The origins of Euroscepticism in German-speaking Switzerland

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Abstract. This article examines why the electorate in German-speaking Switzerland has consistently opposed joining the European Union. It first shows that the region scores highly on a range of general correlates of negative attitudes towards European integration. However, this is compounded by more idiosyncratic factors, above all by the German-speaking Swiss' peculiar political and cultural position. On the one hand, as *Swiss* they belong to a state that lacks a single national culture, is defined in civic and institutional rather than cultural terms, and therefore appears more vulnerable in the face of the European Union's own civic and institutional ambitions. On the other hand, as *Swiss-Germans*, they belong to a cultural and linguistic region whose cultural boundaries are relatively fragile and lack institutional backup and articulation. Caught in this identitive double bind, the Swiss-German electorate has developed an underlying sense of vulnerability and a desire to limit exposure to the outside world.

Introduction

If the European Union (EU) had a favourite country it would probably be Switzerland. After all, of all the countries in Europe, Switzerland embodies most closely what the EU wants to be: multilingual, multicultural, wealthy, stable and democratic, with overarching institutions and symbols that bind together a culturally diverse citizenry. Duly impressed by the country's credentials, many champions of European integration refer to the Swiss confederation with almost ritualistic regularity. From Denis de Rougemont (1985) to Jürgen Habermas (1992) to Joseph Weiler (1996), they see in Switzerland a kind of proto-EU *en miniature* or at least a worthy source of political inspiration for the European project.

Yet while the EU is fond of Switzerland (or, at any rate, the *concept* of Switzerland), many Swiss are decidedly less fond of the EU. Apart from a handful of microstates, Switzerland is the only Continental West European country that has so far refused to join either the EU or the European Economic Area (EEA). Popular hostility towards the EU is far stronger in Switzerland than in most other European countries. If Swiss voters had to vote on EU membership today, they would almost certainly reject it, just as they

defeated their government's proposal to join the EEA more than a decade ago.

At the same time, opposition to the EU among the Swiss electorate is highly uneven. More so than almost any other issue, 'Europe' has produced tensions between the two main language groups. These tensions first came fully to the fore during the ill-fated EEA referendum in the early 1990s and have persisted ever since (Kriesi et al. 1993). Among the country's French-speaking population (referred to as 'Romands' inside Switzerland), a small majority of the electorate favours EU membership (currently around 52 per cent). Among their German-speaking counterparts, by contrast, support for EU membership hovers at around 32 per cent (see Haltiner et al. 2003: Chapter 8). Given that the German-speaking Swiss outnumber the Romands by more than three to one, Switzerland is likely to stay out of the EU for the foreseeable future.[1]

The continued determination of the Swiss-German electorate to eschew EU membership has important consequences, both for Switzerland's relations with its neighbours and for the relationship between its linguistic communities. In its external relations, the Swiss government is forced to perform a continuously difficult balancing act. Presiding over a small landlocked country low in natural resources and highly dependent on foreign trade, it must seek a substantial degree of economic integration with the rest of the continent. Yet, at the same time, it must do this without being seen to endanger Switzerland's political autonomy, lest it frighten an ever-suspicious Swiss-German electorate and trigger backlashes at the polls (Sciarini et al. 2001).

Meanwhile, inside Switzerland, the split over 'Europe' has strained relations between French- and German-speakers – not to the extent of threatening the country's survival, but enough to tarnish Switzerland's erstwhile image as an island of multicultural bliss. Ever since the defeat of the EEA referendum in December 1992, the rift between the two main language groups over the issue has remained a central topic in public debate. Many Swiss-Germans concede that their refusal to take part in the European integration process has put Switzerland's own internal integration at risk. This has engendered a sense of unease and guilt towards the French-speaking minority, outweighed only by a continued aversion to joining the EU.

This article examines why a large majority of the electorate in German-speaking Switzerland opposes joining the EU. It begins by arguing that the region scores highly on a range of general correlates of negative attitudes towards European integration: it is wealthy, 'northern', has a successful political history and constitutes the numerically dominant group in a multicultural state. However, this is compounded by more idiosyncratic factors that derive from the peculiar political and cultural position of the German-

speaking Swiss. On the one hand, as *Swiss*, Swiss-Germans belong to a state that lacks a single 'thick' national culture, is defined in civic and institutional rather than cultural terms and thus appears more vulnerable in the face of the EU's own civic and institutional ambitions. On the other hand, as *Swiss-Germans*, they belong to a cultural and linguistic region whose cultural boundaries are relatively fragile and lack institutional backup and articulation. Caught in this identitive double bind, the Swiss-German electorate has developed an underlying sense of vulnerability and a desire to limit exposure to the outside world. Its reluctance to participate in the European integration process is one sign of this.

The search for explanations

At first glance, the Swiss-German aversion to EU membership seems puzzling given that many of the most common causes of opposition to European integration in other parts of Western Europe fail to explain it adequately. This applies, for instance, to economic explanations. While some sectors of the Swiss economy (such as agriculture) would likely suffer if the country joined the EU, almost all economists believe that, on balance, Switzerland would economically benefit from closer integration with its neighbours (Hauser 1996). At any rate, Switzerland's overall economic position is not significantly different from that of other small, wealthy and trade-dependent West European countries that have found EU membership economically beneficial.

