

Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,
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English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

“Russia has played a very crucial role in the independence and neutrality of our country”

Interview with Oskar Freysinger, member of the National Council and of the Government Council of Valais



National Councillor Oskar Freysinger (picture thk)

In the summer of 2015, National Councillor Oskar Freysinger launched a motion (see box), which is to oblige the Federal Council to start negotiations immediately with Russia for a free trade agreement.

In the following interview, Oskar Freysinger explains what motivated him to take this step.

Current Concerns: Mr National Councillor Freysinger, what motivated you to launch this parliamentary motion?

National Councillor Oskar Freysinger: If you look at the developments of the last 25 years, it becomes obvious that for decades we have aligned ourselves with the United States. We believed that the friend was in the West and that our relationship was economically beneficial for us. In terms of economy, that might be partly true, but the price we paid is very high. For example, we had to give up the banking secrecy, and therefore suffered many disadvantages, as for instance the UBS deal, because we have aligned ourselves wholly with the American system.

What do you mean?

This bonds system creates an artificial wealth, based only on the act of constantly printing paper money. Thus, one runs into debt with no limitations. Unfortunately, the Swiss banks have been increasingly intertwined with this system.

Are there no alternatives?

I was wondering about that, too. Actually I thought that we should once take a look to the East and do away with the old myth that our enemy is situated over there. Historically Russia has always had a friendly relationship with Switzerland. Russia played a very crucial role with respect to the independence and neutrality of our country after the Napoleonic Wars, name-

ly at the Congress of Vienna. Neither have we had any cause to complain about Russia since 1992. There is not a single matter in which this country has decided anything that was negative for our country.

What do you conclude?

The future of Europe will not be without Russia. We should make sure that we ally ourselves with Russia. It is quite incomprehensible to me, that Ms Merkel has not noticed this up to now.

How do you explain this?

I wonder why the US exert such a strong influence on Merkel, because an alliance between Germany and Russia would be the foundation for an incredible economic boom. However, the Anglo-Saxons fear this. If Germany collaborated closely with Russia, in a short time these two would become the leading economic power in the world. They would outdo the Americans.

How do the United States respond?

They create divisive elements using Poland or Ukraine, etc.

What does that mean for Switzerland?

We are free, we are not in NATO and we are not bound by any contracts – in par-

ticular not with the United States. Russia is a country that is very interesting for us as a business partner, if only for the natural resources, but also culturally, and there are historical links. Economically, Russia is a very interesting market for our companies. Russia has a rapidly developing economy, and Putin is trying to keep his country independent and sovereign. I do not see why we should allow the Americans to keep us from establishing privileged relations with Russia.

When it comes to the situation in Europe, of course the relationship with our neighbouring countries, in particular with Germany, plays an important role. How do you assess the relationship?

The relationship with Germany has never been easy. Currently though they play the friendship card, but frankly, Switzerland is a competitor for Germany, because the latter is operating in the same segment as we do. I have nothing against friendly relations with our neighbouring countries, on the contrary, this is very important. But it must not be a submissive position. We do not have to accept a colonial treat-

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Motion: free trade agreements with Russia

Submitted text:

The Federal Council to immediately hold negotiations with Russia on a free trade agreement.

Justification

1. Switzerland has free trade agreements with several countries around the globe. Among others with China, Ukraine, Japan, Egypt, etc.
2. Until today there are no direct bilateral free trade agreements with Russia.
3. Russia could thus become an important trading partner for Switzerland and help our country to reduce the large dependence on the EU.
4. Increased trade with the Russian Federation could lead to more prosperity and innovation in our country.
5. Russia is a resource-rich country with very large reserves of fossil fuels. By

diversifying suppliers Switzerland could reduce its dependence on other states.

6. In the technology sector, Switzerland is top class and by the exchange with a country that has great interest, Switzerland could take advantage and thus develop further.
7. Russia is a part of our continent, and Russia must not be isolated in Europe. Russia is part of Europe. A prosperous and peaceful Europe, will only be including Russia.
8. The relationship between Switzerland and Russia was always special. In the course of history there has always been a close exchange between the two countries. A FTA would build on this tradition for the benefit of all.

Angela Merkel in Switzerland – a review

thk. On Thursday, 3 September, the German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* visited Switzerland for an official state visit. After having been welcomed with full honors at the Airport Bern-Belp she held talks with *Simonetta Sommaruga*, the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police and President-in-Office of the Swiss Confederation as well as with the Federal Councillors *Johann Schneider-Ammann*, *Doris Leuthard* and *Didier Burkhalter*. In the afternoon, there was a joint press conference with Angela Merkel and Simonetta Sommaruga and then the entire entourage moved to the University of Berne where Ms Merkel was awarded with an honorary doctorate. After a few hours, the spooky event was over and she left Switzerland again heading north.

It is difficult to assess this visit in retrospect. Critical voices are talking about a private visit to Ms Sommaruga that was fairly futile and cost a lot of money. Ms Merkel stayed in Switzerland for only six hours, a very short time considered the complexity of the issues and problems that exist between the two countries. The public learned only what came up at the press conference and that was not very much at all. In the run-up to the meeting it was already determined who of the present media representatives was allowed to ask a question, more than four were not approved, there was too little time. At the press conference, the two ladies seemed to agree in everything and that is very striking. They particularly stressed that the starting point for a cooperation of Switzerland with the EU had been “difficult” since 9 February 2014. It is in fact

very strange that the representative of a direct democratic country judges a referendum in this way. It is perhaps a sign of the times that the brotherly German-Swiss relations, with Germany as the big brother, have been transformed into a “sisterly relationship”; however on the occasion of a state visit to a sovereign state this is quite far away from reality. They were generous with niceties; they were, however, too many and not appropriate to the rather strained relationship due to unresolved problems. The stolen bank data, the dispute between Switzerland and Germany about a fair distribution of aircraft noise and other forms of pressure exerted on Switzerland seemed forgotten. It was unpleasant to see how the Swiss Federal President cosied up to the German Chancellor. Ms Sommaruga often spoke of Europe when she meant the EU what is probably more than just a slip of the tongue. She clearly intimated that the bilateral way “with the EU must be further developed and strengthened”. Not only the question of the free movement of persons was open, but it also involved the institutional framework that should govern the automatic (“dynamic”) adoption of EU legislation and determine who decided in disputes between Switzerland and the EU. It therefore involved legal adaptation, monitoring, interpretation, dispute resolution, and thus it ultimately concerned the question of sovereignty.

Ms Merkel paid due respect to the referendum of 9 February 2014 at least verbally, but made quite clear that the free movement of persons was one of the fun-

damental freedoms of the EU and was therefore non-negotiable. Ms Sommaruga confirmed it and she repeatedly stressed that the situation was difficult. There was also a discussion about the refugee wave in Europe – interestingly both agreed with each other in this issue.

Relatively much time was provided for the award of the honorary doctorate. The ceremony lasted for almost an hour. Merkel stressed in her speech at the University of Berne that it was a success that due to the Ukraine crisis all EU States had agreed on the sanctions against Russia. Whether this action against Russia was consistent with international law – international law is something Ms Merkel likes to refer to – is questionable. Well-known UN jurists like Professor *Alfred de Zayas* and the UN Special Rapporteur for the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures, *Idriss Jazairy*, strongly doubt this, because arbitrary coercive measures against a state or a group of states can be sanctioned only by the UN Security Council, and that is not the case with the EU sanctions.

Much like at the press conference, the naïve observer should probably get the impression that Switzerland and Germany were inseparable. A “friendly” relationship with a neighbouring state is always something we should strive for, but we should also never forget who the other one is. So the meeting between Merkel and Sommaruga left a very ambivalent impression which was marked by more illusion than reality. Urgent political issues were not resolved – probably really only a conversation among sisters? •

“Russia has played ...”

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ty. Switzerland is an independent sovereign state, we are not an EU member, we are not a member of NATO, and the other states must respect this. When we see what the interests are that the EU has in the Swiss region, it creates a completely different perspective. More than 300,000 people who as cross-border commuters earn their wages in Switzerland every day, flush foreign exchange into the EU. Next there is the overland transport agreement. Switzerland demands only half the real price for each EU truck crossing its borders, etc. The EU has gained much from the bilateral agreements and will continue to gain much from them. To call us cherry pickers, is simply a lie.

What is the problem with the agreements?

Actually, it’s quite a simple contractual situation. If the guillotine clause would not exist, it could be positive for both sides. The guillotine clause is bothersome, because after all one does not negotiate in the shadow of the guillotine. From the outset I did not understand, how Switzerland could accept this. The motto of the EU was: either all or nothing. This is not a basis for negotiations, it must be possible to negotiate each object individually.

What about the future?

It is unacceptable what is in store for us here with this framework agreement, this automatic adoption of EU law and recognition of a European Arbitration Court. This is a perfidious strategy to achieve an indirect entry into the EU. If we were to ask the Swiss people directly whether they want to join the EU, we would probably have an 85% rejection. It is totally

unacceptable to work around the issue by achieving a de facto accession via “dynamically” adopted laws and this framework agreement, and by not speaking of an automatic adoption but of a dynamic development of laws and thus drawing a red herring across the track.

Would it not be extremely important for Switzerland to look for honest negotiating partners? According to what you said before, Russia would be such a partner. What was the Federal Council’s response to your motion?

They wrote that 12 rounds of negotiations between Russia and the EFTA had taken place already, but that unfortunately the Ukraine crisis had interrupted the negotiations and for this reason they were rejecting my motion.

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“Russia has played ...”

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So, why can we not negotiate with Russia now?

According to the Federal Council the Ukraine crisis is the reason, although we now know that the Ukraine crisis was initiated by the US. The coup on the Maidan Square was not a popular uprising, which had come out of the blue overnight. It was orchestrated, organised, financed. The American intelligence service is behind it all and its objective is to disrupt the connections between Russia and Germany respectively the EU. And it was also a reaction to the fact that Russia had not given up Syria. In the case of *Gaddafi* – we have seen the result in Libya – the Chinese and the Russians had been outsmarted by the US. This is a lesson they have learned. In Syria they stood firm. Therefore, *Bashar al-Assad* is still in power. The monster created by the US, the Islamic State, will continue to be diligently financed by the US as well as supported by Israel and Saudi Arabia. The continuing existence of the IS is convenient to these countries, because due to this, Shiites and Sunnis will continue to wear themselves out in endless conflicts. The European Union is paying the price, as refugees and asylum seekers are now moving to Europe in large numbers. The whole game is of an uncanny perfidy, it is hypocritical. It is cynical. The United States are forever talking about human rights, and about how they always defend them. But they are, for example, very chummy with Saudi Arabia, a country with which they have had the dollar-oil pact since 1973, and it is there that human rights suddenly play no role at all. Whether women are discriminated against, whether people are flogged or whether more than 250 people have been decapitated per year – is all irrelevant to them. We are constantly being fooled.

