

# 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*

## Switzerland made a very important contribution to de-escalation

by Thomas Kaiser

Since the military conflict concerning the Serbian province of Kosovo at the end of the last century the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has taken a back seat, above all in the media in recent years. At that time the OSCE observation mission, which was counselled by the German Brigadier general *Heinz Loquai*, sent reports on the current situation in the Kosovo region to NATO and EU. These reports ran counter to a military intervention, as they did not confirm the picture created by the western media and European policy makers. In various communiqués of that time Heinz Loquai referred to the distorted representation of reality, especially by the NATO press releases and the European media, which had something other in mind than objective reporting, focusing on the preservation of peace. Things, as they then developed, are well known today and even the former German Chancellor, *Gerhard*

*Schröder*, who at the time justified the bombing of the Federal Republic of Serbia on German television, judged it as a clear violation of international law, in hindsight.

If today the OSCE appears in all Swiss media, then this is especially connected to the Swiss Chairmanship of this year. Of course it also received particular public attention in connection with the Ukraine crisis. This was as well in connection with the OSCE Ministerial Conference in Basel planned for early December.

On Tuesday, 2 December, also the press was invited to an off-the-record talk with the head of the *Task Force* in Berne, Ambassador *Heidi Grau*, and the permanent Chairman of the OSCE in Vienna, Ambassador *Thomas Greminger*. In the run-up to the OSCE Ministerial Conference in Basel, the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* (FDFA) wanted to provide insight in Switzerland's last year's work, to the press. Both diplomatic representa-



(picture thk)

tives explained in comprehensive contributions, what their job had been and what challenges Switzerland had faced when chairing the OSCE that year and was still facing. An important prerequisite for success was the close and good cooperation between the task force of the OSCE in Berne and the diplomatic outposts in Vienna. What had been implemented there first had to be discussed and decided in

continued on page 2

## “Switzerland as a neutral country is perceived as a credible mediator”

Interview with Ambassador Thomas Greminger

*Current Concerns: What significance does Switzerland's neutrality have in this process concerning the Ukraine that should possibly lead to a pacification of the situation?*

*Ambassador Thomas Greminger:* The Chairmanship of the OSCE must play an impartial role. This is all the more important, the more the organization is faced with a crisis situation. In the context of this crisis in and about the Ukraine, it was very helpful that Switzerland held the Chairmanship, because as a neutral country it is perceived as a credible mediator. It can talk with the Russian Federation as well as with the United States and the European Union.

*Does this mean that Switzerland should be necessarily concerned to retain this independence and neutrality, so that it can work for peace at the diplomatic level?*

Yes, in the past decade Switzerland has well extended its role as a mediator, as

a facilitator in conflicts. It built corresponding instruments to do so. In general this is a recipe for success. It is not enough to be neutral and impartial. You must have the appropriate instruments. I think Federal Council and Parliament became aware of this and provided the appropriate means. So, we can perform this role competently and should continue to do so actively, in the future as well.

*What are these instruments?*

They involve civilian peacebuilding instruments that allow us to mediate the armed conflict or to introduce requested expertise, process knowledge and constitutional or decentralization expertise.

*How could it be ensured that the peace work of Switzerland continues even after the end of the Chairmanship?*

Switzerland will actively support the Serbian Chairmanship in 2015 in the Troi-

ka context together with Germany. Swiss diplomats will continue to be active in key functions for the Serbian Chairmanship next year, as well, as Ambassador *Heidi Tagliavini* in the Ukraine, Ambassador *Gérard Stoudmann* in the Western Balkans or Ambassador *Gnädinger* in the South Caucasus. The Serbian Chairmanship priorities are also based on a plan that was worked out together with Switzerland.



Ambassador  
Thomas Greminger  
(picture thk)

*Mr Ambassador, thank you for the interview.*

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

## “Mediation is part of the essence of Switzerland – as are neutrality and direct democracy”

Interview with National Councillor Roland Büchel, SVP (Swiss People's Party)



National Councillor Roland Büchel (picture thk)

*Current Concerns:* What weight should we attach to the year in which the OSCE was under Swiss Chairmanship?

National Councillor Roland Büchel: President Didier Burkhalter played his part in an appealing manner. He mastered the balancing act that is inherent in this office

very well.

*What was that balancing act?*

Conflicting parties try to pull the mediator on to their side. This lies in the nature of things. Tact and a sure instinct were necessary when dealing with the seriously upset relationship between the EU/USA on the one hand and Russia on the other.

*Do you think that tact and instinct have not always been used?*

I think we have gone too far in terms of economic boycotts. We have unnecessarily tightened the sanction screw a few times too often under mealy-mouthed terms such as “prevention of transactions for the purpose of evading the law.”

*What will happen next in regard of the OSCE?*

Next year, the Serbs are at the helm of the organization. Like Switzerland, Serbia is neither a member of the EU or the NATO nor of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union. This Chairmanship is therefore an opportunity for Belgrade to raise its profile as a bridge builder between the East and the West. We do not have to feel that we must constantly jump at this new administration's throat. After Serbia it will be Germany's turn to preside over the OSCE.

*What does this mean for Switzerland?*

We will further accompany incipient processes, but with less outlay than before. We have to deploy our staff in other areas now. The best diplomats, namely those who show their backbone, should now be assigned to negotiations with Europe.

*In connection with our mediation in the Ukraine conflict, Switzerland's neutrality was judged to be very positive, among other things because it meant that we had no “hidden agenda”. The conflict is not resolved. In what way can Switzerland's room for manoeuvre continue to be effective?*

We are a neutral state – in the OSCE and outside of it. If we play the neutrality card

correctly, we can continue to play an important role. It does not matter in what context we render our good services. It does matter that we do.

*Will Switzerland continue to act this way?*

Of course, and it will even be more effective in its actions. The OSCE Chairmanship might have been a hindrance. Initially there was no certainty about whether it would be possible to balance this task with our neutrality. This turned out reasonably well. As we no longer have the chair, it is certainly not more difficult to take this approach.

*In an overall view, do you judge the presidential year as having been positive?*

Yes, our people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs went about these things correctly. It's practically part of our DNA to mediate in disputes. This year we have performed our role of mediator. We will need to do that and certainly will do that again in future. Mediation is part of Switzerland's essence as much as neutrality and direct democracy are.

*Mr Roland Büchel, Member of the National Council, thank you for the interview.*

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

### “Switzerland made a very important ...”

continued from page 1

Berne. “The quality of decisions was depending of course”, so Ambassador Grau, “on the information that was forwarded from Vienna to Berne”. Ambassador Grau explained this cooperation as being very close: daily phone calls, several meetings in Vienna, a wide variety of conferences, endless conversations. In addition, contacts to the capitals of the member states existed. In the context of the crisis in the Ukraine there had been contacts with Kiev and the operational part of the OSCE mission, first and foremost the *Special Monitoring Mission* and then that contact group led by Heidi Tagliavini from the middle of the year onwards, acting in the role as representative of the Chairman of the OSCE, Didier Burkhalter.

Ambassador Thomas Greminger is head of the Swiss delegation and representative of OSCE Chairman Didier Burkhalter. Formally, Greminger was chairing the OSCE's Permanent Council in Vienna.

The Council consists of the 57 OSCE ambassadors. This year, his work had been especially determined by the Ukraine crisis. What was normally discussed at a weekly meeting, often required several sessions per week now, including Sundays. Besides chairing these meetings, he was above all in a close dialogue with the ambassadors of the member states. The OSCE is a dialogue platform, therefore there were several conferences, that had to be conducted on a consensus agenda, which of course means quite a challenge in the political environment. Ambassador Greminger stated that “60 percent of his work had concerned the crisis in the Ukraine”. The negotiations on the implementation of the *Special Monitoring Mission* (SMM), lasting for 3 weeks, were a special “Highlight”. Switzerland succeeded due to excellent cooperation between Berne and Vienna and skillful diplomacy in establishing the afore mentioned OSCE observer mission. That opened the possibility to penetrate into the region and to obtain an idea on the situation and to

bring about peace. According to the Minsk agreement, which contained an agreement on a ceasefire, the SMM was suddenly transformed into a peace-keeping mission, which now faces new challenges and must be accordingly equipped and financed.

Switzerland was predestined to conduct mediations in the Ukraine crisis due to its neutrality and the “absence of a hidden agenda”, as Ambassador Heidi Grau noted. Switzerland has tried to contribute to the stability of the situation, but one must ascertain that Ukraine is still very far from peace. It has contributed to Switzerland's heightened credibility that a neutral state and because of its tradition as an intermediary Switzerland is perceived by other states as an honest and sincere negotiating partner, among other things with its good offices. Big efforts were made to significantly contribute to the situation. At several international meetings, Switzerland tried to influence the states concerned in a mediative way. “A key mo-

continued on page 3

# Reckless Congress ‘declares war’ on Russia

by Ron Paul\*



Ron Paul  
(picture wikipedia)

Today the US House passed what I consider to be one of the worst pieces of legislation ever.

*H. Res. 758* was billed as a resolution “strongly condemning the actions of the Russian Federation, under President Vladimir Putin,

which has carried out a policy of aggres-

sion against neighboring countries aimed at political and economic domination.”

In fact, the bill was 16 pages of war propaganda that should have made even neocons blush, if they were capable of such a thing.

These are the kinds of resolutions I have always watched closely in Congress, as what are billed as “harmless” statements of opinion often lead to sanctions and war. I remember in 1998 arguing strongly against the Iraq Liberation Act because, as I said at the time, I knew it would lead to war. I did not oppose the Act because I was an admirer of *Saddam Hussein* – just as now I am not an admirer of Putin or any foreign political leader – but rather because I knew then that another war against Iraq would not solve the problems and would probably make things worse. We all know what happened next.

That is why I can hardly believe they are getting away with it again, and this

time with even higher stakes: provoking a war with Russia that could result in total destruction!

