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Democratic voting?

I wonder whether electronic voting, even though very practical, really allows us to maintain a system of free and democratic voting or, in other words, voting without manipulation and outside influence? My question arises after the recent holding of the first free elections in Tunisia where this issue was raised.

AMEL CHEIKHROUHOU,
ENNASC, TUNISIA

Fitting for the 21st century

I believe that Internet voting is an ideal solution for the Swiss abroad. We are in the 21st century! Depending on the circumstances, it is difficult to vote by post – limited personnel in the embassies and lack of proximity. The issue of organisation remains but we surely have enough talented IT people to make this work.

MICHEL PIGUET,
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

E-voting – a huge step forward

Internet voting is a huge step forward for us expats. We can express our opinion in just a few clicks. This is important because we keep watch whilst far away from Switzerland! We observe and analyse the events that take place before our eyes and when our compatriots have doubts about international issues, we are there to provide answers on various topics, such as the European Union, the benefits and drawbacks of free movement and the dangers of such a policy.

P. VOGEL, FRANCE

The FDFA should raise the issue

It is practically impossible for the Swiss living in Brazil to vote because mail only arrives a few days before voting/elections – if all goes well – or even worse afterwards as a result of

strike action, like at the last elections. Brazil should sign the Wassenaar Arrangement so that the Swiss in Brazil can vote via the Internet. The FDFA should make a request to Itamaraty, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

HERBERT HIRSCHI, BRAZIL

Well done

Dear editorial team, many members of our club have said that "Swiss Review" is now much more modern, interesting and outward-looking. A particularly critical Swiss lady, who was previously a writer herself and is not a member of the club, also says that she now really enjoys reading "Swiss Review". Many thanks for your good work and for keeping us so well informed.

MARIA BRABETZ,
CLUB SUISSE PORTO, PORTUGAL

Reasons for poverty

I wish to point out the following concerning the article entitled "Swiss solidarity faces an acid test" in the November 2011 issue of "Swiss Review". I have lived in Brazil for over 20 years where I am a voluntary worker. I spent a year working on the "Monte Azul" regeneration project in a slum district (favela) of São Paulo where I was able to gain a better understanding of the reasons for poverty. This insight led me to set up the children's charity ARCO in São Paulo with my ex-wife, a Brazilian. During the set-up phase, we also approached the FDFA via the Swiss embassy to present our project and seek support. Our tuition project was approved (10,000 US dollars) and the school for children with special educational requirements is still operating today. I am convinced that the main reason for poverty is related to the local school system. The

THOSE WHO TRAVEL EXTENSIVELY have many tales to tell. This is certainly true of the five Swiss women and seven Swiss men who report on their humanitarian aid work in the anthology "Die andere Seite der Welt" (The Other Side of the World). Some were involved in emergency relief aid, some in development aid, and others in both. They all share a desire to help combined with a spirit of adventure. The third key quality they possess is the ability to negotiate in foreign cultures.

Lengthy interviews have produced recollections and observations in the first person, often about perilous situations, even if sometimes "only" on journalistic assignments (Al Imfeld before his time as a development missionary, Andrea König after working for the ICRC). Just under half of the portraits are about former ICRC delegates. Naturally, these Red Cross deployments often involved trouble spots. The interviews are part of an "oral history" project but they are presented uncritically and only with the necessary supplementary information.

Besides their adventures, this easy-to-read book, which is also suitable for young people, also provides great insight into the motivation of the workers, their approach and their relationship with local people and the head office in Switzerland. The latter appears sometimes to lack understanding of the situation on the ground but at the same time proves invaluable during crises. "Today you spend half the day reading e-mails from Berne with your back turned to the country", says the agronomist Martin Menzi recalling the "golden days" when he was a largely independent project manager several decades ago in India.

The account of the former ICRC delegate Antonella Notari is touching on a personal level, not just but certainly in part because her partner was fatally wounded before her eyes in Somalia. The reports of Notari's ICRC colleagues, Carlos Bauverd, Beat von Däniken and Jacques Moreillon, also contain some extraordinary, disconcerting accounts, above all about prison visits. The two oldest contributors, Verena Fiechter, employed by the Basel Mission, and Anna Wicki, known as Sister Maria-Paula of the Baldegg Convent, recall their long-term humanitarian aid work as hospital managers in Africa. Both were given honorary native names, though a male nurse did tell the nun once when she got annoyed at all the chaos around them: "Mama, you cannot be like us, you have different chromosomes." She took comfort from this.



Two other new publications look at Swiss development policy from very different perspectives. "Gemeinsam unterwegs. Eine Zeitreise durch 60 Jahre Entwicklungszusammenarbeit Schweiz-Nepal" (Travelling Together – a Journey through 60 Years of Development Cooperation between Switzerland and Nepal), written by Rolf Wilhelm, the former deputy director of the SDC, and other experts, is a portrayal and collection of material set out in chronological and thematic order. It was published by Haupt-Verlag, which also has another quasi official-sounding title by several authors in its portfolio: "Im Dienst der Menschheit – Meilensteine der Schweizer Entwicklungszusammenarbeit" (Serving Mankind – Milestones in Swiss Development Cooperation).

DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

THOMAS GULL, DOMINIK SCHNETZER: "Die andere Seite der Welt. Was Schweizerinnen und Schweizer im humanitären Einsatz erlebt haben", hier+jetzt, Baden 2011, 272 pages, CHF 42