

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 17 (1990)
Heft: 2

Artikel: From the point of view of a Hungarian exile : Switzerland and the upheaval in Eastern Europe
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906845>

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Switzerland and the Upheaval in Eastern Europe

The revolution in Eastern Europe – peaceful, at all events to start with – the speeded-up political opening and liberalisation in the countries of Eastern Europe, right to the bloody events in Romania: all these happenings combine to make us look back on 1989 as a year of miracles.

After 33 years spent in Switzerland, I had never completely given up all hope of seeing a genuine democratic system arising in Hungary, the country of my birth, but it re-



Judit Garamvölgyi, born in Budapest in 1937, came to Switzerland after the uprising of 1956. She concluded her studies of history at the University of Berne, under Professor Walther Hofer. She is now herself a Professor of Contemporary History, and has a special interest in social and economic developments in Central and Eastern Europe.

mained for me a beautiful dream that would perhaps come true in the next millenium. Nevertheless, my generation, the generation of 1956, was privileged to see its actions historically vindicated at long last. Together with the Swiss public, we awaited in a fever of excited anticipation a happy outcome to the revolutionary transformation of the erstwhile Eastern "bloc". Distances shrank to almost vanishing point, and in Berlin at the end of the year, the walls of the "Cold War" toppled – not only physically. And we, Swiss citizens with Eastern European roots, felt that we had won a new and strengthened identity.

A wretched situation of the economy

Since those early days of euphoria, the harsh realities of everyday life have caught up with us – on both sides of what used to be the "Iron Curtain". Even Swiss domestic politics underwent convulsions leading al-

most to a crisis. And it has become clear that the path to democratic stability in Eastern Europe will be a thorny one. The political opening up in the East revealed the wretched state of the economy in all of the countries concerned: out-of-date and inefficient industries, combined with grave social and environmental problems, are not the best pre-requisites for a young democracy. No wonder that the present transitional governments are making mistakes, that rapidly introduced new democratic legislation does not function very smoothly, and that a struggle for future power is being conducted sometimes in an unsavoury manner. How can Poland and Hungary – to mention only the two countries with the greatest indebtedness – hope to pay the interest, or even effect repayments, on their mountains of borrowings, now approaching Latin-American proportions, while at the same time implementing fundamental reforms? How can the governments stave off grave social and national conflicts when faced with increasing poverty and the hitherto unknown phenomenon of unemployment? To these and many other questions no useful answers can be offered unless help is given by the West – including Switzerland.

Switzerland has much to offer

Internationally agreed financial assistance, to tide over the present crisis, can only constitute an initial step. Help will have to be provided in the form of know-how and capital to modernise industry, and measures will have to be taken to expand trade relations in a mutually advantageous manner. In these respects, I am convinced that Switzerland has plenty to offer. Her financial strength qualifies her for providing investments and credits for vocational training. Would it not be possible and useful for instance to demonstrate in "model" enterprises exemplary management techniques and time-tested forms of professional training in the technical and commercial fields?

A socially acceptable free market economy, as well as the creation of a parliamentary democracy, not only pre-supposes a recognition of jointly shared values, but also the establishment of well-planned and strong institutions, with professional managements in both State and municipalities, as well as in commerce and industry. These are sectors where Switzerland has most to offer,

and is capable of providing the best and most up-to-date assistance.

Democratisation means painstaking detailed work

The political system applied in the Swiss Confederation is very complicated and not always capable of leading to sufficiently quick decisions. Thus, it could not be simply "transplanted" for adoption in Eastern European countries, all the more so in view of the fact that it is precisely the states of Central and Eastern Europe that have had more than disastrous experiences in the past from slavishly copying foreign systems. But it is also precisely the Swiss system that contains so many elements which could have a beneficial effect in such a markedly international zone, after adjustment and modification in order to fit in with local traditions.

In this context, I am thinking about our federalism, the high degree of local autonomy, the arrangements for ensuring financial equilibrium between the cantonal and federal levels, as well as about the way our "direct democracy" operates, and how the problems of a multi-lingual nation are tackled. Would it not be feasible to offer study courses or seminars in which the work of municipal and rural councils, the administration and drafting of financial budgets, as well as the holding of elections and referendums, would be taught and learned, in theory and in practice? Delegations from the various national states could be shown how the linguistic problem are tackled in Switzerland in all Federal institutions, committees and administrative bodies, and how the national languages are taught in our

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schools. The associations of our teachers and educational authorities could furnish suggestions for the exchange of information about possibilities and problems arising in connection with the teaching of foreign languages to children at an early age.

