The SP also refers to the wider world: “This revolution, which in its womb contains the idea of democracy through the unleashing and communitarisation of economic forces, cannot be stopped in the long run. Switzerland, too, cannot escape the dictates of history. Our country cannot sovereignly determine the course of this world revolution; but it can set a shining example if it satisfies the requirements of peaceful law and social justice within its borders to the best of its ability. Only in this way can Switzerland prove its *raison d’être*.”²



"Push for a direct democratic ..."

continued from page 11

2. Communitarisation of key industries

Above all, banks and insurance companies should be communitarised: "Loans are the foundation of the modern economy. [...] If a country's credit supply is ruled according to a central plan based on economic considerations, the free power of disposal of the 'custodians of the capital states' must be abolished; the big banks must actually become public service institutions. They are therefore to be transferred into public ownership. [...] The same applies in principle to private insurance companies, which have enormous capital power and have a real monopoly in close relationship with the banks. [...] Only the transfer of the hitherto freely 'money-creating' private banks into the public service creates the conditions for controlling the amount of money in circulation and regulating it according to the state of the economy and its development. The stability of the purchasing power of money, the level of the interest rate and the external value of the currency all depend on this ratio".

This text is reminiscent of the sovereign-money initiative on which we voted on 10 June 2018. It also addressed the "money-creating private banks". But it wanted to prevent private money creation through positive money, which would only be issued by the National Bank – also some kind of communitarisation.

Production is also to be planned. The SP 1943 wants to socialise several large companies. SME's, on the other hand, should increasingly form cooperatives. "The monopoly industries must be subject to the public sector. They must be run as a public service, just like the banks." Incentives should be created for SME's: "It should be sufficient to promote the formation of cooperatives, to make them attractive through cheap loans, placing orders, etc."

The SP explains why it is necessary to steer the economy by the state. "This is because an economically organised and planned community can naturally react much faster and more drastically to external influences than a country in which the various economic interests cross or oppose each other. [...] Any attempt to maintain the basic principle of the 'free economy' and to only alleviate its 'social downsides' is doomed to failure. No doctoring around with occasional interventions can help."

3. Cooperatives as the most appropriate form of organisation for Switzerland

"In the slogan 'For man' the idea of freedom and democracy is inalienably included. The exact distinction between personal-individual freedom and social

obligation will result in detail from practice. [...] The bottom up structure, which is based above all on the cooperative system, appears to be the most expedient organisational form of the future planned economy and will be the best guarantee against abuse, dictatorship of officials and distortion of objectives. Switzerland, which bears the beautiful name of a Confederation, is in a favourable position in this respect."

This positioning is miles away from the requirements of a Marxist reconstruction of the state or even of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as they still occasionally appear in the writings of the SP after the First World War – also in connection with the General Strike. The authors of 1943 show that they are completely familiar with the cooperative model of Switzerland.

4. More and fairer progression in the tax system

"The economically damaging inequality of income relations, which provokes the sense of justice and endangers social peace, can be considerably reduced by progressively taxing high incomes and wealth, as well as by expanding inheritance tax even under the current economic system."

The cornerstone of a fairer world

"The liberation from material need, as indispensable this is for the future of the world, is not even the last and highest purpose and sense of the liberal-democratic planned economy. What is more important is that it creates the preconditions and lays the foundation for a world in which law and justice prevail, not arbitrariness. [...] out of this will [...] the program 'The New Switzerland' was born, which is based on the conditions of today's world and strives for a fundamental reorganisation of political, economic and therefore also social conditions.

Popular initiatives are always also a piece of the history of political parties. Already in 1894 the SP had submitted a popular initiative "Right to Work" (which was rejected). The Social Democrats were at that time still a weak party, with *Jakob Vogelsanger* from Zurich as its only representative in the National Council. They had collected 53,000 signatures for their popular initiative and thus only just reached the required quorum of 50,000. The initiative was the first popular initiative after this popular right was introduced in 1892. It contained numerous socio-political demands - but no concept for a new economic order (Kölz 2004, Quellenbuch, [sourcebook], p. 194).

In 1943 – sixty years later – the situation is quite different. The number of SP

members is impressive. It had grown into a large party with a voter share of about 30 per cent, which collected many times the required signatures for its popular initiatives. *Ernst Nobs* was the first Social Democrat to be elected to the Federal Council in 1943 – an event long overdue.

