

**The Swiss Parties and Europe – a look at the parties on the
ground and an explanation for the success of the
Swiss People’s Party**

Andreas LADNER

Universität Bern

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Summary

In this paper it is argued, that Switzerland’s position towards Europe played an important part in changing the Swiss party system. By ignoring the preferences of their voters and rank and file members, the Christian Democrats made it an easy play for the Swiss People’s Party to gain foot in their strongholds in the Alps. In addition to the cleavages between the language areas and between urban and rural regions, the cleavage between the alpine and non-alpine municipalities helps to explain the local parties’ position towards the European Union. In the mountain areas, the resistance against Switzerland joining the European Union is bigger among the members of the political parties.

Keywords: European Integration, Swiss parties, alpine political culture

Some preliminary remarks: Switzerland and Europe

Switzerland, situated in the heart of Europe, does not belong to the European Union. On the 6th of December 1992 a majority of the people and of the cantons did not approve of the parliamentary resolution authorising the Federal Council to ratify the *European Economic Area Treaty* and thus the entry into the free market of goods, persons, capital and services.¹ The treaty was considered a first step towards the European Union, since around this time, the Federal Council established EU membership as a “strategic goal” of Swiss foreign policy in the long run.²

The outcome of the vote revealed a substantial *gap between the ‘political class’ and the people* (Ladner 1993: 552). With the government and the three major parties, the Radical Democrats (FDP), the Social Democrats (SPS), and the Christian Democrats (CVP), at that time clearly in favour of such a step, the support for the EEA was considerably important. Against the treaty were the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the Green Party (GPS), although not for precisely the same reasons.³

The analysis of the results revealed also *two important gaps* within the country. There was a first gap between the French-speaking part, which was strongly in favour of the EEA and the German- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland against it, and a second one between the urban and the rural parts of the country with the former being more pro EEA.

The main *arguments in favour of* Switzerland joining the EEA were economic reasons, a spirit of open mindedness (broaden the horizon) and a fear to be cut off the rest of Europe. Economic reasons however were also given as *arguments against* the EEA, together with an alleged lack of information and an unclear position of the federal council. Other arguments given by the voters against the EEA were the loss of independency and that the European Community could not be trusted (see VOX-Analysen der eidgenössischen Urnengänge, Publikation Nr. 47, Februar 1993).

Since 1992 the European issues has come again on the political agenda on several occasions and EU membership is still a strategic goal of the national government:

On the 8th of June 1997, the Swiss citizens rejected an *initiative* by the Swiss Democrats and the Lega dei Ticinesi asking the federal authorities *to stop all negotiations with the EU* and that no further negotiations should be started without a prior consul-

¹ The “no” majority of 50.3 per cent among the total voters was very small. The verdict of the cantons however was unambiguous. Only the six French-speaking cantons Genève, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura, Valais, and Fribourg, and the two German-speaking cantons Basel-Stadt and Basel-Land were in favour of the EEA. The voting turnout was an exceptionally high 78.3 per cent (see Ladner 1993: 552).

² For more information offered by the authorities see <http://www.europa.admin.ch/>.

³ For the Greens the EEA was primarily an economic project, which at the end would lead to an increase in mobility within Europe, whereas the Swiss People’s Party’s opposition was on more general grounds.

tation of the citizens. All parties in government, the Swiss People's Party included, were against the initiative, being too restrictive in limiting the national government's possibilities. The results were very clear. The initiative was only supported by 25.9 per cent of the people entitled to vote. Voting turnout was on a low 35 per cent.

In the referendum vote held on May 21st, 2000, the Swiss voters approved the *bilateral agreements* with the EU by a clear majority of 67.2 per cent (voting turnout: 48 per cent). In order to reinforce mutually beneficial relations, the European Union and Switzerland have negotiated, and in 1999 signed, agreements in the following areas:⁴

- elimination of technical barriers to trade (mutual recognition of certification and registration of products);
- public procurement (extension of WTO rules to local communities, inclusion of water and energy supplies as well as the railway and telecommunications sectors);
- research and development (Swiss participation in the EU's programmes);
- free movement of persons (this also covers mutual recognition of diplomas and social security)
- agricultural products (improved access to our markets for agricultural products);
- land transport and civil aviation (improved access to our markets, co-ordinated new European transport policy).

