

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

National security by “management by knocking one’s head”

by Peter Regli, engineer, ETHZ, retired Major General*

Switzerland is a lucky country. It is surrounded by neighbors who have to face problems which hardly burden us. The inner situation, social peace and national cohesion are at risk in many EU countries. The world and Europe have become a powder keg, but smoking is still permitted.

The analysis of this confusing, increasingly critical situation is more and more challenging. Political leaders of all levels are confronted with new, complex and unknown scenarios. These executives are often poorly prepared; they often act with too little consideration and without strategic visions. Social restlessness, extremist political movements and social media, which have got out of control, can lead to new crisis situations and demand too much of the governments. Corresponding events in recent times, as for example in Greece, France, Spain, Hungary and Italy, should catch our attention.

The economic success of Switzerland and our liberal social order require security. National security is the prerequisite for our prosperity, internal peace and order as well as for the confidence of foreign countries in our financial, working and thinking place.

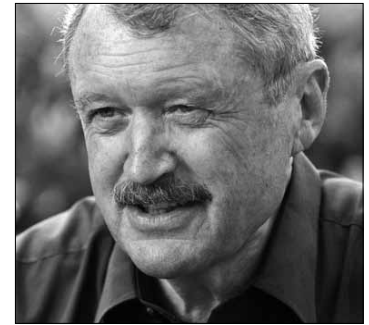
For years, the Federal Council has steered national security, in particular our militia army, through finances. In assessing the security situation (if he does it at all) he attaches too little weight on current and future risks and dangers and their emergence in complex scenarios. The incidents in our neighboring countries with terrorist attacks, social unrest, extremist movements (for example, extreme left, anarchists, neo-Nazis, Islamists and jihadists), cyber-attacks, espionage, organized crime and many more do not startle our political leaders. It must be feared that with this behavior only “management by knocking one’s head” will lead to concrete actions concerning the national security. In addition to the United States with 9/11, the Norwegians made a similar experience with the attack of 22 July 2011 by *Anders Breivik* or else the Federal Republic of Germany with the right-wing radical “Döner killings”.

Following the will of our political leaders, national security has evolved into a “fairweather-security”. The leadership at the top level and the means to be deployed

“For years, the Federal Council has steered national security, in particular our militia army, through finances. In assessing the security situation (if he does it at all) he attaches too little weight on current and future risks and dangers and their emergence in complex scenarios.”

are not prepared neither to storms nor earthquakes. The army is denied the funds to fully meet its mandate. There is a lack of an urgently needed updated legal basis (a modern Intelligence Service Act) for the intelligence service, the first line of defense. Most cantonal police corps and the border guard corps have insufficient personnel resources. The 2011 revision of the Penal Code by the parliament lightened it in a way that its efficacy is now at risk. Particularly foreign criminal gangs cannot be deterred from their raids by conditional fines.

Whether it suits the Socialists, the Greens and the *Group for a Switzerland without an army* or not: our militia army is and remains the strategic reserve of the Federal Government. In case of a long, complex crisis which could spread into Switzerland from abroad, our cantonal authorities would be at the end of their means after 2 to 3 days. The underfunded police and border guard corps would then urgently need support. In that case, only the army could help. It can be deployed quickly, targeted, heavily and well organized. The army has demonstrated their abilities to protect, rescue and help in recent years at countless times, for example during major events such as the G-8, at the *Euro 08*, at the Francophonie Summit, the WEFs as well as in forest fires and floods. The head of the Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sports (VBS) feels responsible to ensure these operations with the army as a real strategic reserve, at any



Peter Regli (picture zvg)

time and optimally, in an extreme case also for the actual fight.

The Federal Council does not want to concede our army more than 4.7 billion Swiss francs a year (of which 300 million francs for the *JAS-39 Gripen fighter aircraft*). This guideline forces the leadership of the army to make painful adjustments in performance profile, infrastructure (also of the cantons) and again of the staff. A rapid, consistent and adapted reconstruction of our militia to future scenarios is necessary. The measures announced by the head of the VBS in April are essential, appropriate to the situation and forward-looking. It is now up to the predominantly conservative parliament to make sure that in a first step the army receives 5 billion Swiss francs every year for their urgent needs (incl. *JAS-39 Gripen*). Then, the evolved army shall be targeted and aligned consistently to the incertitude of the future.

Europe and Switzerland will have to cope with asymmetric scenarios in the future. Actors in the dark, without rules and conventions, inhuman and partly totalitarian will challenge the democratic constitutional state again, surprisingly and brutally, also taking advantage of the cyber space and social media. An attack like the one in Boston of 15 April is possible everywhere. Such a situation would ruthlessly put to the test our national security network.

Federal Council and parliament should consciously “expect the unexpected” and practice a responsible, forward-looking security policy.

* Former head of the Swiss Intelligence Service, currently active in matters of national security.

Source: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 6 May 2013
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Phoney outrage from Brussels Why Switzerland is Europe's favorite whipping boy

A commentary by Wolfgang Koydl, Zurich

Switzerland wants to restrict the immigration of EU citizens – and Europe is outraged. Yet the neighboring countries' excitement is hypocritical and distracts from their own mistakes and shortcomings. The Confederates are better off because they simply do some things in a better way.

Suppose, every year 800,000 economic refugees from all parts of the European Union would be looking for wages and bread in Germany – in addition to the approximately 4 million Poles who have taken more and more jobs in recent years, from Aldi cashier to academic positions. How serenely would politics react? How reserved would the headlines of the "Bild Zeitung" be? For these are, extrapolated to the Federal Republic, the proportions Switzerland has had to cope with for years: Approximately 350,000 Germans work permanently in the Swiss Confederation, and the total influx from the EU adds up to almost 1 percent of the total Swiss population – annually. What impact this has on housing, schools and infrastructure, one can easily imagine. Or precisely one cannot, as demonstrated by the phoney outrage in Brussels on the restriction of EU citizens' immigration by the government in Berne. Brussels deliberately overlooks that the Swiss measure has primarily domestic political symbolism: It affects approximately 3,000 people,

only applies to immigrants who want to stay longer than 5 years, and will run out without much ado in a year. But there is more at stake whenever the Europeans give the allegedly thick-headed and wily confederates a good bashing. In Switzerland, they seem to have found a splendid whipping boy, whom they can blame for their own mistakes and shortcomings. These include their tax systems, completely unjust as to its impenetrability, as well as a failed or missing industrial policy. True to the motto: "Who's done it?" The reasons for the small and large escapes to Switzerland – be it of untaxed money or of unemployed workers – cannot be found in the Confederation, but in the European region. Yes, Swiss Bank consultants have worked out tax savings for German customers. But they have not stolen the money and transferred it to Zurich. All the dentists, lawyers and SMEs came voluntarily; and not only to evade taxes, but often because they trust the Swiss franc and a Swiss bank more than the euro and the Deutsche Bank. Even those European workers in Lucerne and Lausanne were not captured by federal mercenaries and taken across the border as forced labor. They also came voluntarily, because they found well-paid jobs and good working conditions in Switzerland. As Switzerland is still pretty well off, "thanks a lot!" Finally, this is pre-

cisely why workers are imported because Switzerland can barely keep up with the production of products it is exporting around the world.

Source: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 26 April 2013
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Against small-mindedness"

The article "Against small-mindedness" by Dr Peter Forster, chief editor "Schweizer Soldat" (*Swiss soldier*), is very welcome, courageous and appropriate. To lead the "political correctness" in the military area ad absurdum is unacceptable and confirms the fear that little Switzerland is on the way to degenerate from the admirable special case to a petty country by officially controlled metamorphosis. Similar trends as those denounced by Colonel Forster can unfortunately also be found in other areas. For example, in judgments, whose misplaced clemency lets presume that the judging would neglect the "legal correctness" for fear of reprisals against them themselves or their families.

Hans-Georg Bandi, Colonel (ret'd), Berne

Solutions to the euro crisis without turbulences and violence Wilhelm Hankel and Oskar Lafontaine raised their voices

by Karl Müller

The decision taken by the EU governments at the beginning of the nineties to introduce the *European Economic and Monetary Union* (EMU) and alongside with this (also) a common currency, was not the result of thorough national economic considerations, but the result of quite opposing political goals by the governments involved. The literature on the history of the euro proves this very well. Widely known, for example, is that the French government did no longer want to accept the *German Mark* as anchor currency in Europe, and that the German government was still convinced that the greatest threat to Europe were sovereign national states. Therefore, it conceived of the plan of using the EMU and the euro to make a decisive step towards the political union in the EU, which would deprive all national states of their power.

But already with the introduction of the euro all parties knew that there are mani-

fold conditions to make sure that a unified currency can work, and that these conditions were not met when introducing the euro. At that time, the then responsible people brushed aside these doubts for political reasons and believed to be able to create facts which would force to take steps in their favor. They have tried to throw sand into the eyes of their citizens with speeches of a stable community and the contractually committed mandate for a fiscal (and economic) approach ("convergence criteria"). All experts already noticed this when the binding decision for the introduction of the euro was taken, but was "of course" welcomed by those responsible.

Today, the citizens of Europe are to pay the high price for these failed political decisions and drawbacks. And indeed, the only alleged alternatives – actually meant as threats – unrest in Europe or a European super-state – leave many citizens perplexed at first sight.

