

Snippets from Switzerland

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Christoph Blocher successful

The well known manufacturer of chemical materials, Christoph Blocher, at Ems-Switzerland, managed to increase the firms profit for the production year of 1997 by more than 30 %. The firms turnover has increased by 8.5 % to over 1 billion S.Francis.

Swiss becoming more environmentally conscious

Organic farming is becoming ever more popular in Switzerland. Latest statistics show there was an increase of 12 % in environmentally friendly farming in 1997. The organisation BioSwiss said that by its own index 7.6 % of agricultural land in Switzerland was now farmed according to ecologically sound principals. BioSwiss and Switzerland is a European leader in this respect ranking just behind Sweden and Austria.

Proposed amendment to Constitution

The Swiss house of representatives has lent support to a controversial proposal for a more detailed anti discrimination amendment to the Constitution. After several hours of debate the house decided that cer-

tain groups did merit more than a general anti discrimination code. It said handicapped people in particular would benefit from more concrete protection. The senate has already voted to maintain a general clause of protection against discrimination and said naming specific groups was unnecessary.

Visit to Bosnia Herzegovina

The Justice Minister, Mr. Arnold Koller recently made a visit to Bosnia Herzegovina where he visited several Swiss aid projects to help returning Bosnian refugees. Mr. Koller was to inspect the progress of reconstruction projects in the war torn country. Mr. Koller was accompanied by senior officers for refugees and their agencies.

A new Federal Councillor for Switzerland

There has been generally positive reactions to the elections of **Pascal Couchpin** as the new Cabinet Minister. The Radical Mr. Couchpin replaces his Party colleague Jean-Pascal Delamurraz who is stepping down after 14 years as Minister because of ill health.

On the occasion of the election of the new Federal Counsellor there

was a full house of Parliament present with 200 representatives (Nationalrat) and 46 Senators (Kantonsrat) present. The Radical Party presented a double ticket with 56 year old Pascal Couchpin as favourite and 57 year old Christiana Langenberger as the only Woman on the left. There were another 2 Candidates and all 4 got a good start in the first ballot. However it took 5 votes for Mr. Couchpin to finally win with 146 votes. Mrs. Langenberger came second with 92 votes, much more than had been expected, but still a disappointment for many who finally wanted a second Woman in the seven member Cabinet. After gaining 26 votes more than necessary, Mr. Couchpin was sworn in. Mr. Couchpin is a middle-of-the-road radical and supports membership of The European Union but in pragmatic style.

And still more redundancies in Switzerland

The engineering firm of F.Buser in Wiler/Utzensdorf, Switzerland, which specialises in the production of textile printing machinery had to lay off some 110 employees by the end of February due to a downturn in demand.



Sheepfarming in Switzerland

In a few areas of Switzerland and only during autumn and winter you may come across a large flock of sheep (large by Swiss standards) with a lonely shepherd leading and guiding his flock from farm to farm.

- The photo shows such a scene with shepherd Jodok Gloor somewhere in the "Oberland" of Zürich called "Pfannenstiel". The "wandering" of shepherd with sheep that may not even belong to him (Jodok is shepherding on behalf of an absentee owner) is an old custom in parts of Switzerland. Only some of the farmers on the way give permission for the use of their land in the autumn or winter. The sheep are bought as lambs in the autumn and start off "a-wandering" by the 20. Nov. Thus the lambs are fattened to 40 kg. live weight and sold as they reach this target. - The "host-farmers" are rewarded by having the paddocks "cleaned-up" and fertilised by the sheep.

-Jodok Gloor has modernised his "working-conditions" by the use of a mobile home and is in ready contact with his Girlfriend by cellphone. At the time of this encounter with a reporter near Pfannenstiel (end of February) he was very pleased with the unusual mild winter weather in Switzerland.

Switzerland latest newspaper

French in language but national in its ambitions the latest newspaper in Switzerland has been launched in Geneva and is called "Le Temp". The first edition with 64 pages was a great success. It is hoped that this newspaper will be read all over the French part of Switzerland as it has taken over the 2 other papers, "La journal de Genève" and the "Nouveau quotidien". Many observers say that "Le Temp" needs to exceed its sales target of 50,000 copies a day by a wide margin to keep up the promise of its first issue.

