

Current Concerns

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Strengthening family farms

Interview with Markus Müller, owner of a small farm

The Swiss agricultural policy has embarked on a course, which hardly complies with the guidelines given in the Federal Constitution. The direction proposed by the official agricultural policy (AP 2014–2017) breaks the backbone of domestic food production and food supply with healthy natural groceries. The Swiss economy is characterised by an extremely solid and stable structure with a variety of industries and a prevailing share of medium-sized and smaller com-



The Müller family (picture ma)

Content

What can the free trade agreement
TTIP accomplish?

page 3

The crisis in the United States is a
manifestation of decline

page 4

Water supplies in the Valais in danger
part 2

pages 5/8

Documentation:

A conversation with Syrian President
Bashar al-Assad

pages I–VII

Do unilateral sanctions violate human
rights?

page 9

Europa and Russia – who wants war,
who wants peace?

page 10

“Putin is the perfect devil for the US
and NATO”

page 11

Agricultural corporations appropriate
the fertile farmlands of Ukraine

page 12

A visit to the Astrid Lindgren special
school in Weisswasser

page 13/14

Meetings organised by the Genossen-
schaft Zeit-Fragen/Current Concerns at
the Leipzig book fair

page 15

“... and your own emergency supply?”

page 16

panies. These decentralised, small-scale production and supply structures promote supply security, diversity, innovation and a healthy competitive environment. We should not underestimate the very positive consequences for the preservation of jobs for Switzerland as an industrial centre and the related security of income. Without earned income by work and production, an economy gets into trouble quite quickly, not rarely leading to unwanted or even malicious dependencies. This security of earnings applies to all industrial branches including the local farmers. Here, modern policy commits a sin by creating a climate of existential threat for the farmers under wrong auspices (global competitiveness, globalisation, free trade). For years, especially the smaller and medium-sized family farms have been struggling to survive. It makes you think twice that this struggle was deliberately created on the part of politics, especially the technocrats in the Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG). With regard to the so-called “export capacity and competitiveness” the local agriculture is being blackmailed by structural reassessments and direct payments (or the refusal of these direct payments). Instead of family farms, industrial agriculture is to be promoted in Switzerland. This, even though reputable scientists worldwide stated in the World Agricultural Report

many years ago, that family farms are superior to industrial agriculture in the fight against hunger and poverty. Such recommendation, adapted to Swiss conditions, must be very seriously considered in our part of the world.

In addition, last year the UN year of “Family Farming” was celebrated, and in particular Swiss major supermarket chains were busy advertizing by using idyllic pictures of beautiful farms and families embedded in nature. There is no question that we need a well-mixed decentralised structure of food production and supply in our country. Our times are times of unrest so that a largely secured supply of food from local production must have first priority in our state and social politics. It is an essential contribution to strengthen our country’s sovereignty and must be promoted as such.

We have asked Markus Müller, who manages a medium-sized family farm, some questions about the current situation of Swiss family farms.

Current Concerns: Mr Müller, you are managing a small farm. Can you briefly introduce your company and your family to our readers?

Markus Müller: We own a small farm in the village of Trutigen in the commune

continued on page 2

"Strengthening the family farms"

continued from page 1

Neuenkirch (Canton of Lucerne) working as full-time farmers; we, that is *Rita and Markus Müller* with our children, *Silvio, Aline and Leandro*. We also work the Alp Suretta Sufers in the mountains of the Canton of Grisons.

6.6 ha of agricultural land, 10 cows, 20 sows, our dog Simba, a few chickens and cats belong to our farm. Besides animal husbandry we are growing wheat and triticale and we produce cherries, apples and plums from standard fruit trees. Triticale is a crop bred from crossing durum wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and rye (*Secale cereale*). It serves mainly as a feed grain because the baking ability is less good than the mixture of wheat and rye. The cultivation of triticale is similar to that of wheat. The plant has a good adaptability, is not demanding and also suitable for higher altitudes.

In addition, we produce 30,000 kWh of solar electricity. We receive about 18,000 Swiss francs of subsidies per year from the state.

Would you please explain your situation as a manager of a farm in a few sentences to us.

Today, the work of managing a farm is rather the work of an office worker. You have to fill out forms permanently, implement new legislation and adapt operations. Work on the farm, taking care of the animals, machinery repair, are going short. Authorities dictate, what we have to do and how we have to do it.

The farmers are again and again prompted to be entrepreneurs. For free enterprise, however, it is imperative to fix the prices of manufactured products by means of a fair, cost-oriented calculation and generate the price on the market. Why is this principle rendered inoperative with respect to agriculture?

This is because a false ideology is applied. In industry, the bigger ones are said

to produce more and cheaper. This does not apply to agriculture. It is the nature that sets natural limits to us. The structural change with bigger farms leads to a more expensive production, because the corresponding mechanisation cost many times more. For example, in a small to medium farm one can feed the animals just with a fork (costs: 35 francs), a large farm needs a fodder mixing vehicle (costs: 35,000 francs). The larger operation has to produce 1,000 times more than the smaller one, to balance these costs, and this is impossible. And if it is done, there is a consequence on the price. A result of higher production volumes is that prices fall. Only state subsidies can help to keep up such kind of production. This has nothing to do with market and market prices.

The official agricultural policy would like to merge the medium-sized and smaller farms into larger operating units. This structural reform is threatening the existence of the rural family business. What needs to be done to provide a real prospect for the future family farms?

A basic support for every full-time farmer is required, as well as fewer regulations and a market-oriented production, this means a production volume matched to the demand and no overproduction, so that the prices are adequate. The current agricultural policy forces the farmers to increase the production volume in order to compensate falling prices.

With direct payments, farmers should receive compensation for the non-compensatory product prices. Why are these payments not sufficient for a long-term existence of your business?

The problem is not the amount of direct payments, but rather the corresponding regulations. If you first have to invest a lot of money into the business to fulfill the conditions for receiving direct payments and then the rules are changed

again relatively quickly, which again leads to new investments, the bill for the farmer doesn't add up. In addition, this policy leads to ever-increasing production costs.

What must be changed, so that the farming community in our country can fulfill the mandate laid down in the Federal Constitution?

A simple financial back up for every farm operating full-time is required in line with the initiative for small farmers, launched by *René Hochueli* and *Lorenz Kunz*. The *Vereinigung zum Schutz der kleinen und mittleren Bauern* (VKMB, Association for the Protection of Small and Medium-sized Farms) under its President *René Hochueli* launched a popular initiative for a real traditional agriculture with the slogan "Gnue Heu dune! (too much has happened)" on 1 September 1983. "We want to remain farmers!" the committee chose as a headline for an article in the association's own monthly bulletin. Fight was announced to the "meat factories with no connection to the soil" and mass production businesses. The popular initiative "Food sovereignty" (www.ernaehrungssouveraeniteat.ch) of *Uniterre* goes precisely into this direction.

What do you expect from the Swiss citizens in relation to the preservation of the agricultural family business?

Of course, I appreciate the many manifestations of sympathy to the farmers. On the other hand, I'd like to see a fair consumer behaviour and an attitude of understanding of all citizens, that all companies have a right to exist regardless of their size and their location. Also, I expect their determination to affirm their sympathies by political actions.

Mr Müller, thank you very much for the interview. •

(Interview Reinhard Koradi)

What can the free trade agreement TTIP accomplish?

fig. In an interview with *Die Zeit* on 18 February 2015, EU Trade Commissioner *Cecilia Malmström* admitted that the European Commission had made a mistake with respect to the controversial free trade agreement TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) with the United States: "It was a mistake to keep the ne-

gotiating mandate a secret for so long".¹ Ms Malmström also hoped – and thus repeated a statement by *Barack Obama* – to defend "European values" with TTIP because the agreement would negotiate the rules of globalisation with the United States and not with China or Russia. Who had hoped to have substantive, technical

corrections, will be disappointed by Ms Malmström's comments; at best, the communication strategy will change in future.

Recently, numerous critical articles on the trade agreements TTIP, CETA (*Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*, agreement between the EU and Canada)

continued on page 4

New free trade agreements threaten the "Swiss success model" – Stop TiSA!

Signatories: Social democratic members of the National Council Jacqueline Badran (ZH), Marina Carobbio Guscetti (TI), Jean Christophe Schwaab (VD), Carlo Sommaruga (GE) and Cédric Wermuth (AG) as well as Deputy General Secretary François Clément and Fabian Molina, president of the Young Socialists of Switzerland

The "Swiss success model" is based quite emphatically on the quality of our public service, on our (direct) democracy and on an economic policy that redistributes wealth and thus supports demand and, most notably, purchasing power. It is certainly no coincidence that a country like ours, where all the important services for the population are provided by the public sector (education, health, water, energy, public transport, etc.) is still so well off economically. Public service also plays an important role in our national and social solidarity: The necessary services are offered at affordable rates all across the country, while, conversely, the profits of public companies benefit the tax payers.

Yet it is exactly these important benefits that are threatened by new free trade agreements purposing to surrender large parts of the public sector to the "free" market and to withdraw them from democratic control. Although Switzerland does not participate in all of the negotiations (a lot of them only concern the EU, the US and Canada), we could be forced to implement the agreements by means of the "Cassis de Dijon" principle.

In the year 2002, a popular referendum aiming at the liberalisation of the electricity market failed. In the ten-odd years since then, public service suffered very little attack. Some performance deterioration was indeed enforced politically, but it was possible to reject the main liberalisation and privatisation projects with clear majorities. Both the population and the political elite had in fact now noticed that the implementation of neoliberal recipes entails disastrous consequences. The result is always the same: profits are privatised, losses are paid by the public. In the end, as soon as there are problems, the public authorities and the public purse must always be called in to help. But at least since 2010 the wind has been changing again. On the one hand, memories of the failures of privatisation projects in other countries seem to be fading away (for example that of the failed British rail privatisation). On the other hand, the more recent attempts have only been taken in hand a short while ago – politics has not yet taken no-

tice of the drastic negative consequences (for example, privatisation in heavily indebted countries enforced by the EU-"Troika"). In addition, a real tsunami of liberalisations and of the corresponding chaos will be sweeping towards us if the free trade agreements CETA (EU-Canada), TTIP/TAFTA (EU-US) and TISA should ever come into force. Although Switzerland only participates directly in the TISA negotiations (which are held in camera in Geneva), it could still be forced to join even further agreements in the future. Federal Councillor *Schneider-Ammann* only recently announced his intention of joining the TTIP Agreement.

The intention of these free trade agreements is mainly to dismantle so-called "import barriers". Even government-issued rules and regulations are counted among these "barriers", for example, rules relating to health or environmental protection (e.g. the GM ban or land-use planning regulations), to labour legislation (e.g. generally binding collective labour agreements), to social security (e.g. compulsory health insurance), to the protection of domestic production (e.g. indications of source) or to public service (e.g. the public monopoly concerning elementary schools or the water supply). If these agreements become effective, no company can be barred from offering its goods or services for sale as well as any longer neither selling them in another contractual state on an equal footing with its own domestic companies.

If, for example, a US company legally places genetically modified seeds on the market in the United States, according to TTIP rules the EU must also allow this. And by dint of the "Cassis de Dijon" principle, it would automatically also be permitted in Switzerland. Should we nevertheless want to enforce the GM ban enacted by the Swiss people, the foreign investors would have the right to sue Switzerland for "damages" into the millions if they believed that they had suffered losses. The decision would lie with a centre for the settlement of investment disputes meeting in camera – a court or any other authority of appeal is not provided for.

This may seem like a bad sci-fi movie, but is unfortunately already a reality. The State Uruguay was sued for damages amounting to several millions of dollars by a tobacco multi before such an international centre for the settlement of investment disputes. The company takes the view the new law on protection from passive smoking constitutes such an import barrier – and claims "hedge clause procedure" of the kind provided by TTIP, TISA and CETA. It is now quite immaterial that the law serves to protect the public health.

The agreements also provide for a rule that goods or services which are not subject to any regulation at the time of entry into force of the contracts may never afterwards be regulated. This also applies to all products and services that will be invented at some time in the future. Thus, for example, nuclear power could never have been regulated, if such an agreement had been signed before its invention – not even to protect the people. Following the same logic, it would no longer be possible for the public sector to re-assume control of areas or tasks which had once been liberalised or de-regulated – not even if the people were to pronounce for doing exactly the like in a public referendum or if a liberalisation attempt should fail.

Therefore, irrespective of their actual contents, these free trade agreements are unacceptable even merely from a democratic perspective. Should our parliament and our people agree to such agreements, we would limit our democratic rights massively: We would never again be able to exercise democratic control over domains once liberalised or not yet regulated. Such "eternal bondage" for democracy is incompatible with the principles of our constitutional state. Thus, these agreements challenge our Swiss democratic sovereignty and are a serious threat to the public service. They endanger long-fought-for and long defended social achievements such as health and worker protection and the preservation of the environment. We will therefore strive against them passionately.

"What can the free trade agreement ..."

continued from page 3

and TiSA (*Trade in Services Agreement*) appeared in the media. They all deal with various disadvantages: the fact that TTIP is being negotiated between the European Commission (rather than the individual EU member states) and the United States; the fact that a corporation can file a suit for damage compensation against a state – if the state's legislation reduced the return on the corporate's investment – and the fact that these agreements restrict consumer protection. These are all important concerns.

Our approach, however, is different: by using the example of TTIP we intend to find out whether the agreements' principles affect the countries or international units positively at all – in form of an increase in trade flows, the gross domestic product (GDP), personal income, employment, etc.; only in that case would they make any sense. When we address the legislative history of the agreement, we arrive at the conclusion that already in its beginnings a scientific approach is quite questionable.

The Italian economist *Jeronim Capaldo*, Senior Research Fellow at the American Tufts University and currently working

for the International Labour Organization in Geneva, published a study on this topic in October 2014.² He noted that the quantitative arguments in favour of TTIP are based on four studies whose projections draw on the same model as the World Bank which was particularly unsuitable for an assessment of trade policy. These projections were based on the assumption that, for example, trade liberalisation automatically and quickly led to full employment. However, this is far from being the case. Therefore, Capaldo built his research on a model of the UN which is not based on the assumption of full employment but on the assumption of aggregated demand, i.e. the demand for all goods in an economy, an approach that reflects the economy better.³

The consequences are dramatic. According to Capaldo's calculations in 2025 the trade agreement TTIP would have a positive impact in the USA and a negative impact in Europe on their respective economic sectors (trade, GDP, personal income and employment):

- Increase in net exports in the US by 1.02%, and decrease in the EU (by 0.36% in Italy and 2.07% in North Europe⁴)

- GDP growth in the US by 0.36% and GDP sinking in the EU (0.03% in Italy and 0.50% in North Europe)
- Increase in income up to 699 euros per worker in the United States and decrease in the EU (approximately 165 euros in South Europe⁵ and 5,518 euros in France)
- Increase in employment in the US by 784,000 workers and decrease in the EU by 583,000 workers.

