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Isolated in Europe?

By 1992 the European Community (EC) will comprise an integrated economic area and a common market of 320 million people. What is Switzerland doing in the face of this gigantic challenge? In the following article, exclusive to Swiss Review, «Weltwoche» contributor Bruno Hofer outlines how dangerously tight the noose of EC-unification has already been pulled around our Alpine Republic.

Isolation? It seems to suit the Swiss, but the situation is serious. The countries of the EC move ever closer together, eventually to form a homogeneous marketplace of 320 million people – nine-tenths of all W. Europeans. Yet Swiss farmers, undaunted, continue to demand more agricultural support, and just now, in particular, more import curbs on EC cheese.

Another example: Great Britain is going to link the island-nation closer with the EC mainland by a tunnel under the English Channel, a project that will reach into the 21st century to revolutionise transport communications throughout Europe. By way of contrast, Switzerland again charges lorries with a heavy-goods-traffic levy, does not let them travel on Sundays, bans heavy trucks of more than 28 tonnes from its territory altogether, and has yet taken no formal decision to build a new Alpine base-connection for the railway.

Add to this that more and more countries are joining the EC; with the accession in 1986 of Spain and Portugal, there are now already twelve states, and, currently, Norway, Turkey and Malta are also talking about joining. Austria's Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky already soothingly assures his countrymen that a possible Austrian accession to the EC would of course be compatible with the neutrality of the country.

Ever closer entwinement

The economic involvement of Switzerland with the EC becomes increasingly close. Already 55% of Swiss exports go to the EC area and 70% of all imports come from EC countries. New telecommunications technology connected with satellite television tends to make us forget about national borders and adds a cultural unit to the economic area, even if not necessarily a many-faceted one. Technology and research follow, increasingly, in the shape of Euro-projects, for the national think tanks are often too blinkered to take up the challenges

of the future. Increasingly, the national states greet each other only from afar, letting themselves be content with pragmatic co-operation. And Switzerland? The folk who bask blissfully in the role of «island» and «special case» and who, on 16th March 1986 rejected accession to the UNO with a clarity hardly ever paralleled in any previous referendum, any time, but who will have none of Europe, politically. The folk which presented the political party that, since 1978 had promoted the approach of Switzerland to the EC, with yet another heavy beating in the latest National Council elections of 18th October 1987. The party in question, the SLE (Social Liberal Party of European Federalists) failed to get even half as many votes (in the canton of Zurich) as four years ago, and now holds only a marginal electoral share of 0.07%. Disheartened, the Berne section of the SLE dissolved itself. No parliamentarian of this party ever sat in the Federal Assembly. Yet even the SLE no longer waits quite as lonely as before, when it was a solitary but insistent voice crying in the wilderness. Now lines of care also crease the thinker's brows of Swiss captains of industry, Federal politicians, trade association experts and members of the government who, with an increasingly hollow feeling in the stomach, look out beyond the national borders and see for themselves how threaten-

ingly the noose of EC unification has already been tightened round our Alpine republic.

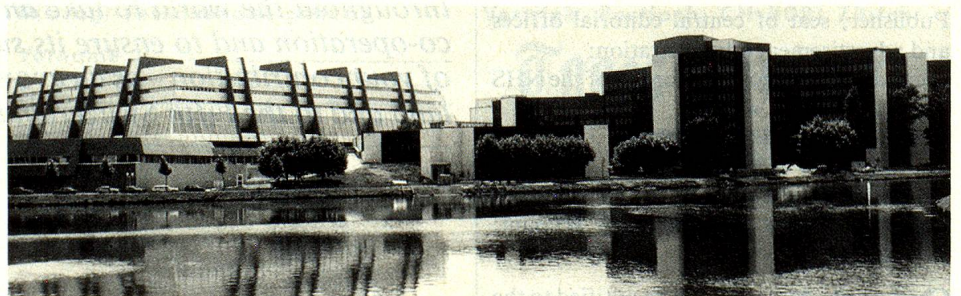
EC: no paper tiger

The EC as Big Bad Wolf, with bared fangs and slaverling jaws, lying in wait for Little Red Ridinghood Switzerland? How much would Herr and Frau Schweizer prefer not to believe this – to banish such visions to the world of fairy tales. Memories of the old EC paper tiger are too vivid: the EC which, ever since its foundation by the governments of six W. European states in 1957, plunged from one crisis to another; which was smiled at, with some *schadenfreude*, by the media, as it struggled along against one threat of collapse to the next, with a courage born only of desperation.

But those days are over. As a result of the constant complaints, in 1983 everything began to change. The Community's Council of Ministers was hauled before the Court of Justice of the EC in Luxemburg on a charge of «inactivity». In 1985 the Community judges declared the Council of Ministers guilty and set a time limit (1992) for it to achieve the complete unification of the EC internal market, otherwise there is automatic realisation of free movement in services according to the rules of the EC constitution. On 29th June 1985 the Council of Europe placed itself, with its full political weight, behind this objective. Further quibbling no longer helped. The four freedoms of the Common Market – the free movement of goods, people, services and capital – were to be put into effect. The pertinent reformatory proposals were adopted by the Council of Europe on 3rd December 1985.

Customs-free area

A free EC internal market from 1992 means a duty-free area, the removal of all trade barriers and border controls between EC countries, freedom of movement for workers, and freedom of establishment for banks, insurance companies and transport



Switzerland remains very active in the Council of Europe (our picture: the Europe building in Strasburg)...



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.

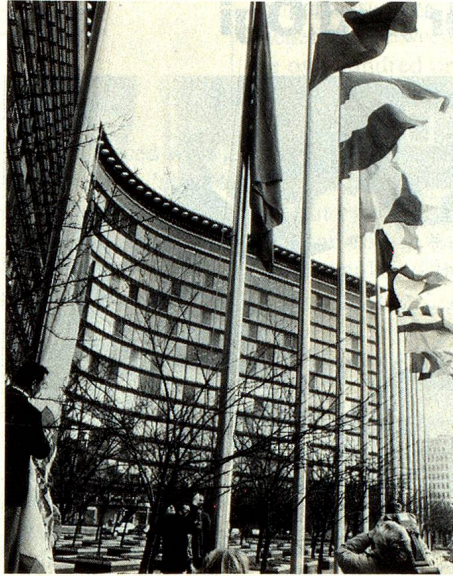
Indirect taxation of consumer goods is to be homogeneous. The EC Commission proposes to levy uniform taxes, expressed in ECUs on spirits, tobacco, wine and beer. The idea behind this: harmonisation of prices should do away with smuggling, by gentle means. Also the ECU (European Currency Unit), created 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

Two ayes – one noe

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

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