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The official screening of Switzerland 1939-1945: an unmerited gift and a missed opportunity. The experience with the Independent Commission of Experts (ICE)

My talk is divided into the four following points:

- 1. I will start by presenting the pre-history leading up to the screening as well as the actual reasons why the Independent Commission of Experts was established.*
- 2. Then the status of the historians' commission and its mandate are presented.*
- 3. In a third step the resources and competences as well as the funding are discussed.*
- 4. Especial important are the findings of the historical investigation; but of even greater significance from a social perspective are the long-term after-effects of the whole exercise.¹*

1. Pre-history and the actual establishment of the Independent Commission of Experts

Switzerland did not really undertake the screening of its own past on its own initiative. Instead, it engaged in this screening to a large extent because of international pressure from the outside. This external pressure was quite deliberately generated in the years 1995/96 by more or less planned step-by-step publications of documents which were compromising, but also somewhat questionable (they partly contained secret service speculations). The title of my talk ironically describes as a gift what was a painful road to the examination of Switzerland's own history. This is because, from the perspective of most Swiss historians, the gift of external pressure aided the country in entering into a historical clarification which it would not have initiated itself from its own sources. Swiss historians for whom these topical questions were not at all new and who had been publishing on these issues for a long time also benefited from this gift as greater notice was now being paid to their work.

1995/6 was not the first time that Switzerland caught up with its own past because of external documents; nor was it the first time that it had begun to investigate its own World War II history. In two preceding cases the same mechanism had already played a role. Then, however, there was the essential difference that the countries from which the explosive documents stemmed at that time maintained a friendly attitude towards Switzerland. In 1954, when German files that had been confiscated by the Allied forces raised some unpleasant questions about Swiss refugee policy (in particular regarding the J-Passport stamp). In response the government commissioned the well-known Ludwig-Report (1957). And around 1960 when unpleasant questions surfaced for a second time from confiscated files – this time dealing with Swiss neutrality politics and the secret accord with France – the government again commissioned a new report. This was the Bonjour-Report published in 1970. Bonjour had privileged access to archives,

¹ Zum Thema vgl. die beiden Publikationen meines Kollegen Jakob Tanner, Die Historikerkommission zwischen Forschungsauftrag und politischen Erwartungen. In: Jakob Tanner/Sigrid Weigel (Hg.), Gedächtnis, Geld und Geist. Vom Umgang mit der Vergangenheit des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Zürich 2002. S. 19-38. - Ders., Geschichtswissenschaft und moralische Ökonomie der Restitution. Die Schweiz im internationalen Kontext. IN: Zeitgeschichte 30. Jg. Sept./Okt. 2003 H. 3, S. 268-280. - Sowie das entsprechende Kapitel bei Thomas Maissen, Verweigerter Erinnerung. Nachrichtenlose Vermögen und Schweizer Weltkriegsdebatte 1989-2004. Zürich 2005. S. 489-520.

including documents which had not yet been declassified under the 50 year limitation period that was in force in Switzerland until the nineteen seventies and which was then reduced to 30 years.

The Independent Commission of Experts, which is the focus of the present talk, was created in 1996 and had its origins in the negligent manner in which Swiss banks had treated dormant accounts. This carelessness was the central issue in the demands for financial restitution, for the disclosure of archives and for addressing a range of questions in a satisfactory manner. The problem of the dormant accounts had been raised on several occasions already since 1945. But it was only in 1995/6 that the conditions were favourable and there was sufficient will to succeed. The main factors for this success in the aftermath of 1995 were: claims for restitution in the formerly eastern European countries; the advanced age of the Holocaust survivors; the 50th celebration of the end of the Second World War; and the established collaboration amongst Jewish organizations, government offices and the courts in the USA.

By September 1996 it was already clear that Parliament and the government would install a special commission. A full three months were needed to arrange the concrete modalities such as the composition; initial funding; initial description of the Commission's mandate; schedules; budgets etc.

