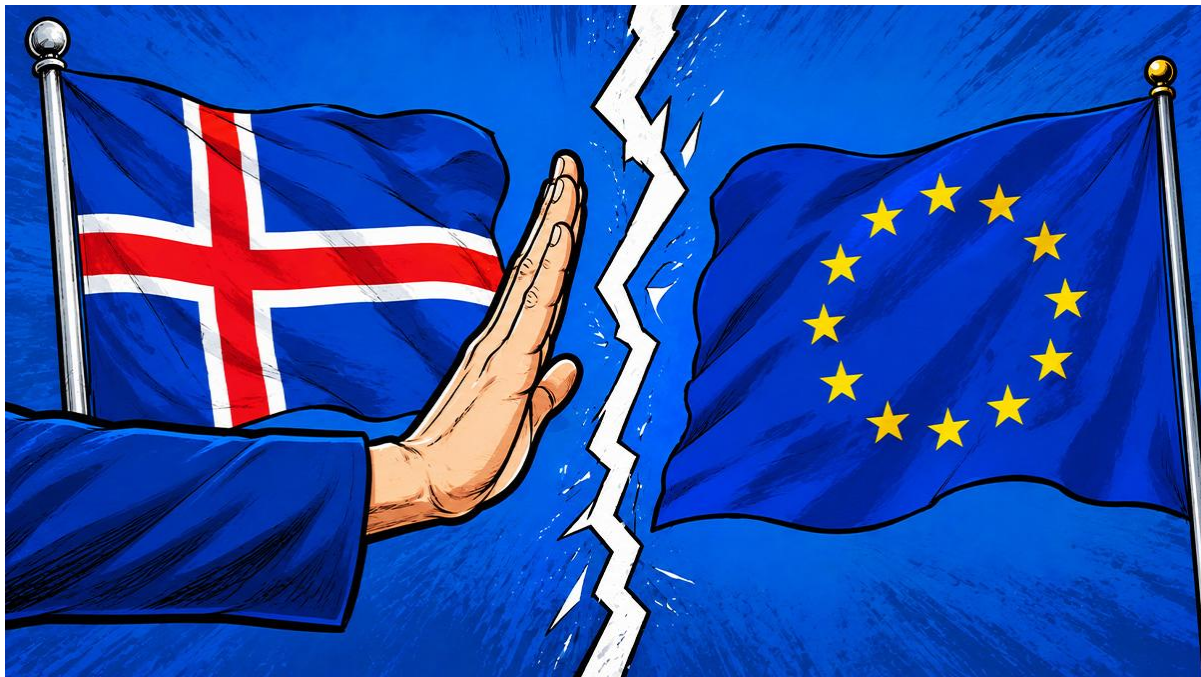


Iceland as a model: Referendum on EU accession – citizens said no

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Symbolic image: AI

There are still nations that act as exemplary models of democracy: Iceland is one such example. Here, the people were allowed to decide whether they wanted to resume EU accession negotiations. The majority of citizens rejected this. The Eurocratic leftward shift and regulatory mania thus continue to bypass the Icelanders.

Below you will find a guest article by Mag. Christian Ebner:

In 1995, Austria, Sweden, and Finland left EFTA to join the EU. Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Iceland, however, remained in EFTA. EFTA is an economic community of sovereign states without common policies or burdensome regulations. Like the EU, EFTA also concludes trade agreements with third countries. Unlike the EU, EFTA states are also permitted to conclude bilateral trade agreements with other states. EU states are not allowed to do this, as trade agreements fall under the exclusive competence of the EU.

Since our accession in 1995, the EU has massively expanded its powers and budget. The European Commission and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) now have far more power than in 1995, and the self-determination of member states has been significantly curtailed.

The EU has become a political union that would ideally like to become a federal state immediately, if only the member states would allow it.

Since 1995, the EU has shifted significantly to the left politically. The density of regulations has increased dramatically, and EU law has led to a substantial expansion of the welfare state. This expansion of social welfare entitlements extends not only to EU citizens but also to EU citizens and third-country nationals, even to asylum seekers who have never paid taxes or social security contributions in the countries in question. When a country joins the EU, it submits to EU law. Conversely, EU law becomes ineffective upon a country's withdrawal from the EU.

A majority of Icelanders said no to the EU

In the case of Iceland or Switzerland, EU membership would be linked to a political shift to the left, which is why it is only supported by left-wing parties. Iceland negotiated EU membership from 2010 to 2013. Negotiations were suspended in 2013 following a change of government; in 2015, the government declared that Iceland should no longer be considered a candidate for accession. Since taking office in 2015, Donald Trump has repeatedly stated that the US must control or acquire Greenland, and has not ruled out the use of military force.

The Icelandic left-wing government saw this as an opportunity to finally push through EU accession by suggesting two things: 1. Trump would ultimately threaten Iceland as well. 2. In the event of an American attack, the EU member states would and could defend Iceland militarily. The fact that EU candidate Turkey occupies the northern part of EU member Cyprus and that the EU member states are doing nothing about it was conveniently omitted. Furthermore, the government claimed that EU membership would lower inflation.

The arguments failed to convince the Icelanders. **In the referendum, 52.8 percent voted against resuming EU accession negotiations, while 47.2 percent voted in favor.** Voter turnout was 82.5 percent. The alleged threat and the supposed protection offered by the EU were only comprehensible with a great deal of imagination.

Furthermore, EU policies are not exactly known for reducing inflation. On the contrary, the countless EU regulations of recent years have increased the price of many products and services, driven many small businesses out of the market, and thus strengthened the dominance of large corporations. This is likely why the Icelanders concluded that it wasn't worth negotiating EU membership.

Exemplary in terms of democratic policy

While the honesty of the Icelandic government's political arguments is open to criticism, its democratic conduct was exemplary: **it decided to hold a referendum on opening accession negotiations, as well as a further referendum on the outcome of those negotiations, should any be reached.** In contrast, Austrian governments of recent decades have feared referendums like the devil fears holy water. Since the referendum on EU accession back in 1994, there hasn't been a single referendum.

There would have been ample reason for referendums. The EU we have today is, objectively speaking, completely different from the one promised to us before the 1994 referendum. From the perspective of many citizens, it is far worse than the one promised in 1994. That is why, as early as June 2015, over 261,000 citizens signed the EU exit petition initiated by a non-

partisan committee, with Inge Rauscher, a long-time ÖXIT activist from the "Initiative Heimat & Umwelt" (Homeland & Environment Initiative), as the driving force. Since then, the state of the EU has not improved; one need only consider the consequential opening of borders from September 2015 onwards. The Austrian government should follow Iceland's example and let the Austrian people vote on whether they want to remain in this EU. If the government has good arguments, it surely won't fear the citizens' decision, will it?

About the author: *Mag. Christian Ebner (*1970 in Krems) works as an independent management consultant and chairman of the party CFU (Christian Free-minded Union).*