Nonetheless, many Swiss believe that EU membership would bring economic harm and these perceptions are statistically correlated to anti-EU sentiment (Christin & Trechsel 2001). Yet in and of itself this does not suggest the direction of causality between the two attitudes. On the face of it, it is equally plausible to assume that among Swiss-Germans a negative view of the EU stimulates fears of economic loss from membership rather than *vice versa*. After all, French-speaking Switzerland is economically very similar to the German part and thus would be similarly affected by EU membership, yet it has much higher levels of support for the EU. In sum, 'economic fear' explanations show that economic anxieties exist among Swiss-German EU opponents, but fail to demonstrate that they cause rather than merely reflect negative perceptions of the EU.

Elite-centred explanations also fail to convince. The Swiss-German electorate's hostility to joining the EU is not a reflection of prevailing elite opinion, given that most political and economic elites from across the political spectrum favour EU membership. Three of the four coalition parties in power since the Second World War embrace EU membership as a foreign

policy objective (albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm). Only the fourth – the right-of-centre Swiss People's Party – has an important Eurosceptic wing. The mass media, too, are overwhelmingly in favour of EU membership, as are most opinion leaders in trade unions, employers' federations and the powerful financial and manufacturing sectors. Mass, not elite, preferences keep Switzerland out of the EU.

Third, explanations that focus on supposed ideological divergences or value gaps between the Swiss-German polity and its European neighbours are also unconvincing given that few such gaps exist. Switzerland and its neighbours practice broadly similar forms of liberal welfare capitalism. They have, moreover, similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that range from falling rates of childbirth and church attendance to rising levels of overseas travel and tertiary education (see Bundesamt für Statistik 2003). Moreover, value surveys and popular referendums regularly confirm that public attitudes on many social issues also broadly converge on the West European average, on subjects ranging from children's rights and abortion to gay marriage and recreational drug consumption. In short, there is nothing to make the Swiss-Germans so socially, culturally or demographically different from their European neighbours as to provide an 'obvious' explanation for their desire to shun the EU.

There remains the most frequently invoked explanation for the Swiss-German stance towards European integration. It postulates that the Swiss electorate shares a deep-rooted commitment to Switzerland's political institutions (above all the 'holy trinity' of federalism, neutrality and direct democracy) and fears that EU membership would weaken these institutions. This explanation comes closer to the core of the matter. After all, as is shown below, many EU opponents insist that membership would be incompatible with Switzerland's political traditions. Moreover, neutrality, federalism and direct democracy alike continue to enjoy strong popular support across the language divide (see Haltiner et al. 2003: Chapter 9).

Yet herein precisely lies the paradox. On average, the French-speaking Swiss are roughly as attached to Switzerland's defining institutions as are their German-speaking counterparts, yet display much higher levels of support for EU membership. This in turn seems to suggest that the Francophone Swiss electorate does not perceive European integration as a threat to these institutions to the same extent as German-speakers. In short, what emerges once more from this is the problem of 'reverse attitude causality' discussed earlier. Those who fear that the EU will undermine Switzerland's political institutions and traditions might well be driven by negative perceptions of the EU, rather than *vice versa*.

In sum, the four seemingly 'obvious' explanations fail adequately to account for the Swiss-German rejection of the EU. We need more subtle accounts that go beyond the statistical linking of attitudinal data and thus suggest causality rather than mere correlation. Two broad approaches potentially meet this criterion. The first tries to account for the particular with reference to the general. It identifies a range of variables that throughout postwar Western Europe have helped to predict whether a given country or population opposes European integration. It then assesses how many of these variables apply to the Swiss-German case, and thus whether Swiss-German Euroscepticism can be explained with reference to a broader empirical pattern. The second approach, by contrast, is more interpretative. It focuses on the social, cultural and political particularities of German-speaking Switzerland. It seeks to ascertain whether there is something peculiar to the condition of being a German-speaking Swiss that engenders negative attitudes towards European integration. In what follows, I begin with the first approach and then turn to the second. Concluding that both approaches offer important insights, I suggest that opposition to EU membership in German-speaking Switzerland is both part of a wider pattern *and* thrives on factors peculiar to Swiss-German society.

'Pattern' explanations

Opposition to European integration is often predictable – that is, we can identify a range of criteria that help determine whether or not a given country or population group is reluctant to participate in the European integration process. None of these variables is a reliable predictor in and of itself. Instead, their effect is cumulative: the more criteria apply to a given society, the greater is the likelihood that large sections within it oppose EU membership.

The first predictor is geographic location and cultural background – that is, whether a given population belongs to the 'northern' or 'southern' part of the EU, and thus whether its cultural origins are mainly Anglo-Saxon or 'Germanic' on the one hand or 'Latin' on the other. On average, those in the former category are more leery of European integration than those in the latter. It is not readily apparent why this should be so, and the academic literature has done surprisingly little to explore it. The cosmopolitan influence of Catholicism on Europe's 'Latins' and the roots of most EU 'founding fathers' in Catholic Christian Democracy might be obvious starting points for an explanation.[2] Whatever the cause, geography-*cum*-cultural background is a

strong predictor. On issues ranging from EU enlargement to institutional and functional expansion, 'southerners' are, on the whole, more EU-friendly than their 'northern' counterparts. Likewise, in 'southern' Member States public support for EU membership has consistently been above the European average, as has been the proportion of citizens who claim to identify partially as 'Europeans' (for comparative time-series data see the bi-annual *Eurobarometer* surveys (1973–present).

