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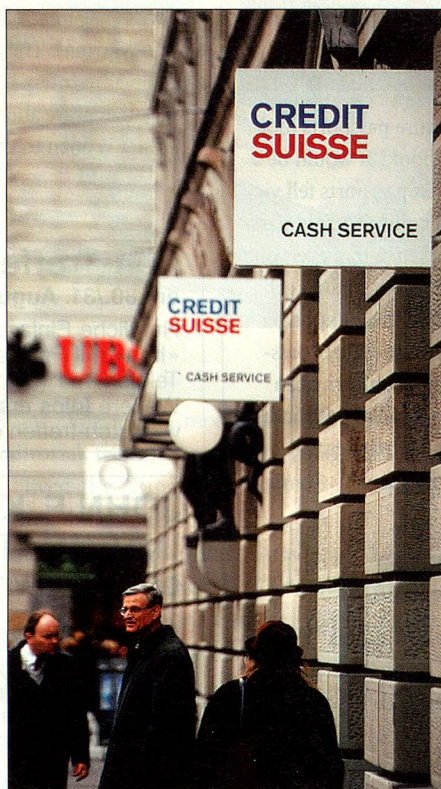
## SNIPPETS

**BAD WEATHER.** Heavy rain during November wreaked havoc in various regions of Switzerland, causing rivers to burst their banks and resulting in a number of landslides. The worst-affected cantons were the Ticino and the Grisons. In the canton of Ticino, the rising level of lakes Lugano and Maggiore threatened to flood lakeside promenades in Locarno and Lugano. The worst damage was in the Grisons, where a number of landslides cut off roads and blocked rail lines. In some communities streams turned into torrents, destroying houses and infrastructures in their wake. To safeguard the population, some communities had to be evacuated. According to the cantonal government, the damage is in the region of CHF 140 million.

**SECESSION LOOMING?** According to a survey conducted by the GfS Opinion Poll Institute, 73% of German-speaking Swiss feel an affinity with French-speaking Swiss, a sentiment which is not returned since only 51% of French-speaking Swiss feel any affinity with German-speaking Swiss. More worryingly, 29% of French-speaking Swiss, as opposed to 13% in German-speaking cantons, are not averse to the possibility of French-speaking Switzerland seceding from the German-speaking part. According to the authors of the study, the different levels of empathy in the two main linguistic groups reflect the French-speaking region's greater economic and political dependence on German-speaking cantons. The higher level of dissatisfaction registered in French-speaking Switzerland is attributable to the fact that a significant percentage of the population has distanced itself mentally from "federal Berne".

**IMAM REFUSED PERMIT.** The Muslim community of Sion will have to wait a little longer for its own Imam. The Alien Registration Office in the Valais has refused to grant a work permit to a 29-year-old Imam from Macedonia on the grounds that his views are too fundamentalist and that his presence in Sion could endanger the peaceful co-existence of various Islamic groups living in the Valais. Following an initial appeal (rejected) by the Imam, the case must now go to the Valais State Council.

**CLIPPED WINGS.** Swiss reported a loss of CHF 582 million on a total turnover of CHF 3.136 billion for the first three quarters of 2002. To reduce costs, the airline aims to shed 300 jobs and cut the fleet down by eight aircraft. The job cuts will affect 160 cabin and ground staff and 140 pilots. While natural fluctuations will account for job cuts in the former category, redundancies are not excluded. For the pilots who are affected, the company is cooperating with the unions to draw up a social plan. Two hundred new jobs will be created in the Technical and IT divisions.



Lawsuits against UBS and CS.

**LAWSUITS IN SOUTH AFRICA.** Two American lawyers have launched lawsuits against various companies, including Swiss enterprises, for maintaining business links with South Africa during the apartheid era. The claims lodged by Michael Hausfeld involve 20 companies, including UBS and Credit Suisse. His client is the South African Khulumani organisation which represents 33,000 apartheid victims and 85 other individuals. According to the plaintiffs, these companies indirectly violated human rights by doing business with South Africa during the apartheid years, which came to an end in 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first black President. Haus-

feld's action ties in with the lawsuit launched by lawyer Ed Fagan, well-known in Switzerland for his class actions on behalf of Holocaust victims. Fagan is claiming up to USD 100 billion in damages. Besides UBS and CS, he has also cited Novartis, Sulzer, Nestlé and Roche. UBS and CS, like many other companies, have rejected the allegations.

**HEFTY FINE.** According to Die Weltwoche, the Federal Banking Commission has slapped a CHF 750,000 fine on Credit Suisse for its negligence in the affair of funds transferred to Switzerland by former Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha. The bank confirms that it has been fined but refuses to disclose the amount. According to the Federal Banking Commission, one of Abacha's sons deposited USD 214 million in an account at Credit Suisse Private Banking in Zurich. The account is currently blocked. Credit Suisse is not the only financial institution to come under the commission's scrutiny: nineteen banks are being investigated for managing the ex-dictator's funds, and six are accused of serious breach of due diligence, including Bank Hoffmann, Bank Leu, Crédit Agricole Indosuez (Switzerland), l'Union Bancaire Privée and M.M. Warburg Bank (Switzerland).