These agreements are primarily economic agreements, which improve the access to the European market. For Switzerland as a small and export-oriented country, this has been especially important. Even the Swiss People's Party did not object these agreements officially, since they consider the bilateral way an alternative to EU-membership.

On the 4th of March 2001, a pro European *initiative* ("Ja zu Europa") was strongly defeated (23.2 yes-votes, turnout: 55 per cent). The initiative wanted the federal authorities to *start negotiating* in order to join the European Union. Only among the voters of the Social Democrats, there was a slight majority in favour of this initiative. Voters of the other parties rejected it strongly.

In June 2001, Switzerland and the European Union reached an agreement of principle to open *new bilateral negotiations* (Bilateral II) on ten further subjects. Some of these

⁴ Relations with the EU are of crucial importance as 2/3 of Swiss exports go to the EU and 3/4 of Swiss imports come from it. Switzerland is also the second trade partner of the European Union (second client after the USA, third supplier after the USA and Japan). It is also one of the main foreign investors in the EU and Swiss companies provide work for more than 1.1 million EU citizens (in Switzerland and in the EU (see : http://www.eda.admin.ch/london_emb/e/home/comeco/switeu.html).

topics are “leftovers” from the first bilateral negotiations (services, pensions, processed agricultural products, environment, statistics, media and education, professional training, youth). The EU and Switzerland have proposed other new subjects. The EU wants action to combat fraud and withholding tax on interest payments to be considered, while Switzerland is interested in improved cooperation on internal security (participation in the Schengen and Dublin system).⁵

Since summer 2002, negotiations are under way in all subjects. Switzerland’s aim is to achieve a balanced overall outcome in the second round of bilateral negotiations. With that end in view, it conducts the negotiations in a parallel and coordinated manner.

Despite these steps towards Europe, or perhaps even because of them, the citizens’ support of Switzerland joining the EU has not increased in the last years. On the contrary, with the EU growing bigger, giving itself a constitution and moving away from the principle of unanimity the percentage of people being reluctant to accept such a step has increased, even in the French speaking part of Switzerland.

The parties positions towards the EU

As mentioned above, whether Switzerland should join the European Economic Area or not led to an “European divide” within the Swiss party system. The most outstanding role was played by the Swiss People’s Party, which fiercely opposed the official plans of adherence, whereas the other three parties, the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats and the Radicals were in favour.

Looking back, the European issue was a stroke of luck for the Swiss People’s Party, and it needed quite some efforts to bring the party on this path of success. The party was founded in 1936 as the Farmers’, Trade and Citizens’ Party (*Schweizerische Bauern-, Gewerbe-, und Bürgerpartei*). Large farmers’ parties, however, had already existed since 1917 in the canton of Zurich and since 1918 in Bern. With the shrinking of its traditional membership base of farmers and merchants, the SVP had to reorient itself. The merger with the Democrats of the cantons of Grisons and Glarus in 1971 revived the petit bourgeois element of the party, which was also expressed by the change of the party’s name from BGB to “Schweizerische Volkspartei” (SVP) (Klöti/Risi 1988: 723). By the early 1970s, the SVP had become a party of the political centre. It sought to strengthen its image as a true peoples’ party and a party of the middle class by pointing to the large number of employees in its ranks. However, this strategy of “renewal” did not lead to political success. Neither the new party programme of the mid-1970s, which gave more attention to the concerns of employees, women, and the younger generations, nor the “dynamic opening”, which was initiated in 1984, significantly increased its voter share.

⁵ See: <http://www.europa.admin.ch/nbv/kuerze/e/index.htm> .

Around this time, an internal conflict broke out between the conservative Zurich section under the presidency of Christoph Blocher, a rich businessman and member of the national parliament, and the more liberal wing of the party, centred in Berne. The most hotly debated issue was the question of European integration, on which the Zurich section, which was opposed to the EEA Treaty, eventually prevailed. The rejection of the EEA Treaty in the popular vote of December 6, 1992, consolidated the Zurich section's internal predominance and strengthened the position of the SVP at the national level. Subsequently, SVP sections were also set up in the traditionally Christian-Democratic or liberal cantons of Solothurn, Basle-Town, Zug, Lucerne, and St. Gall, which closely followed the course set by the Zurich section.