People's Initiative "Economic Reform and labour rights"

In 1943, the SP Switzerland collected more than 150,000 signatures for this popular initiative in the middle of the war – three times more than required at the time. The most important text from the newly planned Article 31 paragraph 1 of the then Federal Constitution were (Kölz 2004, Quellenbuch [sourcebook], p. 319):

- 1 "The economy is a matter for all the people.
2. Capital shall service work, general advancement and the welfare of the people.
3. The Confederation shall be empowered to order the measures necessary for this purpose in the structure and organisation of the national economy.
4. The existence of citizens and their families shall be safeguarded.
5. The right to work and its fair remuneration must be guaranteed. [...]"

Cantons and economic organisations should be involved in the implementation and planning of economic processes. In the text of the popular initiative it is immediately apparent that freedom of trade and industry should be replaced in its present form as a central principle of the liberal economic order.

But the Social Democrats were not alone in their intention to reform the economy. Their most important opponent was the parliament. The National Council and the Council of States had already revised and supplemented the economic articles in the Federal Constitution before the war. Their proposal for reform was ready for a popular vote in 1943, so that the Social Democrats' popular initiative was a counter-proposal.

Parliament's reform proposal

The liberal core of the economic constitution in Article 31 of the Federal Constitution of 1874, consisting of freedom of trade and industry, both as an individual fundamental right and as a guiding principle for the design of the economic order, was not touched by the majority of the representatives of the people – in contrast to the SP. (Kölz 2004, Quellenbuch, [sourcebook], p. 160) In this concept, economic freedom is linked to direct democracy. A deviation from the principle of freedom is possible – but only with a referendum. This means that the people themselves de-

"Push for a direct democratic ..."

continued from page 12

termine the cornerstones of the economic order and also largely set the course for economic policy themselves. Exactly that should happen again.

The parliamentary reform bill, which was also marked by the economic crisis of the 1930s, gave the Confederation additional powers in a number of important areas in order to deviate from economic freedom in the interests of the whole – namely

- (a) "to maintain important economic sectors or professions whose livelihoods are threatened [...];
- (b) to maintain a healthy farming community and efficient agriculture and to consolidate rural property;
- (c) for the protection of economically threatened parts of the country;
- (d) against economically or socially harmful effects of cartels and similar organisations;
- (e) on precautionary measures for times of war."

The Confederation was given further powers to combat unemployment, promote in-company training and also to better regulate the employment relationship (Kölz 2004, Quellenbuch, [sourcebook], pp. 319-321). This parliamentary draft was countered in 1943 by the Social Democrats' draft reform proposal. However, it did not remain with these two proposals.

Further popular initiatives followed

In the same year – 1943 – two popular initiatives with a similar thrust were added – a little later a third: 1. "Right to work" of the "*Landesring der Unabhängigen*", 2. "For the protection of land and work by preventing speculation" of the *Jungbauern* und the *Bauernheimatbewegung* (Young Farmers and Peasant Homeland Movement) and 3. the "*Kaufkraft-Initiative*" (Purchasing Power Initiative) of the *Freiwirtschaftsbewegung* (Free Economic Movement). These three initiatives will also be briefly presented (Linder 2010, p. 208, 223, 228):

"*Right to work*" (*Landesring*): The most influential personality of the *Landesring der Unabhängigen* (Alliance for Independence) was National Councillor *Gottlieb Duttweiler*. Everyone knows *Migros*, which today operates a nationwide network of shops and service companies and is the largest employer in Switzerland. *Duttweiler* had founded *Migros* before the war as a public limited company. In 1941, he transformed it into a cooperative by giving loyal customers with a customer card a share certificate in the cooperative worth of CHF 30. *Gottlieb Duttweiler* pursued a similar goal, which

he wanted to achieve in a different way than the Social Democrats. He too felt that reducing unemployment must be the top priority in the communes, the cantons and the Confederation. This could be achieved, but not with more regulations and "more state", but with fewer laws and more economic freedom. Parliament's draft for the new economic articles would also contain far too many commandments and prohibitions. The "old" economic liberalism should not be corrected with a multitude of new state rules, but combined with a greater ethical attitude and social responsibility. "Social capital" was his political battle cry and also program for his own company. One per cent of the turnover should be used for social and cultural projects. (This is still the case today.) *Migros* was to become one of the greatest reconstruction projects in the economic history of Switzerland. *Duttweiler's* message was clear: citizens should take the social aspects of economic freedom into their own hands.