But only at first sight. Because no citizen, to whom peace and justice, freedom and democracy still mean something, would want one of the two "alternatives". Amongst these citizens there are personalities to be found across all political camps looking for real alternatives and who do not stand still in view of the rather unrealistic demand to simply turn back the wheel of history to the status before the introduction of the euro. Amongst them is Professor *Wilhelm Hankel*, who has presented his concept of the re-introduction of national currencies together with the euro as a parallel currency, published in an interview (*Current Concerns*, No. 14, 15 April 2013), which is now available as book.²

Now, also the former chairman und chancellor candidate for the SPD and

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We need a European currency system again

Under the given circumstances the single currency must be given up

by Oskar Lafontaine

The European policymaking of the German Chancellor is increasingly coming under pressure. Besides European Commission President *Barroso* also *Enrico Letta*, the politician commissioned with the formation of the government by Italian President *Napolitano* refused *Merkel's* austerity policy as leading into disaster. For a long time Europe's politicians have not known what to do. The economic situation is worsening from month to month and unemployment has reached a degree which challenges democratic structures more and more.

The Germans have not yet realized that the South Europeans including France, in view of the economic plight, will be forced to defend themselves against German hegemony sooner or later. In particular German wage-dumping which has been a violation of the essence of the contracts from beginning of the monetary union is exerting pressure on them. *Merkel* will awake from her self-righteous sleep as soon as the European countries suffering from the German wage-dumping form an alliance to enforce a turn in the crisis at the expense of German export economy.

The single currency could have lasted long if the participating states had pursued a wage policy co-ordinated with each other and oriented to productivity. Since I had considered this coordination of wages possible, I recommend-

ed the introduction of the euro in the 90s. But the institutions of coordination, like the macro-economic dialogue above all, were circumvented by those who govern. The hope that economic reason on all sides would be enforced by the introduction of the euro was deceptive. Today the system is off the rails. In order to achieve an approximately well-balanced competitiveness again, countries like Greece, Portugal or Spain would have to become cheaper by 20 to 30 percent, compared with the average of the EU countries, and Germany would have to be more expensive by 20 percent, as *Hans-Werner Sinn* recently wrote in the "Handelsblatt".

However, the last years have shown that such a policy has no chance of being implemented. A real revaluation through rising wages, as would be necessary in case of Germany, cannot be done with the German entrepreneur's organisations and its devoted neoliberal party block, consisting of CDU CSU, SPD, the FDP and the Greens. The real devaluation by means of sinking wages which requires between 20 and 30 percent income losses in southern Europe and even in France will lead – as we have already seen in Spain, Greece and Portugal – to a disaster.

If real revaluations and devaluations are not possible this way, one must give up the single currency and return to a

system, that allows revaluations and devaluations like with the precursor of the monetary union, the European currency system. In essence it is a matter of making a controlled devaluation and controlled revaluation possible again by means of an exchange rate regime supported by the EU. To achieve this, strict capital transfer controls are unavoidable in a first step to adjust the capital flows. In the case of Cyprus Europe has already taken this first step. In the interim phase one must help the countries to back up their currencies which will devalue with certainty also by intervention of the ECB to prevent a collapse.

A necessary condition for a European currency system which works is among other things that the financial sector is newly organised and strictly regulated modelled on the public savings banks. The gambling houses must go.

The transition to this system, which will again make controlled revaluations and devaluations possible, should be done step by step. In Greece and Cyprus it could have started. The experience which Europe has acquired with the "currency snake" and the European currency system should be made use of.

Source: <http://www.oskar-lafontaine.de/link-wirkt/details/f/1/t/wir-brauchen-wieder-ein-europaeisches-waehrungssystem/> 30 April 2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Solutions to the euro crisis..."

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later chairman of *Die Linke* (The Left), *Oskar Lafontaine*, diagnosed in a contribution similar to Professor *Hankel*, that there must not and will not be a continuation in the same way, no "business-as-usual" with the euro. *Lafontaine* proposes a European currency system with a currency snake of national currencies in order to enable national currencies – in accordance with the participating states – to revalue and devalue in such a way that these countries can overcome the presently serious economic unbalances. The idea of common decisions is very important here, since a currency war causing turmoil could be prevented this way. There is also the consideration of overcoming the madness of the unrestricted free movement of capital and to come to an orderly adjustment. The EU treat-

ties offer the contractual possibilities for such a way, already today.

Other suggestions for solving the euro crisis, which is not just about money but also about peace, freedom, justice and democracy, are very welcome. But one-sided accusations do not help. Rather, they deepen the rifts in Europe. Emanating particularly from the present US government, there is an enormous pressure to create, across a liability and debt union and euro bonds, a further centralization of the EU. This reminds the expert of *Jean Monnet's* post-war strategy to make use of the crises in order to enforce a centralization and de-democratization – which is not a useful concept. Therefore trying to stop the next futile steps in the wrong direction, for example, the various so-called rescue funds (ESM, sovereign bond purchases by the ECB) is certainly a good thing.

Europe is a continent of cultural, economic and national diversity. All previ-

ous major European state formations were an expression of imperialism. Existing problems will not be solved by cooptation. If the EU takes its own contracts seriously, it should think seriously about the subsidiarity principle and its contents. The fact that proposals for the future of Europe are now going in this direction coming from different political camps should give us some confidence. •

¹ cf. *Wilhelm Hankel. Die Euro-Bombe wird entschärft* (The euro bomb is defused), 2013 (ISBN 978-3-8004-1516-8), and *David Marsh. The Euro. The Secret History of the new world currency*, 2009 (ISBN 978-3-86774-045-6); *Joachim Starbatty. Tatort Euro. Bürger schützt das Recht, die Demokratie und euer Vermögen (Euro crime scene. Citizens, protect your right, democracy and your wealth)*, 2013 (ISBN 978-3-944305-03-5).

² *Wilhelm Hankel. Die Euro-Bombe wird entschärft* (The euro bomb is defused), 2013

Recent book

Courage to change course – Swiss security policy at a turning point

An clarifying book on the current security situation in Switzerland

pd. An interdisciplinary team of members of the *Group Giardino* had tackled the task to determine the state of our military system. Accumulating inconsistencies after failed reforms and increasing doubts, as to the capability to fulfil its constitutional obligation actual-ly, had been the starting point.

The *Group Giardino* is an association of friends of the Swiss Army and stands up for maintaining a credible militia army on the basis of general conscription. The Group Giardino includes Swiss citizens that are conscripted or discharged, of both sexes, all grades und all professional groups.

A brief but comprehensive analysis of global and security policy relevant factors, with involvement of military, economic and political development,

shows a considerable hazard potential for Switzerland. The global situation has become explosive, the second cold war is under way, and our country has become dangerously susceptible to blackmail, because, due to massive undeclared and unconstitutional disarmament since about 1990, it isn't longer able to fulfil its obligation under international law, to defend their own territory.

The old power blocks continue to exist also in second cold war. Europe is on the verge of getting pulverized between Asia and North America and hardly can expect support by United States. Some of the political elite have lost uprightness; this has to be claimed back by the population. The book shows, how our country may regain its strategic freedom of action. •



(*Courage to change course – Swiss security policy at a turning point*)

240 pages, with graphs, schemata and coloured pictures, ISBN 978-3-033-03917-9

The *Group Giardino* is a non-partisan association of civic-minded women and men of all ages, past and present members of the army. Purpose of the association is to prevent destruction of the militia army, to restore credibility of national defence according to the Federal Constitution and to reset and enforce the conception of armed neutrality.

According to *Giardino's* analysis of the situation, Switzerland's security policy is dangerously asymmetric: A strong economy faces a policy that has lost uprightness as well as a hastily disarmed army. Global security has become high-

ly explosive. Europe and thus Switzerland are on the verge of getting pulverized between North America and East Eurasia. Modern military technologies and the abstinence of a Swiss response have made Switzerland become susceptible to blackmail. Presently there is no strategic action capability.

In order to act as a sovereign state, the army has to regain its defensive capacity. This requires a general inspection by independent experts – not by the Federal Department of Defence Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) or by consulting firms – and all persons re-

sponsible have to be informed of the facts.

Armed Forces Planning must be based on the worst case, dangerous enemy, scenario and not on one's own wishful thinking. While dealing responsibly and professionally with the finances, an army with defence capacity, i.e. in form of proven two army class system, with 120,000 men for defense tasks and 180,000 men for emergency relief assisting the civil authorities, is definitely realisable.

Dr Franz Betschon

Current Concerns

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“Europe can learn much from Latin America”

A lost decade for Latin America: About consumerism, debt service and Latin America's rights

Ecuador's President Rafael Correa in an interview with Harald Neuber, weltnetz.tv



President Rafael Correa (picture ma)

weltnetz.tv: Mr President, hundreds of thousands of Europeans currently suffer from the consequences of the euro crisis, especially in the southern states of the EU: Greece, Cyprus, and Spain. Whereas the EU

sticks to ancient recipes your government promotes the concept of the “Good Life”. Many EU citizens are probably asking themselves this question: How can we live a good life? And above all: how can a government guarantee that “good life”? President Rafael Correa: Well, no one can guarantee it, but you can lay the foundations. By the way, this is no concept of my government, but of the natives. It originates from the *Aymara* ethnic group in Bolivia, but was also accepted by the members of the *Quichua* in Ecuador. In their language it is called “Sumac Kawsay”. It involves living in dignity without striving for more and more wealth. The point is to live in harmony with nature and the fellow human beings. Our government's criticism on the consumption model of the western states is derived from this attitude of the indigenous people. And we are striving for our people to live in dignity without always wanting more, but also without the severe hardship in which a large part of the Ecuadorian and Latin American populations live. The goal is to live in harmony with other cultures, with nature, and with oneself.

