

WILL SWITZERLAND HAVE A FUTURE
IN A DEMOCRATIC EUROPE?

The nation has a hard furrow to plough nowadays. At least with German-speaking people, at least with intellectuals, at least in discussions about the future. These are important reservations that relativize parleys about an approaching "post-national" era or impending "supranational" orders. Whereas some hope for these as a lesson drawn from the nationalisms' bloody wrong tracks, others consider them inevitable because the twenty-first century's global challenges—such as environmental protection, preservation of peace, migration, market regulations—can no longer be coped with on a nation-state level. The author shares this assessment. Yet, he also knows that many people have a different point of view as they experience the nation state as something protecting them or hope it will do that. Can we rashly blame them for this? The East Europeans who regained their independence only after the end of the Cold War; the unemployed who hope that the governments they vote for will keep away the foreigners competing against them; those Ukrainian- or Russian-speaking people who find their freedom and identity threatened by a superior power and take up arms to defend them?

It is easy to speak of a nationalism "blind with rage" when we listen to news about the conflict in the Ukraine, for instance. We tend to forget, however, that this is our own history. Excepting the Norwegian separation from Denmark in 1905 and the division of Czechoslovakia in 1992, no nation state has come about peacefully. In Switzerland, it was the Sonderbund War in 1847 that permitted the revolutionary transition from an alliance of sovereign cantons to a federal state with a national government, parliament, and capital. That this did not lead to an exterior war was not least due to the fact that the neighbouring countries were paralyzed by the 1848 February and March Revolutions. Whoever has a look at the publications concerning the Neuchâtel Crisis (1856) and the Savoy Crisis (1860) will be confronted with a jingoism ready for war, which, compared to other nations, was second to none.

After two world wars, the rhetoric appeal to die for one's fatherland has been thoroughly discredited. Nevertheless, it was an indispensable prerequisite for the modern democracy and may still be one. What is the connection here? Democracy is based on the idea

of a sovereign people composed of politically free and equal citizens who determine their destiny through majority decisions. We find this perfectly natural. This would have been an absurd basic assumption for pre-modern, corporative societies. On the one hand, men were no political individuals but always members of concrete, manageable groups that were far more important than such abstractions as "people" or "nation". Men were not committed and loyal to these anonymous collectives but to the persons they were familiar with in their own families, clans, villages, guilds, and neighbourhoods; in case of need, solidarity and help could be expected from them, not from a not-yet-existing welfare state. On the other hand, god and nature had not created men free and equal but unequal—not least in regards to their liberties. Why should a merchant be able to exercise political power like an aristocrat trained to do so from childhood? How could virtuous, independent full citizens leave joint responsibility for the common weal to the many paupers without risking that these might abuse their power for their own material betterment? Why should religious minorities like the Jews be allowed to have a say about the destiny of the majority whose ideas of salvation and values they did not agree on? Who would grant a share in decisions to women who, at home, remained subordinate to the head of the household?

Against such objections, ubiquitous exterior or civil wars—and frequently both—provided the common victories, sufferings, and memories that forged the basis for national cohesion and subjected and integrated its counter-forces: federalistically oriented regions, self-confident minorities, aloof class-conscious aristocrats, churches geared toward Rome or the hereafter, internationally spirited proletarians. After the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they all were either wiped out or levelled and integrated into a sovereign people, a demos, which comprised aristocrats and commoners, the rich and the poor, Jews and even women as its fully entitled and equal members.

Extending far beyond politics, the fundamental democratization of Western and, later, numerous other societies encompassed economic, social, cultural and religious spheres in which nobody inherited his status and every man virtually became the architect of his own fortune. Like other historical processes, too,

democratization was a bloody affair that had its winners and losers. Minorities frequently counted among the latter: democracy calls for a comprehensive profession of loyalty to the state-nation one belongs to and requires that opinion-forming in a public context precedes decision-finding through elections, for example. But how to argue and come to an agreement with one's fellow citizens without having a command of their language? Democratization processes are also as brutal as they are because they forge this linguistic unity. Only twenty per cent of Louis XVI's subjects spoke French; subsequently, the French Republic forced Bretons, Occitans and Alsacians into a nation trained in the language of Molière. The Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed after the First World War as did Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union after the Cold War: the hope of democratic national self-determination was coupled to the fear of democratic heteronomy within a political alliance in which a different language community would have a permanent say. Thus, Czechoslovakia emerged from the Habsburg Monarchy: it lost its old-established Sudeten German minority through betrayal and expulsion and turned into a linguistically homogeneous country after its separation from Slovakia.