"*Protection of land and labour by preventing speculation*" (*Bauernheimatbewegung*): "Only those who work it themselves and cultivate it themselves as the basis for their existence should be allowed to purchase land that can be used for agricultural purposes".

"*Kaufkraft-Initiative*" (*To secure purchasing power and full employment*) "*Freiwirtschaftsbewegung*" (Free Economic Movement), Liberal Socialist Party LSP): The Free Economic Movement was based on the ideas of *Silvio Gesell*. The Liberal Socialist Party (LSP), which emerged from the movement and had one representative each in the National Council and the Council of States after the war, launched the initiative. It wanted to bring about economic reform through a monetary reform. The *Sovereign Money Initiative*, on which we voted on 10 June 2018, is in this tradition. The *WIR cooperative* was founded in 1934 as part of the free economic movement). It still exists today and has around 60,000 SMEs as members and its own, self-created cooperative currency – the *WIR Franc*.

Democratic delimitation after the war

After the war the parliament made some minor clarifications to its draft challenged by the three popular initiatives. Then the vote was taken:

The people decided as follows:

- August 1946: Voters and all cantons rejected the popular initiative of the *Landesring* "Right to Work". They received about 20 per cent of the votes.
- May 1947: Voters and all cantons also rejected the Social Democrats' popular initiative "Economic reform and la-

bour rights". They received about 30 per cent of the votes.

- July 1947: The electorate adopted Parliament's draft for a new economic constitution with 53 per cent of the votes and a clear majority of the cantons.
- October 1950: The voters clearly rejected the popular initiative of the "*Bauernheimatbewegung*" (peasant homeland movement), after the parliament had already reformed the peasant land law in the spirit of the initiators in the run-up to the vote and had introduced measures for spatial planning.
- April 1951: The voters rejected the Free Economic Movement's "*Kaufkraft-Initiative*" (purchasing power initiative) for a new monetary and economic order, after they had already rejected a draft constitution passed almost unanimously by parliament in May 1949. This draft would have given the National Bank the opportunity to print almost any amount of money – similar to what it does today.
- Also in April 1951, all the cantons and the people with more than 70 per cent consented to a constitutional article demanding: "The banknotes issued must be covered by gold and short-term claims".

Thus the course for the post-war decades was largely set in the area of economic and monetary order, whereby the focus was not on a single referendum, but on the fruitful interaction between the authorities and the people over a longer period of time. Although the four popular initiatives were rejected, they all had an influence on politics and legislation.

Image of Swiss democracy

In the post-war years Switzerland's liberal economic order was on trial. Economic freedom as an individual fundamental right and also as a principle or guideline for the design of the economic order continued to be valid in the Federal Constitution – and is still valid today. However, then right of freedom is linked to the popular rights of the referendum and the popular initiative – through which the people themselves largely determine the cornerstones of the regulatory framework and also the course of economic policy. Moreover, the 1947 reform gave the Confederation additional opportunities to deviate from the economic freedom that it also used – for example in agricultural policy. In the history of the state there have been a total of about 100 economic votes on many topics such as corporate taxes, taxes in general, debt brake, economic and industrial policy, banking secrecy, cartels, education policy, agricul-

"Push for a direct democratic ..."

continued from page 13

ture, etc. If one correctly includes on the economic constitution also the social and environmental policy votes, such as social insurance, protection of the family, environmental, water and animal protection, price monitoring, protection of tenants, minimum or maximum wages, co-determination, more holidays, shorter weekly working hours, etc., there are well over 200 of them. Switzerland would certainly not be what it is without the direct participation of the people at cantonal and communal level. Today it is the only country that recognises economic freedom as a right to freedom – combined with direct democracy. (Kölz 2004, p. 870)

EU policy in Switzerland

From 1874 until today direct democracy is of high importance: an economic policy change in recent times was the very obvious yes of the people and the cantons in favor of the free trade agreement with the European Community EC in 1972 – without political integration – and the clear no of the people and above all the cantons with regard to EEA in 1992 – with political integration.

The people's message was clear: adherence to the liberal economic concept

based on direct democracy as the basis of a sovereign Switzerland. Politicians who want to join the EU or integrate Switzerland politically into EU unfortunately do not seem to understand this.