Political history is the second predictor. Countries with a successful political legacy (i.e., stable, democratic, able to protect national autonomy and so on) are on average less keen on European integration than those whose political legacy is less proud. A rationale for this is not hard to come by: one is more reluctant to surrender or modify something if it performs well and has done so in the past. Pride and confidence in one's political system is a strong reason for wanting to leave it untouched (see Sànchez-Cuenca 2000).

The third predictor is wealth. On average, the poorer a country is, the stronger its support for European integration. This, too, has a plausible explanation, provided one accepts that economic self-interest helps shape political preferences. Overall, European integration has economically benefited both rich and poor Member States, but for various reasons (formal redistributive mechanisms between Member States being one of them), it is generally acknowledged to have disproportionately benefited the poor over the rich. This is borne out by the relative rates of economic growth of different member states since their accession. By extension, richer countries experience weaker economic binding factors to the EU than do their poorer counterparts and are thus more prone to be swayed by other considerations that might militate *against* EU membership.

The final predictor applies to ethnically, culturally or linguistically plural states, where the numerically dominant group tends to be less keen on European integration than those in the minority. This is the case in the United Kingdom, for example, where public opinion in Scotland and Wales has consistently been much more EU-friendly than in England. The same is true for the Catalans in Spain, the Walloons in Belgium and so forth. This, too, has an intuitively plausible explanation. By definition, in democratic states, dominant groups hold more power than minority communities and thus have more to lose by surrendering or 'pooling' some of it within the EU. For minorities, by contrast, the emergence of 'Brussels' as an alternative locus of political authority is often perceived as an opportunity to counterbalance one 'foreign master' against another and thus to benefit from a net growth in political influence. What is more, over the past twenty years, the EU has tried hard to court minorities by, for instance, granting regional authorities a limited involvement in the legislative process and by instituting various 'Europe of the regions' pro-

grammes, minority language charters and so on (see Nagel 2002; more generally Jones & Keating 1995).

As was suggested, none of these four variables is a perfect predictor of attitudes towards the EU, but their impact is cumulative. And this in turn puts the Swiss-German case in perspective. More so than any other population group in Western Europe, German-speaking Switzerland ranks highly on all four main correlates of Euroscepticism. It belongs to the 'northern' and 'Germanic' part of Europe, has a successful political history, is very wealthy and constitutes the numerically dominant region in a multicultural state. In contrast to the French-speaking Swiss to whom two of the four main predictors of opposition to the EU do not apply, German-speakers rank highly on all four dimensions.

To look at German-speaking Switzerland from this perspective makes its opposition to the EU appear less exceptional, less odd and less paradoxical. It *is* exceptional in so far as the region combines all four main predictors of opposition to the EU. However, these predictors themselves derive from a pattern that applies throughout Western Europe. Moreover, such an approach suggests causality rather than mere correlation since all four predictors (except perhaps the 'Latin versus Germanic' gap) have relatively simple and intuitively plausible explanations.

The above account, then, makes for a useful analytical backdrop against which to examine the Swiss-German case. Yet, at the same time, it should not prevent us from casting our explanatory net more widely. Is there something more peculiar to the Swiss-German condition that helps account for its reluctance to participate in the European integration process, something to complement and reinforce the factors just discussed? The remainder of this article focuses on two such factors: first, the civic nature of Swiss self-definitions and, second, the political, cultural and linguistic position of the German-speaking Swiss. The first explanation draws on Switzerland's status as 'state without a culture'; the second on the Swiss-Germans' predicament as a 'culture without a state'. Individually and still more so in combination, both factors drive the Swiss-German electorate away from the EU.

Switzerland as a 'state without a culture'

Most Member States of the EU are self-conceived nation-states. They are bounded units in which the political, social and cultural converge. In an ideal-typical world of ideal-typical nation-states, each culture has 'its' state and each state has 'its' culture; social, political and cultural boundaries are congruent and reinforce each other (Gellner 1983). In reality, of course, most states in

Europe and beyond do not satisfy the ideal-type in that they have minorities of various kinds. Moreover, even where the congruence between state and nation is very close, this typically owes less to a 'natural fit' than to fervent cultural nation building by political elites, using instruments that range from schools and the mass media to military conscription and genocide. In Europe, as elsewhere, states made nations more so than the other way around (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1994).

Nevertheless, once an approximate congruence between state and nation, politics and culture had emerged, it became central to maintaining national identifications. In the language of social psychology, it meant that culture had become a marker for social categorization (Tajfel 1981; Hogg & Abrams 1988). Political elites could now rely on culture to help define and symbolize state boundaries, turning the state into a cultural container that defined and protected 'what it meant to be' French, Italian, Swedish or whatever. Citizens also experienced their state-cum-national community as culturally homogenous at the inside and culturally differentiated from the outside. Just as the state defined culture, culture became a defining principle of the state and the two came to mutually reinforce each other (Brubaker 1996: Chapter 1).

The potential of culture to function as boundary marker has important consequences for the participation of culturally homogenous (or relatively homogenous) nation-states in the EU. It means that the laws, institutions and political traditions of the state can be modified by, or even partially submerged in, the integration process (or, at any rate, be perceived to experience such a fate) without endangering the survival of the national polity as a salient psychological category of belonging for its members. The state may weaken and some political and economic boundaries might get blurred, but for as long as it is culturally distinctive the polity remains intact (Wæver & Kelstrup 1993; Wæver 1996; Theiler 2003).

