

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SWISS ABROAD

S W I S S

REVIEW

MARCH 2006 / NO. 1



Second homes: The other face
of the home country

Jo Siffert: A legend on the
big screen

500th anniversary
of the Papal Swiss Guard



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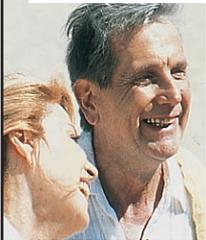
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Who is poor in affluent Switzerland?

WHILE 220,999 SWISS WERE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT LAST YEAR, Swiss companies once more posted massive rises in profits. This led to such a sharp increase in Swiss share prices that even analysts were amazed. Given this situation, it is not always easy to understand reports of Switzerland's economic difficulties. While growth is modest, profits are rocketing. Is Switzerland doing well or badly? The fact is that these earnings are not profiting everyone to the same extent, and the gap in income between management and simple wage-earners is steadily growing. High earners are enjoying even higher salaries, while the rest are being forced to tighten their belts another notch. According to a Credit Suisse survey, 71 percent of Swiss are anxious of losing their jobs and 29 percent are afraid of becoming poor. Five years ago, things were completely different.

This January Caritas issued an alarming report stating that, according to "cautious estimates", one million people in Switzerland must be classified as poor. But who is poor in affluent Switzerland? The Swiss Conference for Social Assistance has defined the following poverty thresholds: CHF 2500 per month for a single-person household, and CHF 4500 for a family of four.

Other statistics have also caused a stir: According to tax statistics, one in four pensioners in the cantons of Zurich and Aargau has a personal fortune of one million francs. At the same time it was reported that more and more young people are taking on financial burdens and face mountains of debt only shortly after attaining the age of majority. Perhaps advertisers should change their target groups and aim for pensioners rather than the younger generation.



Heinz Eckert

Statistics on second homes also reveal some astonishing facts. In the course of his investigations, our reporter Rolf Ribi found that one square meter is built on in Switzerland every second. Per day that is the equivalent of a small farm, and per year to the surface area of Lake Brienz.

The number of second homes and holiday homes has doubled to 450,000 residential units since 1980. One in nine dwellings in Switzerland is only used temporarily. In many villages in the Engadine, between 60 and 80 percent of all houses and apartments are holiday homes, occupied on average for only 75 days of the year. The result is that many villages in Upper Engadine have become ghost towns, and closed shutters are the dominant feature of such locations.

Motor sport is the subject of two separate articles in this issue of Swiss Review, and with good cause: Tom Lüthi, a young man from the Emmental, was voted Sportsman of the Year and is a firm favourite with the public, while Jo Siffert is rapidly becoming a cult figure whose eventful life is currently the subject of a documentary being shown in Swiss cinemas. Did you know that when he died, 50,000 people attended his funeral in Fribourg?

Köbi Kuhn's appeal in the Swiss Review for young Swiss footballing talents resident abroad has attracted a great deal of attention. More than 200 young people have written to the Swiss Football Association in the hope of being invited to Swiss selection trials. Hans Ruedi Hasler, Technical Director of the Swiss Football Association, explains the next steps in the selection process on page 17. More information is available at www.football.ch, menu SFV, "Formulare".

HEINZ ECKERT

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IMPRESSUM: "Swiss Review", the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 33rd year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 21 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 380 000. Regional news appears four times a year.

■ EDITORSHIP: Heinz Eckert (EC), Editor-in-Chief; Rolf Ribi (RR), Alain Wey (AW), Gabriela Brodbeck (BDK), responsible for DFA Information Pages, Service for the Swiss Abroad DFA, CH-3003 Berne. René Lenzin (RL), reporting from parliament. Translation: CLS Communication Ltd ■ POSTAL ADDRESS: Publisher, Editorial Office, Advertising: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 6, Tel. +41 31 356 61 10, Fax +41 31 356 61 01, Postal Account (Swiss National Giro) 30-6768-9. Internet: www.revue.ch ■ E-MAIL: revue@aso.ch ■ PRINT: Zollikofer AG, CH-9001 St.Gallen. ■ CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please advise your local Embassy or Consulate – do not write to Berne. Single copy CHF 5.- ■

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Swiss Review 6/05

Your above noted issue is possibly the best ever – brimful of useful information, well-balanced opinion and highly polished articles of interest to the Swiss Abroad.

The editorial, and in particular the second half dealing with homesickness, is a piece of considerable resonance to me. And the warning contained therein is well placed.

As a Swiss out of the country for over forty years, I was stunned and overwhelmed by the poster photograph of Einsiedeln monastery with Christmas market; namely so much so that torrents of tears ran freely down my cheeks repeatedly. I contemplated at length what adjective to use for this kind of immediate and immense experience. And it came to mind: Glorious!

But, notwithstanding my many memories of home, I still fail to see the aspect beneficial.

FREDERICK JENZER, TORONTO,
CANADA

Must-haves

I have lived abroad for a quarter of a century but visit my home country regularly, and over the years I have noticed that my image of Switzerland as I remember it is increasingly reflected in the number of “must-have” products which I never fail to pack in my luggage before leaving (at the risk of infringing certain regulations!) in case I never find them again.

I would be very interested to find out what sort of image of Switzerland other Swiss Abroad

harbour. I imagine your readers would also be interested. So why not ask them? Here, in descending order of importance, are my ten top Swiss products: Thomy medium hot mustard – Savoy sausage (cervelat) – self-adhesive envelopes (Coop) – white notelet cards (Coop) – self-adhesive address labels for parcels (Coop) – St.Gallen Bratwurst – paper tissues – marzipan fruits (Merkur) – chocolate bars (Lindt) – Graubünden air-dried meat. Hands off!

ERIC HAYWOOD, DUBLIN,
IRELAND

Highly interesting

Many thanks for the interview with Hanspeter Kriesi in your December 2005 issue, which I found extremely interesting.

However, I believe you left out one question: the high number of abstentions from votes.

Does this factor not threaten to falsify results, since often the people's opinion is not truly reflected by the tiny minority of the electorate who exercised their vote?.

This situation is likely to create a weak level of representation in our country's institutions, and may harbour latent tensions.

BERNARD VERNES, BY E-MAIL

Romantic poster

Many thanks for the last issue of Swiss Review in December 2005. We really liked the layout and the many interesting reports, particularly the romantic poster of the Christmas market in front of Einsiedeln Monastery. With everything covered in snow and all the lights: who wouldn't want to be there? In January 1995 I visited Switzerland with my daughter. We also travelled from Zurich to Einsiedeln to see the Black Madonna and visited the splendid basilica. The Christmas market had gone, but it was nevertheless an unforgettable experience.

AGNES K. DOEBELI AND FAMILY,
ARRAIAL DA AJUDA/BAHIA,
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The right to happiness

He's the widest-read Swiss author abroad. His critical non-fiction can be found populating bestseller lists and his previous book, an anti-globalisation work entitled “The New Rulers of the World,” even became an international hit. Jean Ziegler's latest book “Empire of Shame” deals with the battle against poverty and oppression and is already flying off the shelves in Switzerland. Formerly a professor of sociology in Geneva and Paris, and National Councillor for the Social Democrats, Ziegler has spent the past five years tirelessly travelling through the world's famine-stricken regions as the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. The 71-year-old from Geneva considers his UN mandate “a golden opportunity to use my knowledge to benefit the world's poorest.”

In his younger years, Jean Ziegler was strongly influenced by his friendship with French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. His radical criticism and appeals rest on the “human right to happiness.” According to Ziegler, the “Empire of Shame” resides both in the power system of politics and economics, and more particularly in the conduct of global corporations, which shirk their sociopolitical responsibilities and evade regulation in a single-minded bid to maximize profits.

Ziegler names facts: According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 12 billion people could be provided with 2700 calories every day (yet the world's population is currently 6.4 billion). Despite this, 1.8 billion people have to survive on less than one dollar a day, two billion are severely malnourished and 680 million are starving. The 500 largest multinational corporations command 52 percent of the global gross national product and control most raw materials markets, including the global market for seeds and pesticides. Swiss food concern Nestlé, for example, operates in desperately poor Ethiopia, where 95 percent of coffee beans are produced by small farmers. There, in the space of just three years, the price per kilo of beans has plummeted from three dollars to a mere 86 cents, bringing poverty and hunger to farming families.

For Ziegler, global hunger is the world's greatest scandal. Every day, 100,000 people die as the result of starvation and malnutrition – one child under the age of ten every five seconds. According to Ziegler, hunger – the world's most frequent cause of death – is a “man-made affliction”. It is “mass murder” and the cause of it is “debt.” Third-world countries are currently in debt to the tune of 2,100 billion dollars: a sum much greater than any public development aid being offered, and the nearly 400 billion dollars paid every year to service this debt is preventing essential social reforms. “The burden of debt rests on the poor, and on the poor alone.”

What needs to be done? Jean Ziegler believes that the shame felt by all well-intentioned people in light of this hunger and poverty is a revolutionary force. In the tradition of philosopher Immanuel Kant and the French revolution, he is declaring war against the prevailing world order, against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, against debt, against corporations and against the

exploitation of countries that produce raw materials. “I want to help make people more aware of how necessary this revolution is.” ROLF RIBI



JEAN ZIEGLER: Das Imperium der Schande. Der Kampf gegen Armut und Unterdrückung. Pub. C. Bertelsmann Verlag, Munich 2005, 316 pages, CHF 34.90, EUR 19.90 (the original was published by Fayard, Paris in 2005 under the title “L'Empire de la honte”)

Soliswiss 2005 Annual Report

The members have approved new Articles of Association. Naturally, the long tradition of helping Swiss nationals resident abroad to secure their means of subsistence will be continued. The many simplifications which have been implemented will help members make better use of their rights, enhance the efficiency of the Secretariat, and clearly provide clients with more advantages.

Website

Soliswiss is vigorously pursuing a policy of information exchange and communication with members based on modern technologies and a brand-new Internet presence. The new website www.soliswiss.ch was launched in the autumn of 2005. At the end of the year this was followed by www.mysoliswiss.ch to coincide with the coming into force of the new Articles of Association. This site is reserved for Soliswiss members only. For reasons of security and confidentiality, a special log-on is required for cash investments. Thanks to "mysoliswiss", the society is now close to the customer, fast and cost-effective.

Members

In the period under review, the cooperative society acquired 560 new members, both in the young and older age brackets, and further strengthened the society's solidarity.

The 2005 General Assembly voted to replace the minimum premium with an annual contribution. Children and young people in education are exempted from the annual contribution. For

adults the contribution is CHF 40. The cost of membership has not therefore increased. Soliswiss hopes that members view themselves as benefactors and willingly undertake this charitable obligation. The beneficiaries of this fund are Swiss nationals abroad who lose their means of subsistence due to political events and through no fault of their own.

Claims for compensation

Claims for lump-sum compensation and applications for support from the Auxiliary Relief Fund have increased slightly. In many cases the cooperative society was able to help.

Soliswiss thanks the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for their valuable support in the investigations and research required to determine who should benefit from which funds.

Asset accumulation

Since the beginning of the period under review, members' contributions have been deposited exclusively in the federal treasury. Recent yields on nominal securities have been relatively low, but such mechanisms ideally meet the

requirement for high-level security of return. Interest on Soliswiss accounts corresponds to the return on long-term cash bonds and is accordingly highly competitive.