The conclusion is clear: No matter how good functioning an economic order or an economic and social policy guided by experts and experienced politicians may be, it can only be truly successful if it is supported by the people. The state of Switzerland provides the evidence. It would be reckless to deviate from it. (If this term had not been so hackneyed, one could call this "third way" and deservedly so.)

Today, political instability can be observed in many countries with representative democracy due to representatives' policy far too little anchored in the people – even if regular elections and occasional referendums take place. If the people were consulted, many senseless wars with endless streams of refugees would not be possible.

For the moment

Today a framework agreement with the EU is in discussion. It would automatically adopt EU law. A strange project, because a main pillar of the economic constitution – the political rights of the people – which will soon be 150 years old would be broken off. The Federal Council claims that people could still vote. However, it conti-

nues that voting no would lead to retaliatory or punitive measures by Brussels – an undeserving idea for a sovereign country. The answer can only be no.

The Swiss people have lost influence in politics in recent decades. Federal Council and parliament either do not implement referendums or only do so half-heartedly. So-called "international law" (meaning not the mandatory one) and EU law should prevail over the constitution, i.e. prevail over the people – this is what a Federal Supreme Court's department wants. The self-determination initiative, on which we will vote on in November, will halt this trend. The answer can only be a yes. •

¹ The numerous popular initiatives mentioned in the text are listed in the source book by: Kölz, Alfred. *Neuere Schweizerische Verfassungsgeschichte – ihre Grundlinien in Bund und Kantonen seit 1848 – mit Quellenbuch*. Berne 2004. For recent times see also admin.ch/Volksinitiativen

² For further details and additional information on the individual votes: Linder, Wolf; Bolliger, Christian; Rielle, Yvan. *Handbuch der eidgenössischen Volksabstimmungen 1848 – 2007*. Berne 2010

Sources:

Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (Hsg.). *Rote Revue, Sozialistische Monatsschrift*, April 1943

Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (Ed.). *100 Jahre Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz*, Zurich 1988

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

Subscribe to Current Concerns – The journal of an independent cooperative

The cooperative *Zeit-Fragen* is a politically and financially independent organisation. All of its members work on a voluntary and honorary basis. The journal does not accept commercial advertisements of any kind and receives no financial support from business organisations. The journal *Current Concerns* is financed exclusively by its subscribers.

We warmly recommend our model of free and independent press coverage to other journals.

Annual subscription rate of
CHF 40,-; Euro 30,-; USD 40,-; GBP 25,-
for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of
CHF 20,-; Euro 15,-; USD 20,-; GBP 12,50
for all other countries.

Please choose one of the following ways of payment:

- send a cheque to *Current Concerns*, P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich, or
- send us your credit card details (only *Visa*), or
- pay into one of the following accounts:

CH:	Postcheck-Konto (CHF):	87-644472-4	IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4	BIC POFICHBEXXX
CH:	Postcheck-Konto (Euro):	91-738798-6	IBAN CH83 0900 0000 9173 8798 6	BIC POFICHBEXXX
D:	Volksbank Tübingen, Kto. 67 517 005, BLZ 64190110		IBAN DE12 6419 0110 0067 5170 05	BIC GENODES1TUE
A:	Raiffeisen Landesbank, Kto. 1-05.713.599, BLZ 37000		IBAN AT55 3700 0001 0571 3599	BIC RVVGAT2B

A stage victory for pedagogical reason

Study by the University of Bonn shows the success of structured spelling didactics

by Gisela Liebe

In the German-speaking world, an entire generation no longer has sufficient command of spelling. Even students at universities of teacher education have to take postgraduate courses. For decades, this deficiency has been lamented by teaching institutions and universities, but not much has been done about it. The main cause of this dramatic decline in the last 30 years is well known: the method “reading by writing”, also called “writing by ear”, which goes back to the Swiss *Jürgen Reichen* and has found its way into schools in Germany and Switzerland since the 1980s. The children are to quickly write freely and a lot already in the first class with the help of a chart of initial sounds. For a long time, writing mistakes are not corrected on the grounds that this would demotivate the children and hinder their creativity. The method was criticised from the start by many experts, but is still propagated in teacher education.

Now we have before us a scientifically founded large-scale study, which must have consequences. Its results were for the first time presented orally in September 2018 and have received a broad media response.

