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EC membership no problem

Neutrality diluted



We in Europe are going through a period of deep transformation in both the east and west of our continent, each in its different way. Change of this magnitude means moving away from accepted values and too often results in confusion, doubt, hope and dissatisfaction all at the same time. Switzerland is no exception. Our country too is living through a period of change and consequent unrest.

Reasons for this may be seen in the remarkable events which have taken place here at home during the last four years, which have split public opinion: from the Kopp affair to that of the "fiches" – or police records – from controversy about the army to asylum and drug problems. Beyond our frontiers, other reasons may be seen in the fall of the communist empire and its system (leading to economic cata-

world wars and to welcome thousands of refugees – not forgetting that the latter also had its shadow side. In addition, neutrality is a value which has maintained Switzerland in being as a multi-ethnic state and has prevented the painful rifts which might well have emerged from taking sides in external conflicts.

Ready to share responsibility

But today (and this will certainly go on into the future) persistent questioning is taking place about the whole concept of permanent political, economic and military neutrality. This has been intensified by the Swiss Federal Council's recent application for membership of the European Community, an application which has been made without any demand for exceptional status stemming from a desire to remain neutral – as was the case with Austria in 1989.

In its report on Switzerland's entry into the EC made public on May 18, 1992, the government wrote as follows: "It may be assumed that the European Commission and the member-states do not consider that neutrality represents a substantial obstacle to entry, in so far as the neutral country submitting its application is in a position to act in a spirit of solidarity and loyalty in the sense of European unity and in the general context

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strophe and reawakened nationalism), German unification and the march towards European integration in the wake of the European Community.

Basic success recipe for a multi-ethnic state

One of the fundamental values of our country – that which its people have always held nearest to their hearts and which has been increasingly under discussion during the last few years – is neutrality. This is a value which has been recognised de facto for centuries and whose validity has been expressly accepted since the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648. It was confirmed de jure by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Neutrality was one of the values which enabled Switzerland to keep out of two

of common foreign and defence policies. In addition, the neutral state must be prepared in its security and defence policies to follow the objective of European unity which has been jointly laid down (an objective which 'could in certain cases lead to joint defence in the field of security policy'). The neutral state must also be ready to accept without any inner reserve the fact that its neutrality could possibly lose all significance if a day should come when a policy of common defence must be pursued".

Limited to national defence

What does the Federal Council mean by this in substance? For the moment neutrality will be maintained. But it is not out of the question that, depending on the progress of European integration, it will one day have to be strongly diluted or even abolished. These concepts are identical with those contained in another report which was worked out by a group of experts at the federal level and presented on March 26 of this year. This report contains the following points:

1. In the light of recent international developments (the disappearance of the communist threat, European unity marked by cooperation between France and Germany), Switzerland's neutrality must be redefined.
2. In spite of the change in definition, neutrality should be maintained for the moment, since at present Europe does not possess any common defence mechanisms and there are clear signs of political and military instability in "local" areas.
3. Neutrality should no longer be of a political or economic nature, since both these aspects are now outweighed by the principle of international solidarity. For this reason Switzerland has concurred entirely with the UN sanctions against Iraq and almost entirely with those against Libya and Serbia.
4. Neutrality in its narrower sense should be limited to the military aspect. This means that Switzerland should ensure its own national defence and refrain from intervening militarily in conflicts between third states. It should on the other hand, according to the group of experts, be available to the United Nations for participation in actions for maintaining the peace (this is already the case) as well as being ready as and where necessary to open its air space for transit by military aircraft belonging to the United Nations or those acting on its behalf. This was not the case during the Gulf war.