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Clive H. Church

## Britain, Switzerland and the Significance of the Community Dimension

Inter-governmental relations are likely to play an important role in Switzerland's future relations with Europe. The British case is apposite here since relations are very good. Yet closer examination shows that the British are poorly informed about Switzerland and not always wholly sympathetic. This is one reason why official policy can be somewhat passive. The nature and evolution of British policy towards Switzerland also bear the marks of Britain's increasingly close ties with the Community, and the development of the latter. This has been the case even during the phase of more intensive contact with Switzerland which began in the mid-1980s. Consequently Britain now supports both the EEA and the idea of Swiss entry to the Community. However, there are limits to the lengths to which it will go in support of the Swiss and there are lessons to be drawn from this by Swiss policy makers and others.

Il est probable que les rapports intergouvernementales seront appelées à un rôle important dans les échanges à venir entre la Suisse et l'Europe. Le cas britannique est ici significatif puisque les deux pays sont en très bons termes. Mais en y regardant de plus près, on s'aperçoit que les Britanniques sont assez mal informés sur la Suisse et qu'ils ne sont pas toujours bien disposés à son égard. C'est en partie à cause de cette réticence que les relations politiques établies avec la Suisse ont tendance à être quelque peu passives. La nature et l'évolution de cette politique sont aussi marquées par les liens de plus en plus étroits entre la Grande Bretagne et la Communauté Européenne ainsi que par le développement de cette dernière. Ceci a été le cas, même au cours de la période de contacts plus intenses avec la Suisse depuis 1984/85. Par conséquent, la Grande Bretagne soutient à présent l'Espace Economique Européen ainsi que le projet d'entrée de la Suisse dans la Communauté. Toutefois, il y a des limites à la fermeté avec laquelle la Grande Bretagne sera prête à soutenir la Suisse et l'élite politique suisse aurait de l'avantage à s'en rendre compte.

Zwischenstaatliche Beziehungen werden wahrscheinlich eine bedeutende Rolle in den zukünftigen Beziehungen der Schweiz zu Europa spielen. Der Fall Grossbritanniens ist hier angebracht, denn die Beziehungen zwischen Grossbritannien und der Schweiz sind sehr gut. Eine eingehende Prüfung zeigt jedoch, dass die Engländer über die Schweiz schlecht informiert und nicht immer völlig verständnisvoll sind – ein Grund, weshalb die öffentliche Politik Londons öfter ziemlich passiv ist. Grossbritanniens Politik gegenüber der Schweiz ist in ihrer Natur und Entwicklung auch von den immer engeren Beziehungen Grossbritanniens zu der EG und von der Entwicklung der Gemeinschaft geprägt worden. Dies war und ist auch noch der Fall, seitdem die Phase intensiver Kontakte mit der Schweiz Mitte der achtziger Jahre anfang. Infolgedessen unterstützt Grossbritannien den EWR und die Idee eines schweizerischen Beitritts zur EG. Jedoch gibt es gewisse Grenzen inwieweit Grossbritannien die Schweiz unterstützen wird. Davon können die Schweizer politischen Meinungsmacher und andere viel lernen.

Howsoever the new Europe, and Switzerland's place in it, may evolve, inter-government relations will be essential to its dynamics. Dealing with EC is not just matter of talking to Brussels but also of inter-governmental relations which, like the Franco-German link, can often drive the Community (Bulmer 1983; Keohane and Hoffman 1991). Thus, if the EEA goes ahead, Switzerland will clearly need close relations with Community member states to offset the limited role it has obtained in decision making. Equally such relations could play a part in both facilitating its entry, whenever this may come about, and in helping to maximize Swiss influence once inside the Community.

So far this aspect of European integration has not figured prominently in the Swiss debate, which has concentrated on the balance between gains and losses, considered in a more general way. Britain is an apposite case for starting to explore this dimension of Switzerland's likely new role in Europe. Conventional wisdom, understandably, stresses the closeness and similarity of the two: the long history of friendly relations, up to and including EFTA, during which there has never been a war; the continuing, and friendly, military contacts; the shared pride in and influence of long standing democratic and parliamentary institutions, which play a significant role in defining strong political cultures; and the commitment to openness and values of enterprise, self-reliance and pragmatism. All these clearly provide a good base for close relations.