What is your interpretation of the Federal Council's response?

Once again we have shown ourselves to be subservient to the US. But the Anglo-Saxons always pursue only their own interests and they do not care a whit about the interests of others. They give themselves airs as the world's policeman, but they are the ones that kindle the biggest fires around the world. So they are the arsonists who later act the heroic fire-fighters.

What does that mean for Switzerland?

We are a free and independent country and should not continue to play along

here. If others do, it is their business, but we should pursue an independent policy and immediately begin negotiating with Russia, no matter whether this pleases the United States or not. It cannot get worse than it already is. I hardly think that the US will move closer with the 6th Fleet and occupy Switzerland. After all, our relations with the US are already ailing. It would be hypocritical to pretend they were our best friends. With their behaviour they have proved several times that they are not friendly. There is nothing left for us to be gained on this market.

Why has Switzerland waited so long to reposition itself?

Up to date the courage to break away from the American diktat seems to have been lacking. Apparently it is preferable to knuckle under and endure.

So what can be done?

One would have to reconsider things urgently, in the economy, with the banks. Russia needs an independent financial centre, and Switzerland could play this role, and that not only for Russia but also for China, India and the other BRICS countries. We should work together with these countries, because there the pressure is less strong than with NATO and the EU area. In these latter organisations the prevalent relationships are colonial. Small states are crushed or bullied by the big ones. We have been experiencing an American bullying for decades. That is what it is called in interpersonal relationships. It has nothing to do with fair dealings between two equal partners that appreciate and respect each other. Here it is all about the big “partner” imposing his will on the small one. This is unworthy of our Switzerland.

How could we form our trade relations with Russia?

For our wines there is a market. Now I am talking as an inhabitant of the Valais. But our SMEs, which mainly produce high-quality niche products in Switzerland, have a high technological level. Industrial products manufactured in Switzerland have a lot to offer in the mechanical and technological fields, and of course this also applies to the service sector. In the banking sector Switzerland leads the way in any case. On the other hand, the Russians have huge deposits of mineral resources, and Russia is a huge market. We could also import certain products from Russia and create joint ventures. This

course of action naturally requires a precise analysis. At a time when mineral resources are becoming increasingly scarce and expensive reciprocal trade with Russia would be highly advantageous. And here I think of close economic ties, way beyond a purely financial and economic relationship.

So what attitude would Switzerland have to take?

We are a sovereign and independent state. Our direct democracy is unique and could be an indicative target for other democratic states. We have to go into the negotiations as equal partners and we must not submit to any other country. Our neutrality allows us to enter into and to carry on negotiations with every state in the world. And I am saying it again: A free trade agreement with Russia would be of considerable advantage for our country.

Mr National Councillor Freysinger, thank you very much for the interview. •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

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Robbing Greek national wealth

by Dr phil Henriette Hanke Güttinger

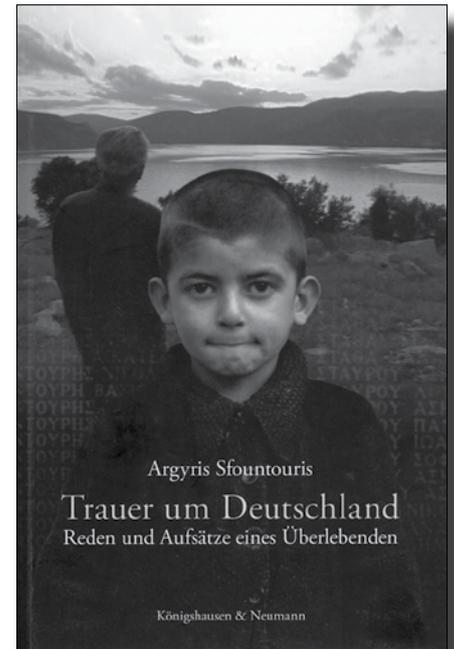
An early morning message on Radio "Deutschlandfunk" (German Radio) informs us that *Fraport*, an investment company located in Frankfurt, is going to take over 14 regional airports in Greece. Now the time has come: the Greek national wealth is being plundered after the country has been lured into a debt trap. This procedure is not new. In the 1960s and 70s it was used in the Third World, as *John Perkins* described it in "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man".¹ At that time Perkins talked developing countries into starting oversized infrastructure projects by making use of false figures and forecasts. As a consequence the countries took up huge loans which pushed them into the debt trap. Subsequently they were subjected to "the economic interests of the United States". In his book, Perkins reports numerous examples and portrays how he and others hired by the NSA, (the US domestic intelligence service), used to lead country by country into this trap in service of the United States.

This is the first time that a nation on the European continent, Greece, is declared open for plundering. The *Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund* (HRADF), a public limited company with the Greek state as the sole shareholder is the responsible authority to execute the related privatisation. Since March 2015 in addition to five Greek members one observer from the euro zone and one from the EU Commission have taken seats on the Board of Directors of the HRADF. The assets that have been transferred from the government to the HRADF consist of real estate, company shares, and other entitlements. Once the assets are with the HRADF, they can no longer be transferred back to the state. The asset development plan of the HRADF as of 30 July 2015 gives an impression of this procedures of privatisation:

1. Regional airports: 14 regional airports, split into two groups of 7 airports each [...]
2. Athens-Ellinikon: Former airport of Athens, 6,000,000 m² real estate on the coast [...]
3. *Astir Vouliagmenis* Hotel Complex, *Astir Palace Vouliagmeni SA* including marina [...]
4. Afandou, Rhodes: Development of two properties in the district Afandou on Rhodes Island for golf and tourism [...]
5. Greek gas pipeline transmission system operator (*DESFA*) [...]
6. *Piraeus Port Authority S.A.* (OLP) [...]
7. *Thessaloniki Port Authority S.A.* (OLTH) [...]

8. *TRAI NOSE S.A. & EESSTY S.A. (ROSCO)* TRAINOSE provides technical transport services for rail transport of passengers and goods. [...]
9. International Athens airport S.A. (AIA) [...]
10. *Poseidi Calkidiki*, promotion of tourism [...]
11. Equestrian centre in *Markopoulo* [...]
12. Electronic auctions II, III, IV [...]
13. Marinas, Marina Alimos and the remaining tourist ports in the portfolio of the HRADF [...]
14. *Egnatia Motorway S.A.* A 648 km long, fully developed toll highway in northern Greece, [...]
15. *Hellenic Petroleum S.A.* [...] the leading company for oil refinery and distribution in Greece [...]
16. *OTE S.A.* [...] the largest telecommunications provider on the Greek market [...]
17. State-owned power producing utility (*PPC*) [...]
18. Water and waste water utilities of Thessaloniki (*EYATH*) [...]
19. Water and sewage utility of Athens (*EYDAP*) [...]
20. *Public Gas Corporation* (DEPA) [...]
21. *Hellenic Post* (ELTA) [...]
22. Further real estate tenders: [...] Sale of land and buildings in Argos, Veria, Styliida, Lefalonia and on the island of Rhodes, Nafplio, Chalkidiki, Messinia and Athens. [...]

The objects of privatization are documented in the asset development plan of the HRADF.



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What is expected of the people of Greece by the troika is shocking and outrageous: Greece was devastated during the Second World War by German troops and subsequently trampled on by Britain and the United States – even up to a military coup. Until today, the official Germany refuses to recognise the massacre of the population in the village of Disto-mo as a war crime against humanity. *Argyris Sfountouris*, who survived the mas-

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Mykonos, Santorini, Rhodes, on these holiday islands FRAPORT will operate airports in the future. Overall, the investor from Frankfurt will take over 14 regional airports in Greece, develop them further and of course make money with them. *Manolis Kalimakis* heads the trade union of the airport employees of Greece. He can't understand at all that the Greek government wants to sell these airports to a foreign investor. "This is our silverware," Manolis Kalimakis says. "These airports are our best airports. These are the airports that provide us with the highest revenue. And these revenues support our economy." If these airports will be privatized now, Greece will lose these revenues. "I don't understand the mentality behind it. To support our economy, our European friends have decided that we will no longer have these revenues. I don't know how that should help us." Manolis Kalimakis calculates: "In forty years, we would be able to earn 16 bil-

lion euro with these airports, but we sell them for two to three billion. We would earn so much more money over the forty years to invest in the airports. Moreover, money would be left to the public to pay the debt." Manolis Kalimakis as a union member sees nothing but drawbacks in this privatisation. He fears the investor would lay off workers and increase fares, under the line the entire tourism would suffer. [...] Manolis Kalimakis from the Union wants to keep fighting. "We, the workers, will try everything possible to stop the deal!" he warns. But even the Greek left party SYRIZA has given up its resistance against the privatisation. No matter who wins the general election in Greece on Sunday next week, Fraport will be allowed to take the 14 Greek airports over.

Source: "Deutschlandfunk". Information in the morning. Thomas Bormann. "Fight over privatisation in Greece: resistance against Fraport". 10.9.2015

Syria – from the colonial interests of Britain and France to securing raw materials for the USA

Interview with Karin Leukefeld*

In the media there is already talk about a modern migration of peoples. And they also discuss the responsibility of so-called gangs smuggling possibly but at least secretly wealthy immigrants. The causes of the mass misery of the refugees, however, are poorly investigated. In an interview with Jens Wernicke the correspondent to Syria Karin Leukefeld reports on an economic and proxy war, which increasingly leads to an exitus of the Syrian state, driving the people into starvation and 11 million Syrians into flight.

Mrs Leukefeld, besides Jürgen Todenhöfer you are the only German journalist I know who is really present in the Middle East, talking with people there, and based on that providing qualified analyses that do more than just serving stereotypes. You have just returned from a voyage to Syria. What is the situation there?

It depends on where you are staying in Syria. In the coastal area it is quiet, some Syrians who are now living in Europe even go on vacation there to meet their families. However, there are very many internally displaced people, so it has all become very crowded.

