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The Asymmetries of Swiss Foreign Policy

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1   Introduction

Switzerland has long been viewed as a paragon of peace and prosperity. During the last one and a half centuries, it has been spared involvement in wars and grown wealthy through intensive foreign trade. There is nothing self-evident about this development: previous Swiss history was marked by great discord and poverty. At the end of the 18th century, Switzerland was so weak that Napoleon was able to conquer the country without any great difficulty. Even in 1847, just one year before the foundation of the federal state, Switzerland was torn by a short civil war between the poor, catholic and rural cantons on the one hand, and the industrialising, protestant and urban cantons on the other. During the last 150 years, this situation has changed dramatically, and this achievement deserves recognition.

Given this success story, one would assume Switzerland's relationship with "the world" to be generally happy and harmonious. However, reality looks rather different. Even though Switzerland's foreign economic relations have generally been unproblematic, it has repeatedly faced serious problems in the political sphere. This contradiction is shown in Switzerland's strong presence on foreign markets, which contrasts sharply with its absence from important international political organisations. In this vein, the 1993 Foreign Policy Report emphasises that Switzerland's important economic role stands "in contrast to its absence from important political decision-making bodies such as the EU or the UN" (Bundesrat 1993: 171). The main argument of this short chapter is that this asymmetry is the most salient characteristic of Switzerland's role in the world, although Switzerland joined the UN in 2002.

The most obvious reason for this fear of political contact with the outside world is Switzerland's traditional neutrality[1], but there are many other, more concrete reasons as well. For the first half of this century, these reasons are to be found mainly *outside* the borders of Switzerland, while since the Second World War, and especially today, they lie increasingly *within* the country. During the two world wars and the inter-war period, Switzerland faced a largely undemocratic, unstable and hostile environment. This situation changed in the second half of the

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[*]   This contribution is based on the original version of the article, which was published in German with the assistance of Manuel Rybach. It appeared in KLÖTI, Ulrich et al. (Hrsg.) (1999). *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*. Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung.

[1]   For additional references on neutrality, see Bächler (1994); Brunner (1989); Schindler (1984); Bonjour (1978).

century as the surrounding countries became more democratic, prosperous and peaceful. Recent papers, such as the Security Policy Report 2000 (Federal Council 1999) or the report by the "Brunner Commission",[2] highlight this development. The principal argument made in these papers is that while Switzerland's neighbours had previously represented a source of uncertainty, today they provide Switzerland with security and protection (Federal Council 1999: 5, 17-26; Brunner Commission 1998: 4-7).

The process of reacting to these changes is for Switzerland more difficult than for other neutral states. For Austria, Sweden and Finland, it was a matter of course to join the United Nations (UN), and in 1994 they decided to enter the European Union (EU) as well. Even with regard the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), these countries show considerably less reluctance than Switzerland. Thus, the Swiss "special case" (*Sonderfall*) cannot be explained through neutrality alone. The decisive factors are more fundamental and domestic in nature: it is the constitutive elements of its political system[3] that prevent Switzerland from reacting appropriately to changes in its external environment. Neutrality is merely one element of this system (Gabriel 2003).

Globalisation and interdependence make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between domestic and foreign policy. Nowadays, almost every internal political problem has an external dimension. Being a small state at the heart of an increasingly integrated Europe, Switzerland is especially sensitive to these linkages. Moreover, the EU is also supranational, which blurs the distinction between domestic and international affairs even further. For the countries of the EU, the autonomous and separate conduct of internal and external politics has long been an impossibility. As a consequence, these countries were compelled to relinquish part of their national sovereignty in favour of the European Union. However, through active participation in supranational institutions, they have gained access to new forms of political governance and thus been able to compensate for this partial loss of self-determination. For Switzerland, in contrast, such a step has proven to be extremely difficult.

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[2]   The Brunner Commission (Studienkommission für strategische Fragen) was appointed by the Federal Government in 1996. The mandate of the commission was to elaborate guidelines for Swiss military and security policy after the turn of the millenium. The Commission issued its report in February 1998. For an analysis of the report, see Spillmann/Wenger/Fanzun/Lehmann 1999. The Security Report 2000 is analysed by Fanzun/Wenger 2000. For an overview of Swiss security policy since 1945, see Spillmann/Wenger/Breitenmoser /Gerber (2001).

