

## **Die Flüchtlings- und Aussenwirtschaftspolitik der Schweiz im Kontext der öffentlichen politischen Kommunikation 1938–1950**

*Swiss Refugee and Foreign Economic Policies seen within the context of Press Publications on Politics 1938–1950*

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### **Summary**

This study analyses the public political communication in the two policy fields of refugee policy (1938–1947) and foreign trade policy (1940–1945) on the basis of the coverage of leading daily newspapers in the three language regions of Switzerland, as a contribution to a comprehensive picture of Switzerland during and immediately after the Second World War. The findings are rounded off with and put into context by an analysis of media discussions about Switzerland's attitude to the national-socialist concept of the «New Europe» (1940/41) and to the Allies' post-war order (1944-1950), as well as by an analysis of Swiss discussions on the post-war period during the war (1942-1945).

Media communication as a target of investigation can be justified by the importance of public political communication in the selection of political issues requiring decision and the legitimization of political action. Even if partial censorship was in operation during the war, this function of the public sphere remained fundamentally unaffected. (For the significance of censorship see the two articles by Georg Kreis in the same volume.) At the heart of the analysis are such questions as: what importance was attached during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period to the subjects considered; what need to act and what options for action were perceived; and what expectation for the future was expressed. The judgement passed on the activities of the public bodies concerned is also of interest.

To answer these questions, all articles touching on the two themes «refugees» and «foreign trade» were taken into consideration – as well as all editorial articles on the three other subjects mentioned in the introductory paragraph – that were found in the daily newspapers *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Vaterland*, *Tagwacht*, *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Liberté*, *Journal de Genève*, *Giornale del Popolo* und *Corriere del Ticino*. In addition, the trade union newspaper *Schweizerische Metallarbeiterzeitung* was included to complete the economic coverage of the media. The choice of party newspapers and forum media allowed the language regions and the most important political circles to be covered in a relatively representative manner (chapter 2.3).

For the evaluation of the articles, both quantitative and qualitative criteria were applied. Quantifying allowed the dynamics and intensity of coverage to be represented by means of time-series analysis (see Chart 2–18), and thus permitting to determine phases of intensified coverage. Moreover, the key sub-themes and agents were also able to be identified. Thus determined, the focal points of coverage were examined more closely in a qualitative hermeneutical analysis.

The results that emerged make it possible to answer unambiguously the question of the importance attached during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period to the issues of refugees and foreign trade. In terms both of the absolute number of articles and in function with comparing the areas on which newspaper interest focussed, reporting on refugee or foreign trade policy was marginal in the leading newspapers of German-speaking Switzerland. Instead, they concentrated, on the one hand, on matters of social policy or

domestic economy and the participation of the Social-Democratic Party of Switzerland (SPS) in the government, as well as on issues relating to national defence or national supply. On the other hand, on the course of the war and the division of the post-war world into two antagonistic blocks (chapter 3.1).

This unambiguous finding cannot be adequately explained merely by referring to censorship, for censorship hardly affected discussions of domestic political issues. Taking articles relating to refugees as an example, it can be shown that if this area of policy was seldom taken up it was primarily because little attempt was made to present it as a problem. This reflected the fact that the Swiss, in all language regions and all political circles, saw Switzerland as a «transit country». Even the occasional voices critical toward refugee policy, raised above all in the social-democratic *Tagwacht*, did not question the transit-country doctrine. Spurred by fears based on cultural or economic considerations that the nature of the country might be changed by the presence of too many foreigners, this transit-country doctrine set limits on the room for manoeuvre in respect of refugee policy (chapter 5.1). The fact that the Swiss saw Switzerland as a transit country and at the same time as a stronghold of humanitarian tradition had an influence on the choice of refugee groups and the way in which they were portrayed. The picture of refugees in Switzerland conveyed by the media was marked by those groups whose return to their homes was certain or could at least be expected, such as refugee children or holiday children (chapter 5.3) and interned soldiers (chapter 5.3). Reporting on the generous children aid programmes plays a key role here, for this removed the latent contradiction between Switzerland's humanitarian tradition and the transit-country doctrine imposed by reasons of state. There was much less coverage relating to refugees who had fled for reasons of politics, religion or race. It was moreover limited to those newspapers that felt tied to the refugee group in question by a common philosophy. The fact that most of the refugees were Jews was explicitly mentioned in French-speaking Switzerland; but this was not the case in German-speaking Switzerland (chapter 5.4). Equally rare – at least until 1942 –, was a substantial linking of the coverage on refugees with the continuous coverage on their persecution in the area under Nazi control. Thus articles about refugees largely omitted the reasons for their flight. This contributed further to the fact that, with the exception of the debate in autumn 1942 (chapter 4.3), the refugee question was barely discussed, and very seldom raised as a problem.