2. Status and Mandate of the Commission

What gave the screening that was initiated in 1996 its official character? It was the creation and instalment of the Independent Commission of Experts by Parliament and the government. The Commission was instructed to work for five years and deliver a report that was in no way deformed by censorship. Strict independence in the research and in the interpretation of the findings was a central precondition to the whole operation. The independent character of the Commission was strengthened by the fact that four of its nine members were not Swiss citizens (Wladislaw Bartoszewski, Sybil Milton/after her death Helen Junz, Saul Friedländer, Harold James). From the perspective of national patriots this was unheard of. This also was extraordinary because the Commission members furthermore had unlimited access – also to private archives. This meant that Swiss bank secrecy laws were suspended, even for these 'foreigners'. Critics objected that the Commission did not include any representatives of the war generation who would ensure consideration of that generation's perspective. Right from the start, the radical right politician Christoph Blocher, who would later become a government member, declared that nothing good would come from the historical clarification because of its Jewish and leftist commission members.²

What was the Commission's mandate? Article 1 of the Federal Decree of 13 December 1996, which was adopted unanimously by both houses of Parliament (i.e. the National Council and the Council of States) defines this task as follows:

«Investigations shall be conducted into the scope and fate of all types of assets which were either acquired by banks, insurance companies, solicitors, notaries, fiduciaries, asset managers or other natural or legal persons or associations of persons resident or with headquarters in Switzerland, or which were transferred to the aforementioned for safekeeping, investment or to be forwarded to

² Versammlung der SVP/ZH vom 1. März 1997.

third parties, or which were accepted by the Swiss National Bank.»

The accent here lay clearly on assets, evidently in view of claims for restitution. In a further government decision, a certain degree of specification as well as some extension of the Commission's mandate followed. Now a list was compiled that included, amongst other things: controls over exports and imports; the role of the Swiss armament industry; the return of stolen objects and flight capital etc as well as Swiss refugee policy.³ Although these were not mentioned, train transits between Germany and Italy were nevertheless also investigated.

The Commission members and in particular its President, J.F. Bergier, more or less became official persons.⁴ Accordingly they were invited to social events (The President was for example invited to participate in the parade of the festival of the Zurich Guilds, very traditionalist and influential institutions in the local society). Commission members partly also had to justify themselves to political groupings. Their public statements were given high regard in the media. Travel diplomacy that was not justified by the historical research work itself was initiated. For example, the President of the Commission travelled to Israel in May 1997 where he attended an official programme. In XY (nachtragen!) the commission travelled *in corpore* to Washington and Princeton. There they formally met Israel Singer of the World Jewish Council as well as the former Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank Paul Volcker. Volcker had by then been appointed as the President of the Independent Committee of Eminent Persons (ICEP) whose task was to identify the dormant accounts in the banks. The Commission also travelled to Poland, paid an official visit to Auschwitz, and was treated to dinner by the historian and Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronislaw Geremek etc – all of this while 30 lesser members of the Commission continued the work back home. These 30 members had to be recruited before in a complicated process in which around of 500 applicants had taken the opportunity to apply for an interesting and well-paid job in response to the Commission's official call for researchers.

With the establishment of the ICE two categories of historians were now created: those with the privileges and prestige associated with Commission membership on the one side and those without such privilege and prestige on the other. Some historians from outside the commission made valuable contributions that supplemented the Commission's work.⁵ Other contributions sought to establish partly polemic counter-

³ Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War (ICE), see <http://www.uek.ch/en/index.htm>

⁴ Vgl. zum Aufgabenverständnis des Präsidenten Jean-François Bergier dessen Darlegungen: Sur le rôle de la „Commission indépendante d'experts Suisse-Seconde Guerre Mondiale“. In: SZG vol 47 4/1997. S. 800-808. Une Commission Indépendante d'Experts: pour quoi faire? In: Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Forschungsstand, Kontroversen, offene Fragen. Informationsveranstaltung an der ETH-ZH vom 27. Mai 1997. S. 41-46 (Kleine Schriften Nr. 32). -- Ergebnisse und Erlebnisse: Der Schlussbericht Schweiz-Zweiter Weltkrieg. In: NZZ vom 1. Juni 2002 (S. 85/86). Commissioned History in Switzerland. In: Revisiting the National Socialist Legacy. Hrsg. v. Oliver Rathkolb. Innsbruck 2002. S. 43-50 (mit Berichten auch aus der österreichischen, litauischen und spanischen Kommission). Bertrand Müller, Entretiens avec Jean-François Bergier. Carouge 2006. Jean-François Bergier im Gespräch mit Bertrand Müller und Pietro Boschetti. Zürich 2007.