[3]   On the peculiarities of the Swiss political system, see Neidhart (1992); Linder (1999).

The present chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, we provide a short description of the asymmetry between Switzerland's far-reaching integration into the global economy and its limited political participation at the international level. Second, we attempt to explain this contrast through a discussion of the main characteristics of the Swiss political system, such as direct democracy, the system of concordance, the principle of collegiality, federalism, neutrality and the militia system, as well as the impact of these elements on Swiss foreign policy. In the third and final part, we glance towards the future and present two possible future scenarios.

2 Asymmetrical Foreign Policy

Switzerland's external economic dependence is extremely high. In 1998 exports of goods and services made up almost 40 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and imports and exports amounted to around 76 percent of Switzerland's GDP (Goetschel/Bernath/Schwarz 2002: 167). Traditionally, Switzerland's foreign economic relations have been concentrated on Europe. It is also typical of a small country that Switzerland's contribution to global trade is about twice the size of its contribution to global production. Switzerland's small size, its strong foreign dependency – which is exacerbated by a lack of natural resources – and the traditional policy of non-adherence to major trading blocks, explains its interest in an open global economy (Kappel/Landmann 1997: 58, 396). It is therefore not surprising that Switzerland is a member of many functional international organisations that deal with very specific – often economic – matters (see Table 1).

This strong international presence within the global economy stands in sharp contrast to Switzerland's lack of international political collaboration. The country is not represented in the most important political bodies that shape its immediate environment, such as the EU and NATO. Its extremely hesitant attitude towards the process of European integration and other forms of international collaboration are the distinctive features of Swiss foreign policy. It took Switzerland 14 years to join the Council of Europe and 24 years to ratify the European Convention on Human Rights; this, despite the fact that these institutions are especially based on

those values, such as democracy and human rights, with which Switzerland has traditionally identified itself.[4]

Table 1: Swiss Membership in International Organisations[5]

	Organisation	Founded	Swiss Membership
Main UN Bodies	General Assembly (GA)	1945	1948 (observer) 2002 (membership)
	Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)	1945	1948 (observer)
	Security Council (SC)	1945	
	International Court of Justice (ICJ)	1945	1948
	Trusteeship Council (TC) (the TC suspended operations in 1994)	1945	
	Secretariat	1945	1948 (contributions)
Specialised Agencies	International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	1865/1947	1865
	Universal Postal Union (UPU)	1874/1948	1875
	International Labour Organization (ILO)	1919/1946	1920
	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	1945	1947
	International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	1944	1947
	World Health Organization (WHO)	1946	1947
	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	1945	1949
	World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	1947	1949
	International Maritime Organization (IMO)	1948	1955
	United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	1966	1967
	World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	1967	1970
	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	1977	1977
	World Bank Group		1992
	International Monetary Fund (IMF)	1944	1992
Programmes and Funds (selective)	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	1946	1947
	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	1950	1951
	World Food Programme (WFP)	1961	1963
	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	1964	1964
	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	1965	1965
	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	1972	1975
Other international Organisations (selective)	Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)	1947	1972
	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), since 1995 World Trade Organization (WTO)	1948	1966
	Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), since 1961 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	1948	1948
	Council of Europe (CoE)	1949	1963
	European Payment Union (EPU)	1950	1950
	European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN)	1954	1954
	International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	1956	1957
	European Free Trade Association (EFTA)	1960	1960
	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)	1970	1996
	International Energy Agency (IEA)	1974	1974
	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), since 1994 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	1975	1975
	European Space Agency (ESA)	1975	1975

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[4]   For an analysis of Swiss human rights policy, see Schläppi/Kälin (2001); Krafft/Vigny (1992); Fanzun (2003).

[5]   The table is taken from Möckli (2003), with additional non-UN organisations added by the authors.

