

Current Concerns

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A major debate about the new trade agreements TTIP and TiSA is urgently needed

by Thomas Kaiser

Whilst the so-called Western world celebrated its victory over communism in the late eighties of the last century, it has at least since the financial crisis become obvious for all that the solely profit-oriented neoliberal economic system has massive defects and is in urgent need of being reviewed and reformed. But so far this is

being done only in the most rudimentary and usually only temporary way. In the red carpet areas of the high street banks people tell themselves – off record – to now sit out the crisis and afterwards just to carry on as before. Rethinking, which would be imperative, is done only in a few places, if at all. On the contrary, central

banks, especially those in the US or the EU, have pumped hundreds of billions into the money circulation to prevent the banking crisis from continuing to spread and the disaster from becoming obvious to everyone. But a debt of almost 20,000

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“By means of TiSA the ‘service public’ will be abolished”

Interview with Stefan Giger, Secretary-General VPOD (Union of Public Service Employees)



Stefan Giger
(picture thk)

Current Concerns: TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and TiSA (Trade in Services Agreement) are sold to the public as free trade agreement. Why do we have to conclude such agreements now?

Stefan Giger: Over the past few years there has been a wave of new trade agreements that have been handled for the most part outside the WTO. The WTO and its predecessor organization GATT are instruments of the North that serve to suppress the Southern part of the world. The crucial change has been that the *Doha Round* start-

ed to raise the demands of the countries of the South, and thus derail brought these negotiations. The main source of conflict is agricultural trade, for which the North has aggravated its protectionism to dismiss free trade. Another source of conflict are the patent rights against epidemics such as malaria or AIDS, where countries such as India and South Africa are demanding medication at affordable production prices, instead of monopolized prices. Pharmaceutical companies prefer to let thousands of people die, instead of renouncing some of their profits. A third source of conflict is the patenting of genetic information of medicinal plants: Pharmaceutical companies want to patent genetic information from all over the world. This might mean, for instance, that a small business in an African country, which processes a native medicinal plant to

produce a drug would have to pay royalties to the *Novartis Group*, if *Novartis* has patented the genome of this plant.

What does that mean for the TiSA agreement? TiSA will in principle cover all services. According to the UN classification of merchandise, chapters 1 to 4 cover freight and chapters 5 to 9 cover services. This includes all possible services: financial services, retail, consulting services, as well as water supply, energy supply, waste management, health services, education, communication, mail, security, law enforcement, social services, social security, in general: the entire public service. The objective is to deregulate trade for services and to provide market access to those services worldwide.

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“Secret contracts are incompatible with our political system.”

Interview with National Councillor Lukas Reimann, Swiss People's Party, SVP



Lukas Reimann
(picture thk)

Current Concerns: What do you consider problematic about these agreements which are being planned?

National Councillor Lukas Reimann: There are especially two things about them which bother me. Many people

feel that it is a matter of a new free trade agreement, dealing with the dismantling of tariffs or of trade barriers. However,

this is not the case. It is not a free trade agreement. Otherwise one might be in favour of it under some circumstances.

What is it then?

It is an agreement to dismantle non-tariff barriers to trade. This is dangerous, because American corporations would then have the right to take legal action, e.g. against the state. It is true that there is no clearly defined jurisdiction as yet, but we do not know how it will come out in the end.

It is possible that data protection and even consumer protection in Switzerland may constitute a barrier to trade, just like

the moratorium on genetically modified organisms in agriculture that the Swiss people introduced democratically by way of a popular initiative, or like our strict animal welfare rules. And in this way, as absurd as it may sound, the sovereignty of our country and the direct participation of its citizens will ultimately be a trade barrier. Legal action may then be taken against this. As soon as we have signed the contract, this alone is valid and overrides Swiss direct democracy. Direct democracy is undermined. The people may then repeated-

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"A major debate about ..."

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billion dollars in the US or of over 2,000 billion in the Federal Republic of Germany brings up the fundamental question of how this is ever to be refinanced. Instead of doing everything to get away from this unbridled debt policy and of pursuing a policy orientated towards the common good and based on economic reality, the European Central Bank ECB has started to buy up government bonds of EU member states and thus to shoot even more money into circulation.

In actual fact the western industrial nations are in deep trouble, notably also because the Russian and Asian competition is growing and because the West is in danger of missing the boat due to their arrogance and to their everlasting claims to power. In order to prevent the possible collapse of the Western economy, and probably in the best case to delay it, the US is trying to create new (coercive) instruments within the old system to generate more money and profits on a short-term basis. These include the trade agreement TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and the agreement on the liberalization or deregulation of services TiSA (Trade in Services Agreement). Both agreements have so far been negotiated in secret, with Switzerland seated at the negotiating table of the TiSA proceedings.

It is the fundamental goal of free trade agreements to abolish customs duties for certain category groups and to thus make free trade between two or more states possible. The EFTA is a prime example for this: here, agriculture is one area which has – with good reason – been exempt from free trade. However, these new contracts go much further concerning their subject matter, namely right through to a private jurisdiction, and they will therefore lead to a massive interference with state sovereignty. Franz Kotteder, editor of the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" writes in his recent book "Der grosse Ausverkauf – wie die Ideologie des freien Handels unsere Demokratie gefährdet" (The Great Sell-Off – How the Ideology of Free Trade Is Threatening Our Democracy) about TTIP and TiSA: "It is part of a coup d'état by international trade associations and by the major corporations, it cannot be said otherwise." Stefan Giger, Secretary-General of the union VPOD (Swiss Association of the staff of public Services), and Lukas Reimann, Swiss People's Party National Councillor and President of the Movement for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS) will provide information from different angles about what this coup d'état is and where opposition to this monstrous group of treaties is already rising, namely even at UN level.

"Secret contracts are incompatible ..."

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ly vote against something, but if, according to the contract, it is a barrier to trade, direct democracy is rendered inoperative.

That would be a total encroachment on our political system from the outside?

Yes, that is what worries me. If the Swiss people advocate it, then it is their right to do that. But it cannot be tolerated that Swiss achievements, Swiss referendums become obsolete because of such a contract. Take agriculture. It is, after all, a big advantage for our agriculture, if our food is clean, and even more so for us, the citizens. If the contract then says the quality standards in Switzerland are a barrier to trade, then that would be a bitter pill we should have to swallow.

Would that then expand to very many areas?

We cannot even begin to estimate all the areas where this would come into play. But you will afterwards be able to say this is an obstacle to trade in almost every area. It may even be possible that we could lose our social achievements entirely, such as worker protection and the like.

Who decides in disputes? What about the question of jurisdiction?

It will certainly be no Swiss court which renders judgements. At best, it will be a new-formed international committee. It will be a mixed committee making its decisions according to the principle of majority rule. Then a dispute may end with 10 Americans and 7 Europeans voting in favour of the issue and perhaps 3 Europeans against it. Then the case has been decided without the other side having the slightest chance. The Swiss position would not be represented.

Up to now, there has been no open discussion. Only very little is known, but what we do know, is not very positive. What is your opinion about this secrecy?

That is correct – the negotiations are not at all transparent. The popularly elected parliament, our National Council and Federal Council, are not even informed. In the end, we will be presented with a "fait accompli" and we will then only be able to say Yes or No. This does not in the least correspond to my understanding of democracy. In case anything happens to be leaked, it is not official. Sure enough, the mode and method of this procedure arouses suspicions. Keeping things hidden and not disclosing them, may lead to the conclusion that you have something to hide and that this is the reason for your wanting to negotiate everything behind closed doors. I often get e-mails where people

ask what TTIP is and whether it concerns our country. And of course it does also concern our country.

Switzerland is not present at the TTIP negotiations. The US, Canada and the EU are conducting the negotiations. What does that mean for our country?

Federal Councillor Schneider-Amman said that Switzerland had a partial observer status, however, without a say. He thinks that Switzerland has to participate because the US market is of no small importance for our country. Switzerland needs to co-sign, otherwise there might be an import ban on Swiss products. So we should now defend ourselves and try to present and advocate our position. Otherwise we will be presented with a fait accompli.

But that is almost like blackmail! In case Switzerland participated, could there be a referendum?

The AUNS (Movement for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland) launched the popular initiative "International Treaties before the People". Had this initiative been accepted, it would be quite clear that this treaty must be submitted to the people, the voters, to decide upon. Now it is a process of weighing the pros and cons and the Federal Council has a large scope of action. They can always decide whether a treaty is more or less important. If they say it is not really so important, then this treaty is not even submitted to an optional referendum. But it should be a core requirement that a treaty or contract of such great importance must be subject to the mandatory referendum. Here the people must be able to decide. That is also what our Swiss Federal Constitution says: If we join an international organisation, this accession must necessarily be submitted to the people for vote. And in actual fact, if we participate in these treaties, this would equal the accession to an international organisation.

What are the arguments presented by the Federal Council?

The Federal Council is acting as if it were a free trade agreement although, of course, it is clearly not. These agreements are not subject to a referendum. The left wing-parties wanted to launch a referendum on the free trade agreement with China. I was in favour of the people being entitled to decide at the ballot box. The majority was against it, and, therefore, there will never be a voting on the free trade agreement with China. The danger is that the proponents of the agreements with the USA and the EU want to smuggle them past the Swiss electorate.

“Secret contracts are incompatible ...”

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Raising once again the question of jurisdiction within the framework of TTIP or TiSA: will it not be foreign judges who are ultimately going to decide?

Quite clearly, it will be American jurisdiction (American case law) which ultimately applies. With those agreements it will be foreign judges who will have the ultimate say on almost every important matter. As I said before, the agreement is so wide-ranging that it may also have an impact on issues such as data protection, consumer protection, worker's rights, etc. As a result the achievements in protecting citizens that we are used to take for granted may be jettisoned. In the end this could go so far that the Swiss old age pension (AHV) might be considered a barrier to trade for private insurers. This can be extended very far indeed. Depending on the terms of the agreement an American large-scale corporation may even hit upon the idea of offering a pension scheme (an old-age provision) in Switzerland. If the agreement permitted something of the kind, the foundations of our peaceful and democratic coexistence would be lost.

In the case of TiSA, Switzerland is also present at the negotiating table. Is it, therefore, better positioned?

Behind this is the Swiss economy's long-standing wish of offering its services on the EU market. The EU has always linked this issue with that of banking secrecy and has offered to grant us access in return for the lifting of our bank customer confidentiality. At the time, this was not negotiable for Switzerland. Now the banking secrecy has been lifted but no *quid pro quo* has come forward in exchange for it and for incomprehensible reasons the Swiss government has not even made an attempt at claiming it. If we sacrifice banking confidentiality, they ought to grant us access to the services market in return. Switzerland has made another attempt at it, but the EU has warded it off being no longer interested in it, as they say. For large scale enterprises in Switzerland this poses no problem, but for smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) which want to offer their products in areas near the border, it is quite difficult. Switzerland should indeed have access to the services market but TiSA is not the right route to take.

What could be the alternative then?

If at all, Switzerland ought to negotiate with the European States and not with the USA as umbrella organization of the whole structure.

What happens to our achievements based on the general interest such as water and electricity supply, postal services, etc.?

“Many people feel that it is a matter of a new free trade agreement, dealing with the dismantling of tariffs or of trade barriers. However, this is not the case. It is not a free trade agreement.”

Until now we have succeeded in maintaining much of our state-owned hydro-power. Would all this have passed away if we joined TiSA?

Switzerland is one of the world's water reservoirs, and we know that water is becoming increasingly rare. Therefore, the international powers have an interest to gain full access to it by international agreements, to control it or at best to purchase it. They will certainly attempt to be granted access by TiSA. Seeing how the USA have behaved towards Switzerland over the last years I see no reason why we should go even only a small step to accommodate them and to grant them access. Apart from that, we also know what happens if you enter into agreements with the Americans. We comply with them whilst for the Americans their own laws still apply, and we are supposed kindly to abide by them. Situations of this nature we must prevent, they are already going very far indeed. From my point of view one should not even negotiate there. I cannot see any benefits for Switzerland so far, but I do perceive a danger. If the agreements between the USA and the EU are in fact concluded, Switzerland will again be presented with a *fait accompli*. It will then be said, of course, that there is no alternative.

What is the stadium of negotiations on the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA)?

We are not provided any information. As a matter of fact, we have repeatedly asked those who are part of the negotiations for Switzerland what they are actually presenting there. But you do not receive an answer. We parliamentarians chosen by the people are not being informed, and that is bad. There is a secretiveness (mystery-mongering) in Switzerland by which the principle of direct democracy is blatantly violated.

Does the question of a referendum arise here, too?

The procedure is the same as in the case of the Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP.) It is being declared as a free trade agreement. It is argued that there are many of them and that it is nothing special. That the free trade agreements with China have not been subjected to a referendum is now catching up with us. I have voted in favour of a referendum at the time in order to enable the people to vote on it at the ballot box, but unfortunately without success. The

people must be able to vote on the issue, a fundamental debate is needed and the people must know what is at stake and what the consequences are for the citizen and for our polity. I want politics for and with citizens rather than without or against them.

The entire procedure is unworthy of a sovereign state.

It means that liberty, sovereignty, and democracy are abandoned. These are the basic cornerstones of Switzerland's success. Participation, co-operative organization, the bottom-up structure of our polity, the sense of active citizenship, and consequently a great transparency of political processes – these are the key strengths of our country. To enter into agreements in secret is at odds with our polity right from the start. Under no circumstances can we throw all this to the wind. Those basic values have already come under attack from the USA and from Brussels. In actual fact this is a death blow to our democracy.

Why are such agreements launched and negotiated at all in the first place?

We are in the midst of a global conflict, in which Switzerland is a neutral country. This means, after all, that Switzerland is open to all regions of the world, and that is how matters should stay. We can talk with a clear conscience to everyone – to the Russians, to the USA, to China. My impression is that they want to win us over to one alliance. The power struggle between the superpowers is intensifying, and in this situation Switzerland cannot align itself unduly to one of the major powers. And the trend is clearly moving towards the USA. In this manner you are offending other good trading partners. The objective seems to be to move Switzerland in the direction of the USA, to dissolve its neutral status so that it can become part of the Western alliance. The entire process has to be located in this global framework, as well. Besides, the USA want to prevent countries from entering into agreements with other states such as China or Russia. In other words, international positioning is also a key issue. The important consideration here for Switzerland is to maintain its neutral and liberal-minded (cosmopolitan) attitude and not to align itself with one side or the other.

National Councillor Reimann, thank you very much for this interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

“Every joint deployment with NATO is questionable” – “Sabre-rattling against Russia’s gates?”

by Thomas Kaiser

Two weeks ago on Monday at six, the early risers had to take in the news – much to their surprise – that the Swiss Air Force fighter planes were involved in international manoeuvres in Sweden, Norway and Finland, close to the border with Russia. Particularly annoying: Besides Norway five other NATO countries took part in this manoeuvre, which Russia perceived as a provocation. The evocative name of this manoeuvre is “Arctic Challenge Exercise”, and it has euphemistically been declared a “multinational defence exercise”.