Sulzer/Winterthur going places.

With a staff of 25000 Sulzer is active in medical technology, the petroleum industries, selected process and mechanical engineering technology, weaving machines as well as plant and building services. There was a profit of some 230 million Swiss Francs last year. It is forecast that profits will be even higher this year. The medical technology division SulzerMedica which makes artificial joints, pacemakers and heart valves went partially public last year as part of a double strategy. This dual strategy is based on the fact that the activities on the medical device industry are different from the ones in the industrial sector. The medical device industry is much more growth orientated than the industry sector.

Sulzer is a world leader when it comes to weaving machines for the textile industry. But in recent years Sulzer made considerable operating losses. Now this division should be in "the black" again this year. And the reason for that is the development of a new machine. It's making headlines, because it is 3 to 4 times faster than the existing weaving machines.

The future shape of the Swiss army

The main conclusion of a new report by a Swiss Government commission has shown that the Swiss army in its present form is not geared to face the challenges of the next century.

Switzerland no longer faces a threat to its borders and the report shows that its security would be better served if the army stepped up cooperation with military organisations like NATO and increased participa-

tion in international peace keeping missions. - On a small scale Switzerland is already doing its part under the auspices of NATO's partnership, "the peace progress" or PFP which Switzerland joined more than a year ago. Recently, military officers from more than a dozen NATO-countries were invited to Switzerland to train in the Alps for the first time. High above the Gotthard Pass, military representatives from 13 NATO and PFP-countries have been learning the Swiss secrets of getting around the mountainous terrain using nothing but skis, finding someone buried by an avalanche, constructing a rescue slab and building a snow bivouac.

- Some conservative groups feel That Switzerland's frail neutrality will be threatened if its armed forces become more integrated into western military alliances. This is a view not shared by the Swiss army itself. All foreign military personnel praised the Swiss army during the combined training, pointing out that such an exercise is ideal to bring people together in the spirit of partnership and peace.

However from a political viewpoint a new and outward-looking Swiss army is bound to cause some controversy.

A legal brothel in Switzerland

Switzerland's first legal brothel has officially opened in Zürich. Such establishments have been permitted since 1992 but it has taken 6 years for the "petite fleur" or "little flower" to open its doors. The opening caused very little objection in the neighbourhood.

Top marks in Mathematics and Science

Swiss School leavers are top of the league when it comes to examination results in Mathematics and Science, according to a new international study that has compared results from technical Schools and Colleges from 20 countries. In Switzerland the results have been analysed by the national Science foundation. It appears that the Swiss educational system has a sound basis and has a good tradition in Mathematics especially. The report did highlight a difference between the results obtained by boys and those of girls. According to earlier studies the disparity is due to boys having a greater interest in Mathematics and Science.



Maitre d' Hôtel of the year

Clara Vogler (40) executive "host" of the prestigious Hotel Storchen in Zürich has been honoured with the title of "Maitre d' Hôtel of the year". She works with 20 employees who are specialists of the hotel trade. Her daily workspan occupies her for approximately 12 hours and she loves a cigar and a glass of wine as part of her relaxation.

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The "Game of the year" of 1997

Every year, as for the past 20 years, some 11 adults from Switzerland, Germany and Austria get together to choose "the Game of the year" in the German-speaking world. This is not "kid's-stuff". The panel of 11 experts, the jury, take their task very seriously, usually by playing the games themselves. And the 1997 winner of the "Game of the year-label" was a mathematician from Southern Ger-

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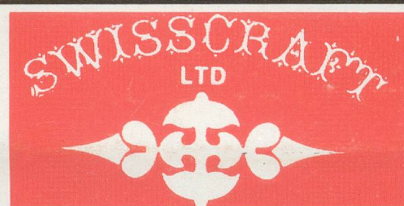
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many, Werner Hodel. And his board game is called "Mississippi Queen". This game was chosen because it involves the whole family. This fact was very important for the jury, as it means that family members of different generations can play together. In our world of today, too often leisure and media keep the different generations apart, so this game enables a family to do the same thing at the same time with the same rules. As in past years no specific reward was handed out to the winner, he merely is now allowed to use the "winner's label" on his product and so to advertise his "Game of the year".



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