Why Switzerland is Mono- not Multi-national
Historical, institutional, attitudinal and behavioural aspects

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Abstract

The paper explores how statehood and patterns of collective identity have historically evolved in Switzerland and how they are interacting in the contemporary Swiss system. It shows that a sense of Swiss nationhood emerged before the creation of a Swiss federal state in 1848 and that it survived the pressures of 'linguistic nationalism' in the latter part of the 'long' XIX century to become fully consolidated in the XX century. While many features of the Swiss system today reflect the multi-lingual nature of its society, they also show rather clearly that Switzerland is not a multi-national federation. Subsequently, the paper offers an explanation of why Switzerland, despite being multi-lingual and multi-cultural, has not become multinational, by arguing that this is best explained by a complex interaction over a long period of time of a unique set of factors, both internal and external. The paper then considers the challenges likely to face the Swiss system in the mid-term and concludes by arguing that the characteristics of Swiss society and the strengths of its federal political architecture will likely enable it to remain mono-national in the foreseeable future. The paper concludes by relating these findings to the role Switzerland plays in the scholarly debate on nationalism and calls for a re-consideration of this role.

Acknowledgments

NOT FOR CITATION

Introduction

This paper[1] addresses the question of whether Switzerland should be characterised as a mono-national or a multi-national state and argues in favour of the former on the basis of a substantial amount of evidence, succinctly summarised here. The paper is organised as follows. The first four sections review the evidence pointing to the mono-national nature of Switzerland, divided into historical, institutional, attitudinal and behavioural aspects. Section 5 offers a brief explanation of why the country has not become multi-national in spite of its multi-lingualism and section 6 assesses the likelihood that it would remain mono-national in the foreseeable future. The last section offers some reflections on the role Switzerland is often called to play in the scholarly debate on nationalism and argues for this role to be re-considered.

1 Historical aspects

Six main aspects of Switzerland's historical experience are relevant for the purpose of the analysis conducted here. First, a sense of distinctively Swiss political identity predated the age of nationalism and the unification of the country in 1848. It first emerged in the writings of 15th-century humanist chroniclers and already during the 18th century it was to acquire a national character and, indeed, to fuel a nationalist movement among the elites.[2] Second, this emergent nationalism was centred on the historical memory of the foundation and the development of the confederation and took for granted the multilingual character of the nation. It stressed the common past of the cantons and the bonds uniting them beyond the diversity of language and religion. In other words, it was already in its early manifestation and somewhat *ante litteram* predominantly 'civic' or multi-cultural rather than 'ethnic' or mono-cultural. Accordingly, nationalists in this phase came not only from the Protestant and German-speaking hegemonic group but also from the linguistic and religious minorities.[3] This emergent Swiss nationalism was given its first institutional framework in the Helvetic Republic – the regime imposed by revolutionary France in the period 1798-1803 – which was explicitly based on the idea of a single but multi-lingual Swiss nation and found its clearest manifestation in the field of education.[4] The fact that the Republic failed to survive the retreat of France should not be interpreted as a result of multi-national pressures as opposition to it cut across linguistic lines and was primarily rooted in the defence of local and cantonal autonomy rather than ethno-linguistic factors.

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[1] The paper is based on Dardanelli (2009) and Dardanelli and Stojanović (forthcoming).
[2] See de Capitani (1983: 153) and Zimmer (2003: 19, 55-65).
[3] See Kohn (1956: esp. 26), de Capitani (1983: 153-5) and Zimmer (2003: esp. 49).
[4] See Kohn (1956: 45), Lerner (2004: 74), Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 226-7) and de Capitani (1983: 162-3).

Third, the nationalist *crescendo* of the period 1815-48 and the conflicts it triggered were not a contest between Swiss proto-state nationalism and rival ethno-linguistic nationalisms. French and Italian speakers were fully represented in the Radical movement focussed on the creation of a Swiss national state and those who opposed it did so primarily in the name of cantonal sovereignty not of ethno-linguistic nationalism.[5] Nor was the defence of cantonal sovereignty itself, moreover, rooted in a nationalist conception. Although some isolated voices did conceive of their canton in quasi-national terms, most of the conservative voices who rose against the idea of Swiss nationalism subscribed to pre-modern conceptions of political legitimacy and rejected the idea of national sovereignty *tout court*.

