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An end to Switzerland as we know it?

At the end of the year Switzerland will have to make one of its most important decisions ever: whether to join the EEA. This is a real parting of the ways, since acceptance of the EEA Treaty would almost inevitably lead to later membership of the EC bloc: a supra-national creation which is striving with all its might for political union on the model of Maastricht. Indeed the Federal Council has already sent its application to Brussels. But EC membership would mean surrendering our sovereignty. We would no longer have our own foreign policy, and the Swiss franc would be sacrificed on the altar of the Ecu. In other words, Switzerland – with all its special characteristics – would be thrust into the melting pot of the EC. This we do not want, and we must start fighting now against the first moves towards it. Even though there would have to be another referendum later on EC membership, the EEA would have taken us 80% of the way there.

But this is not all. The EEA itself contains substantial dangers for our country. In spite of the most strenuous efforts it proved impossible to draw up a treaty fairly balancing the interests of both parties, the EC and EFTA. We are forced to take over almost the whole existing body of EC economic and social legislation. And, much worse than that, EC bodies in Brussels will have a right to decide on the content of Swiss law in the future. But foreign lawgivers are just as bad as the foreign judges expelled

by our ancestors. So the EEA Treaty also implies substantial losses of sovereignty. Our national right to self-determination will be severely limited. Direct democracy, as expressed by the voice of the people through initiatives and referendums, would in future be restricted by EEA and EC diktat. It is in a way tragic for the Swiss Abroad that, on this second occasion on which they exercise their right to vote in federal referendums, they are brought face to face with a proposal to limit our democratic rights. Switzerland will always be open towards the rest of Europe and the world, but there is only one clear verdict to give on a bad treaty which is

unworthy of the heritage of our forefathers: a resounding No.

National Councillor Jean-Pierre Bonny, Joint Chairman of the Action Committee against EEA/EC Rule – for a Switzerland Open to the World. ■

“Opinion” is a new heading for authors whose views are not necessarily those of the editors, although of course the latter decide which articles are published. In this number, we feature items by a supporter and an opponent of the EEA Treaty.

Opinion

Europe: a matter of emotion

Everyone has his own forecast about what will happen if Switzerland becomes part of the EEA. Those against it say there will be worse unemployment, higher rents, more immigration. Those in favour predict lower unemployment, lower rents and no change in immigration. Figures, statistics, mathematical models – all supposedly scientific – are brought out to prove anything between hell and high water.

The only certain thing about these forecasts is that they all lack certainty. Switzerland's position in the Europe of the future cannot be selected according to economic and social objectives, for every supposed advantage has its corresponding disadvantage. Even environmental protection is not a definitive criterion. The fact is that every demonstration, every forecast, every projection reflects a prior decision by the person who makes it. The purpose is simply to give rational form to a judgement which has been made for emotional or intuitive reasons.

What do our emotions tell us? Surely that we are Europeans – brothers, cousins and friends of those Italians, Germans and French with whom we share our cultures and values. That it would

be unfriendly to refuse their invitation to cooperate in building a Europe without internal frontiers, a Europe peaceful and open to the world.

And what does our intuition say? That a Switzerland which would refuse the integration offered by the Community shows signs of mistrust and complacency, of turning in upon itself. It would lose its force, its optimism, its capacity to face the challenges of the future. Deep within themselves, most opponents are driven by nostalgia for a Switzerland which is no longer with us – and it is very dangerous to mistake one's wishes for reality. Membership of the EEA – and later of the Community – would not prevent Switzerland and the Swiss from being themselves. After all, Europe has never prevented the French from being French or the Danes from being Danes. And with our four national languages, our federalism and our direct democracy – we are a European federation in miniature. Surely we cannot tell people to build Europe in our image and then refuse to take part. Are we really as self-centred as that?

Laurent Rebeaud, National Councillor ■

European legislation – a vast package. (Photo: Keystone)