Even though Switzerland, with its small and open economy, might be expected to have a considerable interest in a rule-based international economic system, it waited 19 years before joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and no less than 47 years before adhering to the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Riklin 1995: 21f.). It lasted even 57 years before Switzerland finally joined the UN after an extremely close popular vote on 3 March 2002 (Möckli 2003). Switzerland does play an active role in strengthening international humanitarian law, and it is firmly engaged within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, since 1994 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE), but these are exceptions that only confirm the rule of Switzerland's hesitant and reactive foreign policy. In this context, it is tempting to recall former Federal Councillor Willy Ritschard's famous proverb: "The Swiss rise early, but wake up late".

The minimal political responsibility that Switzerland is willing to assume on the international scene hardly does justice to its own value system and still less to its economic weight. In the security field, these discrepancies are especially conspicuous. The manpower of the Swiss Army (at present 350'000 men) stands in sharp contrast to the little more than 300 soldiers and officers who, in the context of international peacekeeping and similar missions, contribute directly to peace in Europe and the rest of the world.[6] As Switzerland's security comes increasingly to be guaranteed by NATO, the country will be seen more and more as a free rider, which in turn will further diminish international support for its isolationism (Brunner Commission 1998: 8).

Switzerland's integration policy suffers from the same contradiction. De facto, Switzerland maintains close ties with the European Union; de jure, however, the Swiss continue to negotiate bilaterally on a sector-by-sector basis, confining themselves to a limited number of issue areas. The Swiss seek to avoid commitments that would ultimately correspond to their financial resources; in particular, they do not want to become net contributors to the European Union. At the same time, the Swiss engage in tough bargaining over details, a strategy that seems increasingly dysfunctional. At least in a longer-term perspective, the Swiss national interest would be better served by a more active stance within international organisations

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[6]   For up-to-date information on Swiss participation in international peacekeeping and similar missions, see the homepage of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports at http://www.vbs-ddps.ch/internet/groupgst/en/home/peace/peace.html.

(Bundesrat 1993: 159-162; Federal Council 2000: 40-50). Other neutral countries such as Austria, Sweden, and Finland have long learned this lesson.

Switzerland's relationship with the European Union is a telling example of what it means to be influenced by the international environment without being able to shape it. The oft-quoted *autonome Nachvollzug* ("autonomous" adoption) of EU regulations is not limited to "voluntary" compatibility tests for Swiss laws and decrees. Even such sensitive areas as milk production are subject to the supervision of EU food inspectors. The ideal image of Switzerland as a country with full decision-making autonomy has thus long been put into question by de facto integration without rights of co-decision. Given Switzerland's absence from the most important international organisations, it can indeed be seen as a self-marginalised, pseudo-sovereign and pseudo-autonomous *Nachvollzugsland* ("adoption state") (Riklin 1995: 25).

3   Reasons for Asymmetry

In this section, we turn to possible explanations for Switzerland's "foreign policy deficit" by discussing the constitutive elements of the Swiss political system. We thus proceed from the assumption that Swiss foreign policy is influenced by the typical features of the Swiss political system, and that possible future changes will therefore require modification. In what follows, we briefly examine the impact of the main elements of the Swiss political system on its foreign policy. These elements include *direct democracy,* the system of *concordance,* the principle of *collegiality, federalism, neutrality* and the *militia system.* Even though none of these are particularly Swiss inventions, in combination they nevertheless make Switzerland a "special case" (*Sonderfall*) (Gabriel 1990: 102-116; Gabriel 2003).

Direct Democracy

At the federal level, *direct democracy* – exercised through referenda and initiatives – implies an intimate link between domestic and foreign policy. As a consequence, broad domestic support is a basic precondition for a coherent foreign policy. Yet, especially with regard to European integration, which is of the utmost importance for Switzerland, there is no consensus. The frequent lack of domestic support is one of the main foreign policy shortcomings, and if failures are to be avoided in the future, greater efforts must be made to properly inform the public. What is needed are not information campaigns shortly before votes, but rather a clear

and firm commitment by the government to the country's strategic goals (Langejürgen 1993: 202). Moreover, the public should be made aware of the fact that, due to increasing international interdependence, nation-states are no longer autonomous actors. Given the referendum on international treaties, such misperceptions can have a direct impact on foreign policy-making (Germann 1995: 35-60).

