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NEUTRALNOST U MEĐUNARODNIM ODNOSIMA – ŠTA MOŽEMO DA NAUČIMO IZ ISKUSTVA ŠVAJCARSKÉ?

ZBORNIK RADOVA

Urednici

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MARIGNANO 1515, NEUTRALITY AND THE POLITICAL USE OF HISTORY, THE SWISS EXPERIENCE

Introduction

In the following, I will first give an overview of the pre-modern constitution of the Swiss Confederation, then outline the historical setting of the Italian wars around 1500 and illustrate the structural and political requirements for the Confederate military campaigns and the defeat at Marignano. Because the Swiss neutrality is associated with that defeat up to this day, I will ask where this assertion came from, in order to thereafter explain why the Swiss only seized on the concept of neutrality around 1900. Finally, I will conclude with thoughts about the use and of these conceptions in historiography and politics.

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The Swiss Confederation developed out of a network of many confederacies which existed in southern Germany in the late Middle Ages and could embrace cities and rural valleys, but also ecclesiastical and secular princes and noblemen. Until the 17th century at least, the Swiss Confederation was not a state of its own, but it became a quite close, stable and exclusive alliance within the Holy Roman Empire in the 15th century, to which it formally and ideologically belonged well into the 17th century.

From 1513 onwards, it consisted of 13 cantons, several allies (**Zugewandte Orte**), and the joint dependencies or condominiums (**Gemeine Herrschaften**), essentially **Aargau, Thurgau, the Ticino, the Vaud** and other areas of French speaking Switzerland. The Swiss conquered these territories from Habsburg, Milan and Savoy, respectively. The condominiums served the Swiss elites not only as a source of income and for administrative jobs, but they were also the major factor of integration for the 13 petty states. Their joint administration was the most important task the ruling cantons shared; otherwise, its members did not have too much in common.

The only political institution of the Confederation as a whole was the **Diet (Tagsatzung)**, a regular meeting of the 13 cantons' envoys. These deputies acted according to their written instructions, with an imperative mandate. Decisions of great importance always had to be confirmed by the sovereign cantons themselves. No canton would ever have accepted a decision of the twelve others if it felt its true interest put into question. All Confederates shared the conviction that there should not be any common decision unless it was accepted by each canton individually. The only case where majority decisions played a role was the administration of the condominiums, and this consequently was the most

contested area among the Confederates. There were more, although smaller Catholic cantons, and they could usually impose their will until 1712. After their victory in a Civil War that year, the economically and militarily stronger Reformed cantons Zurich and Berne changed the rules and introduced the principle of parity – which means that the Catholics and the Protestants each had one vote all together and were obliged to find solutions to avoid an eternal blocking of their joint administration.

Although the Swiss were quite successful warriors in different medieval battles, their Confederation was a rather weak union for European standards. The *Corpus helveticum* was not held together by one single treaty of union; at least a dozen treaties assured mutual assistance among the 13 cantons. Among the numerous treaties between the different Confederates, only the last one was signed by all the cantons, when, in 1513, the twelve cantons welcomed Appenzell as a new member.

Appenzell had already been their ally for some decades, as a so called “Zugewandter Ort”. That means that it had an alliance with some of the cantons and was usually invited to the Swiss Diet, but did not have the full right to vote; and that it did not take part in the administration of the condominiums. It was not by incident that Appenzell became a full member at this moment, right before the Reformation. Thereafter, it became impossible for allies to adhere to the Confederation: if they were Catholic, the Protestants said no; if Protestant, vice versa. Under these circumstances, some allies loosened their ties, more or less intentionally, such as the Swabian towns Rottweil and Constance. Most allies, however, upheld their status, such as Geneva, Neuchatel, in St. Gall both the Abbot and the city. The Valais and the Grisons were Swiss allies, but also Confederations of their own.

The early modern political structure of Switzerland thus had its advantages and disadvantages, and I will

mention the latter first. Among the many reasons for antagonism, the most important one was confessional strife between Catholic and Protestant cantons. They even led to regular confessional Diets of only the Catholic or the Protestant cantons among themselves. Many local and national crises originated in religious causes, such as the three civil wars of 1531, 1656, and 1712. They were all fought between the big reformed territories **Zurich and Berne** on the one side and **Lucerne with the other, rather small Catholic** cantons on the other. Even in everyday matters, religious diversity provoked mistrust, because everybody agreed on the principle that there could be only one true faith; as one disagreed about which one it was, there was no real moral basis for political collaboration.

