

Summary of the analyses on the website www.mon-mies.ch

To merge or not to merge the 8 municipal districts (*communes*) of Bogis-Bossey, Chavannes-de-Bogis, Chavannes-des-Bois, Commugny, Coppet, Founex, Mies, Tannay into a single administrative unit

Note: as a foreigner you are eligible to vote if you have resided for at least 10 years in Switzerland and 3 years in the Canton de Vaud, and if you reside in one of the 8 municipal districts.

The reasons why this project was proposed

According to our municipal leaders, the administrative duties have become so complex that only paid professionals – be they elected or appointed – can stay on top of their tasks. The fun of performing volunteer work in the communes has mostly gone, because the latter now only control 20-30% of their budget. The lion share goes to the Etat de Vaud. Merging the communes would allow streamlining the tasks at hand and performing more ambitious projects that can currently not be undertaken by a single commune alone. The communes of Terre Sainte share a common destiny, similar political views and a common economy. The Etat de Vaud as well as officials of the Nyon region mandate an increase in population that has also to be absorbed in the Terre Sainte area. This means that all village centres, and the surroundings of railway stations and connecting roads will see a hefty growth in buildings and increased building heights. Only a large municipal district as will result from merging the 8 communes will be able to dictate the required painful changes, and to stand up to Nyon and Lausanne.

Milestones

In 2006 a survey of the populations of Mies, Tannay and Chavannes-des-Bois indicated that Mies was not willing to merge with Tannay and Chavannes-des-Bois. Furthermore, there were as many YES and NO votes on considering a merge with other communes of Terre Sainte. There was no statistically significant difference between various types of collaborations, a merge being no more popular than a more loose union. Nevertheless, the municipal leaders decided to extend the project by proposing a merge of 9 communes including Crans.

In 2008 a new survey was conducted which showed that Crans was not at all willing to be included in this process. Only half the inhabitants of Mies, Coppet and Founex would have agreed with a merge. In fact in all communes of more than 1'000 inhabitants – Mies included – the preferred form of collaboration was not a merge but a loose union. Nevertheless, the municipal leaders decided to elaborate a project leading to a merge of 8 communes. The decision was promoted by a too optimistic reading of study reports written by COMPAS/idheap.

In 2009 the municipal leaders started what they called “l'étude opérationnelle” in order to translate their strategic thinking into concrete actions. The highlight was the signing of a report for defining what is called “La Convention de Fusion” in June 2010. This document summarizes on a few pages the main principles underlying the merge of 8 communes of Terre Sainte into a new large commune called *Terre-Sainte*. This document will be submitted to a vote by the “Conseillers communaux” (the legislative body of the communes) on August 30 2010. The legislative body is pushed to vote YES, as a negative vote of only one commune would halt the process and require a new project for merging the remaining 7 communes.

Specific factors that favour a merge

The will to merge is strongly enhanced in small communes of less than 1'000 inhabitants that are not satisfied with their situation. This tendency cannot be found in communes with more than 1'000 inhabitants. The Etat de Vaud encourages the merges, because it aims at reducing the number of communes it has to deal with. Currently the Etat de Vaud must deal with about 365 communes. Of these 270 have fewer inhabitants than Mies. One would think that at least 200 communes with 50 to 500 inhabitants would be prior candidates for a merge. Merging communes of more than 1'000 inhabitants would not seem to make sense unless there were other factors involved that have pushed the municipal leaders to propose such a merge.

Although most inhabitants in Terre Sainte are satisfied with their situation, many of their municipal leaders are not satisfied at all. The mostly volunteer members of the executive body are overworked and frustrated by the overload of documents that rain down on them from the Etat de Vaud, the district officials, the various associations (26 in Mies), and the inhabitants, not to speak of the increasing workload resulting from lawsuits. Simultaneously the Etat de Vaud shifts various tasks to the communes such that the freely disposable funds have shrunk to a minor share of the budget. The municipal leaders therefore think that elected officials should be paid and work full time, shift part of the workload to paid professionals and experts, and devote their time and energy to more ambitious projects.