Only the society's assets are invested at higher risk in line with the re-established fluctuation reserves. Soliswiss has selected as its partner Wegelin & Co., a private bank in St. Gallen, which performs the mandate with a great deal of success.

Soliswiss is currently in intensive discussions with federal supervisory authorities in order to ensure that its members will continue to benefit from these modern and attractive investment options.

Life and health insurance

Personal financial provisions in the event of illness, accident, invalidity, death and old age appear to be growing in importance for all members around the world. With this in mind, Soliswiss has stepped up cooperation with selected insurance companies and enlarged the Berne team. The insurance services offered by Soliswiss offer members a wide range of financial benefits. Moreover, revenue from commissions covers a large proportion of the overheads for the Soliswiss self-help system.

2005 financial statements

Once more the accounts were closed on a positive note with an annual surplus of CHF 1.5 million. Expenses of CHF 2.4 million were

recorded in the period under review. A substantial rise was recorded in personnel expenditure. Investments in new premises and proprietary software reflect the internal expansion of the society. Lump-sum compensation payments were once more charged to the fund without affecting income. Income from premiums for loss of livelihood insurance was credited in full, without deductions for operating costs, to the compensation fund, which stands at a healthy CHF 13.8 million. Thanks to the federal guarantee, Soliswiss can look to the future securely and confidently.

Council

Having served the statutory term of office, Ruedi Hefti stood down from the Executive Committee. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude. Jeanne Barras Zwahlen, financial consultant for the Credit Suisse Group, Werner Enz, Business Director of the NZZ, and D. Doron Zimmermann, Security Expert at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, were elected for the first time to the Executive Committee. Sabine Silberstein of Singapore, a Swiss national resident abroad, was elected to the Council for the first time. The society thanks everyone for their valuable service on the supervisory organs.

Soliswiss

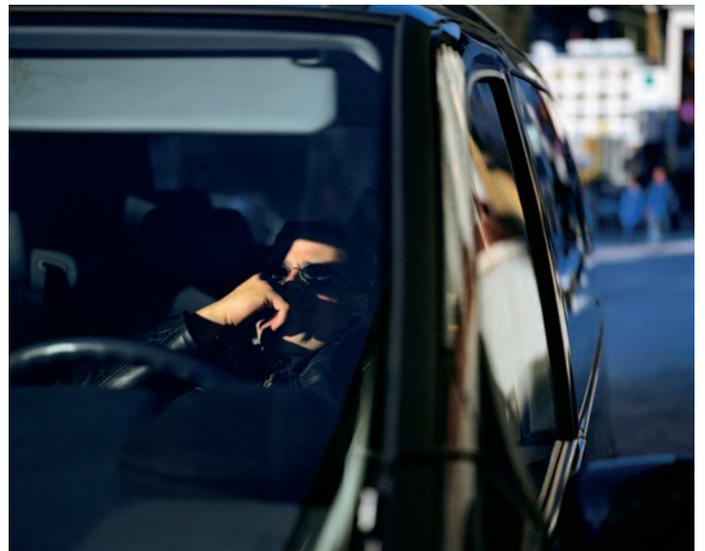
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State of siege. Graubünden photographer Jules Spinatsch took a series of photographs at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He shows unusual views of winter nights in Davos, complete with floodlit barbed wire fences. His book of photographs, entitled "Temporary Discomfort", also features photographs of the WEF in New York as well as the G8 summits in Genoa and Evian. It has won several awards and is published by Verlag Lars Müller, Baden.



The other face of the home country. More and more second homes and holiday homes are changing the face of villages and altering landscapes – in the very parts of the country that are the most picturesque. Now the regulations governing the purchase of real estate by persons resident abroad are to be fully relaxed. But there is opposition. By Rolf Ribi

Article 75 of the federal constitution contains the sentence: “Zoning serves to achieve an appropriate and moderate use of the land and its ordered inhabitation.” If only! For decades Switzerland has seen so much land development, you would think it had twice the amount to spare. Scaffolding and cranes dominate the landscape virtually everywhere, but particularly in the Engadine, Valais and Ticino. New houses are shooting up like mushrooms in these tourist regions, and these second homes are changing the face of formerly quaint villages and entire regions. The home country looks very different from how it looked fifty years ago.

The facts speak for themselves: In 2000 the Federal Office of Statistics recorded some 420,000 second homes and holiday homes (in official use, “temporarily occupied residences”), of which some 57 percent were second homes and 43 percent holiday homes*. This means that almost one Swiss home in nine is only used temporarily. Since 1980 the number of second homes and holiday homes has virtually doubled, and now exceeds 450,000.

Every day 11 hectares of Switzerland’s cultural land is developed. Over the past two decades this has amounted to 32,700 hectares: equivalent to the area of the canton of Schaffhausen. In other words, one square meter of our land is built on every second. Per day this is the equivalent of a small farm, and per year to more than the surface area of Lake Brienz. “One square meter per second: that is the major deficiency of the Swiss zoning system, and a de facto infringement of Article 75 of the federal constitution,” claims the Swiss Foundation for Practical Environmental Protection.

More and more second homes

The highest concentration of holiday homes in Switzerland is in the regions of St. Moritz, Lenzerheide, Flims and Laax, Arosa, Verbier and Goms in the canton of Valais, and in the Ticino. The second home boom is particularly marked in one of the most beautiful parts of our country, the Upper Engadine, where year after year around 400 holiday apartments are built: twice as many as the number of first homes for resi-

dents of the region. Sixty percent of all apartments in villages in the Upper Engadine between Sils and S-chanf are only temporarily occupied holiday homes. In Silvaplana the proportion is 80 percent and in Madulain as much as 82 percent.

Madulain, the smallest of the eleven communes in Upper Engadine, typifies what has been happening throughout the region for some years. More and more second homes are springing up in this small romantic location between La Punt and Zuoz. Nowadays the Engadine village boasts only 180 inhabitants but 253 second homes/apartments. The holiday homes, built in the style of old Engadine houses with “Sgraffiti” facades and rhaeto romanish proverbs, are occupied on average only 75 days a year. Recently Madulain lost its only inn, and with it the village’s only hotel. “Closed for good”, says the notice on the doors of the “Stüva Colani”, once one of the best gourmet restaurants in the region.

Second homes are to be found not only in well-known tourist locations. According to a study conducted by Credit Suisse, more than half the total number of “temporarily occupied dwellings” are in cities or conurbations. These dwellings serve as urban “pied-à-terres” primarily in towns where their owners work or study. Taking five major cities into account – Zurich, Geneva, Basle, Berne and Lausanne – over 45,000 residential units are only used on a temporary basis. Over the past twenty years the canton of Aargau has seen a growth of 379 percent in second homes in rural suburban regions.

Who owns all these second homes in Switzerland? There are no statistical data available, but estimates exist: Ten years ago a panel of experts estimated that four fifths of these homes or apartments belong to Swiss. According to the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation, 83 percent of holiday homes or apartments are built and used by Swiss. According to the Credit Suisse study, 1,400 residential holiday units per year are purchased by foreigners.

The quotas defined by the government for property purchases by persons abroad reflect

the foreign demand for such residences. 97 percent of the current quota of 1,400 units per year was used up in 2004 – and the trend is growing. And over the past five years, the tourist cantons of Graubünden, Ticino, Valais and Vaud have fully used up their quota. “There is significant demand from abroad in these cantons,” claims the Federal Office for Spatial Development.

Different nationalities tend to opt for different regions, due to historical traditions as well as the distances involved and transportation infrastructure. A look at the land register records of transfers of ownership to foreign nationals between 1996 and 2004 reveals the following national preferences: Germans (33 percent of all transfers of ownership) and Italians (18 percent) mainly favour the cantons of Graubünden and Ticino, while the Dutch (10 percent) prefer the Valais and the Bernese Oberland, the British (8 percent) the Bernese Oberland and Vaud, and the French (8 percent) tend to go for ski regions in the Valais and Vaud.

Drawbacks of the construction boom

The drawbacks of the construction boom are enormous, especially in the most picturesque tourist regions: As more and more seldom-used second homes and holiday apartments are built, the landscape is increasingly being encroached on. Locations formerly known for their unique beauty are gradually being ruined. Shutters that remain closed for most of the year convey the impression of ghost towns. “Dead” villages are losing their charm and their tourist appeal. “A high concentration of second homes endangers the quality of the landscape and hence the assets on which Swiss tourism is founded,” says the Federal Office for Spatial Development.

Many second homes are now being built on land in outlying regions, leading to uncontrolled urban spread and increasing traffic congestion. The infrastructure of such communities is geared to cope with large numbers of people during peak season, with the resultant cost burden on public services and tax payers. Land prices and rents are climbing and becoming prohibitive for many local residents. In places like St. Moritz, Celerina and Silvaplana, strong demand for holiday homes has driven land prices up to as much as CHF 10,000 per square meter, and up to CHF 25,000 for luxury locations.

“Second homes are an inefficient form of accommodation because, due to large land requirement and low occupancy, the use of land per night is much larger than for hotels,” explains Thomas Bieger, Professor of Tourism at

* The terms “second home” and “holiday home” are interchangeable. People usually talk about holiday homes when referring to property in the 16 cantons designated as tourist cantons by the government.

the University of St. Gallen. As a rule, guests in holiday apartments have less money to spend than hotel guests, resulting in lower added value. In many places, second homes are in direct competition with hotels. Selling new apartments is a lucrative business – as is the conversion of hotels into holiday apartments. Three well-known hotels in Locarno, on Lake Maggiore, are currently being converted to holiday residences.

Naturally the booming market in second homes also has some winners, such as the construction industry and related sectors, property brokers and holiday home agents. New accommodation capacity is being created, thereby increasing the volume of room occupancy. Communities are benefiting from tax revenue (from ownership transfers and capital gains tax).

The sparse occupancy rate of new second homes has now raised alarm among landscape conservation and spatial planning authorities. “The number of second homes being constructed now far outweighs any form of social, ecological or economic sustainability”, says Raimund Rodewald, Head of the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation. “An inexorable increase in second homes endangers our landscape and architectural heritage, accelerates uncontrolled development and contravenes the constitutional provision for moderate use of land,” says Heidi Haag of the Swiss Planning Association. “A high volume of second homes endangers the quality of the landscape, which is the major asset of Swiss tourism. Large numbers of seldom-occupied residences are changing the face of locations and the quality of settlements. This has a negative impact on tourism” (Federal Office for Spatial Development).

Surprise in Upper Engadine

In a referendum last summer, the citizens of the Upper Engadine recognised the seriousness of the situation and took the bull by the horns. People in this attractive alpine valley are well aware how scarce land is becoming in their home territory: 95 percent of designated construction zones in core community regions has already been developed, and 84 percent in other residential areas. Current land development reserves will be exhausted in only five years’ time. Three in five apartments in the Upper Engadine are seldom occupied holiday

apartments, and in Celerina, Silvaplana and Madulain as many as three in four. Everywhere there are visible signs that second homes are damaging the local hotel industry. The same applies to St. Moritz, where long-established hotels such as the Belvedere and the Post-hotel have now been converted to luxury residences.

mayors of all these communities as well as from commercial and business associations. “The tide has turned,” commented the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation.