Another endemic mistrust opposed the poor rural cantons to the urban cantons; the former depended economically on their mercenary services abroad, while the latter, such as Zurich and Basel, could develop proto-industry or, like Lucerne and Berne, at least some level of organised agriculture. Within all these cantons, there were social tensions which escalated most conspicuously in the Peasants' war of 1653 when Catholic and Protestant peasants opposed the taxation of their governments together and were oppressed by an alliance of these same Catholic and Protestant sovereigns as well.

Depending on the different political and economic interests, considerable jealousy existed even within the same confessional camp, such as between Berne and Zurich. Each canton had its own foreign policy, and different loyalties among its citizens. According to the situation and their interests, the different cantons leaned towards France or the emperor, Spain or England and the Netherlands respectively. Thus the individual cantons, but also the Confederation as a whole became the toy of foreign powers – especially France – that corrupted

the leading statesman by offering bribes or careers as officers in the mercenary armies. This was particularly attractive, as there was no such thing as a common Swiss army, let alone a standing army. In case of war, there was no unified leadership. As to serious foreign policy, the Swiss not only lacked a modern army, but also a unified representation – there was no Swiss ambassador in other countries. If a Swiss delegation went abroad every now and then, it was composed of at least 13 representatives, one for each canton.

The absence of a central power also meant that political procedures took a lot of time and that many issues were never decided because cantonal sovereignty could not be overturned. Fundamental reforms were impossible, e.g. in the economic domain, where 13 petty states jealously protected their customs and other privileges. Mercantilism on a national level was not even a possibility. Corruption was endemic among the office-holders of the condominiums, who abused their position to get the money they needed to pay back for their nomination. The subjects could not do much against it. There were no legal procedures to appeal the way one could do it in the Empire thanks to the Imperial chamber (Reichskammergericht, Reichshofrat).

To finish with the characteristics of the Confederation, there was no culture of religious toleration, as it developed in the Netherlands to their economic profit. If religious unity was desperately missed on national level, the cantons were strong enough to impose it within their territories. Even without toleration, however, there was cohabitation of different confessions at least on the high political level of the Confederation itself and within the condominiums, where Protestants and Catholics often lived in the same village, especially in the Thurgau. Both on the national level and within such bi-confessional areas, the cantons were forced to develop

secular strategies of cohabitation. The three civil wars did not destroy the Confederation, but regularly led to a peace that imposed new rules for political coexistence according to the principle "*cuius regio, eius religio*": the ruler defines the faith of the whole population. This principle was established for the first time in Europe in the peace of Kappel in 1531. Formal and informal rules helped to avoid clashes on religious issues. Thus, each canton was held responsible that its citizens or priests did not insult the other confession. This resulted not from respect or toleration, but from the pragmatic insight that civil wars like the confessional wars in France, Germany, and elsewhere must be avoided. Because the Swiss had to handle this challenge without legal institutions above the cantonal level, they got used to political bargaining. Bargaining could have considerable advantages: it was faster, cheaper and socially more productive than institutionalized political procedures, because the Confederates got in immediate contact and were not torn apart by long lasting processes in court.

Such contacts were also established through economic exchange: the Reformed cities in the plains depended on the milk and cattle that were produced in the mountains that had often remained Catholic, whereas the Alpine cantons were constantly in need of grain, but also of capital from the plains and foreign markets. Finally, the lack of centralized institutions made it very clear to all neighbors that the Confederation was no military threat. Until the invasion of the French revolutionary troops in 1798 and the factual protectorate of Napoleon thereafter, the country itself was spared from a direct involvement into the endemic Swiss wars. It participated in them by offering, over the centuries, hundreds of thousands of mercenaries to the competing powers. But exactly that was one reason why they were not interested in conquering the country.

After having discussed the disadvantages and some advantages of the Swiss political system before the French Revolution, let us have a closer look to the events around 1515 and the battle of Marignano, which has been intensely commemorated and discussed in Switzerland this year, 500 years after the event.

