

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 31 (2004)
Heft: 4

Rubrik: News

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NEWS IN BRIEF

9 April. Major tennis event in Malley (Lausanne): The Swiss men's team meets France in the quarter finals of the Davis Cup. Despite the customary brilliance from Roger Federer, the French ultimately win 3:2.

14 April. GastroSuisse, the leading Swiss hotel and restaurant association, announces alarming statistics at its annual press conference. The Swiss catering sector suffered a further decline last year, and the prospects are not promising.

25 April. The German-French Aventis group is to be taken over not by Basle-based Novartis but by Sanofi-Synthélabo of France. The French government played a key role in supporting this transaction, while the Swiss authorities chose not to get involved.

3 May. At exactly 14.10, ex-Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler enters the Houses of Parliament and follows the National Council debate in the company of students of the University of St.Gallen. The polemics surrounding the election of Federal Council members are rekindled and become a central topic in the Swiss press this spring. To be continued...

16 May. Another slap in the face following the defeat of the Federal Council and parliament at the hands of voters on 8 February. Voters reject all three government-backed proposals. Is the country really well on the way to becoming ungovernable, as was feared in the wake of last autumn's general election?

19 May. At last some good news and a completed dossier: Joseph Deiss, Micheline Calmy-Rey and Hans-Rudolf Merz travel to Brussels to set the political seal on three years of preparatory work for the bilateral negotiations. However, whether or not a referendum will be launched to vote on these accords remains to be seen.

20 May. Some people have been speculating on the liberalisation of cannabis consumption in Switzerland: In Val-de-Travers the police launch a raid against a cannabis production operation worth millions in turnover.

1 June. Switzerland takes a small step towards Europe. The second phase of the transitional provisions governing free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU comes into force. In future, Swiss nationals will be treated in the same way as citizens of the 15 old EU countries in terms of entry and residency entitlement as well as access to the job market.

6 June. At last, a little hope: Swiss Catholics enjoy a major Sunday festival; 70,000 attend the Sunday mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II in Berne. The evening before (Saturday), 14,000 young people had gathered in Berne's ice hockey arena.

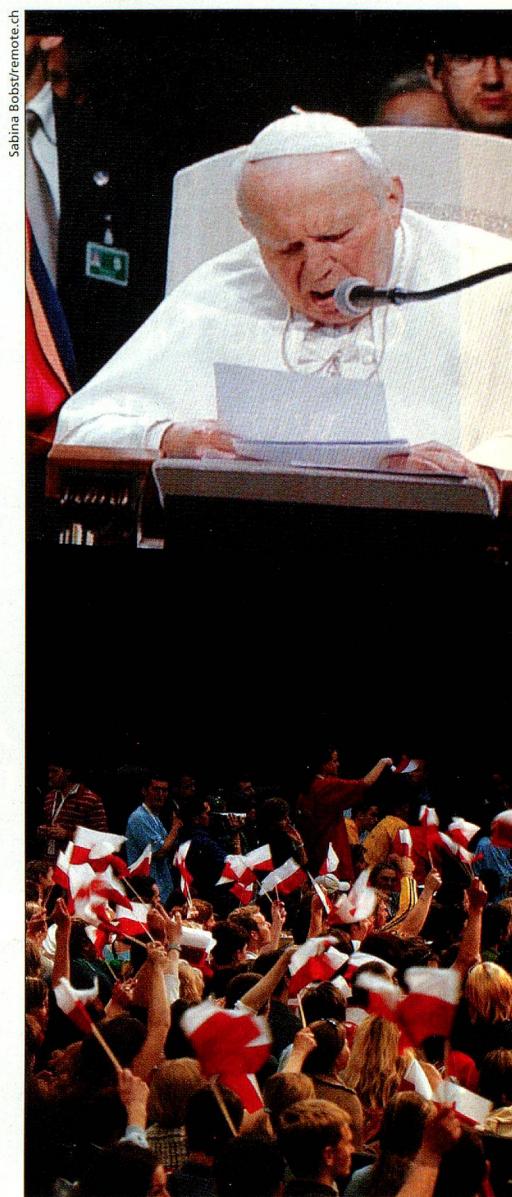
8 June. Information leak in the Federal Council. In Sierre, Pascal Couchepin points to the need to distinguish between serious and less serious indiscretions. For several weeks now, the polemics surrounding the "leaking Federal Council" have been surfacing: from the "symbolic franc" which Christoph Blocher proposed for the Swiss tourist sector, to the in-fighting over the Bilateral II dossier from which the "Weltwoche" benefited. The mood among Federal Council members appears rather frosty.

10 June. Bitter revelations from inside parliament: In her book entitled "Grissini & Alpenbitter", former Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler gives her point of view – six months after her failure to be re-elected to the Federal Council.

13 June. After the Catholics, now it is the turn of the Protestants: At the 6th Christian Day, 40,000 faithful gather in Basle's football temple in St. Jakob Park. The footballers are otherwise engaged this Sunday: they are playing against Croatia in a European Championship match.

15 June. The National Council finally rejects the amendment to the drug law. For the time being, Switzerland does not intend to decriminalise cannabis consumption. Bad news for the cannabis producers in Val-de-Travers...

21 June. The Swiss national football team lose to France by 1:3 in the European Championships in Portugal, thereby bringing the Swiss adventure to a close: the quarter finals will take place without them.



Pope John Paul II visits Berne. Critics fail to dampen the fervour of Swiss papal supporters.

24 June. After brief consideration, the Federal Council rejects the idea of sending Swiss soldiers to guard the Swiss embassy in Iraq, in the belief that such a measure could be misunderstood by the Iraqis. CV