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The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss abroad

FEDERAL COUNCILLOR DIDIER BURKHALTER gave one of his first interviews since his move to the Department of Foreign Affairs at the start of the year to "Swiss Review". By doing so, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a clear indication that the Swiss abroad, whose numbers are growing all the time, are important to him. Federal Councillor Burkhalter told us in the interview that he really loves discovering new countries and has a "good feel for differences". He says that he wants to gain a better understanding of the issues and problems facing his over 700,000 compatriots abroad. His position on the new law being called for with regard to the Swiss abroad is already clear. He supports it unreservedly and believes such a law would establish "the foundations for an integral policy on the Swiss abroad". This is extremely welcome news for Swiss people living outside Switzerland. The Swiss abroad will also have the opportunity to meet Federal Councillor Burkhalter in person at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lausanne in August.

The main article in this issue concerns FIFA, world football's governing body. FIFA is often very directly associated with Switzerland, partly because it is led by Sepp Blatter, who is Swiss, and partly because it has been based in Zurich for decades. This is detrimental to our nation in light of the conduct of many FIFA officials. The federation's financial affairs – it generates billions in revenues, provides hardly any services, pays

very little tax and is seen as a sanctuary for corruption – are increasingly coming in for criticism from Swiss politicians. An anti-corruption campaign launched by FIFA last November has failed to prove convincing.

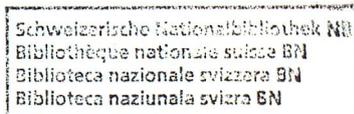


Barbara Engel

While this issue was going to print, a highly contentious debate was taking place in Switzerland over the procurement of new fighter jets for the armed forces. The complaint raised is that the Federal Council, in particular Ueli Maurer as head of the Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS), overlooked negative evaluation reports when selecting the Swedish Gripen aircraft. The fighter jets were denounced as "cheap", their quality and capabilities doubted. The question as to whether the aircraft ordered in November are "optimal" for Switzerland, as the DDPS claims, or unfit for purpose, as critics argue, is bound to remain a topic of debate for some time yet. "Swiss Review" will take a more in-depth look at the subject of the Swiss armed forces in a later issue. However, we will not just examine one controversial decision but will instead consider the army and its objectives and challenges in the 21st century in broader terms.

I would finally like to urge you to sign our petition to the Federal Council for e-voting to be introduced as quickly as possible. Being able to vote via the Internet is extremely important for Swiss citizens abroad (details on page 16)

BARBARA ENGEL



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Cover page: FIFA President Sepp Blatter after his re-election last June at Zurich's Hallenstadion. Photo: Alessandro Della Bella / Keystone