Since the trade agreement TTIP does not produce any economic benefit to the EU countries further investigation and negotiation is unnecessary. •

¹ www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2015-02/cecilia-malmstroem-ttip-fehler

² [http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: European Disintegration, Unemployment and Instability](http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/The%20Trans-Atlantic%20Trade%20and%20Investment%20Partnership%20European%20Disintegration,%20Unemployment%20and%20Instability), October 2014.

³ To simulate the changes in trade flows, GDP, personal income, employment for the year 2025, the data must be calculated without the influence of TTIP (basic assumption) and next with the influence included. Finally, the difference between the two data series is calculated and the result quoted as a percentage of GDP so that it is comparable in the different countries.

⁴ Finland, the Netherlands and Belgium

⁵ Greece, Spain, Portugal and East European national economies

The crisis of the United States is a manifestation of decline

An inner history of the New America

by Prof Dr Klaus Hornung



Klaus Hornung
(picture ma)

How stable is the "leader of the world" (President *George Bush* 1992), "the indispensable nation for peace, freedom and democracy in the world" (President *Bill Clinton* 1997)? At that time, the United States might have considered themselves to be at the height of their history after winning the cold war. Two decades later, after the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan turned into disasters, they drifted into their serious financial and economic crisis and currently sit on an astronomically high mountain of national debt amounting to nearly 15 trillion dollars.

For the American journalist *George Packer*, the crisis reflects decline, the disintegration of social solidarity into extreme individualism, not least into a widening gap between rich and poor. His book traces this inner history of the present-day United States, and the author locates the

roots: those in power in the financial world have cancelled their contract with society in an orgy of excess and cynicism. A system of "revolving door policy" has developed between Wall Street and Capitol Hill, the financial oligarchy, Congress and House of Representatives, which displays all the symptoms of decline.

Packer does not look at foreign and military policy. He wants to describe the internal history of the US scenario through a long series of detailed social biographies of contemporaries in politics and business, including people from all population strata. There is, for instance, *Jeff Connaughton*, who spends his life between the financial sector and politics and moves up the ladder from the campaign team of current Vice President *Joe Biden* to the high bureaucrats and ministers in Washington, acquires a considerable fortune and witnesses the relentless power struggles for influence and financial gain in the elites and their networks.

The conduct of a large number of bankers, lawyers and financial auditors is often far off the law, characterised by the greed for bonuses in the millions and the pursuit

of a further rise to profitable political offices and positions. It is the panorama of a political style in which the reckless are the winners, the picture of an elite exercising their power far beyond the classical democratic standards and the rule-of-law. Within this framework, there also appear well-known figures of contemporary history, such as President *Bill Clinton* with his sex stories and solemn oaths, by which he succeeded to evade the law.

And there is also the tragic figure of *Colin Powell*, child of immigrants from Jamaica, who fought as a soldier in Vietnam for many years and was promoted to the prestigious Chief of Staff and Minister of Foreign Affairs, to be finally misused by President *Bush junior* to deliver his famous address to the UN Security Council, to lie about *Saddam Hussein's* alleged weapons of mass destruction which was to justify the US military intervention in Iraq and destroyed the reputation of the upright civil servant.

The author then switches to Silicon Valley, that symbol of the inexhaustible

Water supplies in the Valais in danger

The power supply is a joint effort – it is important to take care of it (Part 2)

by Dr rer publ Werner Wüthrich



Hydropower plant on the river Aare near Ruppoldingen. (picture thk)

The European electricity policy is in motion. Germany and other European countries rely massively on new renewable energy sources from the sun and the wind. They speak of a revolution – comparable to the moon landing of man. The energy revolution is promoted vigorously with high subsidies. The share of electricity from renewable energy sources

in Germany was at 31 percent in 2014 (6.9% solar energy, wind 10%, biomass 9.5% and water 4%). In 2050, it will have amounted to 80 percent. Eight nuclear plants were shut down immediately after the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. In a few years the remaining plants are to be switched off. The television channel Arte described Germany's policy in a pro-

gram on the energy revolution as "lonely revolution" (5.9.2013). Other countries go their own ways. The differences are significant. The UK plans a new nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point and at the same time realizes the construction of huge wind farms at sea in Scotland. The Netherlands also hesitate to realize a complete exit from nuclear power. In Denmark – surrounded by the sea – 39 percent of its electricity came from wind farms in 2014. The French President Hollande wants to reduce the share of nuclear power in the longer term from 75 to 50 percent and will thus hold on to nuclear power. Poland is a "Coal Country", which relies on fossil fuels for about 90 percent. The Czech Republic has reduced its funding of renewable energy and continues to focus on their own nuclear energy. Poland and the Czech Republic are protecting themselves against the cheap electricity from Germany, which endangers their own electricity production (see "Weltwoche" of 10.10.2013). Other countries wait and see.

A comparison with Austria: the share of electricity from renewable energy sources in Switzerland is at high 60 percent – consisting of 97 percent hydropower and of three percent energy from solar, wind and biomass sources. 40 percent of the electricity are generated in nuclear power plants. In Austria, 67 percent of the electricity are generated by hydropower and 27 percent by thermal power

"The crisis of the United States ..."

continued from page 5

American renewal force. A certain *Peter Thiel* is his biographical witness, son of a "born-again" Christian family, gifted Stanford student, decidedly anti-communist and anti-gay, who one day had to come out himself. Later he founded several hedge funds, through which he became a Titan of billion assets, spending his days as an influential major sponsor in his luxury villa in Stanford on the Marina.

These were the years in which California seemed to develop into some kind of heaven on earth due to the defense and space technology and later on due to Internet and *Facebook*, but has eventually not escaped decline after the bursting of the Internet bubble and the subsequent crisis in 2008. Thus, the libertarian Thiel started to realise the intellectual and political limits of the American dream dance around the golden calf and its consequences.

Parker's book is an idiosyncratic mix of documentation and literature.

With real commitment, he outlines the more recent internal history of the United States. The author's call for decisive corrections of the political system of his country and for a social renewal can be seen throughout the text. Packer's panorama of this decline is reminiscent of social scientist *Christopher Lasch's* book, "The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy" (1994), which also sees the core of the American crisis in a "democratic malaise".

It is the story of the privileged elite's alienation from their society, of those who control the international flow of money and information, who with their multicultural lifestyle of work and leisure in their foreclosed, well protected enclaves, abandoned their civic duties long ago. This world appears to be the realisation of *Max Weber's* famous vision of a society of "specialists without spirit, hedonists without a heart".

• George Packer: *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America*. Faber and Faber, London 2013, ISBN 978-0-571-25129-2

(Translation Current Concerns)

continued on page 6

"Water supplies in the Valais in danger"

continued from page 5

plants, which are powered by gas and coal. The proportion of energy from the sun and wind is also low. The completed Zwentendorf nuclear power plant has never been operating after the referendum in 1978. – It is obvious why Switzerland and Austria are referred to as Europe's water reservoirs.

Electricity policy is an affair of nation states

There are good reasons for the fact – given the large differences between the 28 countries – that there are no uniform energy policies within the EU. The electricity market was liberalized in 1998 but may not be regulated by Brussels because it is the affair of every singular nation state how they produce their electricity. The prices at the European Energy Exchange are characterized by different national approaches both in electricity production and in subsidizing programmes. If it were up to the European Commission, there would not have been any purely national funding programs for the expansion of renewable energies for a long time. The question is open whether the development of wind and solar power will gain as much acceptance as in Germany or – which is to be assumed – whether there will be very different national approaches in the field of power supplies in the future.

Another effect is striking: Most modern gas power plants are currently shut down and mothballed, since they can no longer be operated profitably with the declining market prices in Europe. Old, depreciated coal power plants are, however, operated at low costs. They can still work efficiently at low prices and contribute to the oversupply – a fatal undesirable trend. The developments on the European gas market and their impact on energy prices are also uncertain.

Hydropower must have a future

The current oversupply of electricity clearly shows that irregularly occurring energies do require energy storage devices. The Swiss hydropower plants are able to fulfill this function, so that the power supply could remain independent to a certain degree as it did up to now. The current energy storage devices are part of an overall approach for a secure national energy supply.

The Grisons Energy Director *Mario Cavigelli*, President of the Conference of the Mountain Cantons, demands federal subsidies for conventional hydropower plants to enable them to be managed profitably: In the Grisons, *Repower* (formerly up to 2010 *Raetia Energy*) plans

a pumped storage station for 1.5 billion Swiss francs in the Upper Poschiavo on the Bernina Pass. The two lakes *Lago Bianco* and *Lago di Poschiavo* will be linked by a pressure tunnel at an altitude of 2,000 meters. The project could be operated eco-friendly. But here again the question arises as to whether it will be possible to cover costs. *Repower* has deferred the project. However, the federal government relies on the existing and the proposed additional hydroelectric power plants in order to replace nuclear power capacity later on. The Swiss Federal Office of Energy has made a market study on the situation of large-scale hydroelectric power plants. It states that the production costs of electricity for new or upgraded units are 14 cents per kilowatt hour. They are more than twice as high as the current wholesale price of 5 cents ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 13.12.2013). If the planned investments are not made, Switzerland will become increasingly dependent on electricity imports from Germany and France, which currently come from coal (Germany) or from nuclear power (France) to a large extent – an absurd situation. In the fall of 2014, the National Council responded in the context of the great debate on the Energy Strategy 2050 and granted 600 million investment aid for large-scale power plants. Of these, some projects in the Valais benefit. For the consumer, the surcharge on electricity of 1.5 cents/kWh is increased to 2.3 cents. The project will be dealt with in the Council of States in the spring session. This does, however, not solve the problem.

Resistance against the neglect of hydropower

This assistance operation of hydropower was preceded by a parliamentary decision in summer 2013 to increase the subsidies on new renewable energy technologies – i.e. solar and wind power – up to 900 million francs per year. For this purpose, the extra charge per kilowatt of electricity, which households already have to pay, rose. Various parties showed signs of opposition and set up their own demands:

- The canton of Grisons filed a cantonal initiative in the fall of 2013 and requested to reduce the excessive subsidies again in order to preserve the value of hydropower.
- The independent politician *Christian Riesen* took the referendum in 2013 against the feed-in compensation KEV, as an individual, and quite in the style of *Thomas Minder*. The massive subsidies made solar and wind power in Switzerland a good bargain. He protested that the Federal Council and Parliament did not plan a constitutional vote on the "multi-billion-project energy revolution" and the "Energy Strategy

2050", which would indeed be mandatory in Switzerland for a policy decision of such great importance. Giant has not reached the required number of signatures.

- Given the price situation, the Swiss Water Management Association called for a promotion of large hydropower dams by the federal government as early as 2013 – through concessionary loans ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 25.9.2013).
- *Karl Frauenfelder*, professor of energy management at the University of St. Gallen, called for "a guaranteed federal and cantonal minimum price for output and production of hydroelectric power – especially for that of the pumped storage stations". This would enable the planned development and contribute to supply security. Similar to the National Bank's specifying a minimum rate of 1.20 francs for the euro, the state should set a minimum price for electricity on the border, which would secure the survival of the hydropower plants and enable them to make the necessary investment in expansion. "Electricity is too big to fail," said Frauenfelder ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 6.10.2013). (Czech Republic and Poland go in a similar direction. They waive – at least temporarily – on the import of cheap electricity from Germany to enable their own power plants to produce electricity).
- The industry organizations in the field of hydropower in Germany, Austria and Switzerland also launched the *Energy Initiative of the Alpine Countries* in 2013. The exaggerated subsidizing of renewable energy sources is challenging the survival of pumped storage plants. They demand: No new subsidies, but a reduction of the "one-sided solar and wind power" subsidies for green energy throughout Europe ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 5.7.2013).

2013 – Reaction of the Federal Office of Energy

The Federal Council has responded and reduced subsidies for solar energy. The cost rates of cost-covering feed-in compensation KEV were reduced. Moreover, the money will only be paid out over a period of 15 years (*Statement of the Federal Office of Energy* of 22.8.2013). Furthermore, 2.4 million in funding for the planned large solar plant in the avalanche barriers above the Grisons mountain village of St. Antönien were stopped. This project will – at least for now – not be built: hence a little less money for solar power and slightly more for water.

continued on page 7

"Water supplies in the Valais in danger"

continued from page 6

Before I comment on the other events and especially the upcoming electricity agreement with the EU, it makes sense to take a look at the structures and legal basis of power supply in Switzerland.

Legal basis of Swiss power supply – a reflection of the Swiss model

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the year 1908, people and the cantons of Switzerland decided to vote in a constitutional referendum that the cantons would dispose of the water and use it within the limits of the federal legislation. In the 1916 implementing act *About the utilization of water power*, the federal government set the framework for the cantons and in particular for the concession agreements with the power plant companies. Here are three examples from the act that has been revised several times since then:

1. The federal act supports communities to join forces in a region, to establish cooperatives and jointly address the issues of water use (Art. 43 ff.). This has also been done in the Valais and in many places in Switzerland.
2. The act determines the framework for the water rates. Art. 49: "The water interest [...] may not exceed 100 francs per year by the end of 2014 and it may not exceed an annually 110 francs per kilowatt gross output until the end of 2019."
3. Art. 67 of the act provides for the framework for the escheat. The renewal investments in the years before the escheat should be made as follows:
"The concessionaire is obliged to maintain the equipment and keep those facilities in working order that come under the escheat law."
"Modernization and expansion investments are refunded to the concessionaire in case of escheat, provided that he has made the modernization or expansion in arrangement with the community entitled to escheat."

At the same time countless referendums have taken place at the communal and cantonal level in which voters decentralized the legal basis for the power supply of Switzerland in their regions. Many communes established *communal or public facilities*. Others joined forces with other communes and founded cooperatives and corporations of various kinds in order to supply households with electricity, water and gas in the sense of the "Service Public". Today, approximately 800 independent companies provide the population with electricity and often also with gas and water at production costs. The companies are connected to each other in a variety of regional networks. *Hans Wyer*

Prospects: unity and solidarity among the mountain cantons and the Swiss Plateau

The power supply which was constructed with much foresight in the last century is a gem and we have to take care of it. *Hans Wyer*, the grand old man of the Swiss Valais and the CVP, closes his comprehensive work "The use of water power in the Valais" with the following words:

"Today we speak a lot about synergies, i.e. interaction. The utilisation of water power today takes place in water power stations from Gletsch up to the Lake Geneva, made in the Valais and Bernese Alps, on both sides of the Rotten. To put this specifically into service for the country and the people is the challenging task of coming generations. We start today to prepare them. The significance of this result can surpass by

far the expansion of water power in the last century.

