



Freedom in Danger: The End of European Integration?

The recent shocking vote of the Swiss people to re-introduce strict immigration quotas will primarily affect Western Europeans, most of all Germans and Italians. In line with numerous opinion polls from other European countries, the Swiss referendum shows that migration is one of the hottest political topics Europeans are currently concerned about. Many political strategists will therefore be tempted to use this issue to stir up emotions in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament.

The wide-spread distrust of the EU institutions is also a result of the failure to communicate that our wealth and strong social safety net is owed largely to the international division of labor and increasing economic integration.

It holds true, particularly for Europe, that more labor market mobility translates into better prospects for economic growth. At the ballot boxes in May, the citizens from 28 EU countries will have to decide whether to continue on this path. The newly elected European Parliament and the future European Commission should make it a top priority to develop a truly convincing and credible migration strategy. This will be one of the most vital tasks in the face of various ongoing economic and political challenges.



Klaus F. Zimmermann

This is why the fallout of the controversial referendum will extend far beyond the Swiss border. Apart from the threat it poses to many other agreements between Berne and Brussels, the vote also constitutes a fundamental test case. What is Europe's stance on freedom of movement? Free movement of people, goods, services, capital, information and opinions is the cornerstone of a liberal Europe united in a common market. A free and social Europe is not divided into first and second class citizens. The European idea is also about open, increasingly integrated labor markets. Eroding this principle essentially means giving up the whole concept of European integration.

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We need clear rules on mobility that are fully applicable in practice, not just on paper. Existing uncertainties must disappear, not least to counter the mostly unfounded fears of welfare immigration. Some of the existing regulations in this regard may be insufficient or too vague. It is also necessary to provide more support to integration efforts on the local level. Unless we manage to create a daily environment for the people of Europe to live together in harmony, the great European idea might soon be at the brink of collapse.

The European Union has no choice but to maintain a strong position in the negotiations with Switzerland, given the growing calls in many EU member countries to restore stricter limits on immigration. This will certainly be an issue in the upcoming European elections. Some parties will try to incite fears for obvious purposes. EU policymakers must therefore strongly advertise the idea of open borders and free labor markets in their campaigns.



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