Fourth, the 1848 constitutional settlement closely mirrored the nature of the conflict that preceded it. It was the product of a single nationalist movement and it was plainly not informed by 'ethno-federalism'. In spite of the letter of its first article[6], the document was unquestionably the act of a single sovereign people not a compact between states or between twenty-two sovereign peoples.[7] The anachronistic language of the constitution was part of the strategy of 'appeasement' vis-à-vis the losers of the 1847 civil war. In the same light should be understood the continued use of the term confederation in the official designation of the state as well as other elements – such as the national day, which commemorates the founding of the old confederation rather than of the federal state – intended to stress symbolic continuity rather than rupture with the pre-1848 past. A significant number of cantons voted against the new constitution either in the Diet or/and in the ratification process yet ultimately accepted it as the expression of the 'national will'.[8] The cantons were retained as the constitutive units of the new federal state and no attempt to re-design their boundaries to make them coincide with ethno-linguistic patterns took place. Furthermore, no institutional structure of any kind exclusive to a language community was set up.

Fifth, even when ethno-linguistic nationalism in neighbouring countries posed a mounting challenge from the 1870s onwards, the conception of Switzerland as a single multi-lingual civic nation survived and no significant ethno-linguistic nationalisms emerged. Some German-speaking Swiss rejected the notion of a Swiss nation and subscribed to the idea of a pan-German ethno-linguistic nation,[9] yet this remained a very marginal view in the face of

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[5] See Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 260), Kriesi (1999: 14) and Zimmer (2003: 149, 152).
[6] 'The peoples of the twenty-two sovereign cantons of Switzerland, united by the present alliance, i.e. Zurich…and Geneva, together form the Swiss Confederation', authors' translation from the French.
[7] See, among others, Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 269).
[8] See Aubert (1974: 27-8).
[9] See Kohn (1956: 81, 89-95, 121-6).

widening and deepening mass collective identification with Switzerland, not least as a result of the state-led nationalism pursued by the federal authorities. The growing appeal of ethno-linguistic nationalism came to a head in the First World War and its aftermath when significant tensions emerged between the language communities, notably with regard to relations with the belligerent powers.[10] The campaign for the ratification of the League of Nations treaty and the subsequent referendum exposed linguistic divisions to the full.[11] Remarkably, however, even at the highest point in the ascendancy of ethno-linguistic nationalism throughout Europe and in the very difficult circumstances of the war, no ethno-linguistic nationalisms emerged in Switzerland.

Lastly, the rise of the Jurassian movement in the 1960s and 1970s might superficially be interpreted as the late emergence of ethno-linguistic nationalism and the creation of canton Jura in 1979 as the first step in the direction of multi-national ethno-federalism. However, a closer examination of the Jura conflict does not lend support to such interpretations. The creation of the new canton was not an instance of ethno-federalism because the southern part of the Jura democratically decided to remain within canton Berne. The conflict was determined by religious and economic factors as much as, if not more than, linguistic ones. The southern Jura, opposed to separation from Berne, shared the French language with the separatist north but was predominantly Protestant, as the rest of canton Berne, and perceived itself to be less economically deprived.[12] Moreover, despite its sometimes ethno-linguistic discourse and confrontational strategy, the Jurassian movement never succeeded in making its cause a wider cause of all *Suisses romands*: the conflict remained localised and no French-speaking nationalism emerged as a result. Likewise, no significant movement in favour of redesigning Swiss federalism along ethno-linguistic lines emerged.

As the historical evidence reviewed in this section shows, there is no empirical support at all for the thesis that Switzerland developed as a federation of language groups nor that the latter conceived of themselves as ethno-linguistic nations at any point in Swiss history. On the contrary, the evidence points unambiguously to Switzerland's mono-national character, to the political nature of its nationality and to the latter's importance in legitimising the creation of a democratic Swiss state and in maintaining such legitimacy in the face of severe challenges.

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[10] Bonjour *et al.* (1952: 344-5) and Jost (1983: 94-5, 122-4).
[11] This was the first time the Swiss electorate voted on a treaty and the League was endorsed by 85.3 per cent of French speakers but rejected by 54.1 per cent of German speakers (Kriesi *et al.* 1996: 31).
[12] See McRae (1983: 201-8).

2 Institutional aspects

If we move away from history and focus on the contemporary institutional dimension, it is instructive to consider the extent to which Switzerland's institutional architecture conforms to the characteristics of a multi-national state, as defined by its advocates.

