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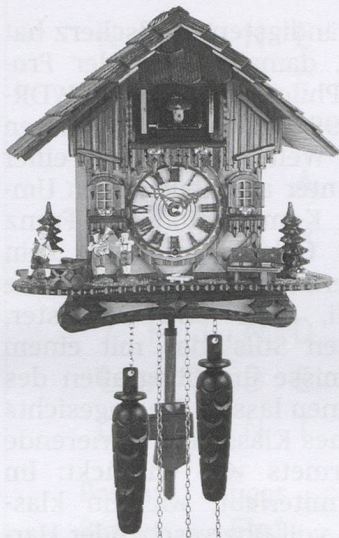
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Bugged cuckoo clock scandal rocks government



The Swiss government has been accused of hiding surveillance systems in cuckoo clocks and then giving them as official gifts to at least 30 embassies. The foreign ministry has yet to comment officially on the claims. The alleged bugging came to light in cables sent from the US embassy in Bern to the US State Department. In it, an unnamed official expressed security concerns about the cuckoo clock - a pendulum-driven "Chalet" model

with music box - which had been presented to the ambassador the previous month as part of Swiss National Day celebrations. "The latest addition to the living room is proving to be a good conversation piece, but I'm not sure we should be holding conversations around it." The official went to explain how doubts were raised when the music box got jammed. "We got it down, opened it up and could not believe it when we found a surveillance system inside!"

It turns out that the US embassy isn't the only recipient of Swiss generosity. An investigation by a Zurich news magazine revealed that at least 30 embassies had been given similar clocks at official events on August 1, 2011.

A spokeswoman for the British ambassador told swissinfo.ch they had been in contact with their US counterparts and had removed the clock from the dining room "as a precaution".

Other embassies known to have accepted a clock include those of Germany, France, Finland, Brazil, Ireland, Norway, Japan, Chile and Mexico. The Austrian consulate apparently thanked the Swiss for the gift but politely turned it down. "We get enough pseudo-Bavarian tat from the Germans," said a spokesman.

The Swiss government has not officially responded to the allegations, but a foreign ministry employee, speaking anonymously because he was not authorised to talk to the media, told swissinfo that the rewards hadn't been as great as they had hoped. "The Finnish ambassador gave the clock to his daughter, who must be about four years old. She kept screaming whenever the bird appeared and eventually it was put in a cupboard," he said. "It wasn't a wild success."

Exchanging presents at a diplomatic level is a common occurrence.

from swissinfo

Swiss design anti-wolf collar for sheep



Swiss sheep may soon be sporting a new anti-wolf collar around their necks alongside a traditional bell

Alpine wolves may soon be running scared from Swiss mountain sheep if a new high-tech protection collar manages to reach the production line.

A Swiss student and a well-known wolf expert have joined forces to start developing a device that can monitor a sheep's pulse and then re-

lease a powerful repellent to scare off a predator in the event of an attack.

"Our project is still in its preliminary phase, but we should have a first prototype collar soon that can set off a repel system due to higher cardiac activity", explained Fabien Matter, a student of infotronics (analogue and digital electronics, combined with computer technology) at the University of Applied Sciences for Western Switzerland, based in Sion VS.

The experimental protection device works by monitoring a sheep's pulse and checking when it gets too high, resulting from the stress of a wolf attack. The precise detection method still needs to be properly validated, but a number of ways of measuring a sheep's pulse electronically are considered:

It could be done using an optical technique to shine light at the sheep's heart and measuring light intensity variations, which correspond to heartbeats. Electrocardiography, using sensors to measure the heart's electrical activity, ultrasound, or microphones will also be considered in the early testing phase. When the pulse gets too high, the collar will then activate a system to scare away the predator - high-frequency ultrasound waves that the wolf can hear but not the sheep, bright flashing lights or a blast of bear repellent pepper spray. Such repellent methods also still need to be properly tested.

The student said he got the idea for the collar following a televised debate regarding the presence of wolves in Switzerland and their authorised shooting.

It is thought there may be up to 20 wolves in Switzerland and the number is likely to rise. The protected predator enjoys national support, but periodic attacks on livestock and growth in numbers are causing alarm among certain farmers and mountain communities.

from swissinfo