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NEWS IN BRIEF

28 February. The CHF 50,000 Gottlieb-Duttweiler Prize for 2004 is awarded to German Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. The prize, awarded by the Duttweiler Foundation, honours persons who have "worked for the common good with commitment, courage and tenacity."

1 March. Mercer Human Resource Consulting's quality of life study reveals that Zurich and Geneva are the world's top-scoring cities. Geneva moved up to top position thanks to an improvement in the quality of its educational facilities. At the other end of the scale, Baghdad was ranked the most unattractive city in terms of quality of life. Berne shares third place in this ranking of 215 cities alongside Auckland, Copenhagen, Frankfurt and Sydney.

4 March. Christiane Langenberger stands down as president of the Radical Free Democratic Party (FDP). The 62-year-old State Councillor from Vaud, who took over the party chairmanship in 2003, concedes her office with a view to the 2007 parliamentary elections. The right wing of the FDP primarily blamed her for the party's poor showing at the federal elections last October.

4 March. Marco Müller, former director of the Locarno Film Festival, is appointed to a four-year term of office as director of Europe's oldest film festival, the Mostra in Venice. The 51-year-old Italian of Swiss origins succeeds Swiss national Moritz de Hadeln, who has been director of the Mostra since March 2002.

5 March. 2003 turned out to be a reasonably positive year for the AHV (Old Age and Survivors' Insurance), which reported a profit of almost CHF 2 billion thanks to the stock market recovery. By contrast, the IV (Invalidity Insurance) posted a deficit of CHF 1,448 billion.

7 March. Hans-Jürg Fehr is the new president of the Social Democratic Party (SP). The National Councillor from Schaffhausen will lead the future SP opposition, which is committed to remaining on the Federal



Highly acclaimed quality of life in Zurich. Open-air restaurants play their part.

Council, and will ensure a continuum of Christiane Brunner's political direction. Vice President of the party since 2000, Fehr has already successfully proved his leadership and integration qualities.

10 March. André Dosé resigns as CEO of Swiss, pending an investigation by the Prosecutor General of the Swiss Confederation into the crash of a Crossair plane near Bassersdorf on 24 November 2001, with the loss of 24 lives. The ex-CEO of Crossair and Swiss as well as André Auer, former Director of the Federal Office of Civil Aviation, are to be questioned as part of the inquiry.

12 March. Urs Hadorn takes over from Jean-Daniel Gerber as acting head of the Federal Office for Refugees (FOR). Federal Councillor Blocher has entrusted the 62-year-old with this office "until further notice". At the same time, the government is examining the possibility of merging the FOR and the Federal Office for Immigration, Integration and Emigration (FOIIE).

13 March. Journalist Roger de Weck is awarded the Davos Media Prize for his life's work. The prize, worth CHF 15,000, honours outstanding achievements in journalism.

14 March. The car show chalks up a new attendance record. During the ten-day show, 729,629 visitors made the pilgrimage

to Geneva's Palexpo complex: 1% more than the record numbers registered in 2002.

15 March. In 2001 the government, cantons and communities invested CHF 23.3 billion in education. In real terms this represents a 4.7% increase in spending on education compared to 2000. By contrast, spending on grants declined.

3 April. FDP National Councillor Yves Christen (Vaud) is appointed president of the New European Movement in Switzerland (NEMS). He succeeds Marc F. Suter, who is standing down after eleven years in office.

4 April. According to a survey published in the "SonntagsBlick", 69% of the people questioned are against withdrawing Switzerland's application for EU membership, thereby supporting the Federal Council's statement published two days earlier.

4 April. Start of celebrations to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the death of Bernese author Jeremias Gotthelf. The best-known work of this pastor who was born in 1797 is "Ueli der Knecht". Film adaptations of his works are part of Switzerland's cultural heritage. Over a hundred events and functions are planned for the commemorative year. IE

Translated from German.