As already pointed out, the component units of the Swiss federation were never designed according to ethno-linguistic criteria. While most of the cantons are mono-lingual, three of them are bilingual and one is three-lingual. The boundaries of the language communities are not coterminous with cantonal borders, save for the tiny Romansh community who live within the Grisons. Most of the cantons are ancient entities while others were formed in the 19th century and one in the 20th century but none of them was created by primarily ethno-linguistic factors, including, as seen above, canton Jura. The six so-called half cantons too, the product of splits in previously 'whole' cantons, emerged as a result of religious and political, not ethno-linguistic, conflicts. The cantons cannot thus be described as ethnic entities *ergo* nor can the Swiss federation be labelled an ethno-federation.

The cantons all enjoy the same prerogatives under the federal constitution, with the minor exception of the former half cantons[13]. The cantons inhabited by the language minorities do not have any special rights compared to the German-speaking ones. Switzerland thus falls in the category of the symmetrical federation and therefore does not conform to the prescriptions put forward by advocates of the multi-national state. Under the symmetrical federalism model, each canton has two seats in the Council of States, the upper house of the federal parliament, regardless of population. While this constitutional mechanism over-represents the populations of the small cantons, it does not provide over-representation for the minority language communities as most of these cantons are German speaking. The linguistic composition of the Council of States barely differs from that of the National Council, the proportionately-elected lower house: German speakers hold over 70 per cent of seats in both chambers. In other words, and taking into account the equal powers of the two chambers under Switzerland's perfect bicameralism[14], the linguistic pattern of representation in the upper house reinforces the dominant (numerically speaking) position of the largest language community. Moreover, the language communities are not granted any form of veto power, even on matters intimately connected to their status such as linguistic legislation. A

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[13] Six cantons – called 'half cantons' until the general revision of the Constitution in 1999 – have only one seat in the Council of States, the upper house of the federal parliament, and count for half a vote in the calculation of the cantonal majority in constitutional referendums.

[14] The only exceptions are the elections for the Federal Council, the executive, and the Federal Tribunal, the supreme court, when the two chambers sit jointly, hence the 46 members of the upper house are outweighed by the 200 members of the lower house.

largely similar pattern applies to the federal executive where the minority language communities have no guaranteed representation. While the institutional practice has been to have at least two non-German-speaking ministers out of seven, this is neither a formal right nor does it extend to the Italian-speaking community, not to mention the Romansh-speaking one .[15] Indeed, there has not been an Italian speaker in the government for almost half of the time since 1848 while on occasion the number of French speakers has been reduced to one. Rather than stipulating formal quotas, the Swiss have thus followed informal, indirect and/or implicit patterns in order to ensure fair representation of the language communities, based on a general commitment to favour minorities.[16]

Lastly, the Swiss language communities are not recognised as nations or as the component units of the federation either in the constitution or in ordinary law. The concept of nation and its related terminology is strictly reserved for the country as a whole and has never been applied to other bodies. As article 1 of the current federal constitution makes clear, the component units of the federation are the Swiss people and the cantons not the language communities. The latter do not even enjoy any recognition as a language-defined corporate entity either and are not entitled to any collective right at such.[17] Moreover, they do not possess any political or administrative structure of their own – save for state-funded television and radio channels – and until the 1990s even the terms 'linguistic minority' or 'linguistic community' were completely absent from the Swiss constitution and other legal documents.[18]

It is thus clear that none of the institutional features defining a multi-national state can be found in Switzerland. The Swiss federal state was created as a historical-territorial, symmetrical, mono-national federation in the 19th century and still displays these fundamental characteristics in the 21st century. The consensual and 'proportional' features of

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[15] True, the current federal constitution, adopted in 1999, states that 'care should be taken that various geographical and language regions be adequately represented in the government', Art. 175, al. 4 (official translation). But this provision has no legal force and is largely symbolic. In fact, since 1999 no Italian speaker has been elected to the Federal Council, even though on four occasions (in 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2009) Italian-speaking sections of the major Swiss parties put forward qualified candidates.

[16] See, among others, Steiner (2009: 199); on the bi-lingual cantons, see Stojanović (2008).

[17] The fact that the federal constitution recognises four languages and confer certain rights to citizens on that basis should not be taken as indication that it recognises four language communities. Levy (2000: 155), for instance, is wrong in affirming that the federal constitution recognises the Romansh as *people* when in reality it simply recognises Romansh as a national (and not even as fully official!) language of Switzerland.