All this helps explain why in Western Europe a growing economic and political interconnectedness between different populations and the rise of 'Brussels' as a political centre has not been accompanied by parallel developments in the cultural and identitive realms – contrary to what some theorists had believed possible at the outset (e.g., Deutsch 1954). In fact, not only has the nation-state remained salient as a cultural unit and locus of social identification, but the past decade has seen a growing emphasis on national cultural particularities across the EU. Signs of this range from the growth of nationalistic and anti-immigrant parties in many EU Member States to a frequent preoccupation with protecting national food standards, languages, music and television programming against foreign 'contamination' (Wæver 1996). The same logic suggests why even otherwise EU-friendly electorates overwhelmingly oppose EU involvement in socially and culturally sensitive areas such as

cultural policy, the audiovisual sector and education (Theiler 1999). One can more easily tolerate a (actual or perceived) weakening of economic and political boundaries if one still 'has' culture with which to define and distinguish oneself as a community, and if one can protect internal cohesion and external boundaries by substituting 'more culture' for 'less state'.

Not so in Switzerland. Unlike most of its European neighbours, Switzerland is not a nation-state. It does not have a single national language and it lacks unifying myths of shared ethnic origins. Consequently, the Swiss cannot define themselves in 'thicker' cultural terms and cannot use culture as a boundary marker and unifying glue. Instead, the concept of Switzerland is constituted and signified by a range of institutional-*cum*-civic norms and traditions – mainly, of course, neutrality, federalism and direct democracy (Sciarini et al. 2001). These are backed up by a limited assortment of – equally civic – symbols and rituals, and by a 'thin' political mythology that centres on the recurring themes of Switzerland as a 'nation of will' (*Willensnation*) and of Swiss heroes securing the country's independence against predatory foreign powers – from Wilhelm Tell to the officers of the Second World War (Schmid 1981; Bendix 1992; Hettling 1998; Kriesi 1999; more generally, Kriesi 1998; Linder 1998).

The civic foundations of the Swiss state are reflected in the strong attachment on the part of its electorate to its political practices and institutions. They suggest why this attachment does not merely grow out of the perceived practical and normative value of these practices and institutions, but also flows from their role as communal signifiers. For instance, while neutrality is in part valued for its presumed historical role in securing Switzerland's independence, its popularity is not simply reducible to this. Instead, surveys show time and again that for many Swiss belonging to a neutral country is a central ingredient to 'what it means to be Swiss'. Swiss political scientists have termed this the 'identity function' of neutrality (Haltiner et al. 2003: Chapter 9; Sciarini et al. 2001). Initially a survival strategy, neutrality has migrated into deeper territories of affective significance. Over time, it became a 'condensation symbol' (Merleman 1966) that signifies something much larger than its immediate symbolic referent – the concepts of 'Switzerland' and 'being Swiss', in the sense of belonging to a psychologically salient communal category that lacks 'thicker' cultural, linguistic or ethnic markers.

An important clarification is in order here. The (especially older) literature on national identity sometimes equates the presumed 'thickness' of particular national symbols (i.e., their degree of ethnic-*cum*-linguistic-*cum*-religious 'content') with their strength and persistence and with the salience and durability of corresponding communal identifications. Yet this equation is not always valid, and the Swiss case illustrates this well. As in some other mainly

'civic nations' (such as, with some qualifications, the United States), in Switzer-land overarching communal markers are 'thin' (i.e., mainly civic) but also strong, and the communal identifications they sustain are equally stable and salient. Theoretically, this is not inconsistent. Social psychologists and social anthropologists have long shown that the 'content' of particular group markers says nothing about the salience of corresponding group identifications (with 'salience' defined broadly as the proportion of the self which a given group category occupies). '*Everything*', in this rendering, 'may be grist on the mill of symbolism' (Cohen 1989: 19, emphasis added). Seen in this light, Switzerland does, indeed, support the claim by 'constitutional patriotism' theorists *à la* Habermas that communal cohesion does not require a 'thick' ethnic, cultural or linguistic base. In Switzerland, overarching communal markers are 'thin', yet strong and highly salient.

Moreover, the 'cultural' and the 'civic' are not, of course, different 'enti-ties'. Instead, they are *concepts* referring to different forms of social practice and identification that cannot be neatly decoupled: in Switzerland, as every-where else, the 'civic' is to some extent also the 'cultural' and *vice versa*, and the two stand in a dialectical relationship (see Auer 2004). Yet while the Swiss state is thus neither 'non-cultural' nor 'a-cultural', it lacks many of the 'thicker' cultural attributes of its neighbours – above all, of course, a shared national language. Perhaps terms such as 'civic culture', 'thin culture' or – most famously in recent years – 'constitutional patriotism' best capture the Swiss situation.

Nonetheless, the civic nature of its overarching communal signifiers means that Switzerland's position *vis-à-vis* the European integration process is over-shadowed by a particular kind of vulnerability that sets it apart from its 'thicker', more monocultural neighbours. As was argued, the latter can more easily tolerate a (actual or perceived) weakening of their political practices and institutions, as long as they retain their cultural attributes as a source of internal cohesion and external demarcation. The Swiss, by contrast, cannot do this, given that Switzerland lacks a national culture in the 'thick' sense of the term. In principle they could, of course, retreat into their respective local or regional cultures, but such a move would weaken rather than strengthen the Swiss polity at large, since language and culture is precisely what *separates* the Swiss from each other. A threat to Switzerland's civic foundations would threaten the very concept of Switzerland itself, since civic foundations are all it has. Herein, then, lies the crucial difference between Switzerland and most of its European neighbours. Take away the German state and Germany still somehow exists as a perceived cultural-*cum*-ethnic-*cum*-linguistic entity of some sort; but take away Switzerland's institutional and civic foundations and Switzerland will be no more.