These are just a few examples, taken more or less at random, and the list could easily be greatly increased. But in every case, the core of the matter is the same: democracy, as well as a free market economy, can only succeed if they are firmly anchored in well devised institutions. And to achieve this end, much painstaking detailed work will have to be undertaken, day after day. Switzerland is not a country devoid of problems, but she has in the course of a long historical process created effective institutions, and successfully tried out procedures that make it possible to know how to settle conflicts in a more or less peaceful manner. The experience thereby gained could prove beneficial to the new democracies now developing.

Strengthening the neutrals

Needless to say, one may wonder what interest Switzerland can have in participating in such relief activities. I am convinced that much more can be involved than merely the application of the so often invoked foreign policy maxim of solidarity. Only through an all-European relief and support campaign will it be possible to bring stability to Central and Eastern Europe – so often in the past a veritable “powder keg” – within the framework of a peaceful and democratic European society.

Thus the political and economical stabilisation of this zone is of importance to the fundamental interest of Switzerland in securing her own security. Moreover, most of the political parties in Hungary would like to see the issue of neutrality become a vital part of their programmes in respect of foreign affairs. And other countries would undoubtedly like to adhere to this same objective. In the light of future European integration, a numerically strengthened group of neutral states would be able to exert greater influence in the shaping of “things to come”. Likewise, the same considerations apply in connection with the European Economic Space (EES) which will be developing: the adhesion of new free market economies to EFTA could perhaps become an encouraging feature of the outlook. The initial aid “package” for Poland and Hungary, decided upon by the Federal Assembly in March of this year, is a step in the right direction, and one which for me brings deep personal contentment.

Judit Garamvölgyi

The index cards (“fiches”) in the Office of the Federal Attorney

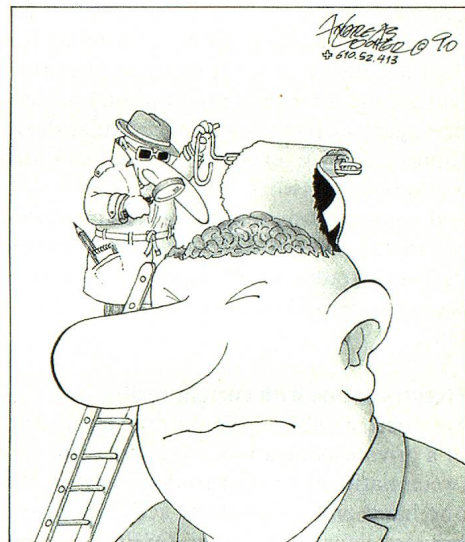
An unpleasant Affair – no State Crisis

Early in 1989 a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry (often referred to by the initials of its name in German, “PUK”) was appointed for investigating the events in the Federal Department of Justice and Police which led to the resignation of Elisabeth Kopp, the first woman to become a member of the Federal Council. In November 1989, the PUK issued its final report, which brought to light the fact that the Federal Police had for several decades maintained a card-index comprising “fiches” (personal index cards) and files in connection with hundreds of thousands of citizens.

It is indisputable that measures for the protection of the State and for an effective military intelligence service were of vital importance to Switzerland during the years of the “Cold War”. Even today, there can be no question of simply abolishing our preventive police forces, quite the reverse. There would in fact be less justification than ever for dispensing with a Federal Police Force operating within sensible limits, or an intelligence service, for counteracting terrorism, organised crime, violent extremism and espionage. After all, security for the State means protection of our country and of its individual inhabitants. But it should never be allowed to degenerate into spying on those individuals, or into ideological “snooping” as appears to have often been happening in this case until very recently.

Participation in an authorised demonstration or making a journey to behind the “Iron Curtain” were enough to result in an entry being added to one’s “fiche” – something that could mean severe prejudice to the interests of the person concerned (for instance when he or she is applying for a job or trying to rent an apartment, without such person having any knowledge whatsoever about the existence of a “fiche”).

When the PUK report disclosed these practices the security services and the political police came in for massive criticism, and an ever-increasing demand



(See also the “official Announcements” section of this issue.)

for every individual, irrespective of domicile and nationality to be entitled to see the contents of his or her “fiche”. Consequently, at the beginning of February 1990, the first applicants were allowed to inspect the index cards relating to them (if any). The widespread irritation caused by this rather amateurish craze for card-indexing affected the cantonal and in some cases, the municipal authorities too, who had set up their own documentation – from which many entries of a banal or incorrect nature had been drawn. In view of the insistent demand for a thorough cleaning-up of the files the Federal Council designated at the end of March a special Commissioner who will until the end of 1990 be responsible for examining and dealing with the 150000 requests already received, and those yet to come, for insight into personal “fiches”.

Such insight will be granted by the despatch of a photocopy of the relevant index cards to the applicants.

The Federal Military Departement (the EMD or DMF) will *itself* in due course inform all those persons in respect of whom such registration has taken place.

(Information available at *time* of going to press)

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