In Idlib, a province adjacent to the coastal region, the “army of conquest” and the Al-Nusra Front dominate, tens of thousands have fled, some villages are

besieged. In Aleppo, the situation is very bad; it’s a war between the armed groups and the Syrian army. Many parts of the city have been destroyed, the electricity and water supply often fails, food is very expensive if at all available. Armed groups fire mortars, rockets and homemade missiles in residential areas, the Syrian army fires back.

To the east of Aleppo, there are areas controlled by Kurds, others by the self-proclaimed “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (IS). There the situation is extremely unsafe, sides are changed every day, the Syrian air force and the US-led “anti-IS-alliance” fly air attacks. Lately the Turkish air force has started to fly attacks, too. In northern Iraq, they attack positions of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). In northern Syria, they attack areas controlled by the Syrian Kurds. The deployment is running under the slogan “fight against ‘Islamic State’”. The US aims at a “protection zone” north of Aleppo together with Turkey. This is a military action inside Syria, which requires the approval of the UN Security Council. This does not exist, so it is an attack on a sovereign state and violates international law.

The populated areas in the central province of Homs are largely controlled by the Syrian government and the army. The desert areas that extend to the east to the border with Iraq are unsafe. The situation in Tadmur, the modern city, which lies at Palmyra, is unclear. From the monastery of Deir Mar Elian, which I have visited many times, the priest *Jacques Mourad* and another clergyman were kidnapped at the end of May. Both could not be traced. Meanwhile, the people from Qaryatayn and Sadat were expelled from the IS, many of them Christians.

Damascus accommodates up to 7 million people, internally displaced persons from all over the country. It is largely peaceful, electricity and water are scarce, the city is repeatedly fired at from the suburbs to Damascus, where the Islamic Front and the Al-Nusra Front have bases, and the Syrian army also fires back at them.

Sweida, where Druze and Christians live, is still quiet. I go there every time when I’m in Syria. Deraa is still embattled like the Golan, on the border with Israel. Currently, a great battle of Zabadani takes place, which lies on the border with Lebanon. There are headquarters of the armed groups that are active around Damascus. The Syrian army and the Lebanese Hezbollah, fighting together, want to reclaim this strategic base of the battle troupes.

Life is expensive, the Syrian pound has only one fifth of its purchasing power of 2010. Many people have lost everything, people are begging, there is rarely meat on the table, if there is at all a table. Unemployment is above 40 per cent, children are working in order to help the family, so they don’t go to school any longer. Half of Syria’s Palestinians have fled since their camps – which actually had been towns – were destroyed.

Syria’s economic centres – situated around Aleppo, Homs and Damascus – are widely destroyed. Syria had its own pharmaceutical industry, a food industry and large corn reserves. All that has been destroyed, looted or sold to Turkey. The humble oil fields in the east are being controlled by fighters who smuggle the oil out of the country in order to sell it there or also inside the country – even to the government.

Meanwhile, many oil production facilities have been bombed by the Anti IS AL-
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* Karin Leukefeld, born in 1954, studied ethnology, Islamic and political science and is a trained bookseller. She did organizational and public relation tasks among others for the “Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz”, BBU (Association of Citizens’ Initiatives for Environmental Protection), the Greens (federal party) and the information agency El Salvador. Since 2000 she has worked as a freelance correspondent for the Middle East. Her website is leukefeld.net.

“Robbing Greek national ...”

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sacre as an infant due to the humaneness of a single German soldier, appealed to the German Embassy in Athens in 1994 with the question of whether compensation will be provided to the surviving victims of Distomo. In the negative response of the German Embassy there is neither an apology nor empathy or regret. It is stated: “according to the Federal Government the reprisals against the village of Distomo are not defined as NS Act [...] as the measure was taken in the context of warfare, as a reaction on partisan at-

tacks.”³ This false view of the Embassy is refuted by Sfountouris in his new book “Trauer um Deutschland” (Mourning for Germany) in detail: in Distomo, a crime against humanity was committed.

Given this historical background, a different attitude towards the Greek people would be appropriate. So, a friend from Germany spontaneously commented on the privatisation of the Greek national wealth as follows: “it is a shame what is being done here. I wish the ground would open and swallow me up.”

What lesson should the European states learn from the tragedy of Greece? Debt can result in debt bondage and loss of

state sovereignty. This also applies to us in Switzerland. ●

¹ John Perkins. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. The shocking inside story of how Amerika REALLY took over the world. 200, ISBN 0-452-28708-1

² *Hellenic Republic asset development fund*, asset development plan, 30 July 2015, internal working translation (Spr.-D BMF).-No. 0818-2015, Internet access 11.9.2015

³ Letter of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Athens by 23 January 1995, reprinted in: Argyris Sfountouris. “Trauer um Deutschland” (Mourning for Germany). Speeches and essays of a survivor, Würzburg 2015, p. 87 ISBN 978-3-8260-5821-9

"Syria – from the colonial ..."

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lies. And then the archaeological sites in Syria dating back as far as 10,000 years before Christ – have been conquered by fighters, sieged, looted, destroyed.

The situation is tough; misery is huge. Especially for the Syrian refugees. Four million have fled to neighbouring countries, seven million more have been expelled within Syria.

And, maliciously, these refugee movements are being instrumentalized politically. The local Syrian conflict has been extended to a regional and eventually to an international proxy war. Where the people had fled, armed groups have entered which are still being supported regionally and internationally. And then we hear that the Syrian government has lost control and is the "root of all evil" in Syria anyway, as it has just been declared by a US State Department spokesman. Syria has been labeled a failed state where it is legitimate to intervene by humanitarian or military means.

And this poverty, this misery you are describing, which the people are fleeing from: where do they come from? And could you please explain briefly why you are speaking of a proxy war?

Syria is a developing country. In 2010, the situation was improving and it was expected that in 2015 it would be the fifth largest economic power in the Arabic world.

Today Syria is just ahead of Somalia. The economic crisis created by the war is being aggravated by the EU's *economic sanctions*. We are also observing an economic war against a rising country.

The EU's economic sanctions started as early as at the end of 2011 and affected the trade in oil and gas and the financial sector. The Syrian airline was no longer allowed to fly to European airports, all bilateral projects were stopped, personnel withdrawn, Syria was isolated. At first the state and the population were able to fill the gaps with their own resources, but one day they were used up. The state received financial support and credit from Iran. Thus the losses from the oil industry could be reduced; oil and gas could be delivered to the population, to the still functioning industry and the army. But the national economy was subordinated to the war – a war economy developed.

Officially, the EU is using its economic sanctions to put the political and military leadership of Syria under pressure to yield and resign. This has not happened. Instead, the society was punished, its livelihood, laboriously built up, destroyed. Money is made by those profiting from the war: militia, smugglers, black market dealers.

But beyond the sanctions, Syria's economy was also purposefully destroyed materially. This could be observed clearly in Aleppo and Damascus. In summer 2012 there was a coordinated attack which was meant to overthrow the Syrian leadership. An assault on the National Security Council killed four senior military leaders and security officers. This was followed immediately by attacks on Aleppo and Damascus. They were led by fighters who were withdrawn from Homs after the fight for Baba Amr had been decided in favour of the armed forces. The fighters had gathered near the two large cities where they were supported by local forces. The overthrow did not succeed; both the people of Aleppo and those of Damascus refused to open the gates of their cities for the fighters. The reaction to this refusal was the destruction and looting of the industrial areas around both cities which were then converted into strongholds for further attacks.

The statement that we are talking about a proxy war becomes plausible if we realize that the so-called Islamic State, which is called "Daish" locally, has not materialized out of the blue – in contrast to what we read in our leading media. It has been and is backed by regional and international sponsors so that its financial resources are unending.

These sponsors are using the fighters to destroy the nation states which were formed 100 years ago in the Levant against the will of the population. Then the colonial interests of Great Britain and France were at stake, now it is the securing of national resources for the Western world, led by the US. The Gulf States' anger against the independent policy which is being defended by Syria leads to the armament and training of irregular fighter groups, dominated by "Daish". Their breeding ground is poverty.

Do you have a concrete example for this kind of "poverty spiral" which this is obviously about?

Consider a firm that has been selling medical equipment for medical practices and clinics. So far the firm has been buying the equipment from Germany. Now, due to the EU sanctions, it cannot buy or sell anything. And buying from another country is difficult for the firm because all money transfers have been interrupted. The Syrian central bank is sanctioned as well; nobody is allowed to do business with it. To bypass this, the German supplier has now begun to deliver its products to a firm in Lebanon which is reselling it to the Syrian firm. Lebanon is not tied to the EU sanctions. This makes the transfer of goods extremely expensive.

Another example is that parents of children studying abroad are no longer able to send them money because it is not allowed to do business with Syrian

banks. By the way, the same is true for Syrian government scholarships for students abroad. Or take pharmaceuticals: So far they were very cheap because they were produced in Syria. Now the pharmaceutical industry has been widely destroyed, so drugs are imported from Lebanon or smuggled from Turkey – driving the prices sky-high.

And the interests behind this conflict – what powers are we talking about? What exactly do you mean by "sponsors"?

Sponsors are those who support armed groups against the Syrian government and army. Russia and Iran who are backing the Syrian government are its allies because they are linked with the Syrian state by treaties under international law. The regional states Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are more like "sponsors" because they use groups for their own purposes which they can, however, drop again if it suits them. This is also true for the sponsors among the European states, Australia and the US.

It is mainly the Gulf States, Turkey and the US who are profiting from the chaos spreading over Iraq and Syria. Of course not the population but the industrial elites, with the arms industry leading the way. In the past five years, the Arab peninsula has been turned into a huge weapons depot. Western military, official and private, are training fighters, arming them and sending them to war. The US are delivering billions of dollars' worth in armaments to the Gulf States as well as to Israel. Germany is arming and training the Kurd Peshmerga in northern Iraq and Turkey, as a NATO country, is profiting from its proximity to Syria and Iraq. Of course Syria is supported by Russia and Iran, but this is based on bilateral treaties.

By the way, in none of the countries affected by the "Arab Spring", the protest movements of the young, educated and modern youth have survived, in none of them! In Tunisia, Egypt and Syria events are dominated by political Islam, as a fighting or opposition group.

The religious fanaticism of the local people is certainly relevant in all this as it contributes to the fact that there are veritable "religious wars" ...

The Syrians were never religious fanatics! Only the Muslim Brotherhood, which advocates the political Islam; or to say it more specifically it is merely a wing of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1970s with their attempt at revolt against the Baath Party, which had enforced a secular state. This uprising ended with the massacre of Hama in 1982. Thousands died during an air raid by the Syr-

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"Syria – from the colonial ..."