If anyone thinks I am exaggerating about how bad this resolution really is, let me just offer a few examples from the legislation itself:

The resolution (paragraph 3) accuses Russia of an invasion of Ukraine and condemns Russia’s violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. The statement is offered without any proof of such a thing. Surely with our sophisticated satellites that can read a license plate from space we should have video and pictures of this Russian invasion. None have been offered. As to Russia’s violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, why isn’t it a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty for the US to participate in the overthrow of that country’s elected government as it did in February? We have all heard the tapes of State Department offi-

continued on page 4

\* Ronald Ernest (“Ron”) Paul is an American physician and politician. He is a member of the Republican Party and from 1976 to 2013 (with interruptions) he was a member in the US House of Representatives. Paul was candidate of the Libertarian Party in the US presidential election in 1988, and he was a candidate for the Republican nomination for the US presidential election in 2008 and 2012.

## “Switzerland made a very important ...”

continued from page 2

ment”, to quote Ambassador Grau, “was the Normandy meeting”, where one succeeded to bring the “contact group” into being. This contact group has existed to this day and as Chairman of the OSCE Didier Burkhalter has appointed Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini as his representative. Here, a very important preparatory work for the Minsk meeting was accomplished, that took place in early September and led to the Minsk agreement. This must be regarded as a milestone in the deadlock. Under Swiss negotiation leadership, a breakthrough was reached, which led to

a ceasefire in the East of Ukraine. Switzerland made a very important contribution to de-escalation.

The situation in the Western Balkans is also an important field of action for OSCE. Although that was not really in the spotlight, another very good work was accomplished. It concerned the reconciliation among the regional nations. Here, Ambassador *Stoudmann* has been very active. Initial reluctance of states has changed over the course of the assistance. “One realised”, so *Stoudmann*, “that it is in their own interests”, to support regional cooperation, to achieve such a reconciliation. Switzerland worked in the field of tension between Belgrade and Pristi-

na. In addition to some successes which were achieved during the past year, there were clearly things that we failed to attain. Of course, this includes necessarily the crisis in the Ukraine, so far not influenced toward a constructive direction, but still great efforts and confidence-building measures must be taken in order to reach a sustainable ceasefire. Looking at the sphere of activity, where Switzerland was acting during the Chairmanship of the OSCE, it must be said Switzerland made a good job out of it in terms of peace building, often in the quiet and behind the scenes, but no less efficient. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “Putin’s actions should be easy to comprehend”

“[...] the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the EU’s expansion eastward and the West’s backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine – beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004 – were critical elements, too.” [...]

“When Russian leaders look at Western social engineering in Ukraine, they worry that their country might be next. And such fears are hardly groundless.” [...]

“Putin’s actions should be easy to comprehend. A huge expanse of flat land that Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany all crossed to strike at Russia itself, Ukraine serves as a buffer state of enormous strategic im-

portance to Russia. No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance that was Moscow’s mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine. Nor would any Russian leader stand idly by while the West helped install a government there that was determined to integrate Ukraine into the West.” [...]

Extracts from the article: “Why the Ukraine crisis is the West’s fault”, by the US-American John J. Mearsheimer, published in *Current Concerns* No 22, 20 September 2014, first published in *Foreign Affairs*, September/October edition 2014.

**"Reckless Congress ..."**

continued from page 3

cials plotting with the US Ambassador in Ukraine to overthrow the government. We heard US Assistant Secretary of State *Victoria Nuland* bragging that the US spent \$5 billion on regime change in Ukraine. Why is that OK?

The resolution (paragraph 11) accuses the people in east Ukraine of holding "fraudulent and illegal elections" in November. Why is it that every time elections do not produce the results desired by the US government they are called "illegal" and "fraudulent"? Aren't the people of eastern Ukraine allowed self-determination? Isn't that a basic human right?

The resolution (paragraph 13) demands a withdrawal of Russia forces from Ukraine even though the US government has provided no evidence the Russian army was ever in Ukraine. This paragraph also urges the government in Kiev to resume military operations against the eastern regions seeking independence.

The resolution (paragraph 14) states with certainty that the *Malaysia Airlines* flight 17 that crashed in Ukraine was brought down by a missile "fired by Russian-backed separatist forces in eastern Ukraine." This is simply incorrect, as the final report on the investigation of this tragedy will not even be released until next year and the preliminary report did not state that a missile brought down the plane. Neither did the preliminary report – conducted with the participation of all countries involved – assign blame to any side.

Paragraph 16 of the resolution condemns Russia for selling arms to the *Assad* government in Syria. It does not mention, of course, that those weapons are going to fight ISIS – which we claim is the enemy – while the US weapons supplied to the rebels in Syria have actually found their way into the hands of ISIS!

Paragraph 17 of the resolution condemns Russia for what the US claims are economic sanctions ("coercive economic measures") against Ukraine. This even though the US has repeatedly hit Russia with economic sanctions and is considering even more!

The resolution (paragraph 22) states that Russia invaded the Republic of Georgia in 2008. This is simply untrue. Even the European Union – no friend of Russia – concluded in its investigation of the events in 2008 that it was Georgia that "started an unjustified war" against Russia not the other way around! How does Congress get away with such blatant falsehoods? Do Members not even bother to read these resolutions before voting?

In paragraph 34 the resolution begins to even become comical, condemning the Russians for what it claims are attacks on computer networks of the United States and "illicitly acquiring information" about the US government. In the aftermath of the *Snowden* revelations about the level of US spying on the rest of the world, how can the US claim the moral authority to condemn such actions in others?

Chillingly, the resolution singles out Russian state-funded media outlets for attack, claiming that they "distort public opinion." The US government, of course, spends billions of dollars worldwide to finance and sponsor media outlets including *Voice of America* and *RFE/RL*, as well as to subsidize "independent" media in countless countries overseas. How long before alternative information sources like *RT* [Russia Today] are banned in the United States? This legislation brings us closer to that unhappy day when the government decides the kind of programming we can and cannot consume – and calls such a violation "freedom."

The resolution gives the green light (paragraph 45) to Ukrainian President *Poroshenko* to re-start his military assault on the independence-seeking eastern provinces, urging the "disarming of separatist and paramilitary forces in eastern Ukraine." Such a move will mean many more thousands of dead civilians.

To that end, the resolution directly involves the US government in the conflict by calling on the US president to "provide the government of Ukraine with lethal and non-lethal defense articles, services, and training required to effectively defend its territory and sovereignty." This means US weapons in the hands of US-trained military forces engaged in a hot war on the border with Russia. Does that sound at all like a good idea?

There are too many more ridiculous and horrific statements in this legislation to completely discuss. Probably the single most troubling part of this resolution, however, is the statement that "military intervention" by the Russian Federation in Ukraine "poses a threat to international peace and security." Such terminology is not an accident: this phrase is the poison pill planted in this legislation from which future, more aggressive resolutions will follow. After all, if we accept that Russia is posing a "threat" to international peace how can such a thing be ignored? These are the slippery slopes that lead to war.

This dangerous legislation passed today, December 4, with only ten (!) votes against! Only ten legislators are concerned over the use of blatant propaganda and falsehoods to push such reckless saber-rattling toward Russia.

Here are the Members who voted "NO" on this legislation. If you do not see your own Representative on this list call and ask why they are voting to bring us closer to war with Russia! If you do see your Representative on the below list, call and thank him or her for standing up to the warmongers.

Voting "NO" on *H. Res. 758*:

- 1) *Justin Amash (R-MI)*
- 2) *John Duncan (R-TN)*
- 3) *Alan Grayson (D-FL)*
- 4) *Alcee Hastings (D-FL)*
- 5) *Walter Jones (R-NC)*
- 6) *Thomas Massie (R-KY)*
- 7) *Jim McDermott (D-WA)*
- 8) *George Miller (D-CA)*
- 9) *Beto O'Rourke (D-TX)*
- 10) *Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)* •

Source: <http://www.ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/featured-articles/2014/december/04/reckless-congress-declares-war-on-russia/>

## 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](mailto:CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch)

*Subscription details:*

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

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

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

© 2014. All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

# “Switzerland has contributed to the process of detente”

## Joint negotiations with Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the USA

*Interview with Councillor of State Filippo Lombardi TI,  
CVP, President of the Parliamentary Friendship Club Switzerland – Ukraine*

*Current Concerns: You have recently visited some countries of the former Soviet Union including Russia. The EU has imposed sanctions on Belarus and Russia. What are the restrictions for countries currently living with sanctions?*

*Councillor of State Filippo Lombardi:* The sanctions are of a different nature. Sanctions have been imposed on Belarus years ago. This was a consequence of the presidential elections and the arrest of a number of opponents of president *Lukashenko*. Switzerland has supported these EU sanctions. In recent time, Belarus has sent signals pointing towards an improvement of the situation, especially through the release of some of these prisoners. Only a few are still arrested, and they are to be released soon. Based on these developments, Belarus hopes that the EU will lift the sanctions. There have been some relaxations but no general lift. This is met with incomprehension by the Belarus government. Also it is a problem that Belarus is not a member of the European Council and does not recognise the Convention on Human Rights since it still has the death penalty which has been clearly confirmed in a referendum. It is an objective problem that is not easy to solve. The sanctions are resulting in severe restrictions for economic growth. Belarus has a strong potential for growth and has a large economic growth. It is a good country, however under authoritarian administration. There is not a lot of corruption in the country and the working morale is good. This is one of the reasons why an important company like *Stadler-Rail* has transferred its production chain for the Eurasian continent to Minsk.

*What is the situation in Russia?*

That is completely different. Here, sanctions have been imposed in consequence of the occupation of the Crimean peninsula, that is, in consequence of a violation of international law. This has happened in 2014. Switzerland has not joined these sanctions but it prevents them to be evaded through Switzerland. This is leading to a number of measures which Russia feels like sanctions.

*What does this mean?*

Formally, Switzerland has remained neutral.

