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*Book review*

*René Schwok. 2006. Suisse -Union Européenne: l'adhésion impossible?,  
[Switzerland - The European Union: impossible integration?], Lausanne:  
Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes, Collection  
Le Savoir suisse, 143 pages.*

Reviewd by: Nicoleta Cristea-Brunel

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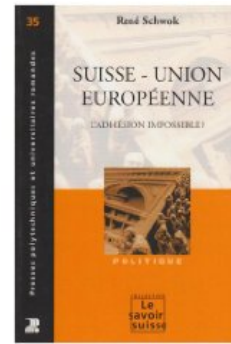
**Department of Political Science**

**Babes-Bolyai University**

**[revista.europolis@yahoo.com](mailto:revista.europolis@yahoo.com)**

**<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/cpa/rev/europolis.html>**

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Reviewed by: Nicoleta Cristea-Brunel,  
European Institute of the University of Geneva

### "The Swiss Issue": why isn't Switzerland a member of The European Union?

Finding the answer to the question of why Switzerland, a European nation both historically and economically, continuously refuses to adhere to the European Union is a subject of ample interest. Until 2006 there had been no elaborate study on the matter. This is why René Schwok's "Switzerland - The European Union: impossible integration?" (2006) represents a premiere, the author offering a relatively brief, politically unbiased and comprehensible study. Along the 12 chapters, events that have marked the relationship between Switzerland and the EU are approached chronologically, from the first decades of the European institutional construction up until the historical 1993 referendum and the following bilateral agreements. The book mainly addresses European studies specialists, but through its rather accessible language and avoidance of highly technical details, the target group can be broadened, rendering it suitable for a mainstream audience.

Schwok's study is by all means a challenge, even more so as the uniqueness of the "Swiss case" is difficult to explain. Hence, regarding the geopolitical emplacement, Switzerland is far from being an island like Iceland, as it possesses common borders with France, Germany and Italy, three of the founding states of what was to become the European Union. Even more so, the Swiss Confederation has adopted the languages, the religions and the cultural manifestations of these countries, being a success story of multiculturalism. As far as the political traditions are concerned, Switzerland proves itself to be a European country *par excellence*, as its parliamentary system and political parties are similar to those of the neighbouring countries.

The author argues that from demographic, economic and cultural standpoints Switzerland is European. From a demographic point of

view, more than 870,000 EU citizens are residents of the Confederation, and approximately 700,000 people cross the Swiss borders in both directions every day. As far as its economy is concerned, Switzerland is practically almost entirely integrated in the EU, as circa 60% of the Swiss exports and almost 80% of the imports are being developed with the EU. Everything seems to concur to Switzerland's natural integration in the EU.

In spite of these influencers, Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, nor does it intend to become one. The European Economic Area (EEA) was constituted in 1992, through the Porto Agreement; it is an original mechanism for the adhesion to the European Union, without formal integration. This agreement was signed by the 12 EU states and the 7 EFTA states; it came into operation in 1994, but with the exception of the Swiss Confederacy, as its citizens have rejected the ratification of the pact.

The referendum through which 50,3% of the Swiss citizens rejected the integration in the European Economic Space on December 6, 1992, generated the most intense and emotional campaign in the history of this country. According to René Schwok, this referendum represents a "traumatic event" and caused a long-term interruption of the steps through which a certain part of the political class was trying to guide Switzerland towards the integration into the EU. The political, economical, trade-union related, mass media related and intellectual influencers were in favor to the EEA, while the right - wing sovereign parties were against it.

The sociologists and political theories identified an important fracture between the "elites" and the "rest of the population"; hence, the polls have shown that the people who declared themselves in favor of the EU integration of Switzerland have high incomes, college education and live in the urban area. The strongest fractures were those related to the main linguistic regions, although the language *per se* was not the explanation.

"La Suisse romande" - the French speaking cantons of Switzerland - have shown their enthusiastic support for the EEA, and the results have shown that in Neuchâtel, Jura, Genève and Vaud, almost 80% of the voters approved of the treaty. The Italian speaking cantons were mostly reserved, and those who voted against were more than 60%. In the suburban regions of the Germanic Switzerland, there were 70% of the

votes against the ratification of the EEA treaty, but in the big cities, the results were different, as the weak majority said "yes". The tensions induced by the blazing fracture between these results were so powerful that there were official talks on the impossibility of going on together. This referendum had transformed the peaceful and multicultural Switzerland in a country that seemed threatened by the Canadian or Belgian syndrome.

Recent history was about to prove that this is not the case: the French speaking Swiss go on cohabiting without any conflicts with the Italian and German speaking Swiss, but recent polls (developed after the year 2000), show that a maximum of 30% of the Swiss are currently in favor of the EU integration, and the 1992 referendum "trauma" is not completely cured. As far as the EU - Switzerland relations are concerned, the solution to the crisis was the negotiation and the adoption of the bilateral treaties in 2002 and 2004, through which almost all issues stipulated in the EEA Treaty were brought under regulation.

René Schwok identifies five thematic frames in which the Swiss' reserves to the EU integration fall: identity issues, neutrality, direct democracy, federalism, and economic particularities. As far as the national "identity" is concerned - an ambiguous and often questioned concept - the author offers a necessary definition: "that which allows the citizens of a country to be acknowledged as such, due to certain distinctive elements". In fact, the Swiss identity is not based on too many common elements, as Switzerland is a mixture of cultures, languages and religions. However, there is a political Swiss identity, and it defies a lot of political theories. The citizens perceive it as such, as a poll that followed up the 1992 referendum proves: almost 55% of the Swiss that voted negative explained their rejection as the fear of an "end of Swiss identity". Schwok identifies as a common point of the recent history of the Swiss the fact that they have not suffered afflictions: "for almost two centuries, they have not endured on their territory world wars, civil wars, dictatorship, foreign occupation, or decolonization. Their situation maintained itself socially stable and economically prosperous".

Following persuasive argumentation, Schwok's conclusion is that an integration of Switzerland into the European Union in the near future seems impossible. The prevalent opinion among the Swiss seems to be that the integration is useless, under the circumstances that they can

have most of the EU advantages without the presumed inconveniences. The author doesn't hesitate in offering specific prognosis: "the closer Switzerland gets to the EU through bilateral treaties, the farther the perspective of integration seems to get".

As a conclusion, René Schwok successfully reaches the main goal of his study, which is that of explaining the political, economical and identity related reasons for Swiss refusal to integrate in the European community structures, and does that in a very plausible and easily comprehensible manner. The analysis is convincing and even though it lacks notable innovation in the methodological approach of the subject, is also without gaps or anomalies in its coverage. The book proves to be a useful didactical synthesis on the relationships between Switzerland and the European Union while proposing plausible answers to the question why the Swiss are the rebellious continentals in the integration matter.