**AMERICA'S CUP.** For the first time in the race's history, a Swiss team will be competing in the America's Cup, the most prestigious event on the world's sailing calendar. Alinghi (such is the Swiss vessel's name) is set to challenge current trophy-holders New Zealand. Switzerland earned this right by winning the Louis Vuitton Cup, beating the Americans of Oracle Racing at New Zealand's Hauraki Bay. Alinghi is the fruit of a Swiss industrialist's passion for sailing. He is Ernesto Bertarelli, of Italian origin, the majority shareholder of Geneva-based pharmaceutical company Serono. According to "Bilanz" Magazine, he is one of Switzerland's richest men.

## PEOPLE

Historian and publicist **Herbert Lüthy** has died in Basle at the age of 84. A lecturer in Swiss history and modern history at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, he lived in France between 1948 and 1958, where he worked as a journalist, essayist and translator of classical authors. During this period he also edited important historical works. He was awarded the Gottfried-Keller Prize in 1985.

**CHRISTIANE LANGENBERGER** is the new Chair of the Swiss Radical Party. It is the first time in the party's history that a woman has held this position. A member of the cantonal government of Vaud, she is 62



and, unlike her predecessors, holds no directorships. Delegates cast their votes in her favour, in preference to National Councillor Trix Heberlein, from Zurich. Langenberger, who is perfectly bilingual, faces the task of restoring calm and confidence to a party recently rocked by economic scandals. Her predecessor, Gerold Bühler, resigned in November under pressure because of his position on the Board of Directors of Rentenanstalt.

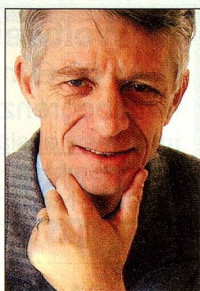
**EURO 2008.** Austria and Switzerland are to jointly host the 2008 European Football Championships. Switzerland has not held a sporting event of this magnitude since 1954, when Germany won the World Cup final in Berne after a memorable game against Hungary. According to the UEFA officials responsible for the selection, the Austrian and Swiss Football Associations presented a solid dossier which will guarantee the tournament's organisational success.

Entomologist **Hans Rudolf Herren** has been awarded the 2002 Brandenberger Prize worth CHF 200,000 for his discoveries in the field of biological crop protection and for his untiring work in aid of the rural population of Africa. Herren has spent more than 20 years working in developing countries and since 1994 has been Chief Executive and Director General of the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Nairobi, Kenya.



### CABINET RESHUFFLE.

The appointment of Geneva politician Micheline Calmy-Rey to the Federal Council has led to a cabinet reshuffle. The youngest member of the Swiss cabinet has had to make do with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Department of Home Affairs, which was her personal preference, goes to Liberal Democrat Pascal Couchepin (VS), who has made no secret of his interest in this office since Ruth Dreifuss announced her retirement. Since the introduction in 1959 of the "magic formula" (which prescribes the distribution of seats among the parties), this department has never been assigned to an FDP member. Economic observers and politicians view the appointment as a long-due opportunity to implement the measures required to cut costs in the healthcare sector. Joseph Deiss succeeds Couchepin as Head of the Department of Economic Affairs, where he will be able to draw his expertise as a former professor of economics.



FDP National Councillor **Yves Christen** (VD) is the new President of the National Council, and hence the highest Swiss in the land. He was elected by his peers during the winter session of parliament. Professor of physics **Gian-Reto Plattner**, Social Democrat representative for Basle City canton, has been appointed President of the Council of States.

On 4 December 2002, 60-year-old Federal Councillor **Pascal Couchepin** from the Valais was elected by the federal assembly to the office of President of Switzerland for 2003. The Vice President is 38-year-old Christian Democrat **Ruth Metzler-Arnold** of Lucerne.

Mountaineer **André Roch** has died in Geneva at the age of 96. In 1952 he was the first to climb the "Nepal route" which took him within 200 meters of the summit of Everest.

Solothurn lawyer **Leo Schürmann** has died at the age of 85. He was Director-General of SSR, the first Ombudsman for consumer prices, Vice President of the National Bank of Switzerland and Christian Democrat National Councillor between 1959 and 1974, and in 1973 narrowly missed election to the Federal Council simply because Social Democrat Willi Ritschard had been elected before him and was from the same canton. Schürmann lectured in jurisprudence at the University of Fribourg for twenty years.

**Text: Pablo Crivelli**  
**Photos: Imagopress**

Translated from the Italian.