

Alexander Lerchl runs amok

Franz Adlkofer

Alexander Lerchl wrote an open letter to Niels Kuster, co-author of the EU-funded REFLEX study, in which he repeats his allegation that the REFLEX results are based on forgery [1]. Of course, there are special reasons for his new attack. Recently, a German district court in Hamburg decided in a suit filed by Franz Adlkofer against the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) that the results of the REFLEX study must be regarded as being confirmed by a series of other studies (Az.: 324 O 255/12). That the SZ got involved at all has to be attributed solely to Lerchl, who supplied the newspaper with unfounded information. And it was the SZ's mistake to join Lerchl's German-wide media campaign against the REFLEX study in 2011 without having checked the truth of his statements. Now, Lerchl's new attack that prompted Niels Kuster to confirm the successful reproduction of the REFLEX data once again comes close to running amok. Whether his frantic handling of the matter can convince the SZ to strive for a revision of the court decision, remains to be seen. This is the story behind:

In mid-2007, at that time already known as the telecommunication industry's lobbyist for science, Lerchl in an apparently concerted action informed the rector of the Medical University of Vienna (MUV), Wolfgang Schütz, about his suspicion that the REFLEX results obtained at the MUV might have been fabricated. Misusing his position and probably in agreement with the Austrian telecommunication industry, Schütz did not shy away from having Lerchl's suspicion confirmed in a pseudo-investigation. Quite obvious, both gentlemen worked at withdrawing the results of the REFLEX study from the scientific literature, and they accepted as well that the scientific reputation of the responsible researchers would be destroyed. The REFLEX findings were not only in sharp opposition to the interests of the telecommunication industry, but they were also the basis of another research application to the EU Commission. The application, which had received high scores from the reviewers and had been recommended for funding, was obviously a special threat to the industry. That was most probably the main reason why Lerchl was called in, so that he – supported by Schütz – settles the problem. And so he did.

Three years after the REFLEX study was finished Lerchl invented the story of a scientific misconduct at MUV. The intrigues he and Schütz then applied to reach their goal have been described in detail [2,3]. It took indeed a while until the editors of the two scientific journals, which had published the REFLEX data, recognized that they had been chosen to execute the wishes of the telecommunication industry. At the end, however, they relied more on their own judgment and on the trustworthiness of the authors and, thus, rejected the withdrawal demanded by Lerchl and Schütz. Lerchl's claim that they had failed as editors due to lack of competence did rather convince them to have decided correctly. His arguments, however, are completely unfounded. He establishes links that do not exist and imagines events that never took place. But above all, he hides the true motives, which made him use methods that do not comply at all with the ethics he is always keen to refer to. Evidence for this ruthless attitude is also provided by his most recent attacks on Lennart Hardell, who showed an increase of brain tumours in long-term users of mobile phones in his epidemiologic studies. Soon, we will report on this.

Next to Lerchl MUV's rector Wolfgang Schütz played a decisive role in the REFLEX affair. While Lerchl gave it a push with his suspicion of fraud, Schütz was intended to gather the pieces of evidence. Such a request does not seem to be exceptional for a university in Austria. In the summer of 2008, when the REFLEX affair reached its peak, the renowned scientific journal *Nature* made the following statement on research in regard of an incident at the Medical University of Innsbruck: "Austria is a small country, and networks between power-brokers are small and tight. But something, it seems, is rotten in the state of Austria, and it needs to be faced and dealt with openly." [4]

1. <http://www.izgmf.de/scripts/forum/index.php?id=52406>
2. http://www.pandora-foundation.eu/downloads/pandora_docu_vienna-i-and-ii-2011.pdf
3. <http://www.profil.at/articles/0826/560/210769/strahlenschmutz>
4. <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v454/n7207/full/454917b.html>