⁵ Insbesondere Hans Ulrich Wipf, Georg Fischer AG 1930-1945. Ein Schweizer Industrieunternehmen im Spannungsfeld Europas. Zürich 2001.

positions to that of the Commission.⁶

So we can say that the appointment of the special Commission contributed to a general increased engagement with the past of the war years, also outside the Commission itself.⁷ Thus a phenomenon that had already existed in the 1960s repeated itself. In the sixties, there had been an eight year period in which the publication of the Bonjour report was awaited, and partly also good authors without official charge made their own pronouncements in advance of the publication of the official report. One such example is the journalist and author Alfred A. Häsler, who published an excellent book in 1967 on war-time refugee policy under the title *Das Boot ist voll...* [The Boat is Full].

The work of the Commission had been laid out for a full five years period, however within one year it already experienced an instrumentalisation. In a tête à tête between the Commission President and the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs it was agreed that the Commission would publish two interim reports on central topics of its research. The first of these reports would deal with the Swiss National Bank's acquisition of Nazi gold. The second interim report would focus on refugee policy. Why did these preliminary reports suddenly become so crucial a desideratum? The government hoped that these reports would deliver such impressive findings that they would stem domestic political opposition. This opposition consisted of an initiative for a referendum aimed at stopping the intended reparation and restitution measures. These measures were firstly the 100 Mio. Swiss Francs Holocaust-Fund and secondly the 7 Billion Swiss Francs solidarity foundation. Although the publication of such premature interim results disorganised the research, it did take place. In May 1998 the interim report on the Nazi gold transactions was published. This was followed in December 1999 by the interim report on refugee policy. Because of its importance, the topic of the refugee policy that had only been added on later to the commission's mandate, became the centre of attention. Again, following similar developments in the 1950s and 1960s, it was the topic that was the most widely discussed in public.⁸ The controversies however partly took place on a rather low level. For example: it was debated whether it was really 25 000 refugees who had been expelled from Switzerland or whether it was not a few less. This narrow minded debate arose because it had happened that persons who had been expelled and had re-entered Switzerland were probably counted twice.

The mood changed radically in August 1998 after a deal had been reached between the Swiss banks, the US class action lawyers and the Jewish organisation. This entailed the

⁶ Fior, Genf, Flüchtlinge Hier nur eine Auswahl: Stephen P. Halbrook, Target Switzerland: Swiss Armed Neutrality in World War II. New York 1998. – Angelo M. Codevilla, La Suisse. La guerre, les fonds en déshérence et la politique américaine. Genf 2001. – Jean-Pierre Richardot, Une autre Suisse 1940-1944. Genf 2002. – Als schweizerischer Beitrag Jean-Christian Lambelet, Le Mobbing d'un petit pays. Onze thèses sur la Suisse pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Lausanne 1999. - Auch die Übersetzung von: Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Schweiz. Hg. v. Kenneth Angst. Zürich 1997. Engl. Retrospectives in Switzerland in World War Two. Ed. By Donald B. Hilty. Picton Presse 2001.

⁷ Ehrliches Bemühen um konstruktive Beiträge und institutionelle Wichtigtuerei vermischten sich zuweilen. So meinte das Bundesamt für Kultur ohne entsprechendes Vorwissen eine etwas amateurhafte Publikation zu bisherigen Publikationen anbieten zu müssen. Die Rolle der Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Auswahlbibliographie. (Bern 1998).

⁸ Die ernstzunehmenden Kritiker des Flüchtlinsberichts wurden von der Kommission zu einem Kolloquium eingeladen, in dem die Aussagekraft der Argumente der beiden Seiten diskutiert wurde.

payment of 1,8 Billion Swiss Francs into a settlement fund.⁹ At that stage the Commission of historians had not even reached the halfway mark in their work. Through this deal, what had previously been the celebrated Commission historians was now turned into disruptive and annoying Commission historians.

3. Resources and funding of the Commission

Besides its – initial – high reputation, one of the crucial resources at the Commission's disposal was unlimited access to archives. As mentioned, this constituted a partial suspension of the far-reaching and repeatedly contested Swiss bank secrecy law. The parliamentary decision of 13 December 1996 stipulated that members of the Commission were "to be given access to all documents which could serve the investigation". What theoretically constituted a generous solution, in practice however ran up against considerable limitations:

a) Regarding the use of private archives, the Commission depended strongly on the varied willingness of the concerned companies to collaborate. From the side of the Commission one did not simply want to take the material that was handed out, but wanted to be able to make the selection oneself. In some cases the archives were perfectly catalogued; in other cases one merely found a 'pile of papers' in dark rooms without tables and chairs. In such cases, the required ordering demanded time and patience. Some companies maintained that the right to the inspection of documents did not imply the right to make copies or even the right to make notes. In every individual case the Commission had to negotiate terms and agreements with the companies concerned. At the end a part of the private archives demanded that once the work had been completed, the Commission had to return photocopies which had been made. The Commission handed its own notes to the Federal Archive.