The fictitious scenario was to establish a UN-imposed no-fly zone above the Arctic, similar to the one the UN had established over Libya in 2011, with devastating consequences for the country and its people. The effects of the no-fly zone imposed at the time are perceptible to this day. The country is shattered, a functioning government does no longer exist, and the people are fleeing to Europe in shoals. The goal of this no-fly zone was to gain air superiority over Libya in order to get the country under control and carry out a regime change. There was far and wide no track of civilians’ protection to be seen which before had been pointed out as a reason for establishing the zone. On the contrary, the country was bombed back to the Middle Ages and tens of thousands of innocent civilians were killed. Today no one speaks of that any longer, except the affected people themselves. But who cares?

No-fly zone over Russia?

So that is what a no-fly zone à la NATO looks like. And it was in such an exercise that eight combat aircraft of the Swiss Air Force participated, together with the NATO member states Norway, Holland, Germany, France, Great Britain and the USA. All of them states who were involved in wars in recent years, partly contrary to international law, namely in the most shameful war in terms of violating international law, the aggression against Serbia in 1999.

4,000 soldiers were deployed and exercised as the DDPS (Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport) informs in a press release, “the deepening of multinational cooperation in current crisis scenarios [...], the deepening of operational, technical and logistical interoperability”. In addition to the fighter planes Switzerland is on the spot with 16 pilots and 45 ground crew men. As the legal basis for the deployment the DDPS refers

to the “Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)”, which has been concluded with the Kingdom of Sweden in June 2002. It is only annoying that it is not Sweden but the NATO country Norway that holds the supreme command of this exercise.

Officially it is a field exercise for a “peace mission”, however, even the conservative German newspaper *Welt Online* writes on 25 May “the military presence has especially geological reasons [...]”. The major manoeuvres are taking place against the background of increasing tensions with Russia and the rivalry for natural resources in the polar region”. Those who have dealt with the new NATO doctrine from 1999 know that the protection of natural resources may be a reason for military intervention. Those who actually believe that this is about a “peace mission”, close their eyes to reality and risk to be in for a shock.

Criticism of the Swiss participation comes from all sides. In the Swiss parliament there is little approval of the Swiss commitment to a NATO manoeuvre on the Russian border.

Jakob Büchler, CVP (Christian People’s Party), security policy-maker and former president of the Defence Commission initially understands that the Swiss Air Force needs to train abroad, as it is no longer possible in the country itself. However, the public’s acceptance of such exercises is very small. He has concerns about NATO: “We need such training opportunities, but not necessarily with NATO. NATO is an offensive and defensive alliance, something unknown in Switzerland as a neutral country.”

Roland Rino Büchel of the SVP (Swiss People’s Party) St. Gallen, Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the National Council, prefers not to comment on this issue at length, but finds a manoeuvre of this scale problematic: “All joint operations with NATO are questionable, this one in particular.”

“NATO is rehearsing Arctic defense against Russia”

The President of the Foreign Affairs Committee *Carlo Sommaruga* (SP/GE) is not opposed to international assignments if they are bilateral or take place according to a UN mandate: “That Switzerland is participating in international manoeuvres with countries such as Austria, Sweden or other Nordic countries, is not new. It is, however, very problematic to integrate Switzerland into a NATO exercise. Because in that case it is not an exercise in a bilateral part-



National Councillor
Jakob Büchler
(picture thk)

“NATO is an offensive and defensive alliance, something unknown in Switzerland as a neutral country.”



National Councillor
Roland Rino Büchel (picture thk)

“Each joint operation with NATO is questionable, this one especially.”



National Councillor
Carlo Sommaruga
(picture thk)

“The problem is, first, that it is an exercise of NATO, and secondly, that this exercise is not aimed at defense, but against Russia.”

nership. Switzerland can only participate in with an UN mandate or in a bilateral exercise. With NATO, it is problematic. That would require a political decision.” The point is that the whole thing has increased political sensitivity, as well, since it takes place in a very tense situation in Europe at the gates of Russia, although he regards the latter as a geographical inevitability: “The fact that it happens near Russia, depends on the geographical situation of Sweden.” But participation in a NATO-manoevre is clearly going too far for him. “The problem is, first, that it is a NATO exercise and secondly, that this exercise is not aimed at defense, but targeted at Russia.” The fact that it is an exercise of NATO, is obvious, even though three non-members are taking part.

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“Every joint deployment with ...”
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The *Welt Online* Magazine titled “NATO rehearses Arctic defense against Russia”, apparently a formulation very much to the point.

For the Member of the National Council *Oskar Freysinger* (SVP/VS) the whole process is totally unacceptable: “They justify the whole thing by pointing to the UN. But that is absurd. They are conducting a security exercise under the pretext of the UN Security Council against a member of the UN Security Council. Above the Arctic Circle there is only Russia. That cannot be against the Fiji Islands. To organize a manoeuvre against a member of the Security Council under the pretext of the UN – this is the most absurd thing I have ever experienced. They always want to please NATO and they want to please the Americans. We are *de*

facto putting ourselves under the control of the Americans. If Switzerland has a contract with Italy to carry out air combat exercises above the sea, because you cannot exercise in the Valais Alps, it would not bother me, in case it is a neutral manoeuvre to practise with aircrafts. But this exercise here takes place in an explosive political context. This is no longer neutral.”

“NATO carried out several aggressive wars, already”

National Councillor *Geri Müller*, responsible for the Green Party’s Foreign Policy, found clear words to comment on the use of the Swiss Air Force in conjunction with NATO. “Flight training with NATO is not possible for the Swiss Air Force. NATO is an alliance of states, which already waged several wars of aggression, including the war against Serbia. And now showing off in front of Russia’s



National Councillor
Oskar Freysinger
(picture *thk*)

“To organize a manoeuvre against a member of the Security Council under the guise of the UN – this is the most absurd thing I have experienced yet.”



National Councillor
Geri Müller
(picture *parlament.ch*)

“Flight training with NATO is not possible for the Swiss Air Force. NATO is an alliance of states, which has already led several wars of aggression, including the war against Serbia.”

Withdrawal from PfP – better sooner than later

thk. In 1996, Switzerland was ushered in a cloak and dagger operation into the NATO sub-organization *Partnership for Peace*, PfP. The then office holding Federal Councillors *Flavio Cotti* (EDA) and *Adolf Ogi* (VBS) signed the declaration of accession, without any debate in parliament. The US with NATO had mainly set up the PfP to lead the former Eastern Bloc countries and Soviet republics closer to NATO and that way prepare them for a successive (full) NATO membership. Although the US had promised *Gorbachev* not to expand further eastwards. That act was and is certainly not compatible with Switzerland’s neutrality. After the Cold

War ended and a uni-polar world emerged, the majority of the Federal Council no longer assigned the same meaning to the Swiss neutrality as it basically had been assigned to during the Cold War. In recent years, however, the geopolitical situation has once more fundamentally changed. The uni-polar world has become a multipolar one, a fact that the former hegemon USA is hesitant to accept. In this situation, the neutrality of Switzerland is of utmost importance. It is Switzerland alone that can mediate convincingly between the power blocs. Switzerland can only do so credibly if it officially withdraws from PfP – better sooner than later.

gates? This may enormously damage our relationship with Russia.”

To Russian diplomatic circles it is disconcerting that Switzerland participates in these manoeuvres as a neutral country. It is understood that the Swiss Air Force has to train outside the country and that it must do so with other countries, but to practice a war scenario before the gates of Russia together with NATO countries, is something altogether different. It seems that the relationship and trust that has been built up during its OSCE presidency is being endangered and inconsiderately squandered.

Oskar Freysinger therefore demands that Switzerland should seek a better relationship with Russia: “We should make a free trade agreement with Russia. We should be a privileged partner of Russia. We could foster and support many economic interests that way, but we are always afraid. It is said that the United States is our friend, yet since the 90’s they have given us one rotten egg after the other. The Russians have never done that. Now we should set on free trade agreements, in the multilateral world, and that includes the Russians. We are a free country.”

Evi Allemann staunchly on track for NATO?



Evi Allemann
(picture *parlament.ch*)

thk. Whereas from left to right, Switzerland’s participation in the NATO exercise is criticized, for SP National Councillor and “security politician” *Evi Allemann* “the cooperation with other countries”, “does

not go far enough”, as the “*Aargauer Zeitung*” wrote on 26 May. She speaks of an “extension of multilateral missions”. Mrs *Allemann* had strongly engaged against the procurement of a new combat aircraft, the *Gripen*, among other things on the grounds that Switzerland could in case of a threat work more closely with the EU or NATO. That is, however, a very strange understanding of sovereignty.

“By means of TiSA the ...”

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Although the agreement stipulates that each country may establish a so-called negative list, comprising the services not to be deregulated in one's own country. But if TiSA is actually standing, it works as a power cartel of the 23 TiSA States. According to website of *SECO* (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) in the end TiSA is to be transferred to the WTO structure. If other countries want to join, they need to be voted in by the 23 TiSA States, unanimously. That would mean that each of the 23 countries can make any claim and can also enforce that claim against any other country. For example France may request the deregulation of the water supply and the United States may request the deregulation of health care in India, and Switzerland could then request the deregulation of the banking sector in the interests of *UBS* and *CS*. With the TiSA agreement, the North takes the crowbar to deregulate the service sector of the South, at the same time the protectionism of the North will continue in agriculture.

What does that mean for Switzerland?

Switzerland can exempt the public service on its own negative list, and that way its health sector, the social services, the public transport and so on will not be deregulated. But recently we learned that there are also appendices, so-called “annexations”, to the agreement, which can be directly enforced. If, for example, Switzerland adds energy to the negative list, that wouldn't help Switzerland at all, in case an appendix of “energy services” existed. That annex would strike Switzerland, because in this case the negative list is useless, the annex overrules it in regard to energy services. And, on the *SECO* website one can read, that there will indeed be an annex concerning energy services.

What are the dangers concealed in the agreement?

The American-European TTIP Agreement or the North American *NAFTA* agreement contain the same elements as TiSA, especially the “standstill clause” (status quo clause) and the “ratchet clause”. These clauses undermine the authority of the state by putting the interests of multinational corporations over those of the state. With TiSA the North wants to secure big business in the services sector – to a large extent, the production of bulk goods has been already moved to the south. The service sector is to be the new money-making machine.

You have mentioned the negative lists. How safe are they, or might this list be modified once you have become member of TiSA?

They will certainly exert pressure to change the negative list. This may already be the case. During the negotiations, the countries

can submit their negative lists, but probably already now debate is going on to change these lists. Neither do we know whether and what deregulation Switzerland is demanding regarding other countries. The VPOD has asked *SECO* the question: Does the Swiss delegation demand deregulation from other countries? At this point, we still have not received an answer.

How does the agreement actually work?

Annexes are negotiated outside of the main text of the Treaty. As we read the Treaty, these annexes undermine the text of the contract. That is, the exception refers to the main body of the Treaty, however, the annex is universally applicable, as well in case the same topic were on a negative list.

How do you know that?

By way of indiscretions three annexes became public last year. In January a fourth annex text by Turkey about health care became public. We went to the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs *SECO* with it. Maybe this had the effect that the *SECO* started to publish the list of topics on the attachments in the Internet. There are 17 areas, where annexes are negotiated, for example in regard to energy services. All these attachments are applicable directly to Switzerland, even if the same topic is on the negative list.

You mentioned the NAFTA agreement. What connection is there?

NAFTA and TiSA know both the standstill and the ratchet clause. With the *NAFTA* Treaty you can beat down an environmental impact study as shown in a new Court ruling of 17 March 2015. The American mining group *Bilcon* had sued Canada on the basis of the *NAFTA* agreement and won. In accordance with Canadian laws Canada had made an environmental impact assessment for a mining project where *Bilcon* wanted to extract ore with use of explosives. With regard to the environmental impact assessment Canada denied the mining permit and must now pay US\$ 300,000,000 damages. *Bilcon* would have made this benefit with the ore mining and Canada must now replace this lost potential income.

What kind of courts are those which rule such high damages?

These are private courts. There is no instance of appeal. The judges are not independent. The same persons who act as judges are acting as lawyers in another case. One hand washes the other. At global level this is probably the new standard how to govern the world.

That is completely absurd, how does this “private” justice system work?

All around the *World Bank* and its court a whole “industry” of lawyers established themselves, they do nothing else than read-

ing the newspapers and thinking about to what company they may suggest what suits against a State. Then the lawyers offer them to the company – in case of failure for free, but in case of success the lawyers will receive a significant share of the revenues made by the lawsuit. When 300 million damages is ruled as in the case of *Bilcon*, that is a big chunk for the law firm.

Can you forward a concrete example for understanding the matter?

In the 1990s the then corrupt president *Carlos Menem* granted the concession of taking over the water supply business in the greater Buenos Aires area to the French group *Suez*. To that end a contract was concluded in which the company *Suez* acquired the water rights and the existing water network. In return, *Suez* committed itself to renew the outdated infrastructure and to build sewage treatment plants. Before the completion of the sale, water prices increased massively at first, after the privatization they were a little lowered, in order to celebrate the business as success of privatization. *Suez* first released half of the staff and then began to turn the water off completely in the slums where many people could not pay the water bill. The renewal of the water networks and construction of sewage treatment plants were delayed by *Suez*. Then Argentina's economy collapsed and thus the Argentine currency. *Suez* demanded an exchange rate guarantee by the Argentine State or threatened *Suez* would increase water prices by 60 percent – due to market and business risk. *Suez* stopped all renovation projects and the construction of sewage treatment plants. The new Argentine Government ended this battle with the re-nationalization of water supply on the grounds that *Suez* had not fulfilled the obligations arising from the contract and that an exchange rate guarantee had never been agreed on. *Suez* too appealed to the private *World Bank* Court and won in April 2015: Argentina must pay over 400,000,000 US\$ to *Suez* – as a compensation for the lost future profits. This is how economic lobby organizations and international corporations dominate the political decision making processes. This is a disempowering of politics by the economy with the help of a completely arbitrary jurisdiction.

This is supposed to take place in our country as well, that's inconceivable.

Let's imagine: Due to a new zoning law, the City of Berne carries out an environmental impact assessment in regard of a new shopping center on the outskirts of the city and refuses to grant the planning permission. An international group that has invested here can now sue the city of Berne due to the TiSA contract and claim damage compen-

“By means of TiSA the ...”

continued from page 6

sation. A lawsuit worth a billion by a global corporation will probably result in that municipal or cantonal governments no longer have the courage to enforce the law that was democratically adopted. Regarding the legislative process, this will also lead to the situation that Switzerland can no longer develop its environmental legislation or social rights or other standards in view of possible lawsuits. Tisa's standstill- and ratchet clauses would prevent this, otherwise we will have some billion-dollar-suits on our hands.