Another key factor regards the management of the area of jurisdiction (“aménagement du territoire”). A merge would overwhelm or dilute local opposition to a project (say a new parking lot or multi-floor buildings), since far away inhabitants would notice only the project's advantages without having to endure its drawbacks. This factor becomes all the more important when local leaders have a profound professional or financial interest in construction and real estate.

Geography

The merge of 8 communes of Terre Sainte would result in a large commune of 25.9 km². Its 13'895 inhabitants would be spread out over 8 villages at distances ranging from 1 to 5 km. In comparison, the communes of Gland, la Tour-de-Peilz, Morges, Nyon, Prilly and Renens have an average area of 4.57 km². Their mean population of 15'270 inhabitants is similar to that of *Terre-Sainte*, yet people live within several hundred meters of each other. The geographic spread of *Terre-Sainte* would impose severe constraints on the required number and location of common buildings and equipment.

Finances

A merge results in throwing all assets and debts into a common pot. Mies is fortunate to have the largest assets in Terre Sainte, but would have to lose these assets while inheriting a mountain of debt. In addition, income taxes would increase by 8 percentage points relative to the taxes paid over the last 5 years. Without a merge, the income tax in Mies would be around 55 to 57%. Coppet and Bogis-Bossey will also be submitted to an increase in income tax, while Founex and Commugny will pay less.

These numbers are based on an income tax of 63% for *Terre-Sainte* in 2012, on the mean income tax percentage points of the communes over the past 5 years, and on the assumption that income taxes will not increase after 2012. Should these increase, most inhabitants of Terre-Sainte would pay more tax than in the past 5 years. Most likely this will indeed happen, because the mean income tax (in points) of communes of this size is around 70%, and additional funds will be needed to pay for a new administration building in Coppet, new

experts with their staff, and full time elected officials. In view of the particular geography, and the pledge not to dismiss current employees, savings appear unlikely in this merge.

Finally, a merge will also result in an adjustment of the real estate taxes. Mies, Founex and Bogis-Bossey would pay 25% more real estate tax, while Coppet, Commugny, Tannay, Chavannes-des-Bois and Chavannes-de-Bogis would pay 3% to 25% less.

Territorial management

This key point has not been the subject of the meetings of the legislative bodies. Public availability of such information is therefore limited. A rare source is a document released to the public in 2010 called Plan Directeur de la Région Nyon (PDRN). The PDRN describes important subjects that will be developed in the Nyon region that also includes Terre Sainte, specifically concerning road traffic, public transport, real estate, population growth, and so on. A plan for Terre Sainte also exists (called PDTS) but is not officially available. Neither document will be finalized before November. Moreover, the “Convention de Fusion” - in its article 22.a – does not mention anything on territorial management, meaning that the population will vote without definite knowledge of what a merger will entail on this key point.

Thus, the fundamental question remains: what will happen with the territory in Terre Sainte? The documents coming from the Swiss Confederation, the Etat de Vaud and the Nyon regional officials are quite clear: there will not be any expansion of the “zones villa”, the areas where private homes can be built – merge or no merge. Agricultural land will remain agricultural land, with one exception. Land around railway stations may be converted (“déclassés”) to allow for the construction of multi-family buildings for example, a process called a densification. An increase in the number of inhabitants is a basic tenet that is not under discussion. This all means that densification will occur in the vertical direction, implying that buildings may have 3, 4, 5 or more floors. The limit is not known.

What changes will be brought about by a merge in this context of evolving reports? One fundamental change would be the loss of all autonomy of the actual communes which for the time being exert full control over the densification in their neighbourhoods, and thus over the quality of life of their inhabitants. Decisions will be taken for the overall good, not for the good of any particular village or neighbourhood. The potential huge development around the railway station of Coppet is a good example. The municipal council and the legislative body of a new commune of *Terre-Sainte* would undoubtedly approve this development. Local opposition would be overwhelmed by the vote from council members living in far away villages.

