

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 16 (1989)  
**Heft:** 4

**Rubrik:** Foreigners writing about our country : viewed from the outside

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 31.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**



# Viewed from the outside

*In this edition of "Forum", five authors from five different countries have committed to paper their thoughts about Switzerland. Their contributions all differ greatly from each other – both in terms of the content and the form they have used. Moreover, each of the pieces was written under completely different circumstances.*

*The selection of the authors was also not made by chance. It is obviously of great interest for us to know what a journalist – and therefore an "opinion-maker" – from the third world thinks about our country. Or what two editors-in-chief, one from an EEC country and the other from a neutral country keen to join the EEC, feel about Switzerland's attitude to the process of European integration. We are doubtless all curious to know as well just how Switzerland is depicted by a writer living in the country where approximately one quarter of all the Swiss living abroad have made their home. Also featured is a view of Switzerland as seen through the eyes of a foreign editor from an Eastern European country which is currently undergoing a far-reaching reform process.*

*The articles were written by the following authors: The Brazilian Gideon Rosa has made a name for himself in his home country as both a television and newspaper journalist. In addition to other positions, he works for "A Tarde", "Jornal de Bahia" and the television station "TV Manchete". The West German Jürgen Engert is editor-in-chief of the "Sender Freies Berlin", while the Austrian Peter M. Lingens used to work as an editor-in-chief, a publisher and a columnist of "Profil" in Vienna. Lionel Richard, a Frenchman, is an art critic and writer living and working in Paris. József Martin, who hails from Hungary, travelled around Switzerland at the invitation of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung". He is the foreign editor of the Budapest daily paper "Magyar Nemzet".* JM

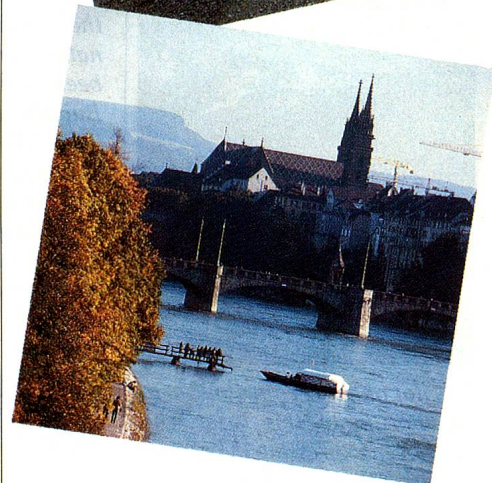
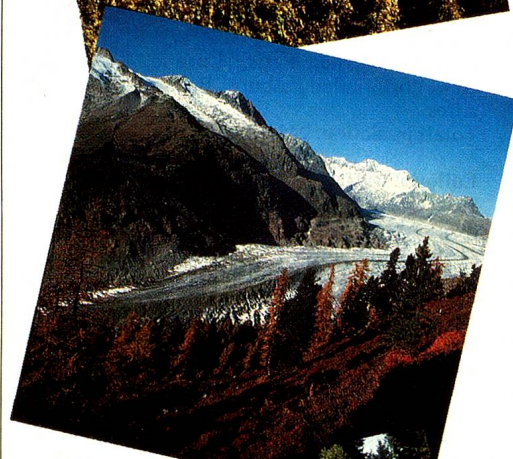
## Switzerland – as seen from Paris

Chlichés are tough but resilient. Many channels of communication in our society stabilise and perpetuate them: picture postcards, tourist publicity, articles in illustrated magazines. Thus in every corner of the world, Switzerland is seen in its most elementary and intrinsic form, in its geographical character, and in a clear-cut representation as the most famous "land of mountains". It seems almost impossible to imagine a symbolic visualisation of Switzerland without a backdrop of snow-clad peaks. The American writer Gertrude Stein had been so thoroughly inculcated with this false image so frequently seen in the USA that when at last she discovered with her own eyes what Helvetic scenery was really like, she was very disappointed not to find titanic mountains everywhere she went!

A land of soaring mountains must of course be ideal for winter sports: and that is, I believe, the idea of Switzerland held by most French men and women. And this involves of course a whole range of other misconceptions: the towns of Switzerland are seen as of negligible interest, there is no such thing as a Swiss proletariat, the mentality of the

Swiss population is essentially that of peasants. High mountain pastures, hazardous mountaineering, dairy farming, greenery and snow, chocolate...! The novels of Ramuz (such as *Aline, La grande peur dans la montagne*, and *Derborence*) – the only Swiss author known to some extent in France and appreciated as genuinely Swiss! – reinforce this image. And even more important, the daily newspapers in France hardly devote any space to what is happening in the Helvetic Confederation, except for references to international meetings held in Geneva or the occasional financial scandal: these seem to be the only links between Switzerland and the rest of the world. Apart from these happenings, nothing seems to come to pass here.