In consequence this would mean that our direct democracy would be completely contained.

Yes, totally. An example: The *SECO* has uploaded a document on its website giving examples of what constitutes discrimination with respect to the “treatment of nationals” where the standstill- and ratchet clauses comes into operation. On this list there are quite a lot of points which mean discrimination; one point is: the constraints of foreign persons and companies to acquire real estate would be discriminatory. This means that *Lex Koller* is discrimination. Thereafter, when the ratchet clause applies, this means that what was recently negotiated in parliament would in future no longer be valid – parliament has recently discussed to plug loopholes in the *Lex Koller* which today allow that any billionaires still can buy their second home in Switzerland. The standstill clause excludes any tightening of the *Lex Koller*. Housing prices will therefore continue to rise; on the other hand any measures to stop them will no longer be possible because of TiSA.

These are devastating examples which interfere directly with the political system ... The main problem with TiSA is that, what we call in Switzerland “*Service public*” or in Austria and Germany “*Daseinsvorsorge*” (*services of general interest*) will no longer exist. Everything is just trade. From the point of view of a trade union, education is not a commodity but a fundamental right and therefore a state monopoly is necessary, because only a state or public school can guarantee a non-discriminatory access to education to all children. This concept is deeply rooted in Switzerland; in the Canton of St. Gallen, the deregulation of the elementary school was recently rejected by vote at more than 70 percent of. On the other hand, the concept of the United States is: those who have money can buy education; those who have none have lousy public schools. This is diametrically opposed to our concept. The concept of *Service public* does not exist in the view of the United States, and with TiSA *Service public* is to be abolished.

Our AHV as well? Is it at the end of a problem for the “free trade”?

Yes, sure. Social insurances are to be deregulated, too. Here is another example: in 2007, the Dutch *Achmea* Group sued the Slovak government. Slovakia was planning a law with which the payout of profits from the basic health insurances should be excluded – precisely that provision is part of the *Swiss Health Insurance Act KVG*. The *Achmea* Group won the lawsuit back then, and Slovakia had to pay 22 million euros in damage compensation. But the Slovak government was not impressed, and fought it.

What did they do?

They initiated a national health insurance. *Achmea* sued this, too – but this time they lost. This case was not settled in a World Bank court. If it had been decided by a private World Bank court, the judgement would have probably been a different one.

What can we citizens do against this development? Negotiations are secret and this alone is not worthy of our democracy. What can the population, we, the individual citizens, do against this disastrous development?

If we succeed in starting a broad social debate, pressure will be exerted on politics. This is the only way to prevent such treaties. The old Agreement on Investment MAI could be stopped by the resistance of the civil society. Currently, a large movement against the TTIP agreement has developed in Germany and Austria.

Is there any connection of Switzerland to TTIP?

In the FDP [the Swiss liberal party] there are some exponents who think we should join TTIP and seek an association. Federal Councillor *Schneider-Ammann* has spoken similarly. I doubt if the US and the EU would be willing to accept a “stowaway” among them, especially since in other questions Switzerland is neither willing to be integrated. I think this is more a kind of wishful thinking. It is bizarre: The core of our service public has been created by the liberals. In 1848, there was no SP [Socialist Party]. It was the liberals who erected the federal state.

Can Switzerland, even if it does not join TTIP, be forced to open its markets by way of the “Cassis de Dijon” principle?

The TTIP agreement will contain the “Cassis de Dijon” principle, but the legal systems in the US and in Europe are different. This becomes apparent in the possibility to ban poisonous products. In the EU, proof is needed that a certain substance is not hazardous if used. In the US, the state must prove that something is poisonous in order to ban it. This of course is a problem for consumer protection. If the US and the EU agree on a mutual permis-

sion for all products permitted in one region, there will be no way to prevent poisonous products from being used in the EU. By way of the Bilateral Agreements this would also be valid for our country, at least for industrial products, and hence could also have an effect on Switzerland.

What about agriculture?

With food this is optional; the “Cassis de Dijon” principle has just been revoked by the parliament. But with respect to industrial products, TTIP could still have an effect via the Bilateral Agreements. From a Swiss perspective, this is another reason why it should be prevented.

And what about TiSA?

Here, Switzerland is a direct partner in the negotiations, but I am convinced that TiSA may finally be challenged in a referendum. If we build up resistance and there is a wider debate regarding the effects, which will also include a reduction of the communes' independence, a referendum can be won.

But first it will be an issue for parliament?

It is crucial that the parliament abides by the constitution. Regarding a treaty with such wide consequences as the TiSA treaty, a facultative referendum must be possible. Then we will move forward to a referendum and I think we can win it. *SECO* seems to be aware of this. They are signalling that they are willing to talk or to publish information which has not been published by other countries, including negotiation documents, the list of discriminations or the list of appendices. This has not been published by any other country.

What is your interpretation of this?

It is a hint that they are worried if we succeed in starting a debate. In the Romandy, the debate is already under way. In Geneva there will be a public discussion on TiSA with several personalities, including our VPOD. Geneva will probably pass a resolution, declaring it to a *TiSA-free Zone*. These are signals which have no legal significance but demonstrate that there is a movement, that there is resistance and that the issue is now to obtain majorities. The topic needs to be taken serious, we have to report on it, like your newspaper is doing. An article has also been published by the *Beobachter*; *Radio SRF* has reported on it in *Echo der Zeit*.

Is this a recent development?

For a long time, it has been difficult to start a discussion. The parties were not really interested. Newspapers were also reluctant. The interest has increased recently.

Mr Giger, thank you very much for this extensive interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

Reviving the idea of sovereignty

A multipolar world needs rules for peaceful coexistence

by Karl Müller

The fact that the era of the “world’s only superpower” is over cannot be denied. It can no longer be overlooked that the world has become “multipolar”, so that there is no longer any one hegemonic power grasping at the whole world. China, Russia, the world of the Latin American states, Asia and even Africa no longer follow the instructions from Washington. Even in Europe, an increasing number of voices are calling for more autonomy.

This becomes evident in a recently published and very readable book written by *Wilfried Scharnagl*, the longtime chief editor of the Bavarian Christian Social Union’s newspaper “Bayernkurier” and close confidant of former party chairman *Franz Josef Strauss*. As early as in 2012, Scharnagl met with a lot of attention through his book “Bayern kann es auch alleine. Plädoyer für den eigenen Staat” (Bavaria can manage by itself: A Plea for our own State.) His new book is titled “Am Abgrund. Streitschrift für einen anderen Umgang mit Russland.” (On the brink: A Pamphlet for a different Approach to Russia.) This book stands out not only by a thought-provoking and insightful examination of Russian policy which tries to understand, but also by a strong criticism of the US policy in particular and the blind obedience of the EU and German policy to Washington directives.

However, the transition to a multipolar world has not yet made our world more secure and more peaceful. This is shown – closest to us Europeans – by the situation in the Ukraine and now also in Macedonia. For both countries the outcome of the development is currently open. There is, however, no question about these conflicts being so violent and intense that they are causing irreparable human casualties. The dead in the Ukraine and Macedonia cannot be brought back to life. Only charlatans and gamblers consider them as collateral damage of a historical change in the world.

We may come to different evaluations of the fact that the Macedonian government has now agreed to early elections, that it has put on hold the agreement to a pipeline route for the Russian-Turkish gas pipeline “Turkish Stream” and made its construction dependent on an agreement between the EU and Russia. What is certain is that developments are under way and that also for Macedonia no one can predict with certainty what will happen tomorrow.

There are “human rights” activists who describe the situation in Macedonia in the darkest colours. An example for this is a contribution of *Xhabir Deralila* in the Eastern Europe Magazine *Ostpol* of 20 May. Such votes support an EU which claims the overall supervision of Macedonia – although Macedonia is not even a EU member yet. It is significant that EU Commissioner *Johannes Hahn*, the negotiator with the government and opposition in Macedonia, is now, after the caving in of the Macedonian government, speaking of a continuing “Euro-Atlantic perspective” (“Neue Zürcher Zeitung” of 3 June) for that country. This suggests the formula (We = EU + USA), according to which the people in Brussels are still thinking.

Then there is the truly massive direct US influence on the events in Macedonia and on the entire European Balkans. One only needs to read to the very insightful analysis of “Mazedonien im Visier” (Macedonia in your sights) (<https://buergerstimme.com/Design2/2015/06/mazedonien-im-visier/>) published on 4 June. We will here report only one characteristic quote, “The US embassy has occupied a huge square on the hill that dominates the city. Besides the visible objects of impressive size, the embassy covers eight floors underground, which were built by the Americans. Residents of Skopje criticize that the modest two-storey building of the Embassy of the Russian Federation, located between a residential building and a hotel in a side street, reminds them of a canoe compared to the US aircraft carrier that hosts the embassy.”

On the other hand, in “Sputnik News”, the Russian news agency, we could read on 3 June, “Turkish Stream: Europeans vie for pipeline connection”. If it is true what is reported here, the Russian government can take its time and await developments. There are several alternatives to a pipeline through Macedonia. Many European countries still covet Russian gas.

It remains to be seen how the ongoing conflict in the current multipolar world will develop. Waiting for the stronger to win or for the problems to solve themselves cannot be the perspective. On the contrary, we urgently need to consider how to find, formulate and codify rules acceptable to all sides which will enable and guarantee a peaceful coexistence in the world.

Already during the Second World War and especially in the weeks after

the end of the war in Europe, many of those responsible in the world were striving for the second time – after the *League of Nations* had failed – to create a basis for the world to become and remain peaceful even under the conditions of multipolarity and in future to avoid the terror of a worldwide war. The leaders of the world at that time did not start from the premise of an omnipotent, dictatorial world government but wanted sovereign nations to be in agreement about the foundations of the coming world order – with all due respect to different political systems and societies. This principle is expressed – with all due tribute to the ruling wishes of the victors of war – in the United Nations Charter of 26 June 1945.

What had the world learned from two world wars? They had developed a longing for the people’s right to self-determination, for of freedom of citizens and the sovereignty of states, which had all been treated with contempt during the wars. They were determined that this should never happen again. An indispensable characteristic of a peaceful and just world order was to be the recognition of the people’s right to self-determination and of state sovereignty and integrity. This was to be the essence of modern international law.

But even 45 years later, after the end of the East-West conflict, these principles were not fully imbued with life, as it would have been possible and to which goal promising approaches existed, for example in the *Charter of Paris*. Instead, the West regarded itself as the winner of the Cold War, spoke of an “end of history”, referring to its permanent and absolute rule which ignored all justice. As a result, international law was violated again and again by the Western Alliance (US + NATO + EU).

But also with the transition to a multipolar world in the 21st century there were no safe and generally accepted guarantors of international law, of the right to self-determination and sovereignty.

Ukraine and Macedonia also show that corrupt governments are particularly prone “coloured revolutions”. The strategists in the background can build on the citizens’ legitimate criticism and channel it along their lines. This is no reason to point a finger at others. On the contrary: Which current government can

Is the EU planning fast access to savers' money?

"Cyprus" was just a "tryout", that is a message to us from Brussels. The grab for the investor community's money is now in preparation in Europe. "... in order to have the possibility to strike suddenly and without a warning", is added smugly. In fact, rumors and indications are increasing that the EU is preparing guidelines for a "Blitz" access to the bank accounts. In other words: In order to prevent the banking crisis in Europe leading to a crash, compulsory savers' and depositors' investments will be executed much faster than during the "test run" in Cyprus. Goal: pull through the bank rescue in a single weekend. The normal bank customer will realize as late as Monday morning that his account was debited during the weekend.

If we can believe the intensifying rumours that the EU is already working on a master plan to involve the account holders in the bank recoveries. Internally, this means to the EU that a plan has to be worked out, at full speed, for the accelerated bank restructuring. Here the specifications: From Friday evening to Monday, the whole procedure could be completed. Ideally, the account holdery do not even

notice it, because no earlier than Monday morning they would see that their account was debited. The experts in Brussels want to prevent triggering off a run on the banks or that the banks have to be temporarily closed. Optimists among the driving forces in Brussels even expect already this year an according directive to be adopted.

The biggest question mark: The amount of deposit insurance which, up to the present, was always put in the first line. So far, all Europeans had thought that their deposits were automatically backed up for an amount of EUR 100,000. No way: In reality, nothing is generally secure. And the banks are already threatening that they will no longer continue to pay into a nebulous deposit insurance. In fact, savers have been involved in the risk of a bank for many years already, both as savers, as well as bank shareholders. For years, there has been an EU directive on deposit guarantee – and this actually involves clearly a retention of 10% for savers. So, all savers would ultimately have to participate in the restructuring of their bank with 10% of their deposits. And whether this is the matter of a one-time "delivery", is written in the stars.

One expert even admits frankly: There will certainly be "hedging techniques". The most common one would be to convert all savings into cash. But first, interests are not paid, there is a risk of mandatory exchange with "fees" to be collected, and such cash storage is also problematic. By no means should it be kept in bank safes, because they will be locked simultaneously and will be subject to an official declaration of bankruptcy, with meticulous inspection and catalogation by officials. The same is true for the flight into gold and silver. Leaving it in gold paper or silver paper, a confiscation is possible at any time, all the same. The flight into land and real estate – since immobile – will also be a safe prey for the greedy institutions. And the physical possession outside a bank safes also has its problems. That means for savers, the word asset maintenance clearly gains a really new significance! •

Source: "Vertraulicher Schweizer Brief" (Swiss Confidential Letter) No. 1431 of 22.5.2015.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Reviving the idea of ..."

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claim to have no "skeletons in the closet"? All the more, the sovereign citizen is needed who takes care for his environment and his community, before a "new order" is forced upon him, which serves someone else's interests. If the peoples' right to self-determination is an indispensable part of national sovereignty, then we need, above all things, the free citizen who sees himself as the generator

and bearer of the sovereignty of his community, his state, his nation, and who acts accordingly.

But the governments of the countries that constitute the international community may no longer watch great powerful countries struggle for even more power and influence and thereby cause damage which is already immense. All the governments of the world need to call for and commit themselves to a return to international law and a blueprint for lasting peace, for freedom and sovereignty for the new multipolar world. •

"Moreover, it is – the keyword is world order – a matter of a new spirit of and a new supporting framework for the relations between East and West. The controversy over military alliances could have been terminated at the historic turning point a quarter of a century ago. This opportunity was missed. We must now, albeit with unnecessary delay, finally create a new peace order in a new world. The abyss of a threat of war may never open up again, as it does in the controversy over the Ukraine. Europe and America on the one and Russia on the other side have to find a foundation for the lasting reconciliation of interests and a trusting relationship."

