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This month I am writing a commentary on a matter which gave me serious concerns whether to tread there or not; however, being well aware that many of our Society members are not Swiss Citizens any more and therefore do not receive the bi-monthly 'Swiss Review' magazine, so would find it difficult to get detailed information on important happenings in, and around, Switzerland, in spite of still retaining a keen interest in these affairs. So, to the gist of the matter that really 'bugged' me! Apparently Switzerland has decided to give 1 Billion Swiss francs (CHF) in aid to several eastern European countries, former members of the communist Block, who have now applied for membership to the EU/EEC.

Admittedly this aid is mostly targeted at specific projects in the recipient countries, which is very sensible, but why Switzerland, I kept thinking, which is not even an EU member? Could not the EU, with its enormous economic and financial clout, have funded these projects quite easily? The short answer is obviously an emphatic yes! So, why Switzerland? One thousand and two hundred million NZ dollars equivalent is no

small sum in anyone's language, even a supposedly little rich country! I would emphasize 'little'. Switzerland's economy may be healthy at the moment, but it is still a 'little' country with a 'little' economy by world standards!!! Or have many Swiss forgotten that their economy was slightly in recession for two or three years in a row only a few years ago? And what a furor of pessimism this hiccup caused in the Swiss business world!!! I could not help but think there could be no other reason than international Politics for this generous 'gift' by Switzerland!

Sure enough, in the number one issue (February) 2007 of 'Swiss Review' reporter Rolf Ribi wrote a very interesting article about Switzerland's relationship with the EU, past and present. If his assessment is right, it will be only a matter of time until Switzerland is forced, by economic realities, to negotiate with the EU, for full membership, a fact I've been convinced of for many years! And when that day arrives, Switzerland will need every friend possible in all sections of this gigantic Organisation! This, I suspect, is the logical thinking in Swiss political circles on

the Nations long term relationship with the EU, and of course it's always a good idea to 'hedge' ones' bets wherever possible.

It's just that my thinking was that Switzerland could have given this Billion francs in long term, 'interest-free' loans to the Nations concerned, say a period of 30 years, with no capital repayments for the first 5 years. This, I thought, would have been a very generous offer of help to the countries concerned. Not completely give away a billion francs of Swiss taxpayers' money! But we can't blame the politicians alone for this. There was a Referendum on this on 26 November last year when 53.4 percent of voters backed this Proposal, a small majority, but majority nonetheless. My 'Nein' vote landed with the minority, again!!!

I could not help scratching my head a little bit. Have I been living away from Switzerland far too long to understand the political psyche of today's Switzerland? I hope not, as I've always taken a keen interest in affairs in Switzerland. My own feeling is that I am still too much of an outdated Conservative at heart who has not yet fully 'rutsched' into the twenty-first Century!!! What do you think? (But don't tell me!!!)

Cheerio everyone, from Paul

Max Black Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne at Auckland Festival AK07

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne is back in the country and their production Max Black will be part of the Auckland Festival AK07 and performed Wednesday 21 to Friday 23 March at 7.30 p.m. at the Maidment Theatre.

This is extraordinary experimental theatre and a true Festival piece produced in Switzerland.

Performed by André Wilms, Max Black is a pyromaniac philosopher, a character between an insane scientist and a childish dreamer filled with wonder in his laboratory.

Heiner Goebbels, the Composer and Director, creates theatrical alchemy with a work that combines experimental music, fine art and theatre with dazzling onstage pyrotechnics.

Book at the Maidment Theatre
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