Switzerland is however a country of very varying aspects. This diversity is even its most outstanding feature, from the administrative and cultural standpoint. The myth of the noble dwellers in the high mountains, which appears to have grown up in the course of the 19th century has hardly any validity at all for more than a quarter of the population. Is this evidence of a lack of cu-



*Well-known scenes from Switzerland: idyllic countryside, majestic mountains, folkloristic farming. (From top: Lavaux on the Lake of Geneva, the Aletsch region in the Valais, bringing the cattle down from the Alps near Appenzell, Basle with the Middle Bridge over the Rhine. (Photos: SNT0)*





riosity on the part of the French public? An absence of interest among those who would otherwise be documenting the situation in the media? These possible reasons cannot be rejected out of hand. Knowledge about what is going on in other countries is not a strong focus of French concern. For that matter, too, statistics have shown that the average French man or woman is not very interested in foreign travel, is weak in geography and not very familiar with foreign languages.

One must ask oneself whether Switzerland – apart from its touristic installations and its bank safes and vaults – has anything to offer other nations. The country has four official languages and, in effect, four separate cultures. And the most talented representatives of three of these cultures turn to, or at all events keep a close watch on, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and Italy – to such an extent that for many of them, the Swiss “identity” is little more than a flight of fancy, to be stressed in publicity brochures, as an alibi for the alleged creative vitality of the Helvetic Confederation! Seen from France, the nuances of cultural pluralism as maintained by the Swiss Federal State are not easily perceptible. The only Swiss book publishers who are reasonably well in evidence in French bookshops are l’Age d’Homme, l’Aire and Zoé. Others are more or less unknown. The result of this is that for the unsophisticated browser, it is difficult to see any difference between Swiss writers such as Jean-Luc Benoziglio, Jacques Chessex, Claude Delarue, Yves Laplace and Robert Pinget on the one

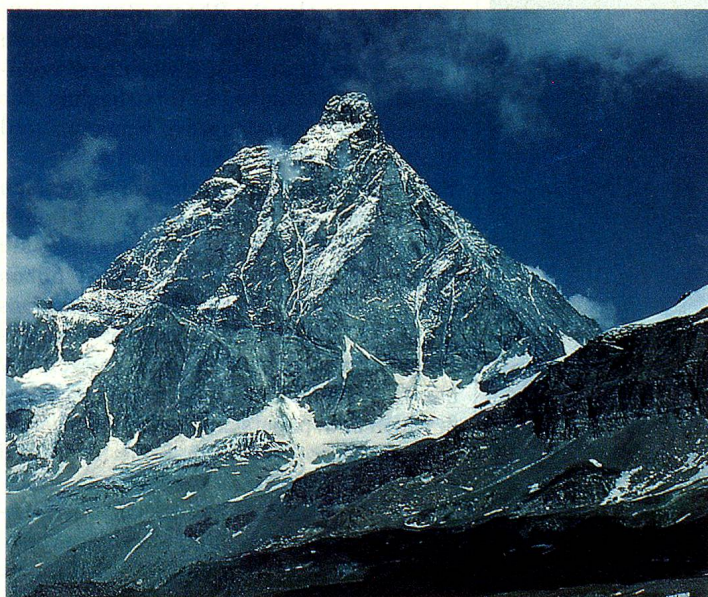
hand and such French authors as Yves Berger, Michel Butor or Bernard Noël on the other: no wonder, they have the same publishers, they are all Parisians. Is this situation very different for writers from the German-speaking regions of Switzerland? Not at all: Dürrenmatt, Frisch, Hohl or Robert Walser are not seen as translated into French from a specifically Swiss original, but from the German language, just like Böll or Martin Walser. Who can see any difference? And how about Swiss authoress Alice Ceresa? Her writings are translated from Italian, just like those of Elsa Morante – and for that matter, she herself lives in Rome.

Switzerland’s cultural pluralism thus seems rather artificial when viewed from outside. In reality, Switzerland gives one the impression of not being really capable of shouldering the responsibility of taking on such a function. There is a marked lack of communication and interpretation between the cultures, as the infrastructures needed for so doing are inadequate. As far as literature is concerned, the most effective link between the cultures is provided by the official Pro Helvetia Foundation, but it can only impart a stimulus by means of subsidies. Logically, the ideal solution would be for works by a Swiss author to be published simultaneously, or as nearly as possible at the same time, in the official languages of the Confederation. In his capacity as a publisher, Bertil Galland attempted to plan his programme in this direction – but without success. At present, even such “classical” authors in the Swiss literary field as Charles-

Albert Cingria and Ramuz are scarcely available in German to readers in the German-speaking region, and conversely, the same applies as regards works by Robert Walser, Ludwig Hohl and Adrien Turel, which have for a long time past not been available in French.