A merge would also lead to the creation of a real estate foundation (“Société immobilière”, SI) that would supposedly help in a better management of swaps of building lots, as already proposed for Nyon. Initially these SI would be owned by the commune, but later entry of private investors or speculators is not excluded. Expropriations for facilitating such swaps are also proposed in the PDRN.

Merge, existing associations, and main concerns of the inhabitants

Mies participates in 26 associations that are vitally important for the lives of its inhabitants. These are involved in areas as varied as police, fire department, schools, or water, for example. Networks of associated communes vary greatly, some even include communes in France. Associations have occasionally irritated the municipal leaders because of their

complicated and varied structure, non anticipated funding requests, and multiple meetings these leaders have to attend. A merge is supposed to streamline the management of these associations. Alternatively, one or two additional municipal leaders could devote their energy to assist the Syndic in managing the inter-communal relationships should there be no merge.

At this time the main concerns of the inhabitants of Terre Sainte are two-fold: 1) public safety; and 2) public transport. A merge would add little to public safety, but may help officials of the Nyon region in streamlining public transport. The PDRN proposes that Coppet will be the hub for road-rail traffic in Terre Sainte. A merge would force this concept on a reluctant Coppet for the overall good of *Terre-Sainte*. The PDRN also proposes a network of minibuses that would ferry groups of inhabitants to Coppet. The Nyon region officials would be in a good position to deal with France over diverting road traffic from Divonne away from Terre Sainte. A merge would not have much effect on such negotiations that must necessarily be conducted at a higher level.

The look of a commune of *Terre-Sainte*

The proposed political leadership is quite clear. There would be 100 members (“conseillers communaux”) of the legislative body. The executive branch would have 9 members (“conseillers municipaux”) including one Syndic (chief executive). Mies would have 11 to 12 representatives in the legislative body and 1 in the executive branch. Professionals (“les experts”) would direct our daily lives. The main administration building would be in Coppet. Small offices would survive in all villages. The political weight of Terre-Sainte in Lausanne would be as great as that of Nyon. However, the political weight of Mies in *Terre-Sainte* would be very modest if not negligible. The Syndic would come from the commune with the largest population, thus certainly not from Mies or Tannay. Political parties would enter *Terre-Sainte* politics as is the case for almost all communes of more than 10’000 inhabitants. Inhabitants would have to travel to Coppet and possibly any of the small village offices to obtain administrative services.

As mentioned, village centres and areas surrounding railway stations and possibly also those surrounding roads connecting the villages would be subjected to population growth. Construction will add new floors to existing buildings, new multi-family buildings, office buildings, stores and workshops. Perhaps the southern area of Gland provides a look into the future of *Terre-Sainte*.

In spite of all efforts to alleviate traffic in the Terre Sainte region, travellers will be faced with the same problems. Indeed, any improvements will be quickly compensated by increased population growth. For those living in Mies and Tannay and working in Geneva, the merge will not add new opportunities in public transport.

As regards the environment, the PDRN proposes interesting solutions for maintaining biodiversity and reducing energy needs in Terre Sainte. Their proposals could be considered with or without a merge.

Alternative solutions to a merge of 8 communes

The survey conducted by COMPAS/idheap in 2008 has well defined the groups of communes that would like to live with each other. There was no consensus for a merge of the 8 communes. However, several strong partnerships emerged: 1) Mies and Tannay; 2) Bogis-Bossey and Chavannes-de-Bogis; 3) Coppet, Commugny and Founex. As for Chavannes-des-

Bois, it was as likely to join any of the first two partnerships. Thus mini-merges appear to be more realistic than a super-merge.

Another way for solving the current administrative problems – without a merge - would be to increase the number of members in the executive branch. The workload and exhaustion would be diminished. One of the additional members – acting as a “secretary of foreign affairs” could assist the Syndic in managing the inter-communal negotiations.