[18] See Coray (2004: 267-70, 287-90).

its institutional practice are primarily due to the effects of direct democracy[19] as well as the linguistic, religious and territorial diversity of the country rather than to multi-nationalism.

3 Attitudinal aspects

Given Switzerland's multi-lingualism and the federal nature of the country's political architecture, it should not be surprising that its citizens have complex patterns of collective political identification. In addition to identifying themselves with the country as a whole, the Swiss also typically feel allegiance to their municipality and canton of origin/residence and to one of the language communities. While the co-existence of multiple identities often leads observers to consider the country as multi-national, a closer examination of how they relate to each other and of the hierarchy between them shows that only one of these identities has a *national* character.

Comparing identification with the language communities and the cantons with identification with Switzerland as a whole, the latter clearly takes precedence. Both German and French speakers identify primarily with the Swiss nation and only secondarily with their language community. Among German speakers, moreover, linguistic identity is even weaker than both communal and cantonal identities. In other words, a German speaker typically feels first and foremost Swiss, secondly a citizen of her/his commune, thirdly a citizen of her/his canton and only lastly a member of the German-speaking community.[20] Even among French speakers, identification with the *Suisse romande* is clearly subordinate to identification with Switzerland and is no stronger than identification with the canton and the commune.[21] Although in some individual cantons, for a complex set of reasons, identification with the canton appears to be as strong as identification with Switzerland, the former is not in opposition to the latter.[22] More generally, the relationship between cantonal and 'federal' identities should be seen as a case of nested rather than rival identities,[23] as it transpires, for instance, from school textbooks.[24] Primary allegiance to the country as a whole is further underscored by the fact that a clear majority in all three language communities, with minimum variation between them, feel 'strongly attached' or 'very strongly attached' to Switzerland and that by and large, cross-language bonds – i.e. between the language communities within Switzerland – are stronger than cross-border bonds – i.e. between the

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[19] See Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 66).
[20] It is important to bear in mind that in most everyday life situations, 'German speakers' do not actually speak standard German, or *Hochdeutsch*, but a variety of Alemannic dialects.
[21] See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 55-7); see also Schmid (1981: 96-8) and Meune (2008: 8-9).
[22] See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 55-7) on the case of Ticino and Meune (2008: 9) on that of Valais.
[23] See Miller (2001: 301-7) on the distinction between 'nested' and 'rival'.
[24] See Schmid (1981: 79-80).

Swiss language communities and their larger 'sisters' in Germany, France and Italy.[25] It is thus not surprising that relations between the language communities are overwhelmingly perceived to be non problematic[26] and that political culture as well as the interpretation of Swiss history and of its 'myths' are highly homogenous across the linguistic divides.[27]

Most Swiss citizens thus primarily identify with a single Swiss nation and conceive only the Swiss community as a whole in national terms. They think of the Swiss nation as being made up of three – or four – cultural-linguistic communities who want to live together and share a 'national character' in terms of historical experiences and political culture. In other words, they construe it both as a *Willensnation*, or nation by will, and as a *Wesensnation*, or nation by character. While the official discourse of the Swiss authorities regularly – and proudly – stresses the *Willensnation* aspect of Switzerland and its 'four languages and cultures', its *alter ego* is equally important. This is particularly the case at present when, after two decades of relentless growth of the Swiss People's Party, one third of voters seem to subscribe to the 'organic' and quasi-ethnic version of nationalism it voices.[28] This is mainly directed, however, towards immigrants and external influences in general and does not contest the autochthonous multiplicity of languages and cultures. It is clear then that the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Swiss nation is thought of as bound together by much more than just constitutional patriotism. The common political culture and shared historical memories which sustain the Swiss national identity are reflected in, and give meaning to, Switzerland's constitution and its institutions but are not generated by them.

