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The Plight of Democracy in the Cell Phone State (Prof. Karl  
Richter)  
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Old age is the time of remembering—before forgetfulness sets in. At my age of 73 years, I can remember the war and postwar period quite well. Sometimes we had to retreat to the basement, but in the end we were dispossessed and deported. It still hurts, but I can rationalize it as an effect of war. However, it strikes me as downright spooky when in the wake of current cell phone politics I see similar things happening more and more often in times of peace: people live in basements or trailers; they feel forced to leave their homes; their property is devalued to the point of not being able to sell it anymore. After the experience of a dictatorship, I have treasured the implementation of democracy as a precious gift. More often than not, I feel compelled today to ask our leading politicians: What have you done with this gift?

**From Citizen Democracy to Corporate Dictatorship**

For more than a decade now, I have become very interested in the effects electromagnetic fields have on the entire biology of life. But within a short time, I also developed a keen interest in the consequences of wireless technologies on democracy. The Federal State of Saarland, in which I live, felt called to be a “model state for wireless communication technologies” and thus provided me with sufficiently worrisome evidence in my region over the years. Through my involvement with a conference and its proceedings on *Wireless Technologies, Humanity and Rights* published by the Austrian Institute for Human Rights in 2006, I came across a multitude of ideas that allowed me to generalize my critical observations even more. Now I also see them in a wider historical context.

Modern democracy and the European Convention on Human Rights are based on the European Enlightenment, the American Declaration of Human Rights of 1776 as well as the French Revolution of 1789. Together these events made the idea of natural human rights and the message of liberty, equality, and fraternity also the basis of democracy. In the course of implementing cell phone and other wireless communication technologies, ruling governments and corporations have significantly restricted these historic achievements for more and more people. Nominally free citizens are forced to live at transmitter

distances, which are irresponsible when taking a frank look at the current body of scientific evidence. In place of fraternity, we now have people inflicting inhumane treatment on other people. The equal treatment of all citizens is basically mocked each time when noninvolved third parties have to pay a high price for the profits of profiteers in the form of:

Health problems that mainstream medicine usually is unable to properly classify or treat;  
High financial costs that occur during the subsequent, trial-and-error search for a therapy;  
Expensive attempts to protect oneself;  
Devaluation of properties;  
Difficult to calculate long-term risks for which none of those responsible in industry, politics, and science—who keep assuring citizens of the safety of wireless technologies—intend to assume liability.

All of this has nothing to do with a democratic market economy but everything with capitalist exploitation in its purest form. The latter has turned citizens, who originally were meant to be the actual subject of democracy, into objects and victims of commercial interests and government-run test trials, thereby reducing them to a commodity. This, however, not only exacts a high price for health and properties but also a high social price.

### **Possibilities and Boundary Experiences of Scientists and Physicians**

I quickly outlined the path of my critical analysis above. Yet criticism only makes sense if we expand our thinking to include the possible changes of the situation criticized. This is also a kind of accountability report as I try finding answers to the questions that one after another have become important to me, and that also complement each other.

Some of you may remember that the founding of the Competence Initiative was preceded by an appeal that called for clarifying the risks of wireless technologies prior to their implementation on the occasion of the WiMAX frequency auction. From the Federal Ministry of Environment, we received the classic reply, which activist groups also keep hearing over and over again, that they are unaware of any serious risks, and thus there is no reason to doubt the validity of the current exposure limits. Subsequently, we founded the "Competence Initiative for the Protection of Humanity, Environment and Democracy" with the goal to counter this level of information illiteracy. But at the

same time, we also intended to place citizen resistance on a better footing.

The brochure series *Effects of Wireless Communication Technologies* (<http://broschuerenreihe.net/britannien-uk>) by the Competence Initiative has made findings of independent research available that specifically cover areas that remarkably had been omitted by the German Mobile Telecommunication Research Programme—probably to avoid any complications with their later endorsements of safety. The first brochure in the series called *Bees, Birds and Mankind—Destroying Nature by Electrosmog* (2007) explored the question concerning effects of electromagnetic fields not only with regard to human health, but also to the entire biophysical reality of nature.

The second brochure dealt with the *Risk and Damage Caused by Cell Phone Radiation in Children* (2008). Brochure number three asked: *How Susceptible Are Genes to Mobile Phone Radiation?* (2008). The issue of exposure limits covered in brochure number four will be discussed further below.

However, when I read a current note from the Federal Ministry of Environment, which reached me via an indirect route, I must ask myself what our politicians still do not get. I refer to a reply of the Federal Ministry of Environment from September 6, 2010, to a Federal Member of Parliament of the SPD, which had been passed on to me. A ministry official refers to the planned revision and review of the safety code (26th Federal Immission Control Act) and promises that “currently available scientific findings” will be considered when reviewing the exposure limits. But at the same time, she points out “that right now there are no scientific findings that would challenge the currently valid exposure limits.” Somehow all the efforts of independent research teams the world over have not been able to penetrate the ignorance and arrogance of the usual exposure limit politics—as if the many worrisome findings documented in numerous studies by international research teams did not exist.