*What do the sanctions mean for Russia?*

The consequences can be felt; the currency situation is very unstable. Within six months, the rouble has lost nearly half its value. This is tangible and has severe consequences.

*Is the prevention of sanction evasions also an indirect form of sanctions?*

The Russians perceive it this way. Personally I think that the Federal Council has done the right thing. We should keep the balance and explain the Russians, Europeans and Americans that we see the situation as a conflict of power and that we do not want to support any party in this conflict. There have been violations of international law by Russia while the Russians declare that they are supporting the right of peoples to self-determination. There is a certain parallelism which the Russians mention again and again: the Kosovo problem. When former Yugoslavia was dismantled, the Russians say with some right, the ultimate norm was, for the first time after World War II, no longer the territorial integrity of a state but there is also – as another ultimate value – the right of peoples to self-determination. If the western powers have used this right to the disadvantage of Serbia, then this same right also has to be applied in other situations. This is how Russia sees the issue.

*I would like to come back to your earlier statement that the Ukraine conflict was a conflict between the large powers. Is it a conflict on even terms?*

It is an asymmetric conflict. *Putin* is trying to reorganise his country and to maintain its role as a regional power in order to keep NATO away from its border. On the other side there are the USA, trying to extend their role as a global power in order to be able to dominate as the only superpower. In that sense it is of course completely asymmetric.

*Should we see the annexation of the Crimean in this context? Russia's attempt to keep the US away from its border but finally losing its only all-season access to the sea to NATO.*

Of course, the reaction is clear. I once said that I do not justify the annexation of the Crimean, but I can understand the Russians' motivation for doing this. Not just the historical reasons, not only because the population agreed to it. Also the strategic move of the US fleet towards *Sevastopol* has created concern with the Russians. This is why they had to do this

stroke. It was their only chance to react early enough. Otherwise the US fleet would have been welcomed by the Ukrainian authorities. Later it would have been difficult to reverse this step. In a strategic sense and with respect to history and the population on the



*Filippo Lombardi  
(picture ug)*

Crimean, Russia's position is very plausible. Also the time pressure in this issue is comprehensible. It would have been better – but of course it cannot be changed now – to solve the Crimean question at the time when the Soviet Union was dissolved. It was partially a topic, and then *Yeltsin* did not want to negotiate it. *Gorbachev* and *Shevardnadze* ignored it completely. Thus it was missed at the time. And also in our times, before the annexation it might have been possible to solve it according to international law through a treaty between Russia and Ukraine and to hold a referendum under international supervision. Of course this would have been better, but we cannot re-write history.

*How do you see the opportunity to come back to stability in the whole region?*

The only way would be if the supporters of the war parties in Washington and Moscow – there are such lobbies in both capitals at work – lost their influence and if in fact the presidents, the governments and the well-meaning politicians had the ability to de-escalate the whole situation. As long as there is escalating on both sides, we have no chance to find a solution. You can negotiate a bit, you can do some humanitarian operations, negotiate an extended ceasefire, but it will not solve the conflict. In the White House, those consultants rule who use this conflict, first to prove the strength of the US and second, to bring the whole NATO back on track, which was not the case until now. NATO had become a little more relaxed. Now you have an enemy that can be exploited to obtain some more discipline in the whole NATO. Then of course, there are those who seek the confrontation for ideological or historical reasons because

**“Switzerland has contributed to ...”**

continued from page 5

they have – quite banal – weapons to sell or pursue other interests.

*What is the situation on the Russian side?* Also in the Kremlin there is such a party. It is wrong to believe that Putin was the sole ruler. He has to master different interests. There is a group in the Kremlin as well that rather seeks confrontation. The end is to discipline Russia itself and to impress the neighbouring nations, so that they understand that they all have to stay in that system.

*This doesn't render the situation any easier ...*

... no, it's very unfortunate. Putin's idea of a Eurasian Union as a common economic zone between China on the one hand and the European Union on the other, was a good idea. It would have served as a good platform for the EU's working together. There is no need for a steady expansion of NATO and the EU. The EU urgently needs reforms. It must start a phase of consolidation. They don't necessarily need to include countries that have a completely different culture, a completely different economy and other rules of living together. In some cases there are very corrupt countries, like for example the Ukraine. The EU has enough problems with corruption in countries like Romania and Bulgaria, it has severe problems in terms of public finances with several countries. Hence, they should have supported the idea of a Eurasian Union. As far as I know there are annual meetings between the EU and Russia, the so-called economic sum-

**“The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine”**

*“There is a solution to the crisis in Ukraine, however – although it would require the West to think about the country in a fundamentally new way. The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine and instead aim to make it a neutral buffer between NATO and Russia, akin to Austria's position during the Cold War.”*

Extracts from the article “Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault”, by the US-American John J. Mearsheimer, published in *Current Concerns* No 22, 20 September 2014, first published in *Foreign Affairs*, September/October edition 2014

mits, but this idea was never discussed there, as far as I know, neither from the one nor from the other side. Putin has developed his idea and then started to work with Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine. The EU had its plans concerning Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, etc., the so-called Eastern Partnership, worked out as well. These two sides, although they regularly meet in this EU-Russia Business Summit, never really discussed it. This was a good project that should have been discussed peacefully. Both side have been lacking the wisdom to discuss it.

*Switzerland has a very important role as a mediator. The fact that it is not a member of the EU, not a member of NATO and predestined by the whole concept of the state is to take a decisive role. How has this affected it?*

Switzerland has played her role during the Chairmanship of the OSCE very well. This year, it was certainly important to have the Chairmanship. Switzerland, with Mr *Burkhalter*, has responded well and made an effort to contribute to the relaxation of the conflict. The

OSCE has gained weight this year. It had been somewhat neglected and has now strengthened its credibility. But I am concerned what is going to happen after the Swiss Chairmanship. From the first January onwards Serbia will take over. This could entail certain difficulties. Then Switzerland loses its privileged role, and I'm not sure that the conflict parties are still going to acknowledge that Switzerland remains as a mediator. I'm not sure if they will call on Switzerland for help.

*Who can be a mediator then?*

Another country that has tried to play such a role was Belarus. That was clever of Lukashenko. He tried to build a bridge, and with the Minsk plan they were able to play an important role. I was in Minsk a few weeks ago and spoke to the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of both councils, as well as the President of the Parliament. You also see that they were able to open this window, but the window does not stay open very long. They fear that it might be closed again. If the Minsk process

**The people decided**

by Reinhard Koradi, Dietlikon

At the election weekend on 29/20 November, the Swiss voters turned down three popular initiatives. By referendum, the discontinuation of flat-rate taxation as well as the Gold Initiative and the Ecopop Initiative were clearly rejected. These results cannot be called into question. All the more surprising are the attempts at interpretation by the “prophets” in politics and media.

The Ecopop Initiative was reinterpreted as a European question and the vote as a Yes to the bilateral contracts with the European Union. Single exponents even believe that a No to the containment of immigration à la Ecopop will broaden the manoeuvring room for the implementation of the immigration initiative of the *Swiss Peoples' Party* (SVP) which was accepted by the Swiss people in Febru-

ary 2014. Others believe that the bilateral way is now undisputed. An opinion which might lead to completely erroneous negotiation strategies in view of the ongoing framework agreement with the EU (institutional integration of Switzerland). However, it is still the order of the day to defend the independence and freedom of our country.

The Swiss population and the eligible voters are very well capable of differentiating between the EU politics (Europe is not the EU) and the factual issues regarding immigration politics. A false declaration of the voting results is to be clearly rejected.

With regards to the relations between Switzerland and the EU, there is still a large need for clarification – inside Switzerland as well. An open and honest discussion in the context of our direct demo-

cratic tradition is still pending. Without a widely supported, extensive dialogue with the population, it is not possible for the Framework Agreements, negotiated behind closed doors in Brussels, to be submitted neither to the Federal Council nor to the Parliament. In the first instance, the people is to be respected – and may not be passed over with respect to these landmark questions. It is all about state and socio-political questions, the future of our country as an independent and sovereign state. A revision of these issues must include our direct- democratic customs with its appropriate culture of speech and equality of all those involved. In addition to this, standpoints are to be frankly declared. Whoever speaks of a bilateral path, for example, must also say where this path leads to.

# For the first time in Germany: A Call for Peace by prominent personalities in politics and business, church and cultural life

by Karl Müller

In Germany something like that has never happened before: A former Christian Democratic (CDU) Federal President, a former Social Democratic (SPD) Chancellor, former Federal Ministers of CDU and SPD, two former prime ministers of CDU and SPD, the former leaders of the megacities Berlin and Hamburg, also members of the CDU and SPD, former members of the "Bundestag" from the CDU, SPD, FDP and Alliance 90/The Greens, business leaders, journalists, artists, theologians and dignitaries of the two major Christian churches have agreed on a call for peace.

On 5 December *Zeit Online* published the text first. 64 well-known personalities expressed their concern, which is shared by the majority of Germans: that a great war could be possible again in Europe because politicians and media professionals go for confrontation and not for détente and understanding.

"North America, the European Union and Russia inevitably drift toward it [war] if they do not bring to a halt the disastrous spiral of threat and counter-threat." This introduction to the text of the 64 personalities is not far-fetched. Anyone who has been observing the relationship between the US government, the governments in the EU Member States, and the Russian government over the past few months, knows this. One day before the publication of the call, the US House of Representatives released a resolution, with 411 against only 10 No votes, (Resolution 758; <https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hres/758/BILLS-113hres758eh.pdf>), blaming Russian politics alone for the

current situation and demanding war preparatory measures which is interpreted as a precursor to a declaration of war by many commentators (cf. Article by *Ron Paul* on page 3/4). The German Chancellor has also intensified her verbal attacks against the Russian government in recent weeks, most recently at her speech in Sydney on 17 November. The sanctions against Russia have poured fuel on the fire. The daily media invective against the Russian policy and the Russian president are undignified.