For Romedi Arquint, the driving force behind the initiative committee, the outcome was “sensational”. He calls the initiative a “citizens’ movement prompted by desperation”. Accord-



Construction land reserves in the Upper Engadine will be exhausted within five years

A few Engadine communities have already responded to this situation by introducing zoning and tax measures in a bid to limit the construction of second homes and sustain the local hotel industry. In addition, most Upper Engadine communities impose restrictions on the purchase of property by foreigners, and some (such as Sils, S-Chanf and Bever) have reduced the quota to zero. In a move that has become the stuff of legends, the community of Sils slapped a conservation order on the Upper Engadine lakelands in 1972, to preserve the picturesque lakes of Sils and Silvaplana for posterity.

Despite these community measures, the population of Upper Engadine applied the brakes in June 2005, when almost 72 percent of the citizens voted in favour of an initiative to restrict the number of second homes to a gross floor area of 12,000 square meters per year, or approximately 100 apartments. This is only a quarter of the current construction volume. The initiative calls for the regionally coordinated regulation of second home construction on the basis of a reference plan with allotments for all eleven communities. The people’s initiative was approved despite opposition from the

ing to Arquint, the building boom has caused major unease among local residents due to the high cost of land, high rents and the destruction of the landscape. Thomas Nievergelt, mayor of Samedan and an opponent of the initiative, believes the result is “a clear directive by the people to apply the brakes on the building boom.”

But the path to implementing the people’s will is long and paved with difficulty. The regional reference plan must be incorporated in community construction by-laws and zoning plans. Yet community councils boast a strong lobby of construction company owners, architects, managers of small businesses, and accountants. At the beginning of the year, two of the eleven community councils rejected the draft regional reference plan with second-home allotments. If a single community rejects the reference plan, the initiative is dead in the water. Even as the consequences of the vote are disputed, the construction of Residenza Serletta – a major 61-apartment development in a top location – is already causing ripples.

The surprising outcome of the referendum in the Engadine has rekindled the discussion

about second home construction in Switzerland. "Now is the time to apply the Upper Engadine model to other regions which are suffocating from a surfeit of second homes," claims Raimund Rodewald of the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation.

Against selling off the homeland

The legal precepts are the Lex von Moos, Lex Celio, Lex Furgler, Lex Friedrich and for the moment the Lex Koller. Since the 1950s, new laws have been introduced at various intervals to govern the purchase of Swiss real estate and properties by persons abroad. Since 1961, persons living abroad have required a permit to purchase property in our country. The idea behind this is to keep Swiss land as far as possible in Swiss hands.

When parliament transposed the federal decree of 1961, which had been extended on several occasions, to an open-ended federal law (Lex Friedrich), the new 1984 law stated that: "The purpose of the law is to limit the purchase of real estate in Switzerland by persons abroad, in order to prevent the excessive foreign ownership of Swiss land." Persons living abroad and seeking to purchase an apartment or plot of land for economic purposes had to apply for a permit. A quota was imposed on holiday apartments, and the purchase of land for investment purposes was prohibited. Federal Councillor Rudolf Friedrich emphasised that only one fifth of all second homes was foreign-owned. "The overdevelopment of entire alpine regions cannot simply be laid at the door of foreigners."

The revised Lex Friedrich was a counterproposal by the Federal Council to the National Action people's initiative. Submitted in 1979, the initiative "against selling off the homeland", called in particular for an extensive ban on the purchase of second homes by foreigners. "With every plot of land that is transferred to foreign ownership, we are giving up a little piece of our sovereignty and homeland," said Valentin Oehen, at that time a National Councillor, and added: "The boom in holiday apartments and second homes is creating short-term employment, damaging the hotel sector and posing a threat to tourism." The outcome of the referendum of May 1984 was extremely close: The initiative was rejected by only 51.1 percent of voters.

Pressure to relax the rigid law began mounting in the 1990s, prompted primarily by concerns about the importance of Switzerland as a centre of business. Federal Councillor Arnold Koller wanted "our country to be open to foreign investors and enterprises". The revised federal law of 1994 provided for a controlled relaxation: Persons abroad require a permit

only if they wish to acquire property here as an investment, for commercial trading purposes, or as a holiday home. Persons residing in Switzerland or who have resided here for five years may acquire property without a permit. However, the purchase of holiday apartments remains subject to restrictions.

The change from the principle of nationality to the principle of residency had some unfortunate consequences. The remaining restrictions on purchasing property applied not only to foreigners living abroad, but also to Swiss nationals resident abroad. Nevertheless, anyone who had lived in Switzerland for more than five years could purchase property without a permit, and their heirs were entitled to inherit the property. The second generation of Swiss Abroad, who had lived here for less than five years, were treated as foreigners. "This turns Swiss Abroad into foreigners in their own country," said National Councillor Werner Vetterli at the time (see inset).

The outcome of the referendum of June 1995 was a "shock" as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* described it: 53.6 percent of voters rejected the proposal to relax the Lex Friedrich. Almost 60,000 Swiss Abroad helped to decide the outcome with their postal votes. German-speaking Switzerland voted against, while French-speaking cantons voted in favour. The Swiss Democratic party, the successor to the National Action party, won the referendum with their slogan "No to the selling off of the home country".

Abolition of the Lex Koller?

Despite the referendum defeat of 1995, the Federal Council and parliament took further steps towards liberalisation (relaxation of provisions governing holiday apartments, lifting of restrictions for EU and EFTA citizens). Last October the Federal Council decided to abolish the Lex Koller (as the federal law was now called) and partially amend the zoning law of 1979. It submitted both proposals for consultation to interested parties, who must state their positions by the end of February.

The Lex Koller is the only mechanism by means of which the government can exert an influence on the second home market. Why does the government want to do away with this instrument? According to the Federal Department of Justice and Police, the federal law on the acquisition of property by persons abroad is no longer required. "With the exception of a few communities, the danger of excessive foreign ownership of Swiss land no longer exists." As of now, persons abroad can also purchase construction land and properties exclusively as an investment, which will trigger important economic impulses.

According to the responsible department, the number of second homes and holiday homes "is currently very high in certain tourist regions", and an uncontrolled rise in such numbers contravenes the constitutional prohibition on the appropriate use of land. The Federal Council is therefore calling for a partial revision of the zoning law, so that cantons and communities can exercise reasonable control over the construction of second homes. Cantons will be obliged to designate in their reference plans the communities and regions where zoning measures are required. The Lex Koller would only be lifted once cantons and communities complete these steps.

Which zoning and other measures could be implemented by cantons and communities? Cantonal reference plans could, for instance, stipulate that regions and communities where second homes account for more than 30 percent of residences restrict the area designated as construction land for second homes, or define a maximum annual number of construction permits for second homes. Fiscal measures such as the introduction of a tax on second homes or higher property tax on second homes are also conceivable.

Opposition and demands

The Federal Council's planned abolition of the Lex Koller has attracted the attention of zoning authorities, landscape conservationists and tourist organisations. They all agree on one point: If this law is abolished and the purchase of property by persons abroad is allowed to proceed unchecked, demand for second homes will rise significantly. The general attitude is therefore: Yes to the abolition of the Lex Koller, but with effective substitute measures.

"Abolition of the Lex Koller will greatly exacerbate the problem," explains the Federal Office for Spatial Planning. Demand will increase in cantons and communities already much sought after by foreigners." The limitations on foreign ownership will be lifted. In the opinion of Pierre-Alain Rumley, Head of the Federal Office, the zoning law reform will "tangibly exacerbate the situation": Cantons must designate problem areas in their reference plans and define measures to ensure a "balance between first homes (for the local population) and second homes". And the government is entitled to reject inadequate reference plans.

The Swiss Planning Association points to the high proportion of second homes in many tourist communities. Given a marked imbalance between first homes and second homes, "there is clearly a need to act". Our beautiful landscapes and our tourist assets are in danger. Director Lukas Bühlmann explains: "If the Lex Koller is

abolished, we need substitute zoning measures.” But every location must find its own practical solution. It is important “that the government defines clear minimum requirements on the content of cantonal reference plans”. If this is not done, “the reference plans must be returned to the cantons for revision.”

The Swiss Working Group for Alpine Regions supports the abolition of the Lex Koller “unconditionally”. The law governs only the purchase of second homes by foreigners, and second homes are also an issue in urban areas. Director Thomas Egger is in favour of “spatially differentiated zoning measures”. The spectrum of measures for cantons and communities is “very broad” and ranges from quotas to taxes on second homes. The Working Group is concerned about “very low occupancy of a large housing stock”, and believes that more frequent use of second homes is essential.

“If the Federal Council abolished the Lex Koller without introducing effective supporting measures, it would be doing the affected regions a disservice, because demand would rocket,” says Raimund Rodewald, Head of the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation. Rodewald believes the Lex Koller should only be abolished if the government and cantons set up a quota system for second homes.

“The Federal Council’s proposal largely passes the buck to the cantons. And that clearly will not do.” The Federal Office for Spatial Planning and the Federal Council “have for too long approved reference plans that they should have rejected.” The best solution would be a “federal competence to rule on second home quotas.”

For the Swiss Tourist Board, abolishing the Lex Koller would bring about the necessary

opening of Switzerland. Foreigners would no longer be discriminated against. But Director Judith Renner-Bach is concerned that demand could rise sharply in popular holiday resorts, and is in favour of supporting measures at the cantonal and community level: Zoning measures such as quotas for second-home construction permits and tax measures such as higher charges for community infrastructures, or tax incentives to encourage the renting out of holiday homes. The Tourist Board views the low

liest. The best-case scenario is for the revised zoning law to come into force in 2007. This would enable abolition of the Lex Koller by 2010 at the earliest. Provided, of course, there is no referendum on the horizon...

“We will launch a referendum” says the President of the Swiss Democrats even now. And who is aiming to be in the vanguard of the campaign against abolition of the Lex Koller? None other than former National Councillor and leader of National Action, Valentin Oehen. He



Empty dwellings have already ruined the appearance of local landscapes

occupancy of these homes of “less than 15 percent at present” as a real problem. “Warm beds rather than cold beds” and a good balance between hotel and holiday home accommodation could promote tourism in individual locations.

What happens next with the controversial proposal to lift the Lex Koller and amend the zoning law? The consultation process in parliament will be held this year and next at the ear-

was the victor in the 1995 referendum. “I will give my all in a bid to rescue the last means of protecting our land.”

DOCUMENTATION: Abolition of the Lex Koller, reform of the zoning law
www.postreg.admin.ch/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen/artikel/20051102/02394/index.html?lang=de
 Second homes and vacation homes in Switzerland, Economic Research Credit Suisse 2005
www.credit-suisse.com/research

THE INTERESTS OF SWISS ABROAD

■ What are the options open to Swiss citizens resident abroad seeking to purchase property in their home country? Some will remember the federal referendum of 1995: The proposed revision of the so-called Lex Friedrich on the purchase of Swiss property by persons abroad would have resulted in Swiss living abroad being treated the

same way as foreigners. This change from the principle of nationality to the principle of residency would have obliged Swiss citizens who had not resided in Switzerland for at least five years to apply for permission to purchase property. Since the revised Lex Friedrich was rejected in the referendum of 25 June 1995, Swiss citizens resident

abroad are still entitled to acquire second homes and holiday homes without restrictions, as confirmed by Pascal Roth of the Credit Suisse Economic Research Department.