1494 is an epoch making year for the formation of the European state system. King Charles VIII of France made a raid through Italy to claim his heritage of Naples. France thereby brought the other European princes to the scene, against whom it struggled for the primacy in Italy until the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. These so called Italian Wars brought forth a new balance of powers at a European level. France's chief opponent in the course of this was Spain and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Under Charles' VIII successor, Louis XII, the war theater shifted to Lombardy. Again due to distant hereditary rights, the new king of France conquered the duchy of Milan in 1499. In these campaigns, Louis as well as his adversary, the duke of Milan Ludovico Sforza, who was referred to as Il Moro, employed numerous Swiss mercenaries.

Following his victory, Louis XII reluctantly handed over the **Blenio Valley, Riviera and Bellinzona** in today's Ticino to the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden. The Confederates had been respected as an armed force since their victory over duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy (1476). However, they regularly disagreed in foreign affairs and concerning their war objectives, which diverged depending on the canton. The belief that the Confederation was a major power at that time, which is widespread in Switzerland down to the present day, is misleading. The undisputed clout of their infantry troops contrasted too obviously with the fact that they had no unified leadership. This not only for political reasons, because the Diet, the only Swiss-wide institution,

remained an inert council and was far away from the happenings. The troops also acted discordantly in the field, where mostly regional corporations of soldiers were in charge, which occasionally refused obedience to their own captains, and to the Diet most of all. Only as long as the mercenaries were in foreign commission and were actually paid, did discipline prevail. In the absence of money they were more attracted to the idea of scavenging on short notice than to permanent conquest.

Such was the state of things when the mercenary contract, which France had concluded with the cantons in 1499, expired after ten years. The Confederates did not renew it. Obviously floutingly, Louis XII had neither paid the pay strikes nor dignified the Swiss merchants: To the king, the burghers and farmers were supplier of cannon fodder but no partner of equal rank. Therefore, the Confederates allied themselves with the two universal powers, Emperor Maximilian I and Pope Julius II. The latter had established the Papal Swiss Guard in Rome in 1506, which exists up to this day, and wanted to expel the French from Italy through the formation of a "Holy League". Apart from the Papal States, the Republic of Venice, Spain, England and indirectly the Emperor were part of this, and so were the Confederates. The Valais cardinal Matthäus Schiner served as intermediary between the Swiss and their allies, the so called "Zugewandte Orte".

It needed this so to speak internationally blessed alliance for the Swiss troops to develop a temporary coherent dynamic, after they had repeatedly campaigned and ransacked throughout northern Italy in the preceding years. Other powers compensated for the structural deficit of the Swiss infantrymen, which was one reason for their military success. In the 1512 campaign of Pavia (Pavierfeldzug), it was the Venetians who supplied the cavalry. With their help, the Confederates

expelled the French from Lombardy and, with Papal blessing, converted it into a tributary protectorate. For themselves, the Confederates obtained trade privileges and occupied the Alpine valleys in today's canton Ticino, which they henceforth governed as a condominium: **Lugano, Locarno and the Maggia Valley**. The allied Grisons simultaneously conquered **Veltlin, Bormio and Chiavenna**. In the battle of Novara of 1513, the Confederates definitely defeated Louis XII thanks to a bold flank attack on his army, which would have been superior per se because of its artillery. The Swiss glory was at its climax. Particularly Machiavelli admired them as an invincible reincarnation of the Roman militiamen.

The Swiss may have been victorious in 1513, but they were suddenly isolated as well. The Emperor withdrew, Pope Julius II died, and Venice allied with France again. Louis XII, however, did not get to profit from this anymore as he passed away in early 1515. Soon after his coronation his successor, Francis I, passed over the Alps towards Lombardy. He made a proposition to the Confederates, which complied with his corporative logic: money for mercenaries, territory for princes. The troops from Berne, Fribourg, Solothurn and Biel consented the treaty of Gallarate on 8 September 1515 and yielded Milan, Asti and Genoa in return for a payment of 1 million crowns and pensions. From the other Confederates' point and the later nationalist historiography, this was interpreted as treason. However, the treaty complied with the praxis of foreign policy of the preceding years. Zurich and Zug leaned towards a decampment, too, but cardinal Schiner called to battle against the French and single Confederate militia heaps at Milan's doors turned from skirmish into an open battle.