From 2013 to 2017, a team of researchers led by Professor Dr *Una Röhr-Sendlmeier* from the Department of Developmental Psychology and Educational Psychology at the University of Bonn systematically examined the spelling performance of over 3,000 children of primary school age, both in a longitudinal survey and in a cross-sectional study. Three different didactic methods were compared. The participating schools were selected at random. In the teaching method “reading by writing”, the children were to write as freely as possible; the child’s individual learning path had priority over classroom instruction. Writing errors were not corrected for a long time. Reading was also to be learned through this writing.

The second teaching method used was the “writing workshop” (after *Norbert Sommer-Stumpfenhorst*). Here, too, the pupils did not experience a fixed sequence of individual learning steps, but were to work independently and in individual order and speed on the materials provided.

With the “systematic primer approach”, individual letters and words were introduced step by step. In primer textbooks, spelling is taught in a structured way, going from the simple to the complex. The teacher guides the pupils and is in this following the textbook and workbook. Errors are corrected right from the start.

The first graders from a total of 18 classes were individually tested for their phonological awareness and letter knowledge shortly after their enrolment. From the end of first grade until the end of the third school year, the spelling skills were recorded a further five times, i.e. every six months, with the age-appropriate version of the standardised dictation “Hamburger-Schreib-Probe”. In this way, the development of the spelling abilities of 284 children was recorded in full over a period of three years. In addition, a cross-sectional study of a further 2,800 first to fourthgraders in 142 classes was carried out in order to validate the longitudinal study.

In addition, the intrinsic motivation of the children to read and write was surveyed at a certain point in time with a questionnaire, following the dictation tests. Since the methods “reading by writing” and “spelling workshop” attribute to themselves an increased motivation of the children to learn the language, this factor also came under investigation.

The research team checked whether the teachers adhered to the chosen didactics. The differences in teaching practice between the various teachers were not the subject of this study, as only the impact of the conceptual design of the lessons on student performance was to be investigated. The study was conducted without thirdparty funding so as to rule out any obligations towards third parties.

At the same time as and together with the first investigation of the children’s prior knowledge shortly after enrolment, the proximity to education of the parents’ home was also recorded, as parents close to education generally introduce their children to educational contents even before enrolment. This factor was statistically controlled in the longitudinal study because it affects spelling performance up into the third year of school. The “reading-by-writing” children unintentionally happened to be superior to the other groups in their previous knowledge shortly after enrolment, as well as in their socio-economic status.

The results of the longitudinal and the cross-sectional studies are clear: The primer approach is clearly superior to the other two methods. At each class level, the systematically instructed children performed better than those in the other groups. It is also interesting to note that the performance differences within the primer group were significantly smaller than for the other groups. This also ap-

plied to children with a non-German family language. There were especially many children with very poor spelling skills in the spelling workshop group.

At the end of the fourth school year, the “reading-by-writing” children made 55% more mistakes than the “primer” children. Even worse were the “spelling workshop” children: They made even 105% more mistakes. Looking at the performance distribution of the entire sample of fourthgraders with a total of 947 children, 42.1% of the primer children scored so well that they were among the 25% of the best overall. Only 10.3% of them belonged to the 25% weakest spellers, i.e. after 3 years, almost 90% of the primer children mastered spelling to some extent.

26.1% of the reading-by-writing children were in the top quarter overall and 20% in the lowest group, with 53.9% in the middle, similar to the 47.6% for the primer children. Of the children who had learnt with the spelling workshop method, 34.4% belonged to the poorest group, while only 17% ended up with the best.

It is also interesting to note that both intrinsic reading motivation and intrinsic writing motivation were the same in all three groups. This means that the often heard argument that children are demotivated by early correction of spelling mistakes is clearly refuted by the results of the study.

As a conclusion of the study, the use of a structured approach from simple to complex with the immediate correction of misspellings is recommended, as it is applied in the didactics of the primer.

The complete study is not yet available in written form.

It will in the future be impossible to ignore the results of this scientifically based study of the University of Bonn: Children learn to write better if they are guided step by step by the teacher, have systematically structured school material and if their mistakes are corrected; and they also enjoy. These are elementary pedagogical insights that are by no means new and which also make sense to every non-teacher.