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ian army, thousands disappeared or were imprisoned. Who ever could escape, fled, and membership in the Muslim Brotherhood was subjected to capital punishment.

This is clearly having an impact, even today. Many young people who have now hired in Islamist combat units are referencing Hama, when asked why they are fighting. A young man who peacefully demonstrated, however, told me in 2011, when it all began, that his uncle had disappeared in Hama and then the whole family became supporters of the opposition. However, one must also remember that the Damascus-wing of the Muslim Brotherhood was in 1970s opposing an armed uprising.

The role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the emergence of radical political Islam must not be underestimated. The ruling AKP party in Turkey is a sister party of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a survey has shown that more than 10 percent of the Turkish population do not consider the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" a terrorist organization, nor a threat, but legitimate and worth supporting. This is only possible because the Turkish government follows a line of political Islam itself. In a secular state this would be impossible.

But back to Syria: There were many political conflicts, but culturally and with respect to religion Syria has always been a very tolerant and open country. Now, this tolerance is to be destroyed, as well. However, this does not come "from the people" nor "from the nature of man" there – rather it is the result of geo-political interests and strategic conflicts.

So people are fleeing and suffering because the so-called West brings war to their homes and exerts economic pressure to bring them to their knees? So, evil gangs who smuggle illegal immigrants, which receive a lot of media coverage, are not the main problem, due to which now 11 million Syrians are fleeing?

The gangs are the result of a totally wrong policy in the Middle East, not the cause. These gangs are an integral part of the war economy. Without the war they wouldn't have any business. The gangs use the same paths that are used to smug-

gle arms, ammunition, equipment, satellite phones and fighters as well as drugs and other things that are required for the war in Syria.

The refugees meet the fighters on these smugglers' routes, for the organizers are the same. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has submitted a detailed report on these smuggling paths.

As long as war and the suffering of the affected people are a lucrative business nothing will probably change.

How come that our media do hardly ever cover this, and if they do, they report in a completely non-differentiated manner?

You have to put these questions to the big media, the so-called "lead media". They are supposed to guide the thought and perception of the population, they are to mentor and "classify", as the latest jargon has it. To me this means something like: media prescribe the direction in which you have to think and judge a conflict. This has little to do with the reality in the conflict regions, especially since many of my colleagues are not on site, but are in the city of a neighboring country, or even at home in a studio. An alternative to this kind of reporting would be a coverage that although it includes military options and developments, it would put the same emphasis, if not a greater one, on the political proposals, initiatives and developments.

What needs to be done in your view so that peace will become possible again in Syria? And: Is there something we, the German people, can do to support and help to alleviate the misery on site?

USA and Russia need to agree on a joint approach to stabilize Syria and the Iraq which involves the Syrian government, the armed forces as well as the government and army of Iraq. Preconditions – such as "Assad has no future in Syria" – have to be omitted. The Syrian actors must be encouraged – and not discouraged – to sit down at a table. Exerting influence to push one's own interests has to be waived. Turkey must be forced – either by NATO or bilaterally by individual NATO countries – to cease their support for the so-called Islamic State. In case Turkey refuses, military sanctions have to be imposed. Furthermore, the home countries of international Jihadists must prevent the departure of Islamist fighters

or supporters. This implies a debate on respectful coexistence and equality.

The German population must especially support the incoming refugees. However, the federal government must not be relieved from its responsibility as they have contributed to a wrong policy that led to this high number of refugees. In the "Bundestag", in the "Länder" parliaments, trade unions, schools, churches, in blogs and political meetings – they must all be informed about the background of the war in Syria. That is everybody's business, everyone who wants this war to come to an end.

One last word?

Yes. 70 years after the end of World War II, I want the people to remember the poem by *Wolfgang Borchert*: "There's only one thing to do: say NO." In the direct neighborhood of Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean areas and in parts of Africa, we have now seen 25 years of wars without interruption, wars being extended ever more. If we add the Israel-Palestine conflict to that, we have had war in the Middle East since 1948. With the wrongful occupation of Iraq in 2003 which was contrary to international law, the US has finally opened "the gate to hell" against which many warned as early as then.

Palestinians have been fleeing for almost 70 years, or they live – as in Gaza or the West Bank – as prisoners in their own country. Iraqis have been fleeing, as are the Syrians now. The West fueled these wars. Even Germany is supplying arms and stays silent to the breach of international law. The political opposition in the "Bundestag" or in the European Parliament does not live up to their tasks in terms of war and peace. And many media are acting as war drummers.

I miss the great peace and anti-war movement, which once took to the streets against the Iraq war. They must stand together and must not get divided. The peace movement must protest against these wars in the streets!

Thank you for the interview. •

(Interview *Jens Wernicke*)

Source: www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=27340, retrieved on 27 August 2015

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Direct democracy relies on historical knowledge

by Dr phil René Roca, *Forschungsinstitut direkte Demokratie**

During the last two hundred years citizens in Switzerland have developed a model of democracy that is globally unique. Direct democracy is an integral part of political culture and the underpinning of economic success. These facts should be reason enough to expect that the formation and development of direct democracy ought to be an important research topic within Swiss historiography. This, however, is not the case. Although in recent years the study of direct democracy in Switzerland has been stimulated by a number of detailed studies many research fields lie fallow.

Paradigm shift

What is the reason for this malaise? Undoubtedly, it has something to do with the paradigm shift among historians in the 1970s and 1980s. Some historians vigorously pursued the project of a “histoire totale”, i.e. they attempted to adopt a multi-perspectival approach to history and focus their attention especially on economic history, social history and the history of mentality. Unfortunately, the opening-up of the discipline propelled by this trend often had the opposite effect, namely an ideological narrowing. Today, this trend is still being nurtured and cultivated. Instead of taking political and intellectual history into consideration people tend to embark upon postmodernist theories that do not yield any gains in insight. In the process they either make a mockery of direct democracy or they embrace outmoded ways of thinking because there are no serious research projects. It is highly problematic that currently diverse academic chairs of history are held by prestigious proponents of the suggested paradigm shift who are blocking any attempts to lead historiography out of this impasse. An actual chair for Swiss history does no longer exist. But direct democracy is especially in need of historical knowledge to raise an awareness of its importance and to develop it further.

The theory of direct democracy

The development of direct democracy in nineteenth-century Switzerland varied widely, but it always developed from the bottom up, i.e. from the political communes to the cantonal and national levels. Crucial as theoretical elements in this process were the cooperative principle, Christian as well as modern natural law and the idea of popular sovereignty.

As the name of the Swiss confederacy – “Eidgenossenschaft” – already suggests the cooperative principle (Genossenschaftsprinzip) in Switzerland has a

long-standing tradition. It meant inter alia a community-shaping and integrating force without which Switzerland as a “Willensnation” (a nation united by the will of its people) could not have come into existence.

In the sixteenth century Christian natural law was provided with a personalist foundation by the Spanish School of Salamanca. It emphasised the inherent equality and natural freedom of human beings as well as their community-forming social nature. On that basis the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century developed modern natural law theory which was intensely debated also in Switzerland (see, for instance, the Swiss-French natural law school, the so-called “*école romande du droit naturel*”).

The Genevan writer and philosopher *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* described the idea of a natural law-based popular sovereignty in his fundamental work “Social Contract”. His reflections were essential for the emergence of direct democratic instruments.

Building on this theoretical foundation rural popular movements established the first direct democratic popular rights in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. They managed to enforce them even in the face of intense resistance in some cases mainly by the Liberals. This can be illustrated by diverse cantonal examples.

The case of Basel-Landschaft

Beginning in 1830 in Basel-Landschaft the development of democracy was vigorously pursued by liberal circles. As a small ruling elite liberals subscribed to the principle of representation. Popular sovereignty should be limited to the election of the legislature and should not be made more specific by further civic rights of the citizens. Soon an opposition against this concept emerged among the rural population, the so-called “*Bewegungsleute*”. These were radical free-thinkers (“*Freisinnige*”) who in line with their Jacobin and early socialist convictions advocated further-reaching civic rights for the citizens. In particular, they campaigned for a “legislative veto”, an early form of today’s optional or facultative referendum. In the course of their separation from Basel Stadt the activists of the democratic movement achieved their first success. In 1832 for the first time the newly created Canton of Basel-Landschaft was able to adopt its own constitution in which the “legislative veto” was established. Initial political experiences were positive. Over the next

few decades, as in other cantons, direct democracy was systematically developed and refined. Thus the legislative veto was transformed and expanded into a mandatory referendum. Very much in the spirit of Rousseau the population was now authorised to decide on every single law.

The case of Lucerne

In the canton of Lucerne a constitution was first adopted by a referendum (a popular vote expressed at the ballot box) in 1831. The 1831 constitution was mainly a product of liberal circles and because of its democratic character it marked a major advancement at the time. Democracy, however, was still a representative one, i.e. apart from elections there was no opportunity for active popular participation in politics. The Catholic conservatives, also called “*ländliche Demokraten*” (Rural Democrats), had a different vision of popular sovereignty. They wanted to secure a much greater share in decision-making for the people. To achieve this end, a rural popular movement evolved. In 1841 after a very intense political debate, the “*Rural Democrats*” pressed for a total revision of the constitution. The predominantly Catholic “*Siebzehnerkommission*” (commission of seventeen) charged with drafting a new constitution explained in its commentary on the first paragraph of the constitution:

“It is declared that a free state is not simply a representative democracy, but a democracy. In a democratic government the popular will – the true public opinion bowing only before God, religion and justice – is the supreme law whereas in a representative democracy the popular will is assigned to its deputies and all that remains for the people is a mere shadow of true sovereignty.”

That same year, the people of Lucerne accepted the constitution by a referendum. The new constitution marked a milestone in the further development of direct democracy. The crucial factor was the introduction of popular rights such as the citizen’s initiative for a total or partial revision of the constitution, the obligatory constitutional referendum and the legislative veto. Nowhere else in Switzerland did the population have that much political power. Although some of the achievements were canceled out again by the “*Sonderbund*” war that began a couple of years later the implementation of direct democracy on a cantonal level could no longer be delayed.

The significance of direct democracy to secure social peace (part 5)

People's rights as a instrument and guide in the economic crisis

by Dr rer publ Werner Wüthrich

A brief resume at the beginning: Part 1 of this series of articles (CC 14 of 2 June 2015) showed how tensions between the workers and their organisations and the political leadership in Switzerland increased during the last years of the First World War and how finally the general strike was proclaimed in November 1918. After this national crisis many referendums had contributed to establish social peace.