The reversion of the large power stations in the years 2035 – 2055 will become the touchstone of the water power utilisation. The Valais will master this task for the future if unity and solidarity prevail between mountain and valley. In the Swiss federal energy policy and electricity supply, the hydropower use will meet a political task that is beyond its energy and environmental meaning if unity and solidarity prevail between the Mountain cantons and the industrialized Swiss Central Plateau. I am confident that an open Valais in an open Switzerland will recognize this opportunity for the future and seize it."

reported about that in his impressive book "Die Nutzung der Wasserkraft im Wallis" (The use of water power in the Valais). The basic provision in the sense of public service is guaranteed today basing on this concept. Import and export balance possible variations.

Scheduled departure from the tried and tested Swiss model – politicians urge to liberalize the electricity market as defined by EU

Contrary to the presented and well functioning current Swiss model, EU turbos have begun in Berne since 2002 to harmonize the EU electricity market. The Swiss Federation of Trade Unions took the referendum against the Electricity Market Act of 2002, and the people rejected the liberalization significantly. After only five years – in 2007 – the Parliament agreed on the *Electricity Supply Act*, intending to liberalize the electricity market – very similarly to the bill of 2002 – this time in two steps. There was neither a referendum nor a popular vote on it. Since 2009, the electricity market has been liberalized for big consumers. However, the free market has not been attractive for them until recently, since the fixed prices for households were lower. Only about 10 percent of big consumers (over 100,000 kilowatt hours per year) used it. However, this changed recently, since a lot of cheap electricity from Germany has been flowing into Switzerland, undermining the prices of domestic power plants. The share of bulk buyers who are stocking up on the open market or in Germany or France, has increased significantly over the past year. The city of Winterthur, for example, obtains its electricity from Germany as of recently.

The market for private households is to be liberalized in a second step by 2016, so

that households can choose their electricity supplier freely – similarly to what is already the case today with telephone and internet providers. This second step would be one of the conditions to join the internal EU electricity market. It is subject to an optional referendum. The people will have the opportunity to stop this unsound development.

Electrical power supply must not be centralized

Currently the "Bundesrat" (Swiss government) is negotiating a new electricity agreement with the EU. However, since the EU has demanded that Switzerland also agrees to adopt all future decisions made in Brussels in this area, without knowing what these decisions might be, all negotiations have been put on ice for months. These carte blanche treaties, which also entail that Switzerland surrender her jurisdictional sovereignty to EU law in the respective area, are euphemistically referred to as "institutional framework agreements", something the EU want to enforce with respect to all future bilateral treaties and even to the already existing ones. In the electrical power market the EU intends to accomplish their mega-goal of a single market. Even today we may fairly predict that this mega-goal – should it be implemented as planned – would have far-reaching consequences, also in regard to hydropower.

Brussels intends to regulate the electrical power market in a streamlined fashion for all 28 countries. Obligatory provisions and shared regulations regarding power plants, networks operators, providers and consumers are supposed to be the solution and accomplish the single market in the electrical power sector. New transnation-

continued on page 8

"Water supplies in the Valais in danger"

continued from page 7

al power lines are planned to connect the countries and unify regional and national markets. So-called "electrical power highways" are being designed, capable of carrying huge amounts of electrical power across Europe. This EU single market is bound to fundamentally change electrical power supply in every single country and create a situation reminiscent of the USA where electrical power of the entire country is dominated by a few big corporations.

There are still open technical questions. One huge EU market of electrical power is not as easy to handle as telephone or internet markets. Big costly investments for new power lines would be necessary in all countries – including Switzerland should she join the scheme – in order to connect power providers and consumers with each other. Switzerland is supposed to play a role as an exchange and storage platform of electrical power. The costs would have to be paid by the consumers. New expensive technologies have to be implemented on a large scale in order to control the expected oscillations in production and consumption.

Legally this plan is covered by the Lisbon treaty. According to its Articles 193 and 194 Brussels has been granted far-reaching competencies to influence national politics of EU member states, although it cannot rule on energy issues directly. And Brussels intends to apply these competencies even to the non-member state Switzerland.

How would the EU single market of electrical power affect Switzerland?

There is not much talk about that. For instance Brussels demands that foreign power providers have to have equal rights in competition with domestic companies. This would actually mean that foreign power providers would be granted concessions to use the water in the alpine cantons. Many small and medium domestic electrical power providers owned today by the municipalities and cantons do not pay any taxes because they serve in the public sector as state institutions, this could be interpreted as an illegal competition bias under the EU single market law. The EU could press Switzerland to sell and privatize these domestic power providers.

Crucial decision

Is the concept which had been developed by citizens of several generations a phase-out model? I don't think so. – When the electorate of the Canton of Zurich voted in favor of a publicly owned electrical power company instead of a private one in 1908, they did that for a good reason. A number

of other polls could be cited here. I think the Swiss people would prefer to keep control of their own electrical power supply in one way or the other – at both regional and cantonal levels. But precisely because it is running so smoothly nobody actually thinks about the system. (It has to be said, though that big segments of Swiss electricity providers have extended their original business scope and started to be involved in the foreign business).

As a matter of fact, those structures that were built over generations would be turned upside down in case Switzerland joined the EU electricity market. Smaller companies – and there are still quite a few of them – would find it hard to meet the Brussels conditions. The ongoing trend towards fewer and bigger megacompanies would be enhanced even further and the public sector of basic needs such as electricity, gas and water would be weakened. – Is that what we really want?

Switzerland is facing a crucial decision with the electricity treaty: maintaining well-functioning structures which have developed over decades, or entering towards a hazardous modification process in a EU single market? There is more at stake than just a liberalization of the electrical power market and a promise of lower electricity prizes for private households. Just like in the case of the Euro, this project of a single EU electricity market is another step towards political union. This explains why the EU wants Switzerland to also sign an "institutional framework agreement" as a pre-condition together with the electricity treaty.

Connecting Europe

The single EU electricity market is part of an EU programme called Connecting Europe, which is supposed to use the electricity treaty to integrate Switzerland into the EU. Brussels intends to spend 50 billion euros on transnational infrastructure projects by 2020. As a side effect, this is meant to boost the EU economy. 9.2 billion are designated to the energy sector. Former EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso commented on the plan as follows: "At the end of the day Connecting Europe will lay foundations for a really unified European Union in which all European nations are interconnected with each other."

We have seen other examples where Brussels made bad economic decisions for the sake of some distant ideological vision. The EU single currency project, which functions poorly because grave economic and cultural differences between the participating countries were ignored, is similar to the single electricity market in its dimension and political implications. The same questions arise

with the power supply as with the single currency: Does it really make sense for so many countries with such huge differences in all aspects of life to be lumped together? Or can people organize their own power supply easier in smaller, decentralized units? In Germany, for instance, a trend towards re-communalisation has been detectable for some years. Municipalities and communes take on responsibility for the electrical power supply themselves, again.

Therefore, with this electricity agreement with the EU there is much more at stake for Switzerland than just some questions of import and export of electrical power or the liberalization of the energy market. It is worth starting early to deal with it.

In Switzerland decisions are made by the people

Switzerland will solve the ensuing questions in the cantons and on the federal level. The regionalisation of mega-power plants has to be discussed and organized in an atmosphere of co-operation, according to the tradition of the Swiss "Eidgenossenschaft". The "new" sustainable energies have to be promoted in such a way that water power is not devalued. Further use of nuclear power has to be decided upon and a regulation framework be established for the future. As already mentioned, in part one of this article (see Current Concerns No 5 of 22.2.2015), quite often Axpo, Alpiq, BKW and Repower act similarly to some globally active megacorporations today, although they are up to 80% owned by cantons and municipalities and should be controlled much more tightly by the electorate. In the Canton of Graubünden the popular initiative "Yes to clean electrical power without coal" was accepted on 22.9.2013 and therefore vetoed the plans of the electrical power provider Repower to invest in the huge Italian black coal power plant in Saline Joniche.

The sovereign has to become active at the federal level, too. Parliament has discussed the energy strategy 2050 in autumn 2014. The expose will be presented to the "Ständerat" (Council of States) in its spring session. Several popular initiatives have already been submitted. On 8 March 2015 people will vote on the initiative "Energy tax instead of sales tax". More referenda concerning the ensuing parliamentary decisions will follow in the months to come. Many questions remain. How to proceed with water power? How fast should nuclear energy be abandoned? Should Switzerland opt out of nuclear energy completely? Should the exit be combined with a new ecological taxation system? How much EU-style *free trade* would make sense without jeopardizing sovereignty? Many questions, the sovereign needs to answer. •

“Whatever solution you want to make, at the end you should go back to the people through a referendum”

An interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

The civil war in Syria will soon enter its fifth year, with no end in sight. On 20 January, Foreign Affairs managing editor Jonathan Tepperman met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus to discuss the conflict in an exclusive interview.

Jonathan Tepperman, Foreign Affairs: I would like to start by asking you about the war. It has now been going on for almost four years, and you know the statistics: more than 200,000 people have been killed, a million wounded, and more than three million Syrians have fled the country, according to the UN. Your forces have also suffered heavy casualties. The war cannot go on forever. How do you see the war ending?

Bashar al-Assad: All wars anywhere in the world have ended with a political solution, because war itself is not the solution; war is one of the instruments of politics. So you end with a political solution. That's how we see it. That is the headline.

You don't think that this war will end militarily?

No. Any war ends with a political solution.

Your country is increasingly divided into three ministates: one controlled by the government, one controlled by ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, and one controlled by the more secular Sunni and Kurdish opposition. How will you ever put Syria back together again?

First of all, this image is not accurate, because you cannot talk about ministates without talking about the people who live within those states. The Syrian people are still with the unity of Syria; they still support the government. The factions you refer to control some areas, but they move from one place to another – they are not stable, and there are no clear lines of separation between different forces. Sometimes they mingle with each other and they move. But the main issue is about the population. The population still supports the state regardless of whether they support it politically or not; I mean they support the state as the representative of the unity of Syria. So as long as you have the Syrian people believing in unity, any government and any official can unify Syria. If the people are divided into two, three, or four groups, no one can unify this country. That's how we see it.

You really think that the Sunnis and the Kurds still believe in a unified Syria?

If you go to Damascus now, you can see all the different, let's say, colors of our so-

ciety living together. So the divisions in Syria are not based on sectarian or ethnic grounds. And even in the Kurdish area you are talking about, we have two different colors: we have Arabs more than Kurds. So it's not about the ethnicity; it's about the factions that control certain areas militarily.

A year ago, both the opposition and foreign governments were insisting that you step down as a precondition to talks. They no longer are. Diplomats are now looking for an interim settlement that would allow you to keep a role. Just today [20.1.2015], “The New York Times” had an article that talked about increased US support for the Russian and UN peace initiatives. The article refers to “the West’s quiet retreat from its demands that Syria’s president step down immediately.” Given this shift in the Western attitude, are you now more open to a negotiated solution to the conflict that leads to a political transition?

From the very beginning, we were open. We engaged in dialogue with every party in Syria. Party doesn't mean political party; it could be a party, a current, or some personality; it could be any political entity. We changed the constitution, and we are open to anything. But when you want to do something, it's not about the opposition or about the government; it's about the Syrians. Sometimes you might have a majority that doesn't belong to any side. So when you want to make a change, as long as you're talking about a national problem, every Syrian must have a say in it. When you have a dialogue, it's not between the government and the opposition; it's between the different Syrian parties and entities. That's how we look at dialogue. This is first. Second, whatever solution you want to make, at the end you should go back to the people through a referendum, because you're talking about the constitution, changing the political system, whatever. You have to go back to the Syrian people. So engaging in a dialogue is different from taking decisions, which is not done by the government or the opposition.

So you're saying that you would not agree to any kind of political transition unless there is a referendum that supports it?

Exactly. The people should make the decision, not anyone else.

Does that mean there's no room for negotiations?

No, we will go to Russia, we will go to these negotiations, but there is another question

here: Who do you negotiate with? As a government, we have institutions, we have an army, and we have influence, positive or negative, in any direction, at any time. Whereas the people we are going to negotiate with, who do they represent? That's the question. When you talk about the opposition, it has to have meaning. The opposition in general has to have representatives in the local administration, in the parliament, in institutions; they have to have grass roots to represent on their behalf. In the current crisis, you have to ask about the opposition's influence on the ground. You have to go back to what the rebels announced publicly, when they said many times that the opposition doesn't represent us – they have no influence. If you want to talk about fruitful dialogue, it's going to be between the government and those rebels. There is another point. Opposition means national; it means working for the interests of the Syrian people. It cannot be an opposition if it's a puppet of Qatar or Saudi Arabia or any Western country, including the United States, paid from the outside. It should be Syrian. We have a national opposition. I'm not excluding it; I'm not saying every opposition is not legitimate. But you have to separate the national and the puppets. Not every dialogue is fruitful.

Does that mean you would not want to meet with opposition forces that are backed by outside countries?

We are going to meet with everyone. We don't have conditions.

No conditions?

No conditions.

You would meet with everyone?

Yes, we're going to meet with everyone. But you have to ask each one of them: Who do you represent? That's what I mean.

If I'm correct, the deputy of the UN representative Staffan de Mistura is in Syria now. They're proposing as an interim measure a cease-fire and a freeze in Aleppo. Would you agree to that?

Yes, of course. We implemented that before de Mistura was assigned to his mission. We implemented it in another city called Homs, another big city. We implemented it on smaller scales in different, let's say, suburbs, villages, and so on, and it succeeded. So the idea is very good, but it depends on the details. De Mistura came to Syria with headlines. We agreed upon certain headlines,

continued on page II

“Whatever solution you want to make ...”
continued from page I

and now we are waiting for him to bring a detailed plan or schedule – A-to-Z plan, let’s say. We are discussing this with his deputy.

In the past, you insisted as a precondition for a cease-fire that the rebels lay down their weapons first, which obviously from their perspective was a nonstarter. Is that still your precondition?

We choose different scenarios or different reconciliations. In some areas, we allowed them to leave inhabited areas in order to prevent casualties among civilians. They left these areas with their armaments. In other areas, they gave up their armaments and they left. It depends on what they offer and what you offer.

I’m not clear on your answer. Would you insist that they lay down their weapons?
No, no. That’s not what I mean. In some areas, they left the area with their armaments – that is what I mean.

