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Swiss allies drift away

ONE ISSUE IS CURRENTLY HIGH on the agenda for many states, notably Switzerland's neighbours – the collection of taxes on assets which their citizens have concealed from the fiscal authorities using various schemes and often with the assistance of financial institutions. The pursuit of those evading taxation and seeking optimized tax solutions is understandable in light of the debt situation facing many countries. Switzerland "the tax haven" finds itself directly in the firing line of many disgruntled governments. Hardly a day goes by without criticism being levelled at Switzerland or the pressure being stepped up. Switzerland has also in recent months lost its last remaining allies – Luxembourg and Austria – in its fight against the automatic exchange of information and complete transparency.

Switzerland now finds itself in an extremely awkward situation. And what has the response been? The actions and comments of our government and the conduct of our Parliament have done little to inspire confidence. An ill-tempered cacophony has been heard from Berne. This does little to improve our nation's position or image in the world.



Many letters and emails sent by readers to the editorial team lead us to conclude that this situation is increasingly having an impact on the Swiss abroad. And in the midst of all this, the Federal Council has now also activated the safety-valve clause which puts restrictions on immigration from all EU states. This has made everything even more unpleasant even if on closer inspection it is clear that the Federal Council's decision is a measure aimed more at alleviating domestic political tension than an effective means of combating immigration and the issues associated with it. These issues were explored in the April edition of the "Swiss Review".

In the current edition we pay particular attention to various players and events in Parliament. The focus-topic article looks at the younger generation of politicians under 40 years of age on the national political scene. Many of these young MPs have an advantage over their more senior colleagues – they are highly adept at handling the media and take every opportunity that arises to raise their profile and to enhance their popularity. Some have thereby quickly established themselves as key figures in political opinion-making.

Finally, our reporter Jürg Müller looks at Switzerland's army and defence policy by observing developments during Parliament's spring session. He reveals where uncertainty lies and which contentious issues the Swiss people are ultimately likely to be called to decide upon.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Echo

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The younger members of the Swiss Parliament do not shy away from high-profile or unusual public appearances: Pascale Bruderer at the Swiss Award, Toni Brunner with the mascot "Zottel", Cédric Werthmüller at Credit Suisse's annual general meeting and Christa Markwalder as an advocate of the EU (clockwise).

Photos: Keystone