An example of this astonishing “compartmentalisation” occurred in 1986 at the Lausanne exhibition devoted to “French-speaking Switzerland between the two wars”. A tremendously interesting expo, and a sumptuously produced catalogue! But one wondered – and still wonders – why the organisers did not take advantage of the opportunity to cover the entire Confederation? For something that became clear at this exhibition was that in all sectors, the French-speaking part of Switzerland has stood aloof from many modern trends, from cubism and constructivism in painting to surrealism in literature. Was this attitude the same as that taken in the German-speaking part of Switzerland? The question deserves to be studied. All the more so as there were “gangways” linking Zurich and Berne to Geneva and Lausanne: the “Allianz” group counted among its members not only the “German-Swiss” Max Bill, Richard Lohse and Max von Moos, but also Camille Graeser, citizen of Carouge.

In November 1968, on the basis of an initiative taken by a group of students, a meeting in Fribourg was arranged for a hundred or so writers, critics and publishers from all over Switzerland. In connection with this gathering, Henri Giordan expressed his as-



*The visual angle is decisive, as one can see everything from at least two sides... The Matterhorn viewed from Italy (left) and from Switzerland. (Photos: Rolf A. Stähli)*





tonishment in the "Journal de Genève" in the following words: "I must confess that I was quite alarmed to learn that a certain leading critic from the French-speaking region had not only never before met so-and-so, an important author writing in German, but had never even read any of his works!". And I fear that today, one could see a comment expressed in exactly the same terms. At all events, that is the impression one received at the 1986 expo in Lausanne.

The magazine "Passages/Passagen" published in French and German by the Pro Helvetia Foundation is evidently endeavouring to change this image of a conventional and conformist Switzerland, and ever since its first issue in 1985, it has been trying to convince its readers that on the contrary, Switzerland is a country in which the cultural scene is both dynamic and polemical. It seems that this is also a realisation which the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris wants to promote. The road ahead appears likely to be a long and difficult one. For not only is it impossible to uproot clichés overnight – over the years, several of the positive aspects of the current image of Switzerland as seen in France have become debased, even "shopworn". Switzerland's reputation for cleanliness and orderliness has been somewhat tarnished by the alarming spread of AIDS – there must be a flaw somewhere. And as far as the country's perfect "direct democracy" is concerned, a system which generations of students have seen as a model, financial swindles and shady business transactions "à la Chaumet" have come to make it seem somewhat like an over-ripe fruit.

Many Swiss have chosen to live in Paris – the long list includes such names as Cendrars, Giacometti and Le Corbusier, so there must be a good reason for their doing so. And they all give the same reason: had they stayed on in Switzerland, they would have been stifled and even paralysed in their vitality and élan. Of course, not all artists and writers have left, or wish to leave. But those who have done so reinforce an image which embodies many other aspects – the image of a country bent on emasculation. Thus Claude Delarue did not hesitate to write in the "Journal de Genève" in 1983 that Switzerland frightened him, instilled a "metaphysical consternation" in him, and that the apparent spotlessness and sterility characteristic of the make-believe image of the country inspired in his sub-consciousness "a gnawing terror, a feeling of disquiet and uneasiness, of unbearable exhaustion."

Lionel Richard, Paris

## Impressions of a Wealthy Country

For me, Zurich is the loveliest city in all Europe. Really and truly! I like to see the young couples – well-dressed and seemingly without a care in the world – strolling in fine weather along the lakeside promenade. I like the atmosphere of Switzerland's financial metropolis – even though the "locals" complain about the chaotic traffic conditions in the inner city. And the fact that after a long evening spent with friends, one can walk home at 2 o'clock in the morning without being molested is something that I appreciate. Anyone who has ever tried to do that in Rio de Janeiro will understand me! Swiss towns seem very peaceful, compared with London, Paris or Rome, not only because of the proverbial cleanliness. What lots of people take for granted in Switzerland – for instance, the clean water spouting from numerous fountains in the streets – seems a momentous discovery to visitors like me from the "Third World".