■ Due to supporting measures, Swiss citizens resident abroad, like Swiss citizens resident in Switzerland and foreigners, may be subject to restrictions on the

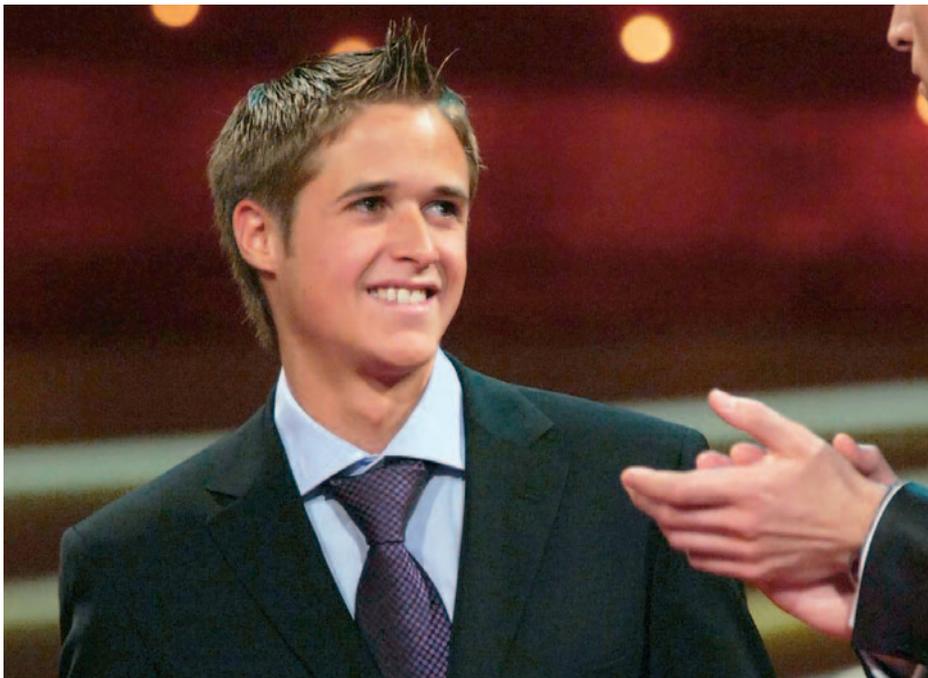
acquisition of second homes in certain regions. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad will ensure that the legitimate interests of Swiss citizens resident abroad are taken into account.

Tom Lüthi: Golden bike

Speed addict and world motorcycling champion in the 125 ccm series with four Grand Prix victories: Thomas Lüthi was voted 2005 Sportsman of the Year by the Swiss public.

A portrait of a world-class racer who is still under 20.

By Alain Wey.



Tom Lüthi rapidly rose to become the public's favourite

TOM LÜTHI: THE FACTS

■ Vital statistics: Thomas Lüthi was born in Oberdiessbach/BE on 6 September, 1986 and lives with his family in Linden (situated between Berne and Thun). Height 1.71 m, weight 54 kg.

■ Comments on Grand Prix of Valencia. "That was the longest race of my life. The last five rounds seemed like they'd never end. I was a lot more nervous before the Grand Prix in Turkey. In Va-

lencia I stayed relatively cool and that seems to have made the difference."

■ Plans for the future. 125ccm in 2006 and 250ccm starting in 2007.

After keeping a cool head in a hot race, Thomas Lüthi of Berne was crowned 125cc World Motorcycle Champion at the Valencia circuit on November 6, 2005. At the tender age of nineteen, Lüthi earned the title in his third season: a season devoted entirely to international competitions. The popularity of this new racing star among the Swiss public has even exceeded the expectations of sports reporters, who had assumed that Roger Federer would be named Sportsman of the Year for the third time. In the end, however, it was Tom Lüthi who went home with 46% of the public's vote and the "Swiss Sports Awards" trophy. He has literally taken the fast track to join the world's elite.

Tom Lüthi's first Grand Prix victory in Le Mans last May was child's play, as he remained in the lead throughout the entire race. This

brilliant achievement was repeated in three further victories last season in Brünn (Czech Republic), Sepang (Malaysia) and on Phillip Island (Australia). As a member of the Honda stable, Lüthi is following in the footsteps of Jacques Cornu, the last Swiss motorcyclist to win the Grand Prix. Cornu won the title for the 250ccm class in Belgium in 1989. The last Swiss motorcyclist to win the 125ccm class Grand Prix was Bruno Kneubühler in Sweden in 1983. As world champion, this native of Berne will now go down in history with two other Swiss racers: Stefan Dörflinger, four-time world champion in the 50 and 80ccm classes for four consecutive years from 1982 to 1985, and Luigi Taveri, who won the 125ccm world championship title three times between 1982 and 1985. Even a sensational fall like the one he suffered at the Grand Prix of Japan, when he sustained

a foot injury, was not enough to break his iron will. The head-to-head race with his archrival, Mika Kallio of Finland, ended in a 3-point lead for Tom Lüthi that decided the outcome of the world championship. The Scandinavian is still hoping to come out on top in 2006... except then Tom Lüthi's bike will no longer bear the number 12, but instead the magic number 1.

"Little Tom," son of a farmer, mounted his first pocket bike at the tender age of 8. He started competing in pocket bike races in 1997 and, riding a 40ccm bike in the Kids category, won the title in both 1999 and 2000. He continued to gain experience by competing in the ADAC Junior Cup in Germany in 2001 where he came in sixth in the overall ratings. In the spring of 2002 the young man from the Emmental joined the Czech Republic's Elit Racing Team headed by Daniel Epp of Basle. He won three victories at the International German Championship (IDM) and, in July 2002, made his Grand Prix debut at the age of 15. Since then, Switzerland's youngest GP motorcyclist of all times – often compared to a purring cheetah – has been on the fast track to success. His first time on the winners' podium was June 2003 in Barcelona, where he ended the world championship season in 15th place for the 125ccm class. The year that followed, however, was one full of bitter disappointments and lessons learned the hard way. He plummeted to 25th place in the overall rankings. At the time he admitted "the best time to learn how to fight is when you're down." And this bad patch was undoubtedly essential for his great talent to shine through in 2005. He is a true champion who, like all heroes, had to cross a valley floor in order to reach the summit.

"You've proven that success is possible even if you're unable to practice your sport competitively in your home country," said Samuel Schmid, Swiss President in 2005 and Minister for Sport. The Federal Council also congratulated Tom Lüthi on the tactical intelligence he displayed in Valencia, when he decided to play it safe and crossed the finish line in ninth place. On his return from Spain, Tom Lüthi received an effusive welcome, and the festivities surrounding the presentation of the "Swiss Sports Awards" were proof positive that he had conquered the hearts of the Swiss. Not even twenty years old, and already world champion: his fighting spirit and confidence in his own abilities make him a popular role model for young Swiss, showing them that they should believe in their dreams and seek ways to make them come true!

www.thomasluethi.ch

Swissmint – or the fine art of coining

Some four billion Swiss coins worth a total of CHF 2.5 billion are currently in circulation in Switzerland. And every year the Swissmint in Berne strikes 32 million new coins. A visit to the Swiss money factory. By Heinz Eckert

Despite the repeated claims by techno-enthusiasts that coinage is in decline since fewer and fewer transactions are paid for in cash, hard cash is part and parcel of everyday life and there is still a major need for coins. Plastic cards and electronic payment transactions notwithstanding, the Swissmint in Berne is not likely to go out of business in the near future.

Swissmint, which until 1998 was called the Federal Mint and is housed in a national heritage factory building in Berne's Kirchenfeld district, is a modern manufacturing outfit which operates as an autonomous unit within the Federal Finance Administration. With a workforce of 18, Swissmint is responsible for providing Switzerland with coinage (via the Swiss National Bank), in denominations from 1 cent to five francs.

While all Swissmint minting tools are crafted by highly skilled specialists, the planchets are provided by foreign suppliers.

Every year, 130 tons of new coins leave Swissmint, neatly packed and destined for the Swiss National Bank. Ultra-modern machines produce 600 coins a minute. The image and

value (heads and tails) are pressed into the coins at a force of 200 tons.

Naturally, Swissmint staff or visitors to the factory cannot simply help themselves to new coins from the pallets and are not permitted to take souvenirs away with them. Even surplus production is strictly monitored. All coins are electronically and mechanically checked and counted by a highly sophisticated system before leaving the pressing machines. A strict record is also kept of all visitors to the mint.

As well as coins for everyday cash transactions, Swissmint also produces commemorative coins that are much sought after by collectors. Every year since 1974 the Confederation has issued special coins commemorating historical events, places of interest, monuments, achievements or distinguished personalities. The commemorative coins are minted in silver, gold or bimetal and are designed by well-known Swiss artists and graphic designers.

Every commemorative coin originates with an artist's sketch. Based on this sketch, a plaster model with a diameter of twenty centimetres is made. From the silicon negative of this

plaster model, a resin model is then cast. The resin model is clamped in a reducing machine where a sensor registers the relief of the model and reduces it to a precise coin-sized metal version. This process takes up to 36 hours to reproduce all the minutiae of the model. An engraver applies the finishing touches by hand, meticulously perfecting the contours and fillet work. The reduction is then hardened and used as a template for the hardened, negative minting die.

The revenue from stamping and selling these special coins goes towards supporting cultural projects in Switzerland. But as Kurt Rohrer, managing director of Swissmint, explains, coin collectors are growing older. So in future, there are plans to launch targeted image campaigns to encourage an interest in coin collecting among the younger population. Rohrer is convinced that there is a huge potential for customers, particularly those abroad. After all, what better souvenir could you bring back from Switzerland than a perfectly minted coin in precious metal, featuring a well-known Swiss tourist attraction?

SPECIAL 2006 COINS

■ Commemorative coins, designed by well-known Swiss artists and minted every year, continue to enjoy great popularity. All commemorative coins have a legal denominational value and are produced as a limited edition. The government uses the proceeds from the sale of these

coins to finance cultural projects in Switzerland.

■ Three new special coins went on sale in January 2006:

To complete the "Swiss mountain" series, Graubünden graphic artist Stephan Bundi designed the 10 franc bimetal coin "Piz Bernina".

The 20 franc silver coin commemorating 100 years of the post bus was designed by Zurich graphic artist Raphael Schenker.

And Rudolf Mirer, a well-known Graubünden artist and former Swiss Guard, was asked to design the 50 franc gold coin commemorating the 500th anni-

versary of the Papal Swiss Guard in the Vatican.

The entire 2006 series, containing denominations from 1 cent to 5 francs as well as the special "Piz Bernina" coin, is available as a set.



“Swiss Guards receive comprehensive weaponry training”

Since 1 August 1998, 40-year-old Colonel Elmar Th. Mäder from Eastern Switzerland has commanded the 110-strong Swiss Guard in Rome. How is the mandate to provide personal protection for the pontiff and permanent surveillance of his Vatican residence carried out in this age of terrorism and state-of-the-art weaponry? Peter Amstutz asked the Guard Commander.