Are you optimistic about the Moscow talks?

What is going on in Moscow is not negotiations about the solution; it’s only preparations for the conference.

So talks about talks?

Exactly – how to prepare for the talks. So when you start talking about the conference, what are the principles of the conference? I’ll go back to the same point. Let me be frank: some of the groups are puppets, as I said, of other countries. They have to implement that agenda, and I know that many countries, like France, for example, do not have any interest in making that conference succeed. So they will give them orders to make them fail. You have other personalities who only represent themselves; they don’t represent anyone in Syria. Some of them never lived in Syria, and they know nothing about the country. Of course, you have some other personalities who work for the national interest. So when you talk about the opposition as one entity, who’s going to have influence on the other? That is the question. It’s not clear yet. So optimism would be an exaggeration. I wouldn’t say I’m pessimistic. I would say we have hope, in every action.

It seems that in recent days, the Americans have become more supportive of the Moscow talks. Initially, they were not. Yesterday, Secretary of State Kerry said something to suggest that the United States hopes that the talks go forward and that they are successful.

They always say things, but it’s about what they’re going to do. And you know there’s mistrust between the Syrians and the U.S. So just wait till we see what will happen at the conference.

So what do you see as the best way to strike a deal between all the different parties in Syria?

It’s to deal directly with the rebels, but you have two different kinds of rebels. Now, the majority are al Qaeda, which is ISIS and al-Nusra, with other similar factions that belong to al Qaeda but are smaller. Now, what’s left, what Obama called the “fantasy,” what he called the “moderate opposition” – it’s not an opposition; they are rebels. Most of them joined al Qaeda, and some of them rejoined the army recently. During the last week, a lot of them left those groups and came to the army.

Are these former defectors who came back?

Yes, they came back to the army. They said, “We don’t want to fight anymore.” So what’s left of those is very little. At the end, can you negotiate with al Qaeda, and others? They are not ready to negotiate; they have their own plan. The reconciliation that we started and Mr. de Mistura is going to continue is the practical solution on the ground. This is the first point. Second, you have to implement the Security Council resolution, no. 2170, on al-Nusra and ISIS, which was issued a few months ago, and this resolution is very clear about preventing anyone from supporting these factions militarily, financially, or logistically. Yet this is what Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are still doing. If it’s not implemented, we cannot talk about a real solution, because there will be obstacles as long as they spend money. So this [with the implementation of the resolution 2170] is how we can start. Third, the Western countries should remove the umbrella still referred to by some as “supporting the moderate opposition.” They know we have mainly al Qaeda, ISIS, and al-Nusra.

Would you be prepared to take any confidence-building measures in advance of the talks? For example, prisoner exchanges, or ending the use of barrel bombs, or releasing political prisoners, in order to build confidence on the other side that you’re willing to negotiate in good faith?

It’s not a personal relationship; it’s about mechanisms. In politics, you only talk

Gen. Wesley Clark: “ISIS got started through funding from our friends and allies”

by Daniel McAdams

Many remember General Wesley Clark as the man who almost started World War III by ordering the British to fire on Russian peacekeepers who landed in the Kosovo capital, Pristina, before the Americans. British commander of the international KFOR peacekeeping force, General Sir Mike Jackson, is reported to have replied, “I’m not going to start the third world war for you.”

One of the most interesting things about Gen. Clark, however, is his propensity to blurt fascinating things out every now and again.

Who can forget his interview with Amy Goodman back in 2007 where he revealed that one of the top generals in the Pentagon had showed him a memo from then-defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld not long after the 9/11 attack outlining US global war plans. According to Clark at the time, the general said:

“[W]e’re going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran.” I said, “Is it classified?” He said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “Well, don’t show it to me.” And I saw him a year or so ago, and I said, “You remember that?” He said, “Sir, I didn’t show you that memo! I didn’t show it to you!” [General Wesley Clark, *Democracy Now!*, interview, 2.3.2007]

Well Clark is back with another very interesting blurt.

Far from a spontaneously-arising root-of-all-evil organization, at least according to General Wesley Clark, ISIS was created and funded by our “closest allies”. As the General said:

“ISIS got started through funding from our friends and allies [...] to fight to the death against Hezbollah.”

Which friends and allies, he did not say. But he did suggest that it has become a “Frankenstein monster”. [General Wesley Clark in an interview with CNN Newsroom, 17.2.2015]

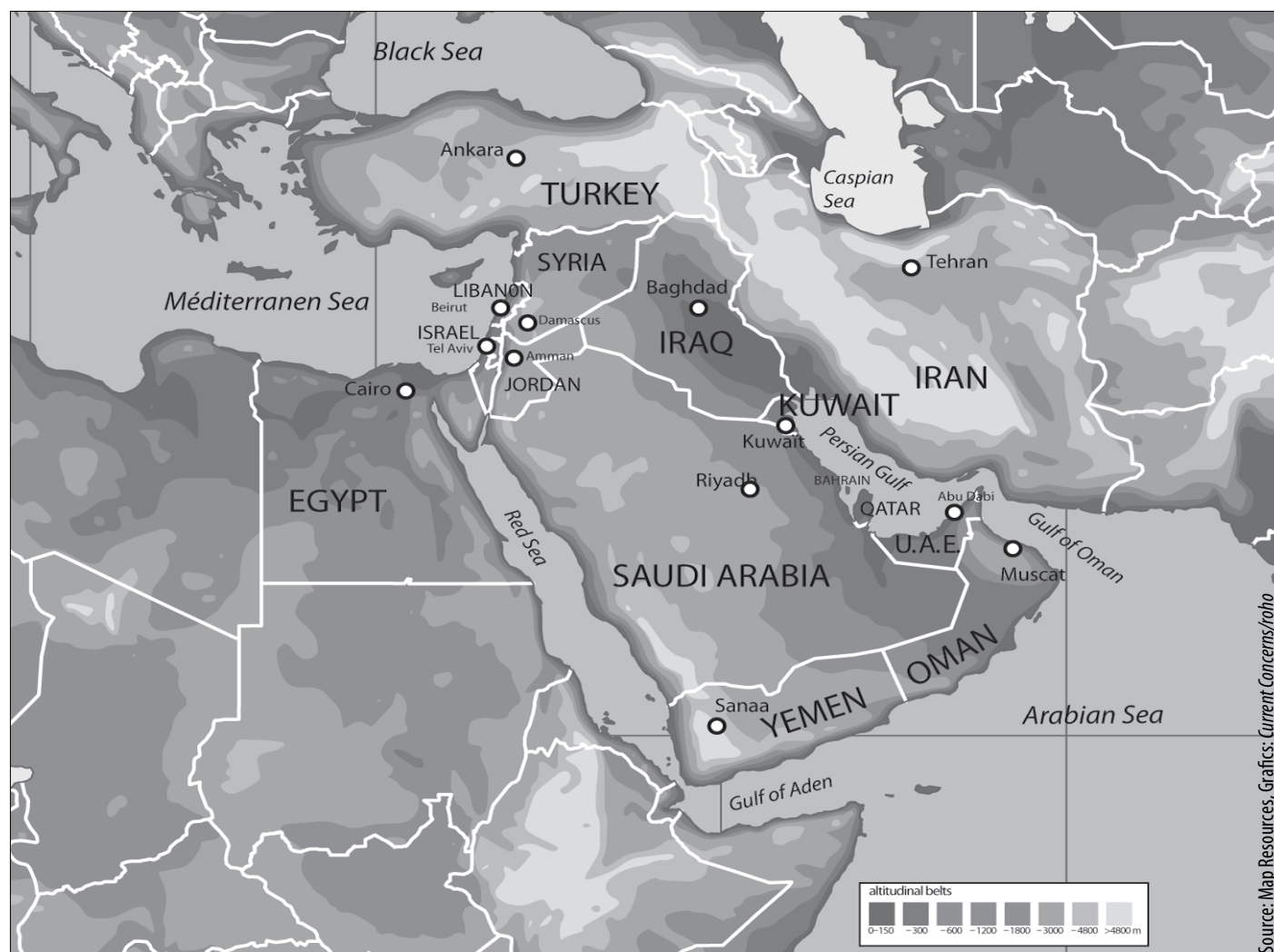
So the insider, Gen. Wesley Clark, informs us that our closest allies in the Middle East have helped create ISIS – the organization we are spending billions of dollars to fight.

We do know that Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf States have long been obsessed with fighting Hezbollah and Assad, and that both are keen to keep the US fighting on their behalf in the region. Could these be who he was thinking about?

Maybe rather than continue to expand the US military presence in the region to fight ISIS, it’s time for the US to have a really good talk with its “allies” in the Middle East.

Source: Ron Paul Institute, 19.2.2015

continued on page III



“Whatever solution you want to make ...”
continued from page II

about mechanisms. You don't have to trust someone to do something. If you have a clear mechanism, you can reach a result. That is what the people want. So the question is, what is the mechanism that we can put in place? This takes us back to the same question: Who are they? What do they represent? What's their influence? What is the point of building trust with people with no influence?

When two parties come together, it's often very useful for one party to show the other that it's really interested in making progress by taking steps unilaterally to try and bring down the temperature. The measures that I described would have that effect.

You have something concrete, and that is reconciliation. People gave up their armaments; we gave them amnesty; they live normal lives. It is a real example. So this is a measure of confidence. On the other hand, what is the relation between that opposition and the prisoners? There's no relation. They are not their prisoners anyway. So it is completely a different issue.

So have you offered amnesty to fighters?
Yes, of course, and we did it many times.

How many – do you have numbers?
I don't have the precise numbers, but it's thousands, not hundreds, thousands of militants.

And are you prepared to say to the entire opposition that if you lay down your weapons, you will be safe?

Yes, I said it publicly in one of my speeches.

And how can you guarantee their safety? Because they have reasons to distrust your government.

You cannot. But at the end, let's say that if more than 50 percent succeed, more than 50 percent in such circumstances would be a success. So that's how. Nothing is absolute. You have to expect some negative aspects, but they are not the major aspects.

Let me change the subject slightly. Hezbollah, Iran's Quds Force, and Iranian-trained Shiite militias are all now playing significant roles in the fight against rebels here in Syria. Given this involvement, are you worried about Iran's influence over the country? After all, Iraq or even Lebanon shows that once a for-

eign military power becomes established in a country, it can be very difficult to get them to leave again.

Iran is an important country in this region, and it was influential before the crisis. Its influence is not related to the crisis; it's related to its role, its political position in general. When you talk about influence, various factors make a certain country influential. In the Middle East, in our region, you have the same society, the same ideology, many similar things, the same tribes, going across borders. So if you have influence on one factor, your influence will be crossing the border. This is part of our nature. It's not related to the conflict. Of course, when there is conflict and anarchy, another country will be more influential in your country. When you don't have the will to have a sovereign country, you will have that influence. Now, the answer to your question is, Iran doesn't have any ambitions in Syria, and as a country, as Syria, we would never allow any country to influence our sovereignty. We wouldn't accept it, and the Iranians don't want it either. We allow cooperation. But if you allowed any country to have influence, why not allow the Americans to have influence in Syria? That's the problem

continued on page IV

“Whatever solution you want to make ...”
continued from page III

with the Americans and with the West: they want to have influence without cooperation.

Let me just push you a little bit further. Last week, a commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, of their air-space command, Hajizadeh, said in an interview in “Der Spiegel” that Iran’s supreme leader has ordered his forces to build and operate missile plants in Syria. That suggests that Iran is playing a greater role and doing it on its own.

No, no. Playing a role through cooperation is different from playing a role through hegemony.

So everything that Iran is doing ... ?

Of course, in full cooperation with the Syrian government, and that’s always the case.

Now Iran is one thing to deal with because it’s a country. But you also have militias, which are substate actors and therefore more complicated. One problem with working with these groups is that, unlike a government, they may not be willing to co-operate and it’s not always clear who to talk to. Are you worried about your ability to control these forces and to rein them in if you need to? And, a related question, this week, Israel attacked Hezbollah forces in the Golan Heights, and the Israelis suggest that they attacked them because Hezbollah was planning an attack on Israel from Syrian territory. Doesn’t this also highlight the danger of allowing militias with their own agendas, not necessarily your agenda, to come into the war?

Do you mean Syrian, or any other militias in general?

I mean especially Hezbollah and the Iraqi Shiite militias.

It’s natural to say that only the institutions of the government, of the state, let’s say, are the guarantee for stability and to put things in order. Any other factor that would play a role in parallel with the government could be positive, could be good in certain circumstances, but it will always have side effects, negative side effects. That is a natural thing. And having militias who support the government is a side effect of the war. You have it, but you’re going to try to control this side effect. Nobody will feel more comfortable than if they are dealing with government institutions, including the army and the police and so on. But talking about what happened in Quneitra is something completely different. Never has an operation against Israel happened through the Golan Heights since the cease-fire in 1974. It has never happened. So for Israel to allege that there was a plan for an operation – that’s a far cry from reali-

ty, just an excuse, because they wanted to assassinate somebody from Hezbollah.

But the Israelis have been very careful since the war began to not get involved except when they felt their interests were directly threatened.

That’s not true, because they’ve been attacking Syria now for nearly two years, without any reason.

But in each case, they say it’s because Hezbollah was being given weapons from Iran through Syria.

They attacked army positions. What is the relation between Hezbollah and the army?

Those were cases where the army accidentally shelled ...

Those are false allegations.

So what do you think Israel’s agenda is?

They are supporting the rebels in Syria. It’s very clear. Because whenever we make advances in some place, they make an attack in order to undermine the army. It’s very clear. That’s why some in Syria joke: “How can you say that al Qaeda doesn’t have an air force? They have the Israeli air force.”

To return to my question about militias, do you feel confident that you’ll be able to control them when this war ends? Because after all, to have effective sovereignty, any government has to have what’s called a monopoly of force, and that’s very hard when you have these independent armed groups running around. That’s self-evident: the state cannot fulfill its commitment to society if it’s not the only master of order.

But you see in Iraq how hard that is. It is now very difficult for the government to control all the Shiite militias that were empowered during the war.

There’s a very important reason in Iraq: it’s because Paul Bremer didn’t create a constitution for the state; he created one for factions. Whereas in Syria, why did the army stand fast for four years in spite of this embargo, this war, tens of countries around the world attacking Syria and supporting the rebels? Because it has a real constitution, a real, secular constitution. That is the reason. In Iraq, it is sectarian. When you talk about a sectarian constitution, it’s not a constitution.

But what will you do about these militias when the war ends?

Things should go back to normal, like before the war.

And you’re confident ... ?