But when you walk along the streets of Swiss towns, you seldom see cheerful faces. The expressions of the passers-by seem to bear witness to sorrow and loneliness. And in this wealthy country, it is not only the older inhabitants who seem lonely, but younger people too. Even in serious high-class newspapers you will find column after column of advertisements which for us Bra-

zilians are very strange: contact ads which invite one to meet the man or woman of one's dreams. Pornographic magazines are prominently displayed in many kiosks and news-stands – but they do not appear to cause any embarrassment to passers-by or to the persons "browsing" through them.

There is evidently a widespread liking all over Switzerland for domestic pets such as cats and dogs – preferably those with a pedigree! The luxury treatment accorded to these darlings shocks anyone coming from a Third World country. The supermarkets have departments full of special offers for pet foods. And for these foods, the TV screens are filled with publicity, in which hyper-intelligent doggies and immaculate pussy-cats speak nicely of the brands that they like best. And that's not all: on every street, in every square, the nation's pets have to be taken for a stroll, with collars and in cold weather, warm jackets, but sometimes there has to be a halt, after which the owner has to collect the steaming excrement and deposit it in the special containers provided by the municipality in many towns! Every morning, afternoon and evening you will see hordes of dog-owners being taken for a stroll by their tail-wagging pooches, who are usually well-behaved and neither bark nor bite.

It is extraordinary to observe how many Swiss are good linguists. Everyone seems to speak English, and lots of people can converse in French, Italian and Spanish. In addition various regional dialects are spoken, as is also the Rhaeto-Romanic language of the Grisons, called Romansch (which although one of Switzerland's official national languages is struggling for survival, as it is in danger of being replaced by the Swiss-German dialect).

The situation as regards the use of German is rather strange. In the French and Italian speaking regions, the written languages are largely identical with the everyday spoken idiom. But in the German-language regions the dialect ("Schwyzerdütsch"), which is the principal *spoken* language in everyday use, is very different from the High German in which newspapers and books are *printed*. This does not mean that Germans and Austrians cannot make themselves understood by Swiss from the officially German-language part of the country, and vice versa. If necessary, the German-Swiss will make the effort to converse with Teutonic neighbours in High German (whereby they may sometimes detect a note of amused con-



*Punctuality of the Swiss railways: an amazing phenomenon for many a foreign tourist! (Photo: Keystone)*





descension on the part of those neighbours). But whereas most Swiss can understand High German, the Germans and Austrians can seldom make any headway with the numerous Swiss dialects.

Although the Germans may occasionally look with envy at the strength of the Swiss franc, even at home, that strength is for us Brazilians something quite incredible and inconceivable. Soon after my arrival in Zurich, I found that an average Swiss can have the tank of his motor-car filled for the equivalent of not more than three hours' wages. In Brazil the officially established minimum wage is equivalent to about Sfr. 65.-. A Brazilian automobile enthusiast would have to pay about half of that sum for the luxury of saying "fill her up"! No wonder that he is speechless. Now if we bear in mind that a member of the middle class earns about two or three times the official minimum wage (if he is lucky!), it is crystal clear that the Swiss are far better off. And the Swiss do not have to cope with a dreadful rate of inflation. In the half-year that I spent in Switzerland, only one item of foodstuffs increased significantly in price: milk. It became five centimes per litre dearer! "Scandalous" was the comment heard almost everywhere. How would a Swiss react if the litre costing Sfr. 1.75 today were to cost Sfr. 2.- in a couple of days time?

A propos money: there seems to be plenty of it in Switzerland. How much exactly, nobody knows. One reason is that although the Swiss have money, they are reluctant to display it. The majority of the inhabitants believe that the present stability and prosperity of Switzerland stem from their tireless dedication to hard work. They tend to forget the many thousands of millions of dollars that flow in from other countries - especially from countries of the Third World!

From time to time, students and other youngsters protest against what they see as an inadequate policy with regard to the environment, or as an unduly restrictive policy for treatment of refugees, whereby persons who have lived in the country for almost twenty years can be expelled. As a sign of their discontent, some young people recently burnt their passports in public: at first sight, a courageous demonstration, although of merely symbolic character - as whenever they felt the urge to go abroad, they would only have to apply for a new passport, without needing to fear reprisals!