Belligerent sense of honor and juvenile presumption, even arrogance explain that the remaining Confederates risked the assault on the army, as they had done in

Novara. German landsknechts, the detested competitor on the mercenary market, formed the French front, behind whom stood the dangerous French artillery, whilst Francis I led the cavalry. His grave in **Saint-Denis Abbey** immortalizes him as a **knight** in battle, while the decisive **cannons** can be seen in the back right. Even though the Confederates invaded the French in the evening and were already regarded as victors, the French reinforced their defensive position overnight. The Swiss troops spent the night in the field, hungry and freezing, and a number of soldiers disengaged. The new assault on 14 September shattered already at the artillery before the Venetian cavalry even arrived and forced the Confederates to withdraw to Milan for good. They ceded it to Francis I soon after, and Massimiliano Sforza abdicated.

The defeat at Marignano caused a stir, the Confederates had lost their reputation of invincibility. However, this did not result in a change of heart. Along with the cantons of Central Switzerland, Zurich and Basel held on to the southern alpine, so called “ennetbirgischen” protectorates. From these rounds, Emperor Maximilian I recruited mercenaries when he tried to regain Milan in the spring of 1516. Francis I, on his part, counted also on Swiss mercenaries, from the Western cantons, who successfully defended that same Milan. Thus, the ultimate, so called “eternal” peace with France, which was concluded on the 29 November 1516 in Fribourg, benefited not least the adjustment of the Confederates among themselves. The peace’s content built on earlier agreements with France and Milan and granted 700 000 crowns of compensation, pensions and trade privileges. The valleys that had been conquered south of the Alps, remained in Confederate hands, which has not changed up to this day.

This eternal peace remained the Confederates’ most important cornerstone in foreign politics until 1798 as

well as a decisive factor for the internal, intermediary balance. The mercenary alliance of 1521 complemented this peace. It would repeatedly be renewed later on and which bestowed privileged access to the Swiss infantry onto the French king. The Swiss thus displaced again the less reliable German landsknechts and thereafter acted as infantry beside the aristocratic-French cavalry and artillery. These two branches were indispensable for modern warfare. Unlike the French national monarchy with its considerable tax revenue, however, the comparably poor and fragmented cantons were barely able to afford these. Whilst they had managed to get away with their foolhardy militia heaps in Novara, Marignano ruthlessly showed the structural boundaries of the Swiss strategy and weaponry. The unpredictable warrior communities were now increasingly incorporated in the French and otherwise European armies and tactically disciplined. In northern Italy, however, this was for the moment of little avail: Francis I, with his once again boldly charging Swiss mercenaries, lost the Battle of Bicocca against Emperor Karl V. in 1522 and had to yield Milan to him later on. The defeat at Marignano was thus a break, but no breakover. The uncoordinated Swiss expansion did not stop in 1515, either: The **Mendrisiotto** in the very south of Ticino was conquered in 1517 and became definitely a condominium in 1521. More momentous still was Berne's, Fribourg's and the Valais' campaign against Savoy in 1536: Berne permanently obtained the **Vaud** as well as temporarily the territories south of the Lake Geneva.

The defeat at Marignano therefore did not mean that Switzerland proceeded to neutrality, as Swiss manuals proclaimed for a long time and as many Swiss believe up to this day. It was rather the Reformation under Zurich's minister Ulrich Zwingli from the 1520ies onwards, which was responsible for the fact that the Confederates, to their sorrow, were unable to pursue a joint foreign

policy and to wage war together: How could they have trust into each other while they were at strife concerning the salvation, *the* decisive question of the right belief? Every involvement into the Europeans wars of the 16th and 17th century – which always were, at least partially, confessional – would have been fatal for the Confederates, because they would have affiliated with their respective co-religionists abroad and would therefore have fought against each other in a civil war within the country.

However, this enormous danger far from deterred the Swiss from confessional alliances, both defensive as well as offensive, which, in the next two centuries, the cantons formed with different states, according to their respective confessional preferences. Thus, Zurich contracted “Christian Federations” in the southern German area already during the Reformation period and allied with Berne and Geneva (1584), Strasbourg (1588) and the Markgrave of Baden (1612). The Catholic cantons stroke up special alliances with Savoy (1577) and the hegemony power Spain (1587). The French alliance was the only treaty that brought together all the cantons into one foreign relation and therefore had a major impact also for domestic politics, as I already mentioned. With their money and influence, the French kings wanted to ensure the mercenary reservoir and thus prevented the Confederation from breaking apart along confessional boundaries.