Although the European issue was very helpful to re-launch the Swiss People's Party, and especially to enter into the new cantons, the party is by far more than a one issue Anti-Europe party. Other outstanding features of the SVP political programme and the issues responsible for its success are:

- Law and order, a more rigorous policy as far as drug abuse, immigrants and asylum seekers are concerned.
- Independency and neutrality. Against Switzerland joining UNO, not being part of the NATO.
- Downsizing the state sector. Tax reduction and free enterprise.

The Social Democrats on the other hand are decidedly pro-Europe, for different reasons however and not without hesitation in some regards. Beside the genuinely international orientation of socialism, quite a few social democrats expected to take advantage of the achievements of the social democrats and the unions in other European countries as far as working conditions were concerned. The more union oriented members of the social democrats feared, however, that without additional measures the high wages in Switzerland would come under pressure through an increased immigration from other European countries.

The other two parties in government, the Radicals and the Christian Democrats, were clearly in favour of the EEA. The liberal roots and the market orientation of the Radicals made the European Economic Area an attractive project to support and the Christian Democrats could at least rely on their close relations to Christian Democratic Parties in other European countries.

In the last ten years, the parties' position toward the European Union remained unchanged as far as the Swiss People's Party and the Social Democrats are concerned. The Radicals and the Christian Democrats have become more reluctant to take a clear pro-European stance.

As for the Radicals EU-membership is still a possible goal in the long run, but they would like to wait until the effects of the bilateral agreements can be evaluated in a satisfactory way. In their 1998-paper "Unsere Schweiz 1999 - 2007", they considered Switzerland being a member of the EU by 2007. Since then, pro European statements

have disappeared from their website (see *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of August 2, 2003). In the 2003 electoral campaign, they tried to avoid the European issues.

The position of Christian Democrats is even more unclear. In 2001, the national delegates supported the pro European *initiative* ("Ja zu Europa"), but almost all cantonal parties (except Basel, Berne and Fribourg) were against the initiative. Their electoral platform for the 2003 elections also fails to give an answer to the party's actual position.

A short glance at recent changes in the Swiss party system shows, that the reluctance of the Radicals and the Christian Democrats to support a pro-European policy is probably not only due to general considerations whether this is the right way for Switzerland. For both of them, it has become a matter of electoral success or failure.

The impact of the European issue on the party system

Given the multitude of parties, the pronounced stability of the Swiss parties' shares of voters and seats during the 20th century was remarkable. Figure 1 reveals that between the introduction of the proportional system until the 1995 election the difference between the best and worst results of the SVP and the CVP was less than seven percent. For the FDP, this difference was nine percent; and only the SP passed the ten-percent mark.

In the 1995 national elections, the SVP's political propositions met with broad approval. With an additional five seats and an increase in its electoral support by 3 % (to 14.9 %), it was clearly among the winners and recovered the position it enjoyed before the Second World War.

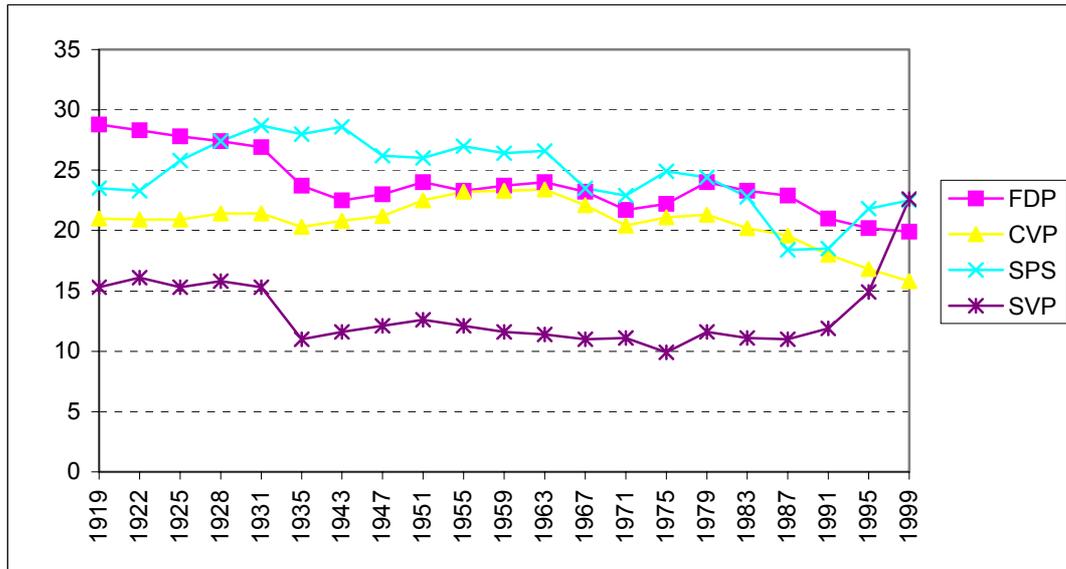
Finally, the 1999 elections marked a real breakthrough. The SVP became the strongest party with 22.6 per cent of the vote (+ 7.7). The party not only consolidated its position in the cantons of Lucerne, Zug, Solothurn, Argovia and St.Gall, where it had entered the national political arena in the 1995 elections, but also gained votes in "new" cantons like Basle-City, Appenzell Inner Rhoden, Valais, Geneva and Jura.