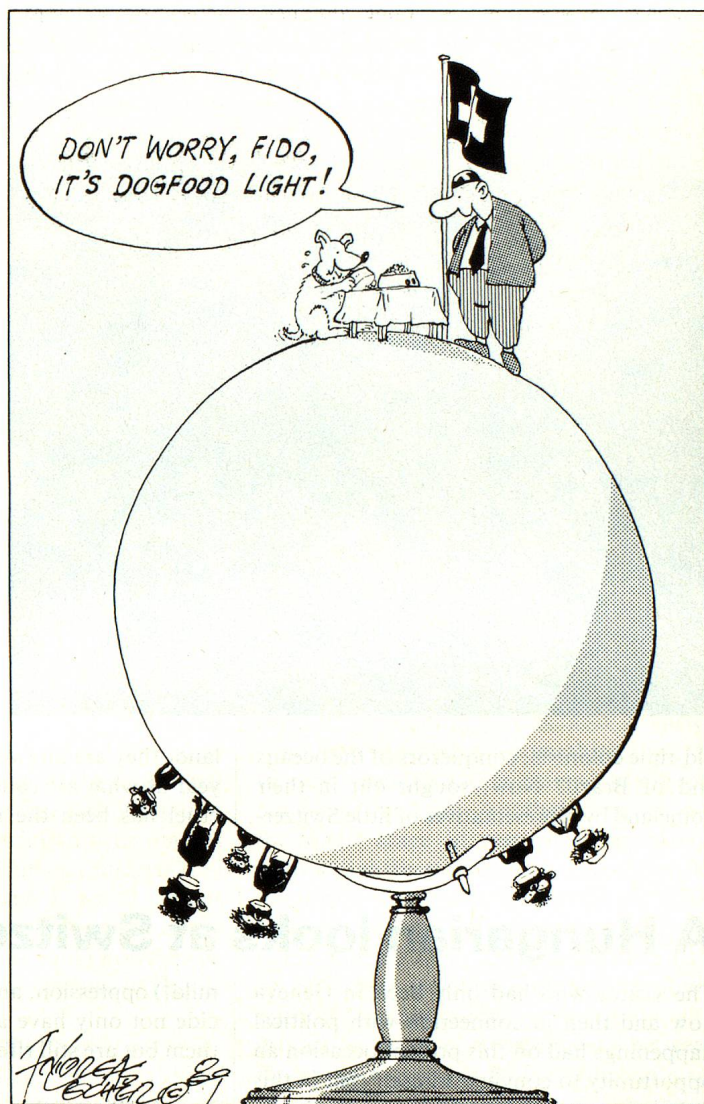
In spite of having a high standard of living and no financial problems to jeopardise their existence, most Swiss seem to be dissatisfied. One must try to understand them. It rains a lot, the skies are overcast and the

winters cold. That is when the Swiss begin to dream of the tropics. They become melancholy and take refuge in their offices, where they seem to throw themselves into their work with incredible enthusiasm - though on closer examination, this élan is nothing but an expression of self-imposed stress! In other words, as so many Swiss have no essential problems in their lives, they create their own challenges in their daily work. One can see this in plenty of retail stores: even if these are empty, the sales staff have strained expressions on their faces, as though the stressful Christmas rush has started!

Those who wish to escape from this at times trying atmosphere go on journeys. The younger generation in particular enjoy working every year only for a few months, in order to fly off with the cash they have saved from their wages. They go often to Third World countries where they live like princes and then come back to tranquil

Switzerland to report on how shocked they have been by the "extreme poverty" they have seen. They do not appear to feel in any way responsible for such poverty: they often put the blame on the native populations for being too lazy to work, for having too many children and for preferring fiestas to regular "gainful employment".

You are mistaken if you think that these globe-trotting youngsters earn their money by working hard at low-grade work. Not at all - they leave the humble and dirty jobs to the foreigners - collecting the garbage or washing up the dishes, and so on. In the post-war "boom" years, the Swiss first of all brought in Italians, and soon afterwards Spaniards. Nowadays Portuguese "guest workers" are very well-liked: I heard a comment that "they are worth their weight in gold, they don't kick over the traces". For us Brazilians it comes as a shock to stand face to face with descendants of our former oppressors. Whatever happened to those







*For a Brazilian visitor, Gideon Rosa, it is Europe's loveliest city: Zurich. (Photo Swissair)*

old-time colonists, conquerors of the oceans and of Brazil? Now, sought out in their homeland by representatives of little Switzer-

land, they are allowed in for nine months a year as what are called "saisonniers" (how cruel has been the vengeance of the Bra-

zilian gods!). Regardless of whether they sweep the streets or mend the roads or clean up in the restaurants, the Portuguese are always liked. One eloquent detail in the process of contemporary "slavery" in Switzerland is that the guest worker is always supervised by a Swiss superior.

One type of public service which functions admirably is that of transport. The Intercity trains and the municipal trams operate with amazing punctuality. If the railway timetable says 7.03, the train leaves at three minutes after seven. I don't exaggerate! And the trams which at frequent intervals – usually of from 5 to 12 minutes – swiftly transport tens of thousands of passengers across big towns every day! Even so, one reads and hears complaints about the service: greater frequency, more seats are needed, and if bus or tram is one minute late, this provokes cross looks at one's watch. Punctuality is still an essential feature of life in Switzerland (even if a big slice of its former near-monopoly of the watch industry has been taken by the Japanese competition).