Economically the two countries have similar economic structures, markedly dependent on trade, and linked through large scale cross investment and tourism. This re-enforces the personal contacts which some think are the most vital liaison between the two. Thus it is not surprising either that there are no real bilateral bones of contention between the two, or that British celebrations of the 700th anniversary of the Confederatio Helvetica were amongst the largest anywhere. Sir John Wraight (1987) can thus quote Carl Spitteler's saying that «England is indeed not the only but the most dependable friend of Switzerland».

It is also often assumed that such links are continuing so that Britain takes an active part in supporting Swiss relations with the European Community and can be relied on to support both Swiss membership and resisting moves towards supra-nationalism. While this is largely the case, it needs to be nuanced in three ways. Firstly, British public understanding of Switzerland has changed and is much less striking than was previously the case (Rose 1991). Indeed, writing about what the British think of Switzerland causes a certain embarrassment because it means confessing that neither government nor people actually think a great deal about the country, and are not very well informed when they do. As Bundesrat Cotti has said «la Suisse est passablement méconnue» (1991).

Consequently, there is little pressure on British policy makers to be pro-active where Switzerland is concerned. Without being at all hostile, Britain tends to be reactive. Hence relations are not always as significant as is assumed since sympathy does not always translate into action. Thirdly, British attitudes are less a matter of simple bilateral relations, as is often thought, and more a function of its Community membership (Muheim 1991). The fact that they are now evolving rapidly owes as a great deal to the Community dimension. And British attitudes on Europe have often been more *communautaire* than is sometimes imagined.

To examine this evolution, and the nuances of British attitudes, requires, first, a brief look at the setting of Anglo-Swiss relations, notably at non official levels and the background of relatively distant relations prior to the 1980s. The way in which relations improved from the 1980s, and the attitudes which emerged will then be examined. Finally, the British stance on Switzerland and the EEA and Community entry respectively, can be considered, as this permits a re-assessment of what line the British may take in the future and what the implications for Swiss policy makers might be.

## **I. The Setting**

Contemporary Anglo-Swiss relations are the latest stage of a long history of friendly collaboration, going back to the era of religious conflict (Wraight 1987). This was developed by cultural and other connections and then by the British role in the political and economic consolidation of independent Switzerland. This, in turn, encouraged the massive growth of tourist and personal contacts which led Mussolini to describe Switzerland as an English colony (Barber 1991: 72–73).

Hence, during the Second World War Britain was slightly more understanding of Switzerland than were its Allies. However, relations between the two countries today are conditioned less by the long term legacy than by the changing nature of general contact between the two peoples since 1945, and by the vicissitudes of official relations over the same period.

### **1. Social Relations**

Although the previous close contacts resumed immediately after the war this was not to last. From the fifties things began to change, especially outside diplomatic circles. These changes, which were to have an indirect effect on official relations, sprang partly from new British holiday patterns and partly from new British economic relationships.

Because of the strength of the Swiss franc and the emergence of rival holiday destinations, contact with Switzerland, though still significant, has become less striking than in the past (Bundesamt 1991: 208). Equally, economic links between the two changed, as criticism of British business for its lack of interest in Swiss and other EFTA markets show. This resulted in a loss of market share and an unfavourable balance of trade with Switzerland.

With general British attitudes altering too there is much less interest in Switzerland amongst the press and educated opinion. So coverage of Swiss events is sparse and not always accurate or serious. References to Switzerland in the House of Commons are equally rare and tangential. The fact that Swiss politics are consensual and lack the ideological edge found in Britain also makes them seem boring to many.