Guard Commander Col. Elmar Th. Mäder

Col. Mäder, the core task of the Swiss Guard is to “constantly defend the safety of the sacred person of the Holy Father and his residence.” How is this actually organised round-the-clock with 110 men?

Col. Elmar Th. Mäder: We are not responsible for all the security, only for the entrances

to the Vatican, the palace and the Holy Father. The Vatican also deploys the gendarmerie and, outside the Vatican, the state police. 110 men are sufficient for our tasks in the inner sanctum of the Vatican. Our bodyguards are specially trained.

What requirements must a Guard meet from the commander’s standpoint?

In addition to the standard requirements – height, age, Catholic, Swiss citizenship, completion of recruit training etc. – the most important criteria are an ability to adapt, physical and mental strength, and a flexible approach to leisure time.

How are Guards trained to perform their personal protection duties?

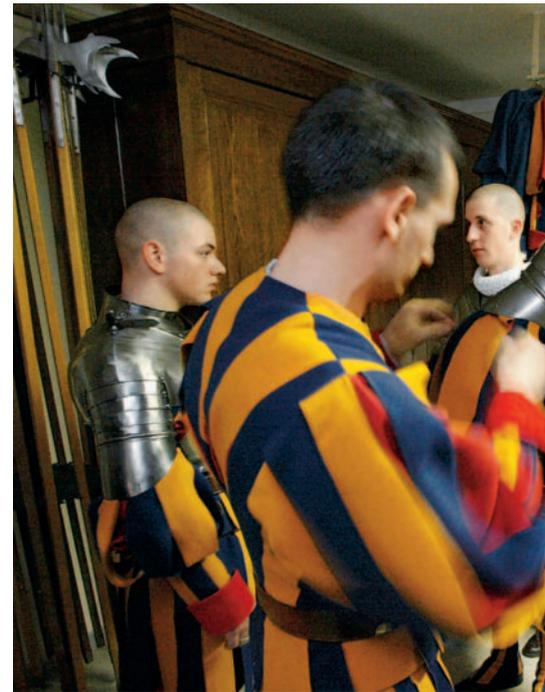
Only longer-serving Guards from corporal level upwards perform personal protection duties. Here, the important criteria are training and experience in the Pope’s environment, and training with the Federal Council’s personal security unit, with annual refresher courses.

Could the Guard’s security mandate not be better served by deploying some of its members in civilian clothes?

This is already happening. Uniformed Guards are deployed in surveillance duties at sentry posts, on ceremonial duty and on regu-

lar duty. Our uniform serves two functions: as a form of representation and to convey authority. Sector chiefs and bodyguards operate only in civilian clothes. During audiences, for example, roughly half of the Guards stand watch in civilian clothes.

Is the “balberdier” image of the Guard during ceremonial duties a deliberate understatement, in order to divert attention from the protection corps’ true capabilities?

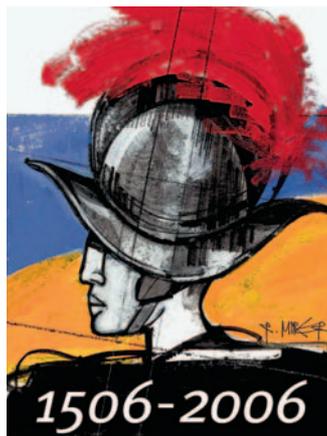


Swiss Guard in the armoury, preparing for the oath-taking ceremony

No. Ceremonial duties are part of our remit. But on average they account for only about eight percent of our total time. Eighty percent of our duties are surveillance. The halberd is used as a decorative weapon only on ceremonial duty. On the other hand, we don’t want to show off our strengths: that would be inappro-

500 YEARS OF LOYAL SERVICE TO THE POPE

■ The “smallest army in the world”, the Guardia Svizzera Pontificia or Swiss Guard, is celebrating its 500th anniversary. On 21 June 1505, Pope Julius II asked the Confederation of Cantons to send “200 hired infantrymen from your country”. The reason? “At God’s behest we intend to avail ourselves of their services to guard our palace.” The first 150 men marched 850 kilometres to Rome under the command of Kaspar von Silenen of Uri.



On 6 May, 1727, 147 Guards died in the service of Pope Clements VII. The 189 men of the Swiss Guard fought heroically alongside their commander Kasper Röst of Zurich during the Sack of Rome by 20,000 German, Spanish and Italian soldiers under Emperor Charles V. Every year, almost 300 young Swiss apply for the Guard, but only 25 to 35 recruits are required per year. The candidates must be Catholic Swiss aged be-

tween 19 and 30, with an unblemished record. They must have completed recruit training and be at least 1.74 metres tall, and prepared to serve for at least two years. They must follow the instructions on their commander’s information sheet: “Teeth must be in good condition. Bring along your military service booklet with authorisation to serve abroad, two pairs of solid braces for the uniforms, a shoe-cleaning kit for black uniform

priate in an ecclesiastical context. But that doesn't mean we are not a well-trained effective force.

The Guard has access to firearms. Do they also have the opportunity to become effective marksmen and take regular shooting practice?

All Guards receive comprehensive weaponry training. There are plenty of opportunities to train and these are regularly exploited. With regard to the infrastructure, we work with part-

mony. rity, and this training is regularly applied. The knowledge acquired in the courses is incorporated in our own courses for Guards. This form of training allows us to motivate Guards to serve additional tours of duty.

What personally prompted you, a lawyer and accountant, to take over command of the Swiss Guard?

Even when I was completing my studies I asked myself what I could do in a professional

ter left a deep impression on us both. During my stay I also got to know the Swiss Guard. A few years later a friend of ours who is a priest suggested that I could fulfill my vocation by applying as an officer in the Swiss Guard. It took four years of applications before I was permitted to join the Guard.

As a senior officer in the Guard, it is extremely satisfying to guide young people on the threshold of adulthood. At the age of 20 to 25 we are all impressionable. Whether I like it or



mony.



A halberdier swearing his oath in the Vatican reception hall.

ners but conduct our own training courses.

The Swiss Guard is a member of the Association of Swiss Security Service Providers. What does that mean?

It means we can offer professional training for a federal diploma in surveillance and secu-

capacity for the Church. The priesthood was also an option, but I had no vocation in that direction.

As a member of the Swiss Student Association I got to know my future wife on a pilgrimage to Rome, at a private mass followed by an audience with Pope John Paul II. This encoun-

not, I am the type of person who influences my troop. And I want to exert this influence in a targeted manner.

shoes and, if possible, an old set of bed linen." Guards are only permitted to marry when they reach the rank of corporal, are 25 years or older, and have served for three years.

■ On 6 May each year, the new Guards take their oath in the Damasus Courtyard of the Vatican, raising their right hand and placing their left hand on the flag of the Swiss Guard corps: "I swear I will faithfully, loyally and honourably serve the Su-

preme Pontiff and his legitimate successors, and also dedicate myself to them with all my strength, sacrificing if necessary also my life to defend them. I assume this same commitment with regard to the Sacred College of Cardinals whenever the See is vacant. Furthermore I promise to the Commanding Captain and my other superiors respect, fidelity and obedience. I swear to observe all that the honour of my status requires. I, Halberdier

[recruit's name], swear I will observe faithfully, loyally and honourably that which has now been read out to me. May God and his saints assist me."

■ The Swiss Guards experienced their biggest nightmare of recent times on 13 May 1981, when the Turk Mehmet Ali Ağca shot and severely wounded Pope John Paul II. At the time Alois Estermann, later 31st commander of the Guard, was on bodyguard duty and threw him-

self between his charge and the would-be assassin. On 4 May 1998, when Lance Corporal Cédric Tornay of the Valais shot Estermann and his Venezuelan wife ten hours after swearing his oath, and then killed himself, things looked bad for the Swiss Guard. The Vatican published an explanation that is disputed to this day, claiming that Tornay committed the murder in an act of revenge. PETER AMSTUTZ

Out with cantonal provincialism.

Parliament is aiming to crack down on federalism in the classroom and is harmonising the Swiss education system, in a move to standardise schooling from Grade 1 of elementary school through to university. If cantons cannot agree on common objectives, the government will have the final say. By René Lenzin

A “quiet revolution” is how Peter Bieri, CVP State Councillor for Zug, describes the new constitutional framework article on education passed by parliament during its winter session. The decision is revolutionary because it encroaches on cantonal sovereignty in educational affairs. For the first time, national policy will govern the educational system from Grade 1 of elementary school to graduation from university. And it gives the government the power to issue decrees if the cantons fail to implement the planned harmonisation measures voluntarily. The aim is for the government and cantons to agree on regulations governing defined areas of education. Parliament plans to harmonise the following areas:

- In addition to a standardised starting date to the school year, all children throughout Switzerland will begin their schooling at the same age, subject to the same schooling obligations, the same duration and the same objectives for individual school levels, as well as mutual recognition of school-leaving certificates.

- The government and cantons will create joint bodies for supervision of all universities. These organs will harmonise the study levels, transfer conditions and the recognition of degrees.

- Further education will now be enshrined in the federal constitution. In this area, the government will lay down principles and has the right to rule on measures to promote further education.

Virtually all cantons are in favour

This revolution is a “quiet” one because it was accomplished without any major public resonance and without opposition. The National Council approved the proposal by 176 votes to 3, and the Council of States by 44 to 1. The education commission of both councils had shared the preparatory work for this debate. The Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education was not only involved in drawing up the proposal, but expressly welcomed the move. 22 out of 26 cantons voted in favour of the wording of the new constitutional article.

Until very recently this broad consensus would have been unthinkable, since education was regarded as the holy cow of cantonal au-

sible” but did not exclude the possibility of parliament reconsidering the issue and assigning more far-reaching powers to the government: for instance, the ability to exert an influence on streamlining university curricula.

The people and parliament must vote

The new provisions must be put before voters and cantons as a compulsory referendum on an amendment to the constitution. They have a



Harmonised educational system: for the sake of parents and children

tonomy. Two reasons lie behind this sea change: Firstly, the solution takes federalism into consideration by allowing the cantons to retain their autonomy in the context of defined objectives. Secondly, it merely enshrines in the constitution a situation which has already evolved in practice. For instance, cantons are currently in the process of harmonising the organisation and curricula for compulsory schooling. And there is a growing realisation among universities that world-class research can only be financed if they collaborate and pool their resources.

The “politically feasible”

The new article on a framework educational system was prompted by a campaign launched by former SP National Councillor for Aargau Hans Zbinden. In an interview with the “Aargauer Zeitung” Zbinden expressed disappointment at the outcome of his initiative, adding that he had hoped for more extensive harmonisation based on wider governmental powers. However, parliament rebuffed the proposal out of consideration of what was politically feasible in realpolitik terms. FDP State Councillor for Glarus Fritz Schiesser described the proposal as an “expression of the currently fea-

good chance of clearing the referendum hurdle. As a result of increasing mobility, people are moving more often or no longer reside in the same canton in which they work. A majority of the population no longer have any sympathy for cantonal provincialism when it comes to education. *The referendum will be held this year on 21 May.*

The trickier part – implementation of the constitutional article by means of concrete measures – comes later. A current example demonstrates just how sensitive the issue is: After some tough wrangling, the cantons have agreed to provide instruction in the first foreign language from Grade 3, and a second foreign language from Grade 5. Both foreign languages must be a national language. But this compromise is already faltering since two cantons have opted out and are campaigning against the move in other people’s initiatives. If the constitutional article comes into force, the government will be obliged to dictate from above. This will trigger some heated debates in Berne as well as in the cantons. At the end of the parliamentary debate Anita Fetz, SP State Councillor for Basle, hit the nail on the head: “Only when it is actually implemented will we be able to see how good the proposal really is”.