*Gideon Rosa, Salvador de Bahia*

## A Hungarian looks at Switzerland

The visitor who had only been in Geneva now and then in connection with political happenings had on this present occasion an opportunity to convince himself that in this little country – little by Hungarian standards, with an area only half of that of Hungary – the citizens feel entirely at home and behave accordingly as the proud owners of the country. Among the saddest features of life in Eastern Europe today is the fact that the governmental systems which are called "Socialism" have weakened and sometimes even killed outright any feelings on the part of the population that they "own" their country, and also that these systems have in a few decades done immeasurable damage to traditional values, large and small, which have been sacrificed and allowed to decay. And a visitor from Hungary is puzzled to understand the basis for such feelings of the Swiss who are at home in a society of such varieties, where there is no uniformity in respect of language or religion.

The co-existence of several national languages in Switzerland is a startling experience for the visitor from the Eastern region of Central Europe, who knows all too well that in his country linguistic and ethnic discrimination, many forms of mild (or less

mild!) oppression, and overt or hidden genocide not only have a long tradition behind them but are still rife today.

### A nation better than its repute

From the standpoint of a visitor from Eastern Europe, the articles in provincial Swiss newspapers claiming to provide evidence of "everyday racism" seem grossly exaggerated. Some 20,000 refugees from Transylvania, most of them Hungarians, are at present living in Hungary and one hears the nervous question asked from time to time: "But what will happen if even greater numbers arrive here?" This question admittedly crops up mainly in connection with the economic crisis currently afflicting our country. But when I look at the official Swiss statistics I wonder what would happen in many other countries if they had a sixth of their populations consisting of foreigners. This high percentage of foreigners living in Switzerland is impressive, and is related to the "linguistic" peace reigning between the various language-speaking regions. I realise of course that this high proportion of foreigners is inseparable from the economic situation. Switzerland is one of the world's wealthiest countries, with a per capita share

of the GNP amounting to 25,000 US dollars a year, or about ten times as much as in Hungary. In view of the tolerance displayed in connection with the various languages spoken, and the Swiss willingness to accept foreigners I have not been thinking of material background, but rather have been asking myself if the Swiss reality is not a lot better than the opinion that the Swiss hold about themselves and whether the whole question of "Foreigners versus suspicious Swiss" is not just a fabrication?

### That famous "direct democracy"

The mentality of a Central European from the East has some difficulty in penetrating into the concept of what is perhaps the most important factor of Swiss solidarity, fellowship and "togetherness": direct democracy, an outstanding system of local autonomy. Only through learning about the democratic perception and defence of local interests which is evident in everyday life can one understand why the Swiss inhabitants of the Western and Southern cantons have no passionate regard for the French or Italian way of life, just as little as those from the German-speaking regions feel affinity with other countries that share the same lan-





guage. Political thinkers in Hungary have long ago come to recognise the values contained in the basic Swiss confederative concept. Oszkár Jászi, one of the most outstanding bourgeois (i.e., non-Communist) experts on the "nationalities" question, revived at the time of the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, plans formulated by Lajos Kossuth in the 19th century for the formation of a Danubian Confederation, and produced a vision – that never became a reality – of an Eastern-Central-European Switzerland. He wrote: "The history of every federal state with solid foundations and imbued with true democratic spirit has proved that the very existence of such a state exercises a powerful attraction on neighbouring states." According to the words of another prominent Hungarian thinker, István Bibó, it was the "misery of the little states of Eastern Europe" which prevented the replacement of the self-destructive nationalisms by an open, federative concept for state government. The reasons are manifold and Switzerland today can in this context only serve as a model for a very distant future.

Swiss democracy as applied in everyday life does however contain certain elements that could be of value to present-day Hungary. Attempts are currently being made by some segments of Hungarian society to fight their way up to the level of a constitutional European state, and to create the possibilities for a many-sided political representation of interests. A debate is going on in connection with the drafting of a new constitution and the introduction of popular polls and referendums. No wonder, therefore, that I, as a visitor to Switzerland, have been fascinated by the high degree of independence enjoyed by the cantons, and by the complicated procedure that has been worked out for organising a popular voting procedure. I have been told by several interlocutors – to my delight – that initiatives and referendums are

an excellent means of controlling the Executive, and that a sword of Damocles hangs over the heads of the Legislative assembly in the form of a possible popular vote. The result is on the one hand that power is limited, while on the other, an opportunity is provided for always "thinking over" every decision anew, so that extreme solutions can be avoided.