Yes. We don’t have any other option. That is the role of the government. This is self-evident.

What impact are falling oil prices having on the war in Syria? After all, your two closest allies and supporters, Iran and Russia, are very dependent on oil prices, and they have suffered tremendous damage to their budgets in recent months as the price of oil has fallen. Do you worry about their ability to continue helping you?

No, because they don’t give us money, so it has no effect on Syria. Even if they are going to help us [with money], it would be in the form of loans. We’re like any other country: we have loans. Sometimes we pay; sometimes we take loans.

But their military support costs them [Iran and Russia] money, and if they have less money to pay for their own militaries, won’t that become a problem?

No, because when you pay for armaments or any other goods, you don’t have a problem.

So you’re saying everything you’re getting from the Russians and the Iranians ... ?

So far, we haven’t seen any changes, so what the influence is on them, I cannot answer.

You’ve said in past interviews that you and your government have made mistakes in the course of the war. What are those mistakes? Is there anything that you regret?

Every government, every person, makes mistakes, so that’s again self-evident; it’s a given. But if you want to talk about political mistakes, you have to ask yourself, what are the major decisions that you took since the crisis started? We took three main decisions: First of all, to be open to all dialogue. Second, we changed the constitution and the law according to what many in the opposition were saying, allegedly, that this is the reason of the crisis. Third, we took the decision to defend our country, to defend ourselves, to fight terrorists. So I don’t think those three decisions can be described as wrong or mistakes. If you want to talk about practice, any official in any place can make mistakes, but there’s a difference between practice mistakes and policy mistakes.

Can you describe some of the practical mistakes?

I would have to go back to officials on the ground; there’s nothing in my mind. I would rather talk about policies.

Do you feel there have been any policy mistakes that you’re responsible for?

I mentioned the major decisions.

But you said those are not mistakes.

To defend the country from terrorism? If I wanted to say that it’s a mistake, then

continued on page V

“Whatever solution you want to make ...”

continued from page IV

to be correct would be to support the terrorists.

I'm just wondering if there's anything you did that you wish in retrospect you had done differently.

Regarding these three main decisions, they were correct, and I am confident about this.

In terms of lower-level practical mistakes, are people being held accountable, say, for human rights abuses, for the excessive use of force, or the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, those kinds of things?

Yes. Some people were detained because they breached the law in that regard, and that happens of course in such circumstances.

In terms of their treatment of civilians or protesters, is that what you're referring to?

Yes, during the protests at the very beginning, yes.

Since the United States began its air campaign against the Islamic State, Syria and the United States have become strange kinds of partners and are effectively co-operating in that aspect of the fight. Do you see the potential for increased cooperation with the United States?

Yes, the potential is definitely always there, because we've been talking about or asking for international cooperation against terrorism for 30 years. But this potential needs will. The question that we have is, how much will does the United States have to really fight terrorism on the ground? So far, we haven't seen anything concrete in spite of the attacks on ISIS in northern Syria. There's nothing concrete. What we've seen so far is just, let's say, window-dressing, nothing real. Since the beginning of these attacks, ISIS has gained more land in Syria and Iraq.

What about the air strikes on Kobani? Those have been effective in slowing down ISIS.

Kobani is a small city, with about 50,000 inhabitants. It's been more than three months since the beginning of the attacks [of the US], and they haven't finished. Same areas, same al Qaeda factions occupying them – the Syrian army liberated in less than three weeks. It means they're not serious about fighting terrorism.

So are you saying you want greater U.S. involvement in the war against ISIS?

It's not about greater involvement by the military, because it's not only about the military; it's about politics. It's about how

“The Syrian people are still with the unity of Syria; they still support the government. The factions you refer to control some areas, but they move from one place to another – they are not stable, and there are no clear lines of separation between different forces. Sometimes they mingle with each other and they move. But the main issue is about the population. The population still supports the state regardless of whether they support it politically or not; I mean they support the state as the representative of the unity of Syria.”

much the United States wants to influence the Turks. Because if the terrorists can withstand the air strikes for this period, it means that the Turks keep sending them armaments and money. Did the United States put any pressure on Turkey to stop the support of al Qaeda? They didn't; they haven't. So it's not only about military involvement. This is first. Second, if you want to talk about the military involvement, American officials publicly acknowledge that without troops on the ground, they cannot achieve anything concrete. Which troops on the grounds are you depending on?

So are you suggesting there should be US troops on the ground?

Not US troops. I'm talking about the principle, the military principle. I'm not saying American troops. If you want to say I want to make war on terrorism, you have to have troops on the ground. The question you have to ask the Americans is, which troops are you going to depend on? Definitely, it has to be Syrian troops. This is our land; this is our country. We are responsible. We don't ask for American troops at all.

So what would you like to see from the United States? You mentioned more pressure on Turkey ...

Pressure on Turkey, pressure on Saudi Arabia, pressure on Qatar to stop supporting the rebels. Second, to make legal cooperation with Syria and start by asking permission from our government to make such attacks. They didn't, so it's illegal.

I'm sorry, I'm not clear on that point. You want them to make legal ... ?

Of course, if you want to make any kind of action in another country, you ask their permission.

I see. So a formal agreement between Washington and Damascus to allow for air strikes?

The format we can discuss later, but you start with permission. Is it an agreement? Is it a treaty? That's another issue.

And would you be willing to take steps to make cooperation easier with Washington?

With any country that is serious about fighting terrorism, we are ready to make cooperation, if they're serious.

What steps would you be prepared to make to show Washington that you're willing to cooperate?

I think they are the ones who have to show the will. We are already fighting on the ground; we don't have to show that.

The United States is currently training 5,000 Syrian fighters who are scheduled to enter Syria in May. Now, U.S. General John Allen has been very careful to say that these troops will not be directed at the Syrian government, but will be focused on ISIS alone. What will you do when these troops enter the country? Will you allow them to enter? Will you attack them?

Any troops that don't work in cooperation with the Syrian army are illegal and should be fought. That's very clear.

Even if this brings you into conflict with the United States?

Without cooperation with Syrian troops, they are illegal, and are puppets of another country, so they are going to be fought like any other illegal militia fighting against the Syrian army. But that brings another question, about those troops. Obama said that they are a fantasy. How did fantasy become reality?

I think with this kind of training program. But you can't make extremism moderate.

There are still some moderate members of the opposition. They are weaker and weaker all the time, but I think the U.S. government is trying very carefully to ensure that the fighters it trains are not radicals.

But the question is, why is the moderate opposition – if you call them opposition; we call them rebels – why are they weaker and weaker? They are still weaker because of developments in the Syrian crisis. Bringing 5,000 from the outside will make most of them defect and join ISIS and other groups, which is what happened during the last year. So that's why I said it's still illusory. It is not the 5,000 that are illusory but the idea itself that is illusory.

Part of what makes Washington so reluctant to cooperate with you more for-

continued on page VI

“Whatever solution you want to make ...”

continued from page V

mally are the allegations of serious human rights abuses by your government. These allegations aren't just from the US government; they are also from the UN Human Rights Commission, the independent Special Investigative Commission of the UN. You are familiar with these allegations, I'm sure. They include denying access for relief groups to refugee camps, indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets, photo evidence provided by the defector code-named Caesar, who made a presentation to the US Congress showing terrible torture and abuse in Syrian prisons. Are you prepared to take action on these issues in order to make co-operation with the United States easier?

The funny thing about this administration is that it's the first one in history to build its evaluation and later decisions on social media. We call it a social media administration, which is not politics. None of these allegations you mentioned are concrete; all of them are allegations. You can bring photos from anyone and say this is torture. Who took the pictures? Who is he? Nobody knows. There is no verification of any of this evidence, so it's all allegations without evidence.

But Caesar's photos have been looked at by independent European investigators. No, no. It's funded by Qatar, and they say it's an anonymous source. So nothing is clear or proven. The pictures are not clear which person they show. They're just pictures of a head, for example, with some skulls. Who said this is done by the government, not by the rebels? Who said this is a Syrian victim, not someone else? For example, photos published at the beginning of the crisis were from Iraq and Yemen. Second, the United States in particular and the West in general are in no position to talk about human rights. They are responsible for most of the killings in the region, especially the United States after getting into Iraq, and the United Kingdom after invading Libya, and the situation in Yemen, and what happened in Egypt in supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, and terrorism in Tunisia. All these problems happened because of the United States. They were the first ones to trample international law and Security Council resolutions, not us.

That may or may not be true, but those are separate issues, and that does not absolve your government of responsibility. No, no. The United States accused, so we have to answer that part. I'm not saying if there's any human rights breach or infringement, the government has no responsibility. That is another issue. The second part of your question is about the allegations. They're still allegations. If you want

cc. The interviewer was *Jonathan Tepperman*, managing editor of the magazine *Foreign Affairs* that is published every two months as the leading forum of discussion and the most influential magazine in US-foreign affairs and international relationships.

Editorially independent it is published by the *Council on Foreign Relations*, a US American think-tank organized under private law, which is attributed to play a leading role in America's strategy and geopolitics since its existence. Amongst its (currently 4,900) members are, respectively were, famous US-politicians and US-Presidents: It was founded in 1921 by the presidential consultant *Edward M. House*, the journalist *Walter Lippmann* and the bankers *Paul Warburg* and *Otto Hermann Kahn*. Amongst the former and current members respectively board members are *Allen Dulles*, *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, *David Rockefeller*, *John McCloy*, *Zbigniew Brzezinski*, *Henry Kiss-*

inger (the magazine's managing director from 1977 to 1981), *Madeleine Albright*, *George H. W. Bush*, *Dick Cheney*, *George Soros*, *John Negroponte*, *Colin Powell* (current board member), *John Bolton*, *Timothy Geithner* and chairmen of international trusts and banks like *Alan Greenspan*, *Janet Yellen*, *Henry Paulson*, but also lawyers or army-generals like *Stanley McCrystal* or *David Petraeus* and last not least also leading personalities of media-concerns like *ABC*, *CNN*, *NBC* and so on and enterprises like *Goldman Sachs*, *JP Morgan*, *Chase*, *Bank of America*, *Merill Lynch*, *Exxon Mobile* and *McKinsey* and so on.

Based on the model of Chatham House and the Council on Foreign Relations the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ausenpolitik* DGAP (known as German Council on Foreign Relations) was founded.

(compare also: net presence of those organisations and Wikipedia)

me to answer, I have to answer about something that is concrete, proved, and verified.

Are you prepared to categorically deny that there's torture and abuse of prisoners in Syria?

If there's any unbiased and fair way to verify all those allegations, of course we are ready. That would be in our interest.

What impact would a US-Iranian nuclear deal have on Syria?

Nothing, because the crisis here was never part of the negotiations, and Iran refused to make it such. And that is correct, because there is no link between the two.

But many in the United States anticipate that if Iran and the United States strike a deal, it will make cooperation between the two countries much easier. People therefore wonder if Iran might decide to reduce its support for Syria as a favor to the U.S. government.

We have never had any positive information about such a thing, never. I cannot discuss something which I don't have any information about.

Describe whether you think the war is going well from the government's perspective. Independent analysts have suggested that your government currently controls 45 to 50 percent of the territory of Syria.

First of all, if you want to describe the arena – it's not a war between two countries, between two armies where you have an incursion and you lost some territory that you want to regain. It's not like this. We're talking about rebels that infiltrate areas inhabited by civilians. You have Syrian terrorists that support foreign terrorists to come and hide among civilians. They launch what you call guerrilla attacks. That is the shape of

this war, so you cannot look at it as being about territory. Second, wherever the Syrian army has wanted to go, it has succeeded. But the Syrian army cannot have a presence on every kilometer of Syrian territory. That's impossible. We made some advances in the past two years. But if you want to ask me, “Is it going well?” I say that every war is bad, because you always lose, you always have destruction in a war. The main question is, what have we won in this war? What we won in this war is that the Syrian people have rejected the terrorists; the Syrian people support their government more; the Syrian people support their army more. Before talking about winning territory, talk about winning the hearts and minds and the support of the Syrian people. That's what we have won. What's left is logistical; it's technical. That is a matter of time. The war is moving in a positive way. But that doesn't mean you're not losing on the national level. Because you lose lives, you lose infrastructure; the war itself has very bad social effects.

Do you think you will eventually defeat the rebels militarily?

If they don't have external support, and no, let's say, supply and recruitment of new terrorists within Syria, there will be no problem defeating them. Even today we don't have a problem militarily. The problem is that they still have this continuous supply, mainly from Turkey.

So Turkey seems to be the neighbor that you're most concerned about?

Exactly. Logistically, and about terrorist financing from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but through Turkey.

continued on page VII

“Whatever solution you want to make ...”
continued from page VI

Do you blame Erdogan personally? This is a man you once had a fairly good relationship with.

Yes. Because he belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, which is the base of al Qaeda; it was the first political Islamic organization that promoted violent political Islam in the early twentieth century. He belongs strongly and is a staunch believer in these values. He's very fanatical, and that's why he still supports ISIS. He is personally responsible for what happened.

Do you see any other potential partners in the region? For example, General el-Sisi in Egypt?

I wouldn't talk about him personally, but as long as Egypt and the Egyptian army and the government are fighting the same kind of terrorists as in Iraq, of course, we can consider these countries eligible to cooperate with in fighting the same enemy.

Two final questions, if I may. Can you imagine a scenario in which Syria returns to the status quo as it was before the fighting started almost four years ago?
In what sense?

In the sense that Syria is whole again, it is not divided, it controls its borders, it starts to rebuild, and it is at peace and a predominantly secular country.

If you look at a military map now, the Syrian army exists in every corner. Not every place; by every corner, I mean north, south, east, west, and between. If you didn't believe in a unified Syria, that Syria can go back to its previous position, you wouldn't send the army there, as a government. If you don't believe in this as a people, you would have seen people in Syria isolated into different ghettos based on ethnic and sectarian or religious identity. As long as this is not the situation, the people live with each other; the army is everywhere; the army is made up of every color of Syrian society, or the Syrian fabric. This means that we all believe Syria should go back to the way it was. We don't have any other option, because if it doesn't go back to its previous position, that will affect every surrounding country. It's one fabric – it's a domino effect that will have influence from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

If you were able to deliver a message to President Obama today, what would it be?
I think the normal thing that you ask any official in the world is to work for the interests of his people. And the question I would ask any American is, what do you get from supporting terrorists in our country, in our region? What did you get from

supporting the Muslim Brotherhood a few years ago in Egypt and other countries? What did you get from supporting someone like Erdogan? One of the officials from your country asked me seven years ago in Syria at the end of a meeting, “How do you think we can solve the problem in Afghanistan?” I told him, “You have to be able to deal with officials who are not puppets, who can tell you no.” So for the United States, only looking for puppet officials and client states is not how you can serve the interests of your country. You are the greatest power in the world now; you have too many things to disseminate around the world: knowledge, innovation, IT, with its positive repercussions. How can you be the best in these fields yet the worst in the political field? This is a contradiction. That is what I think the American people should analyze and question. Why do you fail in every war? You can create war, you can create problems, but you cannot solve any problem. Twenty years of the peace process in Palestine and Israel, and you cannot do anything with this, in spite of the fact that you are a great country.