During your visit to Berlin you also dealt with the euro crisis. At a conference at the Technical University (TU) Berlin you said that Latin America already suffered sufficiently of what Europe is currently going through. Can Europe learn from you?

It depends on whether the goal is to overcome the crisis quickly and without burdening the people much. In such a situation, the first priority is the mistakes that were made, as for example with the introduction of the euro or the lacking alignment of productivity, wages and salaries. However, if the will is prevalent to overcome this crisis without major consequences for ordinary people, then Eu-

Then, when the crisis began, the *International Monetary Fund* came out with its so-called aid packages. Was their goal to overcome this crisis? No, it was their goal to ensure the repayment of huge debts. Therefore, the solution to the crisis has been delayed over a period of ten years.

rope can indeed learn much from Latin America. The first lesson is not to make the same mistakes we made. The measures that were once taken in Latin America extended and amplified the crisis. And the same policy we are just now observing in Europe.

On Wednesday you met Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin. Do you have the impression that Germany and Europe have a sympathetic ear for the lessons Latin America has to teach?

I usually do not give any advice if I am not asked to do so, you know. However, the Technical University of Berlin suggested

spected. We recognize this same error in Europe today.

So a new dialogue between the countries of the North and those of the South is required? The UN does not seem to be able to cope with this task.

The lesson, however, is – as I also said at the TU-talks in Berlin – that also Europe must re-consider the political economy today. There are great political problems in this crisis, not technical ones. It is about who will have the say in society. Let us be sure about it: In Ecuador as well politics was determined by the financial capital in the past.

In the early 1980s we had a debt crisis. It resulted from the situation that the international financial capital had almost forced the loans on us.

a talk on the topic “Ways out of the crisis”. So we compared some of the crises in Latin America with the current problems in Europe. The similarities are impressive. In the early 1980s we had a debt crisis. It resulted from the situation that the international financial capital had almost forced the loans on us. And when the crisis came, we faced the problem of over-indebtedness. In many cases, this surplus money of the financial markets had also gone to certain dictatorships without any social control or democratic legitimacy. Then, when the crisis began, the *International Monetary Fund* came out with its so-called aid packages. Was their goal to overcome this crisis? No, it was their goal to ensure the repayment of huge debts. Therefore, the solution to the crisis has been delayed over a period of ten years. Today there is talk of a lost decade for Latin America. Ecuador, for example, started in the 90s with the same per capita income as the country already had had in 1976. All this was due to the fact that the interests of banks were served whereas the interests of the people weren't re-

This, I guess, is the big challenge humanity is facing in the 21st century: that the people must regain control of the capital. Man has finally become only another instrument of capital accumulation, especially of financial capital. You see, there are hardly any states left, but only markets. In dealing with the euro crisis, I notice exactly the same things as those happening in Latin America in the 1980s and in Ecuador in the great crisis of 1999. Everything was focused on the capital instead of on the people.

For this purpose, numerous new alliances have emerged in recent years in Latin America, such as the *Celac* or *Alba*. How has that changed international politics, and how can the financial architecture be influenced?

They can change a lot. We have developed these projects step by step and have already achieved quite a lot. What the *Union of South American States*, the *Unasur*, has managed to achieve since its

“Europe can learn much ...”

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foundation in 2008 goes far beyond the development of the European Union during the same period of time. For example in case of trade. It is really amazing how 27 countries with different objectives and political cultures, religions and languages could unite. And it is equally amazing that the Latin American countries with approximately the same language, culture and political systems have not managed to do so; as for example with the new regional financial architecture which we are discussing and will hopefully expand soon. All of this began with a new system of compensation in trade.

Imagine: What we know and what we do not know and what we think about people we have never met – it all depends on private corporations devoted to the information business. They are corporations that, when it comes to the right of information and their own interests, will always opt for more profit.

That is why we are creating a new system of accounting. If I spend 500 million US dollars and the regional trading partner spends 400 million US dollars – do we actually need 900 million? No, we offset the costs against each other and need only 100 million. That is the one thing.

Another absurdity is the policy of autonomous central banks to bring the state's reserves out of the country. In Ecuador, we have already corrected this process. We are talking here about 400 billion US dollars, with which we funded some rich countries. We got a 0.5 percent interest rate, perhaps up to 1 percent, for these reserves on their banks. In exchange, we had to borrow money at an interest rate of 6 to 7 percent.

This is absurd. If we leave our reserves in the region, we can work with them. We can combine the reserves. Then we would need less reserves, and the funding could be used to finance regional initiatives. Those are obvious things. These are tasks for coordination. Moreover, we are working on the “Bank of the South”, a development bank, which will give out funds for infrastructure and development projects in South America on reasonable terms.

But there is also resistance against the policy of the New Left in Latin America. In Honduras and Paraguay progressive governments were overthrown. There were attempts at a coup against their own governments, as in Bolivia and Venezuela. Is the impression correct that the left-wing governments in Latin America do

not succeed in reaching a consensus in their societies?

How can we reach a consensus, if we just recently smashed structures that had been existing for centuries? You mentioned five attempts of destabilization, two of them were successful. All five coups and coup attempts were directed against progressive governments. No single right-wing government was affected. This shows quite clearly what is happening here. Obviously we are the dangerous ones. Democracy is fine as long as nothing changes. But with the new democracies and the progressive governments there is a change which alarms our powerful enemies. Latin America was no paradise, a social and economic model.

There was injustice and inequality. If it suits them, they defend democracy, but if we reform the situation in a democratic way, they do not hesitate to overthrow and assassinate the president. We must counter these forces in our American States and defeat them. The problem is that Europe and the US do not perceive Latin America in its context. When I am a guest at conferences in the US, I generally ask the audience to remember their struggle for civil rights in the 1960s to make them understand the current situation in Latin America. Or I remind them of the fight against slavery, through which the US became involved in a civil war and almost collapsed. This is a better comparison and context to understand current events in Latin America.

Do these massive differences in the societies explain the conflict after the recent elections in Venezuela?

Yes. The Venezuelan Right has always tried to achieve a close result to set their plans for destabilization in motion. Even in the era of *Hugo Chavez*. Fortunately, during his reign all the election results turned out to be very clear, and that has thwarted their plans. If Hugo Chavez had won by only a few percentage points, the opposition would not have accepted such a victory until today.

Hugo Chavez is now unfortunately deceased. I still grieve for him, for he was not only Venezuela's president, but a dear friend who has left us. The death of Hugo Chavez has again motivated the opposi-

tion to influence the situation to their benefit.

The now defeated opposition candidate *Henrique Capriles* has prevailed in the last gubernatorial election with some ten thousand votes only. According to the argument that he uses now, he would not have been allowed to take up office then. *Nicolás Maduro* prevailed over the other candidate with over 200,000 votes last Sunday [14 April 2013]. In percentage this figure corresponds to about 1 percent. And that allows them to stir up trouble again, which they have always sought.

We have a very clear position on the part of the Ecuadorian government. After the election we have to verify what has to be verified. This is the decision of the Venezuelan government and its institutions. For us, however, Nicolás Maduro is and remains the winner of this election. And we have to oppose the attempts of destabilization very clearly, which have indeed taken place under Hugo Chávez. With him, the percentage gap to the opposition was only bigger.

Let us talk about the relationship to the media. Why are the left-reform governments without exception in constant conflict with the media?

Who do you think is among the opponents to the current processes, which we just spoke about? Those who create chaos and make a coup? Who was one of the biggest conspirators at the time of the government of *Salvador Allende*? The daily newspaper “*El Mercurio*”! Nobody talks about that any longer today, because immediately they claim it was an attack on the freedom of speech.

We distinguish very well between freedom of expression and certain corrupt transactions of press corporations which in the past were nothing but political tools to preserve the status quo. How can we not criticize the bourgeois press, if it belongs to the representatives of the forces that dominate our country and have exploited it? That is a problem not only of our countries but of all people worldwide. Imagine: What we know and what we do not know and what we think about people we have never met – it all depends on private corporations devoted to the information business. They are corporations that, when it comes to the right of information and their own interests, will always opt for more profit.

And that is something that needs to be discussed by humanity as a whole. The problem, the basic contradiction, that private profit-making companies are to ensure a fundamental right, is not as obvious in Europe and the USA because there are professional media, ethical behavior and

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“Europe can learn much ...”

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resistance to lies. There is a democratization of the media, there. But that does not exist in Latin America, where the traditional media are in the hands of the oligarchy. Here the strategy is to form oligopolies with banks and then to establish a TV channel. Not for information, however, but to defend the banks and the economic oligopolies. There is no professionalism, no ethics. Lying is a common thing there, because we are used to it. And this bad press has a devastating impact on human rights, and on democracy. And we impeach, we fight and therefore we are in conflict with the opposition and certain media companies.

