

News in brief

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **34 (2007)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **26.09.2024**

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Two female presidents on Lake Geneva

Swiss President Micheline Calmy-Rey has had ample opportunity to practice her Spanish. She welcomed Chilean President Michelle Bachelet during the latter's two-day official visit to Switzerland. The two women visited the Ecole Polytechnique de Lausanne (EPFL), the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN Human Rights Council. And Ms. Calmy-Rey also spent a few days in Spain, where she met her Spanish counterpart as well as the country's monarch, Juan Carlos.

Deadly flooding in Switzerland

Switzerland was battered by violent storms on the night of 8 June. In the Huttwil (BE) region, many streams and rivers broke their banks, damaging some 500 houses. Three people lost their lives, including a woman who drowned in her own house. The damage is estimated at CHF 40 million. The storms hit the cantons of Lucerne, Basel, Thurgau, Schaffhausen and Zurich.

Lötschberg opened

Ten years after the project was started, the Lötschberg base tunnel was officially opened by Transport Minister Moritz



Leuenerger on 15 June. The train took just 17 minutes to drive through what is now the world's third-longest tunnel (34.6km).

Swiss guests welcome

A survey of 15,000 European hotels has found that the men

and women of Switzerland are hotel owners' third-favourite guests. The most popular guests were those from Japan, while American tourists were ranked second.

Voting at 16

Glarus canton has taken a pioneering step in lowering the voting age to 16 for elections at cantonal level. This Swiss premiere has reopened the debate on the voting age in the other cantons as well as at federal level. Young Socialists in Fribourg have also launched a popular motion on this issue.

Victory for the wealthy

The trial centring on the Swissair debacle ended with the acquittal of all 19 defendants. The district court in Bülach (ZH) deemed none of the charges to be justified, and awarded damages worth a total of around CHF 3 million. Swissair's last CEO alone received CHF 488,000 in compensation. The outcome was greeted with dismay, and many wonder if the verdict was just. Former Swissair employees have their doubts. They are now pinning their hopes on a series of civil suits.

Unconstitutional

The Federal Court has ruled that degressive taxes in Obwalden are unconstitutional. The taxation system, which was adopted by referendum in December 2005 despite the fact that it favours the rich, has been rigorously opposed by National Councillor Josef Zisyadis from Vaud. He even took up residence in the half-canton to pursue his campaign. Incidentally, in the year following the introduction of the new taxation system, the number of companies settling in Obwalden increased fivefold year-on-year and the population increased by 1.5 percent.

Stubbing out smoking

According to the Federal Office of Health, the number of smokers in Switzerland has fallen by a quarter of a million in the last five years. Whereas fully 33% of the Swiss smoked in 2001, the figure had fallen to 29% by 2006.

Swiss school in Barcelona celebrates opening of new building

On 15 June, the new building of the Swiss school in Barcelona was officially opened in festive style under the motto "Another step – Un paso más" in the presence of Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin and Catalan Education Minister Ernest Maragall. The various speeches given at the opening attested to the importance and wide-ranging influence of Swiss schools abroad. Councillor Couchepin particularly pointed to multilingualism as well as the economic and cultural ex-

changes between Spain and Switzerland. Armin Ritz, the Swiss ambassador to Spain, said he was pleased to announce that Swiss school-leaving certificates (matura) were now officially recognised in Spain thanks to Councillor Couchepin's negotiations with the authorities in Madrid. Representing the school's patron canton, Municipal Councillor Bernhard Pulver from Berne delivered his message not only in Castilian Spanish, but also in perfect Catalan, the language spoken in Barcelona, which he learnt in part at Swiss schools abroad. Headmaster Toni Wunderlin, who has headed the Barcelona school for the past seven years and who played a decisive role in the new construction and all the associated organisation, proudly presented a review of the 88-year history of the school, which currently has 660 pupils. ALAIN WEY

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14-17.2005



Vote SVP, Vote for Switzerland!

Dear fellow citizens living abroad,

On 21 October, 2007, elections will be held. We, the Swiss citizens living abroad can also exert our influence on Switzerland's future; personally, I will support the Swiss People's Party's electoral list of citizens abroad, since:

- **The SVP is committed to Switzerland's freedom and independence.**
- **The SVP defends traditional Swiss values.**
- **The SVP wants Switzerland to remain an attractive destination to live, work and do business.**
- **The SVP represents the interests of Swiss citizens living abroad.**

Therefore, choose the SVP's electoral list of citizens abroad and speak out for the interests of Switzerland and its citizens living abroad!

With warmest regards

Rolf Schudel, Johannesburg (SA)
President SVP International


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