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Viewpoints and perceptions

INTERLAKEN WAS THE STAGE OF A STRANGE SPECTACLE this mid-September: Ueli Maurer, Swiss President and, in this capacity, guest speaker at the conference of the Swiss publishing industry, was met with boos and jeers instead of applause. What had happened? Maurer had expressed his views to the publishing industry gathered before him. He had said that a media monopoly on opinion existed in Switzerland, media coverage was one-sided, everyone took the same line and the concerns of Maurer's Swiss People's Party (SVP) were suppressed as much as possible. His analysis annoyed the senior management of the media groups so much that they lost their composure. It is not just embarrassing, it is also alarming that the media – the newspapers, radio stations and television channels that analyse and criticise the work of politicians, and many other figures, on a daily basis, should react so sensitively to criticism of their own endeavours. This is not the place to assess whether Maurer's analysis was right or not – as is so often the case, it is a matter of perception.



There was also an opportunity for reflection on perceptions in Switzerland after 1 August. Many prominent speakers – including Ueli Maurer, who appeared at nine different venues – contemplated Switzerland's role and its relationships with the rest of the world on Swiss National Day. Some quotations from speeches made on 1 August can be found on page 31.

How Switzerland is perceived in the world also depends heavily on what places foreign visitors – commonly known as tourists – visit in our country and what experiences they have. How tourism in Switzerland is changing – and needs to change – and what this means for our country is explored in the article on our focus topic on page 8 onwards.

A fierce referendum debate will take place in Switzerland over the coming weeks. The battle over the 1:12 initiative, which calls for the highest salary in a company to be capped at twelve times the lowest, is being fought with the gloves off – and with figures and statistics that differ greatly depending on the political standpoint. The background to the arguments for and against the initiative is outlined on page 15.

A look at the statistics on wealth and prosperity in Switzerland and the rest of the world is also interesting in this respect. According to Credit Suisse statistics, one thousandth of the world's population lives in Switzerland and one percent of all billionaires. In Switzerland, one percent of the population owns 58.9 percent of the national wealth. In Denmark, the figure is 36.1 percent, in the USA 34.1, in France 28.7 and in the UK 20.1. Germany is in ninth place with 17.3 percent. This concentration of wealth in Switzerland is clearly the result not just of large salaries and other income but also of the tax situation. Many foreign governments are aware of this and are responding accordingly – the new inheritance tax agreement sought by France is just one such example.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Echo

Cover photo: René Burri, photographed by Sandro Campardo at the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne during the "René Burri – Retrospective 1950–2000" exhibition in 2004.