One does not have to approve every sentence the 64 personalities have agreed on. However, there are many clauses in this call for peace that are of vital importance, in particular the following: The appeal talks about "Germany's special responsibility for the preservation of peace"; about pledges unfulfilled to the present day, made after the end of the Cold War, to establish "a solid European peace and security structure from Vancouver to Vladivostok", to fill the 1990 "Charter of Paris for a New Europe" with life, to build a "Common European Home".

The signatories call for a "new détente" on "the basis of equal security for all and equal and mutually respected partners." They write: "We must not push Russia out of Europe. [...] Since the Congress of Vienna in 1814 Russia has been one of the recognised shaping powers of Europe." They warn those responsible. "Those who only build up enemy stereotypes and accusations only exacerbate the tensions at a time when all the signals should be set to a détente." And they directly address the media: "We appeal to the media to meet

their obligation for unprejudiced reporting more convincingly than before. Editorialists and commentators demonise whole nations, without sufficient credits to their history."

Currently, the authorities in the US and across national boundaries analyse a report by the US Senate on torture practices of the US intelligence (cf. Article by *Willy Wimmer* on page 10). Would that not be reason enough to stop now and rethink the past 25 years as a whole; get away from the finger pointing to Russia and many other countries that have been the target of verbal, political, economic and military attacks in this quarter of a century? Is it not about time for European leaders to think about the role they have played themselves over the past 25 years, or what role has been intended for them?

There are enough materials to be read in order to reconsider. A few weeks ago, for example, an anthology was issued<sup>1</sup> that informs and educates factually, but also adopts a committed position. The information in this book, however, does not correspond with what our political leaders and journalists have said in the mainstream media in the past year. But would it not be a primary obligation of responsible people in politics, economics and society, to study also those books thoroughly that do not take their own view? And then to consider whether those who do not share their opinion have valuable information and good arguments?

continued on page 9

## "Switzerland has contributed to ..."

continued from page 6

is interrupted once, then they do not see how they will continue to play this role. Nota bene, there are these things that are always a part of the game. President Putin and *Poroshenko* can call each other every day, if they like. You do not need a mediator. Also it is known that there are contacts between the Russian and Ukrainian army leadership. There are daily contacts. The conflict would be solved in my view if the advocates of war or confrontation would lose some influence on both sides.

Where do you see a solution?

We have to dream, because at the moment, I see no basis for it. Joint negotiations, I could imagine, would be with Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the United States and possibly also NATO to find an international legally compliant solution for the Crimea with the goal to find agreement between the two parties that would include possible compensation measures. There might also be a repetition of the referendum under international control. The eastern regions of Ukraine should remain Ukrainian, but with a status of autonomy or with a federal structure. A solution of the economic problems related to energy products and the raw materials that Ukraine needs, should be included. The agreement should en-

sure that Ukraine can play a bridging role between the EU and the Eurasian Union in economic matters. You may have agreements with both sides, but these must be transparent, there are the Customs Union on the one hand and the EU on the other. A suspension of approximation to NATO should be set for an indefinite period. NATO wouldn't be a topic for some time. Ukraine could decide later to make it a topic if it was going to be an issue at all. These would be some ideas to solve this crisis.

*Mr Lombardi, thank you very much for the interview.* •

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

Appeal:**War in Europe again? Not in our name!**

*cc. More than 60 prominent public figures from politics, business, culture and the Church warn against a war with Russia in a declaration. The appeal was initiated by former adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Horst Teltschik (CDU), former state secretary in the German ministry of defense Walter Stütze (SPD), and former vice president of the German Parliament (Bundestag) Antje Vollmer (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). The declaration may be endorsed in various online-petitions.*

Nobody wants war. But North America, the European Union and Russia will inevitably tumble towards it, unless they finally stop the disastrous spiral of threats and counter-threats. All Europeans, including Russia, share the common responsibility for peace and security. Only those who keep this goal in mind will succeed.

The Ukraine conflict demonstrates: The urge for power and dominance has not yet been overcome. In 1990, at the end of the cold war, we all had reason to hope for exactly that. But with the successes of the policy of détente and the peaceful revolutions we lost our alertness and caution. Both in the East and the West. Americans, Europeans and Russians somehow lost the determination to ban war for ever from their agenda. There is no other way to explain the Western policy of eastward expansion without strengthening co-operation with Moscow at the same time, which inevitably looks threatening if viewed from Russia, on the one hand, or the annexation of Crimea by Putin, which contradicts international law, on the other hand.

At this moment of imminent danger for our continent, Germany has a special responsibility to preserve peace. Without the willingness of the Russian people to embrace reconciliation, without the farsightedness of Mikhail Gorbachev, without the support of our Western allies and without the cautious policy of the German government at that time, Europe would never have succeeded in overcoming her division. The peaceful achievement of the German unity was a great and wise gesture of the allied powers that had been victorious in the Second World War. They took a decision of historical dimension. Out of the overcome division, a sustainable European order of peace and security was supposed to grow from Vancouver to Wladivostok, as it had been declared by all 35 heads of OSCE member states in the "Paris Charter for a new Europe" in November 1990. Based on the principles that all had agreed upon together, a "common European house" was to be built offering the same security to all states involved. This goal of post-war politics has never materialized to this day. People in Europe have to live in fear yet again.

We, the signatories, appeal to the German Federal Government to live up to their responsibility for peace in Europe. We need a new policy of détente for Europe. This is only possible if based on an equal security for all and with partners on equal footing that respect each other. The German government does not have to be afraid to pursue a solitary way, in case they continue to call for caution and dialogue with Russia. The need of security of Russians is as real and legitimate as that of Germans, Poles, Balts and Ukrainians.

We must not bully Russia out of Europe. This would be ahistorical, foolish and a threat to peace. Ever since the Vienna congress of 1815, Russia has been recognized as one of the influential powers in Europe. All who have attempted to change this by military force horribly failed – the last one being the megalomaniac Hitler-Germany starting off their vain and murderous purpose to subdue Russia in 1941.

We appeal to the members of the German Parliament to live up to the serious situation as politicians elected by the people and scrutinize the German Government's efforts to fulfill their peace obligation. Those who keep depicting other people as enemies contribute to even deeper tensions by onesidedly blaming them at a time when the signals of détente should be in everybody's interest. Inclusion instead of confrontation has to be the leitmotif of German policy makers.

We appeal to the media to increase their efforts towards a more unbiased information, which is actually their duty. Unfortunately commentators and columnists keep demonizing whole nations without sufficiently appreciating their history. Any journalist with an interest in foreign relations will understand the fear of the Russians considering the 2008 NATO invitation to Georgia and Ukraine to join the organization. This is not about Putin. Heads of state come and go. This is about Europe. It is about enabling people to live without fear of war. Responsible information coverage based on solid investigation can make a big difference there.

On 3 October 1990, which is the memorial day of the German reunification-Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker said: "We have overcome the Cold War. Freedom and democracy will soon be prevailing in all states... Now, for the first time they can develop and institutionalize their relations in a way that can create a common order of life and peace. The people of Europe have opened a fundamentally new chapter of their history. Its goal is the integration of all of Europe. It is a great goal. We can achieve it, but we can also fail. We are facing the clear alternative to either unite Europe or follow sorrowful historical examples

and slide back into nationalistic confrontation."

Until the beginning of the Ukraine conflict we thought we were on the right track in Europe. Today, a quarter of a century later, Richard von Weizsäcker's warning is more urgent than ever.

**Signatories**

Mario Adorf (actor)  
 Robert Antretter (former member of the Bundestag)  
 Prof Dr Wilfried Bergmann (Vice-President of Alma Mater Europaea)  
 Prince Luitpold of Bavaria (Königliche Holding und Lizenz KG)  
 Achim von Borries (director and screenwriter)  
 Klaus Maria Brandauer (actor, director)  
 Dr Eckhard Cordes (chairman of the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations)  
 Prof Dr Herta Däubler-Gmelin (former Federal Minister of Justice)  
 Eberhard Diepgen (former Governing Mayor of Berlin)  
 Alexander van Dülmen (chairman of A-Company Filmed Entertainment AG)  
 Stefan Dürr (Managing Partner and CEO Ekosem-Agrar GmbH)  
 Dr Erhard Eppler (former Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development)  
 Prof Dr Dr Heino Falcke (provost, ret.)  
 Prof Hans-Joachim Frey (CEO Semper Opera Ball Dresden)  
 Father Anselm Grün (Father)  
 Sibylle Havemann (Berlin)  
 Dr Roman Herzog (former Federal President)  
 Christoph Hein (writer)  
 Dr Dr h.c. Burkhard Hirsch (former Vice-President of the Bundestag)  
 Volker Hörner (Academy Director, ret.)  
 Josef Jacobi (organic farmer)  
 Dr Sigmund Jähn (former astronaut)  
 Uli Jörges (journalist)  
 Prof Dr h.c. Dr Margot Kässmann (former EKD Council President and Bishop)  
 Andrea von Knoop (Moscow)  
 Prof Dr Gabriele Krone-Schmalz (former correspondent for the ARD in Moscow)  
 Friedrich Küppersbusch (journalist)  
 Vera Gräfin von Lehndorff (artist)  
 Irina Liebmann (writer)  
 Dr h.c. Lothar de Maizière (former president of the ministers)  
 Stephan Märki (director of the Theatre of Berne)  
 Prof Dr Klaus Mangold (chairman Mangold Consulting GmbH)  
 Reinhard and Hella Mey (songwriter)  
 Ruth Misselwitz (Protestant pastor Pankow)  
 Klaus Prömpers (journalist)  
 Prof Dr Konrad Raiser (former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches)  
 Jim Rakete (photographer)  
 Gerhard Rein (journalist)  
 Michael Röska (former principal)  
 Eugen Ruge (writer)  
 Dr h.c. Otto Schily (former Federal Minister of the Interior)  
 Dr h.c. Friedrich Schorlemmer (Protestant theologian, civil rights campaigner)  
 Georg Schramm (comedian)  
 Gerhard Schröder (former Federal Chancellor)  
 Philipp von Schulthess (actor)  
 Ingo Schulze (writer)  
 Hanna Schygulla (actress, singer)  
 Dr Dieter Spöri (former Federal Minister of Economic Affairs)  
 Prof Dr Fulbert Steffensky (Cath. theologian)  
 Dr Wolf-D. Stelzner (Managing Partner: WDS-Institut für Analysen in Kulturen mbH)  
 Dr Manfred Stolpe (former president of the ministers)  
 Dr. Ernst-Jörg von Studnitz (former ambassador)  
 Prof Dr Walther Stütze (former Secretary of Defense)  
 Prof Dr Christian R. Supthut (former board member)  
 Prof Dr h.c. Horst Teltschik (former adviser at the Federal Chancellery for Security and Foreign Policy)  
 Andres Veiel (director)  
 Dr Hans-Jochen Vogel (former Federal Minister of Justice)  
 Dr Antje Vollmer (former Vice-President of the Bundestag)  
 Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter (former Bishop Lübeck)  
 Dr Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker (scientist)  
 Wim Wenders (director)  
 Wenzel (songwriter)  
 Gerhard Wolf (writer, publisher)