### **From Scientific to Legal Projects**

We made exposure limits the subject of the fourth brochure *Why Exposure Limits Cause Harm, Not Protection—Yet Are Kept in Place*, and for the first time we also included a lawyer in our eight-person author team with Prof. Kniep. All the articles in this brochure show from perspectives that complement each other why the exposure limits are a political and scientific scandal of extraordinary proportions. To

share only a few of the most important arguments:

To solely base the physical definition of exposure limits on the degree of energy absorption contradicts the modern life science definitions of human life.

The hypothesis that only thermal effects are capable of causing damage is untenable according to the current body of science.

The duration of the effect, which also is of utmost importance in other environmental risks, is not considered.

Unlike what is often claimed by officials, there are serious effect mechanisms concerning how damage occurs, which are known and verifiable.

As a lawyer, Prof. Kniep states clearly: The exposure limits, which were meant to ensure the right of prevention, have basically become a tool in the hands of the government to suppress this very right. In his line of argumentation, Kniep also refers to the less often quoted article 20a of the German constitution: "Mindful also of its responsibility toward future generations, the state shall protect the natural foundations of life and animals ... within the framework of the constitutional order." This makes "the responsibility of all government bodies for the future" a "goal of the government"—which the government does not fulfill at all with its wireless technology policies. The lawyer recommends taking legal action.

A crucial factor in this damage to democracy involves the courts' acceptance of the exposure limits, which drastically restricts the checks and balances among legislative, executive, and judicial powers, which are constitutive for any functioning democracy. Factual violations of the spirit and letter of the European Convention of Human Rights and embedding them in the German constitution are the logical consequence, which I explain in my own article in this brochure.

Article 1 of the German constitution states: "Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union reads similarly. How does such a provision go together with policies that classify sensitives as fakes and expect from an increasing number of people—that for the sake of commercial interests—they will live in basements, trailers, and wear protective clothing, and will (of necessity) give up their apartments and houses more and more often?

To also protect the weak and the more sensitive people is a special

quality and feature of any democracy. In the case presented here, the government uses its "experts" to certify that a steadily increasing minority of electrosensitive people must not exist—or at least should not exist. Even politicians like to invoke the protection of their privacy, family, and own "four walls." What happens to this protection when an undesirable and, according to independent research, hazardous radiation is allowed to reach anywhere in your home at any time? We have a nuisance law that is issued to protect neighbors from each other's nuisances. In light of this law's stipulations, is it not perverse in the extreme when everybody is permitted to rent out his or her roof to have a cell antenna installed whose main radiation exposure the neighbors have to cope with?

The mission of democracy includes the protection of property (German constitution article 14). The devaluation, which is a direct result of being located close to a cell tower, can reach the point where the property cannot be sold anymore, which is basically the same as being dispossessed.

Already this July, I met with a group of lawyers and especially hard-hit individuals at Stuttgart in order to discuss possibilities and terms of legal actions. We are especially interested in the strategy of an already well-prepared and newly established class action suit before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

But two other avenues via criminal proceedings are also being explored. Prof. Kniep suggested the approach of a declaratory judgment, which would focus on exposure limits and how they are set.

### **For Democratic Resistance**

A few years ago when I had presented "From Citizen Democracy to Corporate Dictatorship" at a conference of the Swiss organization Gigahertz in Olten, a participant asked me the following question during the subsequent discussion: "Herr Richter, have we not already watched this development for far too long? Is it not high time to establish civilian armed forces of at least 5,000 persons who could march through the country and cut down one cell tower after another?"

I told him that I could understand when an injured person may conceive such visions. But I also told him that, in my opinion, this would be a wrong approach. A number of years ago, I committed myself to an explicitly democratic, that is, nonviolent resistance in a "Charter of Critical Citizens."

Although more than ever before, I am convinced that we will not make any progress without this kind of resistance, and that we need to trust

that we can inspire many more citizens to muster the necessary resistance for the sake of health, the environment, and democracy.

The arrogance and self-confidence of the authorities, which we currently face in many areas, are helping us. The ability to voice criticism, solidarity, and courage are three basic virtues of citizens we need for organizing the democratic resistance—the people of Stuttgart are showing us how it is done right now. Anybody who takes up the challenge will be richly rewarded: he or she will again experience what it means to be the subject of democracy—as was originally intended by the concept of democracy!

I had given the book *Commerce, Health and Democratic Culture* the tagline: “A Case for a Living Democracy: Citizens Lead with Ideas, Governments Think Again!” I think this motto is more relevant today than ever. And there is another motto with which we started off the founding document of the Competence Initiative. It is based on a statement by the Swiss poet Friedrich Dürrenmatt who notes about the 21 points in his drama *The Physicists*: “What concerns all of us can only be solved by all of us.” We have expanded on his statement and updated the thought: “He is correct: The attempt of government and industry by joining forces to push through those things as that concern all of us counts among the greatest threats of the present and future!”

Dr. Karl Richter

Prof. Dr. phil. Karl Richter is a retired professor of Modern German Literary Studies at the University of Saarland. Among his research interests, interdisciplinary projects on the relationship between liberal arts and natural sciences and their respective histories have been his trademark for decades. He is initiator of the Competence Initiative for the Protection of Humanity, Environment and Democracy ([www.kompetenzinitiative.net](http://www.kompetenzinitiative.net)) and today serves as its first chair.