With less familiarity than before the war, British public opinion is dependent on a very few clichés. And these ran out during the 1988 take-over of Rowntree by Nestlé despite the public anger over *vinkulierung* when even the gnomes of Zurich were forgotten (Cendre 1989). A recent survey of the take-over even ignored the fact that Nestlé is Swiss (Hyde et al. 1991). Because of all this, the Swiss can no longer rely on unalloyed public sympathy. A certain coolness, somewhat at variance with conventional assumptions, can be found both on left and right.

Hence the very active and extensive cultural programmes of «The Festival of Switzerland in Britain» neither attracted a great deal of press coverage nor redressed this somewhat critical view (MacShane 1991a). While there was admiration for the complex Swiss achievement (Morris 1991), leading the *Times* on 13 June to observe that «Nobody who knows Switzerland minds its short comings much. Why should the Swiss do so?», there was also much that was quizzical or uncomplimentary. Alleged conformity, over-regulation, and even incipient totalitarianism in treatment of Swiss citizens in general and conscientious objectors in particular were picked up (Dodd and Hutton 1991; Sinclair 1991). Swiss angst and lack of self confidence was also a major theme (Dullforce 1991). Foreign policy was but little covered and not very approvingly at that. The *Higher* (1991) opined that Switzerland needed to become more European while the *Independent on Sunday* (1991) warned that Britain should not become like Switzerland, «cut off from the great causes which convulse humanity». And when BBC 2's «Newsnight» turned its attention to Switzerland's position in Europe it was frankly dismissive.

In one sense none of this is very important, as was shown by the robust way that Ministers rejected inflammatory calls for «action» during the Rowntree affair (Clarke 1988). Yet, if there is less British public sympathy for Switzerland than imagined, this means less pressure on Whitehall to develop an active policy on Switzerland. As a result official relations in recent years have been slightly more passive and low key than conventional wisdom suggests.

## 2. Ups and Downs in Official Relations, 1945–1980

Deducing British relations to small countries like Switzerland, with whom there are no major problems, is difficult since they produce few formal statements. None the less, archival evidence suggests that, in the postwar years, Britain clearly concerned itself a good deal with Switzerland, for economic and balance of power reasons. Despatches from Berne, while noting that «the traditional harmony of Anglo-Swiss relations fortunately continue undisturbed by any untoward event», soon testified to British economic and other failings (FCO 1955/56). There was also concern that neutrality might turn into neutralism and hope that neutrality might be jettisoned in order to maximize Swiss security.

In the event, in the late fifties and sixties, economics and politics brought the two countries together in support of a Free Trade solution to the problems of European integration. This was to be a close but difficult collaboration (Fischer 1980: 158). For,

despite things like the 1963 Arbitration Treaty and understanding of neutrality during the Rhodesian crisis, Britain did not leave the Swiss with entirely happy memories of its stay in EFTA (Pellegrini 1990). British inconsistency and the imposition of the 15% import surcharge certainly caused irritation (Wraight 1991: 110–111).

When Britain finally entered the European Community attempts were made to ensure that bilateral relations with former EFTA partners were maintained. The Swiss certainly assumed that they could rely on British support. Ministerial exchanges were organized, but not sufficiently intensively for some. Hence there was a series of questions in the House asking about Prime Ministerial visits to Switzerland. The answer was always no, perhaps because of an anti Swiss streak on the Labour left occasioned by British held numbered bank accounts (Hamilton 1972). And there were snide remarks about Switzerland being «a haven for many things» from Wilson himself (1976).

In the end the first ever State Visit took place successfully in 1980. Yet despite this, and continuing cultural and military contacts (Giussani 1991), it seemed as if Britain, perhaps encouraged by a favourable balance of trade, was somewhat neglecting Switzerland. By the 1980s there were complaints from EFTA states about the lack of attention they were receiving because of British concentration on Community affairs. This was to help produce closer and more Swiss-British relations.

## **II. A developing Relationship**

British policy toward Switzerland since the mid 1980s has been somewhat more active than in the past. This was due not only to outside criticism, but also to changing economic and international conditions. Hence there has been much more contact than in previous periods. This has led to a more sympathetic but not always pro-active policy.