The referendum and the initiative are not only the main instruments of parties and citizens. These instruments particularly enable financially powerful interest groups to further their own interests. Especially in the process of pre-parliamentary decision-making, these groups can enhance their bargaining power by threatening to resort to a referendum, and this in turn can severely restrain the pursuit of a coherent and goal-oriented foreign policy. For this reason, some analysts have identified direct democracy as the main obstacle to a more open foreign policy (Borner/Brunetti/Straubhaar 1990: 19). Obviously, direct democracy also has its benefits: Once bills are adopted, they enjoy a high degree of legitimacy. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that popular votes trigger a process of political learning within the electorate, although this intensive form of direct democracy is characterised by low participation and often overtaxes the voters' capacities.

Concordance and Collegial Executives

The second and third constitutive elements of the Swiss political system, the principles of *concordance* and of *collegial executives,* are intimately related. Concordance refers to the fact that, at all levels of government, the executive represents a broad coalition. The fact that Swiss executives consist of councils, or collegial bodies, favours the forming of concordant coalitions. Collegiality, as it is called, and concordance have proven to be an important asset during times of great external uncertainty. Especially during the European wars, it was difficult to hold together a country as culturally, denominationally and socially heterogeneous as Switzerland. Collegiality and concordance significantly facilitated the integration of different groups of the population.

Nowadays, these mechanisms represent an additional obstacle to a more active foreign policy, which already suffers from a lack of efficiency and profile. The Federal Council, also composed according to these two principles, has difficulty to agree upon a far-sighted foreign policy. Its indirect election further exacerbates this problem. If power alternated in Switzer-

land, i.e. if a ministerial government, or a president, were periodically elected by popular vote, Swiss foreign policy would probably have a clearer orientation. As has been shown by Germann (1997: 155-165), the current system of governance favours neither the formulation of clear alternatives nor the sanctioning of the government by popular votes. Minor reforms or mere changes in behaviour could suffice to bring about different government constellations (Kappeler 1997: 303-306).

Federalism

Federalism is the fourth feature of the Swiss political system. Due to linguistic, cultural and religious divisions, the Swiss state could only survive with a very decentralised structure. In the field of foreign policy, however, the constitution accords full responsibility to the Federation. Even though the cantons might, exceptionally, be given the power to conclude treaties on narrowly circumscribed issues, this authority has been curtailed in recent years. Nowadays, the foreign policy activities of the cantons are largely confined to their contacts with neighbouring regions (Häfelin/Haller 2001: 322). The new constitution has changed nothing. Given this division of responsibilities, it is not surprising that Switzerland's EU accession would have a stronger impact on the Federation than on the cantons; it would particularly reduce the powers of the former (Schindler 1992: 200).

Switzerland's federalist structure has therefore a mostly indirect foreign policy impact. Through the pre-parliamentary consultation procedure, the cantons have, for instance, the possibility of influencing foreign policy at the federal level. However, a combination of direct democratic elements and federalist institutional arrangements proves to be the most effective means by which the cantons can influence foreign policy. The requirement to obtain a cantonal majority for constitutional amendments and for the acceptance of certain international treaties constitutes an additional hurdle, which has often led to significant delays in dealing with questions of this kind. The over-representation of the interests of the smaller cantons is particularly obvious, given that most of the 26 cantons have fewer inhabitants than the city of Zurich. The rejection of the European Economic Area (EEA) treaty in 1992 showed quite clearly that the small, rural and conservative cantons are less supportive of European integration than the large, urban and progressive cantons. The former are indeed capable of blocking or at least of delaying a rapprochement with the European Union.

Neutrality

The fifth constitutive element of the Swiss political system is *neutrality.* Even though nowadays neutrality is no longer considered to be an integral part of Swiss domestic politics, a brief look at the past shows that this was not always the case. As mentioned above, until the 1930s, Switzerland was divided by profound cultural, religious and social cleavages. Consequently, the conclusion of an alliance with a neighbouring country in times of war could have had severe consequences for internal cohesion. Neutrality, therefore, like direct democracy, concordance, collegiality, federalism and the militia system, was an important component of the Swiss system as a whole (Gabriel 1997: 19-27).