“200 – that was beyond my wildest expectations”

The appeal made by national coach Köbi Kuhn, inviting young, talented Swiss footballers abroad to contact the Swiss Football Association (SFA), generated a huge response. Around 200 young footballers from all over the world, keen to play for a Swiss team, got in touch. Hansruedi Hasler, technical director of the SFA talks to “Swiss Review” and explains how the selection process is progressing. Interview by Heinz Eckert

Swiss Review: Has the search for talented footballers among young Swiss people abroad been worthwhile?

Hansruedi Hasler: In terms of numbers, the results have certainly been worth it. Around 200 young footballers from all over the world responded to the interview with national coach Köbi Kuhn in the issue before last of “Swiss Review”; we were particularly pleased to see that 20 girls were among those interested. It’s too early to say whether the campaign will prove worthwhile in terms of quality. But we are convinced that we will unearth a gem or two.

Did you expect such a huge response?

I was surprised at first to learn that there was such a large number of Swiss people abroad anyway, and that among the 600,000 in total there were almost 200,000 young people. This convinced me that there must be a few that were good at football. But to receive 200 responses was beyond my wildest expectations.

How do the applications divide up in terms of countries?

Roughly a quarter live in Europe, around 30 percent are from Latin America, a further quarter come from Africa, and the rest come from Asia, Australia, the USA, Canada and New Zealand. Virtually all of them are under

17 years old, with the youngest, whose father contacted us, only born in 2001!

Did you receive any other strange responses?

Many people definitely did not check what standard of football skills we were asking for. For example, one mother registered all her four children – two boys and two girls – and a couple of young Africans asked us to find a professional club in Europe for them.

Did the youngsters respond themselves, or did their parents do it?

Virtually all of them responded themselves, and practically all by e-mail. For this reason we are continuing the process by electronic means. We are now sending out an e-mail requesting further information from everyone. We are asking them all to complete a so-called ability survey with their current club coaches. We have posted this survey on the Internet. We will also ask the best ones to supply a video. And finally, the very best will be invited to a trial in Switzerland. We have already contacted four boys and one girl because they have played for under-17 teams in their countries of residence.

Do you have any sources abroad as well, whom you could use as “scouts”?

No, other football associations are better off than we are in this respect. We definitely ought

to build up a network of sources abroad. Maybe we will find some Swiss football experts, coaches or club officials among those living abroad who could work with us and keep a look-out for talent.

And then the gifted youngsters will be invited to Switzerland?

If we find any young talents that interest us, we will invite them to a one-week training camp in Switzerland, at the sports centre in Tenero, for example. There they will go through another selection process. The top ones will be offered the chance of taking a two-year course at one of the four training centres run by the Swiss Football Association, which combine school education and football. Anyone who applies will complete not only the training but also the eighth and ninth years of compulsory schooling and will have the opportunity to live with a host family. Their parents will bear virtually none of the costs.

Have any players for the senior national team completed this course?

No, the first graduates are currently only twenty years old. They are still playing in the under-21 team, though one of them already has a contract with Arsenal.

So, the Football Association is offering young footballers a chance of a lifetime?

Yes, absolutely. Anyone who is able to attend one of these courses will benefit enormously in every respect.

But before a talent from abroad can do so, he or she must complete the survey on the Internet.

Yes, and I hope that as many people as possible complete our ability survey on the Internet and take part in the second round of the selection process. The survey can be found at the following Web address:

WWW.FOOTBALL.CH, MENUE SFV, “FORMULARE”

HANSRUEDI HASLER



■ Hansruedi Hasler is 55 years old, married with two grown-up sons, and a Doctor of Educational Science. As a footballer, he played for SC Burgdorf (Premier League), Nordstern Basel (National League B) and FC Biel (National League A). As a coach, he was responsible for the Swiss under-16 and under-17 teams, and as a manager he was in charge of Grenchen und Biel at the second-highest level of the

game. In 1995, after working at the scientific institute of Magglingen Sports University, Hasler was appointed Technical Director of the Swiss Football Association (SFA). He introduced an element of professionalism into the Football Association’s approach to developing young Swiss talent. Whereas previously a single voluntary coach would have looked after youth development, today this work is han-

dled by a staff of ten full-time coaches working in the various training centres. Hasler’s concept is already paying off: a European title for the under-17 team, a European championship qualification for the under-19s and under-21s, and qualification for the FIFA World Youth Championship in Holland. In all its 110-year history, the Football Association has never before enjoyed such success.



Vote électronique: Progress report

“Vote électronique” refers to participation in elections and referenda by voting over the Internet, as well as the electronic signature of initiatives and referenda: in other words, e-voting or the exercising of political rights via electronic media. For several years a working group set up by the Federal Chancellery has been devoted to evaluating the feasibility of Vote électronique in Switzerland.

Background

In August 2000 the Federal Council asked the Federal Chancellery to examine the feasibility of electronic voting in Switzerland. Vote électronique (VE), the working group set up to perform this task, is responsible for analysing the opportunities and risks of VE, developing and evaluating initial solutions, and providing expert support in pilot trials to test this voting medium.

In a first report on VE, the Federal Council weighed up the opportunities and risks of this voting method. It also recommended that pilot trials be held to determine the feasibility of VE. Parliament approved these plans in the summer of 2002.

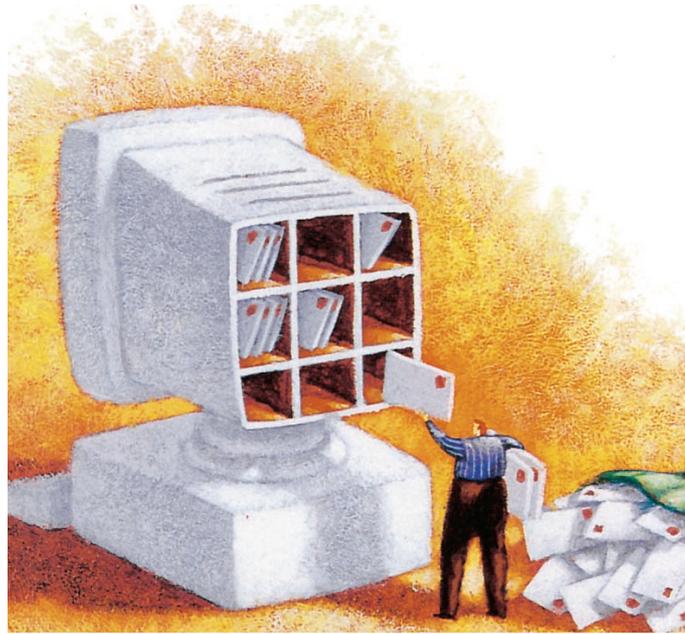
Also in 2002 the working group formulated the legal framework for these pilot trials. These regulations have been in force since 1 January 2003, and allow the Federal Council, with the approval of interested cantons, to hold e-voting pilot trials restricted to defined areas, dates and topics.

The Federal Council has signed agreements with three cantons (Geneva, Neuchâtel and Zurich) that lay down precise provisions governing such pilot projects. Consent by the Federal Council to pilot trials is subject to the provision that entitlement to vote is controlled and that voting secrecy and the registration of all votes is guaranteed. Furthermore, it must be possible

to exclude any misuse of the electronic voting procedure. Any system developed by the pilot cantons must be tested at least once on the occasion of a federal referendum. The pilot phase lasted until the end of 2005.

Pilot trials

The first pilot trial by the canton of Geneva in 2003 attracted major national and international media attention. The subject of the trial was a vote in the community of Anières. Following tests in other communities, VE was used on an experimental basis for two federal referenda in September 2004 (four communities) and November 2004 (eight communities). The outcome was a resounding success.



The pilot canton of Neuchâtel used VE for the federal referendum of 25 September 2005. Voters in the canton of Neuchâtel were also permitted to vote over the Internet for the federal referendum of 27 November 2005. Voting was accomplished without a hitch.

The canton of Zurich tested VE in a community referendum on 30 October 2005 in the town of Bülach. For the first time in Swiss history, voters were able to vote not only over the Internet but also by text message (SMS).

And for the federal referendum of 27 November 2005, the canton of Zurich also offered voters in three communities the choice of casting their vote online or from their mobile phone. These tests, too, proved problem-free.

Outlook

The working group plans to draw up a report on completion of the pilot phase in mid-2006. Based on this evaluation, the Federal Council and the Swiss Parliament will decide whether VE should be further pursued as an additional voting option. However, it could be many years until the relevant law is in place and put into practice.

Swiss at home and abroad will therefore need to be patient. There is no doubt that Swiss

of Swiss Abroad to be centralised in one location per canton (cantonal administration or capital city administration).

Given the way the electoral register for Swiss Abroad entitled to vote in Swiss cantons is organised at present, there are only seven cantons where VE could be introduced for Swiss Abroad: Lucerne, Basle City, Appenzell-Innerrhoden, St. Gallen, Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva. Only these cantons operate a more or less centralised electoral register for Swiss Abroad.

Since organisation of the electoral register is the responsibility of the individual cantons, Article 5 of the Federal Law on the Political Rights of Swiss Abroad needs to be revised so as to oblige the cantons to set up a central electoral register for Swiss Abroad. However, this can only be done if all cantons vote in favour of such a procedure. Cantonal centralisation of a Swiss Abroad electoral register is the only way to create the necessary basis for enabling the electronic participation of Swiss Abroad in referenda and elections. In addition, the 26 cantonal centres are in a better position to provide the requisite infrastructure than the 2800 or so Swiss communities, some of which have fewer than 100 residents.

In 2004 a proposal to reform the law accordingly, along with another proposal, the draft law on introduction of the general people's initiative, was submitted for consultation purposes to cantons, parties and interested associations. In 2005 the Federal Chancellery evaluated the consultation process. The findings indicate that not all cantons are in favour of plans to harmonise the electoral register for Swiss Abroad on a cantonal basis. Six cantons have reservations. The proposal is currently being revised by the Federal Chancellery and will be submitted to the Federal Council and parliament in 2006 – once more along with the federal law on introduction of the general people's initiative

Abroad would benefit most from the introduction of VE. Online voting would save a great deal of time, but from a technical standpoint Swiss Abroad voters are the most difficult to integrate into VE: they live all over the world and are entitled to vote in different communities around Switzerland.

Centralised electoral register required

If VE is to be made available to all Swiss Abroad voters, it is essential for the electoral register

and the evaluation report on pilot trials.

Summary

The prognosis that VE can only be introduced for Swiss Abroad by 2010 at the earliest remains valid. Reorganisation of the electoral register must not only be politically accepted, but also technically feasible. With our federalistic structures, all this – and political acceptance in particular – takes time!