But in the context of Syria, what would a better policy look like?

One that preserves stability in the Middle East. Syria is the heart of the Middle East. Everybody knows that. If the Middle East is sick, the whole world will be unstable. In 1991, when we started the peace process, we had a lot of hope. Now, after more than 20 years, things are not at square one; they're much below that square. So the policy should be to help peace in the region, to fight terrorism, to promote secularism, to support this area economically, to help upgrade the mind and society, like you did in your country. That is the supposed mission of the United States, not to launch wars. Launching war doesn't make you a great power.

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English and French under www.voltairenet.org/article186617.html

Letter to the Editor

Curse of the evil deed

From Libya to Syria and Iraq and throughout the whole Middle East the intervention forces (the Atlantic Alliance and Israel) are now disgraced and unmasked by their Islamic proxy warriors.

These proteges of the western world have committed heinous violations of human rights since the beginning of the so-called Arabian spring (2011), atrocities which were mostly reported in a peculiar value-neutral manner by our leading media for a long time. Protest hardly stirred in this country as long as the sufficiently demonized *Muamar al-Gaddafi* or the thousands of less known civil servants, government soldiers and “infidels” from Libya to Syria were publicly lynched by various radical groups celebrated as “opposition” by the West.

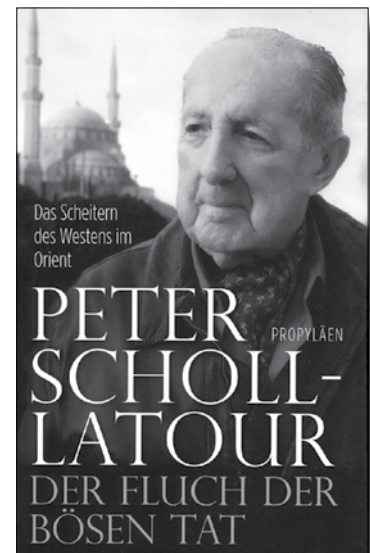
On the contrary: The French Foreign Minister *Fabius* for example, called their crimes in Syria “bon boulot”, and President *Hollande* welcomed the emirates *Baba Amr*'s exiled ruler of terror “amis du peuple Syrien” in Paris. US Senator *John McCain* consulted even personally with the caliph *Ibrahim* who in the meantime became ingloriously known. And it is well known that the militant opposition in Syria – whether it is called “Free Syrian Army”, “Al-Nusra” or just “ISIS” – is financed mainly from the Turkish area, that is to say by NATO (!) and the allied Gulf States including Saudi Arabia.

“Curse of the Evil Deed” is the title of the late *Peter Scholl-Latour*'s last book about the failure of the West in the Orient.

He and many other less famous journalists have been pointing for a long time to the risks of playing with fire, which is geopolitically motivated (*Greater Middle East Initiative*) of the powers mentioned above.

Was that the reason for the poor media covering of his passing last August?

Urs Graf, Zurich



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Do unilateral sanctions violate human rights?

The UN Human Rights Council commissioned an investigation

by Thomas Kaiser

The Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council met in Geneva during the week of 23 to 27 February. This committee – called the *Advisory Board* – is composed of 18 independent experts who are elected based on a key that reflects the continental distribution of the 47 member states of the Human Rights Council. Last Tuesday's meeting included among other topics the report of the working group dealing with the issues of unilateral sanctions and their result on the human rights situation. Thus, an important issue has been taken up by the Human Rights Council that was debated for some time by international lawyers: To what extent do unilateral sanctions violate human rights?

For the general public, it has almost become habit-forming: If a state has adopted a policy that does not fit the powerful of this world, reasons are created to impose sanctions on that country. Even within the EU, the sovereign state of Austria was subjected to a sanctions regime in 2000 for alleged democratic deficits. Quite often, there are economic sanctions, whose effects are disastrous. A look at history shows that especially the US and its allies have repeatedly taken unilateral coercive measures or unilateral sanctions. Cuba, for example, is still a victim of Western coercive measures that have left an immense economic damage. The Latin American country of Venezuela is affected by US sanctions because it simply does not abide by the neoliberal dictate of the United States. Other states suffer from this western power politics as well. The most recent example in this series of unilateral coercive measures and political sanctions against Russia: They were imposed unilaterally by the US and the EU because they accused the Russians of supporting the separatist military in eastern Ukraine. A concrete proof has not been submitted, but the sanctions were imposed. Member countries are forced to participate, although several EU member states including Greece and Austria have taken position against a prolongation of sanctions. The fact that these arbitrary unilateral sanctions are highly problematic with respect to human rights can be seen by reading the investigation report, the working group has prepared on behalf of the Advisory Committee. The working group has investigated the effects on several states which are under a sanctions regime: Cuba, Zimbabwe, Iran and the Gaza Strip. The effects of these sanctions are disastrous and are apparently a violation of fundamental human rights. The report adds that especially the "adverse effects in the Civil Society" are

felt, because "the most vulnerable in society, such as women, children, old and disabled people and the poor" are the most affected. The working group's report recommends, among other things, to appoint a special rapporteur to investigate human rights violations as a result of unilateral coercive measures and to document them.

By reading the report in more detail, one can imagine the impact on the sanctioned countries and what they mean for the population living there.

Cuba

Here especially children and women are affected. It is reported, "that the embargo had contributed to malnutrition that mainly affected women and children, poor water supply and lack of medicine". In addition, the embargo meant that "the State has no access to chemicals that it needs for drinking water treatment", which has inevitably led to a higher morbidity and mortality rate. Since the embargo has already persisted for more than 50 years and has not been abolished by President *Obama* today, one can only imagine the suffering in the country.

Zimbabwe

In 2002, the country's leadership was sanctioned by the EU. The origin of these sanctions came from the land reform under President *Robert Mugabe*. According to the report "the country's population of 13 million people has suffered from the sanctions. Poverty and unemployment rates are high [...]. Diseases such as HIV/AIDS, typhoid and malaria give the country an average life expectancy of between 53 to 55 years. [...] UNICEF found that some 34 percent of children under 5 were underdeveloped, 2 percent were stunted and 10 percent underweight." The poor conditions in the country have led next to a high death rate and to a strong migration with big risks.

Iran

The economic situation of the Iranian people, according to the report, is disastrous. "The sanctions have triggered a collapse in industry, skyrocketing inflation and massive unemployment." In addition, the health care system is severely affected in Iran. "Although the United States of America and the European Union claim that the sanctions do not apply to humanitarian items, in actual fact they have deeply affected the delivery and availability of medical supplies [...] every year, 85,000 Iranians are diagnosed with some form of cancer; the facilities for providing them with chemotherapy and radiotherapy are,

however, scant. While the financial sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran do not, in principle, cover medicine and medical equipment, they make it almost impossible for Iranian importers to finance the import of medical equipment and medicine." The sanctions have "made international payments to Western companies almost impossible. As a result, Western pharmaceutical companies – often the sole producers of these medicines – have all but stopped exporting to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and every year tens of thousands of patients die as a result."

Gaza Strip

"The Government of Israel", the report says, "treats this area [the Gaza Strip] as a foreign entity, submitting its inhabitants to a severe financial and economic blockade. During the 52 days of fighting in July and August 2014, Israeli bombs destroyed or severely damaged more than 53,000 houses in the Gaza Strip. The ongoing blockade violates the social, economic and cultural rights of the people suffering from the unilateral sanctions. Undernourishment is rampant, especially among children. Tens of thousands of families live in the ruins of their houses or in unheated containers furnished by the local authorities. In December 2014, the death from cold of a number of children under the age of 10 was reported to the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*."

After the report was presented by the working group, there was initially a discussion among the members of the Advisory Committee and thereafter, the president of the Committee opened the discussion for the ambassadors present.

The diplomatic representative of Cuba seized the opportunity to draw attention to the injustice of the US sanctions against his country. He condemned the sanctions, which came into force over 50 years ago, as a violation of human rights. The imposition of sanctions was an act of despotism, which means an unlawful interference in the internal affairs of another state. He also sees no change in the US position and denounces them as a blatant violation of human rights and the UN Charter.

Sanctions are an unlawful interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, was argued by the diplomatic representative of Venezuela as well. The aim of these sanctions was to bring about a change of government (regime change). Measures against a State should only be taken by the UN, i.e. by the Security Council, and not

Europe and Russia – who wants war, who wants peace?

by Karl Müller

Two and a half weeks after the agreement between the President of France, the Ukraine, Russia and the German Chancellor on a ceasefire in the East of Ukraine in a joint declaration and after the simultaneously reached agreement on measures to ensure the ceasefire there has indeed been some progress. The number of combat operations declined, prisoners were exchanged and heavy weapons were withdrawn from the immediate front line.

However, no progress has been made on the propaganda front. On the contrary, the pitch in the Western media and by Western politicians and military – apart from interesting exceptions – is becoming ever more acrid. Even in Germany, whose Chancellor was involved in the agreement on the ceasefire.

The German private mainstream media reports are very gross. But also the public broadcasting and public television stations like ARD and ZDF are further demonising – in a rather simplistic fashion – the Russian President and portray Russia as the “evil empire”. The German government opposed, however, the prohibition of work for Russian journalists in the EU countries – which was proposed by bodies of the European Union, and which was especially favoured by the governments of the Baltic States, Poland and Romania. Nonetheless Germany plans its own English-language channel at the public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, which is to counter “Russian propaganda”. The German Foreign Ministry has written a “set of arguments” to counter alleged Russian claims on the East-West relationship and Ukraine circulating it within the ministry and the “Bundestag”. But un-

“Do unilateral sanctions violate ...”

continued from page 10

ilaterally by a powerful state, simply because the country concerned was unwilling to submit to the dictates of this powerful state. He sees this as a violation of the principles of the UN Charter.

During the 28th session of the Human Rights Council, which will take place from 2 to 27 March this report – which was started by the Human Rights Council in September 2013 – will be presented and voted on for its adoption. If it is accepted, a special rapporteur can be established and possibly, international norms and standards can be created.

Source: A/HRC/28/74 Research-based progress report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee containing recommendations on mechanisms to assess the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights and to promote accountability

fortunately this paper is neither a scientific nor a serious factual analysis or opinion.

There are various explanations for this development on the propaganda front.

Some say that Western policy is not really interested in a ceasefire, it wants to increase tensions with Russia and provoke an escalation! Certainly this is true for a number of US politicians and senior NATO military leaders such as the Commander in Chief in Europe, US General *Philip Breedlove*. The United States “need” an enemy and confrontation, a number of analysts believe. Economically, they have weakened and now seek to polarize the world, and especially to bind EU-Europe more closely to themselves. But will this work without Europe?

Others say that Europe does not want war with Russia. Particularly, the German propaganda battle is not a preparation for an imminent military confrontation with Russia, but the attempt to impress and to bring the domestic audience in line politically.

In fact, it is striking that for years the German government has been unable to convince the majority of its population that Germany must take on more “responsibility” in the world – even with war-like means. From Security Conference to Security Conference German politicians like *Joachim Gauck*, *Ursula von der Leyen* or *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* do support this effort. Now even the German Minister of Defence while referring to Russia, wants to reinstate a previously discharged tank battalion (about 500 soldiers with around 50 tanks). Militarily this is largely meaningless, but it is eloquent symbol politics. Finally, the Germans are to understand that great dangers are imminent ...

Previous surveys showed, that in the past years the German population has become even more restrained to take on “responsibility” in the context of a “robust mandate”, as it has always been since the end of World War II. In 2014, the German *Körber Foundation* has commissioned a representative survey of *TNS Policy Research*. The title of the study is “Interfering or retaining?” On the first page the study already summarizes the main result: “The interest in foreign-policy issues is high. However, the willingness to engage in a stronger international commitment is rather slight and fell sharply in the last 20 years. The Germans are particularly sceptical with regard to German soldiers in operation. The Germans have a clear priority for civilian capabilities in foreign policy commitments.”

In the US, the impact of the propaganda war against Russia in recent years has shown in the results of opinion polls. “The attitude of the Americans regarding

Russia is as negative as ever. Not even in the 1960s, when the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev threatened the United States directly, was the gap so deep,” wrote the Russian news agency Sputnik News (formerly Ria Novosti) on 27 February. Which path will Europe follow, which one will the Germans follow? The public protests against the media propaganda battle have not abated in Germany. In the meantime, anyone interested can inform themselves well by reading a number of recent books and a large number of other publications, describing how the Germans are to be manipulated into a confrontation with Russia, but also towards a comprehensive readiness for war. But does the “Sportpalast” speech still work? Even then it was a propaganda lie – and profoundly contradicted human nature. “Another war in Europe? Not in our name!” A few months ago, more than 60 German personalities from public life have expressed under this premise, what millions of Germans and billions of people around the world think, feel and want. This must be the basis of German and European foreign policy. Then there will be no more war in Europe.

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“Putin is the perfect devil for the US and NATO”

Interview with Philippe de Villiers, French politician and writer*



*Philippe de Villiers
(picture ma)*

Le Figaro: What do you think of the Minsk Agreement, which was negotiated by François Hollande and Angela Merkel with Vladimir Putin?

Philippe de Villiers: The Minsk agreement is very im-

portant because it includes four innovations. First of all, they allowed the war parties to step out of the logic of war. The diplomatic way of small steps might promise a peaceful future. Second, two major European countries, France and Germany, led these negotiations and sided with Russia as guarantors for the implementation of the treaty. It is obvious that neither the European Union nor the United States have the ability or determination to establish peace in the area. This agreement shows that only when Europe speaks with Europe a true peace is possible. This corresponds to a Europe of nation states. Third, this agreement paves the way to maintain the only possible solution, the territorial integrity of Ukraine. It takes the consent of Kiev to grant a special status to the East of the country with the right to the Russian mother tongue. Finally, contrary to the one of September, the current agreement contains a time frame for the individual implementation phases.

For once, you agree with an initiative taken by François Hollande?