Wilfried Scharnagl



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Failure of the US coup d'état in Macedonia

by Thierry Meyssan

On the 9th of May, 2015, the Macedonian police launched a dawn operation to arrest an armed group which had infiltrated the country and which was suspected of preparing a number of attacks.

The police evacuated the civilian population before launching the assault.

The suspects opened fire, which led to a bitter firefight, leaving 14 terrorists and 8 members of the police forces dead. 30 people were taken prisoner. There were a large number of wounded.

Not a terrorist act, but an attempted coup d'État

The Macedonian police were clearly well-informed before they launched their operation. According to the Minister for the Interior, *Ivo Kotevski*, the group was preparing a very important operation for the 17th May (the date of the demonstration organised by the Albanophone opposition in Skopje).

The identification of the suspects has made it possible to determine that they were almost all ex-members of the UÇK (*Kosovo Liberation Army*)¹.

Among them were:

- *Sami Ukshini*, known as "Commandant Sokoli", whose family played a historic role in the UÇK.
- *Rijai Bey*, ex-bodyguard of *Ramush Haradinaj* (himself a drug trafficker, military head of the UÇK, then Prime Minister of Kosovo. He was twice condemned for war crimes by the International Penal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia, but was acquitted because 9 crucial witnesses were murdered during the trial).
- *Dem Shehu*, currently bodyguard for the Albanophone leader and founder of the BDI party, *Ali Ahmeti*.
- *Mirsad Ndrecaj*, known as the "NATO Commandant", grandson of *Malic Ndrecaj*, who is commander of the 132nd Brigade of the UÇK.

The principal leaders of this operation, including *Fadil Fejzullahu* (killed during the assault), are close to the United States ambassador in Skopje, *Paul Wohlers*.

Paul Wohlers is the son of US diplomat *Lester Wohlers*, who played an important part in Atlantist propaganda, and directed the cinematographic service of the *US Information Agency*. Paul's brother, *Laurence Wohlers*, is presently an ambassador in the Central African Republic. Paul Wohlers himself, an ex-Navy pilot, is a specialist in counter-espionage. He was the assistant director of the *United States Department of State Operations Center* (in other words, the service for the surveillance and protection of diplomats).

To eliminate any doubt about the identity of the operation's sponsors, the General Secretary of NATO, *Jens Stoltenberg*, intervened even before the assault was over – not to declare his condemnation of terrorism and his support for the constitutional government of Macedonia, but to paint a picture of the terrorist group as a legitimate ethnic opposition: "I am following the events in Kumanovo with deep concern. I would like to express my sympathy to the families of those who were killed or wounded. It is important that all political and community leaders work together to restore order and begin a transparent investigation in order to find out what happened. I am calling for everyone to show reserve and avoid any new escalation of violence, in the interests of the nation and also the whole region."

You would have to be blind not to understand.

In January 2015, Macedonia foiled an attempted coup d'état organised for the head of the opposition, the social-democrat *Zoran Zaev*. Four people were arrested, and Mr Zaev had his passport confiscated, while the Atlantist press began its denunciation of an "authoritarian drift by the regime" (sic).

Zoran Zaev is publicly supported by the embassies of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Holland. But the only trace left of this attempted coup d'état indicates the responsibility of the US.

On the 17th May, *Zoran Zaev's* social-democrat party (SDSM)² was supposed to organise a demonstration. It intended to distribute 2,000 masks in order to prevent the police from identifying the terrorists taking part in the march. During the demonstration, the armed group, concealed behind their masks, were supposed to attack several institutions and launch a pseudo-"revolution" comparable to the events in Maidan Square, Kiev.

This coup d'état was coordinated by *Mile Zechevich*, an ex-employee of one of *George Soros' foundations*.

As governor of the Strumica region *Zoran Zaev* was accused of having promoted the construction of a centre of commerce and was arrested for corruption. To give him support his party demonstratively left Parliament. He was finally granted a reprieve by the President of the Republic, *Branko Crvenkovski*, who then took over leadership of his party. In June 2013 Zaev was elected chairman of the SDSM.



Fadil Fejzullahu (second from the left), one of the leaders of the armed group, killed during the assault, with his boss, the United States ambassador in Skopje, *Paul Wohlers* (third from the left).
(picture Voltairenet)

In order to understand Washington's urgency to overthrow the Macedonian government, we have to go back and look at the gas pipeline war. Because international politics is a huge chess-board on which every move by any piece causes consequences for all the others.

The gas war

The United States have been attempting to sever communications between Russia and the European Union since 2007. They managed to sabotage the project South Stream by obliging Bulgaria to cancel its participation, but on the 1st December 2014, to everyone's surprise, Russian President *Vladimir Putin* launched a new project when he succeeded in convincing his Turkish opposite number, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, to sign an agreement with him, despite the fact that Turkey is a member of NATO³. It was agreed that Moscow would deliver gas to Ankara, and that in return, Ankara would deliver gas to the European Union, thus by passing the anti-Russian embargo by Brussels. On the 18th of April 2015, the new Greek Prime Minister, *Alexis Tsipras*, gave his agreement that the pipeline could cross his country⁴. As for Macedonian Prime Minister *Nikola Gruevski*, he had already concluded discrete negotiations last March⁵. Finally, Serbia, which had been a partner in the South Stream project, indicated to the Russian Minister for Energy *Aleksandar Novak*, during his reception in Belgrade

Where are the voices of the mankind's humanitarian conscience?

Thierry Meyssan shows in his article (*Current Concerns* from 2 June 2015) that the current conflicts in the Middle East have been planned and intended. With the documents of the American organization Judicial Watch the facts are there in black and white: The Western powers, Turkey and the Gulf states, who like to designate themselves as “Friends of Syria”, have supported the establishment of an Islamist regime in eastern Syria – allegedly to overthrow the official government under *Bashar al-Asad* which was elected by the Syrian people – and this together with the terrorist group *al-Qaeda*: “The West, Gulf countries and Turkey support the opposition [...]. Al Qaeda Iraq (AQI) supported the Syrian opposition from the beginning, both ideologically and through the media [...]. If the situation unravels there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Deir Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime.”^{1,2} So it is clear that with regard to the current conflict in Syria and Iraq we are facing a course of action that has been and still is supported from outside the country.

To make us believe that in Syria and Iraq it is just a religious conflict between Shiites and Sunnis smouldering under the

surface for centuries, means to overlook the historical facts. This is not tenable. Actually, in spite of religious differences the two groups have mainly lived in peace and in mutual respect to each other.

After their crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya with a death toll of several hundred thousand people, the above-mentioned powers have once again destabilized a country, caused anarchy and exposed the population to an unprecedented terror. Thus they are guilty of massive violations of human rights. If as a result of this policy the terrorist militias in the Levant are gaining ground this must not be used as an excuse to continue the failed policies of interventionism, as it is made believe to us in a manipulative way in many media reports of the recent days. Our fellow human beings in the Levant must not be regarded as mere pawns in a geopolitical maneuver, where one can intervene when it serves the own economic and political benefit. The interference from outside has to stop.

Everything possible must be done to facilitate a dialogue between the conflicting parties, as it has already been planned with the *Geneva Conference*. The crisis must be resolved with all parties at the negotiating table. Only this can prepare the ground for sustainable peace.

The responsible elites of the terrorist-supporting states will have to answer for their crimes before the Human Rights Court in The Hague.

The media in the Western countries, whose task it would be to inform openly and honestly must stop and think twice about where they could have been manipulated and why in an internal conflict, which was opaque from the very beginning, they did not follow the principle of “*audiatur et altera pars*” – the other party must be heard. By the way, the principle of ‘*auditur et altera pars*’ could also be recommended when reporting about other trouble spots in the world such as the Ukraine³. This would be a contribution to peace in the world.

We, as citizens of those Western countries who finance and support terrorism in the Levant, must protest ceaselessly, with all the means we have. We must demand that support for terror stops, so that our brothers and sisters in the Middle East – the cradle of our civilization – are not any more tortured, raped, ethnically cleansed, covered with bombs and deprived of their entire cultural heritage with our tax revenues.

Each voice that rises up against this barbarity and its supporters in the Western world, is a voice of the humanitarian conscience of mankind. The latest spin that the Asad government benefits from and supports IS is untenable. The tactics to set a fox to keep the geese attracts no longer.

Reader's letter

Carola and Johannes Irsiegler,
Gräslikon (Switzerland)

“Failure of the US coup ...”

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in April, that Serbia was ready to switch to the Turkish Stream project⁶.

To halt the Russian project, Washington has multiplied its initiatives:

- in Turkey, it is supporting the CHP against President *Erdogan*, hoping this will cause him to lose the elections;
- in Greece, on the 8th May, it sent *Amos Hochstein*, Directeur of the *Bureau of Energy Ressources*, to demand that the Tsipras government give up its agreement with Gazprom;
- it plans – just in case – to block the route of the pipeline by placing one of its puppets in power in Macedonia;
- and in Serbia, it has restarted the project for the secession of the small piece of territory – Voivodine – which allows the junction with Hungary⁷.

Last comment, but not the least: Turkish Stream will also supply Hungary and Austria, thus ending the alternative project negotiated by the United States with President *Hassan Rohani* (against the advice

of the Revolutionary Guards) for supplying them with Iranian gas⁸.

¹ “L’UÇK, une armée kosovare sous encadrement allemand”, by Thierry Meyssan, *Réseau Voltaire*, 15 April 1999.

² The SDSM is member of the Socialist International.

³ “How Vladimir Putin upset Nato’s strategy”, by Thierry Meyssan, translation Horst Frohlich, Odnako (Russia), *Voltaire Netzwerk*, 8 December 2014.

⁴ “Möglicher Deal zwischen Athen und Moskau: Griechenland hofft auf russische Pipeline-Milliarden”, by Giorgos Christides, *Der Spiegel*, 18 April 2015.

⁵ “Геннадий Тимченко задержится на Балканах. Вместо South Stream “Стройтрансгаз” построит трубу в Македонии”, Юрий Барсуков, Коммерсант, 12 марта 2015 г.

⁶ “Énergie: la Serbie souhaite participer au gazoduc Turkish Stream”, *B92*, 14 April 2015.

⁷ “Brussels’s Next Balkans Ersatz State: Vojvodina” translation Horst Frohlich, Strategic Culture Foundation (Russia), *Voltaire Netzwerk*, 20 February 2015.

⁸ “Behind the anti-terror alibi, the gas war in the Levant”, by Thierry Meyssan, translation Horst Frohlich, *Voltaire Netzwerk*, 3 October 2014.

Source: www.voltairenet.org/article187685.html of 3.6.2015

(Translation *Pete Kimberley*)

¹ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/defense-intelligence-agency-create-a-salafist-principality-in-syria-facilitate-rise-of-islamic-state-in-order-to-isolate-the-syrian-regime/5451216>; 22.5.15

² <http://www.judicialwatch.org/press-room/press-releases/judicial-watch-defense-state-department-documents-reveal-obama-administration-knew-that-al-qaeda-terrorists-had-planned-benghazi-attack-10-days-in-advance/>; 18.5.15

³ See also Krone-Schmalz, Gabriele: *Russland verstehen*, Munich 2014

On the significance of direct democracy to ensure social peace (part 2)

Economic system and direct democracy

by Dr rer publ. W. Wüthrich

Part 1 of this series of articles showed how a number of referenda and popular initiatives in the difficult time of World War I and the years subsequently made a significant contribution to securing social peace in Switzerland and to coping with the politically and economically difficult times. Only a few years later – in the 1930s – Europe found itself again in a major crisis. The world economy was falling apart. High unemployment and social distress weighed the population down in many countries. No one knew a way out. In some places – especially in Germany – economic depression paved the ground for political upheaval.

In Switzerland, there were intense political disputes. The central question was whether the liberal economic concept of Switzerland would still have a future, or whether the economy would have to be restructured from the ground. Did the liberal economic constitution have to be thrown overboard and replaced by something that was more crisis-suitable? Highly sensitive issues like this defined political life and there was danger that the country could become unstable. Never before had the economic and regulatory differences been as large and the political conflicts as hard. Again there were numerous referendums and popular initiatives. A total of ten popular initiatives claimed to have an answer or a contribution to solving the crisis. While in other countries, the political opponents fought street battles or faced each other in civil wars, they collected signatures in Switzerland. The explosiveness of the proposals are also reflected in the number of signatures. The Social Democrats and trade unions, for example, collected 567,188 signatures for their Crisis Initiative which came to the vote in 1935 – eleven times more than required by the Constitution. The days of the liberal economic system seemed numbered.

How was it possible that in this tense situation there was no political upheaval and social peace was preserved? How was it possible that extremist parties did not have any chance? These questions are to be answered in the following.

The economic constitution of 1874

To understand the events of those years, we need to consider the development of the economic constitution in the Federal Constitution of Switzerland of 1874 as a

starting point and as past history, because it was crucial to the debates and therefore repeatedly attacked or defended during the crisis by the various political camps.

The economic constitution in the Federal Constitution of 1874 was liberal. It contained three main elements as its essence:

1. Economic freedom as freedom right of the citizen, based on natural law
2. Economic freedom as a principle, i.e. as a guiding principle for the development of the economic system
3. Direct democracy – as decision-making procedure, to define the legal framework and the rules for an orderly economic life. The constituent assembly was guided by the conviction that the people should decide on important key issues directly and pave the way for the development themselves. Thus social peace should be maintained and the economy thrive.

This unusual constitution has its history. It is worth to be explored.

The constitutional historian *Alfred Kölz* concludes in his epochal 2004 work “*Neuere Schweizerische Verfassungsgeschichte*” (Recent Swiss constitutional history) that according to the Federal Constitution of 1874 Switzerland was the world’s only country that had accepted economic freedom based on natural law and included it in its Constitution as a fundamental right because it belonged to human existence and was derived from the natural right of man to his individual freedom: Kölz writes, “Switzerland was and is the only country in the world that recognizes economic freedom as a freedom right.” (p. 870) Whoever is interested in the development of this exceptional legal opinion must go far back in the history books.

The Thurgau Constitution as an example in Regeneration times

In 1830, *Thomas Bornhauser*, pastor in the Thurgau commune of Matzingen, gathered with some colleagues from the cantonal parliament around the parsonage table. They had been commissioned by Parliament to draft a new constitution for the canton, which should revive the ideas of the Enlightenment and human rights, and they should be implemented more clearly than before. Other politicians in other cantons had similar goals. This movement was to go down in history as *regeneration*.