# What kind of “community of values” is this?

## The US and Europe after the Senate report on US intelligence torture practices

by Willy Wimmer, former State Secretary in the German Federal Ministry of Defence



Willy Wimmer  
(picture ma)

A little hope is a must. This hope is today embodied in the Californian Senator, Ms *Feinstein*. She was the driving force behind the vilest report one had ever held up in the US Congress. The facts that were published in this report and those that everyone may add in thought must have consequences. It is not sufficient for the always soft-flushing mainstream press to play on time and thus our getting used to it. The United States will not be judged by what has been blackened in this report by whomever in order to cover up the worst. The United States will be judged by whether they will have those tried by an ordinary court, who committed these crimes against humanity, and whether they will let former Presidents and Ministers of the *Bush* administration make acquaintance of the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague. It does not matter whether the United States have signed the Constitutive Act of The Hague or not. Anyway, *Bill Clinton* put his signature under it. Today, one can only guess why *George W. Bush* had withdrawn this signature. Does this mean for the rest of the world that we have to prepare ourselves for life with

the United States who inflict war, terror and murder on the world, only in order not to have to face The Hague?

However, Ms Senator can be sure how things will go on in Washington. With this report the tablecloth between the war-mongering powers in Washington was completely cut. The way the Presidency *Obama* put his predecessor in a pillory of historic proportions, conjures up the next bill as certainly as the gospel truth. The drone killings in many parts of the world for which the current president has to take responsibility and which mock any legal standard known until now, call for a congressional reappraisal à la Senator *Feinstein*. With the Congress majority that has dominated the house in both chambers since the last election, it is likely that we do not have to wait much longer. After they let degenerate large parts of the global financial economy to a “Death Star” by the *Lehmann Brothers* bankruptcy in the United States, a “political civil war” of proportions is imminent that the world has not yet experienced. It’s not about justice for the victims and about leading the perpetrators to a just punishment or about holding accountable the faded governance before an appropriate court at last. It’s about the power in the fortress, at all costs.

And what about us? Where was the Chancellor’s announcement at the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) party conference a few days ago in Cologne, in view of the harrowing parts of the report from Washington already known at this time and her call for an immediate meeting of the NATO countries’ heads of states and governments? She as well as all the others know that these crimes against humanity documented in the report would not have been possible without the NATO structure. One need not wait for a NATO Secretary General from Norway, who seems to have vanished from the face of the earth in those days. The hub of this murder network is Ramstein the very Air Base that is located in Germany. In Poland, which in the usual way is currently going head over heel against the arch-enemy, the word is spread that one does not need to worry about this report from Washington. We need, however, not point a finger at anybody, even if certain types from the past come to mind, among others those with the name “Quisling”. The German federal government appears to have issued the watchword “business as usual”. It does not realize that this means the value community has probably come to its end, if

they do not make these events a subject at the highest level and also use the opportunity for a long overdue “great clean-up in the alliance”. This shows us how disastrous it was to entrust NATO with the enforcement of US policy on the globe, beyond the NATO Treaty that had been passed by the parliaments.

In these days in the United States there is a last rising up for democratic virtues in form of demonstrations because of a series of homicides with the slogan: “We can’t breathe.” Yes, that is what it is like! Once, NATO kept peace for us, now it takes us to war. Not only us, but in one way or another many countries in a blood belt from Ukraine to Afghanistan. Our freedom of the press exists only on paper. Citizens have the feeling that their own governments are helpless to the highest degree, be it wars or streams of refugees. According to press reports in the UK the use of the word “Christmas” must already be discarded in a significant number of communities, because it might displease those who funnel on to the island. Many people have the reasonable impression that it is our way of life that is to be removed – by processes on which the government apparently has no influence at all. Rather one prefers to demonize those who want a government that has the power to act in a free country. It has become stuffy in the country, and the government does not realize it. •

(Translation Current Concerns)

•

(Translation Current Concerns)

### “For the first time in Germany ...”

continued from page 7

In the appeal of the 64 personalities it is stated: “The people of Europe have to fear again.” In fact, current policy is not on a good way. What is more, the citizens lose the sense that they can accomplish anything against this policy. They see themselves caught in a train on the operating and steering of which they have no control and which heads for disaster at increasing speed.

It really is high time for this call. It asks to join in, and encourages to speak up publicly, too. So that the direction may change, before it is too late! •

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Thoden, Sabine Schiffer (ed.): *Ukraine im Visier. Russlands Nachbar als Zielscheibe geostrategischer Interessen*, 2014. ISBN 978-3-9816963-0-1

•

# Memorandum statement by the “550 to 550” on the revised version of Curriculum 21

Ladies and gentlemen,  
dear colleagues,  
dear fellow campaigners,

After an intense and serious examination of the 3<sup>rd</sup> version of Curriculum 21, which we accomplished besides our usual correction work and lessons preparation, we are sending you the following statement on the memorandum 550 to 550.

## 1. How did this statement come about?

Main actors were of course the first signatories of the memorandum. But there were also intensive discussions with other people who supported our memorandum. The exchange was done via email.

## 2. How must we assess the changes?

It is out of question that there is something going on. To some extent the curriculum leaders have accounted for the public criticism of the bill. This speaks for their ability to learn, but also shows that our criticism was justified.

In contrast to our teachers' associations, the signatories of the memorandum 550 to 550 have not prematurely agreed on a consenting line. Neither did the approximately 1,000 practitioners reject the curriculum as a whole, instead they examined the draft on its practicability, its objectives and contents.

## 3. Some positive aspects in detail

- The curriculum has slimmed down with respect to some subjects and now contains a perfectly reasonable number of competences (for example in the natural sciences).
- The request to summarise the sub-skills under basic skills was met (the competency levels and their predefined structure, however, remain).
- The contents have been explicitly re-evaluated and set with binding instructions in each subject.
- The wording of competencies has been improved. Too abstract or completely banal competence descriptions have been largely removed.
- The role of the teacher is seen in a varied manner. In principle, the freedom of teaching methods is emphasized; no method is particularly accentuated.
- The basic requirements are commented on that they might still be too demanding for individual students. A dispensation from learning goals in some areas is newly accepted (though only after thorough investigation).

- With regard to history, the contents have been specified, the methodological suggestions for good history lessons meet the students' ideas more.

## 4. Competence orientation – the crux of the matter!

On the occasion of the presentation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> version of Curriculum 21, the Canton of Berne Director of Education *Bernhard Pulver* said: “Competence orientation is indisputable.” (“Tagesanzeiger” of 7.11.2014).

The initiators of the Memorandum 550 to 550 must of course correct this assessment. The “excess” has never been our main criticism, even today's curricula are partially massively overloaded. The issue of the size was especially picked out by the curriculum managers, and we are compelled to describe their proudly presented 20% reduction as part of their enforcement strategy. For the 1,000 practitioners who expressed their criticism in the memorandum it was mainly the diffuse concept of competency, which is formulated on a fragile scientific basis, that gave rise to contradiction.

Councillor Pulver is soft-peddalling. He does not intend a reform of the century. He sees the curriculum as a compass, as a guiding line. This means that he has chosen a different communication strategy – other than his colleague *Regine Aeppli*, the Zurich Director of Education, who spoke of a “once-in-a-century project” which will change the school sustainably.

His conception of competence orientation, which he formulated in the *Sonntags-zeitung*, is in fact banal and will, should it be implemented, actually bring about no changes in the educational system.

The 1,000 practitioners who have signed the Memorandum 550 to 550, will not have great objections to this interpretation of the term competence, which can in general be traced back to the concept of skills and abilities.

It might be that this quite integer education politician has reckoned without the host.

Renowned professors such as *Herzog*, *Reichenbach*, *Binswanger* and many of our Memorandum signatories, take quite a different view on the background and conceptional basis of the curriculum's competence orientation!

The concept of competencies in Curriculum 21 explicitly refers to the German pedagogical scientist *Franz E. Weinert* and is part of an educational theory

or ideology, known as constructivism. It forms the basis of today's teacher education. Constructivism assumes that there is no mandatory truth, but is constructed by each individual him- or herself. This is also true for learning and education; according to this theory, each child has to determine his or her learning contents, objectives and speed independently. The theory then prescribes individualized (= personalized) learning as a method of choice and ascribes to the teacher the role of a coach who has to prepare the individual learning environments for each student.

The Zurich education professor, *Urs Moser*, is commissioned by the EDK (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education) to develop tests with which the “output” of our schools is to be supervised in the future. Urs Moser fights for detailed competencies that are formulated in the curriculum. They form the basis for the competence grid, the model of competency levels and finally the educational standards that Professor Moser wants to check by testing.