Would, however, membership in the EU really threaten or even 'take away' neutrality, federalism and direct democracy? Many Swiss constitutional scholars agree that it would probably not, especially if Switzerland managed to secure the kinds of opt-outs and exemption clauses that other Member States enjoy in a variety of areas (Hailbronner 1992; Cottier & Kopse 1998; Tanquerel 1991). Yet at a psychological level, the threat might well be real. If 'being Swiss' means harbouring allegiances to Switzerland's civic practices and institutions, and if joining the EU means acquiring – however weak and diffuse – allegiances to *European* practices and institutions (or at least joining a political unit that lays claim to such allegiances), the potential for conflict or, at any rate, perceptions of conflict exists. Acquiring something additional of the same type implies the potential for competition and rivalry, and for having to downgrade the status of the first in order to accommodate the second. Incidentally, for this reason attempts to seduce the Swiss into the EU by pointing out that the Union itself aspires to become some kind of Switzerland writ large may well be counterproductive. For the Swiss polity, notions of civic similarity with the EU will heighten, not assuage, identity-related fears.

Yet why does all this appear to affect mainly the German-speaking Swiss' attitudes towards European integration? As was argued, attachment to Switzerland's civic pillars is strong on both sides of the linguistic divide, and both language groups must define their 'Swissness' in civic rather than cultural terms. Clearly, the French-speaking Swiss' greater fondness for Europe does not come at the expense of a lower attachment to Switzerland or a weaker sense of 'being Swiss' (Métral 2001). Why, then, can the Francophone Swiss reconcile the two concepts more easily than their German-speaking counterparts?

Part of the answer lies with the status of the French-speaking Swiss as, first, a minority group that, second, belongs to Europe's 'Latin' part. As was shown, this means that two of the strongest general predictors of Euroscepticism do not apply to the Francophone Swiss, whereas their German-speaking counterparts meet all four. Following the 'reverse causality' logic discussed earlier, *generally* more positive perceptions of the EU among French-speakers may in turn reduce anxieties that the EU could pose a 'civic threat' to Switzerland. This might then feed back into their overall attitudes towards the EU and render these more favourable still, thus further lowering threat perceptions, and so forth. If the French-speaking Swiss' attitudes towards the EU are caught in a 'positive dialectic' of this kind, those of the German-speakers might well be subjected to a similar logic in reverse. However, the difference in attitudes between the two linguistic communities has yet another explanation. It draws on the peculiar cultural and linguistic position of Swiss-German society.

German-speaking Switzerland as a 'culture without a state'

German-speaking Switzerland is in a cultural position that differs sharply from its Francophone counterpart and is quite unlike that of any other population in Europe. In seeking to account for the Euroscepticism of the Swiss-Germans, few commentators have paid much attention to their cultural predicament and few outside Switzerland grasp its full complexity. However, cultural variables are an essential part of the explanation. The central issue is language.

Swiss-Germans from across all regions and social backgrounds are bilingual in that they use both the Swiss-German and standard – or High – German idioms. Swiss-German (which comes in several regional variants) is the language of everyday interaction. Standard German, by contrast, has traditionally dominated more formal and 'official' situations, from news bulletins on the radio and school teaching to church sermons and speeches by Swiss-German politicians in the federal parliament. Most importantly, Swiss-German lacks a standardized written idiom. Apart from the odd piece of folk poetry, local literature and private email, almost all writing is in High German. Swiss-Germans rarely speak standard German but they almost always write it. Accordingly, Swiss-Germans refer to High German as *Schriftdeutsch* – literally, 'written German' (for classic overviews, see Haas 1981, 2000 and Siebenhaar & Wyler 1997; on the historical evolution of Swiss-German, see Näf 2001; on the complex coexistence of Swiss-German, German and French in Switzerland, see Knüsel 1994 and Wunderli 2001; also see Schläpfer 1994).

Over the past half century, the balance between Swiss-German and High German has shifted in favour of the former. A *Dialektwelle* ('dialect wave') swept Swiss-German into areas hitherto reserved for the standard version. These include many official and semi-official settings such as news bulletins on some private radio stations, church sermons, proceedings in some cantonal legislatures and parts of the education sector. For linguists, all this has resulted in a gradual shift away from the traditional social context dependent division of labour between Swiss-German and High German (the former used in more familiar contexts and the latter in more formal ones) towards a 'medium dependent' diglossia. Oral communication is ever more strongly dominated by Swiss-German, whereas High German remains the language of reading and writing (Siebenhaar & Wyler 1997; Haas 2000). The growing use of Swiss-German in oral communication originated in part with efforts by Swiss elites to cultivate the idiom as part of a cultural self-differentiation strategy from Nazi Germany. In subsequent decades, it was boosted by factors such as the introduction of private radio and television stations and reform movements in education. Beyond this, it thrives on a broader tendency in contemporary Western cultures towards more informal and intimate forms of communica-

tion and the extension 'private' communication patterns into areas formerly perceived as 'public', 'official' and 'hierarchical' (Haas 2000; Siebenhaar & Wyler 1997).

