Book Reviews

Political Change in Switzerland: From Stability to Uncertainty.
Clive H. Church
London/New York, Routledge (2016), 196 p., ISBN 978-1-857-43780-5

Clive Church, Emeritus Professor at the University of Kent, has been an attentive analyst of Swiss politics since 1970. After his major publications *The Politics and Government of Switzerland (2004)*, *Switzerland and the European Union (2007)* and *A Concise History of Switzerland (2013)*, the title of the author's latest book particularly catches the eye of the Swiss reader: How is an external observer looking at the substantial changes that politics have undergone over the last 40 years?

Church starts with the traditional image of Switzerland's politics of the past decades: As a polity characterised by power sharing, conflict resolution by friendly and conciliatory compromise, exceptional political stability, economic success and hence a *Sonderfall*. This post-war *Sonderfall* was meant to apply not only to domestic politics but had a foreign policy dimension as well. It combined armed neutrality with political non-intervention but economic internationalism, based on diplomatic bilateralism. This allowed the country and its export-driven economy to develop useful cooperation and access to international markets while avoiding damaging political commitments. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the "no" of the people and the Cantons to join the European Single Market (ESM) in 1992 and the new dynamics of globalisation changed everything. The neo-liberal opening of markets, beginning with the famous *White Book* in 1994, was accompanied by socio-economic changes and the deepest economic crisis since 50 years. Never had Switzerland known unemployment rates as those of the 1990s. While Switzerland was hit by de-industrialisation, service industries grew but at the same time practices of Swiss banks came under pressure, notably from the US. The welfare state as well as relations between organised capital and labour came under pressure. Growing income disparities, practices of internationalised management of big firms, rising poverty, the growing weight of immigration, increasing crime and violence led to new social conflicts. The time of a "smooth running and harmonious society" (51), so Church, was over. The age of new *Uncertainties* had begun.

What should then be the place of Switzerland in the world? After 1989, neutrality, from being unproblematic, stable and reliable, became questionable, the mission of the army, once the "cement" of society, unclear. With joining the UN by a successful popular vote in 2001, Switzerland took a step closer to the international community. Finding ways to maintain and to develop relations with the EU after the defeat of the ESM-treaty and without membership remained the primary challenge of the Swiss government up to now. The two series of bilateral treaties with Brussels were a first answer, accompanied by further agreements, notably on the Schengen-Dublin system, on financial contributions to the EU-cohesion fund and on education. Yet, difficulties remain. Brussels excludes further developments of the *bilateral way* without an institutional arrangement – a proposition fiercely attacked by conservative EU-opponents. This puts the existing arrangement with the EU in a veritable crisis: The popular initiative against "mass immigration", accepted by the people in 2014, aims at controlling immigration, which is contradictory to the EU principle of free movement of persons.

Turning from current events to politics, Church notes structural and processual changes. As to structural changes, he mentions the new constitution of 2000, which opened the way to the institutionalisation of the Federal Administrative and Penal Tribunals and gave the existing Federal Tribunal more influence. While reforms of the structures of the Federal Council failed in several attempts, the federal and cantonal administrations, using tools of New Public Management, became more effective, more influential and powerful. The Conference of Cantonal Governments, established in 1993, gives the cantons a new voice with growing influence in both domestic and foreign affairs. Parliament, still proudly defining itself as a *militia parliament,* has in reality become more and more professionalised and is increasingly critical of the Federal Council's projects. Most important, according to Church, are the processual changes: Differing uses of direct democracy, political polarisation, mass media that prefer exciting stories and are aligned to mainstream issues and opinions, personalisation of politics, and a growing insignificance of the pre-parliamentary stages of legislation all profoundly changed the political process. In the rising level of conflict and of socio-economic divides, the culture of compromise is being lost. The party system has become tri-polar, reshaped in far-right, centre-right and centre-left, which prevents "the country closing ranks" (79) as it did in the 1970-80s. In the last two decades, the Swiss Peoples Party (SVP) not only became the biggest party but the leading political force in the country, representing the national-conservative part of the electorate. It is setting the agenda not only in its key issue against European integration and immigration but in many domestic agendas, too. Pretending that it speaks and acts for *the people* against an unreliable *political class*, the SVP is using mass media rather than restricted elite channels, and vituperating against political opponents to promote its messages. The party thus "works to assemble, focus and lead populism" (86).