In the discussions of Switzerland's relationship to the Nazi concept of a «New Europe» (chapter 7), which formed the background to the economic coverage until 1942, a consensus also arose on a self-image of Switzerland which was to form the basis for foreign trade policy. In the summer of 1940, both German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland were affected strongly by a fundamental sense of insecurity, which led to a temporary and partial revival of outdated class-specific interpretative models or ideas of fascist renewal movements. Thereafter it was only slowly, and with repeated references to the actual menacing situation, that the central political circles returned to taking their lead, comprehensively and with a unifying effect, from the fundamental values of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* (Spiritual Defence of the Country) vaguely sketched out over the years since 1938. This reorientation tied in with the emphasis on independence, federalism, neutrality and democracy (chapter 7.2). But while democracy and federalism were defined in different ways in the different political circles and language regions, Switzerland's neutrality and independence were intensely mystified in all newspapers. The question of the usefulness and concrete practice of neutrality policy dropped from view. An attempt was made to define the relationship to the «New Europe» under German hegemony by means of a dual semantic dividing line. Economic adaptation («cooperation») and political independence on the one hand, and the autonomous (political) reorganisation («New Order») of Switzerland along with the new ordering of Europe on the other, were defined as two antithetical concepts. The coverage on Switzerland's foreign trade relations was determined by this perspective which

concentrated on Switzerland as a special case and denied the country's involvement with the various power blocs (chapter 8). All analysed newspapers adopted the official terminology which made clear semantic distinctions between economic and political adaptation, and thus contributed both to avoiding problems in economic relations and to the legitimization of the political authorities responsible. Despite the concessions made – which mostly went unmentioned – trade negotiations were represented as a success, safeguarding neutrality and independence. At the same time the coverage relating to the political authorities involved was such that no doubts about their conduct of the negotiations emerged, let alone criticism. Moreover, foreign trade relations were very closely linked to questions of national supply and maintaining employment. If the issue of Switzerland's foreign trade relations were raised at all, in all political circles and language regions – with the exception of Ticino –, this was done against the background of the feared bottlenecks in supply and the expected rise of unemployment (chapter 8.1.3). This markedly pessimistic views of the future derived from a fear of social unrest, reflecting experience going back to the First World War, and a fear of the disruption of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) which was invoked by the *Geistige Landesverteidigung*.

Relations with Switzerland's most important trading partners were generally portrayed as free of problems. This is above all true for Germany, the most frequently mentioned trading partner. Switzerland's increasing economic dependence on Germany was raised in critical terms, only occasionally, in the *Tages-Anzeiger* and the *Tagwacht*.

As the Allies' economic and political pressure on Switzerland increased, this pattern of argument weakened. In the discussion of the Allied remonstrances about Swiss economic policy towards Germany, the *Tages-Anzeiger* and the *NZZ* in particular used arguments based on neutrality policy. However, this was more than a mere knee-jerk reaction to the Allies' criticism, for with the change in the course of the war and the fading sense of a threat, the reference to economic constraints lost plausibility. A legalistic argument took place which put neutrality centre stage. When in early 1945 the Allies threatened to impose a total blockade on Switzerland if it did not change its economic and trade policies towards the German Reich, this insistence on the country's inalienable and integral neutrality in the public political communication allowed only to interpret the threats as an attack on Swiss neutrality (chapter 8.2.5). It was only with the beginning of the Currie mission that the *Tagwacht* began to carry occasional criticism of Swiss trade relations, for which the social-democrat newspaper held the «financial bourgeoisie» primarily responsible. Neither the *Tagwacht* did however not question the Swiss policy of neutrality during the war.

Switzerland's relationship to the victorious powers of the Second World War, which from 1943 on increasingly formed the framework for the coverage on foreign trade, was marked by a questioning of Swiss neutrality which all leading media found deeply irritating (chapter 10.1). This irritation did not, however, lead to any reflection on Switzerland's role in the Second World War, and its political and economic involvement. Rather, with the exception of occasional critical voices in the *Tagwacht* and *Tages-Anzeiger*, all commentators stuck to a picture of Switzerland as a ping-pong ball, the victim of the (geo) political interests of other powers. Reporting varied between arguments based on international law, used to justify Switzerland's behaviour during the war, portraits of the country in the role of victim, creating much of the dichotomy between victorious great powers and little Switzerland, and a pragmatic search for an acceptable *modus vivendi* in the international environment.

Finally, the reference to continuities in coverage raises the question of the significance of turning points. In domestic politics, the turn of the fortunes of war which became apparent in 1942/43 marked the beginning of a phase of increasing polarisation, initiated by a more active role in the opposition played by the Social-Democratic Party of Switzerland («New

Switzerland»), and intensified by the increasingly powerful leftwing socialist umbrella movement, the *Partei der Arbeit* (Swiss Labour Party – PdA) (chapter 9.2). As to foreign policy, on the other hand, Switzerland found herself increasingly facing isolation after the end of 1943. These two aspects came together in the so-called Pilet-Golaz affair in 1944. These double irritations in a phase of transformation as the war came to an end did not, as one could have expected, lead to the adoption of a fundamentally new political orientation. On the contrary, *Vaterland* linked the theory of totalitarianism, which put the brown and red terror on an equal footing, to the perception of threat that existed in the early forties, and established an interpretative approach which was then adopted by the *NZZ* and with reversed premises by the *Tagwacht*. The long process of social-democratic conversion «from east to west» was completed with the Korean war. During the cold war, in the climate of the second *Geistige Landesverteidigung*, now with a conservative orientation, Switzerland's policies on refugees and foreign trade during the Second World War were at last no longer an issue.

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