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Canton Ticino

Playing a major role

Ticino is more than the "sun trap of Switzerland". The canton has been worse hit by the economic crisis than other regions, but it now has ambitious aims.

In the year 1798 gun shots sounded through the narrow streets of Ticino's towns and villages. The echo of tumult and the reek of gunpowder still hung in the air when the trees of freedom were planted in the main squares of

*Ilaria Bignasci **

Lugano, Bellinzona and Mendrisio and crowned with the hat of William Tell. This was a sign that the inhabitants of the Italian-speaking bailiwick of the Swiss forest cantons had freely chosen – for the second time in history – to remain in the Confederation and to resist the "advances" of the neighbouring Cisalpine Republic. In spite of their different origin, temperament and language and their geographical isolation from the other cantons, the Ticinese thus reaffirmed their will to be part of the Swiss nation while keeping a certain degree of autonomy.

Economic problems

Now, nearly two hundred years later, Canton Ticino is one of Switzerland's greatest glories. Situated south of the Alps and blessed with a mild climate, green valleys and turquoise waters, every year it attracts thousands of visitors from the rest of Switzerland and all over the world. Tourists who keep their

eyes and ears open can discover in the narrow streets of Gandria, along the hiking trails of the Malcantone and in the castles of Bellinzona a rich variety of artistic and cultural treasures, as well as breathtakingly beautiful landscapes. But to reduce Ticino merely to its function as a "sun trap", to the famous Zoccoli and Boccalini, is short-sighted in every conceivable respect. Regrettably, too many people still yield to this temptation.

In the past Ticino prospered thanks to its position as a great crossroads. The Gotthard Pass was the quickest route from the economic and cultural centres of Italy to those of France, Germany and Switzerland. Today, however, with the world economy going through a massive transformation process, Ticino's peripheral situation within Switzerland has turned into a severe handicap.

The canton has been mercilessly struck by unemployment; at more than 8% it has the highest jobless rate in the country (more than double the national

Beautiful landscapes, economic hubs, vibrant culture – Canton Ticino is often wrongly reduced to the first of these. (zvg)



average). Its closeness to Italy puts an additional burden on local businesses. The weak Italian lira puts Ticino firms at a substantial competitive disadvantage. And this is not all. Every weekend the very attractive Italian prices lure many Ticinese to cross the border to do their shopping.

Ticino's university

But our canton is nevertheless facing up to the new challenges and is day by day forging a new future. An example? The university of Italian-speaking Switzerland. Throughout history Ticinese students have had to go to university north of the Alps or across the border. Today, Ticino is trying to build up its own university life. This is not a matter of withdrawing into itself – the new faculties are committed to both openness and opening up. In 1992 Bishop Eugenio Corecco founded the Institute of Theology, and next autumn two new faculties will open in Lugano: economics (with the support of Milan's Bocconi University) and communications sciences (with literature, journalism and computer branches). In Mendrisio an architectural faculty will soon open with Ticino architect Mario Botta as its patron.

The teaching chairs at the new faculties will be awarded to professors of international repute, who will teach in three different languages. In this way the small Italian-speaking canton is demonstrating its determination to play a leading role both at home and on the international scene in spite of the economic crisis. ■

Under the aegis of Canton Ticino

The Ping Pong scheme – Visit Switzerland

The Ping Pong scheme gives Swiss Abroad an opportunity of getting to know Switzerland better by staying with a host family. With the slogan "Visit Switzerland – See the World" this contact scheme was born in 1991. It is one of the few projects to have outlived that 700th anniversary year of the Swiss Confederation. In 1996 Ping Pong is under the aegis of Canton Ticino. Further information and registration at:

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