It is true that both Mr *Amsler* and Mr Pulver emphasize that there will be no comprehensive testing. We are not the only ones to doubt this.

With some resignation, the Head of Educational Issues with the LCH (Association of Swiss Teachers), *Brühlmann*, said in an interview with a memorandum's representatives in Spring 2014: “The competence orientation according to OECD guidelines will come, and also the tests will come – no question – all of Europe is already working according to them. And if the tests are there, the public wants to know about the results. Pisa says hello.”

The models of competence levels are far from God-given and their creation is more than controversially disputed in science. They are technocratic constructs that follow primarily metrological requirements, but do not take into account the variety of possible solutions that are not predictable. You cannot even say what they do accurately measure – reading competence, everyday knowledge competence or simply the competence to solve such tasks. The one-dimensional “competence appetizer tasks” are trivial in any case and lack any educational demand.

Many of the tasks are structured according to the Pisa principle: the text and graphics tasks largely contain the answers. In order to achieve the highest level of competence, reading competence, it is sometimes enough to tick

**"Memorandum statement ..."**

continued from page 10

the appropriate box in a multiple-choice task. If the student ticked the right box, the testers assume that the student did understand, analyze and evaluate the underlying content according to their own thoughts when having created the task. In truth, however, the student has only ticked a box, sometimes with only one pre-determined, partly not even half-way reasonable alternative. Often, tasks are assigned to a high competence level for the only reason, that the task includes complicated texts or is formulated in a confusing manner. In such cases the competence level corresponds by no means to the content level of difficulty.

One wonders how this measuring technocracy is supposed to work, in the languages for example. Analyzes and interpretations of texts are only then excellent, if unpredictable, creative and innovative solutions have been found, and those are not precisely measurable by psychometric methods. But even in the natural sciences, the effect can be devastating in the long term: If unconventional ways of thinking are not encouraged, just because they cannot be recorded by the measuring instruments of the empiricist, there will be no more innovations. Even worse, the ability to practice basic scientific investigations such as microscopy of cells cannot be recorded with such a test.

Despite the pronounced commitments to the freedom of teaching methods, despite the repeatedly stressed intentions not to perform comprehensive testing, there is a danger of the factual.

Teachers who signed the memorandum do not wish to be relegated to learning coaches or facilitators and thus to henchmen of empirical educational research. This happens when, for example, they teach by merely handing out worksheets to their students from the pools of tasks for competence levels, with which they were provided, then collecting them, in order to delight the students with more tasks from the nearest "competence stack" and afterwards forwarding the whole package to the empiricist for analysis. Whom would this serve? Certainly not the students' learning and understanding of content, not to mention education and knowledge!

### 5. The crux of the abandoned annual learning objectives

If the annual learning objectives are no longer binding, the gifted math students, for example, will have reached the ability to construct a triangle originally scheduled at the next level (year 7) by the end of year 6. The differences within the class are intentionally ex-

tended this way. In this case only highly individualized instruction will allow the students to work at their respective current competence task. And such a teaching is basically controlled by worksheets alone. At least, that is how students work in the US and the UK, from where the entire matter seems to have been copied.

### 6. Summarising the negative aspects

- The lack of basic annual learning goals (basic competences) in the core subjects German, mathematics and foreign languages will have an impact on the structure of the corresponding teaching aids. The annual schedule for the teachers will therefore be more difficult than it is today.
- The number of binding objectives in the core subjects is still very high. There is too little time to provide basic education so that students can understand and apply the fundamental content. This could lead to the infamous rush of "going through" as many skills as possible.
- The curriculum is still not user-friendly. You have to collect here and there a clear structure of binding educational goals and learning objectives, including content, on the one hand and suggestions for further optional objectives on the other hand.
- Sticking to strictly planning detailed capacity building remains an educational self-deception. The great heterogeneity of classes makes the organization of a scientifically controlled construction of learning processes a Herculean task for teachers.
- The formal narrowing of the competence descriptions to the ever-constant beginning with the verb "can" gives the curriculum the air of trying to aim at a precisely predictable output in the first place. Education with an extended horizon should describe some basic skills with verbs such as understand, know, etc.
- The review of learning processes, in which students are at different proficiency levels, is very complex and can only record certain aspects across many areas. It can be assumed that the teachers will often use centrally designed tests to record differentiated terms of performance among the students (similar to the so-called "Stellwerktests" (signal box tests)).
- For students with learning disorders, the large number of objectives and the lack of options in individual subjects remains a burden, despite the qualification of basic claims. The demand for lessons with individual objectives contained in the curriculum should respect different talent profiles better.

- The important question, what school reports should look like in the future, has been passed on to the cantons. Actually a competence-based Swiss German curriculum should point the way to a reasonable student assessment at least fundamentally.
- The educational unconvincing language concept with the 3/5 model does not fulfill the mandate to harmonize. The language issue is not a minor matter for primary school. In the absence of a foreign language, there are shifts in the significance of the other subjects.
- The lack of testing at least some areas of the curriculum on a pilot basis leaves many questions unanswered that could have previously been clarified. It is to be feared, that after the introduction of the curriculum new costs are continually going to emerge so that mistakes cannot be corrected again.
- A classification of the new curriculum with respect to its relative importance for everyday school is still hardly possible. A German-Swiss curriculum that should cause mainly orientation and coordination in education, should actually not trigger off any major reform including an elaborate training of teachers.
- It is now apparent that Curriculum 21 in its current revised form cannot be implemented directly and without a lot of adjustments. Curriculum 21 will require many more adjustment steps, such as the future assessment.

### 7. Big question mark:

#### Do the responsible people know exactly what they are talking about?

Can we trust the reassuring statements of educational experts? The most contradictory statements of "experts", that is the protagonist of the curriculum, are remarkable. They show that there are very different attitudes among them.

A example of such verbal contortionist is the highest teacher representative *Beat Zemp*: On 26 June 2013, he said: "The new curriculum is a milestone and brings significant progress to the schools." On 22 November 2013 he warned: "The Curriculum 21 is overcharged and needs to be slimmed down."

A month later (23 December 2013) he demanded, "Sustainable development must be considered in the Curriculum 21."

And on 7 November 2014 said he proclaimed again: "A milestone, grade A."

Astonishing also the rhetorical maneuvering of the federal councillors. On 30 May 2011 the EDK announced: "Confederation and cantons agree on a few concrete and

**"Memorandum statement ..."**

continued from page 11

verifiable targets for the current decade." On 26 June Councillor Aepli rejoiced, "This is a once-in-the-century project, which will change our school basically."

On 18 August, her colleague and designated EDK President *Eymann* said: "Nothing will change for the teachers themselves." At the same time, an internal memo of the Teacher Training college Zurich urged that "The lesson will be of major importance for the introduction of competence orientation. The teachers are the key to the successful implementation of the ambitious project". Nevertheless Councillor Amsler said on 7 November in the "10 vor 10" programme on TV, "No, this curriculum is no education reform."

Given this highly contradictory statements, the curriculum leaders who so love to see themselves as experts will have to face some serious questions.

Do they know exactly what they are talking about, or is this kind of communication also a part of their implementation strategy?

**8. Democratic deficit**

On 9 February 2013 *Jan Jirat* wrote in the *WOZ*, "The curriculum was designed in a hermetically sealed laboratory with a hundred inaugurated and the product is now being released for use into the world of cantonal sovereignty. The process could also have been performed in a continuous open discussion."

Of course, this secrecy had a reason. For the way in which Curriculum 21 was presented, it seems to be a comprehensive attempt to control the school, like we have seen in the introduction of the Bologna reforms. And competence orientation is at the center of this process. Therefore, we insist that this kind of competence orientation requires a broad dialogue with those concerned. Therefore, we support initiatives in parliaments and the can-

tons to enforce this dialogue, sometimes even through policy initiatives.

**9. The example United States and international experience**

In the United States the left-wing teacher and once passionate advocate of educational standards, *Diane Ravitch*, admitted in her book "Reign of Error" (Vintage Books, 2013): "I was wrong." And, it is in the very country in which the model of competence orientation emerged, that one begins slowly but certainly to say goodbye to the idea of educational standards and competence orientation. In Australia, Dr *Kevin Donnelly* from the Australia Catholic University, and Professor *Ken Wiltshire* from the Queensland University, suggested proposals for improvement and reorientation of the curriculum, which is based on competence orientation and was particularly criticized by parents and teachers, in a study on 300 pages. Key statement here: "Education instead of competencies to be back on top."

In many European countries, however, the measurement of the educational landscape is in full swing. It costs a fortune and does not add to an increased pedagogical value, as the key features of educational research show (Pisa, World Championships for Apprentices, Nobel Prizes per head of population, youth unemployment).

**10. Outlook: Risk of hybrid model**

We note with great concern that the proponents of reform projects, pushed by educational bureaucracy, react to resistance and objections with concessions, appeasement and a sloppy "anything-goes attitude". But such demeanour threatens to completely paralyze our system by partly massive contradictions.

Individualization and standards, autonomy and unified curricula, standardization and respect for the multicultural diversity of our country, Bologna masters

and a dual system of vocational training, the child's needs and market orientation, intact teacher-student relationship and teachers as learning coaches, integration and selection cannot be brought in line. We are building a hybrid model, and a total overburdening of teachers, their students as well as their parents will be inevitable.

**11. The work is done**

On the basis of our educational experiences we were obliged to inform the public with our memorandum about the serious consequences the implementation of the new curriculum would generate.

We again want to remind you that our existing education system

- is among the best in the world,
- produces the most Nobel laureates per capita,
- generates the most world champions among apprentices,
- guarantees a record low youth unemployment,
- provides the highest integration performance in the European comparison.

The memorandum *550 to 550* has now completed its work. We have always referred to ourselves as a non-partisan grassroots movement of teachers who regarded itself as a voice of practitioners in the ongoing debate about the curriculum. We were not and are not a political movement. We would like to thank all the teachers, many professors and educational scientists and also the anonymous informants of the Teacher Training Colleges, who supported us in the past.

