



International Market Access

Where has **Switzerland's pragmatism** gone?

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At a glance

- Political and economic issues such as the US customs deal or the Bilaterals III are often discussed prematurely, which makes constructive compromise more difficult.
- Switzerland's pragmatism seems to have been pretty much lost. Discussions are increasingly ideological instead of seeking pragmatic solutions.
- Switzerland's prosperity is based on a strong export economy and access to international markets. Regulated relations with important trading partners such as the EU and the US are essential for this.

A brief wave of relief swept through the country when the customs deal with the USA was announced. But instead of waiting to see how things developed, the deal was immediately talked down by certain circles. The fly in the ointment: the US had been kowtowed to, jobs in Switzerland were at risk, chlorinated chickens would be permitted immediately, the investment commitments were unrealistic and a balanced trade balance was illusory.

In the same frame of mind, other circles are talking up the Bilaterals III. Switzerland's democracy would be destroyed, the economic benefits would be small, the dispute settlement procedure would never work anyway and the EU Court of Justice would always have the last word. A sell-out of the homeland, so to speak. Incidentally, the economic benefits of the bilateral agreements are very great, no matter how much this is talked down.

The current cacophony in Switzerland shows two things. Firstly, the positive: we are a country of self-appointed experts. We discuss, criticize, argue and are very reluctant to praise our political leaders. This is good because we are never completely satisfied and always want something more. Just the "Füüfer" and the "Weggli". That was also Switzerland's strength in the good old days, when solutions that caused moderate dissatisfaction were eventually accepted with grumbling and growling.

But Switzerland's pragmatism has pretty much been lost. And that has to do with the second point: solutions are no longer sought, but problems are managed from the perspective of parties and ideologies. This can be seen particularly clearly on the left. Brazil under the right-wing President Bolsonaro was still seen as the devil and Argentina under the left-wing President Perón as a social oasis of well-being, but a victim of capitalism. The view of the left has recently changed by 180 degrees. Brazil under left-wing President Lula is seen as a champion against climate change and itself a victim of capitalism, while Argentina under libertarian President Milei has become the left's favorite whipping boy (even though he has brought the huge inflation under control). The left's view of America is also currently focused exclusively on the problems of the Trump administration and glorifies the period of government under Presidents Biden or Obama as a phase of high culture that is now trying to slide into barbarism. Black and white. Good or evil. Depending on whether a like-minded person is in power or not.

The view of the right is just as simple. Wherever a fleeting trace of a connection with the EU is seen, the devil's work is suspected. The officials in Bern all want to join the EU and are prepared to sell Switzerland. It is only because of the EU that Germany has economic problems. It is only because of the EU that bureaucracy is increasing. In short: the EU is to blame for everything that goes wrong. And Switzerland should please keep its distance.

It's high time we paused for a moment and looked at the facts: Switzerland owes its prosperity to flourishing export companies. We earn around 40 percent net abroad. Net means that all imports required for exports, such as crude oil, metals or primary products, have already been deducted. Without our export industry, we would be as poor as a church mouse. Our companies need the best possible access to international markets so that research, development, management and production for export can continue to take place in Switzerland, an expensive place to do business.

The economy needs regulated relations with our most important trading partner, the EU. We need access to the American market and in future we will also need access to the South American market, the Mercosur states, whether a left-wing or a right-wing party is in power there.

Where has Swiss pragmatism gone? Can we still do the "Füüfi-la-grad-si"? I would like to see a Switzerland that debates wildly, but with players who are not guided by ideology alone, but who fight for the best solutions with well-founded arguments. Who support a compromise in the end, even if they don't agree 100 percent. Who want a solution, and not just problems that will pay for the next elections. In view of the huge challenges facing Switzerland as a result of the new geopolitics, it is crucial that we are able to do this. I am an optimist. We can do it.



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