4 Behavioural aspects

The picture painted by the attitudinal aspects outlined above is confirmed by a range of behavioural indicators. Seven are particularly important for our purposes here. First, the terms 'nation' and 'national' are virtually never used with reference to a language community and are reserved for the country as a whole. Second, no language community has ever demanded either a veto on constitutional change – let alone on ordinary legislation – or greater asymmetry within the federal system. Third, no significant secessionist movement, either based on a language community or a canton, exists. Indeed, taking into account the

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[25] McRae (1983: 96) and Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 58-62).
[26] See Schmid (1981: 111), Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 55-7) and Meune (2008: 13).
[27] See Schmid (1981: 71-82), Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 53, 76, 15-9) and Fleiner (2002: 102).
[28] As Wimmer (2002: 238-41) has shown, at other points in time too, notably in the 1930s, an organic, quasi-ethnic conception of the Swiss nation was widespread. The naturalisation laws of certain cantons and municipalities could also be seen as incorporating quasi-ethnic elements, see Helbling (2008).

limited following of a Ticinese movement in the first half of the 20th century[29] and even smaller organisations in Geneva in the 1980s,[30] one can say that there have never been secessionist movements in Switzerland. Even the militant wing of the *Mouvement jurassien* in the 1960s and 1970s never seriously contemplated a secession of either the Jura or the *Suisse romande* as a whole to join France or become independent.[31] Fourth, significant regionalist movements, notably in French-speaking Switzerland, are also absent. Some *Suisse romande*-wide regionalist parties and pressure groups have been active in the post-WWII period but have received little or no support.[32] The merger of Vaud and Geneva, the two most populous French-speaking cantons, which could have been a stepping stone towards *Suisse romande*-wide institutions, was likewise resoundingly rejected in referendums in 2002.[33] What may superficially appear as indeed a case of linguistic/cantonal regionalism – the *Lega dei Ticinesi* – is actually a phenomenon of cantonal populism with no significant autonomist demands vis-à-vis Berne.[34] This is in spite of the fact, already mentioned, that Italian speakers have not been represented in the federal government for almost half of the time since 1848. On the contrary, fifth, the rise of the new-style Swiss People's Party is a further powerful demonstration of the mono-national character of Switzerland. Instead of alienating French and Italian speakers, it has actually brought them closer to German speakers in voting behaviour. Long term trends confirm that voting patterns in elections and referendums have become more similar across cantonal and linguistic boundaries over time and that, as a result, Swiss politics is now more 'national' in character than ever before.[35] Even in the area of European policy, which many observers[36] feared would produce a growing divide between the language communities after the European Economic Area referendum in 1992, more recent popular votes have shown that attitudes and voting patterns have converged considerably and that the linguistic cleavage is less salient than other cleavages, *in primis* the urban/rural one. Sixth, it is telling that recent proposals put forward to deal with excessive cantonal fragmentation advocate creating functional regions rather than giving institutional existence and policy-making competences to the language communities.[37] Likewise, the debate on the reform of the Council of States has focussed on whether larger cantons should have more seats and on how metropolitan areas could be represented, not on whether language minorities should be over-

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[29] See Kohn (1956: 122) and McRae (1983: 214).
[30] See Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 7, 9).
[31] See McRae (1983: esp. 169) and Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 6).
[32] Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 8) and Tourret (1999: 408-9).
[33] See Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 47).
[34] See Knüsel and Hottinger (1994: 26-31) and Albertazzi (2006).
[35] See Kriesi *et al.* (1996: 28) and Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 93-97).
[36] See, among others, Kriesi (1999: 20-1) and Steiner (2002: 114-9).
[37] See Blöchliger (2005) and Frey *et al.* (2006).

represented.[38] This shows that the debate on the reform of Swiss federalism is shaped by issues of efficiency and democracy rather than accommodation of minority nationalism. Lastly, behavioural data provide additional support for rejecting the characterisation of Swiss national identity as a form of constitutional patriotism. The 1874 constitution had been amended around 140 times when it was replaced in 1999[39] and only 36 per cent of the electorate bothered to vote in the referendum to approve the current constitution.[40]

In sum, historical, institutional, attitudinal and behavioural elements all point unambiguously towards a rejection of the hypotheses that Switzerland is either multi-national or post-national. On the contrary, there is overwhelming support for the contention that the country is mono-national in spite of its linguistic diversity and that such multi-lingual mono-nationalism is the essential underpinning of Swiss democracy.

5 Explaining Switzerland's mono-nationalism

As the preceding sections have shown, what needs to be explained is not why Switzerland has been peaceful and stable despite being multi-national, but why it has not become multi-national despite being multi-lingual. Hence, what explains its peculiar evolution? Five major factors can be identified. First, as frequently pointed out by observers, societal cleavages in Switzerland cross-cut each other. This is particularly the case for the two most powerful ones - language and religion - but it is equally true of the urban-rural and the class cleavages as well as of cantonal borders.[41] The religious division and cantonal borders have thus fragmented the language communities and contributed to the non-politicisation of linguistic identities.[42] In a very real sense, they have also prevented the emergence of a clear majority. What could be called the hegemonic group - German-speaking, Protestant, and urban - was (and is) not a numerical majority. While this is of course of central importance, it is not the only factor that has produced mono-nationality in spite of multi-lingualism.

