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"Most people see themselves as losers". Each year, political scientists are commissioned by Credit Suisse to identify which issues and developments cause the most concern to Swiss people. This survey is known as the "Worry Barometer". Unemployment, the welfare institutions and healthcare were right at the top of the list of worries last year. Concerns among people in Switzerland about their personal security, the immigration issue and the relationship with the European Union have increased. David Bosshart, head of the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, analyses the fears of the Swiss people in an interview with Barbara Engel.

"SWISS REVIEW": Unemployment is top of the list of worries for Swiss people. 10% more than last year said that unemployment was their main concern, despite the fact that unemployment continued to fall in 2010 and relatively few people are actually affected by it personally. Why is there so much fear about unemployment?

DR DAVID BOSSHART: Work is a more important facet of people's lives than ever before. This is why we've coined the term workstyle, as people now organise their lives and plan their time around their job or jobs. Workstyle is today more important than lifestyle. The economic uncertainty and constant flow of contradictory information are unsettling, and the media like to dramatise developments. What really matters is how people feel. If they think they are going to lose their jobs tomorrow, even though objectively there is no reason for concern, then they will also behave as though they are going to lose their jobs tomorrow.

Does this great worry about unemployment indicate that the Swiss primarily define themselves through their work?

It would be good if that were the case as people are active beings and productive work is one of the most important things in life – these days more than ever because retirement is quite rightly being postponed and will become more and more flexible.

Concerns about the welfare institutions and healthcare rank immediately behind unemployment. Does this mean that the Swiss believe our social order and our social solidarity – one of the cornerstones of Swiss society – are in jeopardy? A lot of subconscious fears are revealed here because people feel that the increasingly glo-

balised world is undergoing dramatic change. Demography, in other words economic and social population changes, is our destiny. We all established and expanded great social welfare institutions at a time when a lot of young people financially supported far fewer elderly people. This situation is now changing constantly. Immigration eases the burden to an extent but also increases the complexity of society enormously because other people also bring different values with them. And this, in turn, also increases costs.

Do politicians show too little interest in possible fears about decreasing solidarity in our society? Or are such fears in fact deliberately stoked up?

There is a trend towards more populism throughout the western world. From the US with its Tea Party movement to countries such as Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland, we are seeing the same thing. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find majorities, which is dangerous. Liberal democracy is still the best of a bad bunch of political systems, but politicians need voters and the media needs subscribers and readers and so they all overdramatise events. Everything that is emotive is emotionalised.

Rows in the Federal Council and deadlock in Parliament were constant media topics last year, but the conduct of the authorities and politicians is still not among the major concerns of the Swiss people. Is there a sense of basic trust or perhaps confidence in self-regulation?

We have to ask what we are drawing comparisons with. I firmly believe that we can still essentially take great pride in our political system. However, the challenges that have to be overcome today are much more com-

plex. Owing to federalism and direct democracy, people in Switzerland also feel responsible for what goes on in politics. From this perspective, we do have the politicians we deserve.

The immigration issue, or more precisely the integration of foreign nationals and the free movement of persons (position 5), as well as the relationship with the EU (position 7) have moved up the list of worries. Does the fear of losing national identity play a role here?

Yes and no. Small states can usually deal with migration better than large ones. The USA, Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the UK have much bigger problems than Switzerland. Most people see themselves as losers and believe that globalisation and migration are taking away their jobs, reducing their quality of life and threatening their identity. Indeed, identity, belonging and responsibility constitute major challenges for a country. Switzerland needs a strong basic consensus – without this we will become a segmented society of special interest groups.

Does this basic consensus still exist today? I suspect that it does, but it would take a serious crisis or a great deal of suffering for it to become evident again in our highly prosperous world.

You say that most people see themselves as losers in the globalised world. Will this outlook and the fears inevitably associated with it increasingly become a hindrance or burden to Switzerland?

The success and failure of nations will, in future, be measured by how the middle classes fare. However, you have to bear in mind that middle class is not primarily defined by in-



DAVID BOSSHART AND THE GDI

Dr David Bosshart (52) studied philosophy and political theory at the University of Zurich and has been head of the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute (GDI) in Rüschlikon, near Zurich, since 1999. The GDI is an independent European think-tank for economic and socio-political issues. It was established by the founder of Migros, Gottlieb Duttweiler, in 1962. Duttweiler's principle of "focusing on people rather than capital" continues to shape the institute's approach to lecturing and research.

come, but the hope of a better life. If people stop hoping and instead just respond with cynicism and aggression, then we have all lost. Mental strength and the belief that things can be improved are key. And, in my view, Switzerland is still well placed in this respect.

The main concerns that Swiss people have also reveal that economic considerations are a top priority. Has the economy overtaken politics in terms of importance?

This was, in fact, the case in the period of great illusion from 1990 to around 2008. The euphoria surrounding seemingly boundless global growth thanks to the manipulation of key financial indicators has now given way to disenchantment. The view that we are only

successful if the economy and politics are both strong is once again widely held. The Chinese impressively demonstrate that the market is an instrument of the state and not an ideology, as in the West. Parag Khanna, an expert in geopolitics from the USA, who will give a presentation at the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute's Trend Conference in March, says that we are currently experiencing both an institutional and a geographical shift of power at the same time.

The concerns of Swiss people revolve mainly around domestic issues; global problems are not viewed as priorities. It would appear that the Swiss still see themselves as an insular nation and a special case. Is this so?

Again, you have to ask who we are comparing ourselves with. We are obviously an island of privileged people and I can't really see which of the emerging global economic and political constellations we could belong to. We are not part of BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India and China; we do not belong to PIGS – Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain; we are not a member of the EU; and we are not an "olive republic", the name given to the attractive tourist destinations of southern Europe, stretching from Bulgaria to Greece and all the way to Spain and Portugal. We are a stand-alone nation. Another consideration is that the more global the world becomes, the more interest people take in matters close to home. Who is my neighbour? This explains the emphasis on domestic issues among people's concerns.

In France, the book "Indignez-vous" (Cry Out!) by Stéphane Hessel has sold 900,000 copies within a very short space of time. 93-year-old Hessel, a veteran of the Résistance and a Holocaust survivor, rails against inequality, financial capital and xenophobia in his book and launches an impassioned appeal for people to stand up for the basic universal rights set out in the UN Charter on Human Rights and to react with outrage at their constant infringement. Could we do with a similar pamphlet in Switzerland?

Outrage doesn't really help. I prefer to focus on putting forward arguments and highlighting contradictions. We must avoid too much populism and scaremongering. And, above all, we must ensure that we do not become a segmented Switzerland where special interest groups make majorities impossible.

Do you believe a culture of outrage against the infringement of basic rights, which Hessel calls for in his book, could be fostered in Switzerland?

We are not France. We have never held ambitions of being a major power. France is unfortunately in a state of rapid decline, and it seems unaware of this. "La Grande Nation" is becoming a "Nation Moyenne", an average nation.