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President's Message

Late last year, after first speaking to Swiss Clubs in Singapore and Australia, our five Clubs were also visited by Ambassador Walter Thurnheer of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by Bernadette Hunkeler Brown from our Embassy in Wellington.

Mr Thurnheer began with a very informative speech about Switzerland and issues relating to Swiss Abroad. This was followed by questions which, at least at the meeting I attended in Hamilton, were not in short supply! An abridged version of the speech is printed on page five. Anyone wanting a full copy of the speech is welcome to contact either myself or our Editor.

I would once again like to thank both Mr Thurnheer for making the journey to and around New Zealand to speak to us, and Bernadette for also visiting our Clubs.

Over the recent holiday period I have not received much news from Switzerland, with the exception of new information about websites which I'd like to pass on.

The first is in relation to the 100th birthday celebration of one of Switzerland's most well-known sculptors, Alberto Giacometti. A biography, a selection of his works, texts by and about Giacometti, details of exhibitions around the world and much more can be found at www.alberto-giacometti.ch.

Another website recently established by *PResence Switzerland* (PRS - an official division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) is at either www.schweiz-in-sicht.ch or www.switzerland-in-sight.ch for the English version. This multi-media and interactive site contains a large variety of topics and features about Switzerland and its people - such as landscape and environment, economy, culture, science, population and demography, languages, and the current political system. It can be accessed in German, French, Italian and English - as well as Russian and even Chinese! The site is quite easy to move around in and to read and understand. It is particularly suitable for Swiss Abroad children and young people to learn a lot more about Switzerland, with a variety of knowledge games built in as well. These

sites are definitely well worth a look! Besides these two sites, I have a list of 'Useful Links', provided by Mr Thurnheer, for anyone interested.

Whilst we here in New Zealand experience one of the wettest few summer months we can remember, also spare a thought for the tourist destinations in Switzerland who were struggling to attract people due to a lack of precipitation in the form of snow.

By mid January, resorts throughout the country were producing very expensive artificial snow, to replace what nature wasn't providing, so that the winter sports enthusiasts would continue coming. However, sunshine was very much in abundance - they probably had quite a bit more than we were getting!!

None-the-less, I hope everyone did have a happy and restful holiday season, and that we do still have some nice summer days ahead of us.

Beatrice

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Swiss Federal President
for the Year 2002
Finance Minister Kaspar Villiger

Excerpts from an interview granted to Swissinfo by the Swiss President for 2002, Kaspar Villiger

Finance minister Kaspar Villiger takes on the one-year rotating presidency as Switzerland prepares to vote on United Nations membership, and gets ready for the national exhibition - Expo.02 - which opens in May 2002.

Question: Last year the international community, and especially Switzerland, was shaken by sad and tragic events. What lessons have you learnt from these events for the new year?

Answer: Recent events have affected peoples' emotions, but I think Switzerland is not in a bad shape and that the country has learnt a lot about politics and economics during the last recession. However, people still feel insecure and ministers are just as affected by these disasters as other people. And if I look at recent events in Switzerland, such as the Gotthard disaster, the plane crash, and so forth, I think we must keep in mind that as a country we are pretty well off, and that we can solve problems. I think it is important that we do not lose confidence and I will do my utmost to solve problems.

Question: What are your priorities for the coming year?

Answer: The president does not only represent the country abroad, he also acts as a representative at home. It is important to me to engage in dialogue with different circles and people. I will also try to make the cabinet's policies understood and explain the work of our institutions and, above all, I will try to listen.

My top priorities are the United Nations and (the national exhibition) Expo.02. I think the referendum on joining the UN (on March 3) is very important and I will do my best to convince the Swiss people that membership is important. As far as Expo.02 is concerned, I think it is an important meeting platform and I have placed great hopes in this event.

Question: What will you say to other countries if the Swiss reject UN membership?

Answer: I hope I will not have to explain this to other countries. My top priority is to make sure that the Swiss people vote in favour and are convinced about their choice. The UN deals with international problems, such as poverty, environment, peace, etc. It is important that we join such an organisation, no

matter how imperfect it may be. It would be good to contribute our know-how and influence and I think that the Swiss will realise that we can benefit from it as well.

Question: What role can Expo.02 play in Switzerland? At the moment there seems to be little enthusiasm for it.

Answer: Well, it was the same in 1964 - it will only become interesting once it has started - once people can go and meet there. Expo.02 can only provide the framework - it is the people who make the event a success. It will be a meeting platform for our cultures, our history, but above all for our people and I am sure that if the weather is good it will be a success.

Question: Switzerland has four national languages - do you think English should be taught from an early age?

Answer: If you want to succeed in your job you have to speak a little bit of English nowadays and the question is when to start learning the language. I have noticed that it is much easier to learn a language if you start from an early age. However, I think it is absolutely essential to give our own languages priority, as we have to be able to talk to each other in order to understand each other's culture.

Question: Switzerland has recently come under increased pressure because of the country's banking secrecy laws - are you willing to find a compromise?

Answer: I don't think the banking secrecy laws will be lifted under our direct democracy - even if the government was prepared to do so, the people could stop us. Our banking secrecy is part of our tradition and the Swiss people appreciate their privacy in these matters. However, it is clear that absolute banking secrecy, as it was 40 or 50 years ago, could be abused and this is no longer justifiable. For this reason we have upgraded some laws; we have introduced money-laundering laws and we have introduced rules governing money from dictators abroad. Switzerland has been more successful in tracking down criminals than other countries.

Join Corner...

Nothing to write about?

Well, there is always the weather! For Trudy and I as farmers wives the weather plays a pivotal part in everyday living as we share farming life in a most intimate way with our husbands.

It is unavoidable that farmers are quite often subject to mood swings according to the vagaries of 'meteorological circumstances of the day! Farmer's wives know to live with such hazards as farm work is so closely related to the prevailing weather.

With silage and hay making on the calendar weather predictions can make the difference between a happy husband or a broody, restless 'man of the land'.

The reality of farming life is the fact that most farmers and farmer's wives are 'eternal optimists' and usually find 'happy days' outnumbering the days they would rather forget...

Recently I came across a fitting testimony to farming we would like to share with you.

Regards; Trudy and Doris

A farmers Creed

- I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honourable way a man can spend his days on this earth.

- I believe my life will be measured ultimately by what I have done for my fellow man and by this standard I fear no judgement.

- I believe when a man sums up his days, he should be able to stand tall and feel pride in the life he has lived.

- I believe in farming because it makes all this possible.

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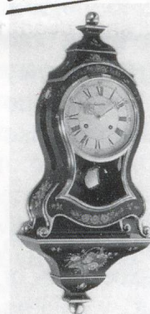
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For our young readers..