b) When companies and institutions declared that they had no files, nothing remained but to believe these claims. The companies were not bound by any legal obligation to retain documents going back that far. It would only have been possible to institute house searches by the police in the case of justified suspicion. Where there was resistance one could threaten to lodge a complaint or to make such behaviour public. Threats like these were necessary, even in the case of the State Archives of Geneva¹⁰ and the art collection of the arms manufacturer Bührle. These threats however helped little, and in the case of the art collection it was established ten years later that the archive had been 'lying in the attic'.¹¹

c) The interest of the Commission focussed on the very big companies. The Commission employees who were young and partly had limited experience were confronted with experts and highly placed managers on the side of the companies. This gap in knowledge and status was not a good precondition for collaboration. Moreover, many small companies, including the private banks, were hardly covered by the investigations. In all of this, Commission members did not behave like hunting dogs out for a quick prize.

⁹ Dem war das schon im Mai 1996 abgeschlossene *Memorandum of Understanding* zwischen der Schweizerischen Bankiervereinigung und der World Jewish Restitution Organization im August 1996 die Schaffung des Volcker-Komitees vorausgegangen.

¹⁰ Staatsarchivarin Catherine Santschi wollte sich nicht in ihren eigenen Studien zur Flüchtlingsfrage stören lassen (vgl. auch Maissen, 2005, S. 492).

¹¹ Urs Steiner in NZZ vom 24. März 2010.

Instead they wanted to produce good academic work in a thoughtful manner. In the meantime this window of opportunity has again closed and one may ask if the unique past moment was really used well enough.

Initially the Swiss Commission received a budget of 5 million Swiss Francs for its five-year task. This budget was however soon increased to 22 million Swiss Francs. Without any doubt, this was an unusually generous amount. Accordingly, those who were dissatisfied with the Commission; the Commission's composition; its manner of operation; and finally its findings also criticised this high amount. Such criticism however reflects a thoroughly one-sided consciousness of the costs involved. J.F. Bergier, the President of the Commission, repeatedly pointed out that the 22 Mio. Francs equals the cost of 3 km of highway. Even more impressive would be a comparison with the hardly criticised cost of the Volcker committee. The audit firms appointed by the Volcker Committee to examine all the banks could generate costs at the banks' expense at the auditors own discretion without causing any offence amongst the general public. This was not 22 million Swiss Francs (the amount allocated to the historical Commission), but 600 million Swiss Francs, which is 27 times more. An editor for domestic news at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* who has a gift for calculations concluded that the taxes collected on the wages paid to the Volcker Committee's auditors allowed the state to easily recover the costs associated with the Independent Commission of Experts.

4. The findings and the long-term social impact

What were the results of the screening? The findings were published in 25 thematic volumes with a total of 10 000 pages. Added to this, there was a synthesis report in four languages consisting of 600 pages for each language. Can one ask about *the* result in the singular? I have to limit myself to two main results and an additional finding that may be of interest especially in Sweden:

The first main finding concerns Swiss entanglement in the events of 1939–1945. What the Commission found was a stronger entanglement with the larger context existing at the time. This entanglement led to graver consequences than had previously belonged to the self-image of a small, neutral, economically isolated and militarily insulated Switzerland. This entanglement was structurally given – in other words it was not chosen. The involvement was firstly given by the fact that Switzerland shares borders with its neighbours. This involvement was also given by the level of development of an internationally interwoven economy. The Commission's report could be considered a milestone to the extent that it changed our image of Switzerland in the Second World War. Possibly it even had the enduring effect that it altered our image of present-day Switzerland in the international context and increased our understanding of the presence of Switzerland outside Swiss national borders. In this sense an important conclusion of the report reads as follows: "By adopting numerous measures making it more difficult for refugees to reach safely, and by handing over the refugees caught, directly to their persecutors, the Swiss authorities were instrumental in helping the Nazi regime to attain its goals."¹² This conclusion – which drew attention to the fact that responsibility does not end at the border – prompted some indignation.