Do you see a reason for the lack of understanding among the general public in Europe for the progressive forces in Latin America?

Sure, because between us there is no information, but only propaganda. And we are not the only ones to say so. You see, *Mario Vargas Llosa*, an arrant Right-winger, ended his cooperation with the journal “El Comercio” in Lima during the last election campaign, the one between *Ollanta Humala* and *Keiko Fujimori*, under protest. He did that because the editors twisted the truth and fired dissident journalists. To call the criticism of such media an attack on freedom of the press is as absurd as if we rejected criticism of the President as an attack on democracy. Freedom of expression is a right for everyboy. Not only for those who have enough money to buy printing presses.

“But that does not exist in Latin America, where the traditional media are in the hands of the oligarchy. Here the strategy is to form oligopolies with banks and then to establish a TV channel. Not for information, however, but to defend the banks and the economic oligopolies. There is no professionalism, no ethics. Lying is a common thing there, because we are used to it.”

So we see that there are two different discourses on human rights and freedom of expression in Europe and Latin America. Will that also play a role in the case of Julian Assange?

Before we come to speak about the case of *Julian Assange*, I would like to add one thing. You see – if they cannot criticize us because things are just too obvious, because poverty and inequality have de-

“But the countries that talk most about human rights, have not signed anything. So this is a hollow discourse, with no action ensuing because the relevant provisions would indeed be binding. We see a huge double standard here.”

clined, because we won elections, and because there is a real democracy, then they come out from behind with elusive concepts like freedom.

How many crimes have been committed in the name of freedom? The French Revolution: Thousands were decapitated in the name of freedom.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States and author of one of the most amazing documents of mankind, the Declaration of Independence, which states in its second paragraph, that every person has the right to happiness and freedom, this *Thomas Jefferson* owned 200 black slaves. *Thomas Jefferson*, however, was no fraudster. He was born in this time, and it was normal for him. For him, the slaves were not human beings; his human rights were only for whites.

If our opponents speak of human rights today, they mean their freedom, their rights. If we defend the rights of all, freedom for all, we will soon be labeled as the ones who violate human rights. This has developed into an instrument of persecution and disinformation against progressive governments. Sometimes I think that in Europe you probably believe the Ecuadorian prisons are full of heroic journalists who are imprisoned because they have accused the government of corruption. Come and see how many

journalists in Ecuador are in prison because of their opinions. Penalties have been imposed because someone has injured or killed someone else. But even in these cases there is talk of attacks on freedom of expression.

lization. In Ecuador, we have not closed down any radio station. In Ecuador, no one was arrested because of his opinion, but proceedings against a journalist were instituted because of an infringement of personal rights. However, civilization prevails here and barbarism in Ecuador. This is the great double standard of Euro-centrism.

But briefly about *Julian Assange*. Strange, isn't it? A defender of the rights to information and freedom of the press selects a country as a safe haven, which allegedly restricts the freedom of opinion according to some media reports. *Julian Assange* will remain under the protection of the Ecuadorian state, which we have granted to him in the line of our sovereign right. The solution of this case is in the hands of Europe.

Ecuador is among the first ten countries that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations. Germany apparently does not even think about it. Is this also a topic of discussion at government level?

No, I am not too familiar with this covenant. But one thing I can tell in view of *Julian Assange's* case. Before we granted him asylum, we have studied the relevant provisions of international law. And it is impressive: The Latin American countries have signed all possible agreements, like the ones on the *International Criminal Court*, the *Court of Justice in The Hague* or the *Inter-American Court*. However, those who talk of human rights most have not signed anything. Ecuador is one of a group of seven Latin American countries, which have signed all relevant human rights treaties in the region. The *San José Pact* against torture, against the death penalty, everything. Similarly, they have signed the international agreements. But the countries that talk most about human rights, have not signed anything. So this is a hollow discourse, with no action ensuing because the relevant provisions would indeed be binding. We see a huge double standard here. •

Source and transcription: *Weltnetz.tv, newsletter@weltnetz.tv* of 26.04.2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Cut off the spin doctors' road to war

**Carla Del Ponte holds the rebels accountable for the use of poison gas in Syria –
“Sarin gas in the hands of the insurgents”**

Interview with Carla Del Ponte

The other major international concern with regard to Syria concerns the use of chemical weapons. For weeks, this issue has been discussed. The world is watching with concern the arsenals of the regime, but on the ground things might look very different.

For the first time Carla Del Ponte reveals in an RSI interview that the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria of which she is a member, has strong and concrete suspicion the insurgents had used chemical weapons.

Resy Canonica spoke with Ms Del Ponte.

Carla Del Ponte: While during our investigation – that is, our investigation team surveys the various victims as well as the doctors in field hospitals on the ground in neighbouring countries – I saw in a report last week that there is strong circumstantial evidence, even if it has not been irrefutably proven yet, that sarin-gas has been used. This can be deduced from the way the victims

were treated; and that it was used by the opponents, i.e. by the rebels, and not by the government. It seems typical to me. It is not actually surprising for us, because foreign fighters have slipped into the opposition, people who come from outside, guerilla fighters etc. So, although at the moment we are not working on a specific study on chemical weapons, we have evidence that if chemical weapons were applied, it was done by the opposition.

Ms Del Ponte, will the work of the Commission lead to concrete results?

I often say that we are an alibi for the international community. That is, we continue our investigations, we do them well, it is a good piece of work. If, however, afterwards nobody cares about giving a court the power to punish these crimes, our work is in vain.

So now, after more than two years, it would be time for the international community, the Security Council, to decide to hand these cases over to

the Permanent Court, and thus our work could have its effects in the field of justice.

But during the two years of the conflict, only weapons have spoken. Has diplomacy failed?

Do you know who it depends on whether peace negotiations are possible? It depends on the United States and Russia. If the US and Russia sit down at a table and come to an agreement, we could have peace in Syria. Unfortunately, this has not been done yet, but a little hope still remains. •

Source: Radiotelevisione svizzera RSI, Sunday, 5 May 2013, 18.32

(Translation Current Concerns)



Carla Del Ponte
(picture ma)

thk. As a former Swiss attorney and chief prosecutor of the ICTY *Carla del Ponte* has not only made friends. Could be that her comments are sometimes “too outspoken” as some international media obviously seem to believe. That she, as a member of the UN fact-finding mission which is to find out whether poison gas was used in Syria, held the rebels responsible for it, although she conceded that further facts would have to be gathered, may possibly seem a bit “hasty”, certainly for those who would have finally had the “right” to intervene by “proving” a poison gas attack by the government. *Barack Obama’s* threat that with a poison gas attack the Syrian government would have “crossed the red line”

and made a “military intervention inevitable,” is still lingering. The whole thing brings to mind examples that we know from history like the US-invented North Vietnamese attack on the US destroyer *Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin. The so-called “Tonkin Resolution”, which was then adopted by the US Congress with one dissenting vote, led to a 10-year-long bloody war in Indochina, in which several million people died. Even *Adolf Hitler*, not surprisingly, used such methods and justified his attack on Poland by the self-staged attack on the *Gleiwitz* radio station when unleashing the Second World War.

With her statements *Carla Ponte* has at least queered the pitch of such a false-flag

operation and that of those who are pushing for an intervention in Syria.

In 2003, were not Iraq’s alleged nuclear weapons, which were said to be capable of reaching London in 45 minutes, also such a fictional pretext for the “alliance of the willing” to invade Iraq? This was not only “hasty” but absolutely untrue, because even 10 years after the conquest of Iraq by the “alliance of the willing” there are no facts to back the claim, but hundreds of thousands of innocents died. In that case, would not a clear opinion of a UN inspector have been able to prevent the disaster? For the purpose of peace we thank *Ms Del Ponte*, because thus another false flag operation with millions of innocent victims may be prevented. •

The “Arab Winter” or the end of Western hegemony in the Middle East

United States want to weaken Iran geopolitically by Assad’s fall

by Prof Dr Albert A. Stahel, Institute for Strategic Studies, Wädenswil

In the past 10 years the United States have intervened four times directly or indirectly, politically or militarily in Arab states. By their interventions the United States toppled the ruling despots in Iraq in 2003, in Libya in 2011 and Egypt also in 2011 and Yemen in 2012. In the case of Iraq, they had the former ruler *Saddam Hussein* executed by his domestic opponents. After an intense bombardment by their own forces and those of the NATO allies, they had Libya’s *Gaddafi* castrated by a mob on the hood of a vehicle, and then shot by a paid mercenary. As far as the pharaoh of Egypt *Hosni Mubarak* is concerned, he must still wait for his final sentence in an intransparent trial which might result in his execution.

What were finally the results and thus the performance records of these US interventions? The human rights violations of the despots should not be apologized post memoriam, but still it is worth looking at the current situation in three countries. After the withdrawal of the United States in 2011, Iraq – due to vote-manipulations by *al-Maliki*’s Shiite government and the Saudi regime’s intrigues – is on the brink of civil war. Al-Maliki is supported by Tehran. The Sunni tribes and Salafists are financed and instigated by Saudi Arabia. Thanks to the Saudis al-Qaeda experienced a revival in Iraq, which is reflected in a series of attacks against Shiites and their religious institutions.