### **1. Intensified Contacts, from the mid 1980s**

There were several reasons why, in the mid 1980s, the United Kingdom took a greater interest in Switzerland, beyond the complaints from EFTA ambassadors. To begin with the Luxembourg Agreement of 1984 provided a process in which more contact with the EFTA states was called for. Secondly, with the solution of the budgetary problem the British Government sought to adopt a more positive stance. Hence it made closer relations with EFTA and the development of the Luxembourg process one of its targets for its 1986 Presidency. Perhaps more significantly, the launching of the 1992 programme, in which the British commissioner Lord Cockfield played a large part, encouraged concentration on the economic development of the Community, in which the Swiss had a growing interest.

There were also economic reasons for closer relations with Britain. The mid 1980s were a period not merely of economic revival for Britain, but one of increasing

openness, leading to Big Bang in 1987. This, like North Sea oil, brought a growing number of Swiss financial institutions to London (Wraight 1991: 125–126). At the same time, the balance of trade between the two countries altered, to the advantage of Switzerland, and this made close relations important for Britain. However, there were complaints in the House about the lack of Swiss openness in public procurement, especially in the military sphere (Wall 1984). And British hauliers were very critical of Swiss levies and restrictions.

Finally, there were two other external factors. Thus, from the late 1980s the Swiss desire to enter the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, if the terms were right, led them to seek British support. Even more important was the Delors' initiative of January 1989 which launched the so called Brussels-Oslo process, leading to the EEA negotiations. These provided another boost to regular contacts.

The reviving interest showed itself in four ways. To begin with there was slightly more mention of Switzerland in the Commons and this of a more positive kind. And even the Rowntree episode failed to disturb the calm tenor of Swiss-British relations. Secondly, the FCO has significantly strengthened its staffing in the area. In the mid 1980s a further desk officer was appointed to deal with the EFTA countries. Then, in 1991, the Swiss desk was combined with that for Italy as well as Austria but entrusted to a higher level officer. Such bilateral relations were only part of the new attention paid to Switzerland and the other EFTA countries by both the External EC Department of the FCO and the External section of the Department of Trade and Industry. It was the latter, for instance, which fended off calls for action over the takeover of Rowntree in 1988.

Thirdly, there was a considerable increase in the number and importance of ministerial visits to Switzerland. Admittedly these are not wholly reliable indicators of bilateral policy since they can be undertaken for a variety of reasons, but the facts that there was a marked increase and that the Swiss regarded them as important suggests they reflect a new trend. Thus in 1984 Paul Channon visited Switzerland and, more significantly, in March 1988 the somewhat delayed visit by Sir Geoffrey Howe the Foreign Secretary took place. The then Defence Minister George Younger also visited in October 1988 to discuss chemical weapons policy, emphasizing the fact that there were continuing military contacts, with Swiss Mirages and Tigers exercising in British airspace.

September 1988 also saw a visit by Douglas Hurd, then Home Secretary, to talk about drug policy and European media proposals. Lord Young, the British Minister for Trade and Industry, also attended the Davos Symposium in March 1989. Such visits were paralleled by Swiss calls on London in 1988–1990 such as those by Franz Blankart, the State Secretary for Economic Affairs, and René Felber, the Foreign Minister. Then, in September 1990 Mrs Thatcher made the first ever Prime Ministerial visit to Switzerland, although she had spent several holidays in Zug and visited Geneva on previous occasions, as had other British ministers. In the summer of the following year Tristan Garel-Jones visited Switzerland to discuss European matters and, most recently, Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind visited Zurich and Berne to discuss combined transport and related matters in January 1992. The visits by Prince Charles, who was patron of the 700th Anniversary celebrations in Britain, to

Europe Day in Sils in September 1991 and to the Davos Forum in 1992 also deserve notice.