Even though this danger is no longer present, a majority of the population still perceives neutrality as an integral part of the Swiss political system and as an essential element of Swiss identity (Brühlmeier 1997/98: 30-32). In other words, traditionally-minded Swiss not only have strong local roots and attach a high value to their direct democratic rights, but they also feel neutral! This obviously gives neutrality a significance going far beyond its original purpose. It is often forgotten that neutrality was never meant to be the ultimate goal of Swiss foreign policy, but rather one of several means of maintaining sovereignty and independence. If Switzerland's independence had been threatened by a military attack (not a mere violation of its borders), Switzerland would have reserved the right to abandon neutrality and enter into an alliance, a choice in full conformity with international law. Unfortunately, the small elite that has traditionally dominated Swiss foreign policy-making has never openly communicated this instrumental conception of Swiss neutrality (Gabriel 1997: 21).

According to surveys, this overvalued conception of neutrality remains dominant among the Swiss population (Haltiner et al. 2002: 103-121), even though Switzerland's official position has been reviewed considerably. In view of the profound changes that have followed the end of the Cold War, the Federal Council has, after much soul-searching, decided to re-conceptualise neutrality. In the 1993 Foreign Policy Report, neutrality is only mentioned in the appendix, and its scope has been severely restricted (Bundesrat 1993: 206-242). Neutrality is now confined to a possible "relapse", that is, to the highly hypothetical case that balance of power politics would again come to dominate Europe. Unfortunately, this new conception has not yet been discussed in public, and the parliament did not even debate the report, it merely "took notice" (Gabriel 1997: 129-158).

The Militia System

The *militia principle* is the last core element of the Swiss political system to be discussed. At first sight, this component seems to relate only to internal politics. It implies that, at the communal, cantonal and federal levels, all parliamentarians, as well as many members of the executive, serve either in an honorary or a part-time capacity (Brühlmeier 1997/98: 26-28). However, this idea also has an important external dimension, in that, of the 350'000 soldiers and officers of the Swiss army, only about 2'000 are professionals. Currently the Swiss Army is undergoing a reform process (Army XXI) that will lead to a smaller army of 140'000 soldiers and officers (plus 80'000 reservists) with a higher share of professional personnel (Bundesrat 2002: 1034-1039). Nonetheless, the Army XXI still holds on to the militia system, because this principle is seen by most Swiss as an essential part of their national identity. For them the word "professionalism" has an almost blasphemous character. Today, however, a point has been reached where the militia is no longer suited to economic and societal needs (Haltiner 1996: 13-18).

The militia system also prevents the formulation of a modern security policy. It shows in the case of SWISSCOY, a small Swiss military unit stationed in Kosovo (Gabriel 2000: 9-39; Wenger/Breitenmoser/Mäder 2000: 119-140). The army, even though it counts 350'000 men, encounters great difficulty to man and outfit the size of a large company.

The relevance of the militia system for Switzerland's foreign policy also affects discussions over a possible NATO rapprochement and, related to this, on further reforms of the armed forces. Nowadays, the NATO member states distinguish between Main Defence Forces and Crisis Reaction Forces, and the latter are considered more important. Crisis Reaction Forces are composed of professionals, as well as non-professionals who serve for a longer period than ordinary conscripts. If Switzerland were to set up units that meet NATO's compatibility requirements, its militia soldiers could only be used as Main Defence Forces. In the eyes of many Swiss, this would lead to a devaluation of the militia ideal and to the creation of a "two-class-army". In this regard, even the otherwise progressive Brunner report and the Security Report 2000 alluded to above, fears that such a development would lead to a loosening of the close ties between the population and the armed forces (Brunner Commission 1998: 20; Federal Council 1999: 55).

