

## Summary

### *„Ein neuer Gesellschaftsvertrag zur Bewahrung der Erde vor den Folgen ungezügelter Zivilisation: Rousseau als Gedankenstifter im 21. Jahrhundert?“*

by Jörn Sack

In 2011, the German Federal Government's Advisory Board for Global Environment Changes presented an expert opinion which tries to pave the way for keeping the global warming definitively within a limit of 2°C. To remain under this threshold is considered to be tolerable because its consequences could still be mastered by the united skills of mankind. To that end, the experts established an ambitious programme for the coming decades, covering a wide range of political, economic and technical measures at local, regional and global level ("decarbonisation without recourse to atomic energy"). The aim is to replace all traditional sources of energy production by renewable ones. The board members consider that to achieve it requires the conclusion of a new social contract by mankind. They also refer to other terms launched in the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, i.e. the famous *volonté générale*, and assume that we are globally close to reaching it with regard to the aim pursued. They turn the slogan "Back to Nature", ascribed to Rousseau, into a new direction: Forward to Nature!

The article examines whether the references are only semantic ones, or whether Rousseau's ideas and legal and ethical principles are still able to inspire the creation of a new world order based on sustainable growth controlled by reliable UN institutions. The conclusion is that Rousseau's thinking was focused on the best possible running of small scale states (the ideal state for him was the Greek polis). Thus it cannot be transferred to large international entities and bodies which are by their very nature not constituted democratically. Consequently, the laudable "Great Transformation" plan, like the European Union (which is often quoted as a model), will remain a project devised and promulgated by an élite of experts, without real popular support, and as such its realisation remains extremely uncertain.