

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 21 (1994)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Changes in small statehood and federalism : the age of frontier regions
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906759>

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Changes in small statehood and

The age

No other country is more interwoven with Europe and the whole world than Switzerland. Hundreds of treaties link us with foreign states and open up cross-border opportunities for our small land. We are forced to admit that without this far-flung system of economic cooperation our very existence would be in jeopardy. Even during the Second World War we lived from exports far more than we liked to own up to in later years. Cooperation across frontiers is our destiny.

In this context, frontier regions play a role which cannot be over-estimated – and the same is true for our neighbours. It is no coincidence that Baden-Württemberg, Spanish Catalonia, the French Rhône-Alpes region and Italy's Lombardy are all engaged in a lively exchange of ideas, since their interests are remarkably similar. They see themselves as the main driving forces of their countries, and they share a desire to grow together within a federal Europe.

Switzerland – A land of frontiers

In the wake of the referendum of December 6, 1992, on Switzerland's membership of the European Economic Area (EEA), there was much talk of internal frontiers: between German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland, for example, or between town and country, or between young and old. But in a Europe in which international barriers are falling like skittles it is the external borders of our country which should be in the foreground. Frontier regions – which are of particular importance for a small country – play a leading role. This is why we have made them the main subject of our forum this time. The article by Oskar Reck on the chances and opportunities of such frontier regions is followed by three concrete examples from each of Switzerland's main linguistic areas.



Gaining in significance

This is also recognised in Switzerland, particularly in its frontier regions. Basle, Geneva and Chiasso – which are all expanding urban centres – have long had neighbourly cross-border contacts with very definite consequences (on both sides of the law). We only have to think of the large number of cross-frontier workers or what might be described as the customs industry.

When we look at our national problems from this point of view, we become very aware that the peripheral areas of our country are steadily gaining in significance. It is these frontier regions which enable us to build bridges abroad and which maintain them through

(Photos: Prisma)



of frontier regions

the years. In so doing, they can build on traditions which reach back into history. In Basle, for example, residual contacts were kept up even during the Nazi period with its hermetic sealing of the frontier – although what happened was surrounded by the deepest secrecy.

It is unfortunate that we did not use the fat years of prosperity which preceded the lean years more effectively to

Oskar Reck

prepare for the future. Economic greed and political fortress thinking overshadowed the whole scene, and even today we have the greatest difficulty imaginable in opening ourselves up on a neighbourly basis. It is truly no coincidence that frontier regions are called upon to play a special role in this dilemma. For they are the real national pioneers in this respect, and it remains to be seen whether and how much they will be able to take the other regions of the country with them.

This consideration leads us to take a closer look at developments on the domestic scene. We see that if our political life still appears virtually motionless, the social fabric of our small country is undergoing a transformation, and this is taking place in the context of movements outside our frontiers. It can be only a question of time before this social transformation spills over into political life, and the result will be to shake the bastions of nationalism to their foundations. Such a process would vibrate right across the country.

Even if all this takes place, it will still be up to the frontier regions to make the decisive breakthrough. However much the original forest cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden have contributed to the heroic founding myths, it is the peripheral regions like those of Geneva and Basle which have the greatest importance for the future – on condition, that is, that they take their mission seriously.

No loss of identity

In the long run, frontiers can be dismantled only by those who live on ei-

ther side of them – by the people who have had to live with such barriers in the past. It is not only legal measures which are needed for this, but also practical experience in good neighbourly behaviour. Frontier regions are the last ones which should fear loss of identity, since they have always been accustomed to meeting foreigners – and they know that they have gained from the experience and never lost.

For Switzerland's peripheral regions, the extent to which we are able to release federalism from its petrified state will be of great significance. However obvious it is that our member states

should look towards the centre for inspiration, it is just as imperative that the frontier regions should persist in opening up our small country to the world. This is also part of foreign policy, and our government should not be afraid to delegate some small part of its authority – in this case to those who are most at home with the problem. This would imply federalism at the functional level instead of in terms of physical territory. If a political renovation process of this kind should be successful, much would have been won for the future of our country. ■

Interview with Fernando Pedrolini

“Taking steps now for future generations”

Fernando Pedrolini, the mayor of Chiasso, has long been committed to cross-border cooperation. In an interview with Swiss Review, he talks about problems and progress in the “Regio Insubrica” – a name which goes back to the Celtic settlements of Upper Lombardy in the last centuries B.C.

Swiss Review: Mr. Pedrolini, since 1988 you have been mayor of Chiasso, which is a really typical border town. This certainly explains your interest for cross-border questions, as expressed in the idea of the “Regio Insubrica” which you have launched.

Fernando Pedrolini: Two preliminary remarks. There are other cross-border structures in Switzerland, the “Regio Basiliensis” being one example, and in 1980 the Treaty of Madrid on cross-border cooperation was signed – leading in February 1990 to a bilateral agreement between Switzerland and Italy. It became clear that Ticino would have to base its policies on overcoming national frontiers and that joint interests would have to be identified. This meant that in-

struments would have to be created for bringing about prosperity for the region as a whole. I am thinking here in terms of settling territorial questions, working out transport concepts, providing jobs and promoting culture and the local economy. As to the future, it is my declared aim to establish during the current year what I have called the “Regio Insubrica”, which will at least include the areas which have already given their assent: Canton Ticino, the province of Como and the city of Verbania, which is to be the capital of the new Italian province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola.

Alongside implementing this ambitious idea, there is of course everyday life to be considered with all its very concrete problems. How does Chiasso's cross-border policy work out in practical terms?

Chiasso has always been in close contact with Italy. We exchange goods, persons, services and ideas with this very important European country. Contacts between Chiasso and Como take place on a permanent basis, both in