A partition of Czechoslovakia had been inconceivable before 1989 and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain: the party dictatorship committed to internationalism had excluded a self-determined democratic-parliamentary process, and any shifting of borders, even within the blocs, would have been a foreign-policy risk with difficult-to-judge consequences. The "new world order" of the 1990s provided a context that made such a process possible, yet did not guarantee it. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the course of several civil wars mobilized world war loyalties even within the European Union—Germany's for Croatia, France's and Great Britain's for Serbia—and put an end to the temporary thaw between the former and new opponents USA and Russia according to a Pan-Slavic logic.

Nothing like that was to be feared when Scotland recently voted in a referendum whether to leave the UK—even if this step had been approved. Though the stability-oriented European Union would definitely not have been pleased with a partition, it would have provided the institutional framework to ensure a rela-

tively smooth transition. Another conceivable development was that Scotland would remain in the European Union, while the no longer united kingdom around England would leave it. Of course, such a separation from the federation of states would cause difficulties or, as in the case of Catalonia, even provoke a crisis—but no civil war. The European Union would be affected by such a crisis—i.e. not what triggered it but rather the institution that would maintain the bridges between the neighbours at odds with one another for the time being or build new ones. What, if not the desire to have a better economic future in the European Union, has facilitated the pragmatic unwarlike coexistence of the young nation states in former Yugoslavia though the wounds of the civil war have not healed by a long stretch?

The European Union is a peace project unique in world history and, with its 28 states and counting, an extremely successful one, too. The European integration process is a lesson learned from wars, though achieved peacefully itself—quite unlike the unification processes in the nation states. The fear of the Soviet Bloc was conducive, and Putin's Russia as well as the enemy image of Islamic terrorism and—far more problematic—of Islam as such may fulfil a similar integrative function in the future. Yet, the dissociation from external enemies or even wars against such adversaries did not ultimately cause the Europeans to see the advantages of cooperation, primarily in the field of economic policy. How solid the foundations are will only be revealed, though, once the EU experiences severer economic crises, i.e. finds itself forced to (re-)distribute massive budget cuts instead of tasty slabs of cake. One can only shudder at the idea of how demagogues of different shades and colours will promise salvation in the nation states' demarcation under these circumstances. It is not only the current example of Hungary that shows how fast such promises entail tensions in foreign policy and internal exclusion measures or the discrimination of minorities.

Committed to the Copenhagen criteria (democracy, rule of law, human and civil rights), the European Union protects these minorities in its member states. It has done away with the democratic problem of constitutive people and minorities on a supranational level as there are only minorities in it: even the

mighty Germans make up only one sixth of the EU's population, and their proportional influence in the EU committees is even decidedly smaller. The sovereign states are of equal importance in many instances, and twenty-four official languages have been acknowledged. Is it possible to lay the foundations for a European demos forming its political opinions in a critical public dialogue within such babel? It is not least due to this problem that the EU has a democracy deficit and has remained an elitist project. A stronger involvement of the people is only conceivable within a federal structure in which uniform languages would ensure a (direct) democratic process on a regional and national level. A global language familiar to all—English—would be used for comprehensive issues to be settled on the level of the Union. Ironically, the English themselves would no longer be part of such a solution endowing the EU with far-reaching state structures. This would be of no disadvantage as all actors would be equal in that they could not use their mother tongue in political negotiations.

