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A future full of unknown factors

SWITZERLAND IS SLOWLY AWAKENING from a dream of unfettered prosperity." This comment recently appeared in the German weekly newspaper "Die Zeit". That raises the question of whether this verdict is an accurate reflection. Is there any truth in these words by journalist Peer Teuwsen, a very attentive and sympathetic observer of Switzerland? As we sometimes discover from angry letters, not all readers of "Swiss Review" appreciate references to problems and conflicts facing Switzerland, whether domestically, with neighbouring states or with more distant countries.

However, the fact that we were able to dream the "dream of unfettered prosperity" at all can be attributed to our democracy, most certainly our efficiency and also the stable conditions within our country – that means our laws, too, such as banking confidentiality. But banking confidentiality is becoming increasingly problematic for Switzerland. This is illustrated by the threatening posture being adopted by the USA towards Switzerland (report on page 16). American courts are preparing to take legal action, which may include charges of fraud, falsification of documents, money laundering, insider trading, bribery and the financing of terrorism.



The world experienced a nightmare on 11 March 2011 when an earthquake resulted in a tsunami and a disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power station in Japan. Shortly afterwards, the Federal Council announced that the Swiss government had decided to make fundamental changes to the country's energy policy. The term "energy turnaround" is now part of every politician's vocabulary. But what did the Federal Council actually mean by that?

What does the "energy turnaround" signify for Switzerland and its future? In whose interests is this turnaround? Who is holding it back and does not want a shift in direction? And where will it lead us? Marc Lettau of our editorial team provides some answers in his feature article on page 8 onwards. He explains that the energy turnaround is not an abstract scenario but a process that will present challenges for each and every one of us.

Another futuristic idea, indeed quite an unconventional one, is currently being debated in Switzerland as well as in other European countries – the notion of an "unconditional basic income". This proposes that every individual should receive enough money from the state on which to live from the cradle to the grave – even if they do not work. Advocates and opponents of this fundamental reorganisation of society are found right across the political spectrum from the far left to the far right. This complicates the debate significantly. As signatures are already being collected for a popular initiative in Switzerland, Jürg Müller outlines the arguments for and against the proposal on page 17 onwards.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Cover image:

The Rhaetian railway in Grisons is one of the most spectacular stretches of railway in the world and is now a UNESCO world heritage site. The photo shows the Davos to Filisur stretch at the "Bärentritt".
Photo: Rhätische Bahn