With this French protector and arbitrator, the Swiss cantons combined pragmatic restraint. They did not their co-religionists in the German wars of 1546/47 and 1618–1648 or in the French religious wars (1562–1598) with an official array, but only indirectly through mercenaries. However, the Swiss never would have accepted the appellation of this conduct as “neutrality”. The word and the associated disposition were doubly proscribed. On the one hand, it stood for military weakness. When

the word appeared in the Swiss environment, it referred to “neutralized” territories, e.g. to the Free County of Burgundy since 1512; comparable are the cases of Savoy in the 19th century and of Austria in 1955. Major Powers thus agreed that regions, which were hard to defend and very exposed, were excluded from their confrontation area. The Confederates, however, in the 16th and 17th century, continued to consider themselves subject, not object within the European state system. More importantly still was the second, the religious aspect. In the crucial matter of salvation, neutrality equaled “cowardice” and “indifference”, i.e. indifference between the devil and God. “Neutralist” was a swearword, in accordance with Matthew 12, 30: “Whoever is not with me is against me.” When god and the devil fought about the eternal truth, one was not allowed to remain neutral.

Only in the secularized state system, which developed after the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, a sober and even positive understanding of neutrality became possible. The modern system of states was grounded in their sovereignty. The most important aspect of sovereignty in foreign policy was the “*ius belli*”, the right to wage war. It no longer mattered whether this was a “*bellum iustum*”, a just war in the medieval tradition. As long as the solely entitled person declared war, i.e. the sovereign himself, there was thus no moral question anymore whether a state waged war – or did not do it, i.e. remained neutral. Neutrality thus became a legitimate option. In the war of Louis XIV against the Netherlands, in 1674, the Diet declared for the first time officially that “*wir uns als ein Neutral Standt halten und wohl versorgen wolle*”, i.e. that they would behave as a neutral state. It was not a coincidence that weakening middle powers, such as Venice and Genoa, wended their ways to neutrality in the same times.

Even though the internal conflict lines between the cantons went on to correspond to the boundaries between Catholics and Protestants, the Swiss began to retire from the confessional interpretation of the world in foreign policy around the end of the 17th century. Consequently, they started to consider neutrality as a positive trait. A very ostensive example is a stove tile, which was created as a part of a very deliberately conceptualized iconographic program during the construction of the new Zurich town hall in 1698. The tile bears the title INTER SCYLLAM ATQUE CHARYBDIN, between Scylla and Charybdis, und "Der glücklich wirdt gepreiset, der im Mittelweg durchreiset", i.e. "He who travels through the middle ground is praised as blissful". A fox watches two fighting cats of prey from the background, while the scroll declares "Confederate Neutrality". In early modern political theory, the fox was a burdened animal, since it was identified with the Machiavellianism of reason of state, and therefore with treachery, slyness, falsehood and pretense. Especially in Protestant Zurich, such character flaws had regularly been attributed to the Jesuits in the 17th century. It is all the more surprising that this oven tile interpreted the fox's cunning and reticence not as sneaky anymore, but as "wise". The relatively weak and yet successful animal became a symbol for pragmatic politics, which did not dedicate itself to noble religious principles, but concentrated on the own, terrestrial well-being.

The political neutrality also served as a secular explanation for the fact that the Confederates had experienced a period of peace and then an economic bloom during the catastrophes of the 17th century with its religious wars – actually not despite their confessional differences, but just thanks to them. Thus, the Swiss started around 1700 to speak of their ancestors' "state's rules" (Staats-Regeln) or the maxims and rules

(“Maximes and Regul”), which allegedly had practiced neutrality at all times: “sich jederzeith einer Neutralität befließen haben”. The Diet scribe Franz Michael Büeler from the small Catholic canton of Schwyz was probably the first to ascribe the origins of neutrality to the defeat at Marignano or the peace of Paris. Without explicitly naming these, he asked in a treatise, which was published in 1692: “Hat nit eine lobliche Eydtgnoßschafft durch die Neutralitet von 176 Jahren hero, da die außere Potentzen in Krieg gewesen, sich in Fried und Ruhstand mit Gottes Gnaden Hilff erhalten?” – „The laudable Confederation, hasn’t it survived in peace and quiet with God’s merciful help and thanks to neutrality that is 176 years old, while foreign powers waged war?” If you deduce 176 from 1692, you get 1516.