Part 2 (CC 15/16 of 16 June 2015) advanced to the roots of our economic constitution and stressed the significance of direct democracy for a peaceful economic development.

Part 3 (CC 17 of 30 June 2015) showed how, after the First World War, the Federal Council and parliament too often circumvented the people's rights in the economic field via emergency law, and how the population resisted.

Part 4 (CC 19 of 29 July 2015) dealt with the 1937 peace agreement between the associations of employees and employers in the metal industry and its significance for Switzerland.

Part 5 will show the significance of people's rights as an instrument for crisis management and the preservation of social peace during the severe economic depression of the 1930s. That crisis also originated in the US.

On 25 October 1929 the fall in prices at the New York Stock Exchange triggered a global economic crisis that was to last for many years. Switzerland was also severely affected. The national income fell by 20 per cent. The number of unemployed people rose to 120,000 by 1935 – about 7 per cent of the workforce, an extraordinarily high number for Switzerland. Only 30 per cent of workers were insured against un-

employment. The main burden of unemployment benefits lay with the communes and cantons. Quite a few people were even suffering from hunger. Cities established soup kitchens and shelters. The extent of the global economic crisis put all previous crises in the shade. Production of major industrial countries declined by 30 to 50 per cent. In 1932, the total world trade was only one-third of that of 1929. Switzerland was already strongly export-oriented and therefore severely affected, even if the unemployment rate of 7 per cent was low by international standards. Fewer and fewer tourists visited the country. The wages and tax revenues of the Confederation decreased. Everybody wondered, what comes next and what is to be done?

Debate among economists: Three trends

Given the desolate economic situation in many countries, the classical liberalism that left a lot of freedom to the economy was more and more called into question. Apart from the communist planned economy in the Soviet Union, three major trends could be observed – liberalism or neo-liberalism (as of renewed liberalism), a mindset oriented at the English economist John Maynard Keynes' ideas and a policy that wanted to attach greater importance to professions or corporative associations as collectives.

Liberal economists argued that the unexpected crisis made it necessary to reconsider the regulatory framework for the economy and make it stable for the crisis. Some issues should be corrected, new crisis-proof rules were needed, and the state had to be able to enforce them. However, they kept to the core respectively to the principle of a liberal economic order. At the annual meeting of the Association for



Social Policy in 1932, German economists like Alexander Rüstow, Walter Eucken and others found the term “neo-liberal” for this renewed kind of liberalism, which is often used differently today – namely, as the epitome of an unbridled capitalism. The Association for Social Policy, which had been founded in 1873, held regular meetings and names of many famous scientists such as Max Weber and Walter Sombart have been linked to it.

John Maynard Keynes argued a bit differently than the liberal economists. In his opinion, economy needed a fixed guide. The state had to take the lead and intervene vigorously. Undesirable developments – such as the high unemployment rate – had reached such a degree, that nothing would work independently and only the state was able to help. It should

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Correcting the liberal view of history

Oskar Vasella, a Swiss Catholic historian largely ignored by his expert colleagues correctly wrote in his essay “Zur historischen Würdigung des Sonderbunds” (An historical appraisal of the Sonderbund) that “greater freedom of historical thinking” was required especially in an appraisal of catholic conservatism in order to achieve a more accurate and faithful account of the early history of the founding of the federal state. The same applies for the significance

of early socialism. Most of the early socialists were federalists who were committed to a de-centralised political system and advocated the extension of popular political rights. The subsequently emerging leftist movement adapted for the most part the centralist-oriented marxist ideology whose view of man was rather oriented towards class struggle than based on natural law.

The catholic conservatives and the early socialists were among the political losers in Switzerland. But they have shaped the history of the Swiss confederation just as much as the liberals. Those who won the “Sonderbund” war had to

go through a lengthy learning process until they could accept direct democracy and cast off their self-conceit and arrogance towards “the populace”. Switzerland would not have become a federal and direct democratic state if the liberal, anti-clerical and in some cases also centralist elements had kept the upper hand without resistance. Today's historiography shaped by the victorious liberals urgently needs to be corrected.

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"The significance of direct democracy..."

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adopt a planned and systematic approach – for example by means of job creation programmes. The state should behave counter-cyclically, that is, in times of crisis the state should strengthen the demand by greater spending and thus boost the economy. For this purpose, it was appropriate to incur debts and make comprehensive use of the money printing press. Keynes shaped the image of a government that directs the economy as a helmsman, plans workplaces and secures social justice. The epitome of this policy was the programme of the US President *Roosevelt*, who fought the massive crisis with his *New Deal Policy* in the US, where unemployment temporarily had increased up to 25 per cent. (G. Braunsberger, *Keynes für Jedermann*, NZZ 2009)

The difference in approach lies in the view of man. Liberal economists such as *Wilhelm Röpke* had more confidence in the people and believed they were able to organise independently, to seek new ways for themselves and follow them autonomously. In his view public intervention in excess was harmful and would paralyse people's initiative and their research and entrepreneur spirit. The people in their individuality were so diverse and their opportunities in the social network so immense that no government in the world would be able to grasp the complex events to their full extent. A large-scale, centralised "fine-tuning" of economy from above – as was often attempted by "Keynesians" – was therefore simply impossible and would not do justice to the people (*von Hayek*). It would often do more harm than good. Following the recipes of Keynes included the danger that debts would rise to uncontrollable amounts and the monetary system would be going to pieces. Nevertheless, it was necessary to define conditions and adopt clear rules and then adapt them on a small scale to the needs of the population (*Wilhelm Röpke*). Similarly, a strong state was required to put them through. Similarly, a certain social balance and a "safety net" were required as well. On the other hand, the government was to remain humble and refrain from intervention in order to increasingly give people the chance to be active, to unite and to seek new ways. Even during the crisis, it was necessary to rely on the positive forces among the people.

Decline and renaissance of liberal economists

During the 1930s, liberal voices became ever quieter among economists until they ceased almost entirely. The German "Verein für Socialpolitik" dissolved in 1935 in order to forestall the inclusion into a Na-

tional Socialist organisation. (It was re-established after the war and still exists today.) John Maynard Keynes dominated the field of economists and policy advisors almost completely. His thinking has had great influence until today. The issue of government debt, however, has grown into an almost insolvable problem in many countries in the course of decades.

In 1938 a very small group of liberal economists from various countries met in the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris and discussed ways to revitalise liberalism and to renew its content. The Germans *Wilhelm Röpke*, *Alexander Rüstow*, *Walter Eucken* and the Austrians *Ludwig von Mises* and *Friedrich August von Hayek* also took part. Their credo was that liberalism needed new rules and a strong state to implement them. The discussion was also about a new name. "Social liberalism" and "positive liberalism" were proposed. Just like six years before in the Association for Social Policy, they agreed on the term "neo-liberalism". (Thomas Sprecher, *Monatshefte* 2013, p.84). Time for the new liberalism was to come after the Second World War – in different variations. In addition to the people mentioned before, there were *Alfred Müller-Armack* and *Ludwig Erhard* in Germany who shaped the social market economy and the economic miracle of the post-war period with their ideas, and their thinking is now called "ordoliberalism", "Freiburg School" or "Rhenish capitalism (social market economy)".

Countering the economic crisis by popular initiatives

In Switzerland the discussion about new economic policies suitable in times of crisis had begun at the beginning of the thirties. It was less theoretical but more practical and oriented towards a solution, corresponding to the directdemocratic model. To what extent should the federal government actively steer the economy from above and plan economic processes? Was it increasingly vital to seek solutions that weighed individual freedom less and put more weight on the collective – as in the time of the guilds? Or should the state continue to be modest and limit itself in the liberal sense by setting clear rules and giving the people space for self-help and initiative? In short: It was about fundamental issues of economic policy and ultimately about reforming the articles in the Federal Constitution concerning the economy. In directdemocratic Switzerland it goes without saying that activists would soon interfere with popular initiatives. That was indeed the case: A total of four initiative committees in the 1930s and during the Second World War submitted their proposals on how to reform the economy articles in the Federal Constitution.

In the recent history of Switzerland, there was seldom a point in time, in which the population was kept busy so intensely with the question of what a "wise policy" or "wise police laws" should be like in order to bring the ruined economy back into balance. *Thomas Bornhauser* had invented this term in the 19th century. (See part 2 of the series of articles from 16 June 2015)

Popular initiative of the trade unions to "combat the economic crisis" (Crisis Initiative)

In 1934 the Social Democrats and trade unions called for a policy according to the Keynesian model. With their people's initiative they wanted to bestow the federal government with far reaching competences in many areas and transfer numerous responsibilities on it to combat the crisis "in a systematic and planned manner" (National Councillor *Obrecht*, president of the Social Democratic Party). The Social Democrats had a "plan of work" in their programme. The economic policy of the Federal Council and parliament was to be fundamentally changed. According to this plan, the authorities should ensure stability of prices and wages, guarantee a minimum income, initiate job creation programmes, promote agriculture, industry and tourism, regulate the capital market and control the export of capital as well as cartels and trusts – there were many more claims, as well. Additionally the federal government – as the popular initiative said – could deviate from the principle of freedom of trade and go into debt. The measures would be limited to five years and had to be renewed thereafter.

This popular initiative was unique in several respects: it was launched on 15 May 1934, submitted as early as on 30 November of the same year, with a record-high of 334,699 signatures (50,000 signatures were required). It was brought to vote by the Federal Council and parliament after only six months, on 2 June 1935, without submitting a counter-proposal. The voter turnout on that day amounted to a record high of 84.4 per cent, which shows how much the people were worried about the economic crisis. However, from the perspective of the people's rights, it was problematic. The Federal Assembly would have enacted the many laws (which would have been necessary to be implemented) as "final" i.e. under exclusion of the referendum. Switzerland's economic system would thus have lost its directdemocratic character, which had made it possible so far to harmonise the laws largely according to the needs of the population. The economic constitution would have got a "dirigiste

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character". (Alfred Kölz, *Neuere schweizerische Verfassungsgeschichte*, 2004 p. 754). In addition, the federal government would have run into high debt and the administration would have to be increased massively to cope with the many tasks at least. Parliament and also the population were widely divided – more than in case of any other initiative.

On 2 June 1935 almost everyone went to the polls. 57.2 per cent voted No. In 18 of the 22 cantons, there was a negative majority. The wish hold on to direct democracy in economic matters as well, has probably been the decisive factor that the initiative was clearly rejected. But the Yes-share of over 40 per cent was high. Many had probably been guided by the hope that the government would work it out in the end.