You can find more information on the Vote électronique project at:

www.admin.ch/ch/d/egov/

Changes in the Swiss representation network

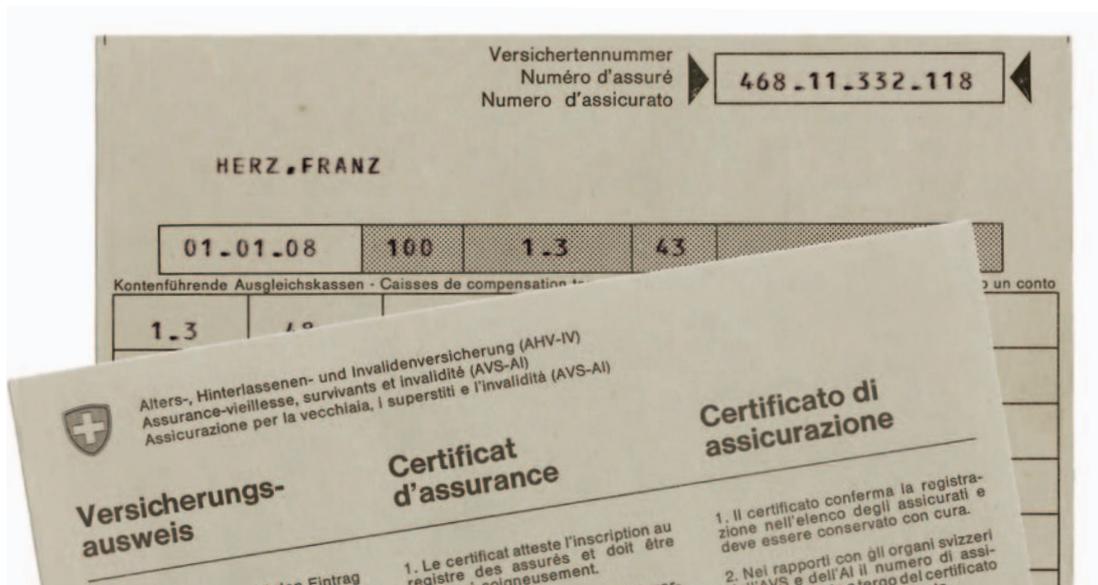
The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs has announced the following restructuring measures for various Swiss representations.

The Consulate General in Amsterdam will be changed to an honorary consulate. It was closed at the end of November 2005, since when the embassy in Den Haag has been responsible for official business.

The Consulate General in Houston will close on 30 June 2006. Official business will be transferred to the representations in Atlanta, Los Angeles and Chicago.

The Consulate in Las Palmas will also close on 30 June 2006, with official business being transferred to Madrid. Honorary consuls will be appointed both for Houston and Las Palmas.

The honorary consulate in Edinburgh will be changed to a professional Consulate General with effect from the beginning of 2006. At the same time, the Consulate General in Manchester will be changed to an honorary consulate by 30 June 2006. The embassy in London will now be responsible for offi-



cial business. The Consulate General in Melbourne is to be closed in October 2006, with official business being transferred to Sydney. On the same date the Consulate General in Dresden will be closed, with official business being transferred to Berlin. There are plans to appoint an honorary consul for Dresden.

In China, a third General Consulate in addition to those in Shanghai and Hong Kong is to be opened in Guangzhou (Canton) in the course of this year.

New AHV number

From 2008, the existing AHV (social security) number is to be replaced by a new number. While the existing system has proved its worth, it no longer meets all requirements.

Soon the current AHV numbering system will no longer be capable of assigning a number to every insured person. Furthermore, the current AHV numbers contain information which can be decoded. Every group of digits has a meaning. For instance, information about the date of birth (day, month and year), sex, surname initial group and nationality (Swiss or foreign national) can be deduced from the numbers. The current AHV number is also used outside the AHV field, and is often used for busi-

ness and private applications. In short: The existing AHV number system no longer complies with current regulations on data protection.

For this reason, from 2008 the existing 11-digit AHV number will be replaced by a 13-digit number which cannot reveal information on the insured persons. In future, the number will be used as a social security number by all federally regulated social insurances.

Insured persons do not need to take any action ahead of introduction of the new AHV number, as they will be notified by the AHV, IV or their employer. The compensation offices are the point of contact for insured persons. The point of contact for Swiss Abroad is the Swiss Compensation Office in Geneva.

Additional information:
www.bsv.admin.ch
www.ahv-iv.info, "NNSS – Neu AHV-Nummer"

PEOPLE'S INITIATIVES

The following people's initiatives are available for signature:

- "For a flexible retirement age" (until 21 December 2006)
- "Living Water (Renaturation Initiative)" (until 4 July 2006)
- "Associations' right of appeal: For an end to obstructionist policy – more growth for Switzerland!" (until 16 May 2006)

Signature forms for pending initiatives can be downloaded from www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html.

VOTING:

Federal Referendum of 21 May 2006

- Federal decision of 16 December 2005 on the amendment of the constitutional articles governing education

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swissworld.org
Your Gateway to Switzerland

Jo Siffert: A legend on the big screen.

He came from humble beginnings but went on to become one of the greatest racing drivers of all times. Jo Siffert of Fribourg lived life in the fast lane at 300 kph. A documentary traces his flamboyant but tragic fate. In search of a legendary hero. By Alain Wey

1963 brought his first Grand Prix victory in Syracuse. Jo Siffert was one of the few drivers to enter races as an independent. He put together his own team which he called the “Jo Siffert Racing Team” and which was honoured by the Grand Prix Drivers Association that same year. His rivals were works drivers, yet he still managed to beat the then world champion Jim Clark twice (Enna, 1964/1965). In 1964 he



Joe Siffert 1968: “A charming gentleman and a charmer”

A heroic epic à la “Rocky.” A whirlwind life on racetracks all over the world. A virtuoso of motor racing with an iron will. Racing driver Jo Siffert of Fribourg embodied all this and much, much more. Motor racing was his life and his death. 34 years after his death, the documentary “Jo Siffert, Live Fast – Die Young” celebrates Siffert’s life to a sound track of 60s-style pop music. In the minds of his fans, however, this Formula 1 driver will keep on racing for all eternity.

He was a courageous go-getter who did everything in his power to make his childhood dream of becoming a Formula 1 driver come true. Jo Siffert succeeded with a combination of bravura and humility. His popularity and success was reaching new heights when fate put a sudden stop to his unprecedented rise to the world’s racing elite. In 1971, at the Brands Hatch circuit in England, 36-year-old Jo Siffert suffered a fatal accident during a F1 race in honour of world champion Jackie Stewart. All of Switzerland grieved for him and more than fifty thousand people attended his funeral in Fribourg. The legend became a myth.

His humble beginnings meant that he had to work hard for everything from very early on in

life. Joseph Siffert, nicknamed Seppi, was born in Fribourg in 1936. His rise to fame was just as steep as the funicular railway that connects the upper and lower portions of his home town. “Even when he was very young, all he ever wanted to be was a racing driver,” recalls his sister Adélaïde. “But what really made up his mind was the Grand Prix of Berne in Bremgarten that his father took him to.” Born into a poor family, as a child he sometimes collected rags or cartridge cases before beginning an apprenticeship in a car body shop. His goal was clear, but he needed the financial wherewithal to reach it. Seppi combed Western Switzerland for accident-damaged cars that he then repaired and sold. He started out by entering motorcycle races and then sidecar races in Europe (with him in the sidecar). News of his courage and desire to win got around. His hard work paid off and, at the age of 24, he was able to buy a Formula Junior and moved from one European racetrack to the next along with two mechanics, Michel Piller and Jean-Pierre Oberson. A vagabond who slept and ate in the truck along with his mechanics, he soon won his first title. Then he shifted up to the next class: Formula 1.

began entering long-distance races in sports car prototypes, the discipline he was destined to dominate. Fortune continued to smile on Seppi in the Formula 1 circuit. Rob Walker, an English patron, took him into his racing stall. Walker described his protégé as “one of the greatest racing drivers of our time, behind the wheel of both prototypes and single-seaters.” “He was a sportsman through and through, and never lost his temper unless his car was acting up despite his good driving,” recalls Walker. “If that happened, he would sit down in the box like an enraged lion. But just half an hour later, he was back to his normal good mood and all you would hear was the occasional ‘merde alors!’”

The Siffert epic unfolded during a transitional phase in motor sports. Jacques Deschanaux, biographer and friend to Siffert, points out that it was “in the process of changing from a gentleman’s sport to a professional sport” and adds, “There were four to five deaths every year.” Seppi just couldn’t sit still, so he entered Formula 1 races, Formula 2 races and prototype races (Porsche). He was a racing driver body and soul, and would not even take a break after returning to Fribourg, where he

had his businesses, his car repair garage and a display hall for Porsche and Alfa Romeo.

What kind of driver was he? “A virtuoso always on the offensive,” is how Jacques Deschenaux described him. “Every time he sat behind the wheel of a good racing car he notched up success after success! He was the greatest long-distance racing driver in history when it came to prototypes, a distinction he possibly

Siffert’s charisma. He was one of a kind. He could cast a spell over people. He was a real, approachable hero.” Motor races have thrilled Men Lareida ever since he was a child. At the age of 37 he was a fan of the other Swiss Formula 1 great, Clay Regazzoni of Ticino, but had heard his grandmother talk about the legendary Jo Siffert although he himself had never seen him. “It’s really a very American story: About

a man who started out with nothing and then, on his own, managed to make his dream come true. Even though the ending is tragic, I think we need these kind of stories. Having the courage to take risks is a good thing. Whatever you take on, you have to do it with zest and zeal!” When talking to relatives of Jo Siffert, Men Lareida noticed something that he considers very rare: He never once heard a negative word!



Joe Siffert with friends after a race in 1967, and (below) on the film poster.

shared with Jacky Ickx. His last year in Formula 1 was going really well, with a victory in Austria and second place at the Grand Prix in the USA only a few days before his accident. People said he was a world-class driver. He gave you the impression that, with a good car and a good team, he could have become world champion someday!”

Jo Siffert, to whom his friend Jean Tinguely dedicated a fountain at Schützenmatte in Fribourg, was a successful person, a leader surrounded by friends who helped him reach his goal. So great was his fame that the director of the movie “Le Mans” (starring Steve McQueen) asked him to supply the vehicles to ensure the success of the project. Siffert was a true national hero. “A charming gentleman and a charmer,” in Rob Walker’s opinion. Jo Siffert can justifiably be described as a legend. Just like a hero from Greek mythology, he accomplished great deeds before the gods decided to intervene on October 24, 1971.

“He could be compared to James Dean,” thinks Men Lareida, director of the movie “Jo Siffert, Live Fast – Die Young.” “But I don’t think there’s ever been another athlete with Jo

SIFFERT’S TRACK RECORD

- 1957-59: Motorcycle racing (1959 Swiss champion in the 350ccm class) and sidecar races
- 1960: Debut in Formula Junior
- 1961: (unofficial) European Formula Junior champion
- 1962: Formula 1 debut, 96 GP races driven until 1971, two victories (1968 at Brands Hatch, England, and 1971 in Austria). Three victories out-

side of the championships (Syracuse 1963, Enna 1964 and 1965), best season: 1971, fourth place in the driver championships

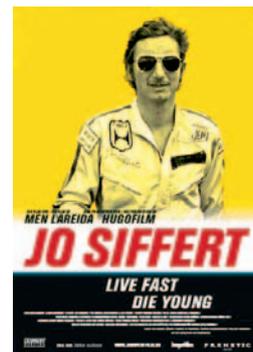
- 1968/71: Official Porsche driver for sports car prototypes. Porsche won the International Manufacturers Championship from 1969 to 1971. 14 world championship victories: 24-hour race in Daytona 1968, 500-mile race

at Brands Hatch 1968/69, 1000 km race on the Nuremberg Ring 1968/69, Austrian GP 1968/69/70, 1000 km race in Monza 1969, 1000 km race in Spa 1969/70, 6-hour race in Watkins Glen 1969, Targa Florio 1970, 1000 km race in Buenos Aires 1971.