Thomas Bornhauser was very close to the people and committed himself passionately to the new movement and the canton of Thurgau. On the parsonage table in Matzingen there were entries from 130 communes and professional organizations who expressed their detailed wishes for the new constitutional documents. On top of their list were economic reforms and the guarantee of economic freedom, which simply belonged to human existence. Some elements of the then economic system in Thurgau had their roots in the Middle Ages. So there was still a feudal tax in Thurgau, which did no longer correspond to the new times. The so-called *marriage liabilities* were also widespread. For the construction of mills, bakeries, butcheries, blacksmiths, brick factories, pubs and other businesses a patent had to be obtained from the authorities which was subject to payment. It was only granted if a necessity existed. A rival business could thus not be opened and competition could not develop. Thomas Bornhauser considered the marriage liabilities a privilege which was no longer appropriate. Also, some of the existing craft orders – the industrial revolution had just begun – were no longer considered up to date.

The constitution that Thomas Bornhauser and his colleagues had drafted and which was adopted on 14 April 1831 by a large majority of the Thurgau people, contained, among other things, the following key points: “The population governs itself by self-elected deputies.” (Article 4) State power is divided in a legislative, executive and judicial power. (Art. 5) The whole state administration, especially court hearings, are public. (Art. 6) The State is responsible and provides for a good education. (Art. 20) The draft constitution contained an amazing and unusual catalog of human and civil rights such as equality before the law, the freedom of expression and freedom of religion. “[...] There are thus no privileges of birth, of people, of families, of resort, of office and of assets. The citizen is only subject unto the law, which is the same for everybody.” (Art. 9) The freedom of expression – in speaking and writing (Art. 11) is guaranteed, as is the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience for Christian denominations (Art. 21). Thomas Bornhauser added economic freedom to this catalog of human

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rights – and in addition, the protection of private property:

"All citizens of the Canton enjoy full freedom of labor, employment and trade. Only the abuse of that freedom is to be prevented through wise police laws. [...]. "(Art. 12) "The property is sacred. No one can be forced to waive his property neither as a whole, nor in parts, except in the case of a legally recognized general need, and then only against fair compensation" (Art. 14)

This Constitution of 14 April 1831 was revolutionary for its time. The words "wise police laws" that restricted the freedom of trade express something that Thomas Bornhauser had already anticipated. It would not be easy to set limits to the economic freedom of the citizen, so that they would meet the diverse needs and interests of citizens and serve the common good. In the years after 1831 other cantons with similarly liberal constitutions followed. In urban cantons like Zurich, Schaffhausen or St. Gallen it was always about loosening the strict regime of the guilds.

Development of direct democracy in the cantons

In those years the beginnings of direct democracy could also be observed in cantons, who did not know the "Landsgemeinde" (cantonal assembly). Some introduced the so-called right to veto. (cf. René Roca, "Wenn die Volkssouveränität wirklich eine Wahrheit werden soll", Zurich 2012, ISBN 978-3-7255-6694-5). Basically it was about giving a majority of the voters the opportunity to say No to a new act of Parliament. Hence in different cantons the referendum evolved which worked as follows: Parliament approves of a new law and submits it to the people's judgment so that they can say yes or no. That way the people really became the sovereign – in the true sense of the word.

The 1860s were a decade of "democratic movement" which brought the breakthrough for the referendum law and the right to initiative in a number of cantons. As an example, the Canton Thurgau is again to be looked at in the following. Article 4 of the Constitution of 28.2.1869 reads:

The following [...] are subject to referendum:

- a) all laws and concordats
- b) all Grand Council decisions, which result in a new one-time total spending of at least 50,000 Swiss francs, or an an-

nual recurring use of more than 10,000 francs; [...]

Voting is compulsory and is done by secret ballot.

The cantonal constitution of Thurgau additionally contained a right for the people to make a proposal (right to initiative) for the amendment of laws and the Constitution. – Before the vote, the voters were given the following words of conduct by the Constitutional Council, "It is now up to you, worthy citizens, to seriously and conscientiously consider whether you place enough confidence in your own strength and insight to take the reins of governance of the state in your own hands." (Alfred Kölz, "Neuere Schweizerische Verfassungsgeschichte", p. 186) In a polling of 80 percent the people agreed by 64 percent Yes-votes. – This and other cantonal constitutions of that time were truly revolutionary – without a single gunshot being fired.

The freedom of trade and economy must be connected to direct democracy: the principle of freedom of trade and commerce

The 1874 constitutional principle of freedom of trade and commerce is related to the political changes in the mid-19th century. The first socialist movements and parties occurred. Early socialists like *Saint Simon* or *Charles Fourier* published their ideas. They denounced the social injustices that occurred as a result of the industrial revolution in different countries as well as in Switzerland and developed counter-models for economic freedom from the perspective of the factory owners. *Karl Marx* and *Friedrich Engels* went one step further and published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 that called for class struggle, "Workers of the world unite!" was their battle cry, which was yet to shake the world. Marx went into exile in London and began to write his major work "Das Kapital", in which he analyzed the liberal market economy and rejected it as unfit. The book was to become the basis for future, mostly violent revolutions.

The events in Paris after the February Revolution of 1848 were of particular importance for Switzerland. The Socialist Party under the leadership of *Louis Blanc* had won the elections and did not hesitate to put their ideas about new forms of economy into practice. They added a new human right to the constitution: the right to work. They implemented it by establishing national workshops within a short time and in large numbers, with hundreds of thousands of new jobs. They wanted to drive back the private sector by competition from the state economy. (cf. Proudhon, "Bekenntnisse eines Revolutionärs", p. 62) However, the economic project of national workshops claimed

large parts of the taxpayers' money that the government was lacking elsewhere, in consequence. In addition, defects soon became obvious which later were also to be observed in communist countries. As a result of faulty planning products were produced, which consumers did not favor. The political response came promptly: The Socialists lost the next elections massively and Louis Blanc had to flee to England. In Paris there was severe, political unrest with thousands of deaths.

The events of Paris made it clear that the freedom of trade and commerce and the right to work were not easy to handle in practice and contained a considerable potential for conflict. The Socialists had indeed realized their far-reaching economic experiments due to an electoral success without asking the people, whether they really wanted them. A referendum has more legitimacy than an election victory. Here it was necessary to learn.

The events of Paris had an impact on Switzerland. In 1856, the Canton of Solothurn reinforced the freedom of trade and commerce as a civil right, by granting a policy framework in the Constitution, which the constituent assembly designated as *principle of economic freedom*. Which means that all laws or government activities that restrict the freedom of trade and commerce in the public interest, must in principle – this was its central idea – be based on a liberal economic order. It should not be possible, neither for Parliament nor Government to push back the private sector through exaggerated policy laws or governmental activities of all kinds, such as had happened in Paris. The Solothurn people approved of the new Constitution with 78 percent Yes votes on 1 June 1856.

The three pillars of the Economic Constitution of 1874

In 1874, all three of the above-described elements that previously had all been tested in numerous cantonal constitutions, were included in the 1874 Constitution. They are:

1. The freedom of trade and commerce as a fundamental right of the citizen
2. The principle of economic freedom as a guiding principle and framework for the development of the economic system and
3. Direct democracy as a decision-making procedure by which the people give the freedom of trade and industry a concrete regulatory framework; they do so in two respects:
 - a) All the "wise police laws" (to keep to Thomas Bornhauser's formulation) that make up the regulatory framework and serve the public interest, are subject to

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On 6 July 1947 the Swiss people adopted the law on the Old-age and Survivors' Insurance (OASI) by 80% Yes-votes. Thus a central demand in the national strike of 1918 was finally realized after the years of economic crisis and World War II – although it had already been included in the Federal Constitution by the voters in 1925. (cf. Part 1 of these series of articles in *Current Concerns* 14/2015). The posters call to vote on three different economic referenda. The one in the middle, designed by the Swiss artist Hans Erni, who died in March at the age of a hundred and six years, is about the OASI referendum: An old-age pensioner leans on a young worker. (picture keystone)

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an optional referendum. That means with 30,000 signatures a referendum can be brought about.

- b) If a political foray, however, differs from the constitutional principle of economic freedom, i.e. if it does not fit in a liberal economic system, there is a mandatory constitutional vote. In other words, regulations that deviate from the principle of freedom of

trade and commerce are permitted – but only with the consent of the people and the cantons. Thus national workshops, as the Socialists had established in France, would have been possible in Switzerland – but only with the consent of the people and the cantons. Only in this way could social peace be secured, was the view of the constitutional drafters – truly a "wise" solution that Thomas Bornhauser would have liked. – Furthermore, the following applied: The initiative for a constitutional

amendment in Switzerland can be submitted by Parliament or even directly by the people, if interested citizens (then) collected 50,000 signatures and submitted either a formulated proposal or a suggestion for a complete revision of the Constitution.

This unique concept of an economic constitution allows the people today to directly shape and develop the regulatory framework for the economy and contin-

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uously adapt it to current needs. Of the more than 600 total Swiss referendums that have been held since 1874 until today (of which approximately 200 were triggered by popular initiatives), about a hundred were concerned with issues of economy and economic order. It was about the employment relationship, health protection, maximum weekly working hours, holidays, participation, pension funds, accident insurance, minimum wage, vocational training, management salaries and many more. There were a variety of submissions for agriculture. People voted on issues of crisis management and the fight against unemployment, protection of tenants' rights, economic policy and the promotion of individual sectors. The population also voted on foreign economic issues such as, for example, about the 1972 free trade agreement with the EC. They also repeatedly voted on issues of taxes, the money, the gold reserves and the monetary constitution. – It is noteworthy that neither the federal government nor the cantons can implement new taxes or their increase without mandatory referendum.

One thing must still be added: The referendums in the 2,600 communes and the 26 cantons included such, in which the voters could decide, for example, on the income and property taxes, trade reg-

ulations and shop closing laws; there are probably thousands of referendums that shaped and developed the regulatory framework for the economy in Switzerland both on the large and small scale. No one has ever counted them.

Many economic votes in the 1930s – a true test for direct democracy

In the history of the Confederation, there was a period in which lots of votes on industrial issues occurred, which are worth to be considered in more detail. In the 1930s the world economy was falling apart. Many procedures did no longer work. Big countries like the US or Germany had an unemployment rate of 20 percent or more. *Hitler* succeeded in taking advantage of this situation and seized the power. In Switzerland, the economic difficulties and social deprivation were enormous, as well.

It is well understood that the citizens in this crisis were asking themselves, whether the economy should not be fundamentally reorganized and the liberal economic constitution should better be abandoned. As mentioned above, the political differences had never before been so great and the economic and regulatory ideas of the various political camps from the right to the left been so different. Liberals, conservatives, social democrats, unions, Liberal Democrats, Catholic conservatives, commoners, laborers and entrepreneurs, Communists, Frontists, etc.

– in those years, ten very different popular initiatives came from these circles, many of which wanted to turn economic life upside down and put the economic constitution on a new basis. Two initiatives were dealing with the human right "right to work", another wanted to allow government job-creation programs, another wanted to fight the crisis with a state-run economy, another one persecuted corporative state objectives and wanted to install an economic council next to the Parliament, which would govern the affairs of the economy, and another initiative wanted to restructure the economy according to socialist and more cooperative principles, some wanted to strengthen direct democracy in the economic sphere, for others it was a discontinued model, etc. – Can we still govern such a country, the Federal Council must have asked themselves then. – Yes – you can. While in the surrounding countries, the political opponents were involved in street battles and in some places totalitarian regimes were established, signatures were collected in Switzerland – across the political spectrum – and how well! There were many referendums that were a real test for direct democracy and for the liberal economic system.

Would Switzerland pass this test in the tense situation and find back to a common line? Would the cohesion and social peace be maintained? More on this in Part 3 of this series of articles. •

The citizens don't let anybody fool them

The lady is new in business in our village. We chat a little. She does not live here, she comes from Etzwilen, a small village close to Stein am Rhein.

I know the village. "The people there have defended themselves against something", I remember vaguely. "Yes", she answers excitedly, "against the Geothermal project". She tells me who and why they would have protested against it.

Then the experts had come and had spoken with the people. "You know, they always act in such a way as if we had no idea, as if we did not understand anything. However, we are citizens, and if we grapple with something, then we understand what it is. Firstly, they came up psychologically and acted so very understandingly. They said, they understand that we would have 'fears'. However, the fears were completely groundless, nothing would happen. They would explain it to us. When despite this, we still did not agree, they became angry, and tried to exert pressure. However, we did not let them do this to us.

It is about our property and our village. They did not want to guarantee, that our houses would not be damaged, and to insure us against the loss of value, that, they did not want to do."

Pathological mongering of objective criticism

This short meeting has shown me: People see through the spin absolutely if one tries to appease them, and to talk them into "consequential fears". Everywhere it is the same: It does not matter whether it is about Geothermal, Curriculum 21, PIGD or "new ways in drug policy", everywhere the know-it-all "experts" deal with critical citizens arrogantly. They try to convince them, that their doubts were only an expression of groundless "fears" of something new, they would not understand completely what it was about, and they could not understand it at all.

They, the experts, would simply "explain it all". And take care: if one still confronts them with objective counterarguments, they turn nasty.

Leuenberger: A lie is good ...

In former times, good faith had once been valid in our country. Today, the lie is acceptable at political level. *Moritz Leuenberger*, SP, the former Federal Councillor, boasts publicly to have lied to the people. "The climate summit in Copenhagen was disastrous", "Thurgauer Zeitung" cited him. However, at that time he intentionally did not inform the media and therefore lied to them, so that the Swiss would vote for the reduction of the CO₂ output. "Well, I believe, lying is legitimate if it causes something good." And who determines whether "something is good"? *Moritz Leuenberger*?

Help yourselves using your brains

Therefore, I find the lady's conclusion – by the way completely in the sense of *Kant* – very appropriate: You can trust neither the politicians nor the media; you must make yourself a picture of the thing in order not to be fobbed off.

Maria Brügger

Letter to the Editor

No to Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)

The “pro”-arguments in the referendum campaign for PGD are dishonest. *Felix Gutzwiller* claimed in the “Thurgauer Zeitung” from 26.05.2015, that the constitutional change was merely “a moderate adaptation of the legal framework for fertility treatment.” In fact, it was a paradigm shift – away from the protection of life towards the selection of embryos. Performing PGD, the fittest (!) embryo will be selected and implanted into

the uterus, and the others will be frozen, discarded or used for research. This means nothing else but the decision between lives worthy or unworthy of living – a fact that was brushed aside by the advocates of PGD. The Federal Council (FC) originally proposed PGD only for couples with “serious hereditary disorders”. But later on the FC could not resist the pressure exerted by different economically interested lobbies, as National

Councillor *Christian Lohr* commented in the “Wiler Zeitung”. If the constitutional amendment was adopted, it would become the basis for further claims – which the National Ethics Committee (NEC) already formulated, i.e. egg donation, embryo donation, or the production of savior babies. Therefore, No to PGD.