Corporative state instead of parliament and people

However, the Crisis Initiative of the Social Democrats and the trade unions was not the only one. There was a second initiative almost that would also have put the Constitution on new grounds with respect to the economy. In 1934 catholic-conservative circles and young liberals launched a popular initiative that wanted to set up a self-regulatory corporative economic order which in some respects differed from the liberal economic concept. Since its initiators were from all different political camps, they were unable to agree on a joint text, they chose the form of a "general proposal" (initiators only set the agenda and the exact wording is left to the parliament) and worked out each of them various constitutional drafts.

The movement was impaired because Frontists were also involved, representing anti-democratic views in many respects. For the Young Liberals, who had already prepared a draft, this was reason enough not to submit the 30,000 collected signatures, so that they were not named along with the National Front. The popular initiative was launched anyway. The National Front, being the well-known organisation of the Frontists, was no mass party and was in decline already in 1934. It participated merely in order to raise its reputation but without submitting any own concrete proposal. It did not succeed. In 1935 it had only one single National Councillor and was constantly losing members. In the Second World War their meetings were forbidden. (Walter Wolf, *Faschismus in der Schweiz*, 1969; A. Gebert, *Die jungliberale Bewegung in der Schweiz 1928 bis 1938*, 1981).

In 1935, the Catholic Conservative Party presented its constitutional draft:

corporative associations as a collective should regulate pending issues instead of the parliament. The then 600 professional associations should be grouped in seven industry associations:

1. Agriculture, 2. Industry 3. Manufacture 4. Trade, Banking and Insurances, 5. Inns, 6. Traffic and 7. Self-employed professions. They would send delegates to the Swiss Chamber of Commerce which would be authorised to adopt laws instead of the parliament. (Kölz 2004, p. 755) The initiators were supported by the Catholic Social Doctrine: Pope Pius XI advised simultaneously to the advent of the communist parties in Europe that a policy of social justice should be pursued which reconciled work with the capital. He, too, saw the solution in a corporative economic order. Hence, the encyclical „*Quadragesimo anno*“ read in 1931, "Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also establishing the proper order of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces."

The trend towards a corporative state could be observed all over Europe then and those ideas were discussed in most Swiss parties. Even the constitutional draft of the Liberal Youth Movement of Switzerland included an "economic council", which, however, was equipped with only consultative powers. Even in the ranks of the Social Democrats, such voices could be heard. The parliament, elected by the people, and the people's rights would have become less important.

The corporate economic model would have changed the liberal economic order in its core and led to an authoritarian state. That view was expressed by Federal Councillor Schulthess when he spoke up in the Council of States on 11 October 1933: "Corporations, as some imagine, lead (...) to dictatorship and political conformity; and if one wishes for such a corporative order, one has to accept the omnipotence of the state as well." Even the workers wrote to the Federal Council, stating that a corporative body would smell of "facism which we do not want." (Cit. in Kölz, 2004, p. 766)

The popular initiative of the Catholic Conservatives was rejected on 8 September 1935 by 72.3 per cent of the votes. In the catholic Cantons of Valais, Fribourg, Appenzell Innerrhoden and Obwalden it was adopted – but only with narrow majorities.

The proposal to form corporative associations and to involve them in the legislative process was not new. In 1894 the people had voted on an article in the Federal Constitution. It had planned to adopt a federal commercial law that would have allowed to form corporative associations, which in place of the parliament would have had the competence to adopt legal

regulations. 54 per cent of the people had voted No in 1894.

1935 – The people paves the way for direct democracy

The year 1935 became "a fateful year for Swiss democracy" (Alfred Kölz). The people proved worthy of its political responsibility and rejected both popular initiatives presented above. An acceptance would have led to an authoritarian order and restricted the people's rights. Switzerland's entire political system would have changed.

Switzerland had kept to the liberal principle in its Economic Constitution – associated with social components – and was therefore quite unique in the thirties. In the Soviet Union there was communism, in Germany and Italy fascist state economy ruled, in France the Popular Front with a kind of economic government and Austria was under a corporative state economic order regime. The Anglo-Saxon countries followed the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who recommended government intervention, economic management and public debt to a large extent. Almost all economists (who were no Communists) followed his credo.

The people's No on the two economic initiatives of 1935 had a completely different effect. It was a signal that the population expected the problems to be solved not only by the authorities, but that the citizens themselves were in control of the situation to improve their living conditions. It was becoming obvious that these efforts were often more sustainable and more successful than the government measures. For example, many cooperatives were newly established or the existing ones were extended. There is always a risk that political debates forget about the contribution of the population to crisis management.

Self-help and self-responsibility in the crisis: the creation of cooperatives

To improve legal certainty, the National Council and the Council of States revised the cooperative law in the Code of Obligations in 1935 and in the following years, until the post-war period a number of cooperative start-ups came about or expansions of cooperatives in agriculture were made, consumer services in housing and in many others areas of life and business – all of this in an amazing variety. Numerous writings on the cooperative movement have been published – in line with the recently published booklet "Wie gründe ich eine Genossenschaft?" (How do I start a cooperative?) The Confederation, the cantons and communes supported this movement by fiscally favouring and subsidising the cooperatives in many ways. Today

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there are about 12,000 cooperatives in Switzerland. Three typical examples from this period are to demonstrate the variety of ways that the citizens themselves have to become active and to take up the reins on their way out of the crisis.

WIR cooperative

When in 1934, the economic crisis increasingly intensified, sixteen businessmen met to found the *WIR cooperative*. Banks had become more cautious during the crisis and were reluctant in granting credits. The cooperative built up their own system of credit with an own (complementary) currency – the WIR francs. The merchants and artisans invited their suppliers and business customers to participate. They could get loans free of interest in WIR francs, which in turn created this money out of nothing, just like any other bank. The cooperative needed the permit as a bank, which it received in 1936. This cooperative money facilitated payments, solved some financial straits and promoted the sales between the cooperative members, who were in contact at common fairs and regular meetings, something they still do today. The system has been successful – until today. Around 60,000 SMEs – that is a quarter of all Swiss SMEs – have joined this system. Sales in WIR francs amount now between two and three billion per year. Approximately 800 million WIR credits are outstanding accounts. In 1998, the cooperative opened a "real" commercial bank – the *WIR Bank*, which offers both loans in Swiss francs as well as in WIR and manages savings (in Swiss francs).

"Bauernhülfskassen"**(Farmers' help savings banks)**

In terms of self-help, many farmers established innumerable, various agricultural cooperatives. Interestingly, there have been and there are still those that do not consist of farmers: the so-called *Bauernhülfskassen*. An example from the Canton of Zurich: In 1932 the *Zürcher Kantonalbank*, five commercial banks and some rich individuals (who remained anonymous) founded the "*Zürcher Bauernhülfskasse*". Its purpose was to help the farmers in need, and that was when the farmers' self-help organisations and in particular the *Raiffeisen banks* could no longer grant loans in accordance with their statutes. In difficult times the "*Bauernhülfskasse*" rescued – as the name says – various family businesses. It still exists today.

Adventure Migros

In parallel with the decline of the *National Front* in 1935 a new party entered

the political scene: the "*Landesring der Unabhängigen*" (*Ring of Independents*) with *Gottlieb Duttweiler*, owner of *Migros*. Duttweiler set off to advance things in the economy and in politics in Switzerland. Five representatives of the new party were immediately elected to the National Council. In 1940, Gottlieb Duttweiler converted his Migros from a plc to a cooperative by giving the company as a gift to its loyal customers. Each of the 75,540 customers who had a customer card and was thus enrolled, now received a free cooperative share of CHF 30 and became co-owner. For many small grocery stores, Migros spelled the end. For many housewives on a narrow budget, however, the low prices for staple foods were a blessing. In order to strengthen the civic education and intellectual resistance in those difficult times, Duttweiler gave the new cooperative members a book about "*William Tell*". It was the first "book transfer", which should be followed by many more. Thus began the adventure "*Migros*" with steady growth and its own cooperative culture, including the *Club School*, *Exlibris*, *Culture Percentage* and many others. Today Migros is a huge company and the largest employer in Switzerland.

Recognition: Plea for direct democracy

These lines should end with a retrospective. In the Canton of Thurgau in 1830, *Thomas Bornhauser* had postulated the trade and economic freedom as a freedom right based on natural law – a hundred years prior to the great economic crisis in the 20th century. Other cantons followed and the federal government included the freedom of trade and commerce as a fundamental right in the Federal Constitution. (See part 2 of the series of articles from 16 June 2015). "Wise police laws", so Bornhauser's words, were to avoid abuse. Today we can say the following. There is no political authority that would have been able to adopt such "wise laws" or even implement the "ideal economic order". But Thomas Bornhauser's words have initiated a learning process at all political levels, a constant search and further development, in which the people in Switzerland play a central role and are directly involved via the people's rights – as this series of articles has shown. Direct democracy with initiative and referendum is probably the best way to adjust the legislation directly to the needs of the population. The former relative low number of signatures of 50,000 necessary for the launching of an initiative and 30,000 of a referendum has favoured the involvement of the population in the learning process. Even today – after the introduction of women's suffrage – this numbers (100,000 and 50,000) are still low, but these signatures

must always be at first collected and then authenticated. The required number of signatures in the cantons and communes is also relatively low.

The present state of the economy and the large number of referendums that have taken place at the federal level since 1848, are proof that the learning process often works better and produces better results than if basic decisions are made by a small elected elite in the government and parliament only. The discussions are supported widely and more intensely. Suggestions from the population are included that would otherwise not be heard. A popular initiative sensitises the political elite, even if it is rejected in the vote.

However, it is not just about the question of how decisions are taken, but also about how the population can be involved and how politicians respect the people as the sovereign. In direct democracy the people identify far more with the political process and with the legal system than is the case if they are involved only indirectly through elections. All this maintains social peace and strengthens the social cohesion which cannot be overestimated in today's troubled world.