A second essential element has been the way multi-lingualism emerged and developed. As McRae points out, the decisive factor was that language equality "never had to be fought for"[43] and, moreover, that by the time nationalism became a powerful force in politics the

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[38] See Vatter (2004: 79-80).
[39] See Fleiner (2002: 98).
[40] See the online database of the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy [http://www.c2d.ch/detailed_display.php?lname=votes&table=votes&page=1&parent_id=&sublinkname=results&id=34752] (accessed 27 November 2009).
[41] See for instance McRae (1983: 74-92; 114-7).
[42] For instance, Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 29) stress that at the time of the French - and Helvetic - revolution, French-speaking Protestants did not identify with traditionally Catholic France.
[43] McRae (1983: 41).

country had already become officially multi-lingual.[44] While this, in turn, was a result of several factors, a key one was that, at the dawn of the national era, no significant language stratification by class existed,[45] unlike for instance in Belgium and in much of East-central Europe.[46] Another has been the informal balance of forces between the language groups with larger, but more fragmented, numbers on the German side being balanced by less fragmentation and higher prestige on the French side.[47] However, while these factors help explain why French-speaking nationalism has not developed, they find it more difficult to explain why its Italian-speaking cousin has not done so either. After all, in Italian-speaking Switzerland the religious and linguistic cleavages as well as the political borders largely overlap and the minority status of the language in numerical terms is not compensated by higher prestige.

A further factor that therefore needs to be added to the equation is that the existence of confederalism before 1848 and of decentralised federalism afterwards gave a large degree of cultural and political autonomy to the language communities preventing their nationalist mobilisation. Due to its high decentralisation, the system has never produced the pressures, coming especially from centralised political parties and a powerful central bureaucracy, that have generated language-based regional nationalisms elsewhere.[48] Moreover, the long-term territorial stability of the language communities and the lack of expansionism on the part of the largest one meant that the smaller communities have had no reason to fear for the survival of their language and their culture.[49]

A fourth central factor is the connection between the historical evolution of the Swiss political system and the emergence of nationalism. The fact that by the turn of the 19th century, Switzerland already had five centuries of history as a political system, albeit a confederal one, was absolutely crucial.[50] In addition to providing a powerful historical memory ready to be exploited for nationalist ends, this also meant that the foundation myths of the cantons were *collective* rather than individual and thus did not easily lend themselves to exploitation for the purpose of building cantonal nationalisms.

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[44] See McRae (1983: 232).
[45] Although with some exceptions, see Kohn (1956: 17), McRae (1983: 139, 174) and de Capitani (1983: 119-20); in all likelihood, this was due to all three languages being major literary languages of high culture.
[46] Hence, nationalist politics focussed on "'reconquering' the urban metropolis", as Arel (2001: 77) put it, had no *raison d'être* in Switzerland.
[47] See Schmid (1981: 29) and McRae (1983: 62-7, 70-4, 96); also Arel (2001: 78).
[48] See Dunn (1972: 18).
[49] With the exception of the Romansch-speaking community, of course, whose fate is probably largely due to the absence, until very recently, of a standardised, written form of the language.
[50] See also Kohn (1956: 15).

The last but not the least important factor has been that being surrounded by ethno-linguistic states culturally linked to the domestic language groups meant that secessionist aspirations fuelled by linguistic factors would have almost certainly implied joining either Germany, France or Italy rather than create independent states out of the *Deutsche Schweiz*, the *Suisse romande* and the *Svizzera italiana*. However, joining either Germany, France or Italy not only would have meant a repudiation of Swiss history, it would have also implied turning the back to a great deal of cultural heritage[51], to say nothing of crucial political values such as cantonal autonomy, direct democracy etc. Linguistic nationalisms would have thus had to trade history, culture and political values for linguistic unity. Yet because cultural interactions and linguistic *républiques des lettres* are largely unimpeded by political borders whereas distinctively Swiss historical, cultural and political features would have been lost as part of a neighbouring ethno-linguistic state, the terms of the linguistic unity/Swiss values trade-off have always been heavily stacked against the irredentist mobilisation of the language communities.