Yes, because Europe must no longer rely on American standards for its future. François Hollande has acted as a head of state, regardless of the American statements. He has opposed Ukraine's accession to NATO as was required by the US. From now on France has to be encouraged to expand this first positive eman-

atory phase. Now, François Hollande must deliver the Mistral ships to Russia and thus fulfill the trade agreement signed by France and funded by the Russians already with one billion euro. France must also lift the sanctions which are currently warlike acts and which punish the French economy even more than the Russian one. The US economy is in no way affected. But most importantly, rather than to fixate the structure of an artificial Europe of Maastricht prepare for a real, meaningful and sound future Europe, coupled with a great cultural and strategic partnership with Russia. One Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals.

The agreement has already been violated by the Ukrainian separatists. Is Vladimir Putin to be trusted?

When we return to the beginning of the events, one can clearly notice a construct of lies by the European Union and wishful thinking spread widely by the Western press. To my knowledge, the ceasefire on the front line is observed. The only exception is Debaltseve representing a special problem since it arose only shortly before the Minsk Agreement. But even there, the heavy weapons are withdrawn now. The control processes are established and the state leaders talk to each other. If the media claim that Russian trucks carrying humanitarian aid have loaded ammunition and cross the Ukrainian border, I certainly ask myself: Why is no evidence presented to us, in the age of satellites that see everything, in the age of iPhones filming everything? Where are the pictures?

The concept of leisure parks “Puy du Fou” with historical themes will also be taken on in Russia. Is your full support of Vladimir Putin to be seen in this context as well?

Quite the contrary. After I became familiar with Russia through the implementation of the Franco-Russian project, I discovered two things. First, Russia is profoundly European. Its entire culture, its elites and the people as a whole are focused on Europe. *Solzhenitsyn* had warned me “not to make the mistake of turning the back on Russia. It's about our future.”

Furthermore, I discovered that *Putin* is a true statesman. I also understood why he is constantly criticized by the globalized elites in the West. The US want to make Europe the fifty-first star on the American flag. For this, they have to get the Europeans to further subject themselves to total NATO control. Vladimir Putin is the perfect excuse for the perfect devil. Let us

not forget the real causes of the Ukrainian crisis. First, there was the coup instigated by NATO. Next, the Ukrainian government's mistake to prohibit the Russian language. Finally, the American claim to integrate Ukraine into NATO. How could one ever come to get the idea that the Russians would accept NATO right on their doorstep? Vladimir Putin does not want a fragmentation of Ukraine. He just wants the recognition of the mother tongue in the Russian-speaking areas, a special status for these regions and the neutrality of Ukraine towards NATO.

Russia seems to regain its national pride. Is there not the risk of an excess of nationalism?

The difference with France is the following. In Russia there is a real restoration of the moral, civic, patriotic and spiritual values. Younger Russians learn the pride to be Russian. Amongst the Russians one speaks positively about one's own country, about its size, its rich heritage and its Eurasian appearance. What do the young Frenchmen hear all the time? That they have to be ashamed of France, that the French are racists and that patriotism is a flaw. There is more freedom of speech in Russia than in our country. As *Philippe Muray* has predicted, we are caught in a cage of “phobias” – islamophobia, xenophobia, europhobia and homophobia. No one dares to move anymore! There is a spin-dry, sterilized, soft-boiled political class, that praises the division of labor between the secularists that create the spiritual void and the Islamists who fill this void.

Doesn't this also prevent the Russians from being confronted with strong ethnic and cultural tensions?

The difference for integration “French Style” is obvious. With 140 million inhabitants there are 20 million Muslims in Russia. Vladimir Putin applies the old principle of caution. “In Rome you live as Romans, in Russia as Russians.” In France, there are those who want to make believe that secularism and the “faith in human right” are sufficient to solve the problem. They are nothing else but manipulators or cowards. There is only one type of integration in our country. It is Frenchifying!

If the negotiations between the European Union and Greece stagnate, can Tsipras turn to Russia?

* *Philippe de Villiers*, born on 25 March 1949 in Boulogne (Vendée), is a French politician and writer. He is the founder of the sovereigntist party “Mouvement pour la France” (MPF) and founder of the leisure park “Puy du Fou” (Vendée) with theatre plays on the history of France. From 1988 to 2010 he was president of the General Council [Conseil général] of the department Vendée. From 1987 to 1994 and from 1997 to 2004 he was a member of the French National Assembly. From 1994 to 1997 and from 2004 to 2014 he was a member of the EU Parliament. In 1995 and 2007 he was a candidate in the French presidential elections. His latest book “Le Roman de Jeanne d'Arc” was published by Albin Michel in November 2014.

Agricultural corporations appropriate the fertile farmlands of Ukraine

km. Niema Movassat, a member of the German left parliamentary party addressed the public with an article about the access of international agricultural companies to the fertile farmland of the Ukraine (www.links-fraktion.de of 18 February 2015), after his question had been answered by the Federal Government ("Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 18/3925", 18th election period, 4.2.2015). He writes that in the wake of the war in the East of the country and largely unnoticed by the general public there is "a massive sellout of Ukrainian agricultural land to quoted national and international agricultural corporations". Although a sales moratorium for land in the Ukraine applicable up to the year 2012 has been extended until January 2016, the construct of leasing Ukrainian land for periods up to 50 years is very attractive among investors.

The consequences for small farmers in the country are devastating: "They lose their land and are at best employed as cheap labourers by agricultural companies. Poverty and land concentration in the hands of a few are the result."

Together with a number of group members, the MP had tried to get more detailed information about the land transfer. The Federal Government con-

firmed in its reply "the immense extent of land grabbing". Half of the agricultural area in the Ukraine is already managed by large companies. The largest of these, the agricultural holding *Ukr-LandFarming*, owns about 670,000 hectares. In contrast, large-scale farming in Germany would manage a maximum of 12,000 hectares.

The ten largest Ukrainian agricultural companies control approximately 2.8 million hectares of land; some oligarchs have many hundred thousand hectares each. These areas are cultivated mainly for the export of agricultural products; they require a lot of technology and capital and are closely linked to equity as well as European pension funds.

Earlier, the Ukraine was considered the "granary" of the Soviet Union, because it has abundant black earth soils and the acreage of 32 million hectares is about twice as large as in Germany. The Ukraine today is world's third-largest corn and fifth-largest wheat exporter and also produces large amounts of rapeseed which are exported to Western Europe for the production of gasoline.

The sellout of the agricultural area is accompanied by a massive privatization policy. The treaty of association with the EU foresees privatization and deregulation in

the agricultural sector. In the future, genetically modified seeds can be grown in the Ukraine. The country, says the MP, counts among the most promising growth markets for the seed producers *Monsanto* and *DuPont*. The loans amounting to EUR 20.5 billion granted by the IMF and the World Bank in May 2014 did not only make "reforms" such as the raising of the retirement age and lowering the gas prices a condition. The MP believes that one of the conditions was the sale of farmland to listed companies.

The German Government and the EU support the sellout of the Ukrainian country with millions of funds. So, the loans of the European Bank for Reconstruction (EBRD) to Ukrainian and international agricultural corporations have grown vigorously. As in 2013, 45 million euros have been paid to Ukrainian companies, in 2014 with 131 million euros this amount has already tripled. With foreign companies, the total sum rose from 122 to 186 million euros in the same period.

In the Ukraine, German companies are also active. Among others the agro-dealer *Toepfer International* (today *ADM Germany*) who were granted a loan over \$50 million from the EBRD in 2012 "for the purchase of grain and oilseed". For 2015 approximately 1.2 million euros are scheduled for agricultural projects carried out by the German Ministry of Agriculture in the context of the Bilateral Cooperation Programme in the Ukraine. A Twinning Project of the EU with the Ukrainian Government financed land evaluation, soil management, surveying and the creation of a ground cadaster with 1.8 million euros. Since 2008, the German Agriculture Ministry has also financed the "German Agricultural Center in the Ukraine" (DAZ) which offers training courses for farmers. German agricultural companies, including also *Toepfer/ADM* and the seed manufacturer *KWS* are among others the founding members of the DAZ organization. So far 2.5 million euros have been spent. *Bayer* and *BASF* play a big role in these trainings as well.

Considering the overall development, it is only little credible that the Federal Government writes: "The responsibility for managing agricultural structures is within the sovereignty of Ukraine. [...] The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) places special emphasis on the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises in the bilateral cooperation. [...]"

"Putin is the perfect devil for ..."

continued from page 12

For the European oligarchy, *Alexis Tsipras* is committing a mortal sin. Soon, he will be sacrificed on the Parthenon, because he does not prostrate before the euro and admits his predisposition towards Russia. He even finds positive things to say about the "devil". But the worshipers of Brussels and Frankfurt have still not understood that the euro will bring no salvation to the European economies. Greece will leave the euro, negotiations may only postpone the due date. This entire European construction is nothing but a deadly deconstruction. Today's European Union is a crazy, miraculous attempt to resolve the states and borders and to abandon the people with their valuable work to surrender themselves to the masters of globalization so that the latter can continue to scoop up huge profits.

What could the future of Europe look like?

The free trade agreement concocted by the Eurocrats and the globalized elites to transform Europe into a secondary market of USA, destroys our future and contradicts any common sense. What I accuse this "Europe" of is that it becomes an American Europe, a mere economic and cultural adjunct of the United States. In order to predict the future, one might say, "The European Union is dead, long live Europe"! The real, the great Europe, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the Europe that rediscovers the true cradle of its traditional cultural alliances. The Europe of the *Queen Anne of Kiev*, the Russian queen who married a French king. The Europe that rediscovers the good old ideas which govern the world since the triptych "sovereignty, borders, identities" was invented from the experience of mankind.

Source: *Le Figaro* of 23.2.2015,
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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“For me it is important that every child can develop”

A visit to the Astrid Lindgren special school in Weisswasser

Interview with the headmistress Christiane Burges

This first of all: At the Weisswasser Astrid Lindgren special school an impressive work is being done. Here pupils with learning difficulties with a focus on intellectual development are taught and cared for. These are mainly pupils who cannot adequately be supported in the schools of general education. School authority is the Görlitz administrative district office. In the following interview the headmistress Mrs Burges presents the work of her school in detail.

Christiane Burges, Headmistress: Our school was established on 1 August 1991. We were initially housed in two old mansions in Luxembourg street, where, before the reunification, there had been the special school for mentally handicapped children. But it quickly became clear that it would be much too small in the future. I submitted an application to the administration asking to build or rebuild a school, and on 1 January 1994, we could move in this house here. Previously, the house had been used as kindergarten and nursery but then it had become available. The city handed it over to the district, since all special schools, colleges and secondary schools are overseen by the district; middle schools and the primary schools, however, by the communes. At that time, we would have had the opportunity to build a brand new house, but for me it was more important that we were situated as closely as possible to the city center, so that we would be able to use everything in our environment, and that our pupils could master their ways to school independently, whenever possible. The commuting area is relatively large, comprising the former County of Weisswasser and Niesky and extending to Görlitz. Therefore, many pupils get here with the optional school transport, i.e., by taxi.

Current Concerns: How many pupils have you got here?

It varies, but in the last ten years, there were always between 50 and 60. You must imagine that the pupils are always grouped in age levels. The lower level correspondingly includes 1st to 3rd grade, the intermediate level 4th to 6th grade, the upper level 7th to 9th grade and the work level 10th to 12th grade. Normally, we always lead two classes at the lower level, two at the intermediate level, two at the upper level and two at the work level. With the work level we fulfill the compulsory school attendance as well. Usually, compulsory education is completed



(picture ma)

with the ninth grade, but since there isn't any vocational school supplied for our students, we offer it as well, internally.

At the lower level we have six pupils per class on average, at the intermediate level as well, and at the upper level and the work level there are eight to ten students. Of course, it also depends on the clientele of students to be found in a class, and there we have a very wide range, which means that we have severely multiple-handicapped and disabled children with a focus on walking aids, whose parents wish that they are placed close to their home. The “classic mentally-handicapped pupil” – now represents the lowest share of our students. The latter refers to students with a specific medical indication or to pupils with an IQ score of less than 65. Ours are rather students who do not fit into all other current schools, who might be able to cope with the school for children with learning difficulties, but who have behavioral problems or problems with concentration to such a degree that this is not possible.

In the schools for children with learning difficulties compared to the regular schools, performance requirements are curtailed by one to two years and at our school, these are three to four years. In our school the learning material is orientated towards everything that can help students to cope with life. When the pupils start school, they are six or seven years old, but regarding their development often only two to three years old. There, we do not offer reading, writing and arithmetic, but: How do I make a

sandwich, how do I lay the table, how can I get dressed or undressed, rather everyday tasks. Usually we start our lessons in mathematics, German and other subjects at the intermediate level, when students are ten to twelve years old; of course this is very individual. Everything we offer is tailored to the level of the individual child. In addition, we offer a lot of handicrafts, that is working with ceramics, wood and metal as well as paper and textiles. The pupils also cook for themselves. Of course there are also several levels, i.e., the kids make tea or a little dessert. The older ones already start with a salad or smaller dishes. And at the work level, they prepare meals regularly, so to say. The intention is indeed that they learn to take care of themselves. We also give them recipe books according to their level.

Is there also a discussion about integration and inclusion in Saxony?

I was going to come to that anyway. We have our main house. In this main house all tasks of subject teaching are covered. But there are also included three classes with severely multiple-handicapped pupils. For these children, even physical, occupational and logo treatments are available on prescription basis. These children are also housed in the main house, because here we have the necessary facilities, such as a therapeutic bath and more.

Next we have a whole floor in the high school next door. All those who are physically fit and able to cope with the ways

continued on page 14

“For me it is important ...”

continued from page 13

independently are grouped into classes there. Also an internal training flat is integrated there. This means that the students are there all day and fulfill their work stage concept, i.e., compulsory vocational education; they cook for themselves, go to their individual internships from there and have certain learning programs. For our very fit students we also have an outsourced training apartment.

Since 1991/1992, we have also had a school project in cooperation with various primary schools in the city of Weisswasser, which means: we join students in common classes, however, only in those subjects that we consider to be appropriate, these are mainly sports, crafts, music and art education. The remaining subjects are taught separately. Currently, the principle of inclusion is top of the agenda, but here it is always regarded with some reservation, and in Saxony the attitude is the following: The requirements have to be met, and if they are not fulfilled, inclusion can not be granted.

I can remember: In a commemorative publication in 1982, “150 Years of Zurich elementary school”, the special education of children with disabilities was praised as a great achievement, as an expression of a human spirit and as a sign of solidarity. One was proud that every child received training and one began to defame this special support as discrimination. And today it is demanded that the special schools should be abolished and all children should be integrated into the regular school. Are you also affected by that provision?

