

# Swiss independence : between fiction and reality

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## Between Fiction and Reality

*The approaching EEC Domestic Market is animating the political scene in Switzerland – it is also enriching Switzerland's political vocabulary: The latest word to have been created is 'compatibility with Europe'. People are racking their brains to work out how one can retain ones independence whilst at the same time trying to fit as comfortably as possible into the framework of the EEC. The question being asked here is: How much of our independence can be saved anyway – with or without EEC membership?*

If our country was merely a 'production unit', then the case would probably be clear. The economic advantages of becoming a member of the EEC would be so predominant that – apart from the agricultural problem – no great debate would be necessary. A land, a nation, however, is a lot more than that. It has its own history, its languages, its cultures and its own very specific state structures. This is particularly true for Switzerland. She doesn't regularly call herself 'special case' for nothing.

### Three maxims, three obstacles

Three fundamental principles colour our state; three principles which are large obstacles when thinking towards Europe:

■ **Armed neutrality:** This is an integral part of the foundation roots of our history and is seen as a guarantor of our independence. The fear that this neutrality could be injured played a significant, if not a deciding role, prior to the referendum concerning UN membership. The (successful) motto was, rather 'out' but retaining neutrality.

The neutrality question is an even stronger one in connection with the EEC: Then the long term goal of the EEC is a political union with a common foreign policy. Assuming that Switzerland were to join the EEC: The autonomous sphere of pursuing a credible neutrality politics would dwindle into insignificance.

■ **Federalism:** Although our country is small, the capital remains distant for many of our inhabitants. One is suspicious of the work which is pursued 'up there' in Berne. One doesn't like it, if the Federal government allocates itself with more competency. However, a stronger rapprochement with the EEC or furthermore membership of the EEC would only increase this centralisation trend, because Switzerland would have to adopt EEC-law, for example in the areas of education, health and foreigner control – all these coming under cantonal jurisdiction at present.

■ **Direct democracy:** Sometimes it is impossible to ignore the groans about the many initiatives and referenda – especially

in political circles. These direct democracy instruments have nevertheless very important functions: They force the authorities to tackle difficult problems (initiatives), they prevent that legislature be passed, over the heads of the citizens (referenda). An EEC membership would make these functions redundant to a certain extent. The authors of the Federal Council's Integration Report of 20 September 1988 have made the following calculations: 126 (31 per cent) of the 410 laws and Federal decisions issued between 1973 and 1987 came under specific areas, which fall within the EEC field of competence. Were Switzerland an EEC member, then there would have been no referendum opportunity in these cases. Similarly six popular initiatives, which were launched during the same period, would not have been possible, as they would have impinged on EEC law.

### Some of our independence will be lost come what may.

The Federal Council does not want to undermine the three political maxims mentioned above – and this is the reason why it (and probably the majority of parliament) will not consider EEC membership. Then independence, neutrality, autonomy count for more than anything else. That is a very feasible attitude – however, a lot of illusion naturally accompanies the belief in our autonomous and independent future.



VAT soon in Switzerland too?

Already today legal editors do their utmost to make their texts conform to EEC-norms. The question of autonomy is at its most accentuated when considering heavy transport: How long will Switzerland withstand the EEC request to accept 40-ton lorries?

The public has voted no to value added tax on two occasions (1977 and 1979). This question is being brought out of mothballs yet again – not out of pleasure for this taxation form, rather for reasons of rapprochement.

Pressure to show adaptability is there, and it will increase with the growing integration of Europe. It is probably psychologically good for us Swiss to bravely defend our foundation pillars. Nevertheless we will have to admit, that these pillars will certainly not get any stronger.

Jürg Schoch,

Editor, Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich

## Swiss Culture and Europe

Over 50 years have elapsed since Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz flatly rejected the concept of a 'Swiss Culture' in the area of literature, which is supposedly primarily language-bound. At the same time his own particular world and more importantly, his language was being felt as foreign and strange in France.

It was not least due to the great successes in France of the French speaking Swiss films

which stirred the interest for the literature of this 'region'. Alain Tanner was a leading figure at this point in time. Godard was as loosely connected to Switzerland as were Giacometti, Le Corbusier, Cendrars, Max Frisch, Dürrenmatt, Tinguely, Max Bill. These names – albeit a limited but not an arbitrary selection – are on the one hand proof of how Swiss artists and authors have attained worldwide recognition. They also go