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Referendum on bilateral agreements?

“Raus aus der Sackgasse” (Out of the cul-de-sac), or RASA for short, is the name of an association seeking to save the bilateral agreements with the EU through a referendum. The popular initiative was launched on 2 December 2014. Around 300 people from the fields of education, science, business, culture and sport belong to the RASA association. They include the billionaire Hansjörg Wyss, the artist Pipilotti Rist and the footballer Andy Egli. Those behind the initiative believe that the implementation of article 121a (from the Swiss People’s Party SVP initiative against mass immigration) will lead into a cul-de-sac. The Swiss people should therefore be given the opportunity to revise their decision of 9 February 2014. If enough signatures are collected, a referendum could take place in 2016 at the earliest.

Bastian Baker as a Swiss “ambassador”

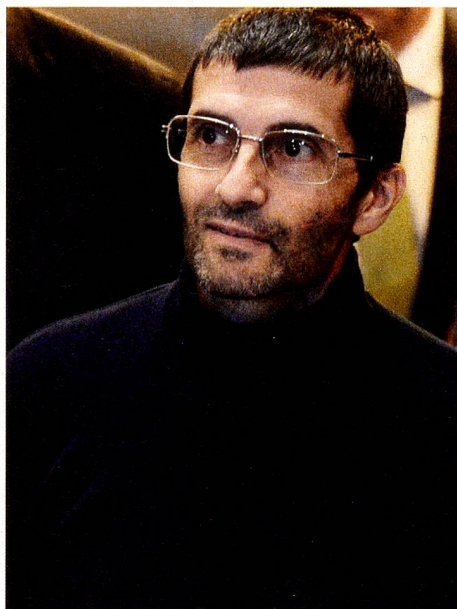
“Democracy Without Borders” is the name of a project launched in August 2014 under the leadership of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). As part of this initiative, Bastian Baker, a musician from French-speaking Switzerland, will take part in “The Nile Project” in Egypt as a Swiss ambassador. This project aims to promote sustainable use of the Nile basin through music, education and innovation. Musicians from the 11 countries through which the river flows are already participating in the project.

House of Religions opens

The House of Religions in Berne was officially opened in mid-December. Five world faiths – the Alevist, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu religious communities – have prayer and meeting rooms under one roof. The Jewish, Baha’i and Sikh communities are also involved. It has taken 16 years from the initial idea to the opening of this extraordinary facility (see also “Swiss Review” no. 5/2012).

E-voting in 14 cantons

The Federal Council has authorised 14 cantons to use electronic voting at federal referenda in 2015 and 2016. From the referendum on 8 March 2015, individually verifiable systems are to be deployed in all cantons, which means that voters can check that their vote has been sent correctly. This will enable voters to identify manipulation of any kind on their platform or on the Internet. The cantons of Zurich and Glarus are planning to offer e-voting to eligible Swiss voters abroad for the first time at the referendum on 8 March 2015.



Lorenzo Vinciguerra

Lorenzo Vinciguerra spent 1,039 days on the Indonesian island of Jolo held hostage by the rebel group Abu Sayyaf. The 49-year-old Swiss was abducted on 1 February 2012 with a colleague while bird-watching on one of Jolo’s neighbouring islands. Vinciguerra managed to escape when the rebels relaxed their guard over their hostages during a wedding celebration. Vinciguerra’s Dutch colleague was too weak to flee. There has been no news of him since the Swiss got away.

The world needs Switzerland.

Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter looking back on his year as Swiss President and Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE

There are more things in Heaven and Earth ... Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

William Shakespeare (1564 to 1616), English poet and playwright

We are bridge-builders not demolition experts.

Christoph Darbellay, President of the CVP, on the role of his party

One is not realistic in having no ideas.

Max Frisch, Swiss writer (1911 to 1991)

I regard patriotism as dangerous. I see patriotism, forgive me, as a crime.

Peter Bichsel, Swiss author

Take good care of the international agreements to which our nation is committed and that are of fundamental importance to Switzerland and our treaty partners.

Markus Büchel, President of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference, in his letter to the Swiss members of parliament at the turn of the year

Remaining on the sidelines is shirking one’s responsibility. Christians are responsible for their actions but also for what they do not do.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German foreign minister

What can be said at all, can be said clearly.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 to 1951), Austro-British philosopher

To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Mark Twain, US author (1835 to 1910)