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Swiss Standard

«Swiss Review», 2/05

A very good article but have you gone a little over the top or do I take it, this is just a printing error? Page 4/top of 5: "75% of trains must be no more than 4 minutes late, 95% no more than 1 minute late". Should this read 25% which would still be excellent?

Unfortunately we are not near this target yet in England. When the Government discussed privatising British Rail I wrote to my member of Parliament, asking whether they had looked at the SBB before deciding on privatisation. The Government Minister wrote back, saying yes, they had looked and found that the subsidy to the SBB exceeded the amount that the whole of British Rail was getting and there was no way they could match this!

In Switzerland people can vote on such and many other matters, here we elect the members of parliament and the parliament and the government decide. Our rail system is now improving but it will take a long time to come up to Swiss standard, if ever.

*Walter Trachsel
Goostrey, Cheshire. GB*

*(It was a printing error.
Sorry for this. The editor)*

Correct spelling

«Swiss Review», 2/05

I read with great interest your article on the Swiss Railways – which I consider the very best world-wide.

However, as one of the driving forces of the introduction

of the Metric System in Canada, as a co-founder of the Canadian Metric Association (together with the late Professor Dr. Fred Rimrott of the University of Toronto) in 1969, and its secretary ever since, I was astonished at the way the wrong abbreviation "kph" was used several times in your article.

I suspect that your translator may have been an American; and the Americans know very little about the Metric System, since the U.S.A. is the only industrialized or "First World" nation to have failed to adopt the Metric System for public use.

Anyone who knows the basic rules of the Metric System knows that only km/h is the correct version. I am sure that even Mr. Benedikt Weibel knows that. If you have any doubts about that, I suggest that you check with the ISO headquarters in Geneva.

One reason why I suspect that your translator is an American, is the spelling kilometer, with which I, having over the years studied ten languages, completely agree. The spelling kilometer is found in at least ten of the leading European languages; whereas "metre" occurs only in British English (where the Metric System was only recently forced on the country by the E.U.) and Turkish. It isn't even French, where the word needs an "accent grave", as in mètre.

Most American geographical books are also more sensible, as was the venerable Economist in an article on Switzerland some

time ago, in using the correct spellings Basel and Bern, instead of the distorted "Basle" and "Berne" that you have been using. After all, Basle isn't even French, and when travellers arrive at the respective railway stations, the spellings are Basel and Bern. At least you spelled St.Gallen correctly.

Regarding the comments on the Swiss Metro, I think it is a stupid concept – after all, who wants to travel in an underground tube – not to mention the high costs – just look at the Alpine tunnels now under construction! The "maglev" or Transrapid concept is also questionable, and even their inventors, the Germans, decided against its implementation in Germany. It is far less advantageous environmentally, compared with the regular modern electric railways in Switzerland – which is the main reason why Switzerland has, among industrialized nations, the lowest per-capita emissions of greenhouse gases, along with almost no electric power produced from fossil fuels. With Best Wishes, I remain, Yours faithfully

*Albert J. Mettler
Ontario, Canada*

Provocative rubbish

«Swiss Review», 1/05

I found your article and the interview with Pius Knüsel very interesting.

For a Swiss company I have worked in Amsterdam, Paris, and since 1962 in Madrid (until retiring in 1993). So I was lucky enough to live in cities offering a rich variety of authentic art, and in Paris I took up landscape and portrait painting as a hobby.

Today's definition of "Art" in Switzerland is incomprehensible to me: the Swiss Art exhibition in Madrid, opened by Federal Councillor Couchepin, was a complete flop. Surely infantile

pictures – such as a distorted red car – cannot be taken as a benchmark of Swiss artistic achievement? Clearly, plenty of Swiss people still appreciate real art, as shown by the enormous success of Anker, Hodler, Segantini, Erni, etc. exhibitions.

It was high time for the Hirschhorn case to finally throw some light on the Swiss art scene. Do you really call that exhibit in Paris a work of art? For me as a Swiss citizen, it is scandalous to squander CHF 180,000 on such provocative rubbish. Pro Helvetia wants to expand worldwide, but I am convinced that in Asian countries – where Switzerland is practically unknown – this kind of thing gives a completely wrong idea of our culture. What happened to our art critics and experts? We can count ourselves lucky that at least the Swiss parliament reacted.

*Elmar Bossart,
Madrid, Spain*

Inaccurate

«Swiss Review», 2/05

I am disappointed with your article on the Schengen treaty, which is not according to the facts. Your comment that "Switzerland is abolishing identity checks at the frontiers" shocks Swiss voters in the same way as the SVP strategy: with half-truths and false information. While borders within the European Union will no longer be checked on a matter-of-course basis, frontiers to the EU will be scrutinized more strictly. In Switzerland these frontiers are the airports, where I trust that all checks will be carried out as prescribed. If the countries surrounding us check their frontiers to the EU equally well, I see no problem. Every country also has the right to carry out spontaneous checks, not only at its frontiers.

*Eva Dellafera
Dieburg, Germany*

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