This short overview shows that the six constitutive elements remain firmly rooted in the population and that, under certain conditions, they can have a considerable impact on foreign policy. For the majority of the population, the combination of these elements still corresponds to the ideal image of a democratic, free, peaceful and prosperous state (Brühlmeier 1997/1998: 17-33). In the past, this view might have been justified, since for centuries, Switzerland's very *raison d'être* placed it in opposition to the general developments on the European continent. Switzerland saw itself as a anti-monarchist, anti-hegemonic, anti-imperialist, anti-centralist, anti-nationalist, anti-fascist and anti-totalitarian island in Europe as well as in the world at large (Riklin 1995: 22). However, since the end of the World War II, and even more so since the end of the Cold War, the international environment has changed radically, and Switzerland is now surrounded by countries that adhere to the same basic values, such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Thus, as far as basic issues of political order are concerned, Switzerland no longer represents an exceptional case within Europe.

Nevertheless, the idea of Switzerland's special role, enhanced by a tendency of self-conceit, is alive and well. These factors go far in explaining the asymmetry. While the Swiss political system, together with the corresponding conception of Swiss identity, hardly constitutes an obstacle to global free trade, these two often stand in the way of stronger international commitments.

Switzerland's attitude towards the United Nations is one example of this problem. In 1986, three-quarters of the voters decided against Switzerland's accession to the UN, while in 1984, the creation of a blue helmets unit was rejected by the Swiss population. Analyses of these votes have shown that, in the eyes of the voters, the costs of participation far outweighed the benefits. This looks like a purely financial consideration, but there is a political motivation: with no faith in the utility of an institution, every franc spent seems a bad investment. The decision to join the UN can be interpreted as a renunciation of this attitude and as a sign of a changing political identity.

Similar arguments can be made with regard to NATO and the EU. According to the 1990 Security Report the Federal Council considers a collapse of the surrounding regional institutions and the outbreak of war on Switzerland's borders as a possibility ("relapse" scenario) (Federal Council 1990). Moreover, at a time when countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany

were taking the irreversibility of the process of European integration for granted, Switzerland was still anticipating a development towards disintegration. This, too, proved to be a misperception that needed to be corrected within a few years. The costs of this mistake were considerable, however, since a different assessment of the external situation would have had a decisive impact on the reform of the army in 1995. The ongoing reform of the armed forces is based on a scenario of international cooperation and integration (Federal Council 1999; Bundesrat 2002). However, the reform process proves to be difficult because the "relapse" scenario is still alive.

Traditionally, Switzerland is sceptical towards multilateralism; bilateralism was always the preferred form of diplomacy. The negotiation process between Switzerland and the 15 members of the European Union and its executive body, the European Commission, is therefore called "bilateral"! It is also assumed that Switzerland's good offices depend on bilateralism. However, the possibility that Switzerland might be able to mediate even more often and effectively as a member of multilateral bodies such as the UN has entered into Swiss consciousness only in the last few years.

Self-deceptions of this kind often lead to faulty assessments of Switzerland's political bargaining power. As a small state, heavily dependent on foreign trade, Switzerland is much more dependent on the "world" than the other way around – but this fact is seldom acknowledged. For instance, when, during the EEA negotiations, the other neutrals (realistically) showed a greater willingness to make concessions, the Swiss chief negotiator accused them of being too submissive. Also, when the Swiss encountered unexpected obstacles in their "bilateral" approach to the EU, the Federal Council declared incessantly that it was up to Brussels to make the next move. In general, the Swiss have a great deal of difficulty admitting that the other party holds better cards and is less interested than they are in reaching an agreement (Langejürgen 1993: 193-204). This attitude still prevails in the ongoing bilateral negotiations with the European Union despite the fact that Switzerland has much less bargaining power than the EU.

4   Future Scenarios

This article proceeded from the assumption that core elements of the political system lie at the basis of Switzerland's asymmetrical foreign policy. These elements are the cause of an isolationist and increasingly dysfunctional policy, which stands in sharp contrast to the foreign policies of its European neighbours. Other European countries also have their own distinctive features and political identities, but these do not prevent them from joining NATO, or the EU. Given that nowadays Switzerland's neighbours share the same ideas about legitimate forms of governance, the insistence on being a "special case" seems increasingly ill-suited to our long-term national interests (Bundesrat 1993: 159-162; Federal Council 2000). If Switzerland wants to safeguard its long-term interests and remain true to its fundamental values within a changing international environment, it will have to abandon its time-honoured foreign policy. The country will have to rethink cherished traditions to the extent that these prove inadequate to cope with future challenges. It must be emphasised, however, that the ability to deal effectively with foreign policy problems should not be taken as the only measure for evaluating the overall capacity of the Swiss political system.

