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Autor: Engel, Barbara
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the expansion policy unquestionably continued. Two decades later, Berne conquered Vaud and temporarily even parts of Savoy south of Lake Geneva. The confederation also primarily committed itself to France through mercenary agreements. The criticism of most experts points out that the policy of neutrality only emerged much later.

■ 1815: The Congress of Vienna, which shaped post-Napoleonic Europe, resulted, amongst other things, in the recognition of Switzerland's permanent neutrality. However, this was essentially in European interests because Switzerland represented a buffer zone on France's eastern border. This required a diktat from the victorious powers. Switzerland, which appeared extremely divided in Vienna, had to accept the internal and external borders established for it as a penalty and had to integrate the new French-speaking cantons of Geneva, Valais and Neuchâtel.

View of history as a political message

Those who solely see these events from a national historical perspective interpret them as targeted, deliberate acts of self-determination, the fight for independence and military defence against foreign rule. This perception of history is used as background music for a highly political message – those who wish to preserve independence won at great sacrifice must vote SVP. The SVP has prepared this debate “well in advance”, according to Hermann Strittmatter, the doyen of the Swiss advertising industry in an interview with the “NZZ am Sonntag”. “In contrast to other political movements, the national conservatives plan such campaigns long-term,” he says. The campaign is “professional and intelligently orchestrated in terms of communication”. The advertising expert

therefore warns against “belittling this Marignano debate”.

The supposed historical debate is in actual fact a proxy war for cultural hegemony and the power of interpretation. It offers a means of identification to a profoundly uncertain nation – one which is torn between economic globalisation and greater integration in terms of European policy, on the one hand, and a cultural inclination to look backwards, re-nationalisation and a tendency towards isolation on the other. Thomas Maissen remarks that it is legitimate to use “outdated research” in the battle for power and share of the vote: “However, it is equally legitimate and sometimes necessary for academics to compare the political and popular interpretation of history with the current status of research by experts.”

Interdependence and delimitation

The perception of history is not just an issue for Thomas Maissen but also for his no less eminent colleague, the historian André Holenstein, a professor in Berne. At the end of 2014 he published a much discussed book entitled “Mitten in Europa: Verflechtung und Abgrenzung in der Schweizer Geschichte” (In the Middle of Europe - Interdependence and Delimitation in Swiss History). “The Swiss People's Party (SVP) owes its rise since the 1990s to become one of the best supported parties to a political strategy which addresses the fears of the Swiss people of cultural alienation in their own country,” writes Holenstein in the introduction. The current vexations of national sensitivities are the reason but not the underlying motivation for this book. This has much more to do with the observation of “how ambivalent, contradictory and sometimes downright schizophrenic the behaviour of the small state of Switzerland seems having always been existentially en-