6 The prospects for Switzerland's mono-nationalism

Yet, it is not inconceivable that the language communities might one day generate forms of sub-state nationalism and thus turn Switzerland multi-national. What are the odds on this happening in the foreseeable future? While, as seen above, the linguistic cleavage is certainly an important feature of Swiss politics today, there is no evidence of its saliency having increased recently and no indication that it might do so in the near future either. Even the question of the country's openness vis-à-vis the rest of the world and its participation in the process of European integration, which exposed sharp divergences between German and French speakers in the 1990s and attracted a lot of attention, seems to be less divisive at the time of writing and there is evidence that attitudes have converged somewhat.[52] Likewise, tensions generated by the decision on the part of many German-speaking cantons to give priority to English over French in primary school have now abated following a series of cantonal referendums. Moreover, it is remarkable that even after a century and a half of centralisation has progressively reduced cantonal autonomy, the French- and Italian-speaking cantons are not more alienated from the federation in 2010 than they were in

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[51] As Grin points out (2002: 271-2), the French-speaking and Italian-speaking areas of Switzerland have never been part of France or Italy and possess a distinct *cultural* heritage from that of their neighbours.
[52] See concerns voiced by Kriesi (1999: 20-1), Sciarini et al. (2002: 75-6) and Steiner (2002: 114-9). For a more recent and more optimistic assessment, see Dardanelli (2006: 24).

1848.[53] Further centralisation - notably in the area of education, the last bastion of the cantons' legislative competences - is thus unlikely to fuel nationalist feelings in the language communities. The high degree of stability of the Swiss institutions as well as of linguistic boundaries also militates against relations between the language communities significantly deteriorating in the next few decades. As already mentioned, the debate on cantonal fragmentation is dominated by 'functional' considerations rather than ethno-linguistic ones.

Several commentators see the end of the Cold War and European integration as threatening Swiss identity and, potentially, the survival of the country by removing its *raison d'être* as a neutral state.[54] However, this view of the post-Cold War is only partly correct from a historical perspective. It would be more accurate to say that traditional Swiss neutrality already lost its *raison d'être* after WWII with the end of the Europe-centred international system. Moreover, if we understand the Cold War as a struggle between two politico-economic systems, capitalist democracy vs communism, rather than between two military alliances, NATO vs the Warsaw Pact, then Switzerland was not neutral at all during the Cold War, it was a full member of the capitalist democracy camp.[55] At a deeper level, the causal link between external neutrality and the peaceful preservation of internal diversity is often mis-interpreted. As seen in section 1, the Swiss confederation adopted neutrality well before the system became multi-lingual so, while it is true that neutrality helped to keep the confederation together, for a long time this was in relation to religion, not language. Only between roughly 1870 and 1920, did neutrality play an important role in preserving national cohesion between the language communities. This shows that external neutrality and internal unity are only linked if external conflicts are structured by the *same issues* that structure internal cleavages; i.e. in Switzerland's case primarily religion and language. However, as international conflicts have long ceased to be structured by religion, in the sense of intra-Christian (or, better, intra-Western Christianity), and language, in the sense of struggles between linguistically homogenous mono-national European states, one could argue that the link between Switzerland's neutrality and its internal diversity is weaker now than at any time in the last 500 years.

It is often argued that primarily 'civic' nationalities – such as the Swiss one – are more fragile than ethno-linguistic ones because they are to a degree 'artificial' rather than natural. Yet,

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[53] An interesting comparator here is Canada, where the process of centralisation is said to have significantly contributed to Quebeckers' alienation from the Canadian federation hence fuelling support for secession, see Gagnon (2007: esp. 24).
[54] See, among others, Sciarini et al. (2002: 74).
[55] Nor were such feelings absent during the Cold War, when the idea of a *malaise helvétique* was voiced by some intellectuals, see Kriesi (1999: 13).