Given this success, the SVP claimed a second seat in the Federal Council. The other parties, however, refused this demand, at the end of 1999 in the re-election of the government following the election of the National Council. Since then, the Swiss People's Party has not missed many opportunities to put forward this claim again and uses the under-representation in the national government as one of the reasons for its frequent opposition against the national government.

It can be expected that the electoral success of the Swiss People's party is to an important extent due to its anti-European course. This must be especially true in the old Swiss cantons in the mountain areas, in the Alps. Here, the gains were to the detri-

ment of the Christian Democrats, which were historically dominant. The anti-Europe position was probably of lesser importance in the cases of the gains from the traditional working class left and from the Radicals. In the case of the former, it was much more its law and order and anti-immigration orientation, in the case of the latter it was its neo-conservative downsizing the state policy.

Figure 1: Voter share of the parties represented in the Federal Council in National Council elections, 1919-1999



Source: Bundesamt für Statistik

The parties on the ground

The party on national level does not necessarily have to reflect the party on the ground. Katz/Mair (1993) not only pointed at making a distinction between “the different faces” of a party while analysing party politics, but also claimed that the party in public office and the party in central office were becoming more important and moving away from the party on the ground.

The party on the ground is generally closer to the party members and the voters. A gap between the national party and the party on the ground thus might help to explain a party’s failure in national elections.

A recent survey among the local parties in Switzerland⁶ allows for having a closer look at the parties on the ground's position towards the question of whether Switzerland should join the European Union or not. For the first time, since citizen surveys do not cover this in a satisfactory manner, it becomes possible to analyse the differences between party members from different cantons and regions. The following questions are of interest:

- Are there differences between the national parties' positions and the parties on the ground? To what extent do rank and file party members support the official line of the national parties.
- Do the characteristic cleavages found among the voters also exist within the parties? Are the same differences between the language areas and between urban and rural areas to be found among the members of the parties?
- Finally, is there something like an alpine culture, which could be made responsible for the differences within the parties?

The results thus not only contribute to a better understanding of the national parties' official position in regard to the European integration and their "marge de manoeuvre" but also help to answer the question to what extent an isolationist tendency can be found in the alpine region of Switzerland. Finally, it can be tested to what extent the anti-Europe position of the Swiss People's Party can be made responsible for its success.

Differences between the parties on the ground and the national parties

A first glance at the local parties' position towards the European Union supports the perception that this is a very controversial issue in Swiss politics. One third of the presidents claim that there is a majority among their members in favour of the EU, one third thinks that the majority is against it and one-third believes that their members are split on this issue (Table 1).

⁶ For further information see: www.socio.ch/par.

Table 1: What do the active members of the local parties think about Switzerland joining the European Union?

	Percentage of local parties
Majority in favour	32.6
Majority against	33.2
Members divided	34.2
All parties	100.0
N	2468

Source: Local parties survey 2003

As far as the Social Democrats and the Swiss People's Party are concerned, their members' attitude towards Europe is quite clear and reflects the position of the national parties. The most homogenous party is the Swiss People's party with its rejection of Switzerland joining the EU. In almost 90 percent of their local parties, the majority of their members is against Europe (see Table 2). Almost as homogenous are the Social Democrats on the other side. In about three out of four local parties a majority of the active members is in favour of the European Union, and in one out of five local parties the opinion of the members is divided on this issue.