¹² Engl. Version, S. 168.

The second main finding was that the agents of the time did not only carry out actions imposed by factual constraint. On the contrary, they also had room for manoeuvre. This was evident in the variations in behaviour of companies such as the Basel Chemical companies; the Swiss National Bank and the Swiss national railways. It was also evident in the behaviour of persons involved with refugees. Thus it was possible for some to continue business as usual and to maximise profits.¹³ But it was also possible on the other hand to raise the question if one was acting in an ethically correct manner.

An important formula that was used to justify concretely practiced behaviour was that there was an objective factual constraint and that concessions had to be made. A common phrase stated, that the Swiss worked during the week for the victory of the Axis powers and prayed on Sunday for the victory of the Allies. (the same with the day and night).

Behind the concept of concessions lay the idea that, from one's own inner attitude one would in reality have liked to have acted differently. It was maintained that the actual behaviour was virtually an accommodation enforced in result to external expectations. In reality this so-called 'accommodation' was to a large degree the actual result of a deliberately chosen, self-determined attitude.

A further important finding that is also likely to be of interest in Sweden, is that one cannot seriously accuse Switzerland of extending the duration of the war, an accusation that the US American side enjoys to make.

Swiss contributions to satisfy the overall needs of the Axis powers were in purely quantitative terms relatively small. But a qualitative analysis shows that the Swiss contribution was of some importance. It must however be added that the fundamental criticism of neutrality, as it was exercised by the USA in 1944/45 and in 1996/97, lacks credibility if it comes from a power that itself had remained neutral till the end of 1941, due to legitimate self-interest.

The screening study was very Swiss in its focus on the 'Swiss case' and in its lack of any comparative perspectives.¹⁴ The national conservative side claimed that the study singled out Switzerland for criticism. They also stated that the screening should have shown how restrictive other states behaved concerning refugee questions. They called for comparison while at the same time insisting that the Swiss case was unique. One of the cases that this group of critics liked to cite was the refusal by the USA in 1939 to allow entry to the St Louis.

¹³ Auch in der Verwaltung: zum Beispiel der automatische Vollzug von NS-Gesetzen z.B. im Zivilstandswesen durch die Anwendung der Kategorien des „Nichtarischen“. Dem hätte man und hat man ausnahmsweise auch das Konzept der *ordre publique* entgegenhalten können. etc.

¹⁴ Thomas Maissen, der dem gesamten Intermezzo ein über 700 Seiten dickes Buch gewidmet hat, diagnostizierte bei der Umsetzung eine gewisse "Verschweizerung". Gemeint war damit die geringe Kontextualisierung und Vernachlässigung der europäischen Makroebene. Die eine allgemeine Tendenz ansprechende Kritik knüpfte an der Studie zu looted Art /Kunstraub und an der Unmöglichkeit an, die internationalen Transaktionen im vermuteten Mass dingfest zu machen. Vgl. Georg Kreis, Switzerland and Art Traffic 1933-1953. In: Revisiting the National Socialist Legacy. Coming to Terms with Forced Labor, Expropriation, Compensation and Restitution. Ed. by Oliver Rathkolb. Innsbruck 2002. S. 133-144.

In response to these objections Saul Friedländer and I added chapter 3.7. 'Context and Comparison' to the final report, with the above cited ominous concluding sentence on the extent to which Swiss authorities indirectly assisted the Nazi regime to promote its goals. The Swiss Commission had already extended an invitation in October 1997 for an international conference at the symbolically charged location of Monte Verità near the Swiss town of Ascona. The effects of the conference, however, remained modest. Four years later, at an international conference in Vienna, the President of the Commission, J.F. Bergier repeated his call for bringing together researchers in an extensive transnational project. Bergier was easily optimistic:

"25 countries are at work, have engaged commissions, often using the Swiss example as a model. Yet we are discovering that many questions (refugees, movements of capital, art trade etc.) cannot be solved within a narrow national framework. This is the reason why I would wish for a transnational research project within a defined framework. Such an undertaking is certainly ambitious and will be difficult to manage. But it would be worth the effort."

Developments have since passed that point and the episode of these historical clarifications has itself become history.