With no past or present attempts to standardize Swiss-German, linguistic differences between Swiss-German regions (and often between different localities within the same region) remain strong, to the point where for some linguists the very notion of *the* Swiss-German idiom is problematic. All the same, divergences in syntax, grammar and vocabulary (though not to nearly the same degree, in accent and pronunciation) have started to weaken somewhat and – albeit unevenly – to converge on a more 'regionalized' Swiss-German idiom (Haas 1981, 2000; Siebenhaar & Wyler 1997; Christen 1998; Wunderli 2001). This stemmed in part from a growth in intercantonal trade, mobility and marriages, as well as from the greater use of Swiss-German on radio and television. A further factor was the absorption by Swiss-German of new words and expressions, both from High German and (more recently and to a lesser degree) from English (Haas 2000).

Swiss-German's surge at the expense of High German has had two direct consequences. First, it meant that Swiss-German became less like a conventional dialect and more like a 'full' language, in so far as one follows most modern linguists in distinguishing between language and dialect above all by their social position and by the range of functional contexts in which they are used (see Laponce 1987). Yet Swiss-German's journey from dialect to language has only been partial since it has not completely replaced High German in oral communication (e.g., the national evening news on Swiss-German public television is still presented in standard German) and since it lacks a standardized written idiom. Lest it were to cross the elusive threshold of acquiring its proper written form, Swiss-German cannot replace High German completely, regardless of how much it advances in other respects.

Second, as Swiss-German moved closer to being a 'full' language, High German became in some respects more like a foreign language. This does not apply to syntax, vocabulary and grammatical structure where, paradoxically, the Swiss-German idiom has on average become marginally more similar to the standard version, owing to the import of expressions from High German and to the widespread consumption of German electronic mass media throughout German-speaking Switzerland (Haas 2000). A sense of High German being 'foreign', however, pervades public perceptions of and attitudes towards the two idioms. As far back as one decade ago, a study found that Swiss-German primary school pupils develop strong negative attitudes towards High German and positive affect towards Swiss-German. They perceive Swiss-German as 'their' language and High German as 'someone else's' language. Swiss-German signifies intimacy, community and authentic self-

expression, whereas High German to some extent carries opposite connotations (Häcki Buhofer & Studer 1993). Other studies came to similar findings (see Sieber & Sitta 1994; Siebenhaar & Wyler 1997). As standard German vanished from many spheres of oral communication, it became psychologically more alien and remote. In addition, some observers maintain that (especially younger) Swiss-Germans have become less proficient in standard German (Wunderli 2001; but see Schläpfer 1994).

In light of all these factors, the German-speaking Swiss find themselves in a peculiar linguistic position *vis-à-vis* their northern neighbour. On the one hand, the Swiss-German idiom is sufficiently distinct from standard German for a cultural boundary to have crystallized and become internalized. To most Swiss-Germans, 'being Swiss-German' entails unambiguously 'not being German'; it means, among other things, not to belong to the same cultural category as the Germans and – increasingly so – to speak differently from them. Yet, on the other hand, because of the relative proximity of the two idioms, because of the Swiss-Germans' reliance on High German as their written idiom and because the two idioms are still to some extent entangled at the level of oral communication, the cultural boundary between them is neither unproblematic nor secure. Language separates the Swiss-Germans from the Germans, but it is also language that keeps them tied together.

Borrowing from Sigmund Freud's (1991[1922]) well-known terminology, such situations have the potential to result in a kind of 'narcissism of minor difference' (see also Barth 1969; Tajfel 1982; Cohen 1989). *No* cultural difference means the absence of distinct cultural categories and thus cultural security. *Large* cultural difference means cultural boundaries that are strong and thus perceived as unproblematic and secure. *Small* cultural difference, by contrast, means distinct yet insecure cultural categories. The boundary appears fragile, triggering a process of continuous self-differentiation and often subconscious fears of insufficient separation from and damaging exposure to the other category. Seen in this light, the Swiss-German position *vis-à-vis* Germany is fundamentally different from that of the French-speaking Swiss in relation to France. As standard French-speakers, most Romands are able to reconcile a notion of full and unambiguous membership in a wider Francophone cultural space, on the one hand, with an equally firm sense of institutional and political 'Swissness', on the other. Swiss-Germans, by contrast, are *to some extent* part of a wider German cultural space, yet cannot fully belong to it; they must locate themselves inside and outside at the same time.

To complicate matters further, Swiss-German society must walk this cultural tightrope without political backing and without an institutional safety net, as German-speaking Switzerland has no political expression. The closest political units 'downwards' are the cantons. Most are officially monolingual

and under the Swiss federal system hold almost all powers in cultural and linguistic matters (Knüsel 1994). At the same time, the German-speaking cantons are too politically autonomous and fragmented to collectively add up to an overarching Swiss-German political block of one form or another. The federal government, by contrast, must remain culturally and linguistically 'neutral' so as not to imperil Switzerland's internal cohesion. Thus, neither the cantons nor the Swiss federation can give political expression to German-speaking Switzerland *qua* linguistic region. In many ways this is of course the flipside of the 'state without a culture' coin discussed in the previous section. Just as the Swiss state lacks a 'thick' culture to reinforce its political boundaries, so German-speaking Switzerland cannot give institutional backing to its cultural boundaries because it has no institutions of its own.