## Representing interests

To the countries to the East of the Elbe, the most desirable import would be the concept of Switzerland's "Everyday Democracy". Two recent popular votes in Switzerland seem to me to justify this assumption. The circumstances and arguments in connection with the rejection of the proposal to join the United Nations are well-known. As a token of conciliation however, wealthy Switzerland has recently been more willing than before to accept obligations for mediation or surveillance in other countries – this was the case for instance in Namibia. Foreign observers are inclined to believe that more voices are being raised to plead on moral grounds for an expansion of the traditional "good offices". Against the background of an economy that is striving to overcome its problems, the idea of Hungary undertaking to provide "good offices" is not at present "on the cards", of course. A policy based on ethical considerations could however be very helpful if there were a change of régime in Budapest.

The other popular poll that could be very instructive is the one in connection with an "initiative" for "A Switzerland without an Army", due to take place in the autumn of 1989. Practically everyone that I spoke to considered it certain that the electorate would reject the proposal out of hand. Depending on the number of votes supporting the initiative however, it might prove necessary to give more consideration to the situation of conscientious objectors who

refuse to undertake military service, and also to whether one should to any extent meet the wishes of left-wing and pacifist circles for a cut in defence expenditure. This manner of dealing with very complicated issues should convince the Eastern-Central-European observer that direct democracy can effectively help to ensure that very divergent interests will get a fair public hearing.

## A Europe of the Regions

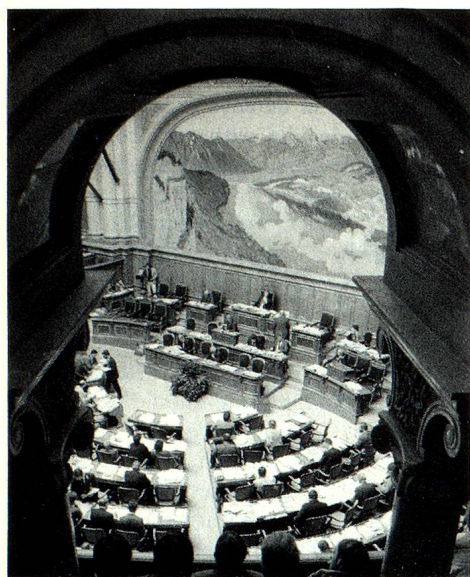
While we are talking about the nuances of European politics, one should remember that the local autonomy so indigenous to Switzerland is also matched by the systems in other Western countries. The inhabitants thereby feel, as I have learned in many locations, that they are firstly citizens of a municipality or other type of local community, then citizens of the canton, and only then citizens of the Confederation. This sort of self-government does not only lead to closer contact between the citizen and the various official authorities, but is also a factor conducive to stability – something that can be very revealing and instructive to observers from the East. Another, "middle-of-the-road" stage in respect of autonomy leads in a different direction, outside of the range of typical Swiss characteristics. What I have in mind are the international contacts of the cantons. In my conversations in Switzerland, there was some discussion about scientific collaboration in connection with protection of the environment, between Basle, the Alsace and Baden-Württemberg. In our territories, such types of cooperation over the national frontiers in Eastern Europe are rare and difficult, although they are bitterly necessary.

So now we have arrived from the way the Swiss feel that they own their country, via popular direct democracy and cantonal autonomy, to the questions of regional collaboration and of Europe itself. The systems prevailing in Switzerland give the Eastern observer a sort of "compass", the needle of which points *inside* the country in the direction of small communities which can freely organise themselves, but *outside* in the direction of a Europe that is striving to dismantle the "blocs" that now exist, and in which regions with greater autonomy than now will be able to collaborate with one another. Switzerland remains outside the EC but continues to expand and develop its economic contacts with "The Twelve" – something that is most instructive to a Hungarian observer: it shows that adhesion can be rejected on political grounds without disturbing relations in the sphere of commer-



*Dozens of proposals are voted on every year – on a communal, cantonal or Federal basis: direct democracy is a typically Swiss form of democracy for everyday use. (Photo: Keystone)*





*Swiss domestic politics: to a Hungarian they sometimes seem rather boring – but they do not often result in too hasty or extreme solutions. (Our picture: National Council. Photo: Keystone)*

cial and industrial collaboration. This is admittedly possible only when the economic potential of the supporting parties is similar to that in Switzerland. From the foundation to the peak: even on a relatively small scale and with adjustments to take Hungary's special circumstances into account, a transplantation of Swiss qualities could prove of great help to Hungary in that country's strivings to become a genuinely European country in the spirit of centuries of democratic and Christian traditions.