It is not necessary to go into the changeful but yet increasingly deliberate Swiss praxis of neutrality in the 18th century; nor into its abolition after the invasion of French revolutionary troops in 1798, whereupon many soldiers had to join Napoleon’s troops. After his defeat, the major powers wanted to restore the independent buffer state between Austria and France and thus stabilize the European power balance in the two peace treaties of Paris and the Congress of Vienna in 1814/15. Admittedly, the quarreling Confederate envoys at the Congress of Vienna could not frame a common position, but the representative of the new Swiss canton of Geneva, Pictet de Rochemont, was allowed to word the relevant peace article on behalf of the major powers, which is ever since regarded as the international establishment of neutrality. Thus, the signing powers of the treaty of Paris guaranteed the integrity and invulnerability of the Swiss territories as well as its neutrality on the 20 November 1815. “Les puissances signataires ... reconnaissent authentiquement, par le présent acte, que la neutralité de la Suisse et son indépendance de toute influence étrangère, sont dans le

vrai intérêt de la politique de l'Europe entière." Maybe the most important phrasing referred to the true interest of Europe, to which Swiss neutrality corresponded.

The Swiss neutrality was thus established as a part of international law such as it had developed since the Westphalian peace congress of 1648 and as it was stipulated by the five major powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The legend that the Swiss neutrality dates back to Marignano came into existence about in the same time when neutrality itself became a legitimate option. Thus the legend was created relatively early, around 1700, although – as I repeat – no Confederate in the 16th century would have dreamt of designating himself or his country as neutral.

It is also significant in this respect that the defeat of 1515 was of course regularly mentioned in Swiss historiography during the 18th and 19th century, but not interpreted as break or watershed. The search for dates as early as possible for alleged traits of the Swiss history began only in the late 19th century. In the beginning, the motive dominated that the militarily defeated but morally unvanquished Swiss withdrew honorably. Ferdinand Hodler's famous fresco of 1900 documents this perspective until today in the Swiss national museum. A reinterpretation did not ensue because of the painting but because of the classics of national historiography, which wanted to found and legitimate the novel national state with roots as early in the Middle Ages as possible, just like everywhere else in Europe.

Johannes Dierauer, a pioneer of national historiography, said in 1892: "The eternal peace of 1516 meant the conclusion of their big, European authority and ... the transition into neutral conduct in the midst of their neighbors' belligerent entanglement, which is appropriate for their true means." During the First World War, at the battle's 500-year-anniversary, the Basle historian Emil

Dürr wrote a “Beitrag zum Ursprung und Wesen der schweizerischen Neutralität”, a contribution to the origin and essence of the Swiss neutrality, in which he claimed Marignano to be the one origin and cause of Switzerland’s neutrality. („In der Tat: von Marignano sprechen heißt im Grunde nichts anderes als auf den *einen* Ursprung und die *eine* Ursache unserer Neutralität eingehen.”) This interpretation was taken up often in the so called “Geistige Landesverteidigung”, the “spiritual national defense”, with which Switzerland officially exposed and justified its particular historical existence (Sonderdasein) against foreign ideologies and mostly against the völkisch National Socialism from 1938 onwards. The minister of the Interior, who was responsible for the spiritual national defense, federal councilor Phillip Etter, explained on the 1st August 1940 that the national patron saint Niklaus von Flüe had preached: “Let us not meddle with foreign squabbles. Niklaus’ contemporaries did not comprehend immediately. The hard lesson of Marignano was necessary to open their eyes.”

Etter’s idea of a timeless lesson, which the Swiss had to internalize in remembrance of Marignano, inspired a committee “Pro Marignano”. The association used the opportunity of the 450-year anniversary of the battle to erect a memorial at the battle site. Its charity appeal proclaimed: “With the retreat of Marignano began our retreat to neutrality, which, however, certainly is an armed neutrality, ready for defense.” The monument’s inscription read “Ex clade salus” (Out of defeat came salvation) and suggested a long tradition thanks to the Latin wording. In truth, however, the Zurich Fraumünster pastor at the time coined the phrase, hence a Protestant. The times of confessional strife were definitely over as was evident by the fact that the – by now former – federal councilor Phillip Etter, a Catholic-Conservative presided the Marignano-committee and was joined by other

leading politicians, high officers, academics and writers such as Meinrad Inglin and Maurice Zermatten.