Far more ambiguous are the Radicals and the Christian Democrats. They have a much bigger percentage of local parties where the members are divided on this issue, and the percentages of parties in favour or against Europe are more or less of equal importance. The Greens either are in favour or divided.

These results are only partly in line with the official positions of the parties on national level. Originally the Christian Democrats were, at least officially, much more pro Europe and the Radicals clearly supported the idea, that Switzerland should join the European Union. In addition, the Greens on the other hand rejected Switzerland joining the European Economic Area in 1992.

By looking at these figures, it becomes understandable why the national parties of the Radicals and the Christian Democrats find it difficult to have a clear position pro or anti Europe nowadays. Important intra-party resistance will meet any move in either direction.

Table 2: What do the active members of the local parties think about Switzerland joining the European Union? Differences between the parties.

The majority of the active party members is	in favour	against	divided	N=
Radicals	20.4	28.6	50.9	548
Christian Democrats	21.2	32.7	46.0	452
Swiss People's Party	1.5	87.3	11.2	410
Social Democrats	75.8	2.9	21.3	520
Greens	60.3		39.7	73

Source: Local parties survey 2003

Intra-party cleavages

Various studies in the aftermath of Switzerland's rejection to join the European Economic Area have shown that a least two cleavages were responsible for the differences in the voting behaviour of the citizens. There was a cleavage between the pro European French-speaking part and the German-speaking part, which as a whole turned against Europe, and there was a second cleavage between the urban and the rural parts of Switzerland with the latter being against an integration of Switzerland into Europe.

The "European divide" between the language areas also exists within the parties. For the five most important parties, the percentage of local parties in which a majority of the active members would be in favour of Switzerland joining the European Union is higher in the French-speaking part of Switzerland than in the German-speaking part (see Table 3). The differences are, however, considerably more important within the Radicals and the Christian Democrats. In the Italian speaking part of Switzerland, the parties on the ground's position towards Europe, is more alike those in the German speaking part. Only among the Social Democrats, there is a much bigger part of local parties in which the members are divided. The low number of local parties of the Swiss People's Party in the Italian-speaking part does not allow for an interpretation.

Table 3: What do the active members of the local parties think about Switzerland joining the European Union? Differences between parties and between language areas

	Local parties in German speaking areas			Local parties in French speaking areas			Local parties in Italian speaking areas		
	pro	contra	divided	pro	contra	divided	pro	contra	divided
FDP	15.0	33.6	51.4	46.5	8.1	45.3	18.8	26.1	55.1
CVP	18.9	34.2	46.9	45.9	14.8	39.3	11.9	40.5	47.6
SVP	1.0	87.4	11.6	8.3	91.7		(50.0)	(50.0)	
SP	77.0	2.9	20.1	84.9	1.2	14.0	51.0	5.9	43.1
GPS	53.3		46.7	100.0					100.0

Source: Local parties survey 2003

The intra-party differences between local parties from urban and rural areas are much smaller than between the language areas (see Table 4). For the Radicals they do not affect the percentage of parties clearly in favour of the European Union but only those, which are against it or internally divided. The former is more often the case in the rural areas. For the Christian Democrats a considerably higher percentage against the EU is to be found in the rural areas, whereas for the Social Democrats there are a little bit more parties internally divided in the rural regions. Finally, an exceptional trend exists for the Greens. Here, the pro-European support seems to be bigger in the rural areas.

Table 4: What do the active members of the local parties think about Switzerland joining the European Union? Differences between the parties and between local and urban areas

	Local parties in urban areas			Local parties in rural areas		
	pro	contra	divided	pro	contra	divided
FDP	20.0	24.5	55.5	20.8	32.3	47.0
CVP	24.8	24.3	51.0	18.3	40.8	40.8
SVP	1.2	90.0	8.8	1.7	85.1	13.2
SP	78.4	3.2	18.3	72.6	2.5	24.9
GPS	58.2		41.8	83.3		16.7

Source: Local parties survey 2003

The results show clearly that the differences among the citizens regarding the language areas and the degree of urbanisation found in the vote on the EEA also exist within the parties and regarding the European Union. This is not astonishing but has to be taken into account, while analysing the differences between the Alpine areas and the rest of Switzerland.

