

Conflict Handling Styles in Switzerland- Some Preliminary Findings & Initial Interpretations

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Abstract: Switzerland's recent rejection of the free trade area agreement (European Economic Area) on 6th December 1992 puzzled many people, since Switzerland's foreign trade greatly depends on EC trade flows, e.g. in 1989 an estimated 70.8% of Switzerland's imports and 56.6% of its exports came from the EC (Hauser, 1991, IMF Occasional Paper Nr. 74 1990). Still, despite potentially very negative economic and political consequences like missed future market access and possible EC retaliatory measures, the majority of Swiss people and Swiss cantons voted against the treaty. This seemingly "unreasonable" or "stubborn" decision makes sense once one analyses the decision in the light of data collected on general conflict behaviour of Swiss citizens. Using the MODE conflict handling instrument, the authors gathered data from mostly Swiss German people, namely 184 Swiss diplomats, civil servants, managers, bankers and students over a period of 5 years. The results indicate a preference for a conflict and behaviour pattern which moves from compromising, avoiding, collaborating, competing to accommodating. The results are presented below together with a general overview of Switzerland's political, economic and social current conditions. Finally, an attempt is made to interpret Switzerland's conflict behaviour towards the EC over the last 40 years in the light of trends suggested by results of the data analysis.