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On the track of the gold trade

The long-awaited interim report of the Commission of Independent Experts on Switzerland and gold transactions in the Second World War is now available (see Swiss Review 1/98). The report presents its detailed research results on the role of Switzerland as a turnover centre for gold from the area controlled by the Third Reich. During the war gold played a key role in international economic and currency policy. This meant that Switzerland could not abstain from the gold trade if it wanted to defend its currency and its money market.

The Commission also reaches the conclusion that the Swiss National Bank was not led by profit motives but wanted to maintain gold cover, the convertibility of the franc, the nation's supplies and the ability of the money market to continue its operations. However, in the view of the Commission the National Bank's justification strategy is not convincing, since it must have known as early as 1941 that it was receiving stolen gold. Those responsible at the time claimed political neutrality obligations and argued that they wanted to prevent an invasion of Switzerland by Nazi Germany.

The Commission paid particular attention to trade in victims' gold. It discovered that the National Bank received 119,5 kilos at a value at the time of SFr 581,899. Compared with the

total German deliveries, amounting to 1,6 to 1,7 billion SFr, the gold from the dead was a small amount. But in view of the human suffering that lay behind it, book-keeping considerations are hardly appropriate.

This is why the Federal Council regretted in its statement on the report that this gold had found its way to Switzerland, but also emphasised that those responsible at the time did not know that they were receiving victims' gold.

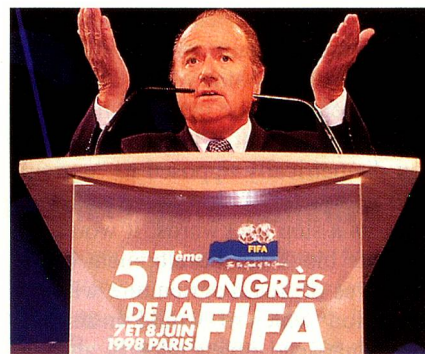
Blatter is the world's most senior footballer

In the run-up to the 16th football world cup in France, Joseph Blatter has been appointed as president of the International Association Football Federation (FIFA). In an electoral campaign fought hard and sometimes below the belt on both sides, the 62-year old Swiss citizen won out over his opponent, Lennart Johansson of Sweden, who is 6 years older. Blatter takes over from the Brazilian Joao Havelange, under whose presidency he was General Secretary for seventeen years. 203 states belong to FIFA, which is probably the most influential and richest sports federation in the world.

Alongside Blatter, 6 other Swiss are at present at the head of world sports federations: Ernest C. Buser (carting),

On the whole the government does not see any reason on the basis of the report to accept further claims on Switzerland or to bring the 1946 Washington Agreement back onto the table.

The Independent Commission of Experts "Switzerland-Second World War" under the direction of historian Jean-François Bergier was set up at the end of 1996 to examine the role of Switzerland in the Second World War. The interim report on gold may be obtained from bookshops or may be read on the Internet: <http://www.uek.ch>. ■



The new head of world football: Joseph Blatter.

Gottfried Diener (cross bow), René Fasel (ice hockey), Erich Gröbel (mini-golf), Gian-Franco Kasper (skiing), and Denis Oswald (rowing). ■

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«Strategic Chance»

Study Report on the Redevelopment of Swiss Security Policy

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Point of view

"Not every political idea must be given a means of dissemination nor must every political style be tolerated. Politics and aesthetics must not be associated".

Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberg on the occasion of the Award of the 1997 Switzerland Design Prize on the subject "Design and Politics".

100 years' National Museum

On June 25th the Swiss National Museum celebrated its 100th birthday. As long ago as the days of the Helvetic Republic the government had proposed a central collection point for national treasures.

But nearly 100 years were needed for conversion of this idea into reality. After long discussions on its location the plan was finally realised in Zurich. The National Museum was given the task of bringing to an end the destruction of Switzerland's cultural heritage and serving as a source of encouragement to artists. Today its central task is concerned with history and cultural history.

The most important event of the jubilee year is the opening of the branch at Prangins Castle on Lake Geneva. The exhibits in Prangins are mainly devoted to 18th and 19th century Swiss history. Further external branches are located at Wildegg Castle (Aargau), Seewen (Solothurn), the Museum of Musical Machines, Schwytz (Forum of Swiss History) and Gandria (Ticino), Customs Museum.

People

Former federal councillor **Ernest Brugger** has died at the age of 84. The Zurich liberal democrat headed the Federal Department of Economic Affairs from 1970 to 1978. Amongst his most important concerns were the free trade agreement with the European Community, policy on foreigners in the wake of the Schwarzenbach initiative and economic policy following the 1973 oil crisis.



Drama in the Swiss Guard

The newly appointed commandant of the Vatican Swiss Guard, Alois Estermann, and his wife, Gladys, were murdered the evening before he was due to be sworn in. The murderer was most probably 23-year old vice-corporal Cedric Torney, who killed himself afterwards. According to information from the Vatican, it was an act of vengeance on the part of Torney, who felt that he had been unjustly treated by Estermann. However, Torney's mother expressed doubts about the genuineness of a farewell letter which confirmed this thesis. The Vatican's diffuse information policy led to wild speculations about an alleged link between Estermann and the State Security Service of the former GDR, and about disputes within the Guard.

The Pope appointed Pius Segmüller as successor to Estermann. As a career officer in the Swiss army, this 46-year old native of Lucerne has already been posted abroad as a member of the Swiss Medical Unit in Namibia and Western Sahara. The Swiss Guard was set up in 1506. Today it has a compliment of 100 men and is directly responsible to the Pope. These are the only troops maintained by the Vatican.



Shortly before their tragic death, Alois Estermann and his wife, Gladys, were received by Pope John Paul II.

Reto Braun has been appointed to succeed Jean-Noël Rey as head of the Post corporation. The 57-year old Appenzeller will take over operational control of the corporation in September. As an international top manager, he has been among other posts head of the American computer manufacturer Unisys, and more recently restructured the Canadian communications firm, Moore.



At the end of November, 1998, **Franz A. Blankart** retires as director of the Federal Office for Foreign Economic Affairs. Blankart has left a substantial mark on the Swiss trade diplomacy of the last few decades. Amongst other things, he was chief negotiator in the EEA negotiations, whose results were rejected in the referendum of December 6th 1992.

Amédée Grab is the new bishop of Coire. Until now bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, he replaces Wolfgang Haas, for whom a new Archbishopric has been created in Liechtenstein. 68-year old Grab is seen as a conservative, but also as a man of dialogue and balance. He has been president of the Swiss Bishop's Conference since December 1st, 1997.

Maurice Bavaud has been rehabilitated fifty-seven years after his death. In 1938 this Neuchâtel theology student had tried to murder Hitler and was condemned to death by the Nazis for it. The Federal Council has expressed its regret to his family that the authorities of the time condemned Bavaud's plan and did hardly anything to prevent his execution.



Texts: René Lenzin
Photos: Keystone