Dr med Viviane Kaiser

Data as the primary topic of interest?

On June 14, we are voting in a referendum whether more embryos may be produced than can be implanted directly into a woman’s womb. A constitutional amendment for a few wealthy families with hereditary diseases? This is hardly likely – otherwise for example, a chromosome screening for all couples using in vitro fertilisation would not already have been provided in the related implementing law. “The Federal Council had indeed originally chosen a quite pragmatic, reasonable approach, but then withdrew under the pressure of various interested circles including some economical ones” explained

National Councillor *Christian Lohr* in the “St. Galler Tagblatt”. Radio stations, television channels and the “free” press are probably under the same pressure: It is striking, that in a suddenly flared-up “ethics discussion” the two major national churches, which clearly reject the constitutional amendment, could hardly get a word in edgeways in the media whereas the inhuman philosopher *Peter Singer* from Australia, who had suggested as early as in 2001 that an infant had the right to live only after 28 days after birth, was called to visit the country and was interviewed by the “NZZ am Sonn-

tag” and in the “Sternstunde Philosophie” by Swiss TV. Peter Singer propagates *Bill Gates’* global medical programs, and Bill Gates in turn justifies his programs with Peter Singer’s theories, at least since the two have met at the WEF in the year 2000. “Big Pharma” is present in these programs, too. On the occasion of chromosome screening, personal genetic data are obtained. Perhaps these data are even more important for certain circles than the approval of PGD (pre-implantation genetic diagnosis) in Switzerland?

Dr med Thomas Lippmann, Uznach

“Hands off human beings”

The PR-company *Farner* advised the pro-PGD-camp: the topic “eugenics”, “selection” should be avoided to win the vote. But: on 27th May *Felix Gutzwiller*, a prominent figure of the pro-camp, expressed in the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”: “The most extended eugenics is practised by nature itself by eliminating a great many embryos who are not capable of developing. In a laboratory you are doing nothing but this.” We can only be grateful for this sentence: If *Felix Gutzwiller* equates nature with the labora-

tory, he admits that it is about eugenics, after all. In the laboratory man breeds. But nature does not breed! Eugenics means: Man wants to breed human beings. The Social Darwinists and Mr *Gutzwiller* (as cited) imputes evolution with acting like a (breeding) man, claiming that man must take evolution in his own hands. – We should know whereto this would be leading. Nature has created life in more than four billion years. And now we want to know how to do it in 50 years? The PR office *Farner* advises the

pro-camp: Impute the anti-PGD-camp with making people scared of eugenics! I am actually afraid of people who do not shy away from dealing with human beings in the lab as though they were peas! “Hands off human beings”, the great Swiss anthropologist *Adolf Portmann* warned in the sixties, when the man-breeders gained the upper hand again.

*MA & lic phil Moritz Nestor,
psychologist, Uzwil*

Curriculum 21: media and computer science - and what about media competence?

by Dr phil Bernadette Fontana

Media are now part of everyday life. They offer plenty of opportunities, but they also contain major risks and dangers. Today's children and adolescents have to cope with them. The school has to face the task, too and – in support and cooperation with the parents – to help adolescents to develop an own internally established position for a responsible and beneficial usage of the media.

The sooner the better?

Very early was the argument fed into the public debate that the rapid development of the new technologies would make it necessary to teach children and young people how to use them from an early age on, otherwise they would be at disadvantage later on in their professional careers. This also included the phrase – being circulated for some time now – about the so-called “half-life of knowledge”, limiting the learning process to the skill, where one would have to look things up. Given the global economic development and the concern about jobs and future, this argument took effect among many parents and still today it determines – often unquestioned – the debate.

Curriculum 21 – media and computer science

The acquisition of media competence is included in *Curriculum 21* by way of an interdisciplinary module “Media and Computer Science” with the following objective: “They [the students, note of the author] are able to orient themselves in a rapidly changing world, characterized by media and information technology, to use traditional and new media and tools independently, critically and competently and to assess the associated opportunities and risks. They know rules of conduct and legal bases for a safe and socially responsible conduct in and with the media.”

Module curriculum Media and Computer science, objectives!

A high aspiration! And what is the path towards attaining this objective? Are the requirements of the curriculum in touch with the developmental-psychological conditions of children and adolescents? Does Curriculum 21 provide conclusive answers on this question or do the phrases remain empty words directed by ideology?

Application competencies are not enough!

The so-called application competencies are a priority in Curriculum 21. It is about technical aspects of “handling”, “research and

learning support” and “production and presentation”, which to a large extent are to be acquired on the basis of issues and projects in German or Nature lessons, or in People and Society and Design lessons. Already in Cycle 1 (kindergarten with 1st and 2nd class) the children are to make first steps in operating the respective devices.

“Already at the beginning of the first cycle, analog and digital media offer diverse creative possibilities”. (cf. Didactic instructions, priorities at the beginning of the 1st cycle) Tests with tablets – sponsored by *Samsung* (see *Current Concerns* 9/10, 31 March) – are already conducted in this age group. That's probably the smallest problem for the present generation, the so-called *digital natives*. Already three-year-old children are able to “wipe and type”. Already for a long time the media industry has been exploiting this, for example by marketing the *iPod-Touch*. Also entering search terms for “research and learning support” as labelled by Curriculum 21, is expected to be no problem, except for the spelling. The question, however, is, how a child is going to get along with the more than two million Internet sources, showing up for instance under the search entry “penguin”, and which of these would it reasonably use for its paper. This requirement is a basic requirement for middle school students (2nd cycle: “Students [...] are able to acquire specific information from various sources, to select and evaluate them with regard to quality and utility”, MI 1.2e). In order to acquire this ability, a child would need appropriate opportunities for comparison; it would have to be able to assess the reliability of sources and especially to understand the text and to mentally “digest” it.

But it is precisely through the early application of technology at school that these comparative experiences will be more and more difficult to be had at all by the children. Their world has not widened, but narrowed. They need us adults for the establishment and the development of a healthy sense of judgement. That is part of the adults' duty of care and responsibility and that cannot be delegated to protection programs. Therefore, application competencies, as emphasized in Curriculum 21, are not enough and are only a very small fraction of media competence.

Digital media as a tool for self-organized learning

Just as all other areas in Curriculum 21 also the curriculum module “media and computer science” is to be seen against the ideological background of pedagogical

constructivism which holds that self-organized learning and competencies are the key elements of learning. In the Didactic Instructions we read among other things: “In computer science education the independent discovering has the same priority as the communication of knowledge and methods.” (cf. Computer science, promoting students' independent discovery) Using a metaphor that would mean to position a non-swimmer at the edge of a deep water basin saying: “Just jump into the water and find your personal way how to swim!”

Accordingly, the competence development from kindergarten to graduation is characterized by the idea of self-organized learning. Fiddling around on a computer and fishing on the Internet instead of instructions and interpersonal support by a teacher – a way into solitude with all its psychological consequences, such as the not insignificant risk of addiction development. But the parents are responsible for such problems: “The educational responsibility for the media use of children and young people outside the school lies with the parents and guardians.” (cf. Didactic instructions, media.)

It starts with cooking, baking and dancing ...

“The pupils are able to analyze simple problems, identify possible solutions and implement them in programs”, the construction of this competency in computer science already begins in kindergarten and in the lower grades when cooking, baking, playing:

“... are able to recognize formal instructions and follow them (for example, cooking and baking recipes, games and crafts instructions, dance choreography).” (Cf. MI 2.2 a)

And where is the kindergarten teacher or lower secondary teacher who instructs the children in this joyous and educational activities, thereby fostering the community activities and showing how to maintain friendships and to work together in a team? Where is the class community sharing the cake, showing off a little dance to the parents or being pleased with the shining eyes of those who have received their piece of handicraft? Are children's needs and developmental tasks here instrumentalized for building up computer technology skills?

Continuing with the students of 3rd to 6th grade:

“... can write and test programs with loops, conditional statements and parameters.” (cf. MI 2.2 f)

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Finally this capacity building ends with the basic demand on the eighth-graders:

"... can formulate self-developed algorithms in the form of executable and correct computer programs with variables and subroutines." (cf. MI 2.2 h)

Here the central question arises whether the „fundament“ for all these skills does actually exist.

Media competence does not just mean being able to "use" the computer

For a responsible approach to the computer far more than the technical handling is required. The interview with *Uwe Buermann* clearly shows how complex the requirements are, which a user of digital media has to face. Lots of schools are already busy getting to grips with the undesirable consequences of their pupils' Internet use (such as cyberbullying). Of course, there are also proficiency levels in Curriculum 21, for example for the 2nd cycle:

"The students can recognize and name consequences of media and virtual actions (e.g. identity formation, relationship management, cyberbullying)." (cf. M 1.1 c)

This may result in a test question for the proposed educational monitoring. How the emotional foundations for that can be acquired, however, is nowhere described.

Not even the cross-reference to a competency level of "Nature, man and society" can help, that is supposed to show on the basis of what topics they may acquire these skills: "Pupils can question stereotypes and prejudices about people with other lifestyles for example on the school grounds, in media, politics". (cf. NMG 7.1 e)

Media education is a much more complex matter. If it is not only to stay on the surface and to be limited to theoretically testable knowledge, it must be appropriate to the developmental conditions in the personality of the child and adolescent and to the development and the maturity of the respective age group. Unfortunately, you're searching such information in the curriculum module "Media and Computer Science" in vain!

Media competence is not possible without cultural abilities and psychological maturity

Media competence education is a challenging capacity and the independent use of the Internet stands at the end of this process. Its presuppositions cannot be acquired at the computer. Yet, these presuppositions are the fundament without which nothing works. Media literacy is often referred to as the "new cultural capacity". *Uwe Buermann* writes:

"When they call media literacy the new culture ability, this does not mean that the traditional cultural skills would be super-

fluous. It is important to note the order: After the formation of the classical cultural abilities, media literacy is the necessary skill of the present. As has been shown, the training of other skills is an essential component of media literacy education. Who wants to secure the future lives of today's children, has to make sure that the basic skills are trained! Of course, the computer belongs in schools, not as a substitute for existing educational concepts, though, but as an additional supplement in adolescence."²

In other words, a stable basis in German, mathematics and a good general knowledge are prerequisites for young people to grow up with a good education backpack and extended interests in peoples and the world. This includes a secure foundation in mathematics, which allow an understanding of the legalities of the computer. Equally important is the sovereign command of one's mother tongue and a broad general education, which includes far more than testable user knowledge. The same applies to handwriting, an important cultural skill, which not only connects to the fellow human being in a very personal way, but own thoughts can also be arranged and developed spontaneously. Therefore, the education of these basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic, independent thinking) is an essential part of media literacy education and must remain the central content of school education independent of the computer. Just as little, social skills, responsibility, empathy, creativity can be learned at the computer. They need the emotional confrontation in the relationship with a You. Here do parents and schools have a common task. We adults have to give adolescents the time and the opportunity to address these development tasks. Only the final point of such a development is media literacy, worthy of its name.

Back to square 1

Therefore, media education first of all involves the careful development of intellectual and emotional basic skills. Thereafter, the computer can be used to deal with more complex tasks. If this step is done too early or on an unstable foundation, it means scoring an own goal for those who call for the early use of digital media in schools as a model for the future, as it is requested in Curriculum 21. Thus, the masters and employees would also be better off, even if today working on the computer is part of many occupations (enticing the call for early computer use at school). Curriculum 21 misses the chance to give an instruction to competent media education. One can only say: Back to square 1! Perhaps in a second attempt it would be worth looking beyond the horizon, to the media concept of the city of Wil³. This mature concept takes all these

aspects into consideration. As early as in 2012, it was ready for testing. ●

¹ The quotations from the Curriculum 21 are always taken from the module curriculum "media and computer science", from now on the detailed descriptions are listed only.

² www.erziehung-zur-medienkompetenz.de (accessed 24.4.2015)

³ Board of Education of the city of Wil. Concept media literacy at schools of the city of Wil. Basic information and measures for a meaningful use of new media at home and at school. Wil 2012. www.erziehung-zur-medienkompetenz.de (accessed 24.4.2015)

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Enabling our children to deal with media

*Interview with Uwe Buermann, pedagogical-therapeutic media advisor**

Current Concerns: Today, media are present everywhere in our daily life. For many parents, the question arises, how should their children acquire the necessary media competence. What does it take?

Uwe Buermann: We are living in the media age. It is good that way, but it is a challenge, as well. To begin with: we must get away from debates that lead to questions like: "Is the Internet good or bad, are smart phones good or bad?" This doesn't get us any further. Lastly, the question "Which capabilities and skills must I have as a user, so that I can use the various devices and services in a sensible way?" is the one we need to ask. This question as well as the problems connected with it are ever-present. The whole problem of cyber-mobbing for instance, emphasizes that media competence is not as easy as we, parents, teachers and kindergarten teachers have been told over a long time. According to the motto: "We must bring the children into contact with the media as soon as possible and then media competence will happen by itself!" That is not really what things are like.

What do you consider to be the prerequisites of a competent media use?

With respect to that issue, we as adults, make a fatal transfer mistake, over and over again. I mean by this that we, the adults who use these devices privately and at work in a sensible way, automatically assume that our children behave just as sensibly and practically and use these things as we do. As long as we think in that way, we are sinning against our children, because we hardly ever know exactly what they are doing and what exactly they are looking for. Media competence is nothing that children acquire at the computer, rather they obtain it in the family and at school where they are led to knowledge and societal values. Only this way will they be able to use the media properly.

What do I need to know in order to use media correctly?

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With respect to this question I always ask about the terms of usage in my presentations. Most of the time it turns out that there is rarely a smart phone user who knows the terms of use, be it *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* or *Instagramm* or has at least partially read and understood them. I also ask my audience, who has read his or her contract of employment or rental contract. The answer is clear: I am reading my working or rental contract because I might have to re-negotiate it eventually. However, the Facebook terms of use for instance, are not read, although they are legally binding. This is something that needs to be understood. In the case of Facebook I cannot negotiate, later. We know that about all Internet contracts. I can either accept or reject. In the Internet, the general terms and conditions appear, when I am already in the process of registering. That means, I have already decided to go along with the conditions and then the legalizing pages appear. That is clear to me. When I press the button "refuse", I don't accept, but when I begin to read, I will be more confused than informed; consequently I click on "accept"! I can understand all that.

But now think of your children! The question that we need to understand is: The generation, which is growing up in our time, signs already ten to twelve contracts per week. They are actually not allowed to do this but they are doing it anyway. With every App which they download, they accept the conditions of use and they sign a contract without having read one word of it. They learn this from us, we do it this way, too. If we now think of our children: when then the first rental contract or the first contract of employment is presented to them, how should they have the impulse to read even one word of this contract? That means, they will just sign their name just like they currently download an App and accept the conditions of use, without having read them. This is our responsibility.

