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Far-sighted or narrow-minded

THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR FESTIVITIES are over. We have returned to our day-to-day lives. This column was written in early January but will only reach readers worldwide a month later. Commenting on his work and the global situation in an interview shortly before Christmas, Cornelio Sommaruga, the well-known former Swiss diplomat and ICRC President, said: "Terrorism and violence can largely be avoided if we respect human dignity. We must resolutely tackle the poverty of one third of humanity, the overexploitation of the environment, and legal and illegal arms transfers." Few would argue against that, except perhaps for a handful of potentates and arms smugglers.

There are various possible ways in which we could help combat poverty and war and foster respect for human dignity in our everyday lives: by demonstrating a generous spirit, by not just focusing on our own interests and by taking heed when our actions are detrimental to others. The outcome of the referendum on 9 February this year on the "initiative against mass immigration", put forward by the Swiss People's Party, will provide an indication of how far-sighted or narrow-minded we Swiss are. I presume



that many Swiss abroad in particular would like to see a decision that reflects far-sightedness in Switzerland's relations with the rest of the world rather than small-mindedness and egotism. Didier Burkhalter, Swiss President in 2014, will have a particularly challenging time in dealing with the international community. He will adopt a different approach to that of his predecessor, Ueli Maurer, as he clearly stated after his election. You will find more on his election and that of the presidents of the National Council and Council of States in the "Politics" section, which also includes an interview on diplomatic relations with our neighbouring countries.

In this issue's key focus article one of our editors, Marc Lettau, has taken an in-depth look at something that is quickly disposed of, soon forgotten and which people usually turn their noses up at. He has taken a peek inside Switzerland's rubbish bins and at its mountains of trash, which are growing in line with rising incomes. It is alarming how much food is thrown away and amazing what can be reclaimed from refuse.

Alain Wey profiles the Swiss singer Sophie Hunger in the "Culture" section. She is enjoying major international success with her unconventional, highly diverse music, and creative and surprising collaborations with various artists.

The editorial team wishes you, our readers, a happy and successful New Year and looks forward to hearing from you from afar.

BARBARA ENGEL

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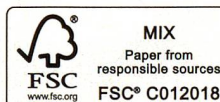
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Echo

Cover photo: Switzerland County with the village of Vevay in Indiana, USA, is one of the places that Swiss photographer Benno Gut photographed for the book "Weltatlas der Schweizer Orte". The texts were written by journalist Petra Koci. Find out more in "Images" on page 6.

Corrigendum: The cover picture of the December edition shows Mount Titlis, not Mount Säntis. We apologise for the error.

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