There is a model for such a multi-lingual federal state: Switzerland. Why does Switzerland of all countries refuse to join this European Union? It has been spared by both world wars and regards this primarily as its own achievement, as a reward for its armed neutrality. This is why it considers a peace organization in the form of the EU as unnecessary as the NATO's protective shield. Another important reason is to be found in the country's economic welfare and wealth. Both seem better protected in the niches granted to Switzerland as a special site by Europe and the world economy not only in the field of (financial) services. This makes for a fragile basis, though. Those who all in all survived the financial crisis of 2007/2008 well are not automatically steeled against the next. We should remember that as good as all requests for EU membership were made against the background of a lasting economic crisis as was that of Iceland most recently. The country was once regarded an economic wonderland like Ireland, the Netherlands or Japan. Economic success has become an ephemeral thing.

That said, the question arises why the Swiss do not simply keep their cool and stand apart like the equally rich Norwegians but use—or need—the European Union as a projection surface for their fears. Why the

frothing hate against the Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 2012 that deserves and needs to be criticized like any human construct, including Switzerland, yet, with baffled indifference, can only register the ignorant yapping sometimes assailing it from Helvetia's "gaue" (districts). Many Swiss consider the EU an intellectual misconception, a centrally controlled great power and, therefore, an aggressive opponent of freedom and (direct) democracy. Such denigrations have different reasons. Who has got lost in navel gazing will absolutize undeniable differences which are less differences from the EU as a whole but rather from its various states and societies that have not been brought into line at all. One may, of course, condemn the curvature rule for cucumbers as an example of Brussels' bureaucratic regulatory rage and thus as a curtailment of freedom (of cucumbers or of men?). One will actually find out, however, that these norms are valid on an international scale, i.e. not restricted to the EU, and that such norms are indispensable for Switzerland as an exporting country with a small domestic market if it wants to be present on European as well as global markets. One may also feel sorry for the Europeans because they have no direct democracy. Yet, this is actually not part of any guideline of the EU, which has actually gone through several learning processes through plebiscites, but a constitutional principle left to each member state. However principally undesirable making do without referenda may appear to the Swiss—even if many have preferred this option in concrete cases—the instrument's creative power should not be overestimated. Most issues of everyday life are not regulated through referenda, and many subjects of referenda and initiatives are forgotten after a week.

Who considers Switzerland a "special case" within the further context of neutrality, communal autonomy, and concordance democracy also overrates the national state as an agent of political regulation. This begs the question after the "normal case" from which Switzerland supposedly differs: is it centralist France with its monarchic tradition, federalist Germany with its Nazi memory, the American confederation the constitution of which provided a model for Switzerland in 1848, neutral Sweden, or Liechtenstein with its high exports? There are as many special cases as states in the United Nations.

The problem of many (German-speaking) Swiss—not of Switzerland, though—is not that other countries and particularly their neighbouring countries are so much different from the supposed “special case”, but that they are so similar. These countries are democracies and, in a certain way, more democratic than Switzerland, where magic formulae drastically reduce alternatives and conceal political responsibilities. They are constitutional states with a division of powers and better than Switzerland where no constitutional court protects minorities from direct democratic attacks on their fundamental rights. They are successful national economies and sometimes more successful than Switzerland, a country which owes a lot to the fact that its institutions and means of production were not affected by the world war. They are peace-loving societies and more peace-loving than Switzerland when the latter tries to distance itself by means of mass immigration initiatives and polemics against its immediate neighbours.

Yet which German-speaking Swiss reads a French-language newspaper, which French-speaking Swiss a paper from the Ticino? Who watches or listens to programs from other language areas? But that is not all: the market share of the Swiss Broadcasting and Television Corporation SRG is less than a third: the country's inhabitants rely on foreign countries for obtaining about two thirds of their knowledge, entertainment and culture. Not the historically long since outlived hostility but the encouraging cultural affinity to its neighbouring peoples puts Switzerland at risk, makes it drift apart along its internal language boundaries so that its inhabitants are rather able to list—depending on the region—the names of seven German, French or Italian ministers than of the members of their own government, the Federal Council. The Swiss are surrounded by friends, yet depend on the bad enemy from which they can distance themselves for their self-understanding. Instead of looking for this enemy in Brussels it would not only be more demanding but also more promising to positively define what still holds the Swiss together, considering that they are less and less willing to learn the mother languages of their confederates. Will the Swiss Confederation follow the model of the European Union one day precisely in the regard that it will use English as its common language?