Swiss populism, according to Church, has two social bases. The one is a changing electorate, leaning to traditional conservative values, defending the old Swiss *Sonderfall* and opposing the government's policies of modernisation. In particular, conservative patriots are suspicious of any further steps of European integration and hostile against the government's liberal policy concerning immigration and asylum seekers. The second is the organisational framework: It was the SVP who was able to be responsive to these values of the electorate, integrating different social strata from all levels of society, not least parts of the working class who had turned away from the Social Democrats. Thus, we see the emergence of a new cleavage, the SVP opposing all other (governmental) parties, and deeply dividing the country.

Under the title of *The political strategies of Swiss populism,* the author then discusses the party aims of the SVP to become "the dominant, and solely legitimate force in the country, hardly to reconcile with conventional consensus politics" (102). In detail, he describes the party's powerful organisation, the role of the leadership of Mr. Blocher, the media presence as well as the populist rhetoric and campaigning tactics, which allowed the party to become an immense presence in Swiss politics: The SVP is seen as the dominant player not only in political decisions, but changing also "what politics are about, how people make politics and who controls them" (114).

Church draws a rich and very detailed picture of 40 years of Swiss politics, as a historian occasionally referring to roots of the past. In many respects, the account on *Political Change* is in line with Swiss academics' views, while in others it opens new perspectives. The chapters on the establishment's response to populism and on the negotiations between Brussels and Bern are particularly sober and reveal illusionary positions of the government, and of Euroskeptics and Europhiles as well.

The underlying concept of the book – opposing the old *Sonderfall* to the new *Uncertainty* – is stimulating. It often surprises the Swiss reader who, witnessing the daily incremental

adjustments, is less aware of the "big" change of politics noticeable in a longer time-span. Not always, however, does the author avoid the pitfalls of his concept. Take the key notion of consensus politics: It was not so idyllic in the period of the *Sonderfall* as suggested by Church. In the parliament of the 1980s, for instance, the political left was systematically marginalised by an "eternal majority" of the united bourgeois block. By contrast, with the division of the bourgeois block and with the emergence of a tri-partite systems, the chances of negotiated "changing majorities" among right, centre and left are higher under the new *Uncertainty*. The author leaves no doubt that populism is the main political challenge and detrimental for the Swiss system and beyond. This resembles what the liberal Swiss elites pretend. But is populism really the cause of today's disruptive political changes in Switzerland and many other European countries? Populism throughout modern history was mobilising the losers of modernisation. Today's losers are those of globalisation and Europeanisation. This is what Swiss liberal elites forget and omit in their discourse, and it is also what one can somewhat miss from Church's book. The reader may wonder why he learns little about those liberal conservatives or economists who argue with good reasons for restrictions on immigration or on globalisation/Europeanisation but have nothing in common with neither the SVP nor its populism. Is the record of Swiss asylum policy as deficient, hostility to foreigners as widespread as Church suspects? This is not the place to give different answers to these and other appreciations. Rather, we should ask why such appreciations come into being. Maybe our self-perception is not only different from the external perceptions, but even more: One has to assume that even the external perception of Swiss politics is overly influenced by the SVP's discourse.

Yes, the account from stability to uncertainty is a message worth reflecting upon. If Church rightly warns against risks of populism in direct democracy, I am however not convinced that populism is the main challenge of Swiss politics. There will be further disruptive changes under external pressure in a wide range of policy fields from education, research, industrial innovation to social culture, questions which are not in the centre of Church's book. The real challenge therefore is to find the narrow path between keeping Swiss republicanism and adapting to global innovation. In the novel *Gattopardo*, dealing with the pre-revolutionary situation in Italy, the author Tomaso di Lampedusa gives the last word to Prince Don Fabrizio: *"For things to remain the same, everything must change"*.

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Political decision-making in Switzerland. The consensus model under pressure
Sciarini, Pascal, Manuel Fischer and Denise Traber Palgrave Macmillan (2015), 291p, ISBN 978-1-137-50859-1

About two decades ago, a handful of pioneering studies on the impact of increasing internationalization of politics on decision-making processes in Switzerland started to argue that – despite formal institutional stability - power relations and patterns of collaboration in Swiss politics were quickly moving away from the patterns of slow, consensual and corporatist decision-making that were identified in the 1970s as the prototypical Swiss consensus democracy. Pascal Sciarini's early work on the reform of Swiss agricultural policy in the 1990s was key in launching a whole