Just recently we have had parents who definitely wanted that their daughter visited an elementary school, close to her home if possible. After the diagnosis, we carried out, it was clearly a G-Child, that is to say, a child with a focus on mental development that should be taught strictly according to our curriculum. The problem is that this girl – even in a small primary school class – would need a special offer that corresponds with our curriculum. She would need a special education teacher that the school would have to provide for parallel. Now imagine: The girl needs at least 15 lessons at its own level, while the others have their English and maths lessons. A primary school teacher can not accomplish that, she has to take care of the rest of the class. In addition to these subjects, there are also sports and other subjects, in which the girl could not take part. It would take an integration companion, so again another person. The girl must be ac-

companied during transport, it needs help with dressing and putting on its shoes and, and, and. Now look at the effort that you would have to make, and here is a school that can accomplish all that. Actually, that's crazy, right? Meanwhile, the issue is settled. The parents exercised their right of appeal and judicial use and won their case in the instance of the Saxon Higher Administrative Court of Law, so that the girl has been taught in a primary school since the end of November, with all of the above conditions.

Even though it is questionable, whether the enormous effort required now is really for the good of the child. The idea that special support is discriminating is not correct. It is a matter of fact that there are differences, even organically related disabilities, and one can only appreciate that these children are promoted at their level. But this is a topic where we exercise restraint in discussions with parents more and more, because the parents say: There is the position of disability rights, we have the right to that and it is our wish. Of course, we give recommendations, and the parents recognize that. The problem is simply that they want something that they consider to be their right. They want that their child is happy, and feel that they help if it goes to school close to home. But this has often not been thought through. For me it is important that each child can develop. It will not be small and cute forever, it must be integrated into society at some point. When schooling is over, it must be decided whether the child goes to the sheltered workshop or to the open labor market and where it is to live then. The school has the task of preparing the children for this. This means that every child is encouraged at its level, so that it can cope with life subsequently. And this is our basic approach.

Many German states just closed down the special schools and put the children in other schools. So I am glad Saxony is watching and waiting at the moment. At the moment, the culture minister promised us that the special schools would continue to exist. I say at the moment, because you never know ... There is the concept of sitting it out, waiting to see what happens. In some states, in which there is inclusion of the children, they notice now that it does not work. Not even integration works out, much less inclusion.

Reality is quite different from theory. With the inclusion, children actually are supposed to be no longer encouraged, but simply be accepted in their “otherness”. Most of the parents do not want that. They are happy that their children can come to us and they support us. One mother told

me, “I also once wanted my child to attend a regular school, but I can see now that it does not work and therefore I am glad that this school exists.”

We also have an acute shortage of teachers in Saxony, each year we fight for every teacher. It is like that: In GDR times, many teachers were hired from the 1955 to 1960 cohorts in our region and new schools were opened. At that time 45,000 people lived in Weisswasser, now we have 16,000 to 18,000. Meanwhile the city has been dismantled and the teachers have been spread everywhere. But just as they all started together, they are all together retiring now. There will be a severe cut. To make matters worse, many (teachers) who are currently trained in Saxony move to the old federal states because they can earn more money there and can become civil servants; they are leaving. I just do not understand, there are kids everywhere, even here in the Lausitz.

There is one thing I would also like to mention: We have had a very good cooperation with the integration service for three or four years, so that we were able to open up many individual internships in companies for our students. Our aim is to integrate them in the primary labor market at least partially. Perhaps I'll tell you one example: We have been working in cooperation with the horse farm in Rietschen for years, where children go horseback riding, a therapeutic treatment. There they also learn how to handle horses and to take care of them. One student who liked it very much, is now employed as an assistant. And in this process, expanding over many stages the integration service does all the clarification and guidance. Another student desperately wanted to work in the nursing care. She even worked there and she enjoyed the work, but she did not like the environment. She had no contact person to talk to and no one to give her some acknowledgement. And here the integration service took really great care and found another place where she was integrated into the team immediately. Now there is a good chance that she will be employed next year. Thus there are ways to integrate our pupils. Indeed, they have got good qualifications, they have a good attitude, they want to work, they come voluntarily, they are endearing and open, they come on time and do not wander around.

One can feel that you are very committed to your pupils, and that is something needed in the first place. Thank you very much.

(The interview with the headmistress was led by Dieter Sprock.)

Meetings organised by the *Genossenschaft Zeit-Fragen/* *Current Concerns* at the Leipzig book fair



**Leipziger
Buchmesse**

Leipzig liest
12.–15. März 2015

Zeit-Fragen and Current Concerns are again represented at the Leipzig Book Fair this year. The stand is situated in Hall 4, booth A107. In addition, in the context of the reading festival "Leipzig reads", Zeit-Fragen/Current Concerns invite the visitors of the fair to several events and to three evening lectures followed by a discussion.

Who was Henry Dunant? Book presentation of "Who is Henry Dunant?" a book for children and young people, written by Lisette Bors

Speaker: *Urs Knoblauch (CH)*

It was the Swiss businessman *Henry Dunant*, born in 1828 in Geneva, grown up in a humanist family, who witnessed a terrible war in Solferino, in the vicinity of Lake Garda in Italy in 1859. In 1862 he wrote the world-shaking book "A Memory of Solferino". In this book, he already formulated the thoughts and tasks of the Red Cross, which was to become a globally active movement. With the founding of the Red Cross in 1863 and the first Geneva Convention 1864, international humanitarian law evolved to become a mandatory standard. Geneva became headquarter of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Red Cross means the last hope of humanity for countless people in need and in war zones. Lisette Bors' book about Henry Dunant has the great advantage that it contains valuable contributions to the discussion of fundamental ethical values with children and adolescents, in schools and at home.

*Thursday, 12 March 2015,
10 – 10.30 am, Lesebude 1: hall 2,
stand E 307*

How to set up a cooperative

Speakers: *Reinhard Koradi (CH)* and *Dr Tankred Schaer (D)*

The cooperative movement can look back on a successful history – auspicious also for the future. From the history of cooperatives we can draw very valuable conclusions for the present. It is the tradition of the cooperative movement to address current socio- and economic political challenges and to develop respectively implement constructive problem-solving approaches. The cooperative principle is characterised by a high degree of partici-

pation, involvement and codetermination; Therefore, the cooperative is often preferred to other forms of enterprise. In our modern times, the basic cooperative principle can demonstrate new solution approaches, especially when it comes to the areas of the provision with basic supplies. A stable supply of basic requirements for the population – catering to local/regional needs – is a prerequisite for the common good. Within the framework of a cooperative this can be set up and maintained in a very promising way.

*Thursday, 12 March 2015,
1.30 – 2 pm, Sachbuchforum, hall 3,
stand E 211*

The family as a school for life

Speakers: *Sonja van Biezen, Psychologist, Dr Elisabeth Nussbaumer (CH), Reinhard Koradi (CH)* and *lic. phil Moritz Nestor (CH)*

The family – father, mother and siblings – naturally form the first protective community into which a child is born and without which a child cannot become a person who is independent as well as capable of forming and maintaining successful and satisfactory relationships. A child experiences its parents as the "first people", to whom it naturally relates and from whom it learns all the fundamental values necessary to the culture into which it is born. In this first "life partnership" the child learns through its experiences how and whether people can live together peacefully and what values, knowledge and modes of behaviour it will need for this. This learning process may take place more or less successfully. In the family, the adolescent girl can identify with her mother and the boy as a soon-to-be man can identify with his father. On an emotional level, they already both acquire the armoury they will be able to draw on later in life as a grown woman or man. In the years spent in the family the child absorbs the practiced values that characterise the coexistence of people of its cultural environment. After 1945, the family underwent a change in the FRG that was foreign to the citizens of the GDR. This historical aspect will also be considered.

*Thursday, 12 March 2015,
at 7.30 pm, Location: Die Brücke –
Begegnungsstätte Leipzig,
Zollikofer Strasse 21, 04315 Leipzig,
am Volksmarsdorfer Markt
At the same time an event on the same
subject will take place at the Wiederitzsch
Bibliothek, Zur Schule 10a,
04158 Leipzig (Nord)*

*Speakers there: Klaudia Schaer (D),
Josef Nyari (D) and Urs Knoblauch (CH)*

Referendum about the Community School in Rielasingen

Speakers: *Dr med Angelika Spur (D)* and *Tankred Schaer (D)*

Every citizen has the option of directly influencing local politics in his municipality by means of a public petition and a subsequent referendum. Citizens can thus effect a direct democratic correction of decisions made by the elected representatives. In Rielasingen citizens exercised their democratic rights and conducted a referendum aiming at the preservation of their secondary schools. The Red-Green state government of Baden-Württemberg wanted to abolish these established, good schools and introduce the controversial community schools state wide instead. The initiators will report how they succeeded in realising the referendum and what were their experiences.

*Friday, 13 March 2015,
10.30-11 am, Sachbuchforum,
hall 3, stand E 211*

Reading – a royal way

Speaker: *Dr Peter Küpfer (CH)*

Reading fiction achieves something fundamental: By literary texts we experience the world through the eyes of another human being. We experience what the hero or heroine in our story experiences; we feel with her, with her fears, her threats but also with her pleasures and highlights of life. This participation on the life of the other person, this sharing his path, this sharing of the life perspective of another from one's own inner experience – no other medium is able to perform, neither the comic strip nor the film, nor music. While reading we are ourselves forming pictures of life, given to us by the text (text actually means texture), depending on our experiences and our imagination. As long as we are reading meaningful texts, we are ourselves looking for meaning in life. This is something fundamental in a media world which is trying to substitute life's meaning by superficial adventures, thrill and the deceptive image of a world that is one continuous party or an adventure trip.

*Friday, 13 March 2015, 1 – 1.30 pm,
Literaturcafé, hall 4, stand B 600.*

Decentralised structures as an alternative to globalisation

Speakers: *Matthias Anders (D)* and *Dietmar Berger (D)*

Pressed by the ongoing globalisation, economic structures changed along with the economic policies and the employ-

“... and your own emergency supply?”

Considerations in a politically unstable time

rt. In November 2014, Toni Frisch conducted a safety exercise of the federal government, the cantons and cities on possible blackouts and flu epidemics “Sicherheitsverbund Übung 14”. The former head of the humanitarian aid of the Federation will recommend the Federal Council and the State Councillors that every household should store up an emergency supply. Almost a year ago it was the head of the Swiss Army, André Blattmann, also called to mind the need for a domestic emergency stock in view of the current crisis situation in Ukraine.

The team led by Toni Frisch took an important first step and demanded an emergency supply for everyone. But the problem of our electricity supply situation remains. Power supply is getting increasingly internationalized and thus more susceptible without while the aspect of the country's secure supply is not sufficiently considered. Many vital institutions have been changed in recent decades and converted to electricity. Just think of warehousing, health care, water pumps, gas stations, transportation, etc. The novel “Blackout – Morgen ist es zu spät” by Marc Elsberg (ISBN 978-3-442-38029-9 2012) conceives of a possible scenario.

The global political escalation, which we observe in Ukraine, urges us as well

to account for possible direct consequences for our lives. The warlike activities in a region with 15 Ukrainian and 12 Russian nuclear power plants might escalate rapidly. Within hours an international confrontation might be triggered possibly leading to acute warfare. The potential impact of such a scenario can range from the effects of pro-time supply shortages to a long-term nuclear pollution with all its dangerous long-term consequences. Many may remember the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, some of which are still tangible today.

Also the economic and fiscal political situation in the EU can quickly lead to unstable conditions in individual states. Social explosives have been accumulated abundantly in recent decades. Not only in the southern countries developed a massive impoverishment of wide strata of the population, even in the “winner countries” like Germany a broad class of “working poor” has formed whereas international banks are served with billions of interest payments.

Are you well-provided for? Are your relatives, your neighbours? Depending on the assumed scenario, the kind of possible emergency supply might vary. It may help you during difficult times. At the “Bundesamt für wirtschaftliche Landesversorgung, BWL”, (Federal Office for National Economic Supply) you can get some informa-



tion about a short term 7 day emergency supply “Kluger Rat – Notvorrat, BWL” www.bwl.admin.ch or advice in case of a possible power failure (www.bwl.admin.ch/dienstleistungen).

In addition to the current instructions of BWL, which have recently been updated and are also available per “social” media (see box), it is strongly recommended to refer to older information material. It involves a larger stock and also includes suggestions how to manage the emergency stock. We recommend, for example, the list of goods from the brochure “Haushaltsvorrat – Damit der Fall der Fälle nicht zur Falle wird” (Household reserves – For the worst-case scenario) by BWL from 1997, which is conceived for a fortnight. In this brochure you will find advice for a sensible management of the stock, too.

We can only hope that the various conflicts will end peacefully and that some political decision-making circles might come to their senses. The situation calls upon us to make sufficient provisions. •

Alertswiss is launched – help for individual emergency plans

cc. In early February 2015, the Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) launched the system *Alertswiss* in collaboration with various partner organizations. Now everyone who is interested finds information on a website (alertswiss.ch), a smartphone app, Twitter (@alertswiss) and YouTube information about the precaution and the behaviour in disasters and emergencies in Switzerland. In the centre of the newly launched websi-

te is an individual emergency plan that every household can create for themselves. In it e.g. family meeting points can be set, important information can be deposited or a list with emergency supplies can be stored. In an emergency, it is essential that the relevant authorities and the population concerned will act as quickly and as correctly as possible, said Benno Bühlmann, Director of the Federal Office.

“Meetings organised by ...”

continued from page 15

ment situation. The process of concentration at the economic level leads to migration out of the less densely-populated regions and leaves its traces also in the deficient provision of the region with public goods. The school, the post-office, the doctor disappear from the village, because everything is oriented towards the law of “increase in sales and earnings by augmenting quantities”. Merging schools, closing businesses because

of lacking competitiveness, etc. are the order of the day.

This clear-cutting is propagated and accepted as irrefutable as well as the following loss of life quality, security of provision and jobs and is legitimated by the costs that might be saved. The social-political and social consequences of centralisation and concentration are recklessly ignored. However, we may ask the question: Is this economic doctrine of low costs at all sustainable and viable for the future from the perspective of national economy? What would be the con-

sequences if one replaced the principle “Efficiency through size” by the principle “Quality of life through decentralised structures”?

In the context of this event we will answer questions dealing with the basic supply of the rural regions and how the still existing structures might be used and promoted in a better way, in order to meet the tasks of securing livelihoods.

Friday, 13 March 2015, at 7 pm,
lawyers Vieweger, Hartmann and partners,
Chopinstrasse 9, 04103 Leipzig
(center)