this vision is problematic in several respects. To begin with, nations are not 'natural' in any way, they are always socially and politically constructed 'imaginary communities'. Moreover, all nations are intrinsically political because nationalism - i.e. the idea that political systems should be legitimised by collective identities - is, by definition, a political concept. If anything, because primarily civic nations cannot be based on shared ethnicity and language, their 'construction' has to be stronger and, as a result, citizen identification with them is likely to be more intense.[56] Likewise, the fact that primarily civic identities are often more discussed and contested than primarily ethno-linguistic ones does not mean that they are necessarily weaker. As Zimmer put it: "because its polyethnic composition deviated so obviously from the nationalist norm and had its legitimacy periodically contested both domestically and abroad, it was never self-evident but had to be constantly reasserted and redefined".[57] On the other hand, it may be true that primarily political nations depend to a greater extent on the 'performance' of their political and economic system than do those based more on ethno-linguistic unity.[58] After all regional nationalisms - and their accompanying demands for secession - would hardly arise if independence or joining another state were not perceived to be more attractive than the status quo. From this perspective, Switzerland seems safe enough for the time being as comparisons with its neighbours in the political and economic field are almost invariably to its advantage.[59]

Therefore, if it may be plausible to argue that linguistic conflict is not absent in Switzerland but merely dormant,[60] the likelihood that it may acquire sufficient saliency to generate linguistic nationalisms and threaten the unity of the country - a Canadian or Belgian scenario, so to speak - still seems to be dwarfed by the extremely solid factors of unity discussed above. Thus worries that the prediction by the 19th century thinker Keller, that Switzerland would become redundant once its neighbours became democratic,[61] might materialise soon appear to be as unfounded now as they ever were. Thus, McRae's observations that "in broad perspective, language frictions have been minimal throughout Swiss history" and "language divisions have never constituted the dominant line of

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[56] This had already been observed in the 1870s and 1880s by Carl Hilty and Ernest Renan, see Brühlmeier (1992: 26).
[57] Zimmer (2003: 10).
[58] On this point, see, among others, Sciarini et al. (2002: 59) and Seton-Watson (1977: 77).
[59] On the basis of the latest available data, Switzerland has higher satisfaction with democracy, higher GDP per capita, lower public deficit, lower public debt, lower interest rates, lower taxes, lower unemployment, lower inflation and lower corruption than either Germany, France or Italy while Zurich and Geneva regularly top the rankings for the cities with the highest quality of life worldwide.
[60] See Kriesi et al. (1996: 77) and Bächtinger and Steiner (2004: 27).
[61] Cited in Sciarini et al. (2002: 80). Bluntschli also voiced a very similar prophecy, see Brühlmeier (1992: 28). More recently, both Hughes (1993: 156) and Fleiner (2002: 103) expressed veiled doubts about whether Swiss identity will prevail over linguistic and religious allegiances for ever.

cleavage"[62] are still very much valid today and all the evidence reviewed in this paper point to a very low probability indeed that Switzerland will become multi-national in the foreseeable future.

Conclusions

In the light of the evidence discussed above, the core contention of this paper is that Switzerland should unambiguously be characterised as a mono-national state. Not only is the country not multi-national today but it has never been such and is highly unlikely to become multi-national in the foreseeable future. Its being mono-national in spite of being multi-lingual can be explained by the combined effect of several factors at play throughout its history. Although some of these factors are almost purely 'structural', a crucial role has clearly been played by what McRae called "attitudinal predispositions".[63]

These findings call for a reassessment of the role Switzerland is often asked to play in the debate on the connections between federalism, nationality and democracy. Two aspects in particular are important. First, given that Swiss society is not multi-national and Switzerland's institutions are not designed to accommodate multi-nationalism, there is little that can be learned from its experience to illuminate the search for solutions in genuine multi-national countries. Attempts to identify features of the Swiss model as devices that can be applied in countries torn by nationalist conflict, without taking into account the crucial factor of Switzerland's mono-nationalism, are thus profoundly misguided. The second, and related, aspect is that Switzerland should not be used as an 'empirical token' in the advocacy of either multi-national or post-national democracy because the country's experience does not lend empirical support to either. The Swiss case shows, in contrast, that several linguistic communities can democratically coexist within a single nation based on a degree of shared political culture while preserving and developing their cultural distinctiveness in other spheres.[64] Hence, that it is not 'objective' diversity - be it linguistic, religious or whatever - that makes a country multi-national but how such diversity is politically 'constructed' and perceived. I hope the other participants to this conference will find the paper a valuable contribution to the debate.

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[62] McRae (1983: 46 and 111).
[63] Ibidem (1983: 239); see also Fleiner (2002: 105).
[64] See Dardanelli and Stojanović (forthcoming) for a broader discussion of this point.

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