*For the Memorandum "550 to 550"*  
*Alain Pichard, Hans-Peter Amstutz,*  
*Elfy Roca, Daniel Goepfert, Ruth*  
*Wiederkehr, Eliane Gautschi*

(Translation Current Concerns)

# Parents, citizens and experts fight back against education cuts in their cantons

## Final version of Curriculum 21 is unsuitable

*In a short time, committees have been formed in Swiss cantons which are committed to a good elementary school. In Aargau, in Schwyz, Zurich and St Gall initiatives have been started, and also in Solothurn one is about to be planned. In other cantons there are committees formed directly by concerned parents, teachers and citizens to defend themselves against the tacit assumption of the Curriculum 21.*

*rl.* A common concern of the initiators of the particular cantons is the purpose to ensure a good elementary school that will meet the needs of the individual child and also of our modern society.

### Unapt didactics

More and more parents have become annoyed over the fact that their children are deprived of a good education, already today. Deceived by the slogan “independence”, students are ever more working off worksheet by worksheet – completely on their own. In countless hours, parents are trying to understand, at home, the “weekly schedules” or “presentations” of their children. Meanwhile, teachers are becoming increasingly degraded to “learning escorts” or “learning coaches”. Very few parents know that the “systemic-constructivist” didactics underly those lessons. The latter are more than controversial and are not adequate for a good elementary school. But they increasingly set the pace in classrooms.

### SMEs need a solid foundation

Many SME (Small and Medium Enterprises), entrepreneurs and apprentice trainers have been fighting these negative developments for quite some time, now. They noticed that school-leavers master fewer essentials and need to be retrained at some cost. Exactly these mistakes are now codified by the Curriculum 21. The new curriculum will no longer provide uniform solid mathematical or physical basics to the school leavers. The conception of Curriculum 21 is not designed to teach these fundamentals.

As the now edited “final version” of Curriculum 21 issued by the EDK (Directors of Education Conference) to the cantons does not withstand professional criticism, the resistance in the cantons is growing against its tacit introduction.

### Avoiding professional criticism

The criticism of renowned educational scientists (Professors *Walter Herzog*,

*Roland Reichenbach, Mathias Binswanger, Jochen Krautz, Hans-Peter Klein, Konrad Liessmann* and many others) provide the emerging initiatives with a broad professional support. Note that the core elements of the curriculum, its “competence orientation”, the “cycles” and the new “interdisciplinary objectives” were left out in the so-called “consultations”. But, exactly these same elements are the Curriculum’s blind spots. They mean the dissolution of the age groups and their yearly learning achievement goals, the blurring of clear learning objectives and the ideological indoctrination of students.

### Making use of the opportunities for open discussion

The different cantonal initiatives, working for a good primary school education, now open up the possibility to discuss in detail the contents of the curriculum and its background for a wider public and to stop the curriculum in its current form, if necessary.

### Curriculum 21 – a million frank grave

Spending money on education is always a good idea. Investing in the next generation secures our society’s survival. But the money has to be spent in a sensible way.

Curriculum 21, however, does not ensure any success! Its theoretical foundations are already outdated, new studies contradict it. Millions of francs in tax money are to be spent on retraining teachers, new teaching materials and an extremely wide-ranging “evaluation” will be necessary. The sound competition among the cantons for better and more efficient elementary schools is prevented. Instead, it will finance an even greater bureaucratic education, which is centrally controlled. Costs are not spared. With a better curriculum we could achieve more with less money!

### The dummy argument of “harmonisation”

Even today, the curriculum cannot keep what it promised. The Swiss educational landscape will indeed become equally bad, but flexibility cannot be guaranteed with Curriculum 21. Whereas a student today faces the situation that he must swot for subject matters on his own, without his new colleagues, the new curriculum will make this a rule for all students: Each has to swot up the competencies on his or her own. Class teaching of a common subject is not supported by

continued on page 14

### Curriculum 21 – who decides about Swiss curriculums?

*rl.* The emergence of the Curriculum 21 is as bizarre as the history of his political implementation. Over years the draft has been worked on behind closed doors. Obviously certain OECD or EU-Round-tables standards were taken over without declaration (cf. *Current Concerns* No 25, 18 June 2012). Thereafter “competences” and “cycles” were sacrosanct and have not been allowed to question up to now, although they were long since outdated. Participants, who could not be brought into line, left. But participation from outside, by education researchers, teachers and parents associations was not desired.

After years the surprised public was confronted with a curriculum-draft of 550 pages including 4,000 competences in June 2013: Unreadable! And hardly anybody has read it yet until this day – neither politicians, neither teachers, school principals nor school presidents.

Criticism of the curriculum till October 2014 was so definitely submitted that a major overhaul should have taken place. What happened?

After a so called “Vernehmlassung” (legislative process by consultation) of the curriculum draft, which evaded the

main problems by prefabricated questionnaires, the curriculum makers withdrew into their EDK-financed laboratory: A few sentences were summarized (less pages), a few terms euphemized (emotive words replaced) and eventually one got down to the concession – paper doesn’t blush –, that the teacher plays an important role within the teaching lesson (Orwellian Newspeak). But the concept hasn’t been changed. An open slap in the face of every serious critic.

Subsequently the EDK-East head proclaimed with vehemence that the new curriculum would be available for the cantons and ready to be implemented. Now that even the SVP-directors (Swiss People’s Party) of education agree to this enterprise – because via EDK they have been involved in the implementation of the curriculum – one dares to put it on the political agenda that this more than poor curriculum will be forwarded to the cantons for implementation.

Summarized: A curriculum secretly designed behind closed doors following a secret guideline, was being developed at a democratically not legitimized level, namely the EDK, and is to be implemented in the cantons without discussion!

**"Parents, citizens and experts ..."**

continued from page 13

the curriculum; quite the contrary, teaching in "cycles" will rather prevent class teaching.

Even the "language controversy" – what language is to be taught in what canton at what level – shows that an adjustment within Switzerland can be meaningful only within certain limits and not every canton requires the same contents. Therefore, Curriculum 21 is certainly not useful for a "harmonisation", even though this "harmonisation" ought to serve its official legitimisation!

**Dealing with critics**

Since Curriculum 21 is technically bad, of no educational use and therefore more than debatable, it is and was enforced by political power play.

Parents, who launched various initiatives, were at first presented in an appropriate neutral manner by the Swiss media and their concerns were addressed reasonably. This enabled a wider discussion. Unfortunately, some media then tried to put

**There cannot be good schools without strong teachers**

erl. The fact that Curriculum 21 fails to take into account the strongest and most recent findings on how to provide good teaching – New Zealander *John Hattie's* 'mega' study – can certainly be described as ironic. Hattie evaluated more than 800 of international meta-studies on the topic of school and teaching. In his study, he made a distinction between factors able to effectively influence teaching and student performance and factors less effective for that specific purpose. Among them, he listed factors that school itself is unable to influence, such as the parental home as well as factors that can indeed be influenced by school, e.g. the teach-

er's role. These factors are essential if one wants to draw up a good educational policy.

A teacher who, for instance, actively engages in instructing his pupils, collaborates with them and offers his feedback on their performance, is crucial to good teaching.

Conversely, constructivist didactics involving learning coaches hardly make any significant contribution to the quality of teaching! (Hattie, John. *Visible Learning*, p. 26)

A good primary school needs joint teaching with strong teacher personalities. Due to its ideological design Curriculum 21 is unable to provide that!

critics into the right-wing corner and thus disconnect a continuation of the discussion at the cantonal level.

Whereas the promoters of Curriculum 21 can rely on taxpayers' money via the EDK or the respective education departments and can also begin with the propagandistic introduction of the curriculum, concerned parents and all concerned cit-

izens and taxpayers have little legal recourse to stop this huge project. They are forced to stop the curriculum by means of cantonal initiatives that interfere with the educational legislation at cantonal level.

The promoters of the curriculum are now invited to pick up the gauntlet and enter in an honest and open discussion on cantonal level. •

**Mobile phone ban in Salem**

ef. What is a constant problem at many schools has led to consequences at the internationally known *boarding school Schloss Salem* on Lake Constance. Since the beginning of the school year, the school management have drastically reduced their students' media consumption. This was reported in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" of 5 December. Students have to hand in all web-enabled screen devices after 21.30 in the evening. Laptops and tablets are only again placed at the disposal of the 13 to 17 year old students at the beginning of classes. Mobiles are not issued until 14.15 after the collective lunch. The newspaper reported that the use of electronic devices had gotten out of hand in Salem. Every time a class

was interrupted, the students had "their cell phones in their hands or glued to their ears." Messages etc. were exchanged electronically underneath the tables. "We could no longer sit and watch how much precious time, concentration and attention these devices stole from our students," said headmaster *Bernd Westermeyer*. The school is not at all anti-technology, but experience had shown them, "that their students no longer got away from their web-enabled devices, even though they thought they had their media consumption under control." Teachers and school management have therefore come to the conclusion "that the excessive use of these devices downrightly undermines the educational concept of our school".

The students' parents support the measures of the school almost unanimously. Many parents, as the newspaper writes, "have long since given up trying to teach their children to use web-enabled devices prudently and moderately." They would be happy, "if the school took over this task in their place."

Admittedly, there is still the expected resistance on the part of some students. But the school administration has gained the impression that "students actually feel relieved, even though they may hardly admit it in the midst of this heated situation." They now had more time and could even once again quietly read a book. •

# An inspiring and instructive teaching and reading material: Adelbert von Chamisso

by Esther Levy, grammar school teacher

Adelbert von Chamisso's novella "Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story" is still relevant today and worth reading.