Another committee, which went by the name “Committee for the valuation of the battle of Marignano and its consequences”, wanted to bequeath books, not a memorial. However, it was built on a similar patriotic spirit and also had personal overlapping with the Pro Marignano-committee. An example is the historian Georg Thürer, who was active in both committees. He also published a “reflection” on the “reversal of Marignano” in 1965 and therein speculated about the mission of the petty state. He praised the “Confederate’s retreat from universal history”, which allegedly had happened in 1515, as far as taking part in combat was meant. But this, Thürer claimed, did not let the “quieter voices of cultural history” fade away, which came along with neutrality – naturally a neutrality that was well protected through “effective armes”. The other publication, which was released on the committee’s behalf, was Emil Usteri’s 600-pages long depiction of the “years of destiny 1515/16, based on historical sources.” The rock-solid opus ended with the conclusion: “What is most commonly claimed in school, namely that the Confederates’ interference in foreign squabbles stopped right after Marignano under the impact of defeat, is false; it definitely went on, only less officially... Switzerland’s turn to true neutrality is even the achievement of later generations”.

The long quote is justified because the “Committee for the valuation of the battle of Marignano and its consequences” had an interesting personnel composition. Its secretary was Christoph Blocher. He also rose to become the leader of Switzerland’s national conservatives in the 1980ies and reshaped the rural and Protestant Swiss People’s Party into a modern, populist far-right party, which has effectively won every election since then and soared up to become Switzerland’s biggest party. In the

national council election this October, it received easily 29 percent of all votes; one person out of three voted for them in the German speaking parts of Switzerland. Christoph Blocher is the party's figure of identification and irritation, which is why he was voted out from the Federal Council after a four years' term in 2007.

Blocher interprets Marignano differently from the mentioned Emil Usteri, whose publication he, amongst others, had encouraged. In a dialogue with the writer Adolf Muschg in 2010, Blocher thus claimed: "Our neutrality traces back to the battle of Marignano, it is a lot older than the federal state. The famous phrase, which is accredited to Niklaus von der Flüe, followed: "Machet den Zun nit zuwit" – "Don't extend the fence too far", and "Mischt euch nicht in fremde Händel" – "Do not meddle with foreign squabbles". Switzerland is here now. If we entered the EU, we would have to relinquish the fundamental elements of our nation; neutrality, but also direct democracy".

Conclusion

Why do the Swiss anti-EU activists appeal to Marignano, why does a country celebrate a military defeat, anyway? At this, Switzerland is not as alone as it may seem at first. In 1989, Slobodan Milošević appealed to the defeat on the Kosovo (Amselfeld) of 1389 to legitimize the Serbian intransigence in the Kosovo. In the movie "Alamo" of 1960, John Wayne is only one example for the American-Texan patriotism concerning this defeat. And the Australians and New Zealanders commemorate not only the defeat of Gallipoli (1915) with the ANZAC-Day but simultaneously the foundation of their national state. Just like glorious victories, heroic defeats are masculine material,

based on which national conservatives from many countries pride themselves on their supposed exceptionalism and from which they deduce allegedly timeless lessons. Christoph Blocher and his national conservative fellows insist on a conception of history, according to which the Swiss performed the epochal revulsion to neutrality out of own insight in 1515. Thereby, they imply that neutrality is a part of the country's timeless essence, as if it was not subject to change. And they suppress that the over-assessment of the own power in 1516 resulted in a peace treaty with victorious France, that turned the Confederation into a dependent mercenary supplier for almost three centuries. More problematic still is their denial of the fact that Switzerland's neutrality, its mostly peaceful existence and the current blueprint for lasting peace are grounded in international law. In turn, the international law needs institutions and instances, which keep watch over it. In Europe, this corresponds to the EU. Not only in Switzerland should the national conservatives be grateful for this achievement instead of spreading false conceptions of history in order to blame the EU for all of today's evils.