The final report was delivered to the government in December 2001, exactly five years to the day. This was followed by the production of the book and its translation. The report was published in March 2002. For two to three days the research findings dominated the daily media. Then it was all over. The reception of the report was modest in comparison to the initial interest of 1996/97.¹⁵ The government politely expressed its gratitude for the work that had been done, but it did not engage with the material. In Parliament, which had actually mandated the research, there was no debate at all. Discussions especially took place amongst historians and interested NGOs.¹⁶ The distribution – especially of the merely 1000 copies of the English version of the report – was miserable. Because of the preferences of the President the report appeared with a small publisher which lacked the required distribution capacities. In this regard the opponents of the report were much more efficient. In order to cement the older image of Swiss history they distributed 1500 free copies of older publications from the era of the 1970s and 80s to libraries in the USA.¹⁷ Nationalist circles from the right sought to discredit the Bergier report and to attach the label 'controversial' to it. 'Controversial' just about had the meaning of lacking credibility and therefore not at all worth deserving attention. While many people were satisfied with a few quick comments, we can assume on the other hand that findings from the report quietly found their way into the schools and general opinions of the nation.¹⁸

¹⁵ Zwei Produkte der Anfangsphase sind die Schrift der Nationalen Schweizerischen UNESCO-Kommission: Warum wird ein Thema von gesellschaftlicher Bedeutung nicht zum öffentlichen Thema? Bern 1998 (zu einer Tagung vom September 1997) und die Publikation des Schweizerischen Israelitischen Gemeindebunds (SIG) zu einem hochdotierten Symposium u.a. mit Nobelpreisträger Elie Wiesel "Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit". Zürich/Basel 1999 (zu einer Tagung an der Universität Freiburg vom Oktober 1999).

¹⁶ Am 28. Februar/1. März 2003 wurden an der Universität Freiburg die erstmals durchgeführten Schweizerischen Geschichtstage dem Thema "Erinnern und Vergessen" gewidmet. Vgl. Georg Kreis (ed.) *Erinnern und Verarbeiten. Zur Schweiz in den Jahren 1933-1945. Itinera*, Fasc. 25, Basel 2004.

¹⁷ Maissen, 2005, S. 519. Stefan von Bergen, Bücheraktion. Die Wiederbelebung der wehrhaften Schweiz. In: *Espace Mittelland* vom 25. Januar 2003. Und: www.americanswiss.org. Zur Umsetzungsproblematik vom gleichen Autor im gleichen Blatt der Beitrag vom 1. Dezember 2001.

¹⁸ Vgl. zum Beispiel das Schulbuch: Barabara Bonhage u.a. (Ed.) *Hinschauen und Nachfragen. Die Schweiz und die Zeit des Nationalismus im Licht aktueller Fragen*. Zürich 2006. Schulbücher

Lets return again to the beginning, which also brings us to the long-term social impact of the screening. Switzerland, because of its neutrality and because it is such a small state, has often understood itself to be untouched by world affairs. In the time of the Nazi-domination, the Swiss self-understanding that it is an island and especially the strict separation from the mighty neighbour, contributed to the national survival. This led to the incorrect opinion that Switzerland had absolutely nothing to do with the Third Reich. This distorted self-image is evident from the following event:

In a press interview at the end of 1996, the Swiss Federal President Jean-Pascal Delamuraz raised a rhetorical question that would have far-reaching consequences when he asked *if Auschwitz were then in Switzerland*.¹⁹ In posing this question about the scope of Swiss responsibility for events beyond Swiss borders, Delamuraz was merely the medium who expressed an opinion that was widespread amongst the Swiss population. With his question that was meant to deflect criticism of Swiss entanglement in affairs outside Swiss borders, he gave voice to the majority view which always eclipses or even denies existing interconnections between the bad world and the Helvetic garden. This was the silent Swiss majority who were pleased that someone finally dared to say what 'everyone' was supposedly thinking all the time.²⁰

President Delamuraz' remarks did not, however, remain uncontradicted, also in Switzerland. The minority opposite side – a side that belongs to Switzerland too – saw in his statements yet further evidence for the 'national stereotypical way of thinking', a way of thinking which holds the small neutral state for genuinely incapable of guilt. Adolf Muschg, one of the most famous Swiss writers made a good point in this regard when he said: "The historic experience, that Switzerland had been spared because of its neutrality, it today lacks." By this he drew attention to the fact that, what in the past had seemed to be an advantage – namely that Switzerland was seen to be separate from the rest of Europe – has become a disadvantage in the present.²¹

To many, Switzerland appears as an exclave of world history, as a multifunctional off-shore duty-free warehouse. Existent but also not quite existent. Used by the International Committee of the Red Cross, by the League of Nations, the UN, the Universal Postal Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), by international secret service agencies and by a few companies in various lines of business such as banking, insurance, travel, nutrition, machine manufacture (including watches), the chemical industry, the art trade, etc.

