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Great shame

To my great surprise, there was no mention of the 20th anniversary of Switzerland's rejection of accession to the EU in the December 2012 issue of "Swiss Review". The vote held on 6 December 1992 was a momentous event in our nation's history. I believe that this 'no' has had detrimental consequences for our country. It forces us into bilateral agreements that are costing us dear and which we are compelled to sign. They prevent us from participating in Europe's development and from contributing our wealth of experience in the cohabitation of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. We are obliged to take European laws into account in our legislation but have no say in European legislation. Switzerland is in fact a passive member of Europe and this is a great shame.

MAX PLATTNER,
LUCINGES, FRANCE

A network of pilgrimage routes

I have also walked 900 kilometres along the Way of St James and would like to point something out. The Way of St James is not the only pilgrimage route. There is an entire network that stretches across Europe, including through Germany and Switzerland. Many of these routes are not very well developed and you can walk the entire day without seeing another soul and only meet other pilgrims in the evening at your accommodation, which is hopefully available. Many volunteers keep these routes and lodgings in good condition and expressly welcome leisure-time pilgrims. Many a pilgrim has not just found himself or herself, but has also made new or first encounters with God and faith.

VIVIAN FRÖHLICH-KLEINSCHMIDT,
AURICH, GERMANY

Alternative pilgrimages

I enjoyed reading the article on pilgrimages in the December issue of "Swiss Review". I have been living in Sweden for two years as a Swiss abroad. As a born Catholic theologian, I have taken on the task of raising the profile of the pilgrimage routes and destinations of the north in German-speaking Europe. When you talk about pilgrimage destinations in Central Europe everyone thinks of Santiago de Compostela (which really is very overcrowded). Few people are familiar with Trondheim in Norway or Vadstena in Sweden despite the fact that Trondheim was the third most important pilgrimage destination in Europe in the Middle Ages.

Pilgrimages here in the north are calmer and less commercial. The vastness of the countries is ideally suited to pilgrimages.

SIBYLLE HARDEGGER,
UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Persona non grata

Swiss abroad face insurmountable hurdles in securing housing, employment and a decent standard of living when returning to Switzerland to stay and live here. Unfortunately, they do not get any support from the communes they originally came from. It seems as though they are not welcome. But at election time they are told that they are fully fledged citizens with the same duties and rights as everyone else, which unfortunately is not the case. A communal official told my daughter when she returned to Switzerland that she should have stayed where she was! What is that supposed to mean? It means you are a persona non grata!

ANONYMOUS, BY E-MAIL

Love stories from Switzerland

LOVE COMES. LOVE GOES. And anyone who invites seventeen authors to write about love sees love come and go in many different ways, blossoming and founder, sometimes growing slowly and sometimes lasting forever. In "Amami - Liebe mich", the carefully produced publication by the recently established "Abendstern Edizioni" publishing house in Ticino, the authors do not simply attempt to explain love. They provide accounts of it. They relate the most intimate of all emotions. They explore what love does to us and what we do with love - and how we also sometimes mistreat it.

The seventeen accounts, many written especially for the anthology, include the angry, rebellious love of two teenagers (by Martin R. Dean), calculating, feigned compassion for a dying person (by Charles Lewinsky) and tender affections that outlast death, as in Daniel de Roulet's tale where an elderly widower tries to scatter the ashes of his deceased love in the wind only for the wind to blow them back in his face: "I feel your ashes on my lips but dare not lick them. Is that not your farewell kiss?"

Containing just under 200 pages, the book reveals subtle inner reflections from the complex realm of love experienced by people living in Switzerland. But what actually makes "Liebesgeschichten aus der Schweiz" (Love stories from Switzerland), which is the book's subtitle, a Swiss book? All the authors are obviously of Swiss nationality. But, that aside, they are all very different. They speak different languages, use contrasting writing styles, represent different generations and, in some cases, have dissimilar temperaments. Yet, the compilation of literary gems produces a cohesive picture of lovers in a very small country, which, despite its size, still breaks down into different living environments and linguistic regions held together not least by love. Or, at any rate, they remain fatefully entwined through love stories.

From that perspective, the book is also something it does not set out to be - a declaration of love to Switzerland. In any case, the role played by the small publishing house is to be commended. It is contributing to new emotional ties by bringing together in one work authors who write in Italian, such as Giovanni Orelli, German-speaking writers like Anne Cueno, Eveline Hasler, Pedro Lenz and Peter Stamm, authors with their roots in the Romansh region, including Oscar Peer, and literary talents from French-speaking Switzerland, such as Sylviane Chatelain and Daniel de Roulet, thus counteracting the trend where one Swiss linguistic region barely recognises the literature produced in the other Swiss languages. The book is therefore also an affectionate contribution to the miracle of this tiny nation with its many national languages, but above all it simply contains stirring literature.

MARC LETTAU

"AMAMI - LIEBE MICH", 17 Liebesgeschichten aus der Schweiz; Abendstern Edizioni, 2012; 195 pages; paperback; available in German and Italian; CHF 25; EUR 20.