The fact that the method of writing by ear is still, despite better knowledge, taught to students at teacher training colleges today, even if perhaps no longer in its pure and unadulterated form, can probably only be explained by very strong ide-

continued on page 16

Ulrike – a story about the work of Friedrich Fröbel

by Rita Brügger

In an interesting bookshop in Weimar, I discovered a book that was published in 1957 in Knabe's Jugendbücherei (youth bookshop) and recently re-issued by the same publisher. The youth book deserves our attention and is worth reading not only for young readers.

On the basis of the life story of the girl *Ulrike* the life work of *Friedrich Fröbel* (1782–1852) is presented in an impressive way. Friedrich Fröbel, a pupil of *Pestalozzi*, was the founder of the kindergarten. His pedagogy encompassed the holistic approach to educate pre-school children. Fröbel emphasised the importance of children's play, which was considered revolutionary in his time. Previously, children had mostly been treated as small adults, and small children were merely kept, if necessary, in depositories without adequate support.

The little booklet begins with an episode from the year 1813, when *Napoleon* ruled, Europe was shaken by war and later in the Battle of Leipzig countless people lost their lives. Fröbel was on the move as a soldier with the *Lützow Freikorps* and meet a horde of ragged children begging. A gaunt boy ran off with some bread he managed to grab without giving any of it away. During the commotion, a little boy fell unnoticed into water while his sister *Magdalena* tried to pull him out and almost drowned herself. Fortunately the children were rescued by *Michael*, Fröbel's comrade, with Fröbel's help.

After this experience, Fröbel reflected on his own childhood, his professional development in becoming an educator and his time in Switzerland with *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi*. With his comrades he discussed at length what should be done to enable children to have a better, carefree life and how to prevent such neglect they had just encountered. It became Fröbel's goal to do everything in his power to bet-

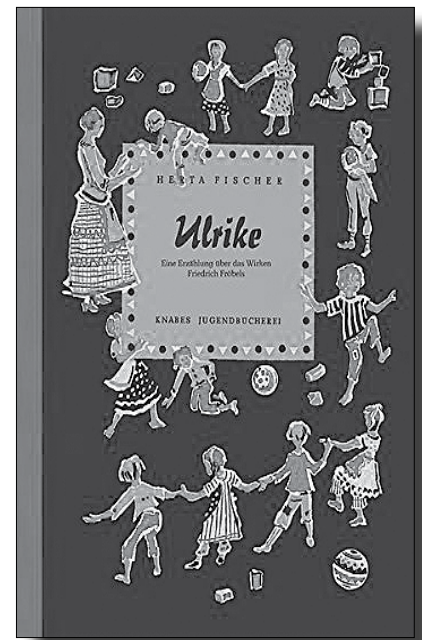
ter the children's lot after the end of the war.

His comrade *Michael*, later married *Magdalena*, the girl he had rescued during the war. They had four children, lived in a gloomy basement flat and they both were forced to work out of town to make ends meet. While their children helped along according to their means to secure a sparse livelihood, no one had the time to look after the youngest girl, *Ulrike*. At first she spent the days with a neighbour, who looked after numerous children without much skill and who *Ulrike* was scared of. Later, the girl was allowed to go to the "depository", where she was more comfortable, but where the children are drilled militarily.

Friedrich Fröbel did not remain inactive after the war. He wrote articles and in 1837 founded an "Institution to foster the need for activities in early childhood and youth". He, for whom nature was imminent to his heart throughout his life, realised: "As I wandered through the blossoming spring one day, it came like a revelation to me: garden ... paradise! Yes, the paradise brought back to the children shall be called *kindergarten!* And the children there shall feel light hearted and they shall thrive and grow." Fröbel also trained young girls to become kindergarten teachers and gave lectures about his pedagogy in the nearby health resort.

Ulrike grew up and got a job as a nanny with "well-to-do" people. She loved the two children in her care, but she couldn't cope. The parents blamed the nanny for all their offspring's mischief thereby increasing the children's lack of respect for *Ulrike*. With this family she travelled to a seaside resort to continue her work there.

In the hotel *Ulrike* became friendly with the footman *Wilhelm*, who told her about Fröbel. By chance, *Ulrike* made acquaintance with this man, about whom it



ISBN 978-3940442277

was said that he was one to play along with children in the garden. Some just laughed about him but others admired the pedagogue, like *Baroness Marenholtz*, who also helped *Ulrike* along. Thus her greatest wish became true: she was allowed to train as a kindergarten teacher with Friedrich Fröbel.