The Alpine Region and Europe

The alpine region is not a common category to analyse Swiss politics. Much more common are language, religion and urbanisation. On one hand, this seems obvious, since the latter categories cross cut the Alps and leave them as a very heterogenous area. On the other hand, it is precisely in the mountain area where the Swiss Peoples Party found an up to then unknown support and the relatively highest increase in it's share of the vote in the 1990s (see Table 5). Is there, despite the differences in various aspects, something like a common alpine culture being more hostile towards Europe than the rest of the country?

Table 5: Swiss People's Party: average share of the vote in national elections in alpine and non-alpine municipalities

Municipalities		SVP_91	SVP_95	SVP_99	Increase	Increase in %
Non-alpine	Mean	19.5	20.8	26.1	6.6	33.6
	N	2015	1981	1995		
Alpine	Mean	13.0	14.7	19.4	6.5	50.0
	N	879	881	873		
All	Mean	17.5	18.9	24.1	6.5	37.3
	N	2894	2862	2868		

A bit less than 30 per cent of the local parties in our survey are situated in the alpine region of Switzerland (see Table 6).⁷ There are quite important differences between the parties. The most alpine party are the Christian Democrats. More than 40 per cent of their local parties are situated in the Alps. The least alpine party are the Greens and the Swiss People's Party.

Table 6: Local parties in the alpine area

Party	Plain	Alpine area	N=
FDP	72.2	27.8	569
CVP	57.6	42.4	469
SVP	83.0	17.0	418
SP	74.3	25.7	529
GPS	85.1	14.9	74
Total			2059

⁷ The distinction between alpine and non-alpine municipalities has been made according to the propositions of the "Alpenkonvention".

Is there is a difference between local parties from the alpine area and those situated in the plain? Table 7 shows in two cases a significant difference regarding the EU integration. For the Christian Democrats the percentage of the local parties in favour of the EU drops considerably and those against it increase when we move towards the Alps, whereas for the Social Democrats there is higher percentage of parties, which are internally divided in the mountain areas. For the Swiss People's Party there are hardly any differences to be found and the same applies to the Radicals. Finally, for the Greens the EU seems to be closer in the non-alpine regions.

Table 7: Differences between parties from the alpine region and the plain regarding Switzerland joining the EU

		Majority in favour	divided	Majority against		CHISQ/ SIG
Radicals	0	21.5	51.0	27.5	396	
	1	17.8	50.7	31.6	152	1.368
Total		20.4	50.9	28.6	548	n.s.
Christian Democrats	0	29.1	45.3	25.6	258	
	1	10.8	46.9	42.3	194	
Total		21.2	46.0	32.7	452	26.831 0.000
Swiss People's Party	0	1.5	11.8	86.7	339	
	1	1.4	8.5	90.1	71	0.667
Total		1.5	11.2	87.3	410	n.s.
Social Democrats	0	81.8	16.4	1.8	384	
	1	58.8	35.3	5.9	136	29.502
Total		75.8	21.3	2.9	520	0.000
Greens	0	62.9	37.1		62	
	1	45.5	54.5		11	1.188
Total		60.3	39.7		73	n.s.

0 = non-alpine parties, 1 = alpine parties

Before we start interpreting these results, they need some further testing. It could well be, that the differences are hidden or blurred by other variables, i.e. those responsible for the differences in the voting behaviour in the 1992 vote on the European Economic Area.

The logistic regressions in Table 8 show for all four parties in federal government together, that there is a significant effect of the variable "Alps" on the parties' position towards Europe even when we control for the language area and for the degree of urbanisation. Local parties in the alpine area are less in favour of the European Union than in the rest of Switzerland.

