

Two ayes - one noe

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undertakings. The immediate consequences for Switzerland: bilateral agreements will be obsolete. Not only traffic and transport accords with EC states but also agreements on the employment of foreign workers (example: Italy) will be affected.

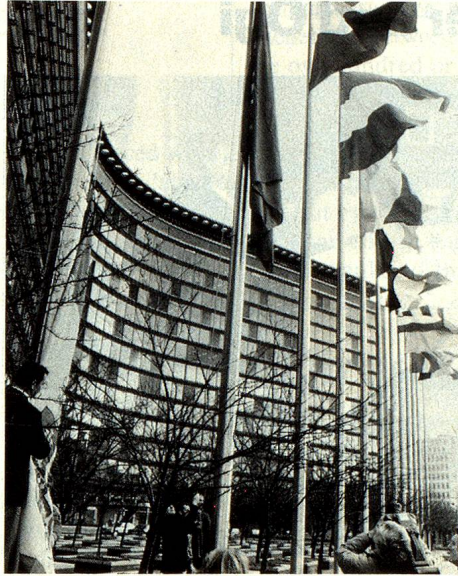
Indirect taxation of consumer goods is to be homogeneous. The EC Commission proposes to levy uniform taxes, expressed in ECUs on spirits, tobacco, wine and beer. The idea behind this: harmonisation of prices should do away with smuggling, by gentle means. Also the ECU (European Currency Unit), created in 1979, is to be transformed. It is no longer to be regarded merely as a unit of calculation but purely and simply as an instrument of payment within the EC area. Thus a monetary union would be created whereby unwelcome Swiss competition could be kept off the market by means of exchange-rate manipulations.

Entry unrealistic

Faced with this startling challenge, in 1984 the EFTA states expressed, in the Luxembourg Declaration, their idea of forming a homogeneous economic market area together with the European Community. However, Franz Blankart, Swiss Secretary of State and, as Head of the Federal Office for Foreign Economic Affairs, the *de facto* architect of trade policy, considered that Switzerland did not need intensified co-operation within EFTA as much as a new, and greatly heightened Europe-consciousness. Our country could no longer expect the EC to show consideration for Switzerland as a «special case» (in the countless cases), especially if, at the same time, in those few cases where the EC was unable to get along without us, concessions were also not to be made by Switzerland. In all seriousness, Switzerland is in danger of becoming «marginal», if not redundant. But EC membership is unrealistic («to believe that on a balmy May Sunday in this century the people and the cantons would vote to join the European Community is totally unrealistic» – speech of 28.10.87).

Switzerland should therefore not weaken its negotiating position in Brussels by the illusory prospect of joining, but must tread other practicable paths. For example, before Switzerland in future lays down new rules, it should enquire of the EC how the Community thinks about dealing with the problem. Through such «prior consultations», an «active integration policy» would be pursued, which would avoid subsequent discrimination.

«Should we however regard the Free Trade Agreement of 1973 as the conclusion of a



... but is hardly likely to move into the EC building in Brussels (photos: Keystone).

policy and look on the consolidation of the Community interestedly but inactively, or even with hauteur, then it might no longer be possible to withstand the economic and political pressures for autonomous reconstruction. This would mean a loss of independence greater than that which would have to be accepted on joining the Community – the very independence we have sought to maintain for ourselves by staying outside the EC.» Blankart, philosopher and pupil of Karl Jaspers, doubtless steers a pragmatic course in trade policy which, bearing in mind the limited possibilities open to domestic policy, seeks the best conditions available for mutual co-operation; this, to avoid a situation in which, in the newly-reconstructed Supermarket Europa, the Swiss Confederation can, at most, run a kiosk in a forsaken corner where it sells only those products the supermarket management allows it to.

Bruno Hofer

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On 6th December 1987 three important Federal issues were put to the Swiss people for decision by popular vote.

The Rothenthurm Initiative was only the ninth popular initiative to find favour with the electorate – the sovereign Swiss people – since the introduction of the Federal Constitutional Initiative in 1891. Acceptance, with 58% ayes, thus caused astonishment among the public. This initiative «for the protection of the moors» relates to a building ban in moorland countryside; in fact it is aimed directly against the Federal Military Department's weapons training ground on the high moor of Rothenthurm, canton of Schwyz. These planned military installations cannot now be built – at least to the extent originally envisaged. Commentators reporting on the result are agreed that, in accepting the initiative as they did, the voters intended not so much to rebuff the army as to lodge a clear avowal of the need for greater regard for nature conservation and the protection of the environment, even where military buildings are concerned.

«Bahn 2000» relates to a concept for the promotion of public transport. Both rail and road services are to be improved, step by step, by the year 2000: more frequent train and bus services, more through trains, better connections, shorter journey times and better service are the aims of Rail 2000. The concept, which has now been approved

by 57% of the people who voted on the issue, was disputed mainly because of the loss of land that the building of new railroad tracks would entail.

The voters reacted to a revision of the Federal law on health insurance with ill grace. The bill was rejected by 71.3% of the votes cast. The proposed revision was aimed at getting more control over the costs explosion in the health sector and it provided for the introduction of a percentage system (earnings-related contributions by employer and employee) as in the Swiss national insurance scheme (AHV), to finance maternity benefit. Business circles had seized on this proposal to oppose the referendum – with success, as it turned out.

JM

PLACEMENTS RENTES HYPOTHÈQUES

votre service en Suisse

Jean-Michel Honegger

Route de Lavaux 35

CH-1009 Lausanne

Téléphone 021/28 95 72

Rentenanstalt