¹⁹ Interview of the 31. Dezember 1996 in „24 heures“ und „Tribune de Genève“. The protest against the word of the „Lösegeld-Erpressung“ was even stronger than the protest about the Auschwitz-word. Gemäss Informationschef Yves Seydoux, official speaker of Delamuraz said that 145 of 150 letters Delamuraz got approved the statement of Delamuraz. waren von 150 Zuschriften 145 zustimmender Art (Tages-Anzeiger vom 9. Januar 1997). Der Vorstand der SPS forderte den Rücktritt des Bundesrats. Delamuraz äusserte wenig später in einem Brief an den WJC sein Bedauern über die gewählten Formulierungen. About the inability to the feel itself guilty (Schuldunfähigkeit) see Thomas Maissen, Weltkrieg und nationales Gedächtnis. In: *ZeitSchrift für Kultur, Politik, Kirche, Reformatio* 47. Jg. H 5 Okt. 1998. S. 261-267. Ausführlicher im Beitrag "Outside history" in diesem Band.

²⁰ Delamuraz added something else. He spoke of extortion for ransom and then had to apologise for it.

²¹ Adolf Muschg, *Wenn Auschwitz in der Schweiz liegt*. Frankfurt a.M. 1997. First publication in Erstveröffentlichung im Tages-Anzeiger vom 24. Januar 1997. - Mariatte Denman (Duke University, now Stanford), *"If Auschwitz Were in Switzerland. . . .": German Swiss Intellectuals Respond to the Nazi Gold Affair* *New German Critique*, No. 85, Special Issue on Intellectuals (Winter, 2002), pp. 167-191 [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-033X\(200224\)85%3C167%3A%22AWIS.%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-033X(200224)85%3C167%3A%22AWIS.%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2)

But under the shock of the accusations triggered by Delamuraz' remarks, things changed for a brief moment. In the immediate phase from 1996 to '98 there was considerable concern. Correspondingly big too was the willingness to accept Switzerland's own transnational entanglements. Official Switzerland thoroughly did its homework by mandating scholars to shed light on the past. Soon Switzerland returned from the whipping boy it had become, to model boy – again.

In a second phase the old image of an independent Switzerland could once more re-establish itself. Possibly this old image could even entrench itself even more than in preceding times. Thomas Maissen, who dedicated an exhaustive study to the whole operation, gave the following pertinent title to his important book: *Verweigerte Erinnerung* (Refused Memory).²² It is difficult to say what the 'final' effect will be of 'coping with the past'. There are two parallel memories: a large heroic self-confirming memory that focuses only on the good sides and a small, self-critical memory that insists on the dark sides of the past. The two probably have found an arrangement of sorts, some kind of co-existence.

Serious engagement with the Second World War has however remained an episode. The majority of Swiss missed the opportunity to integrate Switzerland into world history in terms of its own self-understanding of its entanglement with these events.²³ The idea of a severely restricted membership in the world-community continues to prevail, even if one believes and partly hopes that such distorted self-understanding will erode somewhat as time goes by. Although an island-mentality still continues to shape the Swiss self-image, Switzerland can hardly be excluded from the evolution of transnationalisation and integration. We may assume that the insight has gained some ground that 'Auschwitz' cannot simply be dismissed as a concern of others in apparently distant Poland. It might still be possible that the idea of an internationally responsible, because internationally active Switzerland may increasingly establish itself. Through that, Switzerland may become more closely part of Europe. Possibly the work of the historians in the Independent Commission of Experts made a small contribution to the development of such an awareness.

(Vortrag Universität Stockhol, Mai 2009, erscheint im 5. Bd. der Vorgeschichten zur Gegenwart. Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Basel Schwabe 2011).

²² Maissen, 2005 (Anm. 1).

²³ Georg Kreis, Das verpasste Rendez-vous mit der Weltgeschichte. Zurück in den Zweiten Weltkrieg (Teil III) in Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte (SZG) 3/2004, pp. 314-330. Reprint in: Georg Kreis, Vorgeschichten zur Gegenwart. Ausgewählte Aufsätze Bd. 2. Basel 2004. S. 193-210.