After the violent removal of Gaddafi, there is a mess in Libya, as well. They didn’t succeed in forming a functioning government and administration. Without them, Libya has no future. Again, there is anarchy, which is especially exploited by the Salafists and their al-Qaeda offshoot.

In Egypt, the fall of Mubarak led to the Muslim Brotherhood’s and its President *Mursi*’s seizure of power. Since then the economy of Egypt has been decomposing. The country is at odds in domestic politics. Again, the Salafists agitate against religious minorities, such as the Christian Copts. The only functioning institution would be the army, but the intentions of

the generals have remained unclear until now. Perhaps they have come to terms with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Syria is obviously the next candidate for the overthrow of a despot. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and the US withdrawal from Iraq, al-Maliki receives his instructions from the ayatollahs of Iran. Due to the support of their allies, the Hezbollah of Lebanon, and the support of the Syria’s Alawite *al-Assad*, the geopolitical influence of Tehran almost extends across the entire Shia Crescent in the Middle East. Also, the western part of Afghanistan with the old capital of Herat is part of the Iranian sphere of influence today. The United States want to weaken Iran geopolitically by Assad’s overthrow. The Shia Crescent shall be divided into two parts. In these endeavours the United States are supported by their Saudi allies, who thus want to bring down their Shiite arch enemy Iran. To this end, they support their Sunni executors in Syria and Iraq with money and weapons.

Also the second ally of the United States in the region, *Erdogan*’s Turkey, wants to eliminate Assad and establish a Sunni regime in Damascus. Erdogan, who is thus guided by the delusion of a re-establishment of the Ottoman Empire, makes the supply of arms to the Syrian rebels possible. Willingly, the NATO allies Britain and France are applauding the demise of Syria, however without bearing in mind the consequences of Assad fall. The bleeding of the Syrian regime is likely to lead to the decay of Syria in different parts – a Sunni state and a refuge for the Alawites. It also might open a hitherto little-noticed Pandora’s box. It would not only be expected that the Salafists of Riyadh’s grace could take power in Damascus, they would unite very quickly with their comrades in the Iraq and try to establish a Sunni Empire. The result would be both a collapse of Syria and Iraq. As in Iraq, the Christian minority of Syria - 10% of the Syrian population of 22.5 million – would be distributed and exterminated. The Syrian civil war is likely to lead, such

as in Libya, to a supranational anarchy and the destabilization of the entire Middle East. Every Arab State and probably also Turkey could get caught in the undertow of this fall.

The victory of the Salafists in Syria is likely to be synonymously with the reign of al-Qaeda in Damascus that would not hesitate in their religious zeal to demonstrate their power to Europe by terrorist attacks. Instead of the expectations of an “Arab Spring”, we would get an “Arab Winter”. The former hegemonic position of the US and its allies in the Middle East would then only be a footnote in history. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Current Concerns

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögeli

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of
SFr. 40,-, Euro 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-
for the following countries:

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

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

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

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The future of the Middle East and Afghanistan from the perspective of General McChrystal

A reflection on the simplistic view of many Americans about the world situation

by Prof Dr Albert A. Stahel

At the invitation of *Notenstein Private Bank AG* the former Afghanistan US commander General *Stanley McChrystal* held a lecture on "Scenarios for an Unpredictable World – Views from a Military Leader" at the Dolder Grand on May 3, 2013. After introducing himself by means of a video presentation the General presented his approach to the development of scenarios.

First, according to McChrystal, it is of utmost importance to determine, isolate and weigh the most relevant factors for a scenario. On this basis, he develops the logic and contents of a scenario. According to McChrystal, this creation requires a higher level of abstraction than computer simulations and analytical models. (Note the following: Scenarios and analytical models are usually used as a basis for the development of computer simulations.)

After an analysis of the Iraq insurgency in the aftermath of the occupation by the US and its Coalition of the Willing McChrystal identified six points in the "lessons learned" from the "debacle". They included the fact that in a war decision makers need to focus on the most unlikely case and must not let themselves be paralyzed by fear. With respect to McChrystal's personal experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the following description of scenarios is solely based on the Middle East, which the General called the worlds region that will face the greatest challenges in the coming years. In particular, he focused on Egypt and the threat to Israel by the "Arab Spring."

He conjectured that in future the strategic positioning of the Middle East will increasingly be determined by the confrontation between Sunnis and Shiites.

The following three scenarios and their implications were briefly outlined by McChrystal:

- Hyper-contamination of the "Arab Spring"
- Iran obtains nuclear weapons
- Regime change in Syria.

With respect to the first scenario a widespread and increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Saudi Arabia was going to occur. One had to reckon with a destabilization of the entire Middle East. Iran would exploit this situation. Israel would be highly endangered by such a development.

In the second scenario Israel would be seriously threatened by the nuclearization of Iran. It was uncertain how the United States would react in such a situation to enforce their strategic interests in the Middle East.

In the third scenario a regime change in Syria would pull Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq into the abyss and in turn would further destabilize Syria.

At the end of the event the General was asked what he thought about the future situation in Afghanistan after 2014. In a few words, he described that Afghanistan had been in the state of war since 1979, that then wealthy Afghans had fled the country and that the Taliban were not popular today. Pakistan's influence on Afghanistan was very important but the country was highly fractionated.

Note that these three scenarios represent the official United States' typical view and assessment of the Middle East. The fact that it was *Obama* who exerted pressure on *Mubarak* and the generals which allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to take over power in Egypt and transfer the Middle East into an "Arab winter" was not mentioned by the General with a single word. Neither was there a word about the fact that Israel with its 200 nuclear warheads is still the only nuclear power in the Middle East which is actually threatening Iran and not vice versa. Apparently McChrystal knows Iran and its population only by hearsay, which is not surprising in fact, as the US has no diplomatic relations with Tehran. That the uprising in Syria was initiated by the US and its allies, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, in order to weaken the geopolitical position of Syria's associate Iran was left unmentioned by the General, as well.

Concerning Afghanistan it must be noted that the war had already started in 1978 with arms shipments by the CIA to the Mujahedeen. These deliveries were carried out on the instructions of the then National Security Adviser *Zbigniew Brzezinski*, who with his "Bear Trap" aimed at luring the Soviet leadership of the USSR into a war of attrition and thus destabilizing the USSR. Apparently General McChrystal has never visited Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, otherwise he would not claim that especially rich Afghans fled in 1979. Of course, there were some, but the majority of the refugees were destitute and had lost everything through war and expulsion.

The false report about the unpopularity of the Taliban is widespread in all US documents dealing with the current situation in Afghanistan. Fact is that since the expulsion of *Mullah Omar* in late 2001 the Taliban leaders and their fighters are able to stay undisturbed in the Eastern and Southern province of Afghanistan which is dominated by the ethnic Pashuns. Their follower base is intact and they will take over power again in these provinces once US and *NATO* have withdrawn their troops. That the land is fractionated between North and South is a fact. However, this fractionation is the result of artificial boundaries imposed by the colonial power Britain at the end of the 19th Century when borders were arbitrarily rounded up or areas split like those Pashtuns who are now controlled by Pakistan.

What lessons can be drawn from the statements made by the General who was forced by Obama to retire? On the development of scenarios, there are many theories. Everything is possible except for the fact that scenarios form the basis of simulation models. McChrystal's scenarios largely correspond to the official US perspective on the Middle East. This includes the stereotypical finding that Iran is the real threat to Israel and that Israel must be protected against Iran. Not a single word about the fact that for decades the US has been using a policy and strategy including the promotion of despots which is co-responsible for the present development in the Middle East.

Regarding McChrystal's remarks on Afghanistan, the general seems not to have realized the factual situation during his stay or does not want to acknowledge it. Otherwise, he would have had to contradict the Obama administration's official view and their habit of glossing things over, which is to reassure the American conscience and cover up the chaos that is going to take place after the withdrawal of troops.

Despite the high expectations about the lecturers the presented scenarios on the Middle East and the assessment of Afghanistan are very much "hand-knitted". They reflect a simplistic view shared by many Americans about the world's situation. A view, which had been nourished specifically by the *Bush* administration and which most likely can be attributed to be the deeper cause for political and military defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Quality management by marking schemes dumping “Competence to compensate incompetence” conceals the failure of school reforms

by Prof Dr Hans Peter Klein*



Hans Peter Klein
(picture ma)

It has long been all over town: The methods of alleged “quality management” in education do not lead to greater knowledge and skills, rather they conceal the fact that students know less and are capable of

less. Ever more beginners, particularly in the natural sciences, lack basic knowledge and skills to successfully take up and complete their studies. However, the kind of trouble caused by ministerial guidelines which teacher teams are facing and let out only behind closed doors, is something the public must know about.

How knowledge and skills develop as the basis of real education and how this can be achieved best during lessons, has been well-known for a long time. Why are teachers not given the freedom to take independent decisions how to organize their lessons according to their professional training? After all, they are the experts.

Performance explosion by competence orientation – a bluff package?