You mention our responsibility as adults. Does that possibly concern the point in time at which we give a smart phone to our children and teenagers?

Yes, here as well. As I mentioned in the meeting, we commit certain collective mistakes in thinking as adults and children, as well. "At what age can one participate in WhatsApp?" I asked the children. At 16, because it is not allowed earlier, they answered. Next I asked, who had what device. Many have smart phones and so I asked the individual children: "Whose is it?" There they look at

you embarrassedly: "It's mine!" Then I always say: "Try again, let's rewind." Then interesting theories are brought forward: "Google?" With the time, the answers are closer to the truth: "My parents?" Already a bit better but still wrong. That's just the point: One can buy a SIM card for a prepaid mobile phone anywhere without a problem. But, I must activate it with the Internet or with a telephone. And there I have to insert the personal data of a person who is at least 16 years old. Each SIM card is registered to one person and it remains that way. It is not the parents, it is either the father or the mother, who has signed. When I want to open an account for a mobile or smart phone, I need to be 18 and show an identification card. The device is registered to that person. The collective mistake in thinking is that even today parents still believe that they can just give their child such a present. It is legally impossible. It doesn't work. They may lend it to whom they want, but the SIM card is and remains registered to him or her. That's the point. With WhatsApp I don't need to give any name or birth date at the point of registration. But I need a mobile number and because I can only get one of these at 16, it is legally understood that there is no person under 16 that can participate in WhatsApp. When there is a problem and a complaint regarding insult or sexting or whatever it may be, then the complaint is sent to the father or mother, the person whose telephone number is registered. This is not clear to a lot of people. We are responsible as adults for that what our children do with their devices. We have a parental duty of care for them.

Can we as parents protect our children?

This is a difficult question. Everybody who goes to the Apps-store or the Google-Playstore knows that there are no age requirements. Our children have access to all Apps, at least to all those that are free. Neither Google nor Apple nor Microsoft need to worry about child protection because legally there is no person under the age of 16 who can have access to these offers. The parents are liable for their children, it's that easy.

We have a responsibility here as in other areas as well.

Yes, if you want to make a comparison, the situation is similar to that of a car. When I am the owner of a car, the vehicle is registered on my name. I can lend it to whom I like. But when the car is sighted by radar, I will receive the police pro-

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protocol and am responsible. Exactly that happens with smart phones and mobiles. The other thing is that the smart phone and the iPod-Touch as well mean Internet access without monitoring. That is something we need to make clear to ourselves. With respect to the protective functions that are offered, one cannot depend on them because meanwhile for *YouTube* for instance, there are step by step directions for any smart phone on the market how to deactivate the parent control function. In practice, this means non-monitored Internet access.

What does this mean in practice?

For example this: All people have realised that during the last months IS terrorists decapitated several Western and Japanese journalists. All people know that, since it was reported in the media, and they know that these videos were put on *YouTube*. It is like that: we hear something like that and we find it so dreadful that we do not even have the idea to sit in front of the computer and watch the video on *YouTube*. Due to my meetings with youths I know that this is different with them. More than half of them have watched these videos whether we agree or not. And the point is – let us be honest – if we could have watched pornography when we were youngsters, we would have done so. We must not reproach the young ones. But now more than half of the boys and girls are doing it. That is part of the reality concerning smart phones. And technically we cannot do anything about that in the case of smart phones.

Thus young people have a different way of dealing with media?

Yes, they have. The youngsters do no longer mail and wait for the answer which might arrive within a couple of hours or days. With *WhatsApp* they know the actual status of their colleagues. If they see "online" and send a news, it will arrive now – and then – depending on the peer-group – they have about 5 to 10 minutes to answer. Otherwise there will be a problem. A lot of youngsters have their online account permanently open – even if that is forbidden at school – but they are always online.

From sleep research we know today that this online use of smart phones has also an effect on the sleep of children and youths. Often they wake up at night because they think that their mobile phone is vibrating. The phases of deep sleep are thus reduced which limits the processing of the matters they have learnt and gradually reduces their performance at school.

What advice are you giving to parents?

A very urgent recommendation for you is this: If you think one day that your child should have such a device, please introduce the rule from the very beginning that the devices are switched off at a certain time, age-adjusted, a time you agreed on, and that the device is handed over to the parents at that time and does not remain in his or her room. Your child will perhaps be grumbling – maybe – but it is in the interest of your child and even of the youth.

What conditions do you think appropriate to cede a smart phone to a youth?

That is the other thing that I would urgently recommend – in case you can still do it as a prevention: Smart phones must not be given on 24 December or on the child's birthday. This encourages the wrong idea that it is a present. As I have told you already: You cannot give it as a present, that is not possible at all. That means that if you want your child to have a smart phone, please, do so on an ordinary workday.

And in your own interest, hand it over accompanied by a written leasing agreement. Meanwhile, you find drafts on the Internet. In this leasing agreement you define quite clearly at what conditions you are ready to put such a device at the child's disposal. Part of this agreement is that you as the parents are entitled at any time to have a look at the transcripts in order to verify what things your child has passed on in your name. The device functions in your name: If you do that from the very beginning, you will have a chance that it works that way, as well at the age of 15 and 16. And then the children also learn that it is not a matter of their private sphere because there is not private sphere on the Internet. And you can define precisely which things are allowed. "If I find out that you watch pornography, if I find out that you have to do with sexting, that you participate in bullying – even so by being silent – I will retain the device for a certain time." If you agree on that from the very beginning, it will work.

And in case the children have already got such a device?

That is even more of a problem: I see it quite clearly that you cannot go home now and take the thing away. It will not work. There will be not other possibility than to have several talks and to try then to renegotiate and come to a regulation.

Another problem is all that data monitoring!

We must of course take all this data monitoring seriously. There are alternatives to *WhatsApp*. Of course I realize that I cannot just say: Delete *WhatsApp*! When the kids use it and have these group dynamics and structure, then I cannot just say, they should leave it. But privacy about *WhatsApp*, especially since it is

part of Facebook, is a huge problem technically. With respect to data privacy it is in fact the worst App we currently have. Many people do not know this: In the last two enforced updates the camera law was added. That means that each time you start *WhatsApp* and the device has a front camera, it photographs the user. That Facebook handles all these photos bio-metrically, is well known. That is, even if I have no related profile picture, Facebook knows the face of the user. At the last enforced update in January this year, it happened that *WhatsApp* got a microphone access. Of course. That won't take place permanently, no false panic, the data network would not allow it, but it is happening.

Are there any alternatives to WhatsApp?

The alternative, about which I told the students, is this: to my knowledge and in one's best knowledge and belief this is *Threema*, a Swiss quality product whose programmers are situated in Zurich. *Threema* can do everything that *WhatsApp* can do – including forming groups, voice messages, pictures, text. The advantage is that data on the server are deleted automatically after two months, so no one can become confronted with problems in his professional life because of something he posted as a teenager. In *Threema* everything is encrypted "peer to peer". Therefore *Threema* is the current alternative. There is no advertising and the data will not be disclosed to third parties. What more do you want? And "current status" means, of course: If you ever hear in the media that *Threema* has been purchased, then of course you have to change again. But it would be nice if you as a parent could animate your kids, if they currently use *WhatsApp*, to persuade their colleagues to switch over to *Threema*. This is an issue that I know well. If I tell a young person, move to *Threema* and his colleagues won't do it, it is of no use. Therefore today I animate the young people to send the last *WhatsApp* message of their life to all their contacts saying this: "I'm not stupid, I'll go along here no longer, you will meet me at *Threema* now".

Let's come to the data monitoring again, an important issue!

Data monitoring must be considered seriously as well as data analysis. The arrogance that exists in the adults' world, must stop. Repeatedly one gets a lot like: "I do not care, what they monitor on the Internet, I am no terrorist, I have nothing to hide!" All right, however, we must be aware of the responsibility, for instance, if we distribute school presentation topics at school. If I give a pupil the task: "Do a presentation on IS-terrorists", and I let him simply go to the Internet, he may get on the black list of

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the United States. That is a fact, and I as a teacher, am responsible, though not legally, but morally responsible. And it is the same for you as a parent: If you have the habit of searching everything on the Internet. Depending on the topic you are embarking on a minefield. You cannot surf anonymously, forget it. You have a duty of care.

Do we have the transparent person ...?

I would like to make it briefly clear by using the example of Google. You all have used Google before and know that YouTube belongs to Google. Then you know that your children are dealing with Google, more or less daily. Now you enter a search term and type "sch". And while you are typing, you get a maximum of ten proposals. And now it is clear, if I type "sch" or you as well, every one of us will receive a different list of suggestions. Have you ever thought about that? It does not matter what computer I am using. I get my suggestions, although I have not signed on. What is the secret behind this? Every key click is forwarded to Google, eBay, Amazon, etc.. What applies to the keyboard, is also true for your mouse. Google knows exactly whether you read the list of results. They see this observing the scrolling speed. The internal profile of Facebook stores, how many minutes and seconds you have been on which chronicle and which paragraphs of a chronicle you have read and which not. The real secret behind it is – just as everyone has his or her own, absolutely clearly identifiable handwriting – everyone who has learned typing after he has mastered it, has an absolutely clearly identifiable typing signature. When I am visiting you, after two minutes when I am using your computer, the Google system knows that it is me who is sitting at your PC. The system immediately recognises who sits at your PC and sends corresponding advertising. The Internet has long been individualised.

So the adults' duty of care for their children is at the core?

Yes, on the one hand regarding the data which are being collected about children or teenagers. The traces on the Internet are inextinguishable. The older we are, the closer we are to the end of our lives, the more we can afford to be indifferent. We have got our work, we have got our home, we have got our insurance. But I remind you again of your duty of care for the children. More and more personnel managers from companies use these data of Internet usage for their decision on who is recruited. Meanwhile it is evident that it plays a role with insurances. Thus, in Germany, theoretically a company can ask the policyholder of a home insurance policy in the event of

London School of Economics study shows: Cell phone ban in schools leads to better school performance and more equal opportunities

ev. A study by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics examined the influence of how schools dealt with mobile phones on the performance of students aged 11 to 16 years. The study showed that the academic performance of students increased by an average of 6.41% after a cell phone ban, however, those of weak pupils by 14.23%, under the condition that the ban is also respected in practice. The study reads: "We found that following a phone use ban, student test scores improved by 6.41% of a standard deviation. Our results indicate that there are no significant gains in student performance if a ban is not widely complied with. Furthermore, this effect is driven by the most disadvantaged and underachieving pupils. Students in the lowest quartile of prior achievement gain 14.23% of a standard deviation, whilst, students in the top quartile are neither positively nor negatively affected by a phone ban. The results suggest that low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones, while high achievers can focus in the classroom regardless of the mobile phone policy. This also implies that any negative externalities from phone use do not impact on the high achieving students. Schools could significantly reduce the educa-

tion achievement gap by prohibiting mobile phone use in schools, and so by allowing phones in schools, New York [which cancelled a 10-year ban on mobile phones in March 2015 so as to increase the equality of opportunities, now instead] may unintentionally increase the inequalities of outcomes. We include several robustness checks such as an event study, placebo bans, test for changes in student intake and range of alternative outcome measures with the approval of the phones in schools unintentionally inequality increases the school success." (p. 3)

It is not difficult to understand that students who have trouble to concentrate on the subject matter, are distracted by the mobile phone – distracted as well as by making calls while driving and thereby increasing the likelihood of accidents. Particularly with regard to the equality of opportunity therefore a total ban on cell phones in the school would be of great advantage and – like the authors say rightly (p. 18) – a cost-effective way to reduce inequalities.

*Louis-Philippe Beland
and Richard Murphy.*

*III Communication: Technology,
Distraction & Student Performance.
London School of Economics and
Political Science.
Centre for Economic Performance.
London 2015*

a burglary, whether he is in Facebook or WhatsApp. If he says no, and it turns out his answer was untrue, he has no insurance claim. And if he says yes, then the insurance company may purchase the communication of the past three days from Facebook. Everything this member has posted on Facebook or WhatsApp! And if he has written somewhere: "We are off the weekend for three days", this is considered as a gross negligent conduct and the insurance cover expires. Concerning this matter we have not yet a precedent, but that will come in the near future. That is like talking to the answering machine: "We are on Mallorca for the next two weeks." In that case the insurance coverage also expires. This is just the beginning, other insurance companies such as liability insurances etc. will refer to the stored data of the customers, so as not to have to pay. We have to expect these things with regard to our children, as well. So please do not take it lightly!

What then would be the way to achieve media competence?

What I said at the beginning, I meant quite seriously. I am not saying, smart phones are bad. I am not saying the Internet is bad. It is quite clear to me that all these devices hold

their advantages in themselves. Remember what I have just said. The question we have to ask is the following: "What skills and abilities do I need as a user to deal with the media sensibly?" I am not saying I must not use Facebook. But I must consider well, what I am writing. If we take all that into account, we have a dilemma. And that is what I criticise about teaching media competence. It is reduced to the question "Do I know how to use the equipment?" That is no media competence, even three-year-old children can do that! But in these matters that I have tried to present here, it may perhaps become clear that it is about completely different questions, that are much more important. "Do I have the ability to judge in the sense of self-assessment?" "Can I realise what topics I can look up on the Internet and in what case I'd rather go to the library?" "What topics can I discuss with my colleagues on the Internet, what should I rather discuss from mouth to ear, or on the phone or by mail?" "There are things I should rather write in a letter than on the Internet, even in the year 2015." We, as adults aren't aware of all these connections, how should 14-year-old be! We have all experienced that with being 14 the pri-

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mary goal in life is to be 16, and the Utopians in class think of 18, and everything after that is science fiction. Of course, I can stand in front of the teenager and say, "Think of your career!" Our parents and teachers did the same. It gets in and there off again. Now we have a historical dilemma, again. We were able to permit ourselves to do so. We all did a lot of nonsense, too. The nice thing is, no one knew what we were doing. Even our partners didn't know what stories we told them. The problem of today's young generation is, if they use the Internet and the smart phones without inhibition, as they do at present, they are potentially open to blackmail, all along the line. That's the problem and that means, this rule "smart phone not before 16" is not only legally, but also developmental-psychologically correct. For us it should be obvious – and I know it's completely against the trend – but if I give a smart phone to a 12-year-old, then one or another disaster is inevitable (whether sexting, bullying or problems in workforce). The question is really just which of these disasters it will be.

In other words, we adults need to act preventively, predictively and take our responsibility and our duty of care seriously?

