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## The flood of the century..

15.5.99

Swiss authorities say flooding situation critical. The Swiss authorities say the situation is critical across large parts of the country, threatened by flooding.

Dozens of homes on Lake Thun and in the east of the country have been evacuated, and police cordoned off parts of the capital, Berne. Several railway lines in central Switzerland were closed following landslides and high water. In other regions, roads have been cut, shipping on lakes has been suspended and there are fears that a dam near Lake Zürich might burst.

*The reasons for the flooding is a combination of heavy rain and high temperatures causing the snow in the mountains to melt quickly. Experts predicted months ago that the severe winter combined with heavy rain would cause flooding at a scale not experienced for hundreds of years. (Editor)*

## Swiss Development Aid via Encouraging Imports

Switzerland is proposing to help poor countries overcome their market handicaps. On Monday, the Federal Bureau of Foreign Trade (BAWI) made public a four-year program designed to promote imports from economically weak countries. Yet developing countries become potentially lucrative sales markets for others only when they themselves

succeed in exporting goods. The proposed import-promoting measures aim mainly at overcoming obstacles to market access. At the same time, initiatives aimed at air trade can receive several years of start-up help.

The Center for Trade Promotion (known as OSEC) has a budget of Sfr. 26 million to support its activities along these lines. The BAWI's proposed annual budget for promoting imports is Sfr. 13-15 million.

Humor  
Herr Ober soll das Schaumwein sein?  
Der schäumt ja gar nicht!  
Na, und?  
Haben Sie schon mal eine Ochsen-schwanzsuppe gesehen die wedelt?

## Swiss President Takes a Goodwill Tour

Swiss President Ruth Dreifuss has visited New York. Addressing the Foreign Policy Association on Thursday, she spoke of Switzerland's role in the world and also about the controversy over dormant Holocaust assets. In her remarks, President Dreifuss attempted to find a positive, forward-looking aspect to the disputes which have burdened relations between the USA and her country in recent years. But she refrained from comments about her own Jewish ancestry and the personal experiences that has involved. In doing so, she disappointed a good many expectations, since her status as the first Jewish president of Switzerland has been widely treated as a curiosity. While granting the justification of the claims put forward by Jewish organizations, Ms. Dreifuss decried unfair attacks which ignored the personal efforts of Swiss citizens on behalf of freedom, democracy and solidarity. She also contradicted assertions that Switzerland in recent years has made efforts only in response to external pressure.

## A Special Church Ritual for Homosexuals in Switzerland?

The Church Council of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Canton Zurich has recommended the introduction of a special ritual for same-sex couples, which would be clearly distinct from a conventional wedding

ceremony. The Council reached this conclusion in a report to its Synod, presented to the media. The report is based on consultations with 1,500 individuals. On the one hand the consultations revealed that, in keeping with modern social sciences and theological and biblical studies, a great majority regard homosexuality as a healthy expression of human sexuality, to which no sin is attached. But on the other hand, judgments about official church recognition of extra-marital relationships tend to be more reserved. Moreover, opinion is divided over the principle of church consecration of such relationships. Because a large number of church members have strong reservations about an official church ceremony, blessing same-sex couples, the Church Council recommends that a special ritual for this purpose be developed.

## Better Train Connections in Switzerland

The Swiss Federal Railways' new timetables, which go into effect on 30 May, were made public on Saturday. They provide a marked expansion of offerings, including nearly twice as many daytime express trains between Lausanne and Fribourg and between Zurich and Lausanne. Other added services include early trains to Geneva and Zurich airports, direct trains between Basel and Zurich-Kloten Airport (avoiding a stop at Zurich's main train station), and check-in service for airline luggage for many airlines at 23 of the country's train stations.

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