JO SIFFERT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- “Jo Siffert – Live Fast, Die Young” was the only Swiss film shown at the 2005 Locarno Film Festival. Using wonderful original records, it portrays the epic story of this legendary racing driver. Witnesses of his unstoppable rise reminisce on his life: mechanics Jean-Pierre Oberson

and Heini Mader, his family (sister, wives, children) and his friends including his biographer Jacques Deschenaux. The 60s-style pop music in this film was specially composed by a friend of director Men Lareida. The split-screen technique used to divide the picture into multiple win-



downs adds a strong dynamic feel to the production and is reminiscent of hit films of the 1960s.



84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. A congress with a cultural influence

Between 18 and 20 August, the Congress Centre Basle will host the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. Since Basle enjoys a long tradition of close links between culture and business, the OSA has chosen the following enduring theme for this year's congress: Partnership between business and culture.

"Look, then talk" is the motto for this year's congress which is largely dedicated to the discovery of those locations to which Basle owes its international fame: its museums and its industry. The two have always been inextricably linked on the banks of the Rhine. The major pharmaceutical companies, thanks to which Basle's industry is thriving, soon recognised that their prestige also depended on support of the numerous institutions in this stronghold of European culture. The promotion of culture led to the establishment of such renowned institutions we know today as the Museum of Art, the Tinguely Museum, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum and the Schaulager, where artists can exhibit their works in buildings designed by star architects like Herzog & De Meuron or Renzo Piano. What was the patrons' aim, though? Spurred on by their weighty shareholders, these companies could think of no better

way of creating a profile for themselves at home and on the international stage. But did they achieve their goal? And how did the cultural realm benefit from this backing? Congress organisers and delegates, in particular, will be able to answer these questions by forming their own opinions through the various activities. This way Swiss Abroad can also gain some idea of the important position held by the Swiss business sector – after all, Switzerland boasts the highest number of multinationals in relation to its size. Can the cultural milieu therefore consider itself fortunate?

A rich and enriching programme

The congress kicks off on Friday 18 August, with the meeting of the Council for the Swiss Abroad in the town hall between 9 am and 12 pm. The session will continue after lunch until 5 pm. The evening will then be dedicated to the official opening of the congress in the Congress Centre, with the performance of the musical tale "Mountains Don't Move". Saturday morning will see the congress plenary session, and in the afternoon a choice of locations such as the Schaulager, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum, the Museum of Culture, the Museum of Art and the Museum of Antiquities is on the agenda. The evening will be reserved entirely for the banquet at the Messe Basle banqueting hall. In keeping with the theme of the congress,

Sunday will be given over to museum visits. So delegates can look forward to a variety of opportunities to experience for themselves the symbiotic relationship between business and culture in Basle.

For further information on the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad go to www.aso.ch.

Sports Camps

There are still spaces available in both forthcoming Youth Service camps. Register now:

Winter Sports Week in Scuol in the Engadine, from 25 March – 1 April 2006. A springtime arrangement for Swiss Abroad aged 18 or older.

Easter Camp in Fiesch, Valais, from 15 – 22 April 2006. A unique camp with loads of sports options. Indoor and outdoor activities in the famous Aletsch region, plus a great group of participants assembled from around the world: a multicultural Easter celebration that's sure to offer bags of entertainment and fun. From age 14. As always, information and details on youth arrangements are available from: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad Youth Services, Alpenstr. 26 3000 Berne 6
Tel.: ++41 (0)31 356 61 00
Fax: ++41 (0)31 356 61 01
youth@aso.ch
www.aso.ch

Portraits of the Fifth Switzerland

Throughout the year, the Saturday edition of the daily newspaper *Le Temps* will be devoting a full page to 52 portraits of Swiss Abroad. An opportunity to find out more about the extraordinary personalities that make up the Fifth Switzerland. The OSA has contributed to this project by providing *Le Temps* journalists with useful background information for their articles. You can find the portraits (in French and English) at:

<http://www.letemps.ch/monde>

In conjunction with its collaboration with the OSA on this project, *Le Temps* is offering a free 3-month subscription to its online edition under the following link:

<http://www.letemps.ch/cadeau/revuesuisse>

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad Summer Camps 2006

We are offering young Swiss children living abroad, aged 8 to 14, the chance to attend our two-week holiday camps between 1 July and 26 August 2006.

There are still a few spaces available for our summer camps. Each camp welcomes 30 to 50 children every year from all over the world.

The parental contribution of CHF 800 covers all costs of the stay.

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad would like to give all Swiss children abroad the chance to benefit from this opportunity. For this reason we have set up a fund for contribution reductions. An application form can be requested when registering.

Detailed information on the individual holiday camps and the registration form can be found at www.aso.ch (heading FYSA). Applications will be processed in order of receipt. Please register your child as early as possible. If you have any questions, please contact us at:

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26
PO Box, CH-3000 Berne 6
Tel: +41 31 356 61 16
Fax: +41 31 356 61 01
E-mail: sjas@aso.ch

84TH CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD, BASLE

Please send me documentation on the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad (Please complete in block capitals)

Surname:	First name:
No./street:	Postcode/Town/city:
Country:	Tel:
Fax:	E-mail:

Please return completed coupons, to reach us no later than 30 May 2006, to: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Congress, Alpenstrasse 26, Postfach, CH-3000 Berne 6, e-mail: congress@aso.ch. For organisational reasons, the deadlines have been shortened this year. As a result, the deadline for registration for the congress of the Swiss Abroad is the end of June. The registration form is included with the congress documentation which you can order using the above coupon. You can also order congress documentation by e-mailing congress@aso.ch. Please remember to include your full postal address.

Wind of change for the blue giant

Should Swisscom be fully privatised? That was the proposal put forward by Finance Minister Hans-Rudolf Merz at the end of November. As majority shareholder of the Swiss telecoms operator, the Swiss government owns 66% of the capital and could therefore use the CHF 17 billion from the sale of this stake to reduce the federal debt. These plans caused a furor in the left-wing press and parties of similar slant. The Universal Service Obligation plays an important role in the minds of the Swiss. The Federal Council has now laid down clear guidelines for the "blue giant". Whereas shortly before Swisscom had been in takeover talks with Irish telco Eircom, the Federal Council has now forbidden the company to acquire stakes in foreign telecoms companies. The maximum new debt for corporate expansion (Internet, TV services) has been set at CHF 5 billion for 2006 to 2009. The Federal Council also proposes revising the relevant law to permit the government stake to be reduced to below 50%. Among the variants being considered is the proposal by Hans-Rudolf Merz for a blocking minority of 33%. The government hopes that parliament will be able to pass the revised law in the summer of 2006. Jens Alder stood down as Swisscom CEO on 20 January.

2006 World Cup

Following its impressive qualification for football's World Cup, the Swiss National Team's opponents for the final stage have now been decided. Once more the Swiss squad is up against France: the two national teams will play against each other in Stuttgart on 13 June. On 19 June the team meets Togo in Dortmund: a total unknown. And on 23 June Köbi Kuhn's team battle it out in Hanover against South Korea, who made it to the semi-finals in the last championship. The national squad have not exactly

drawn an ideal group (G), but they have every chance of making it to the last sixteen. If they get through, they will meet a Group H team, which could be either Spain or Ukraine. At the 2005 Swiss Sports Awards the national team was voted Team of the Year and Köbi Kuhn Trainer of the Year.

Fear of poverty

In the latest Credit Suisse worry barometer, unemployment still heads the list of what is troubling the Swiss (71% of respondents). Worries about unemployment have ranked uppermost on the list for four straight years, followed by health, pensions and the issue of asylum seekers. This year, however, poverty made it to the top five for the first time, ending fifth on the list (29% as opposed to 22% in 2004). The results are less flattering for politicians and businessmen. 48% of Swiss voters are of the opinion that politicians let them down, and 46% believe that captains of industry are no better.

Gold for the AHV

While the cantons have already received CHF 14 billion of the National Bank's surplus gold reserves, the National Council has also arrived at a consensus on the allocation of the CHF 7 billion earmarked for the government, voting unanimously to transfer this amount to the AHV compensation fund. The National Council's solution is an indirect counterproposal to the initiative launched by the SP party, which wants to assign the proceeds from the Swiss National Bank to the AHV and in all probability will put this to the public vote in a referendum on 21 May. The solution would only be implemented if this initiative is rejected.

Comeback for Martina Hingis

The former Number One in the world tennis rankings has fought her way back to the tennis circuit through a combination of iron will and tough training. Having



recovered from the knee injuries that brought her career to a premature end in 2002, the 25-year-old from St. Gallen announced: "I didn't want to have to accuse myself of not having tried to return to tennis while there was still a chance." In January Martina Hingis celebrated her comeback in Australia.

New banknotes in the offing

The subject of the new banknotes scheduled to go into circulation in 2010 is "Cosmopolitan Switzerland". Zurich graphic artist Manuel Krebs emerged as the controversial winner of the competition for ideas launched by the Swiss National Bank (SNB). The result is perplexing, since the jury voted in favour of banknotes which show a skull, an embryo, a skinless human body and the AIDS virus. The press expressed astonishment and in many cases also outrage. In spring the SNB is expected to select a winner from sketches by artists who took part in the competition.

Second presidency

Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger takes over from Samuel Schmid, who was Federal President for 2005. This is the second time round for the Minister for Environment, Transport, Energy and Communication, who first held the premier's post in 2001. His aim is to work closely with all the sectors of the population, including young people. In his address he said "I want to encourage young people in particular to help shape our society in cultural, social and politi-

cal terms. Direct democracy requires that everyone takes a part in public affairs."

Sportswoman of the Year

And the winner is: Simone Niggli-Luder, six-time world orienteering champion. As in 2003, she was head and shoulders above her fellow nominees for the "Swiss Sports Awards". The 27-year-old biologist from Berne won the gold medal in three separate disciplines at the World Orienteering Championships in Aichi, Japan, as well as in the relay, where she made up more than two minutes' lag and clinched the victory for the Swiss team. In 2005 she also won the overall World Cup. Since 2001, therefore, Simone Niggli-Luder has been setting the pace in women's orienteering. World champion motor cyclist Tom Lüthi was voted Sportsman of the Year.

buureradio.ch

The online radio buureradio.ch was launched on 28 December 2005. Due to extensive media attention and the interest shown by the target group, the network became overloaded only a few minutes into the broadcast, with the result that additional capacity had to be freed up. According to editor-in-chief Toni Brunner, this initial success has continued unabated. Day after day, up to 20,000 listeners tune in and the 400 or more entries in the visitor book to date indicate that buureradio.ch has already found fans in North and South America, Asia, Australia and South Africa.

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