How, then, does all this affect Swiss-German attitudes towards European integration? To be sure, EU opponents in Switzerland cannot play the 'German card' too overtly, nor can they advance straightforward cultural arguments. On the German factor, the Swiss electorate is too sophisticated to conceive of the EU as a German-led conspiracy. In any event, only very few are given to the loathing of all things German that has afflicted some sections of the anti-EU movement in the United Kingdom. Most importantly, in Switzerland no countrywide political issue is ever overtly fought on cultural grounds. In fact, it is near impossible to make logically plausible cultural arguments on *any* national (i.e., Swiss-wide) issue, given that there is no single Swiss-wide culture in the 'thick' sense of the term. Invoking cultural arguments would inevitably privilege one cultural region over the others and thus be potentially divisive. It would be seen as an attempt by one language group to hijack the Swiss state for its particular cultural ends.

On the issue of 'Europe' such sensitivities are especially strong. Conscious that their anti-EU activism has strained relations between the language groups, Swiss-German opponents of EU membership have tried hard not to be seen as anti-Romand and to recruit Francophones into their ranks. Yet to do so they must try to make a political and economic rather than cultural case, lest they further alienate a linguistic group whose own cultural position is very different and much more secure.

In Switzerland, then, the debate over EU membership is rarely framed in cultural terms. Yet this does not mean that cultural and identity-centred concerns play no role. Rather, the rhetoric of the 'anti-Europeans' is underlain by the recurrent themes of smallness, encirclement, vulnerability and identity loss. And while they part company with some of their British counterparts who depict the EU as little more than a German-led colonial project, they nonetheless imply – however subtly – parallels between Switzerland's position *vis-à-vis* the EU today and its plight during the Second World War.

During the EEA referendum campaign, for example, one of the most hard-hitting advertisements by the 'no' side played on just such fears. Its graphical style was consciously reminiscent of 'morale-boosting' posters during the Second World War. The advertisement depicted Switzerland as a tiny red-and-white island amidst a vast gray European landmass from which all other national boundaries had been erased. It called on Swiss voters to resurrect their ancient 'spirit of resistance' in order to stop defeatists in their midst from surrendering Switzerland and Swiss ideals to a foreign power in exchange for a few economic advantages. The central message of the advertisement was clear: then and now, preserving Swiss values and Swiss identity requires caution and suspicion when dealing with the outside world. It was not so much an anti-German message (though that connotation, too, was subtly present) as a more general warning against unbridled foreign exposure.

Such themes resonate much more strongly among many Swiss-Germans than among their Francophone counterparts because their cultural position is different. It is defined by the Swiss-Germans' cultural separateness from a much larger (and historically often feared) kin-state to which they are nonetheless culturally tied. This has resulted in insecure cultural boundaries of which many Swiss-Germans are highly protective precisely because they are insecure. Add to this that *qua* linguistic region German-speaking Switzerland has no political expression and no institutional protector. As a cultural region, German-speaking Switzerland confronts the world alone, for a cultural region is all it is.

This led the Swiss-German electorate to adopt a cautious approach to Switzerland's relations with the outside world, from involvement in foreign peacekeeping missions and the United Nations (UN) to membership in the EU.[3] Again, the point is not to argue that Swiss-German voters perceive all these issues to conceal direct cultural threats. Rather, their peculiar cultural and political position helped condition a generally defensive and often inward-looking and isolationist stance in large sections of Swiss-German society – a diffuse sense of vulnerability and a desire to limit exposure to the outside world. Within the delicate cultural equilibrium that has developed inside Switzerland, the Swiss-German polity has found a niche that is secure enough to bolster its otherwise difficult cultural and political position. It resents moves that could upset this equilibrium or force it out of its niche. Its unease *vis-à-vis* the European integration process is one manifestation of this.

The future of Swiss-German Euroscepticism

The German-speaking Swiss inhabit a state without an overarching 'thick' culture and a cultural region with relatively precarious boundaries and without

political support and articulation. In the ways discussed above, each identity makes the Swiss-German electorate cautious towards the EU. Combine the two and that effect becomes much stronger still. The divided nature of Swiss-German identifications has had many beneficial consequences. For while the two identities – Swiss and Swiss-German – are in permanent tension and deny each other closure, they also help sustain each other. Moreover, their inter-play has fostered among the Swiss-German polity a liberal civic ethos that values pluralism, compromise and accommodation and that makes it treat Switzerland's three cultural minority groups with exemplary magnanimity. Yet the same identity mix has placed the Swiss-German electorate in a peculiar kind of double bind in its relations with the outside world.

The full picture is of course more complicated. Throughout German-speak-ing Switzerland (as in the country at large) both cantonal and local attach-ments are strong (Métral 2001) and they co-determine attitudes towards European integration. Some German-speaking cantons are much more opposed to EU membership than others. Further divisions with a bearing on attitudes towards European integration include those between rural and urban, old and young, rich and poor, left-leaning and right-leaning, and so on (Kriesi et al. 1993). Even when it comes to their views on 'Europe', Swiss-Germans are by no means a homogenous block.