Finally, such contacts led to the signing of a number of accords between the countries. Thus in March 1989 Hurd and M. Pictet, the then Swiss Ambassador in London, signed an agreement allowing for mutual freezing and/or confiscation of funds arising from illegal dealing in drugs. Then, in 1990 a new programme of sponsorship of joint research in the social and natural sciences was launched. This was followed in October 1991 by a visit by State Secretary Blankart to London to sign an agreement on legal co-operation between the two countries. And during this time, as well as Swiss representation of British interests in Argentina, military and other collaboration continued, often within the context of Swiss participation in Community programmes. Clearly the replacement of Margaret Thatcher by John Major, although it rather surprised the Swiss, has not made any real difference to government policy, even if the new Prime Minister lacks his predecessor's contacts with Switzerland and is less prone to endorse its values (Reich 1988).

## **2. Changing Attitudes to Switzerland from the Later 1980s**

The question now arises as to how far the improved working relationship led to an actively pro-Swiss stance by Britain. The answer is that the increased contact did bring more understanding but not a pro-active policy, and this was to be true over European questions as well. Hence, at first, the British felt that the existing relationship was perfectly satisfactory. Thus during his visit Sir Geoffrey Howe (1988) argued that Britain had to give priority to Community consolidation and, especially, the Internal Market. Enlargement was seen as an unwelcome and rather long term complication. Moreover, not merely were the Swiss were not pushing the issue but he was convinced that having one foot inside and one foot outside the Community had done the Swiss no harm. He felt they would continue to prosper, especially with British support for closer EFTA links with the EC including through schemes like EUREKA.

Switzerland, as the second largest investor in the European Community and a country which shared sound economic and financial policies, had a special role to play, as far as Britain was concerned, notably by investing in the new Britain and allowing British companies to buy in to and take over European companies. «Swiss companies for example expect to make take-overs in our market. Their government must ensure British companies can make take-overs in theirs. We want the single market to be an open market.» Such arguments were supported by other Conservative figures at the time, though there do not seem to have been any official demarches on the matter.

With the Delors' initiative attitudes began to change. The British government early decided that this was in its interests and encouraged such contacts with EFTA. There was also more public expression of sympathy for Swiss practices and interests than during the Rowntree crisis, although this never affected inter-government relations.

Indeed the Rowntree purchase may have helped Switzerland since, in the end, it showed Nestlé as good, hands off, managers, and not as imperialists. George Younger looked with interest at Switzerland's civilian army while Lord Young said the two countries needed each other and Cecil Parkinson praised Swiss politics. More recently not merely has the attention of the DHSS has been drawn to the advantages of Switzerland's Social Security system by MP Peter Thurnham (1991) but the stress placed on combined transport, often in the context of the Channel Tunnel project, has provided a common interest. Moreover, Eurosceptic British members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Jessel 1991) have expressed sympathy for the Swiss refusal to be bullied by the Community and its Parliament over Alpine transit, although this has been more of an EC than a bilateral interest for the British. There has also been more understanding of Swiss neutrality as a longstanding and valuable policy, not marked by some of the excesses discerned by the media. Similar attitudes to South African sanctions and the application to the Bretton Woods institutions were also welcomed (Thatcher 1990).

Such sympathy however rarely showed itself in dramatic initiatives, especially when it clashed with other British policies such as restraining Community activity and expenditure. This could curb programmes in which the Swiss were interested, such as the 1987–1991 Framework Programme for Research and development (Journal de Genève 1987). None the less, apart from very minor matters such as the ban on British beef in July 1990, slight difficulties on security links and policy in the Gulf, and the now overcome problem of relating two rather different legal systems there were no real bilateral problems for the two governments.

Neither of the other major parties queried this stance. The Labour Party has largely ceased to ask questions about its banking systems and now assumes Swiss entry, although possibly still preferring that of the Nordics (Hattersley 1991). And if the SLD was critical of the Swiss sitting «behind the barricades of the Alps and picking of our ripe cherries» during the Rowntree crisis (Bruce 1988), it has often admired Swiss decentralization and consensus government (Pardoe 1976). Both parties, however, share the general British lack of detailed acquaintanceship with Swiss institutions and policies, even where European matters are concerned.