Summary of the arguments for and against a merge of 8 communes

The people of Terre Sainte who should have voted on the merge on November 28 2010 would have had two choices. By voting YES on the merge, they would have been assured to be governed by efficient professionals, experts and elected officials working full time and paid accordingly. There would be no lack of candidates for the executive branch, and ambitious projects would be more readily proposed and performed.

By voting YES, however, the price to pay would have been steep for all communes involved. They would lose all their autonomy in decisions affecting their immediate living environment. Citizens performing volunteer work in various associations and in the legislative body would lose part of their motivation. A close relationship between citizens and their government is one important condition for a good administration. A merge would necessarily create a distance, territorial management being one of its first victims. By taking somewhat extreme examples, the choice of the future of Terre Sainte will be: Gland-Sud or Céligny? The thought that a merge would make local intrigues less likely is wishful thinking. A merge would simply replace local intrigues that are known to everybody by distant intrigues that will remain unknown. That a merge would reduce the administrative costs is equally wishful thinking for reasons outlined below.

For certain communes (in particular Mies and Coppet) income taxes would have substantially increased relative to the past 5 years, even assuming that the future financial burden remained the same.* In view of the projected additional expenses and of the impossibility in saving on salaried positions, income tax would increase even more in the long term for Mies and Coppet and increase also for other communes. By merging, Mies – with its highest net and gross worth of the region – would pay the debts of others and lose important assets. The new apartment buildings at the Sorbier – built to accommodate young and not so young people from Mies – would be turned over to *Terre-Sainte*. The modern new dump (already voted for by the commune of Mies) that was to be accessed only by people from Mies, would also be turned over to *Terre-Sainte*. Thus people from many communes would use this dump, adding traffic on the narrow road that provides access to the School, the apartment buildings of the Sorbier, and the tennis courts. Coppet would also pay a hefty price by becoming a road and rail traffic hub while losing control over its own development.**

* Interestingly, Mies recently voted to reduce the tax rate to 50 points for 2011 from 65 points in 2010 and 55 points in 2009. A 6 point drop was expected since 6 points are added to the State tax. This means that the effective rate is 7 points lower in 2011 (and probably beyond) than the 63 points expected if Mies had been merged, and corresponds to an effective increase of 1 point relative to 2009.

** A large proportion of voters (nearly 30%) of Coppet recently successfully submitted a popular initiative requesting to scale back projected huge developments and building complexes around the Coppet railway station and in front of the Château de Coppet.

Outlook for 2011

As is now well known, the Conseil communal of Founex voted NO on August 30th 2010, preventing any vote of the inhabitants on November 28 2010. The reason was that all communes should have voted YES in order for a popular vote to take place. Although one member of the conseil communal of Founex raised an official objection to the vote, and this objection was sustained by the Conseil d'Etat of Vaud, the time table can no longer be maintained for an official merge by 2012.

A new vote by all candidates for a merge of 8 communes is unlikely in the near future, as Founex and possibly also Coppet would probably vote NO. Moreover, the inhabitants of Founex, and probably also Coppet may vote NO if given a chance to vote. A popular vote in Mies would be close.

What are the alternative solutions to this maxi-merge? The survey of 2008 clearly showed that groups of communes of Terre Sainte may well work together by creating mini-merges. This approach appears to be a more realistic solution than the proposed maxi-merge. The survey also showed that a maxi-merge was clearly less popular than a better management of regional affairs via better inter-communal ties. To be concrete, this survey implies that increasing the size of the executive branch would also be a solution even though no merge was involved. One of its members should be involved in inter-communal management to face this challenge.

New elections are approaching soon

Interested persons should contact their County Office between January 17 and January 24, 2011 to have their name placed on a list of candidates for the Conseil Communal and the Conseil Municipal. A meeting aimed at explaining the upcoming vote is organized in Mies on Wednesday January 12, 2011 at the Maison de la Commune. The first round of the vote will take place on March 13, 2011. If elected, you will serve from July 1st 2011 to June 30th 2016.

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