Ulrike learnt as much as possible, she was visibly successful with the children and made friends with other young women. She greatly appreciated her teacher and his young wife. *Ulrike* couldn't contribute any money to their wedding, which she deplored very much. To her distress, she was criticised by one of her classmates and hereupon withdrew. Friedrich Fröbel and his wife managed to reconcile the two young kindergarten students with much empathy and aptness by assigning them a shared task.

It is precisely in this way that *Ulrike*, in her profession as a kindergarten teacher, dedicated herself to the children entrusted to her. She strengthened the bonds among the little ones, she won them over for one another, even if their behaviour left a lot to be desired.

While the young girls learnt in their education to have a heart for the children and to teach them things conducive to their lives in a playful way, Fröbel was increasingly faced with hostility towards his pedagogy and his kindergartens were even banned in Prussia. He was accused of spreading socialist ideas and educating children to become atheists. As a result, Fröbel worked even harder. He did

"A stage victory for ..."

continued from page 15

ological, political or financial interests, which have so far stood in the way of a return to reason. Who will ever know how many thousands of "apparent dyslexics" have been produced by the use of these false didactics, some of whom will suffer from this inability of theirs throughout their lives?

In the German federal states of *Hamburg* and *Baden-Württemberg*, the "writing by ear" method is already prohibited, and from summer 2019 only the primer method is allowed to be used in *Branden-*

burg's schools. In Switzerland, too, individual cantons such as Nidwalden are slowly beginning to abandon the Reichen method, albeit still very timidly (mistakes are only to be corrected from second grade onwards).

The spelling study, however, is only a one stage victory over many unsuitable school reforms. Spelling is only one of many subjects, and it is relatively easy to evaluate. For the didactics of mathematics, a similar study is overdue. Many children are unable to grasp arithmetic due to unstructured "self-organised" learning. Where then should the much longed-for computer scientists come from? •

continued on page 17

"Ulrike – a story about ..."

continued from page 16

everything in his power to prove in his writings that his opponents were wrong, and his wife *Luise* comforted him: "Prussia is not Germany. They want to destroy your work, but they will not succeed. Your name will still be mentioned when no one will speak of the Prussian bureaucrats anymore. Friedrich Fröbel was happy about this act of faith from his wife. And he was just as happy about the visit of Ulrike's father Michael, his former comrade. At that time, however, he was already ailing, and his strength was

dwindling more and more. In June 1852 Friedrich Fröbel died.

As it turned out, the name Fröbel is still known today as the founder of our kindergartens. And the beautiful word "kindergarten", which he coined and which has symbolic meaning, still exists all over the world, even in English speaking countries. The importance of kindergarten and playful learning have survived for decades now and have contributed much to the development of small children.

Unfortunately, in recent times, there have been increasing efforts to abolish the kindergarten as an independent level of education and to "integrate" it more and

more into school. As a result kindergartens will become increasingly intellectual with contents formerly designated to school grades and do not benefit the children.

Reading this little booklet opens one's heart, because it shows us, with the example of Ulrike, the importance of the relationship with the educators, delighting in children, playful learning and developing a sense of community, all that accounts for our successful kindergarten and at the same time it introduces Friedrich Fröbel, as the founder and "father" of these marvellous ideas. •

* The author has been working as a kindergarten teacher for many years.

Germany**Donations for Kantha Bopha**

Thank you very much for the two very informative reports about Dr *Beat Richner* and his life's work in *Current Concerns* from 3 October and 16 October 2018. We, too, are convinced that his commitment and his model for successful and humane health care cannot be reported often enough. For all *Current Concerns* readers in Germany we would like to point out that since 2001 the *Kantha Bopha e. V.* in Erlangen has been a non-profit association. (IBAN DE84 7635 0000 0000 0030 45, BIC BYLADEM1ERH) The association supports the Kantha Bopha Foundation, Dr Beat Richner, by transferring

all donations to Switzerland without deductions. All donors will receive a donation receipt.

Another major concern of the association is to make Kantha Bopha better known. We try to reach a broad public through lectures, action stands, the sale of commodity contributions at flea markets and working groups with pupils. We have a website for those interested. (www.kantha-bopha.de)

*Elizabeth Erhard and Judith Latour
for the association
Kantha Bopha e.V., Erlangen*