Social market economy

Our history of popular rights has not yet come to an end after these remarks: Inspired by the two fundamental and pioneering economic referendums in 1935, the parliament began with the reform of the economic articles in the Federal Constitution. They should be adapted better to the crisis and better respond to the requirements of a population in need. The groups that had launched the *Crisis Initiative*, joined forces and created the "*Richtlinienbewegung*" (*Guideline Movement*) to accompany these works in their spirit. The Second World War delayed this process, so that the Social Democrats and the *Ring of Independents* with *Gottlieb Duttweiler* took the opportunity in 1943 and submitted two other popular initiatives – both on the "right to work", which they wanted to have implemented in different ways into the Constitution. Almost simultaneously, two groups in the field of social policy became active. The *Catholic-Conservative Association CCA* launched a popular initiative on the topic "Protection of the Family", which was to allow more of family-friendly policies, and handed it in with 178,000 signatures. Almost simultaneously the *Commercial Association of Switzerland* launched a popular initiative with 180,000 signatures, making a concrete proposal for the establishment and the social aspect of the *old-age and survivors' insurance* (AHV), which the peo-

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Art as a “textbook of life” On Russian 19th century painting and the work of the “Peredvizhniki”

by Urs Knoblauch, painter and cultural publicist

The unforgettable Art Exhibition “Russian Painting in the 19th Century” in the Kunsthau Zurich in 1989, gives evidence of its great significance just at our present time. In view of the wars, the injustices and current social tensions, there is an urgent need of reflection on a peaceful coexistence and on the related moral and ethical basic values. An impressive example is the “Cooperative of Travelling Exhibitors”. Peaceful solutions to conflicts and a dialogue between people, cultures and civilizations on an equal footing are the order of the day.

In Russia, during the important historical period from 1850 to 1910 the relationship between Russia and Europe was consolidated. The common heritage of Christianity, Renaissance and Enlightenment, with its great thinkers and philosophers, had a unifying impact. Russia has its geographical, historical, cultural and political roots in this historic Europe. Trade, scientific exchange and diplomatic relations are important for all European countries. Meaningful cooperation has always been a common concern and should be given more importance again. Instead of today’s EU centralism and of transatlantic dictation, more democracy, autonomy, cultural identity and sovereignty of the nation state have to be achieved again.

The years 1850 to 1870 marked a creative peak among the great painters and writers of Russia such as A. S. Pushkin, N. W. Gogol, I. S. Turgenev, A. P. Chekhov. In 1851, the railway line St. Petersburg-Moscow, at that time the longest in the world, was opened. In 1850, Tsar Nicholas I. ruled over the Russian Empire. Leo Tolstoy was 22 years old, Feodor Dostoyevsky 29 and N. G. Chernyshevsky 22. Chernyshevsky minted the term “culture as a textbook of life”. Hence art was given a social task which also strengthened democratization. Thus, the population, many intellectuals, artists and writers in the mid-19th century were concerned about poverty, social injus-



Vladimir Yegorovich Makovsky, *Philanthropists*, 1874



Ilya Repin, *L. N. Tolstoy resting in the forest*, 1891

and the peasantry’s needs. In the thereby developed revolutionary movements the focus was on the struggle between liberal and authoritarian forms of society and the view of man. Poets, painters and musicians, “started out to bring the Russian peasants and craftsmen to the center of their attention and to poetize their way of life and their daily work” (p. 61), as the Russian art historian Lindija I. Iowlea writes in the exhibition catalog about the concerns of the *Peredvizhniki* and their cooperative exhibitions.¹ So the artists began to work in the open air, like their French fellows J. F. Millet and G. Courbet in the Barbizon school. It was also an expression of real solidarity with the population, with its culture and with inherent natural beauty.

Relating to the population’s joys and sufferings

The painters calling themselves “Peredvizhniki”, the “Cooperative of Travelling Exhibitors” placed these topics at the center of their work. With their works the “travelling painters” trekked from the cities to the rural population in the remotest regions of Russia. Through their exhibitions they enabled the people there to participate in these cultural activities. They aroused great interest, because in their beautiful paintings they highly appreciated these people and their cultural way of life. Due to the visual language of realism, their contents

were generally understood. They seriously entered into dialogue with the population. The major part of Russia’s population were peasants, often living in degrading dependence. The climatic conditions were also harsh. Occasionally, agricultural work could be done merely during four or five months. Famines were common. In his poignant article “The famine in Russia” Leo Tolstoy depicted the people’s misery and great need and he also proposed new ways to ease the latter. In 1861, serfdom was abolished by Tsar Alexander II, pressured by the social developments and the writers’ work who were striving for more social justice and humanity. More rights and liberties were granted to 25 million farmers, many social problems, however, continued to exist.

Truthfulness, meaningfulness and moral values

W. G. Perov was the important representative of the “Moscow realistic school”. With great compassion this “poet of sorrow” raised everyday situations, social inequalities and human tragedies to the general human level, for instance in his picture “The Drowned” created in 1867.

Many younger artists, who were well trained in the tradition of classicist academism at the St. Petersburg Academy of Art,

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ple had already agreed on in principle in a constitutional vote in 1925. A first concrete draft law, however, had been rejected in 1931 in a referendum.

As a result of these activities in the middle of the war five referendums were

to take place between 1946 and 1947 that set the course for the social market economy, as we know it today. •

Sources: Alfred Kölz, *Neuere schweizerische Verfassungsgeschichte* (mit Quellenbuch), Berne 2004; *100 Jahre Sozialdemokratische Partei*, Zurich, 1988; Häner Isabelle, *Nachdenken über den demokratischen Staat und seine Geschichte*, Bei-

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searched for their own ways. Their focus was on truthfulness, meaningfulness and moral values. The themes of Romanticism with their search for "fathoming the truth of life and of human character" were also important. The driving force were painters like *K. P. Bryullov* or *A. A. Ivanov*, who created the great work "Christ appears to the people", on which he worked for twenty years, namely from 1837 to 1857. You can admire this great painting in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The artist wanted to show ethical and moral values which were important for the tasks and the existence of a society. This was associated with the reverence for nature and landscape. These painters considered progress to be the striving after "perfecting the moral principles of the lives of every human being, even of society as a whole". This search for meaningfulness and social justice was crucial: "In the autumn of 1863, a group of students of the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts in their final year refused to paint the picture for their final competition with a predetermined topic ('Feast of the Gods of Valhalla'), and demanded free choice of subjects." (p. 61) This extraordinary event went down in history under the name "revolt of the fourteen". The demands of the students were rejected, whereupon they left the academy and founded the first independent association of artists in Russia, named the "St. Petersburg Artists' Association". It became the predecessor of the "Cooperative for Traveling Exhibitions of Visual Arts" which was launched seven years later. Later it was abbreviated to "Cooperative of Traveling Exhibitors" (Peredvizhniki). In her profound contribution Lidija I. Iowlewa writes: "The establishment of this very important and, in the history of Russian art, also permanent organization is of the utmost historical importance, since it represents the dawn of a new era of the enhanced reference to society." (p. 66) The works of art were no longer kept in the buildings of the Academy for only a few people, but were made generally available by the enhanced relation to the questions of life of the people. So not only the people in the great cities but also the people in the so far untapped province came to enjoy these pictures and the "textbook of life".

Social bonding as a vital principle

One of the founders of the cooperative was the artist *I. N. Kramskoy*, who from 1872 onwards became famous with his portraits and the painting "Christ in the Desert". He succeeded in raising the religious motif onto philosophical and general human level. High moral and ethical ideals were central and the unifying principle underlying the work of the different personalities of the Peredvizhniki. One of the most original art-

ists was *N. N. Ge*, a friend of *A. I. Herzen* and *M. A. Bakunin*. He was also one of the founding members of the cooperative. In his famous picture "Peter I interrogates Tsarevich Alexei Petrovich in Peterhof" (1871) he succeeds in profoundly representing a momentous interpersonal situation with uncompromising realism. In the late 1870s, he made friends with Tolstoy and accomplished a series of pictures, in which Tolstoy's moral and philosophical doctrine was central.

The images of *W. I. Surikov* and *W. M. Maximov*, such as his masterpiece "Sick Man" (1881) also treat "humanistic" themes in a very sensitive manner. In his genre paintings *W. J. Makovsky* included also the urban social classes and revolutionary intellectuals. His impressive picture "The soiree" (1875–1897) shows a table at which many people are assembled listening to a poetry reading in a scarcely illuminated room. As early as that these artists recognized the necessity of including the psychological dimension in order to understand interpersonal and social processes: "Striving to serve the 'real interests of the people' (I.N. Kramskoi), the Peredvizhniki sought a broader definition of art than just the presentation of scenes from among the people. They realized that the image of contemporary life cannot be complete without the representation of the inner life of man, at these times 'of issues and newspapers' (Kramskoi)."

The representation of nature and landscape paintings enjoyed great popularity. Here again, credibility, realism and accuracy of monitoring were important. In their works of art the painters were also searching for the soul and "humanity", even though people did not always appear. "Many landscape paintings were in their character 'lyrical manifestations' of the artist, an expression of his feelings and inner life, a reflection on the fate of his country and the people." (p. 71) Thus, the works of *I. I. Levitan* show "the wealth of nature in a hitherto unprecedented diversity and illustrate the harmony between nature and human soul. Levitan's landscapes are not only images of nature but sensitive representations of various mental states and emotions of the people."

In historical paintings, painters like *N.N. Ge*, *Ilya Repin* and *W.I. Surikov* sought – apart from historic truthfulness – "to capture history in its general human, moral and ethical importance". But the "roots of national independence" were also emphasized. They contributed decisively to the rooting of democratic ideas. The central figure of the entire group and of Russian art in the second half of the 19th century was *Ilya Repin*. Well-known are his masterpiece "Barge Haulers on the Volga" (1870–1873) and his paintings and portraits of Tolstoy. With his extraordinary artistic skills he mastered all themes of art. It was "his bound-

less love for life and his insatiable curiosity for all its phenomena, the interest and attention towards his fellow human being, an almost 'Tolstoyan' ability to sense the inner life of another person, and the artistic skill to always find new methods to make these inner worlds visible. "(p. 72) The influence of Repin as an artist and educator cannot be esteemed highly enough. The long-standing friendship between Leo Tolstoy and the painter Ilya Repin may serve as an example. They agreed on humaneness and their ideals of a just and good social system. In Ilya Repin's grand picture of "Tolstoy plowing" (1887), the substance of their concept of culture is expressed. By one's own honest and existential work of tilling the soil the significance of culture as "agricultura" becomes understandable – a multifaceted civilizational performance in the widest sense. With their work, these artists contributed to a high ideal of education of an entire era. Thus, the most advanced and most viable forces of the Russian art of the 1870s and 1880s were associated in one way or another with the Peredvizhniki.