*József Martin, Budapest*

## Details of sources

- Lionel Richard. «Switzerland – as seen from Paris». From: NHG-Jahrbuch 1987: Wir und die Welt/La Suisse et le monde. Edited by Jürg Altwegg. Publishers: Sauerländer Aarau.
- Gideon Rosa. «Impressions of a wealthy country». From: Tages-Anzeiger, 30th July 1988 (Translation of the Brazilian text for the Tages-Anzeiger: Marc D. Herzka).
- József Martin. «A Hungarian looks at Switzerland». From: «Neue Zürcher Zeitung», 20th July 1989.
- Jürgen Engert. «No special favours for the Swiss». From: «Politik und Wirtschaft», No. 9/1989.
- Peter M. Lings. «Not really wise, but perhaps a bit shabby». From: «Politik und Wirtschaft», No. 9/1989.

It was necessary to shorten individual articles. Some of the titles were supplied by the editorial staff of «Swiss Review». We should like to express our thanks to the authors and publishers for their permission to reprint these texts.

## “Not really wise – but perhaps a bit shabby”

By renouncing the possibility of joining the European Community, Switzerland has missed the opportunity of having a say in the creation of the “new” Europe. Some damage to the Confederation's interests can perhaps result from this attitude, since even a merely associate membership will not enable Switzerland to shut itself off from the consequences of EEC policies. But the Swiss abstention could above all harm Europe, as its republican mentality and outlook, its liberal basic attitudes, and its successful handling of the problems of a multi-national and multi-lingual population could serve as a pattern for the EEC's future development. Like the Swedes and the Austrians, the Swiss see their neutrality as an irreplaceable asset, for which they are prepared to sacrifice the ideal of European unity. Personally, I cannot appreciate the value of this asset. To stay out of every conflict, as a matter of principle, is something that I do not regard as really wise – but perhaps as a bit shabby! And the only justification for such shabby behaviour – namely that one is spared the sufferings inevitable in all-out war – is in practice not valid: neutral Bel-

gium was overrun by Hitler's troops, and that he did not invade Switzerland was solely due to the Swiss combat strength, and had nothing whatsoever to do with respect for Switzerland's neutrality.

The united Europe of the future comprises far more than merely the sum total of benefits in terms of the economy and of security policies. The vision that we hope will come true is that of the final and definitive conquest of nationalism, of a future in which we shall be proud to be Europeans of Swiss, German or French origin, a vision of cultural unity born of diversity, of intellectual and physical freedom, a vision of the re-birth of the Occident as an economic, cultural, socially progressive and militarily potent great power.

For the realisation of this dream of a united Europe, comparable in its influence to the art of the baroque period and to the Age of Enlightenment, it will, I believe, be essential to overcome parochial narrow-mindedness among the various nations – and not least of all, the “Kantönligeist” in Switzerland.

*Peter M. Lings, Vienna*

## “No special favours for the Swiss”

A dynamic force has been released by an age-old but constantly renewed desire, and a broadly conceived draft proposal: a momentous change by which Switzerland, as a small country, is too directly affected for it to be able to lay claim to recognition of its entitlement to a special role.

In its dilemma, between full membership of the EEC on the one hand and a policy of isolation on the other, Switzerland is trying to “make a virtue of necessity”: it wants to remain capable and acceptable as a true European state. It reminds one of the phrase used in official certificates in connection with possible pregnancy: in German, “Zeugungsfähigkeit”, in English “procreative capacity”. Or more crudely expressed: “I could if I wanted to, but I don't want to. Not yet!” And one must remember: the objectives and the scales of value in matters of the economy are virtually identical for Switzerland and the EEC.

Will the Swiss one day be seen as “second-class Europeans”? Will they no longer have to worry about “infiltration by foreign ele-

ments” because nobody will want a Swiss passport anymore? As I am not Swiss, but German, I would nevertheless like to see the “interior decoration” of the European house being influenced by Swiss “design” with its democratic pattern. A true conservative will not cling to yesterday's values – he will always contribute to the fashioning of the future, with due sense of proportion and mindful of tradition, of course. Thereby he will be very different from the reactionary, who only reacts to what others propose. Dear Swiss readers: make full use of your potential. Create, conceive and bring forth. Do not hope for any extra favours – be content with the best you can achieve. But I fear that I may be wasting my breath. In my own country a lot of people would like to see the frontiers of 1937 restored. Keep Europe sustained at the level of the Gotthard pass? Wouldn't Liechtenstein be quite nice too? The only snag is that it would not satisfy Switzerland's aspirations.

*Jürgen Engert, West-Berlin*