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A weatherproof system

SWISS POLITICS ARE RARELY MENTIONED IN THE FOREIGN MEDIA. The goings-on in the Federal Parliament are usually far too mundane to raise any interest abroad. This isn't helped by the fact that the mechanism of our system of direct democracy is difficult for outsiders to grasp. Indeed many foreign journalists fail to comprehend how our seven-member government can consist of representatives from four different political parties, that we hold referenda and that true power lies with the Swiss people themselves.

As a result, Switzerland is generally only written about on the business and culture pages or, ever since Roger Federer started making waves, under sport. Even our federal elections have largely been ignored abroad up to now. After all, we neither elect a charismatic president nor bring left- or right-wing parliamentary majorities to power. Political life in Switzerland is simply so stable that it's boring for outsiders.

This time round things were rather different for once. Never before have the media in Frankfurt, London, New York and elsewhere reported so extensively about Swiss politics. And what would a review of the world's press have us believe? The international media described a racist, egotistical and divided country. For instance, the Washington Post ran a piece under the headline "Swiss Fury at Foreigners Boiling Over". Spiegel Online in Germany knew we were a "Democracy on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown". And the Independent newspaper in England fretted on its front page that Switzerland had become "Europe's Heart of Darkness".

It is traditional in the run-up to an election for current or former members of the Federal Council who have studied the international press to publicly voice concerns about Switzerland's image abroad and even worry that negative reporting could turn investors away from Switzerland.

But this will not be the case. Even after the most expensive, emptiest, and bitterest election campaign of all times, Switzerland is neither racist nor xenophobic, and it still



Heinz Eckert

isn't run by the SVP and Christoph Blocher alone, no matter what the foreign media try to sell their readers. "Our system is weatherproof," said legendary former SP leader Helmut Hubacher. Foreign reporting of Switzerland this election year was extremely one-sided, subjective and far from the truth. That's rather a shame. The Swiss political system deserves to be treated in a more differentiated and thorough way, even in the foreign media.

As we went to press, the new Parliament hadn't yet decided whether or not to confirm the present seat allocation in the Federal Council. The Federal Council election won't take place until 12 December. Both www.aso.ch and www.swisinfo.org will provide regular updates on the eagerly-awaited outcome.

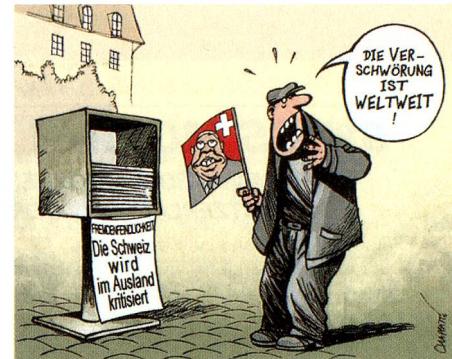
The editorial team of the Swiss Review would like to thank you for the interest you have taken in our work, and wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

HEINZ ECKERT, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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■ **EDITORS:** Heinz Eckert (EC), Editor-in-Chief; Rolf Ribi (RR), René Lenzin (RL), Alain Wey (AW), Gabriela Brodbeck (BDK), responsible for DFA information pages, Service for the Swiss Abroad, DFA, CH-3003 Berne Translation: CLS Communication AG ■ **POSTAL ADDRESS:** Publisher, editorial office, advertising: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3006 Berne, Tel.: +41 31 356 61 10, Fax: +41 31 356 61 01, Postal account (Swiss National Giro): 30-6768-9, Internet: www.revue.ch ■ **E-MAIL:** revue@aso.ch ■ **PRINT:** Zollikofer AG, CH-9001 St.Gallen.

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Angel figure in front of Einsiedeln Monastery church
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