### **III. Britain and Switzerland's future position in Europe**

Given all this how has Britain reacted to the two major policy questions presently facing Switzerland: the European Economic Area and Community entry? On the first relations and interest have certainly been encouraged by the negotiations. But while the British have been sympathetic, in the end they have expected the Swiss to accept the deal offered to them. On entry, again while there is sympathy the matter is seen as essentially one for the Swiss. And wider considerations of British policy on Europe remain vitally important, so as a member of the Community Britain has allowed its old EFTA friendship to fade and probably thinks in terms of full entry with no special deals.

## 1. The British Stance on the EEA

Whereas some Community states like Belgium have had doubts about the EEA, the British have always been in favour. This is less because of bilateral concerns than because of a general view of European integration and the possible economic benefits to Britain, benefits which could help to redress the existing £ 1.89 billion trade deficit with Switzerland (DTI 1991). Services which are seen as especially significant in the EFTA context are thought to have less prospect of success in Switzerland (CBI 1991).

However, such sympathies were not always taken very far nor expressed very publically. Thus during her visit Mrs Thatcher (1990), as well as promising to speed up EEA negotiations, made it clear that there would be no real support for exceptions. She emphasized that the *acquis* had to be accepted right up to the point of signature, and failed to urge collaborative decision making amongst sovereign nations in the EEA rather than Brussels' ideas that the EFTAs could «feed in their views». And she appeared not to understand a question about Swiss concerns about their lack of influence on legislation once the EEA was in force. Indeed, she reemphasized Geoffrey Howe's insistence that only membership provides full benefits and full decision making rights. Since this was somewhat at odds with her perceived position, some Swiss were rather surprised and shocked (Pellegrini 1990). They thus failed to understand how deeply Britain had become involved in the Community, even if rhetoric and preferences for future development seemed to point in other directions.

So, even after her resignation, official policy remained guardedly in favour of the Single Market being open to the Swiss and others. Hence there was no dramatic last ditch intervention on 13 May 1991 when the Swiss came close to withdrawing from the negotiations. Observers who believed that Britain encouraged Switzerland to take a tough line are probably mistaken. With the French and others wishing to pounce on such moves as further evidence of British perfidy this was unlikely. In any case Swiss negotiations do not really need any encouragement to be firm. Requests for outright support from Switzerland and other EFTA states were politely diverted. Moreover, on some issues, like Norwegian demands for access to the British salmon market, the government was as unhelpful as the next state.

None the less, the British position was never hostile and was understanding of the pressures Swiss negotiators faced because institutional and free movement questions threatened to offend the all important Swiss electorate. So the UK provided helpful advice while its general stance on matters such as comitology and judicial enforcement was on lines which the Swiss found helpful. Yet, in the end, this did not lead to an outcome the Swiss felt acceptable for the long term.

On the other hand, some elements of British opinion found Swiss negotiating tactics irritating. The respected Select Committee on the European Communities in the House of Lords, which investigated relations with EFTA in the spring of 1990, was aware of the unease the Swiss felt about land ownership, free movement of workers, and environmental standards within the EEA, not to mention institutional arrangements such as neutrality. Yet it also saw Switzerland as a barrier to a necessary element of supra-nationality within EFTA (Lords 1990: 10, 27). Lord Cockfield (1990) was adamant that a Customs Union was a vital necessity for making an

enlarged Single Market work. And the *Times* of 15 May, regretting the failure of the EEA negotiations to capitalize on British efforts to share the benefits of the Single Market with EFTA, saw Swiss reservations on even «bland declarations of principle» as one of the causes. It urged the Swiss to «practice at home the art of compromise which they so often preach to world organizations».