In a 9<sup>th</sup> class of a Hamburg grammar school, I first discussed Chamisso's well-known ballad "The Giant Toy" with the students. In the ballad of the year 1831, the Lord of the castle Niedeck in Alsace is described as a giant and it deals with his daughter who, while playing, sees a farmer tilling his fields. She thinks him to be a toy and takes him home together with plough and horse. There she is severely reprimanded by her father. He tells his daughter to bring the farmer back to where she has taken him, and that "uncomplainingly." For, as he tells her, without the farmer and his work in the field also giants would have no bread to eat.

I worked with the students on two issues of this ballad: First, the guidance of the giant girl, because she acts thoughtlessly and selfishly from ignorance and curiosity. Through her father's rebuke the girl realises that she has made a mistake. By the father's demand, to bring the farmer back, it is made clear that children should be educated and instructed so that they are able to behave correctly in later life. In addition, I talked with the students about the importance of farmers. The students agreed that all people depend on the farmers' work. They supposed the author Adelbert von Chamisso to be a social-minded person.

In the following lesson we started together with the reading of the "Schlemihl". The students were looking forward to getting to know the story of a

poor young man arriving in a harbour city and wanting nothing more than to obtain fast wealth and recognition in society. The language was not easy for them to understand sometimes, but together we always clarified concepts and questions of substance regarding the text. The plot of the story is the following:

Peter Schlemihl arrives in a rich society where he meets a strange man who immediately fulfills all material wishes of those present. To him he offers in exchange for his shadow inexhaustible wealth in the form of the Fortunati happiness coffers. This is a purse filled with gold pieces which never empties. Schlemihl agrees to the exchange, blinded with the greed for money and prestige. In the further course of the story, however, the reader learns that he is shunned and mocked at by his fellow men because of the lack of his shadow. He is now a rich man, but he does not make friends with any community, his love for Mina fails. Only a faithful servant holds on to him. After one year, the devil offers him a renewed deal that is to say to swap his shadow for his soul. Schlemihl refuses, he throws the happiness coffers away, renounces the money and by chance comes into the possession of seven-league boots. They quickly carry him from one part of the earth to the other. He finally finds happiness and fulfillment in an active life as a natural scientist.

After having completely read the novella and everybody understanding the plot, the students discussed topics which in their opinion are addressed in this novella:

- The one who has no money, is regarded as inferior.
- If you are different, you will be excluded.
- Attitude to life: to think only of the material goods and not of that what is important in life.
- Love, friendship, loyalty.
- Money can twist your mind.
- Need to be included in society.

I asked the students where to find the relevant passages in the novella for their statements.

By declaring that the prospect of quick money "can twist your mind", as one student said, she was referring to the conversation between Schlemihl and the strange grey man at the beginning of the novel-

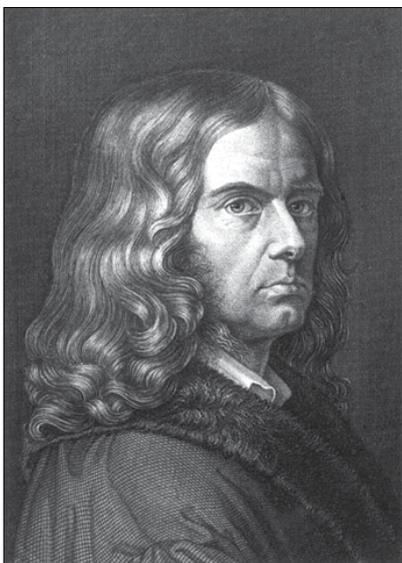


la. Although Schlemihl finds this man scary, who is able to conjure up everything, he gets involved with him by sealing the deal. The text states: "Fortunati happiness coffers', I cut off his speech, and no matter how afraid I was, with that one word he had captured all my mind. I felt dizzy, and it flickered before my eyes like double ducats".<sup>1</sup> The student said. "Schlemihl was so much flashed at that moment that he did not know what he was doing."

Again and again, the students puzzled over the significance of the shadow in the novella. One student suggested: "It stands for being integrated into the community."

By describing in detail individual persons, the students realised how relevant this story is. A student characterised in her work Schlemihl's servant as follows:

"Bendel, whose name is a meaningful name, meaning tie, ties his fate to that of Schlemihl. This means that he is very devoted to him and that he is always at his side and helps him, understands him. He stays also with him when he learns that he has no shadow, because it is not important to him, what other people think. A position in society and wealth are of no importance to him. Therefore Bendel is Schlemihl's complete opposite, which is very important to him in the beginning. Schlemihl is selfish, thinking only of his own well-being. Bendel is quite different there, because at the end he does not enrich himself with the money, Schlemihl gives to him, but with Minas help he builds up a hospital for the sick. He is a social human being, who worries about the welfare of his fellow men."



Adelbert von Chamisso  
(picture wikipedia)

**"An inspiring and instructive..."**

continued from page 15

The students came to the conclusion that such values and behaviours are still important today.

The literary scholar *Winfried Freund* emphasizes the up-to-dateness of this novella. He points to the individual psychology of *Alfred Adler* in connection with *Schlemihl*.<sup>2</sup> Freund writes that at the beginning of the novella *Schlemihl* is ridden by selfish striving for recognition, then, because of his experience, his awareness of the sense of community is growing. He cites Adler:

"Man is an extraordinarily receptive basis for feelings of inferiority of all kinds. At the moment, there occurs a feeling of inferiority, the process of his mental life, the turmoil that seeks to strike a balance, that requires security and integrity actually begins."<sup>3</sup> A further quote is this: "We can not judge an individual except by comparing his whole attitude, his thoughts and actions to his sense of community. This attitude is given to us, because every individual's position in human society requires a deep sense of the inter-relatedness of life."<sup>4</sup>

According to Freund, *Schlemihl* reaches self-knowledge, insight into the social nature of man. In the second part of the novella it becomes clear that it is not money but the acting related to the community, that has priority. From his mistakes *Schlemihl* draws the conclusion to serve the human society with his research.

In Adler, we read:

"... If we are aware that it is possible, through enhanced self-knowledge, to behave more appropriately, it is also possible to interact with others, especially children, successfully and to prevent their fate becoming a blind fate ... If we achieve that, then the culture of humanity will have taken a major step forward, and there will be the chance that a generation grows up that is aware of being able to master their own destiny."<sup>5</sup>

A student commented on *Schlemihl*'s development: "It was not only negative that *Schlemihl* had no shadow. As a result, he found his heart and learned to appreciate the important characteristics of human beings."

Another student writes about the importance of the "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" (social interest) in this novella:

"The novella shows that social interest and supporting the community gives fulfillment and makes oneself happy. Only thus a society can work. If everyone thinks only of his own good, if everyone is related only to himself, then it's a terrible world full of hatred and envy. However, it is nice to see others happy, to know that you have done something good even though it is only a small deed. If there are such facilities like the hospital in the novella, which was founded by Bendel and Mina, then there will also be more solidarity, because you want to help each other."

I compiled small texts on Chamisso's life, so that the students could discover parallels between Chamisso and Peter *Schlemihl* in the novella. Here are just a few aspects of Chamisso's eventful, varied life:

Adelbert von Chamisso (1781-1838) was born into an aristocratic family in a castle in France. The family was forced to flee during the French Revolution. At the age of 14, he moved to Berlin. Chamisso suffered from an anti-French atmosphere in Berlin, although he had found good friends. During visits to France he also felt excluded. In 1811 he lived for a while as a guest of *Madame de Staël*, who had fled from *Napoleon* from France to Switzerland. There he developed his passion for botany.

After having returned to Berlin in 1813 he did not go to war against Napoleon. As he wrote he did not want to burn down anything and to massacre anyone. Who told him that "the peoples did not lead the dispute of the kings, but that the kings led the dispute of the peoples".<sup>6</sup>

Thus Chamisso spent several months in the Brandenburg village *Kunersdorf* in the *Oderbruch*. The family of the State Council *Itzenpliz*, who was known as an excellent farmer, and the cosmopolitan Brandenburg nobles welcomed the impoverished French guest. Chamisso dealt with botany and made himself useful on the estates of his hosts. During the leisure hours he wrote "The wonderful history of Peter *Schlemihl*". After the defeat of Napoleon, he returned to Berlin and worked on his scientific studies. He read Rousseau, in whose writings he saw his ideal realised:

"As a citizen, I want to be known only by a few, but loved by a few."<sup>7</sup> In 1814 he wrote in a letter, "I decided to devote myself to the study of nature as soon as I realised that here (Berlin) I was a stranger, there (France) I was excluded from public life because of my hatred towards tyranny."<sup>8</sup>

For Chamisso it became difficult again, as Napoleon returned from Elba in March 1815 and the mobilisation of the Prussian army was carried out. In this situation, he applied for the participation in a Russian expedition to explore the Arctic Sea as a natural scientist. For him this expedition became a three-year research trip around the world.

Answering the question which parallels become clear between the author and the figure Chamisso *Schlemihl* one student wrote:

"Even though *Schlemihl* searches only for wealth and recognition in the rich society at first, he finds the truth about happiness in the end. *Schlemihl* is interested in botany like Chamisso and deals with it until his death. Also, both wore a black Kurtka. In the end, they both are of the same opinion of what is important in life: to have a dream, to look for a task and to support society. They both know that some things destroy society, the compulsion to wealth and good status, and that wars are not the right way to solve problems."

I think that dealing with the life of Adelbert von Chamisso and his work is worthwhile in many ways. Living out the values he teaches in his work is also necessary today. It is a pleasure again and again to discuss these important issues with students in German lessons. •

<sup>1</sup> Adelbert von Chamisso. *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte. (Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story)* Frankfurt am Main 2012, S. 23

<sup>2</sup> Winfried Freund. *Chamisso, Peter Schlemihl, Geld und Geist. (Chamisso, Peter Schlemihl, Money and Spirit)* Paderborn 1980

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Adler. "Menschenkenntnis". (Understanding Human Nature), Cited in Freund, *ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 86

<sup>6</sup> Werner Feudel, *Adelbert von Chamisso*, Leipzig 1988, p. 69

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 87

(Translation *Current Concerns*)