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Swiss virtues and immigration

INDEPENDENT, RESILIENT, CAPABLE and united – these attributes are the basis of Switzerland's success. These virtues, thanks to Friedrich Schiller's "William Tell", have become legendary well beyond Swiss borders. But is Switzerland's success explained by these qualities alone? Of course not. Many ideas conceived by those not of true Swiss origin and implemented by people not of pure Swiss stock have also made a contribution. In our key focus article on page 8 onwards, Jürg Müller describes the huge interest shown by many Swiss during the 19th century in foreign ideas, developments and achievements and illustrates the contribution made by various immigrants to Switzerland's advancement, success and modern-day identity.

Immigration will also play a key role in political debate in Switzerland in the near future. The electorate will have several opportunities to voice its opinion on this subject over the coming year. The first will be on 9 February 2014, when the Swiss people will vote on the initiative against mass immigration. (Further details



can be found on page 14). Referenda will also be held on the Ecopop initiative "Stop overpopulation – safeguard our natural environment" and on the extension of the free movement of persons to Croatia.

Many Swiss abroad are clearly anxious about the referendum on the free movement of persons as they are concerned about the ramifications of a No vote. This could have grave consequences, resulting in the termination of the bilateral agreements with the European Union (EU). Experts in constitutional law are in agreement, and those behind the referendum do not refute the claims either. Whether that is actually their objective, as suggested in some quarters, remains open to debate. Switzerland would unquestionably be left in a very isolated position without the bilateral agreements and would have to renegotiate its relations with the EU states. The Federal Council has strongly warned against such a scenario and believes it would jeopardise Switzerland's economic development in particular. The end of the bilateral approach would also clearly have an impact on many of the over 400,000 Swiss abroad living in a European state.

I would finally like to mention some changes taking place within the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. Rudolf Wyder, who as Director has been a key figure for the past 28 years in representing the interests of the Swiss abroad to Swiss authorities and politicians, will retire at the end of the year. A review of his achievements can be found on page 26.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Echo

Cover image: Photographer Alessandro Della Bella took this photograph of a moonlit night on Mount Säntis in February. It comes from a new book featured on page 6.