Table 8: Testing for language, urbanisation and alpine region (logistic regression)

All parties in federal government					
	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
LAGUAGE	-1.347	0.144	88.041	0.000	0.260
URBAN	-0.416	0.103	16.369	0.000	0.660
ALPS	0.553	0.119	21.683	0.000	1.739
Constant	2.375	0.189	157.449	0.000	10.748
Nagelkerke R Square (Pseudo R)			0.088		
Radicals					
	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
LAGUAGE	-1.579	0.258	37.582	0.000	0.206
URBAN	-0.158	0.227	0.488	0.485	0.854
ALPS	0.126	0.255	0.245	0.620	1.135
Constant	3.323	0.391	72.297	0.000	27.752
Nagelkerke R Square (Pseudo R)			0.104		
Christian Democrats					
	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
LAGUAGE	-1.533	0.309	24.672	0.000	0.216
URBAN	-0.386	0.248	2.420	0.120	0.680
ALPS	1.261	0.281	20.205	0.000	3.530
Constant	2.868	0.425	45.517	0.000	17.609
Nagelkerke R Square (Pseudo R)			0.161		
Swiss People's Party					
	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
LAGUAGE	-2.021	1.161	3.029	0.082	0.133
URBAN	0.386	0.876	0.194	0.660	1.471
ALPS	0.321	1.132	0.080	0.777	1.378
Constant	6.178	1.417	19.013	0.000	481.880
Nagelkerke R Square (Pseudo R)			0.039		
Social Democrats					
	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
LAGUAGE	-0.661	0.330	4.002	0.045	0.517
URBAN	-0.467	0.215	4.712	0.030	0.627
ALPS	1.148	0.222	26.675	0.000	3.152
Constant	-0.505	0.420	1.445	0.229	0.604
Nagelkerke R Square (Pseudo R)			0.097		

Dependent variable: 0 = a majority of the members are in favour, 1 = the members are divided or against Switzerland joining the EU. Independent variables: LANGUAGE: 1 = German, 2 = French-speaking parties; URBAN: 0 = parties in rural, 1 = parties in urban areas; ALPS: 0 = parties in the plain, 1 = parties in the alpine region.

If we look at the four parties separately the independent influence of the variable “Alps”, although pointing in the same direction for all four governmental parties, remains only significant for the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. For the Radicals the only significant variable is the language area, whereas for the Swiss People’s Party none of the variables has a significant influence. This latter result is due to the fact, that there is hardly any difference between the alpine and the non-alpine regions to be explained in the case of the Swiss People’s Party.

It is thus very likely that the loss of votes of the Christian Democrats and the success of the Swiss People’s Party in the Alpine area are closely connected (see Table 9). For the other parties, there is no such decline to be found. The Radicals lost relatively more in the non-alpine areas and the Social Democrats gained more votes in the alpine area.

Table 9: Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Radicals: average share of the vote in national elections in alpine and non-alpine municipalities

Municipalities	CVP91	CVP95	CVP99	Increase	Increase in %
Non-alpine	17.2	15.4	15.4	-1.7	-10.1
Alpine	32.6	31.3	27.6	-4.9	-15.1
Total	21.8	20.3	19.2	-2.7	-12.2
	SPS91	SPS95	SPS99		
Non-alpine	15.8	17.7	18.6	2.8	17.8
Alpine	13.9	18.0	20.2	6.2	44.6
	15.2	17.8	19.1	3.9	25.3
	FDP91	FDP95	FDP99		
Non-alpine	20.9	19.5	19.5	-1.4	-6.6
Alpine	21.4	22.1	20.4	-1.0	-4.7
	21.1	20.3	19.8	-1.3	-6.0
N Non-alpine	2015	1981	1998		
N Alpine	879	881	881		
N tot	2894	2862	2879		

Conclusion

Obviously, there is a difference between party members from alpine and non-alpine local parties regarding their position towards Europe. This difference is especially accentuated within the Christian Democratic Party. The electoral loss of the Christian Democrats in the 1990s mainly took place in their strongholds in the Alps. Considering the national party’s pro European line, it is very likely that the success of the

Swiss People's Party in the mountain areas is due to a misjudgement of the party elite of the Christian Democrats on national level and a wrong course in the European question. The question why particularly the party members of the Christian Democrats in the alpine regions are more hostile towards Europe, however, remains unanswered.

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Andreas LADNER, Prof. Dr., Kompetenzzentrum für Public Management, Universität Bern, Falkenplatz 9, CH-3012 Bern; E-Mail: andreas.ladner@kpm.unibe.ch.