British Ministers were also aware that time and the Swiss debate were moving on. Tristan Garel-Jones (1991) indeed suggested the Swiss should sign even if the terms were not ideal. His argument was that a deal was necessary as a transition and that opting out even from unpalatable rules, as Britain had found after 1958, merely allowed the *acquis* to grow in size and indigestibility. This reflects a reverse effect of the EFTA link, the British feeling that if they could bite the bullet, the wealthier Swiss can certainly afford to do so. And, if the Swiss decision to accept the final agreement on 22 October was welcomed, the latter's concerns over the subsequent ECJ ruling have not been fully shared, although the British were aware of how hard a decision it was for the Swiss. However, both agree that it is a problem for the Commission to resolve.

## 2. The British Stance on Swiss Entry

If some British opinion (Usborne 1991) is often too quick to assume Swiss entry, the Government has been careful not to fall into this trap. Indeed, at times in the mid 80s enlargement was not popular in Whitehall. There after attitudes changed though, even so, there was little enthusiasm for negotiations before the Single Market was up and running and while opinion in the rest of the Community was still unenthusiastic. However, concern for deepening has become much less marked of late. And, in practice John Major has proved even more committed to enlargement than Mrs Thatcher was reputed to be. This is because he hankers less for a wider transatlantic role and partly because the question is now one of greater actuality than in 1990. Some Tories, like James Moorhouse MEP, have gone as far as advocating the abandonment of the EEA in favour of rapid entry (Lords 1990: E94–101).

Where Switzerland is concerned Britain has been more reserved, partly to avoid giving offence to others and partly because it takes the view that this is a matter for the Swiss. Mrs Thatcher was well aware that a decision on entry had to go before the people. However she was said to have done nothing to dissuade them from the idea of entry. Equally Garel-Jones realized that, like the British, the Swiss do not like outsiders telling them what to do especially when they would have to make greater sacrifices than many other would be members. Neutrality was not seen as something which would have to go, since he believed that foreign and security policy would be conducted outside the Community's main structures. Partly for ideological reasons federalism is not given much consideration where as direct democracy is, rightly, considered to be the major structural barrier to an application. Equally, there is only a limited amount of sympathy for Swiss concern for conserving its agricultural base, whether in the Community or the GATT context, since subsidized agriculture is seen as a barrier to the freer trade for which the government strives.

Despite this the British had, by the summer of 1991, come round to thinking that the entry of countries like Switzerland would be both right and advantageous, should the Swiss want to commit themselves. Garel-Jones, when pushed, said that the ultimate questions were whether they would be able to exert as much influence on decisions and standards from outside as they could from within, and whether they really wanted to be involved in the big decisions of the future. The British had decided they could not afford not to be inside, while in the pre-Maastricht debate one Conservative MP observed that the option of being more like the Swiss, sometimes urged by Eurosceptics, was not open to them (Whitney 1991).

The Government believes that strong democracies with shared values ought to be inside. They would re-enforce cautious attitudes towards new policies and costs, not to mention effective application of Community legislation. And entry would help to strengthen both the EC economy and its centre of political gravity before other, weaker, countries joined. Britain would clearly find Switzerland a sensible and congenial partner. However, whether enlargement to include Switzerland would assist what some people take to be the British strategy of creating a looser, multi-pillared Community is open to doubt (MacShane 1991b). While some British opinion still hankers after a Community which is more economic than political and social, Maastricht and opposing voices in Britain mean that this cannot be relied on, especially as history suggests that enlargement is likely to encourage more integration as well as more intergovernmentalism (Wallace 1990). Equally there are voices inside Switzerland who are attracted by the social dimension while, as Edward Heath (1991) pointed out, countries like Switzerland, wanted a full Community and not a repetition of the free trade area they were seeking to leave.

British opinion was also taken a little by surprise by the Swiss ministers' announcement on 23 October that Community entry was the long term objective. It had not been expected so soon. However, it was warmly welcomed and may have encouraged John Major (1991a) to take a robust stance on enlargement at Maastricht. Afterwards he was to commend to the Commons the Summit's decision to endorse the idea of enlargement, beginning with the EFTA states and made it clear that pushing this forward would be a major theme of the upcoming British Presidency. However, there has been no specific mention of Switzerland in this context.