Nonetheless, the very high overall rate of opposition to European integra-tion in German-speaking Switzerland becomes intelligible only in light of the two main factors discussed in this article: multicultural Switzerland's civic foundations and lack of a 'thick', state-defining culture, and the Swiss-Germans' peculiar cultural and political position. This is compounded by the fact that the Swiss-German polity has all the general attributes that most engender hostility towards European integration: wealthy, 'northern', numer-ically in the majority inside a multicultural state and with a successful politi-cal history. In more than one respect, the odds remain stacked against the EU in German-speaking Switzerland.

How does all this augur for the future development of Swiss-German atti-tudes towards European integration? For a start, the four main general pre-dictors of anti-EU sentiment will continue to apply to Swiss-German society, and for this reason alone it is set to remain one of the more Eurosceptic con-stituencies in Europe. Much the same holds true for the nature of Swiss-German identifications with Switzerland. Because of the multicultural makeup of the Swiss confederation, these will continue to be mainly civic and institutional and thus more likely to clash – or be perceived to clash – with the EU's own civic and institutional ambitions. Likewise, the Swiss polity will con-tinue to lack 'thicker' cultural material with which to fortify the boundaries of its multicultural state against an (actual or perceived) erosion resulting from

closer integration with its neighbours. Against this backdrop, the development of the EU itself will be an important variable. The more resolute become the EU's own civic aspirations, the more will the Swiss-German electorate perceive it as an identity threat and the stronger will be its determination to stay outside.

A further factor, clearly, is the perceived economic cost of eschewing the EU. In this context, the recent bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU (which were negotiated in the wake of the ill-fated EEA referendum and bring Switzerland economically a great deal closer to the EU) have an ambiguous role. As many proponents hope, they could help the German-speaking Swiss 'train' for eventual EU membership and demonstrate to them that closer ties do not produce cultural or political harm. Yet, at the same time, for Switzerland the bilateral treaties have reduced the economic cost of non-membership and thus made the economic case for joining less compelling.

What, finally, of the cultural and linguistic situation of the German-speaking Swiss? With effective moves to ring-fence the status of High German improbable in the foreseeable future (though not entirely out of the question), it is more likely than not that the Swiss-German idiom will continue to move further outwards on the dialect-to-language continuum in sociolinguistic terms. In such a scenario, Swiss-German would penetrate into more and more areas of oral communication at the expense of standard German, increasingly confining the latter to the status of a mainly written idiom. This would further advance the current transition from social context dependent to 'medium dependent' diglossia discussed earlier. On some accounts, this development will further benefit from the spread of English as global and European *lingua franca*, since this will reduce the relative significance of standard German as one of the local *linguae francae* (Brändle 1998). Swiss-German would become at once more widely used and more clearly disentangled from High German, as the boundary between them would coincide ever more closely with the separation between writing and speech.

To be sure, linguistic developments of this kind can never be predicted with certainty, and they tend to happen slowly, over several generations. It is, moreover, hard to foresee their political consequences: language does not inevitably confer social identity and social identity does not inevitably condition political preferences and patterns of political organization. All the same, following the logic outlined in this article, a Swiss-German polity whose cultural boundaries become more sharply delineated and more secure might, over time, become less concerned with protecting these boundaries and more confident to accept greater exposure to the outside world, 'Europe' included. 'Narcissisms of minor difference' often fade as the differences become more clearly articulated and less minor.

At the same time, this would not necessarily end German-speaking Switzerland's plight as a 'culture without a political home' – a plight that, as was argued, has further fuelled its slant towards political isolationism. Here change is unlikely anytime soon. In the first place, German-speaking Switzerland has not become a salient category of social identification for most of its inhabitants. Their identifications have largely remained divided between the local communes, the cantons and Switzerland at large (see Métral 2001). This in turn would seem to rule out a strong identity-driven push for a linguistically defined 'meta-regionalism' in the foreseeable future. Second, while institutionally backed linguistic regions would give clearer political expression to the importance of language in Swiss politics, their creation would require the kind of radical constitutional reconfiguration that the Swiss polity generally abhors. Finally, aligning language more closely with political structures would weaken the crosscutting cleavages that many observers – rightly or wrongly – credit with the stability of the Swiss political edifice.

On balance, then, many German-speaking Swiss will remain leery of European integration. Some signs point towards a gradual softening, but slowly so and without yet having reached a point of no return. This is not surprising for a polity that is wealthy, 'northern', the numerical majority in a multicultural state and with a successful political history, and thus has all the attributes that most engender opposition to European integration. It is still less surprising in light of the peculiar political and cultural position of the German-speaking Swiss, belonging as they do to a state without a unifying culture and to a culture without a state.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. This article focuses on Switzerland's two main linguistic groups, which together account for almost 85 per cent of the population. Italian-speakers (most of whom inhabit the southern canton of Ticino) are the third largest group. In Ticino, rejection of EU membership is roughly as high as in the German-speaking part of the country. An important factor in this is the desire by many Italian-speaking Swiss to prevent unrestricted immigration from Italy into Switzerland in order to ensure that Italian immigrants do not out-

number Switzerland's 'native' Italian-speakers. As for the tiny Rumantsch-speaking population, clear data is hard to come by since it is scattered across the trilingual eastern canton of Grisons.

2. Incidentally, however, the Francophone Swiss are untypical 'Latins' in that they are almost evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants, as is the Swiss population at large.

3. Even though it hosts many UN institutions, Switzerland did not join the organization until 2002, after a narrow majority of Swiss voters had at last approved accession in a referendum. Reflecting attitudes towards the EU, support for UN membership is much higher among French-speakers than among their German-speaking counterparts.

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