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Not such clear positions

The editorial in the June 2012 edition of "Swiss Review" looked at the debate on Switzerland's position in Europe, but definitely did NOT do this in an unbiased way – the editor clearly took a partisan approach. "Special case charade" to describe those she does not agree with is just one example.

It is good that "Swiss Review" should provoke thought, but not that it should take such clear positions on issues where parties and people differ.

ALEXANDER WYLIE,
CAMBRIDGE, UK

Congratulations

I really enjoyed your article on "a solar-powered voyage around the world" as I am sure many other readers did, too. I found it fascinating reading from beginning to end. The man behind the project deserves high praise indeed. I wish to express my gratitude to you for sharing the achievements of the ingenious Raphaël Domjan and his team with us. Long may we continue to enjoy such a well-produced "Swiss Review" (print edition).

MONIQUE THOMAS,
LE CANNET, FRANCE

Shocking attitude

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) is campaigning for a later start to school life and against day schools to protect its traditional family model with the mother over the stove. I left Switzerland at the age of 12 in the mid-1960s when this attitude was prevalent. I find it shocking that a large proportion of the population still thinks this way half a century later. This is no better than the Tea Party, which is quite simply abysmal.

HERMANN MEIERHANS,
HEIDELBERG, GERMANY

Procurement of combat jets

I am retired and live in Thailand but regularly keep up to date with Swiss news thanks to "Swiss Review" and "RTS.ch". I find the attitude of Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer absolutely shocking. I do not know whether he is lacking in ability, closed-minded or whatever else, but his actions, failure to act and little secrets are starting to become very annoying. A highly critical report was published about the Gripen jets and experts warned against purchasing them but Mr Maurer was insistent and signed the agreement with Sweden. They are purchasing aeroplanes that are

already out-of-date compared to the models of other manufacturers. This is a farce and makes Switzerland a laughing stock in the eyes of the world. I am glad that my taxes have not been used on this outrageous project.

G. PH. STRIBERNI, LOPBURI,
THAILAND

Electronic voting for the Swiss abroad

I took the first opportunity to vote electronically and welcome this initiative wholeheartedly. The voting documents only used to reach us just before the referendum date by post, which prevented us from voting on several occasions.

My entire family is delighted by this new option.

FRITZ BURRI, BAHIAS DE
HUATULCO, MEXICO

An excellent initiative

The e-voting system that enables me to take part in federal referenda as a Swiss citizen living abroad and which I will continue to take advantage of in future is an excellent initiative. I would like to say a big thank-you to the Swiss authorities who enable us to participate in direct democracy.

HANS PETER AUER,
YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA

Referenda from abroad

Many of my Swiss friends and I in Brazil/Natal would jump at the opportunity to vote via the Internet. We have been waiting for this opportunity for some time. We could easily obtain campaign information online. Almost all publications and political parties have a homepage.

RENÉ GUSSET, PIUM, BRAZIL

The Swiss passport is becoming unappealing

I must express my annoyance about the procedure for applying for a new Swiss passport as a Swiss citizen abroad. I believe many Swiss abroad will share my sentiments. A new passport (due to photograph, fingerprint and signature requirements) can only be applied for in person at the consulate responsible. I live in Dortmund and would have to take a day's holiday and drive 600 km by car to make the application. I could hardly take my four-month-old daughter on such a trip. I would therefore have to organise an overnight stay in Frankfurt to make passport applications for the two of us. That means a total of two days of holiday plus hotel costs. In the case of my 90-year-old grandmother, who also lives in Germany, travel-

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ling to Frankfurt is out of the question for health reasons and she cannot therefore renew her passport.

I appreciate the stringent security requirements for the new passport but fail to understand why we cannot cooperate with the German authorities, who could record the biometric photographs and fingerprints and send them digitally to the Swiss authorities. The technical capabilities available today are incredible.

On account of such an inconvenient procedure, dual citizenship is becoming an increasingly attractive option for Swiss people living in Germany. This would nevertheless result in us holding a valid German passport and an expired Swiss one.

DR DIRK ECKERT, DORTMUND,
GERMANY

Marcel Cellier, magic words

Many thanks for the article on Marcel Cellier. When people ask me "Why Romania?", where I have lived for six months of the year since 1990, I explain that a French-speaking Swiss used to play fantastic Romanian music every Saturday on Radio Lausanne around 1960. I've bought countless recordings ever since and I've been visiting Romania since 1982. In 1990, I decided to live in this magical country with its captivating music. I would like to express my thanks to the man (and his wife) who inspired my decision to live in this paradise. And thank you for having celebrated the achievements of this unique couple.