Since the “PISA shock” politicians and their advisers from the field of empirical educational research claim that quality of teaching could be improved and a better PISA ranking be achieved only by educational standards, competency-based lessons, core curricula, comparative studies and central exams up to central high-school graduation. The logic behind this standardization is simple and not completely wrong. One is looking for a binding standard to measure the dubious status of skills and knowledge of students. May we believe the advocates of these concepts and the supporting press who

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Editor’s note

Due to a technical error a paragraph of the article «Quality management by marking schemes dumping» by Professor Dr. Hans Peter Klein in our issue of Current Concerns No. 6, 11 February 2013, was missing. We therefore republish the article in full length.

“For year after year the number of high school graduates with the dream grade of 1.0 (or better) rose while failure rates declined against zero. Who feels like grumbling? Peculiar though, the voices of crafts, SMEs and universities do not stop complaining about the lack and further decline of the quality level of school-graduates. Engineers and students of the natural sciences have become scarce and craft apprentices that are ready to learn and let themselves be trained are urgently searched for. Are these merely the complaints of the diehards and dissatisfied? Or what is happening?”

claim that within a short time an increase in the high-school graduation rate has been achieved and the rate of failing students has been brought down to almost zero, the number of school dropouts, has been reduced underachieving students have been better promoted and their level of performance has been raised; the ability for studying has improved while getting rid of unnecessary knowledge bal-last! For year after year the number of high school graduates with the dream grade of 1.0 (or better) rose while failure rates declined against zero. Who feels like grumbling? Peculiar though, the voices of crafts, SMEs and universities do not stop complaining about the lack and further decline of the quality level of school-graduates. Engineers and students of the natural sciences have become scarce and craft apprentices that are ready to learn and let themselves be trained are urgently searched for. Are these merely the complaints of the diehards and dissatisfied? Or what is happening?

New quality management – the prescribed levelling of standards

To uncover the cause for this discrepancy and to check the success reports for their truth would now indeed be an important work of research. But so far no one has been appointed to it. Apparently, the euphorics of quality management in the ministries and the KMK (Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture) of the “Länder” are not interested in examining their own measures of quality management in an open scientific investigation. Upon inquiries at the ministries in one or another “Land”, one receives the reasonable information that such scientific research would certainly be of great interest, albeit only under the premise that the

questionnaire, the aim of investigation and the handling of possible results were discussed in advance! It could not be clearer: research, yes please, but only politically and didactically correct! Otherwise, the imported quality assuring concept of formal technique and management doctrine might possibly be at stake, altogether.

A first disillusioning that “competence orientation” was the ostensible solution of all educational problems occurred by the study on the “Abitur” in biology conducted in North Rhine-Westphalia¹, presented below: Non-prepared ninth-graders had passed the final Abitur-examination in biology without any problem. Is this the secret of an unforeseen quality explosion? No, but all the answers were given in the text accompanying the questions, you only had to have some “literacy competence” in order to be able to copy and transcribe them. Expertise? Methodical skills? Wrong! This of course stimulated further, needless to say, undesired investigations. And now look at that: In math as well it showed that common knowledge, reading skills and a certain cleverness for the successful management of this type of competency-based tasks were sufficient for the central exam.² Students of the eleventh-grades of a high school (G9) were able to reach at least the mark “sufficient” in the complex task analysis, without having ever studied the necessary math basics of the twelfth and thirteenth grades that were required. Again, the trick is simple: In a task, which concerns the value of a cyclist’s pulse rate shown in a graph, the student does not have to conduct any arithmetic operations. It is sufficient to describe the course of the curve and to draw the right conclusions from the

"Quality management..."

continued from page 11

given factual information with some common knowledge. The detailed work material supplies all information the student needs to correctly answer the question and to achieve the full credit points needed. Knowledge of mathematics is merely hindering, since pupils might assume that they would have to do complicated arithmetic operations for achieving the correct answer. Pupils in countries who are blessed with such exams see through this foul play: They feel they are not taken seriously. Corresponding comments can be read in the web – it was undemanding and pure copying of given texts. Expert knowledge was not required, there was no mathematical expertise demanded, etc.³

Meanwhile it seems obvious that all this is well-known at the top of the ministries of education and culture and no one denies it. Heads of department participating in this school form in some countries are instructed by the corresponding superior authorities in training sessions that pupils' performance

ber of repeaters has fallen virtually to zero only because pressure was exercised correspondingly on principals and teachers in a kind of predetermined target plan. Meanwhile, a general prohibition of repeating a grade is written down quite openly in appropriate regulations in many German states. Students' underperformance is now simply certified as sufficient. Teachers on the wrong track are condemned to write "tuition reports" for inadequately given performance certificates and during grading conferences additional pressure is exercised on the teachers; they are to give grades from the upper half of the grading scale since the school was indeed in a kind of "competition" for students with neighboring schools and it also served to ensure the maintenance of the school site and thus the teachers' jobs. The main concern of many heads of schools is the student figures, which are to be kept at a certain level at all costs. So the performance requirements are reduced to keep the parents in a positive mood and to ensure that the staff is not told off by the superior authority. Hence schools in North-Rhine-Westphalia can de-

Choice are Undermining Education"⁴ that particularly standardization and the including testing methods have the opposite effect to the one intended by undermining any educational standard. Tests were to direct greater attention towards low quality schools as well as to allow free choice of school for poor children:

"All of this seemed to make sense, but there was little empirical evidence, just promise and hope. [...] But over time, I was persuaded by accumulating evidence that the latest reforms were not likely to live up to their promise. The more I saw, the more I lost faith." (p. 4.) Since the beginning of 2010 and continuing in 2011 the whole of the US was shaken by a cheating scandal of unprecedented dimension. This happened although over the past few years the pleasant improvement of student performance notably in the southern United States was celebrated under the *Obama* Administration as a success of the testing methods, a law, entitled 'No Child Left Behind' that had been adopted under *George W. Bush*; a law that our politicians like to refer to. This law aimed at assuring an adequate level of performance for the largest number of students possible within twelve years and employed financial and personal bonus-and malus-points for well-achieving and poor-achieving schools. The cheating originated in Atlanta, where the questionnaires of those students with insufficient results were sorted out and replaced by forms correctly filled in by the teachers. One resorted to cheating in order to obtain a better position in the national ranking and to avoid sanctions for schools and teachers with poor student results. The press even believed that this was done in a silent agreement with the respective governor since in the USA this method of achieving better ranking positions has developed its own culture taken from the field of sport. Obviously, nobody can evade such ranking in the USA of today. Moreover, better ranking positions yield additional funds and reputation. By now it has been assumed that the series of cheating have occurred in several US states to an unknown extent. The scandal heightened criticism of such testing procedures: "It is this idiotic pressure being exerted on schools and teachers caused by the test results and I believe that those tests not only corrupt the results themselves but also education and schooling as a whole", said the well-known test expert Professor *Haney* from Boston College. Since this cheating scandal at the latest, the "No-child-left-behind"-law is considered as failed.

Educational standards and quality management in Germany – the subtler form of American "cheating".

Whereas in the USA the producers of these test methods tend to demand rising

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"A first disillusioning that "competence orientation" was the ostensible solution of all educational problems occurred by the study on the "Abitur" in biology conducted in North Rhine-Westphalia¹, presented below: Non-prepared ninth-graders had passed the final Abitur-examination in biology without any problem. Is this the secret of an unforeseen quality explosion? No, but all the answers were given in the text accompanying the questions, you only had to have some "literacy competence" in order to be able to copy and transcribe them."

in all central exams are exclusively be assessed by working with the given material of diverse text and graph information. Basic knowledge or additional knowledge capacity which formerly used to be the key factor of the assessment are no longer allowed to be taken into account. Upon cautious inquiry by subject experts of the schools at the corresponding superior department, whether it was not known that almost all the answers were already given beforehand, the consternated teachers had to learn that this was very well known. One would try to make it less obvious in future examinations, was the information. Basically, however, teachers should not worry about it, since it was indeed politically intended.

"Competence to compensate incompetence" – or the quality management's various tricks

All the other tricks to doctor performance figures are known in schools: The num-

ber of repeaters has fallen virtually to zero only because pressure was exercised correspondingly on principals and teachers in a kind of predetermined target plan. Meanwhile, a general prohibition of repeating a grade is written down quite openly in appropriate regulations in many German states. Students' underperformance is now simply certified as sufficient. Teachers on the wrong track are condemned to write "tuition reports" for inadequately given performance certificates and during grading conferences additional pressure is exercised on the teachers; they are to give grades from the upper half of the grading scale since the school was indeed in a kind of "competition" for students with neighboring schools and it also served to ensure the maintenance of the school site and thus the teachers' jobs. The main concern of many heads of schools is the student figures, which are to be kept at a certain level at all costs. So the performance requirements are reduced to keep the parents in a positive mood and to ensure that the staff is not told off by the superior authority. Hence schools in North-Rhine-Westphalia can de-

Educational standards and quality management in the US – a cheating scandal

We have known for a long time what may be caused by a misconceived 'quality management'. Lately, Professor *Diane Ravitch* from New York, who under *Bush* senior was greatly involved in the enforcement of testing systems, realized and publicly confessed her fatal error. Once being a fiery advocate of standards, tests, free choice of schools and Charter Schools, she openly admits today in her book 'The Life and Death of the Great American School System. How Tests and

"Quality management..."