Yes, we can only hope that all future parents will remain more steadfast than the parents' generation, that has been hit now. Peer pressure has always existed in that age. Once it was designer clothes, next skateboards and now

the smart phone. We cannot prevent it, at all. But that it has now become the smart phone, is homemade. There was one parental couple in each class community that came up with the idea, to please their child with a smart phone; then there were two, then three. All are running home saying, "everybody has got a smart phone, I need one, too." And one parental home after the other gives in. Why? Because we have all been contaminated with this slogan, "The one who does not introduce the media to his child early enough, spoils his future." We have to realise, it's just exactly the opposite! The children don't have to learn it in their early years. Another example is driving a car. The possession of the driver's licence is a professional advantage in Switzerland, too. But no-one has ever demanded to attach pedals at the tables of the first class, to let the children playfully learn driving a car. Neither do we have a discussion "driving licence at 14" in Switzerland. If we asked a thirteen-year-old, "would you prefer to drive yourself?" we could be sure that he took it seriously and started to drive off. We wouldn't discuss that because we know that you need more than knowing which leverage to use in the car, in order to participate in the traffic. I must be able to act with foresight. I can not do that at the age of 14, quite a few can't do it at 20, either. Therefore there is an agreement: driving licence at 18!

Yet, the children are with us in the car ...

Of course, that does not mean that we do not take our children in the car. That's the point. To me it is not about a wrong preservation pedagogy. But, the way I drive my children through the area, not letting them sit behind the wheel, the same way we should handle the uncontrollable medium Internet. If my child has a question and I do not know the answer, then as a father I'll look it up on the Internet, but not my 8-year-old child. Just as teachers use material from the Internet to prepare their lessons, nowadays. Teachers select them like they do with other master copies. This step from, "we use the Internet together with and for our children" to "I let my child use the Internet independently," we should adapt to the development of children.

In other words, we must take our duty of care seriously, here as well!

Well, we have failed here for a whole generation, let's face it, we failed. The children have got the equipment. For this generation we can only hope for damage limitation. But we should learn from it as soon as possible so that we do not make the same mistake for the following age groups. In this respect we need to rethink. Real media competence, that we all wish from the bottom of our hearts, begins with media abstinence – not in the sense of a preservation pedagogy. No, in the sense of teaching the abilities you need to use media sensibly.

Mr Buermann, thank you very much for the interview.

(Interview Eliane Gautschi)

Curriculum 21: Apple ready for take off

mw. Since last summer a school experiment called "myPad" has been underway in the Canton of Solothurn "as it has never before taken place in Switzerland". In twelve classes from 3rd to 6th primary grade all students and teachers obtained their own tablet-computer. But even more: in Adliswil, even three kindergartens were equipped with two iPads each. The devices are provided to the children

for usage "during the unguided playing period" – as an opportunity in addition to traditional games. So-called experts assert: "iPads in kindergarten are useful". (<http://www.20min.ch/digital/dossier/apple/story/23783755>)

Useful for whom? Certainly for hardware and software manufacturers of all kinds. Already three years ago *Apple* advertised in the United States: "Interactive

graphics and videos instead of dry books". ("Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", from 19.1.2012). This sales hit has belatedly arrived in Switzerland now, however, just in time for the planned "implementation" of the unspeakable Curriculum 21. Well, no computer company wants to miss making this business of billions

Anyway, the College of Education (PHZH) in Zurich nicely complies with the IT multinationals by just offering training courses for the use of iPads in kindergarten and lower primary school:

It is up to us parents and teachers, to put an end to such activities. Ongoing or already submitted popular initiatives in the cantons of Aargau, Basel-Land, Schwyz, St. Gallen, Thurgau, Zurich and Solothurn and planned ones in other cantons give the people the opportunity to prevent the introduction of the Curriculum 21.

"iPad in kindergarten and lower primary school" "Meaningful applications"

"What new educational opportunities do the mini-computers provide that can be handled by touch and taken anywhere. How can competence-oriented and cooperative learning be encouraged with iPads? The course shows pleasurable and creative ways for children to use the tablets as learning, designing, and game media in the classroom.

MI, 03.06.2015, 1:30pm–5:00pm"

Homepage of PH Zurich

Screen or love?

by Moritz Nestor, psychologist and anthropologist

In the glamorous world of an airport, a well-dressed couple have taken their seats with a five-month-old toddler on an upholstered three-piece suite. The father is staring at his cell phone, headphones in his ears, tapping the keys continuously. From time to time he sips his cola. The mother, also with a Coke in front of her, is staring at the screen of a larger electronic device, constantly receiving and sending news. The child is sitting in a basket next to the table. There is an iPad in front of it. The loudspeakers in the hall fill the room with "socket music". The kid's small hands are slapping the screen. One silly bubble faces with stumpy legs and triangular arms, one after the other show up, red, blue, yellow, green, they laugh at the child and disappear. And the child laughs at the bubble faces, wants to hold them with its little fingers, but it does not yet understand what unreal images are – much like my dog, who is searching the barking dog that has appeared on the screen behind the TV set. Every now and then the child squeals. And every now and then, the mother bends down to him without a word, busying herself with her electronic device. Every now and then a piece of "information" is exchanged between the adults, a quick exchange of glances, then again the same picture. This lasts for almost two hours.

While I am reading my book, my eyes and my thoughts are straying to the couple and their child, time and again. They are together, but yet alone. What is going on there?

The child is well-fed, warmly dressed, the parents are obviously wealthy. One does not have the impression that the child is missing anything material. It sits there quietly and attentively and vividly "communicates" with its "social medium", an "intelligent machine" – as the cybernetics, who set the tone in education today, call such machines. The child has everything, is mentally stimulated and emotionally addressed by the machine, you can see it on its vividly moving face. Isn't this an early stimulation of figure and color vision and imagination? Does the child not exactly – and how early! – synchronize his hands and eyes? And all by himself! And does it not just go on a discovery trip, exploring independently the possibilities of the medium and its presentations? A perfect example of "self-directed learning"? So, you might think.

Or maybe not? Is there not anything missing, after all?

I recall an experiment by the US primate researcher *Harry Harlow*: In a cage, separated by a partition, there are two wire-dummies of chimpanzee mothers with big eyes. One of them is only wear-

ing a soft fur coat. The other one does not wear a fur but two full milk bottles as artificial breasts, instead. A newborn monkey is placed in the middle between the two dummies. Harry Harlow wants to know: which of the two "mothers" the monkey will prefer? By common Freudian theory – which Harlow shared at the time – it would prefer the wire mother with the lactating breasts: Emotional attachment to the mother was believed to be created only by the satisfaction of needs, by feeding. But the little monkey swiftly moves to the fur dummy and clings to it. From time to time he whizzes over to drink the milk spent by the wire mother, but then quickly searches the fluffy fur mother, again whose warmth and security is preferable. Harlow reverses his original assumption and concludes: The first and most important need in life is not food, but motherly love, warmth and security. Now this monkey grows up with a fur coat as "mother". When she is of child-bearing age, the hitherto hidden tragedy is revealed. When a strange newborn monkey is set into her cage, the female who has grown up with a fur dummy of a mother flees from the newborn and anxiously hides in the corner of the cage. The newborn runs after her, looking for the security-giving mother; just like the now adult female had then done with her fur dummy. But the female chimpanzee who has grown up with the fur dummy slings the baby away when it comes too close looking for a mother's love: She clearly reacts with fear towards the baby monkey, who is looking for a vivid to and fro, whereas its mother is not able to provide it, because she has not experienced it, herself.

The fur coat was just a poor substitute for real mother love. After all, it had been enough to survive. But the fur had not been able to answer the monkey's need for love. And without having made the living experience of being loved, this chimpanzee female could not reciprocate love as an adult later on. She was not able to be a mother. She was unfit for a family! She could not help to reproduce the own species. A coat is just not a mother, is not a loving living being that accepts the other and pays attention – undivided attention.

Now I know all of a sudden what the little child in the airport hall is missing. The iPad cannot provide (just like the fur coat in Harry Harlow's experiment for the small chimpanzee) any relationship, no undivided attention. Just like the fur which was indeed cuddly for the unfortunate monkey, but was not able to establish any reciprocal relationship, the device cannot respond to the child's searching for attachment, and the child itself cannot have any

experiences, which effects the expression of his emotions has on a living person. All the senses are stimulated, but the most important "sense" remains dead: the child's search for a relationship is not answered. For relationship means to get an emotional echo, obtaining undivided attention, being loved. All this can a "smart" machine not do.

And the parents are far away, mentally. All three of them are "lonely together". The adults hardly bother. But the child is still essentially dependent on the mother's attention, on her emotional response.

Other families talk to each other, exchange feelings, are attached to each other, have an inner emotional bond and look into each other's eyes. They connect mentally and emotionally to a common inner world – shaping their relationship. This procedure that is necessary for a toddler's survival was missing here for two long hours. How will this deprivation affect the child? What consequences will this have? The resulting emotional and spiritual vacuum is filled with unspeakably primitive and unreal figures on the screen. What impact will that have? No real people, no real figures and objects, no real smells, nothing to touch, to sniff, to taste, nothing really hard or soft.

At the age of six months the child has already plunged into an unreal world on the screen. This happened right before any specific experience of reality has been constructed which is so necessary to cope with life. This child has indeed hardly had the chance to get to know the real world! And now the somewhat little real experience is already mixed up with an unreal one, without the child being able to distinguish between the two.

That way a dangerous path is being prepared. Because if the child cannot distinguish between reality and fiction, it will not develop a stable ego. It will not develop a solid inner core, from which it can deal adequately with the world and judge it. The soil is being prepared for one or the other mental malformation without the parents wanting it. If the two parents in the airport hall knew that, they would stop immediately. Because they love their child. They would not care about all the false theories of "early promotion" by "intelligent" media, the talk of "self-directed learning" and the like, because they would rather sacrifice the device to the dustbin as their child to the device – and talk to their child and read books to their children and give them everything that a child needs to learn for life: human affection, guidance, instruction, correction, formation of conscience – in short: human relationship. •

Not a referendum is disastrous, but the cost of the Curriculum 21 are

Arguments for the Thurgau popular initiative against Curriculum 21 and for amending of the Public School Act

Section 23 paragraph 1 of the Thurgau Constitution reads: “Resolutions of the Council of States, which concern non-recurring expenses of more than 3,000,000 francs or an annually recurring expenditure of more than 600,000 francs, are subject to a mandatory referendum.”

Cantonal Councillor *Monika Knill* (SVP) had the “Thurgauer Zeitung” of 20 May declare that a referendum on Curriculum 21 would be “disastrous”.

Recently the Federal Court called her off sharply, because she had wanted to bypass the people in pushing through the spending of renovation and conversion costs of the Fine Arts Museum in the Carthusian Monastery in Ittingen. An expenditure of more than 3 million was declared as recurring “maintenance cost”. At present, the Thurgau Government is suspected again to be afraid of the people, because it tried to hide preparation costs for the participation of our Canton in the planned Expo at Lake Constance by apportioning them and thus keeping them below 3 million francs.

However, the much bigger financial and democracy-political scandal is the planned introduction of Curriculum 21: the Canton of Berne estimates its annual costs at more than 21 million Swiss francs – the Canton Thurgau is silent, so far ... About 150 facilitators are planned to be trained in the Thurgau, resulting in training costs of at least 2 million Swiss francs. Annual costs for temporary deputies of at least another 2 million Swiss francs are to be added. Over 150 headmasters were and are kept busy with several-day-lasting workshops on Curriculum 21. Again this certainly accounts to another 2 million francs of training and salary costs. Thousands of teachers were and are summoned up to meetings and trainings on Curriculum 21. Salary cost of estimated 8 million must certainly be added. Hundreds of thousands of textbooks adapting to Curriculum 21, must be newly purchased. Costs amounting to at least 30 million Swiss francs will arise in the next few years. Diverse school buildings have been or will be converted to suit the needs of Curriculum 21. Here, millions of francs are planned to be invested.

The annual expenditures for Curriculum 21 exceed by far the financial authority of the Council of States as ruled by the

Thurgau Constitution – let alone the Government!

It is another scandal that those financial consequences are concealed from the Thurgau people and State Councillor Knill and her consultants refuse to subject Curriculum 21 to the Thurgau people’s vote. The costs will become even much more, if due to the questionable methods of Curriculum 21 thousands of students will no longer have a good command of the essentials of German and mathematics, and are no longer ca-

pable of being trained as in many occupations.

But, maybe, there is a fifth column that want people to master only the by-1, by-2, by-5 and by-10 series of the multiplication table, as is conceived in Curriculum 21. (see Curriculum 21 “competency MA1.A.2”). Well, there is a calculator at hand ...

Georg Koch, Stettfurt

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Put Curriculum 21 to vote!

IG (Interest Group) for a good Thurgau Elementary School

A broad-based Committee launched the popular initiative “Yes to a good Thurgau elementary school – without Curriculum 21”. In order to eliminate the aberrations of the bureaucratic moloch of the curriculum, the Thurgau people shall vote on the curriculum. Because the elementary school is too important – it must not be left to education bureaucrats.

For years, companies who take on apprentices for training, have observed fundamental flaws in the latter skills of reading, writing and calculating, as well as in their attitude to work. Parents have to practice school lessons with their children for hours at home, because in many schools, children are no longer taught in a systematic and understandable way. A dramatic change in direction has taken place in the elementary school. Stealthily, a new understanding of education has been introduced. It assumes that learning takes place automatically, if students work as independently as possible in a suitable environment equipped with didactic material according to individual plans with a weekly scope. Already today this aberration has resulted in the disorientation of many children and youngsters, disgruntled teachers and parents who have to take over parts of the teaching assignment themselves. This was never publicly discussed, although this was repeatedly questioned, in particular by teachers. In particular for children with learning difficulties, this approach has fatal con-

sequences. After all, how can you learn skills if skills are not taught?

With the Curriculum 21 the learning achievements would certainly further deteriorate, not only in the core subjects German and Mathematics, but also in other subjects as Swiss history, cooking, housekeeping and handicrafts would be taught only in a rudimentary manner. Thus, the precious common good of education would be put at risk. Regarding these developments with concern, a broad-based Committee made up of parents, teachers from the kindergarten to college, remedial teachers, entrepreneurs, masters, members of executive staff and representatives of almost all political parties from left to right have got together and founded and launched the popular initiative “Yes to a good Thurgau Elementary School – without Curriculum 21”. It is calling for a referendum on new curricula as well as a curriculum with mandatory annual objectives for the individual subjects.

In 2008, the Thurgau population rejected the accession to the HarmoS Concordat. It cannot be that the uniform curricula, which represented a major part of this Concordat, are now being reintroduced via the back door, in spite of the people’s rejection.

Frauenfeld, 13 May 2015

*Felix Huwiler, Co-President
IG for a good Thurgau Elementary school*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)