

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

[See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)

[Order a reprint of this article now](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

REVIEW & OUTLOOK | NOVEMBER 30, 2009, 8:36 A.M. ET

Switzerland and the Minaret

Sunday's vote keeps European heads in the sand about Muslim immigrants.

Nearly 58% of Swiss voters Sunday cast their ballots in favor of banning the construction of new minarets in the Alpine republic, a surprise result that led at least one Swiss member of parliament to declare that "the foundations of Switzerland's direct democracy have failed."

That is clearly wrong. Swiss direct democracy shows its mettle when Swiss voters use it to stand up to their political elites, as happened here. Having said that, Sunday's vote, for all the hand-wringing leading up to it, was a decidedly mild-mannered sort of protest. The construction of new minarets is banned, but the building of mosques is unaffected, and the vote does not affect the four existing minarets in the country. Nobody's freedom of worship is threatened, but a symbolic message has been sent.

But what message, exactly? The vote betrays an undercurrent of fear among the Swiss—a fear that is not without cause. There is no denying the connection between radical imams and terrorist acts. Nor should anyone look away from the fact that too many European Muslims flatly reject the norms of their host countries, sometimes in ways that are criminal: honor killings, child brides and the like.

Yet banning minarets does nothing to address that fear. It merely makes it less likely that the average Swiss will be confronted by a visible symbol of Islam upon his skyline. Thus, even as a symbolic gesture, it seems to encourage a head-in-the-sand approach toward the 5% of Swiss who are Muslim. In much of Europe, this is the norm anyway, the result of political correctness and cowardice.

Rather than being a blow against that attitude, Sunday's vote seems only to reinforce it. Banning minarets won't do anything to assimilate Switzerland's or Europe's Muslims, or to ensure that economic opportunity is available to everyone of whatever creed, or to deal with Western Europe's demographic problem of too few newborns.

The ban, in other words, does too much and too little at once. Too much because it becomes a very visible and easily exploited symbol of supposed European intolerance. But it accomplishes too little because it seeks merely to hide from view the problems that gave rise to the fear of the minaret in the first place.

Copyright 2009 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com