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standards the opposite path is being tread in our own country. Insufficient graduation exams (Abitur) are being retouched at the desk; and centralized nationwide examinations are being softened at selected schools under strict nondisclosure until nobody can fail. Students, parents and the public were made believe that better results had in fact been achieved. Universities indicate that it is not true: A major part of the elementary students is insufficiently qualified for successful studies, especially in the field of sciences. Consequently, the "Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF" (Federal Ministry of Education and Research) that had sponsored the concept of empirical education research, of educational standards, orientation towards competences and all kinds of central and decentralized test procedures with multi-million dollar amounts during the last twelve years, is now spending another multi-million dollar amount in order to tutor the high-school graduates with a kind of supplementary courses. Simultaneously, the pressure on university professors is being raised to make them rigorously reduce the failing rates. Only students who complete their studies in the standard period of studying are funded by the state. The extremely high failing rates at several German universities in particular in mathematics and engineering sciences point to the fact that an ever-wider gap is opening between school subjects which are oriented toward competences and respective university subjects. Apparently, nobody asks for the actual reason: why do mathematics and engineering sciences require mathematical knowledge as a precondition, for which the mathematical and reading literacy of PISA is just not sufficient.

"Furthermore the Swiss-German longitudinal study on the quality of classroom teaching of mathematics comes to the conclusion that teaching success can be expected when the teacher disposes of a) a profound and differentiated knowledge of his subject, b) a well-organised lesson-structure, c) the necessary amount of discipline and d) a good atmosphere in class. To the amazement of everyone including the researchers, group teaching led to poorer results."

Outlook

It is high time we return to education in its fullest sense, and steer clear from reducing education standards by diluting and lowering standards with carnivalistic didactics and by forcing teachers into the role of mere teaching guides while forbidding them to teach the basics – above all in the field of science, which is neither a priori there, nor easily acquired.

We've known since long how to teach and develop knowledge and skills as the basis of genuine education in the classroom. Why do we not give the teachers the liberty to decide on their own how to conduct their classes on the basis of their knowledge, in view of the fact that they are the experts in their field, and not the empirists and gurus of all sorts, who are currently pulled out of the hat by many a German Land. Hereby the decisive and sovereign role of the Finnish teacher, who has the liberty to choose from the various teaching methods those he considers appropriate, may serve as an example, as well as the most comprehensive comparative study in this field by *John A.C. Hattie "Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement"*⁵ from 2009, which undoubtedly points to the overriding role of the teacher in the education process, a fact that still seems to be ignored in our country. It gets rid of the preconceived idea that solely student-centred learning can bring about better learning results. The results of the study show that the teacher's role as the "activator", giving clear instruction, is much more successful than that of the "facilitator", or learning guide. It is exactly the often criticised "reciprocal teaching", similar to the method of development by questions, which achieves top results. Other interesting findings are the poor results of "problem-based learning". Furthermore the Swiss-German longitudinal study on the quality of classroom teach-

ing of mathematics⁶ comes to the conclusion that teaching success can be expected when the teacher disposes of a) a profound and differentiated knowledge of his subject, b) a well-organised lesson-structure, c) the necessary amount of discipline and d) a good atmosphere in class. To the amazement of everyone including the researchers, group teaching led to poorer results. Where is the teacher who could not confirm without reservations that the four points are fundamental? There is no other country in the OECD, which over-emphasizes the methods over the results as much as Germany. In contrast to the Anglo-American and Asian countries, and our French neighbours, who all prefer the teaching-to-the-test method, which we would not necessarily like to describe as exemplary. The solution seems to lie in a methodological variety, which makes the lessons also interesting for the students. Instead, the teachers here are being degraded to hirelings of the empirical education researchers and constructors of this so-called better teaching, who have no better idea than to advise teachers to produce assessment programmes – within the frame of the unduly controversial competence development models – which the teacher is permitted to hand out and collect from the students, whereby closest attention needs to be given to avoid any falsification of the quantitative assessment. And more and more we are obliged to answer the question why we continue mending the crumbling ruins of the Potemkin-style education villages against all better judgement. •

¹ Klein, H.P. (2010): *Die neue Kompetenzorientierung: Exzellenz oder Nivellierung?* (The New Competence Orientation: Excellence or Leveling?) *Journal für Didaktik der Biowissenschaften* JfdB 1, 1–11

² Klein, H.P., Jahnke, Th. (2012): *Die Folgen der Kompetenzorientierung im Fach Mathematik.* (The consequences of New Competence Orientation in the subject of Mathematics) *Vierteljahresschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik* (in print)

³ www.uni-protokolle.de/foren

⁴ Ravitch, D. (2010): *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Tests and Choice are Undermining Education.* Basic Books, New York

⁵ Hattie, J.A.C. (2009): *Visible Learning. A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement.* Routledge, Chapman & Hall, New York

⁶ <http://www.dipf.de/de/projekte/Pythagoras>
(Translation Current Concerns)

General education classes – preparation for life as a responsible citizen

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich, former long-time vocational school teacher

There were nine young men sitting in my class of pre-vocational education (today: two-year basic education to mechanics practitioners with vocational certificate). They had different reasons for attending a pre-vocational education. Some of them had acquired only a small basic stock of school knowledge during their time at elementary school – for various reasons – others had been assessed by teachers and school psychologists resulting in the verdict that they would not be able to complete a three-or-four-year lasting apprenticeship until the final exam because of deficits in their personality development. This diagnosis was not valid for all cases, as I found during the first semester.

It is essential that the vocational school teacher offers each individual young man or woman a new beginning that allows him further development of his intellectual and social capacities. The students of the pre-vocational class have got these capacities just like all other young people. Because of the labels that one or another has been pressed on during his school career by various institutions, I will not let myself be kept from approaching him unbiased and inviting him to enter the way of learning in the classroom community with myself and his classmates: “Each of you who wants to learn and make a progress in life, will have that opportunity. It is my task as a teacher to support you at school. At work this is done by your master. We will work together in the general subjects and gain the knowledge that you will need as a future professional and family man and as a citizen in our state in order to be able to stand the ground.”

All students thrived rapidly when they realized that I accepted them without the mortgage on their previous career and started teaching them without putting limits to their future development.

Teacher-guided instruction also in vocational school

According to the “Curriculum Framework for general education in vocational basic education” of 27 April 2006 the “promotion of language, self-, social and methodological competence [...] forms the core of general education together with the construction of expertise.” And further: “Educational objectives describe the evolving competences of the learners.”

However, by focusing on the acquisition of so called competences, vocational school – as any other school type and grade – does not meet the needs of young

people and does not fulfill its legal mandate.

Thus, the public educational mandate, for example, in the Education Act of the Canton of Basel-City is explicitly expanded to the secondary general education schools, that is also to the vocational schools:

§ 3a. The elementary school and the secondary general schools have the task of supplementing and supporting the family education by encouraging the physical and mental development of the students so that they meet both the general human and also the professional demands of life.

§ 3b. The elementary school provides the students with the knowledge and skills that are necessary for a successful life in society and in the professional world. At the same time it supports the students to find their individual identity in society and to develop the ability to learn for a lifetime as well as acting responsibly towards himself, his fellows and the environment.

(Education Law of the Canton of Basel-Stadt of 4 April 1929; as of 1 January 2013)

The elementary schools – as well as the Educational Universities – have to be demanded that they fulfill their mission which is established by the law. The children shall acquire the knowledge and the capacities that are necessary for a successful life in the society and professional life. They shall become able to act in a responsible way towards themselves, towards their fellow humans and towards the environment. Or you may express it this way: Without a rucksack packed up with knowledge, readiness for engagement and achievement, in a responsible manner towards the other persons and towards the working material the youths will not be able and apt to do a professional apprenticeship. If there is a youth who is late for the job interview and expresses that he is interested in recreation time and in holidays above all, another youth will get the job – it is just as simple as that.

Teachers whose teaching and relation with the students are based on a personal anthropology, do not watch the young people from the side doing things in an “autonomous way” and watch their allegedly growing “competences”; but they provide their students with a really good educational background.

In my lessons I am demanding towards the students of vocational school. Here they do not encounter the situation that everybody does whatever he likes, as some of them had unfortunately become accustomed to during their Secondary School. Here we do study. The teacher teaches the students something – as much general instruction general background as is in fact possible to teach during two school years with four lessons a week. The most important things in it are the following:

- The possession of one’s mother tongue as a fundamental condition for the acquisition of instructions; improvement of the oral and written expression, learning to write in a grammatically and orthographically correct way, reading a book together and discussing it in class – without mastering a language no education!
- The preparation for a life as a responsible citizen; the Swiss State with its foundations in direct democracy and federalism and perpetual armed neutrality; getting to know one’s own commune and the multiple possibilities to take an active part in its life; reading newspaper articles and discussing them; understanding motions brought forward in the Federation, the Canton or the commune and forming a substantial opinion about it.
- The preparation for a life in family and profession; learning the most important foundations of living together in our country (family law, labor law, road traffic law, penal law, but also the moral and ethic foundations and international law, humanitarian law, compassion and respect towards the other persons; discussing human fundamental issues as war and peace, and the just order of economy and much more.)