NOEL TAMINI, CICIRLAU,
ROMANIA

Tireless commitment to music

I would like to commend the author of the article "Love stories behind the Iron Curtain"

on the Cellier couple I have known for 40 years. The article told your readers that one of the main reasons for the popularity of folkloric music from eastern and southern Europe in western Europe were the tireless efforts of Marcel Cellier and his wife Catherine. The film "Balkan Melodies", which also received a mention, is well worth watching and may open up new horizons for music lovers. I wish to thank you and the author for this hugely enjoyable article. "Swiss Review" often contains excellent articles and does not shy away from tackling contentious issues and expressing controversial opinions. Hats off to you!

WALTER KNAUS,
RAMMERSMATT, FRANCE

Education

according to HarmoS

I was surprised to learn that mandatory education in Switzerland is undergoing reform and is to be standardised at national level. This is not such a bad thing and progress in the administration of the public service of education will enable us to move closer towards unification between Switzerland's various cultural regions.

However, it is regrettable that this reform is part of an economic approach based on the fundamental requirements of capitalism and the pragmatic societal paradigms that are increasingly characterising the industrialised nations. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, emancipation and the need to understand the world differently gave Western societies the opportunity to develop new concepts full of hope rather than efficiency.

ALFONSO PERRET, CALI,
COLOMBIA

Clear thinking and smart action

"TRY TO GET THROUGH LIFE WITH A MINIMUM of information. You will make better decisions. What you do not need to know remains worthless even if you are aware of it." This sentence appears towards the beginning of the 200-page book "Die Kunst des klugen Handelns" (The Art of Acting Cleverly). As the reader, this makes you wonder whether it is worth reading on. By continuing to read will you only learn things that will prevent you from making good decisions?

The author of "Die Kunst des klugen Handelns" is Rolf Dobelli, a columnist with the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and the Swiss newspaper "SonntagZeitung". This is his second book featuring newspaper columns. The first was entitled "Die Kunst des klaren Denkens" (The Art of Thinking Clearly). It topped the bestseller list for weeks. Dobelli's specialist field are the "thought traps" we constantly fall into and which

make life difficult for us. His premise is that our brains are not designed for the modern world but instead for life as hunter gatherers. "This results in systematic errors of reasoning that can have a devastating impact on your finances, career and happiness", he writes. He also explains to readers why we systematically overestimate our own knowledge and regard other people as less intelligent than they really are, why things are not necessarily more likely to be true if millions of people believe them to be so and why we stand by theories even when they have been proven wrong. Examples Dobelli gives are voting blindly and the illusion of self-observation. These involve beliefs, positions and viewpoints of which we are deeply convinced. Dobelli explains that when judging those who do not share our convictions, we assume they are ignorant, stupid or ill-intentioned. But this can also be a mistake, which is why it is dangerous to hold firm to one's convictions for too long.

Dobelli does not consider himself to be a philosopher and certainly does not regard himself as more intelligent than others. His strengths are his abilities to research, read, consider and deduce. There are dozens of clever studies and analyses on behavioural economics and psychology. And this is where Dobelli finds

the errors of reasoning that destroy careers and make people unhappy. He has also learned "to act on gut instinct when making less important decisions". He writes that thinking clearly is time-consuming: "If the potential damage is small, don't rack your brain."

What emerges when Dobelli reflects on and discovers errors of reasoning is not just extremely enriching, it also makes for very enjoyable reading. Dobelli shows great

empathy and has a tremendous sense of humour. In the book's foreword, Dobelli quotes Aristotle: "A wise man does not seek happiness but rather aims to avoid unhappiness." Readers will most certainly take a step closer to achieving this goal by reading this book.

BARBARA ENGEL



ROLF DOBELLI: "Die Kunst des klugen Handelns"; Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich 2012; 248 pages with illustrations by El Bocho and Simon Stehle. CHF 21.90, EUR 14.90.

An English translation will be published in the UK and the USA in spring 2013. "The Art of Thinking Clearly: Better Thinking, Better Decisions" by Rolf Dobelli has already been translated into 20 languages.