In the late 1880s a large group of talented young artists joined the "Cooperative for traveling exhibitions". Apart from the concerns of their teachers new trends and formal varieties of European Art Nouveau took increasingly central stage. More and more issues of the technique of art replaced social and substantive issues. "The crisis of Russian Realism began at the turn of the century. The new social and economic situation, which was caused by the accelerated development of capitalism, also changed the art." (p. 76) Other values prevailed. The last exhibition of the Cooperative for traveling exhibitions took place after the great October Revolution, in 1922.

To conclude let us hear once again the art historian Lidija I. Iowlewa: "The pursuit of high moral and ethical ideals was an essential aspect of Russian Realism, as indeed of the whole Russian 19th century culture. To realize this way of life, the rejection of the existing world order and, primarily, the social structure of society, the steadfast faith in man and the power of his mind and spirit, the confidence in the possibilities of a just and social life and the ability of the Russian national character – all this had inspired the work of the Peredvizhniki in the best years of their interaction and was expressed in all their work, regardless of whether it was about moral images, historical paintings, landscapes or battle scenes."

Rethinking this major historical development, the great cultural power and the ethics and morals of the Peredvizhniki are certainly worthwhile for society today and for the peaceful accomplishment of the tasks of the coming generations. •

¹ *Russian Painting in the 19th century* (Kunsthau Zurich, 3 June to 30 July 1989)

Manifesto for Europe

We want Europe to be based on peace and justice!

We, citizens of some European countries, are worried about the future of our continent. Europe's economic, social, political and cultural development are moving farther and farther away from what the people, not only in Europe, have hoped for since after the Second World War: Never again war and dictatorship, never again colonial exercise of power and exploitation; instead international understanding and international reconciliation, economic reconstruction and social justice – living in political freedom, cultural diversity and constitutional democracy.

A threat to freedom, democracy and peace

The high level of debt in nearly all European countries, high unemployment rates, especially among young people, the creeping inflation, the weakening and thinning of the SMEs, numerous unresolved questions in connection with the millions of refugees from the Balkans, from Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, the state's disregard of civil and human rights and the increase in social and political tensions within and among the states in Europe are threatening prosperity, democracy and peace.

Political and economic crises are being misused to centralize the EU's political power increasingly – at the expense of our sovereignty and liberties. Many citizens notice that there is no longer an honest dialogue with their political representatives. They realize that the rulers with their political decisions ignore the people. They also notice that via the mainstream media a certain feeling of weakness is artificially generated. Severe crises, continuously created anew are to divert from fundamental questions and from what is actually going on.

Side by side with the US and in an almost slave-like allegiance the governments of EU-states and NATO have been breaking international law for many years. We, citizens of Europe, sympathize with all fellow-humans and peoples who have suffered and are still suffering from that situation.

The War against Yugoslavia in 1999 was the Fall. Sanctions imposed on Austria in 2000 and lasting many months aimed at turning over a democratically elected government. In 2004, as well as in 2013 and 2014 the US, together with the EU, massively interfered in the internal affairs of the Ukraine and contributed to a war being waged in that region

– in the heart of Europe. The treatment of Greece since 2010 is humiliating a whole people. A people, the ancestors of which lived in a country that has been the birthplace of European thought and cultural creation.

Europe's cultural heritage

The first codified European law originated in Ancient Greece. Politicians of Ancient Greece recognized it as their duty and the duty of all men to stand up against injustice. Greek philosophers laid the foundations of scientific thinking; they struggled for answers to the basic questions of social and political ethics as well as for a systematic theory of education. In the fifth century before Christ, the Kos physician *Hippocrates* constituted the Medical Ethics, which, throughout the centuries, have had an essential formative influence on medical actions. Greece set standards in architecture and art of Europe, considering the human being the benchmark and thus stimulating developments that are still being drawn on today.

There were those Greeks who developed the basic principles of the European model states already 2,500 years ago: democracy, separation of powers and natural law. They demanded that government action must be measured by an ethic that is based on human nature – so that it would not degenerate into despotism and tyranny.

It was the Greek philosopher *Aristotle*, who said that in a just state money must not be a tool of power.

Whenever brute power politics wanted to enforce the "law of the jungle", European history was led into the abyss of bitter confrontation and wars.

The acrid manner by which politics and media are again creating an atmosphere against individual countries and peoples today, brings back memories of past disasters on our continent. Given the world's existing nuclear destructive potential, any incitement to military confrontation and war, as for instance acted out against Russia, represents sheer madness.

Europe at the crossroads

Europe's history is a history of injustice and violence, but it is as well a history of overcoming the latter evils from its own moral insight and political strength. The Western and Christian humanist tradition has developed viable foundations for equality before the law, humaneness and respect for human dignity. Whenever in

history these basics could wield their influence, human coexistence was peaceful, just and secure. This was often accompanied by general prosperity, social equity and cultural upswing.

Europe is characterized by a rich diversity of cultures and nations in a small space, from Crete to the North Cape, from Lisbon to Yekaterinburg. People across Europe have contributed much in all spheres of life in more than 2,500 years.

For the people's coexistence in peace and freedom, the development of law and right towards ever greater justice was of fundamental importance for Europe and the world.

Europe has significantly contributed to the fact that human rights and the principles of international law are today guaranteed in international agreements (Charter of the United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and in national constitutions.

We therefore demand,

- that the protection of human life must have absolute priority and that the destruction of decent working conditions, social welfare, pension systems, health care and all steps towards euthanasia be stopped;

because every person has a right to life and freedom of bodily harm. Man's right to life is the core issue of human rights. It is of maximum value. Human life is sacrosanct, inalienable and cannot be balanced against other considerations. The "respect for life" must have absolute priority. Every person has the right to life and physical integrity. He or she has inalienable social rights such as the right to fair working conditions, to social security, to an adequate standard of living for himself or herself and the family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, to education and participation in cultural and political life;

- that all anti-family ideologies in national and international regulations are cancelled;

because the family is the natural and fundamental nucleus of society and

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should enjoy the greatest possible protection and assistance;

- that all education slashings of our public schools are stopped; that professional content linked to scientific knowledge be promoted again; that social connectedness, social ethics and civic education be strengthened and schools meet their constitutionally vested mission to educate mature and responsible citizens. Education is the most fundamental task of sovereign states. It cannot be that young people are not fit for employment when they leave schools and are thus abandoned to neglect;

because every person has the right to education. It serves the full development of the human personality and makes her capable of taking responsibility for the common good and for peace. In this sense education must foster an awareness of human dignity and enable humanity to acquire and practice understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations;

- that it may not be a self-proclaimed international "elite" from politics, media and (financial) economy that determine the destiny of citizens and peoples;

because the people, the citizens, are the sovereign in the state (sovereignty of the people), and that is why the citizens have all political civil rights and liberties; they have the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association, the right to free elections and referenda. Elected officials and governments must be independent trustees of the common good. The citizens' freedom of information and the importance of media for democracy demand that they are committed to truth and the common good as well as objective and balanced reporting; the economy has to serve the people; every state is sovereign over its own economic system, in particular over its currency. Natural resources must be protected and safeguarded for further generations;

- that the intelligence services and police authorities of all states should be limited to their core tasks under the law and put an end to the all-encompassing collecting of personal data beyond all borders;

because every person has the right to privacy. He has a right to be protected against state arbitrariness. Government action is only legitimate and legal if it is bound to uphold statute and law (rule of law);

- that people and countries are not forced into dependencies such as debt bondage ("odious debts"); that further the subjugation of countries under the financial domination of the EU, the IMF and similar institutions and the associated loss of state sovereignty be undone;

because all nations have the right that their country, regardless of size, of economic and military power, is an equal member within the international community;

- that any interference in the internal affairs of the states of Europe, be it through political or economic pressure or enforcing voting results, should be refrained from and that all the agreements that were made in this way, be reversed;

because all nations have a right to self-determination and by virtue of that right are free to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development;

- that all European countries renounce the use of military force to push economic and political interests, respect and comply with international law. All wars must be stopped;

because all states have a right to territorial integrity and political independence. Every war violates human rights. Conflicts must be resolved by peaceful means and at the negotiating table. Everyone has the right to an international order that ensures a life in peace and freedom.

Human acting must be based on ethics

Good faith must be the basis of all human coexistence and political activity again. Without this principle, there is no confidence in agreements within and between the states, and the floodgates are open to arbitrariness. Control mechanisms (such as "governance") and manipulation techniques of all kinds, which aim at influencing people by the abuse of psychological methods without full and open information, deprive the citizens of the possibility of indepen-

dently forming their opinion. Thus they violate the dignity of the person and destroy the basis of political dialogue and the legal system.

People are capable, with their reason and their empathy, to recognize the necessary fundamental orientation of a moral and political action, to think and feel in a humane and social way, and to learn to act accordingly. This is the disposition embedded in the human heart. Guided by reason and conscience, these fundamental orientations are intended to form the basis of the whole of the moral, legal and political determinations that guide the life of man and society. They guarantee the dignity of the human person in the face of transitory ideologies.

We will not surrender what has been recognized as right and what is considered to be right; because:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Adopted by the about 300 participants of the XXIII International Conference "Mut zur Ethik" which was devoted to the topic of "Freedom, Sovereignty and Human Dignity – A Safeguard against Despotism and War" and took place in Switzerland from 4 to 6 September 2015. Among the participants were the following speakers from Switzerland and abroad: Dr Zoltan Adorjan (Slovakia), Bob Barr (USA), Prof Dr Stanislas Bucyalimwe (Belgium / Democratic Republic of Congo), Katalin Z. Csörszéné (Hungary), Nicole Duprat (France), Jürgen Elsässer (Germany), Rev Dr Joseph Emmanuel Seemanpillai (Germany / Sri Lanka), Bishop Emeritus Dr Elmar Fischer (Austria), Dipl-Ing Heinz Werner Gabriel (Germany), Dr Marek Glogoczowski (Poland), Axel Grunow (Switzerland), Dr Eike Hamer (Germany), Živadin Jovanovic (Serbia), Dr Germán Muruchi Poma (Germany / Bolivia), Prof Dr Velimir Nedeljkovic (Serbia), lic phil Moritz Nestor (Switzerland), Manfred Paulus (Germany), Dr Maria Isabel Pérez de Pio (Argentina), Prof DI Rudolf Pomaroli (Austria), Inge Rauscher (Austria), Dr René Roca (Switzerland), Dr Hans Wilde (Austria), Willy Wimmer (Germany), Prof DI Dr Heinrich Wohlmeyer (Austria).

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