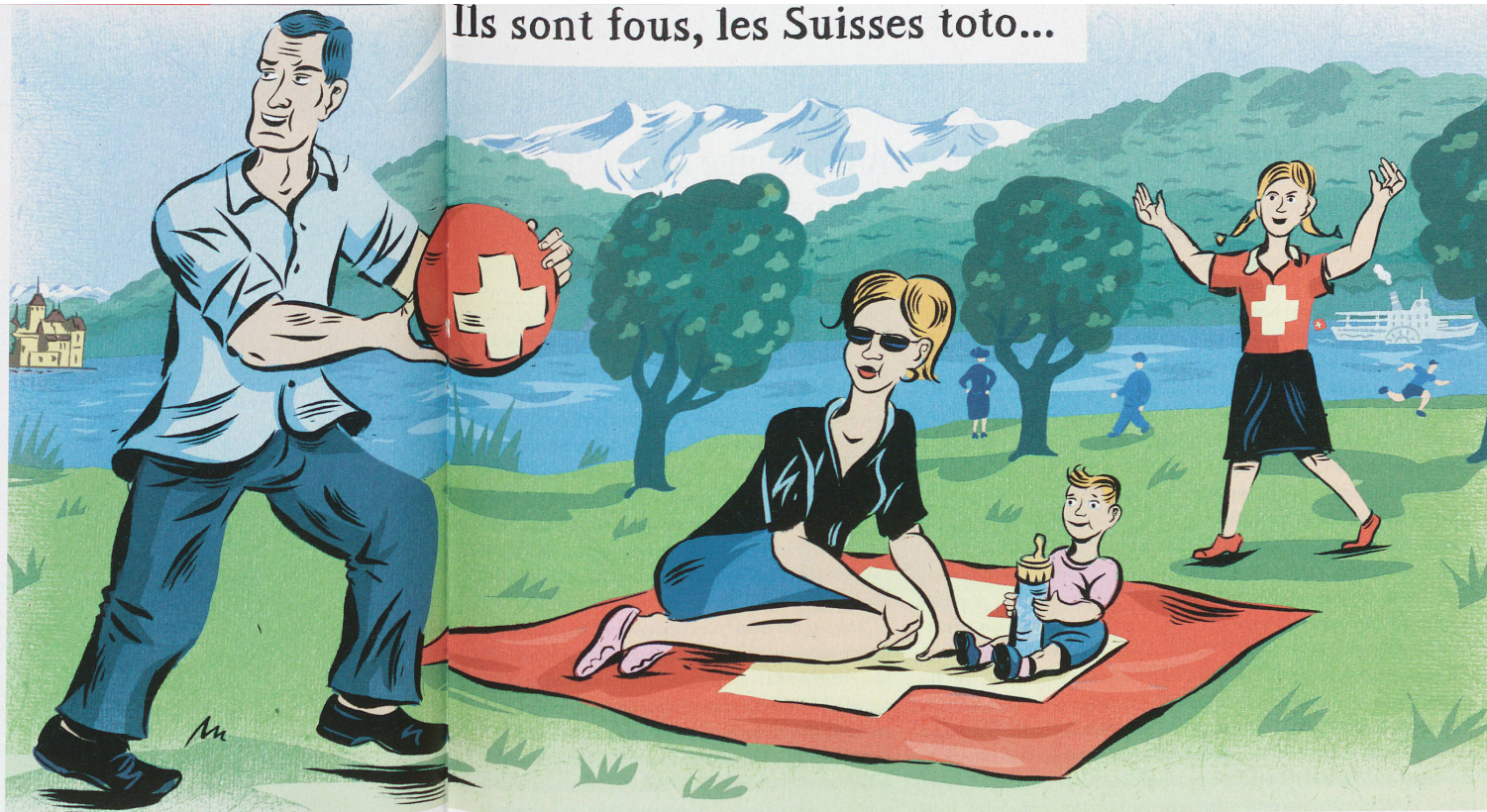
No interest in Marignano

The historical debate over Marignano and its truth and myths holds little appeal in French-speaking Switzerland.

BARBARA ENGEL

The French-speaking Swiss, who are usually keen debaters, are only involved peripherally in the discussions over the significance of the historical events being celebrated in Switzerland this year. The reason for this is simple - Marignano in 1515 is not a significant date in French-speaking Switzerland as the battle never played an important role in the history of that part of Switzerland. The traditional narrative of German-speaking Switzerland is of little interest to the French-speaking Swiss because they were

Ils sont fous, les Suisses toto...



not involved at that time, either in the heroic founding years of the confederation, during the expansion to eight-canton Switzerland during the 14th century or in the subsequent period of expansion with the conquest of Aargau and Thurgau. Switzerland's rise to become a power in Europe also took place before the French-speaking Swiss became confederates.

The eight-canton confederation of 1388 was an entirely German-speaking entity. The expansion of the Swiss confederation into what is now Romandy first began with the Burgundian Wars (1476 to 1481), which ended with the accession of Solothurn and Fribourg to the confederation. Bilingual Fribourg was the first French-speaking part of the confederation. However, strictly speaking, a French-speaking Switzerland was first established in 1798 with the Helvetic Republic. It was not until 1848, with the foundation of the federal state, that the people of Geneva, Vaud,

Neuchâtel, French-speaking Fribourg, French-speaking Valais and the Jura also became citizens of a single state. 1848 could therefore also be declared the year when Romandy was founded.

In the 19th century, Romandy was nevertheless still clearly divided into two parts. There were the regions with a liberal and reformed tradition – Geneva, Vaud, Neuchâtel and the southern part of the Bernese Jura – and those which were predominantly Catholic and conservative – Fribourg, Valais and the northern Jura. The ideological and religious differences were much more important than the binding element of language.

The situation changed at the beginning of the 20th century. The growing enmity between Germany and France was also reflected in tensions between Switzerland's

linguistic groups. The French-speaking Swiss were suddenly no longer just citizens of Geneva, Vaud or Neuchâtel but defined themselves as belonging to a linguistic region.

“Switzerland's rise to become a power in Europe also took place before the French-speaking Swiss became confederates.”

The term “Romandie” also emerged for the first time during that period as an alternative to the customary names of “Suisse romande” or “Welschland”. The new linguistic term expressed a new sense of togetherness but it has a “rather poor reputation” in French-speaking Switzerland to the present day,

writes Christoph Büchi, Lausanne-based culture correspondent for the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”. It only appears officially in the name of the “Tour de Romandie” cycle race.

BARBARA ENGEL IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF WITH THE “SWISS REVIEW”