Given the tenacity with which the Swiss cling to their overdrawn identity, rapid change is not to be expected. Nevertheless, Switzerland will eventually join the European Union and even the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. How this will be achieved is less clear, however. Will Switzerland choose the path of *renewal* or of *persistence*? We consider the first choice to be more desirable, but also less likely; the second scenario, by contrast, is more realistic, but less attractive.

The *strategy of renewal* is reminiscent of the period when the Swiss Federation was founded in the first half of the 19th century. The changes of those times resulted, to a large extent, from a process of internal awakening. If the country were able to mobilise the same amount of energy in the coming years, then at least a partial restructuring of its political institutions seems conceivable, allowing Switzerland to meet its future foreign policy challenges. Just as the liberal cantons in the early 19th century reformed their political systems in anticipation of a change at a higher level, present-day Switzerland would have to prepare itself for the challenge of European integration. Today, as in the past, the Swiss should be inspired by foreign

models. Such a process has also been referred to as a transition from being a "special case" to being a "normal case".

The preconditions for such a transition seem to be present in Switzerland inasmuch as its political culture contains elements that, already 150 years ago, made it seem like a *"Europe en miniature"*. Since in the French-speaking part there is more awareness of these elements than in the German-speaking regions, it is scarcely surprising that the French-speakers are also more supportive of the process of European integration. They are better prepared for a double engagement, that is, "renewal" at home, combined with increasing participation at the European level.

This strategy of renewal, however, is just as unlikely as it is desirable. Precisely because the Swiss in many respects were the "first Europeans", they will also be the last. Numerous plans for true reform have been shelved. The latest constitutional reform was largely confined to formal amendments and adaptations to current practices (Rhinow 2000). Left to itself, present-day Switzerland seems incapable of reform: the events of 1848 are unlikely to repeat themselves. Reforms might be brought about through external pressure, and a reluctant and hesitant participation in the process of European integration is to be expected. This, however, does not amount to a strategy of renewal; it seems more like a strategy of persistence.

If Switzerland follows this course, effective change is unlikely to occur since the population will support the process of transformation for purely utilitarian considerations. Such motives will prevail especially among those who will come to recognise the necessity of change but are at present not yet willing to support this transformation in popular referenda. If the votes of these segments of the population can eventually be secured, it might suffice to bring about successful decisions on accessions but not for a restructuring of the political system. Therefore, it seems more likely that the system, apart from some minor changes, will persist in its current form. When Switzerland joins the EU, the Federal Council might have to be re-organised, and some restrictions on direct democracy at the federal level will have to be introduced. Beyond this, few things are likely to change.

Paradoxically, the changes in the international environment will help to maintain the special features of the political system. The fact that important political decisions are increasingly taken in Brussels will lead to a de facto shift in political responsibilities away from Berne.

This development is comparable to that which took place between the Federation and the cantons after 1848. In Switzerland, even though formally the cantons still have their own economic and military departments, since 1848, the basic decisions on these issues have been taken in Berne. Ironically, this task reduction has enabled the cantons to preserve their cherished institutions over longer periods of time. This is true in particular for the *Landsgemeinde*, which would have been abolished much earlier had it not been for the Federation.

Transposed to the European level, this logic implies that, if Switzerland joins the EU or NATO, there will be not more but, rather, fewer incentives to restructure the political system. Thus, after an initial phase of stress, during which important decisions will be taken through inefficient decision-making mechanisms, Switzerland will be able to return to its usual routine. A majority of the Swiss seem to be willing to swallow the bitter pill of joining the European Union one day, in the hope that the pain of adjustment will pass quickly. However, this too might turn out to be an illusion!

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