If there seems to be some preference for an application before the summer of 1992, the timing is seen to be a matter for the Swiss. The earlier date appeals partly because it would facilitate grouped negotiations, thereby reducing the burden on the Community machinery, which has always been a concern in Whitehall. It is also partly a reflection of the fact that it would probably be wiser for the Swiss and others to take part in the next round of IGCs in the mid 90s, rather than waiting until the central European states apply sometime early in the next century. But press comment on the Finnish decision to seek entry did not suggest that the Swiss would, or indeed, should do so.

## IV. Conclusions

Here too Britain's stance has been somewhat laid back, suggesting that the British are less inclined to think about the Swiss, and what they have to offer, than the Swiss are inclined to think of Britain (Pilet 1991). There are perhaps three reasons for this. Firstly, at least one of the things the two countries have in common, the strong emphasis placed on sovereignty and national interest in their political culture, leads the British to go their own way, sometimes self-defeatingly far in some people's opinions. Secondly, although there are strong transactional pillars to the bilateral relationship, these have had only limited effects (Deutsch 1957). They have not translated into an intimate acquaintanceship with Switzerland, let alone a strong pro-Swiss lobby. Certainly there is not the exaggerated respect for Swiss institutions sometimes assumed. Thirdly, bilateral relationships increasingly respond to Community imperatives and Switzerland is not present in the latter. Moreover, the British are actually more involved in, and supportive of the Community, than the headlines admit. The result is that the British view Switzerland as an extremely friendly and unproblematic partner in Europe, but not as a major concern.

There is neither a special relationship nor a grand strategy to use Switzerland against the Community. This is, perhaps, ironic given the stress laid on inter-governmental relations in the Community dynamic both by theorists and by the Thatcherite approach to Europe. Yet the position is not specific to Switzerland but can be found in the British approach to many smaller powers in Europe (Wallace 1984).

Two questions arise from this. Firstly, what line will the British take in the case of possible future developments in Switzerland's relations with Europe. Secondly, what are the implications for Swiss policy makers? On the first, assuming the EEA goes ahead, they will be able to rely on underlying British support for their interests and hopes for entry. If they feel forced to back out this would be understood and the United Kingdom would – no doubt – support Swiss entry, assuming this was requested in the near future. However, if the Swiss sought to return to a more resolute policy of «alleingang» it would be unwise to assume that the UK would differ from its Community partners in declining to accept the replacement of the EEA by a whole new generation of bilateral. Equally there is likely to be more support for early than for later entry. The passage of time would surely cost the Swiss the sympathy they have built up and any unease over the fact that the Community had developed more cohesion while they were outside might meet an «I told you so» response.

This suggests that the Swiss would do better to present themselves as a normal nation state, rather than as a «sonderfall» with special claims on Europe (Pettifer 1992). Calls for special, and understanding, treatment are likely to fall on deaf ears since all powers are really motivated by their own interests rather than by philanthropy. And, like other states Switzerland will need to become aware that it is only by translating national interests to a new plane that they can safely be preserved in the new Europe. There is perhaps also a need to reconsider Swiss promotional and information strategies, including explaining at home the way the Community functions.

Once inside the Swiss would be ill advised to look to the UK to preserve them from moves to further deepening, assuming this is what they want. For while the UK will not make stirring calls for federalism (for which it is not ready), it will not stop the advance to Union or seek to remodel it on Swiss lines, let alone leave the Community. Thus Ministers insisted after Maastricht that the Community will continue to be a *sui generis* political animal, and not one modelled on anything else. And if there are parallels between the EC and the Swiss experience it may well be with that of the pre 1798 Confederacy rather with that of today (Church 1991; Rose 1991). Moreover, John Major has stressed the futility of «leaving a party in full swing for one which is breaking up» when asked about a return to EFTA (1991b). In the future, as in the past then, Swiss-British relations will have to be played out within the framework of the evolving Community.

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