Self-dependent studying alone or in pairs

Of course, the vocational students – according to their age occasionally – also work independently in general education, but in my classroom “self-dependent learning” is something completely different than the acquisition of so-called “self-competence” with which *Fratton & Co.*¹⁾ is molesting us. In my classes, students learn the subject matters in direct-instructive class lessons first and clarify their questions. Then they apply what they have learned to enlarge upon it, next they take further learning steps that are comprehensible to them, independently. In general, that can

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be done in cooperation with a classmate. Partner work is a meaningful form of learning for vocational students (as a supplement to classroom instruction). Here, I make sure that the two learning partners work together constructively. If two students are inattentive and not really at work, I clarify with them what the reason is: Do they have a problem and need an explanation to the point or a reference to where they can find the answer? It often takes just a little support or encouragement, and the two of them start work again. Sometimes it also happens that a learning partner disrupts the other learner's work or lets him do the job alone. In this case, I consider together with the students, whether they better get together with other learning partners – or the interferer decides to invest his energy in cooperation rather than in disruption.

Furthering commitment to one's fellow human beings

Every week we have four lessons together, tackle learning tasks and frequently discuss the topic of learning and learning together in class. And the nine students start off to learn together with me and develop to become a gratifying classroom community. Three of them turn out to be quite able to complete a three- or even four-year apprenticeship after the elementary training. It is also part of my job as a teacher of general education to give them the necessary encouragement and practical help to achieve this objective. Others like their choice as a semi-skilled employee, they are proud of their work and are fully committed to it. I support them at that. And of course, the classmates are interested in the work of the others and in everybody's plans for the future. It is part of human nature to take an interest in his neighbors and in other people in his village, his country and all over the world. Therefore the active engagement with the events of the day and with the question, "What may I, what can we contribute?" is part of the fundamentals of general education. It is the vocational teacher's duty to build up this fundament together with his students. The wonderful educational goal fixed in the UN Convention concerning the Rights of the Child shall be added here:

Article 29

(1) States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and

physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

(Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989, entered into force for Switzerland on 26 March 1997; as of 8 April 2010)

Erich, 18 years old, learning the multiplication tables

I particularly remember one of my students in the above-mentioned basic training classes: *Erich*, who had spent his ten years of elementary school in a special needs school. At first he did not attract my attention in arithmetic lessons, as long as we dealt with adding and subtracting. He was capable of adding up and subtracting. But when I wanted to introduce percentage calculation, he did not understand any-thing. I tried to explain him the principle, the classmates assisted. To no avail. Finally *Erich* summoned all his courage and confessed: "I do not know the multiplication tables." When discussing the matter in our class we learned that his teachers had given up teaching him the multiplication tables- and thus multiplying and dividing! – since the 4th grade. During the remaining school years he had spent the arithmetic lessons without learning anything. I thought about the matter and talked to experienced primary teachers about how I could help *Erich*. We agreed that it was an absolute scandal if a child in full possession of its senses is let down in such a way at elementary school. His teachers had abdicated their responsibility by releasing the boy from learning the multiplication tables – and that is from a large part of the subject math! So they had been guilty of actively denying him equal opportunities.

Every normally intelligent person can learn that

In the next week (which was our next school lesson together) I addressed *Erich* and the whole class: "If you want, *Erich*, you can learn the multiplication tables in our arithmetic lessons." The students asked whether it would be possible that he could be successful in learning the multiplication table at the age of 18, although he had previously failed. I answered that every normally intelligent human being could learn that, even later, and *Erich* was indeed an intelligent young man, which we had already had evidence of. *Klaus* mocked him: "Uh, he cannot remember the times table!" I replied: "I'm not sure whether everyone in here is as brave as *Erich* – otherwise we might get to know all sorts of things that one or the other is not capable of doing yet." The students chuckled, and *Klaus* blushed, because he himself was at war with spelling, which was well known. I then asked the class: "Have any of you ever thought: 'Well, I will never be successful at that!' and still he learned it?" The experiences just poured forth, and I myself told the class that I had experienced the same when I had learned to ride the bike: I could not imagine that the bike would not tip over and that I would be capable of keeping the balance. Of course my mechanics trainees did not comprehend that: for them learning how to ride a bike was easy, as opposed to learning to read or write, in which one or the other had great difficulties. So the young people learned that everyone might have a difficulty in his life sometimes and that it is possible to join forces to surmount difficulties you never thought you could cope with.

Proper support by a confident teacher

After another week, *Erich* somewhat reluctantly agreed to giving the multiplication tables a try. For me it was as much a new experiment as it was for him. However, due to my educational knowledge, I was one hundred per cent sure that he would learn them if he was only resolute enough. In my practical training under the guidance of veteran teachers I had met several teenagers whose parents and teachers had capitulated under the influence of false theories, and who had yet been able to make their own way through life because of the proper support and confidence of other teachers. This had convinced me that we, the educators of a child, should not be allowed to pining it down to anything and this way cutting off its further development.

Based on these fundamentals I started out together with *Eric* to teach him the multiplication tables. I was prepared to ad-

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vance together with him and the class step by step. Since he was already 18 years old, he was an adult, and so I dealt with things on eye level with him from the beginning. As an orientation, I told him amidst his classmates, "I shall prepare one additional learning step for you every week. I am able to do maths with you for about 15 to 20 minutes every week during the mathematics lesson. You will have to practice diligently at home. You will decide every week, whether you are ready to do the necessary step. You undertake the work freely from week to week. Your will and your strength of purpose are necessary. We shall also need your classmates' approval: Are they ready to quietly work on the exercises I shall give them and on their own tasks during a part of the mathematics lesson, so that I shall be able to work with Eric without interruptions?"

Erich and his classmates gladly agreed to this plan and pledged their full commitment. We were all very curious about what was to come.

I produced the first worksheet under the guidance of a primary teacher. We started with the two-times table. Erich learned it by heart as a homework for the next week, his work was excellent, he knew the table in the correct order and also mixed up. I checked his work in the mathematics lesson and then introduced the ten-times table. Some classmates – Klaus amongst them! – were quite ready and willing to take on this training and to test his knowledge during lunch break or after school. I soon realized that Erich was able to learn the respective division task together with the multiplication of each number. After each new table we also practised the other tables which he had already mastered, apart and mixed up. As he already knew something about addition and subtraction, I gradually taught him written multiplication and division, as well and introduced larger numbers into his exercises.

The teacher has a positive effect, if he takes active control of the lessons.

Erich's reliance on me as his teacher was important for his success in learning. He saw me treat him with respect despite his poor arithmetics and felt that I thought he was capable of learning the multiplication tables just like everyone else.

It was also important that Erich's classmates considered it as quite natural that in the mathematics lesson, everyone did their own thing. While the others were busy



Whole-class teaching instructed by a teacher is how pupils can learn best.
(picture keystone)

with percentages or fractions, Erich was doing the multiplication tables, so what?

After half a year Erich mastered the multiplication table and had command of oral and written multiplication and division – after having learned all that in 20 minutes a week alone with me as his teacher, as well as with the help of his colleagues, plus diligent practice at home. Not once he had evaded the task, every week he had again agreed to tackle the next task. He had done his homework every week. He had become ever more eager and happier, as he realized that he could actually overcome this obstacle, which had appeared insurmountable to him. And the effect of this experience on his classmates was a positive one as well. The whole class was more optimistic, they had more confidence in their own learning abilities – and acquired the assurance that together with others all life's work will be handled much more easily.

The example shows that students – even the older ones – want to work together with their teachers and that the teacher has a positive influence if he guides the class actively through his lessons.

Finally, I would like to quote the great educationalist *Alfons Simon*, who followed the tradition of *Alfred Adler's* individual psychology, about the importance that the teacher's special attention and assistance has for the whole class if he supports a child needing this help. In his book "Helga" he describes the development of a child, who is helped out of her difficulties by a teacher who devotes special attention to this one child in her class. Some people

objected that the other children came off badly in this process.

Here is Simon's answer: "Granted – as we have often heard say – admitted that *Helga* and her teacher may be well satisfied with their achievements, but was not the price too high? Did not the other children in the class have to pay for this fine result by coming off badly, especially concerning teaching and lessons? Did not the teacher have to spend limitless effort and time on *Helga*, which she then lacked for the other children? [...]"

The calming down of the class atmosphere, the growing sympathy between teacher and children, and also between the children and *Helga*, the mutual trust between them all, all this predominantly bright and cheerful classroom climate created favourable prerequisites for any type of progress of all the children, as for their progress in learning. [...]"

The best thing, namely, that in such classes each child quietly develops more self-confidence, cannot be proved statistically. It is reflected in the faces and in the attitude and in the open affection the children show their teachers and in what they tell about them at home. [...]"

But even the measurable learning success in these classes is higher than the average of others. ●

(Alfons Simon, *Helga, Kindernöte, Erziehsorgen, Wege u. Hilfen*. Zurich 1958, page 90/91)

¹ See also: "From the lucky bag of the education dealers" in *Current Concerns* No 33 of 20 August 2012, and "Neue Lernkultur" im Musterlände" by Matthias Burchardt and Jochen Krautz in "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" of 10 May 2013