

In praise of Liechtenstein

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HOW CAN A FOREIGNER BE NATURALISED IN SWITZERLAND?

It was at a recent tennis tournament that I made the acquaintance of a "Neo-Swiss", a Hungarian refugee, by profession a dental surgeon, married to a Swiss lady, with a well established practice in one of the sleeping-suburbs of Zürich. Meeting him gave me the impulse to find out what requirements a candidate for Swiss citizenship has to fulfil and what kind of formalities he has to go through until he is finally handed a document establishing his Swiss identity and enabling him to receive the red passport.

The legal requirements are laid down by a Federal Law concerning the acquisition and loss of Swiss Citizenship (1951) and by a number of regulations worked out by one Marc Viro, formerly Head of the Cantonal Alien's Police of Berne, some ten years ago.

To begin with the candidate has to prove 12 years practically uninterrupted residence in Switzerland, 2-12 of them in one and the same canton. Next more than 20 documents, issued by and circulated amongst the borough where the candidate lives, the canton and the confederation have to establish that he is considered suitable and worthy. It goes without saying that one of these documents has to prove that the candidate has an absolutely clean sheet legally, or in other words, no criminal record whatever. Another one has to establish that he has no debts and has never had to appear in a bankruptcy court. The local policy of his

borough of residence then has to issue an official certificate which establishes that "nothing negative" is known about the candidate. Before issuing such a certificate, the local police will have made all sorts of enquiries and will have consulted the candidates' neighbours. Detectives of the Federal Police will then find out to what kind of newspapers the candidate subscribes and when this is known, they will, one day, suddenly turn up on the candidate's doorstep in order to have a close and scrutinizing look at the books in his bookcases. Extreme left or subversive literature is, of course, frowned on.

The authorities, who are, of course, fully aware of the financial situation of the candidate and who know what assets and investments he may possess, then fix the so-called naturalisation-fee, which, depending on the circumstances, can vary between 300.- and 70,000 Swiss francs.

According to the regulations laid down by the said Marc Viro, the candidate has to go through a thorough process of assimilation, during which he is watched at his work, and he has to live and behave in such a way that he does not attract attention and become conspicuous. And finally, when all these hurdles are overcome, the candidate has to appear before a cantonal Commission for an oral examination during which he has to show sufficient knowledge of Swiss history, law, institutions, customs, as well as geography. Some candidates study and read, I am reliably told, during months in order not to fail this examination. It is, as

the reader will have seen, not exactly easy to become a Swiss citizen and the image of our country does not appear to be a very welcoming one. Is this a good or a bad thing?

In praise of Liechtenstein

A majority of readers of the *Swiss Observer* will, I presume, think of an income tax paradise first and foremost if I dedicate a paragraph to the principality of *Liechtenstein*, which borders on eastern Switzerland with its 157 square kilometres of territory and roughly 20,000 inhabitants. Yet the hereditary Monarchy of Liechtenstein constitutes an interesting speciality in Swiss foreign policy in so far as the Swiss Confederation looks after the Principality's interests abroad. The Swiss Ambassador – to the Court of St. James's for example – does not only represent his own country, but also, owing to agreements concluded between the two countries, His Serene Highness the Prince ("Fuerst" in German Language) of Liechtenstein. He in turn maintains one single Embassy abroad, namely in the Swiss Capital of Berne.

For all intents and purposes the Principality, which chiefly consists of the two old counties of Vaduz and Schellenberg, could be and is in many



DISCARDS people like orange pips. His charm is similar to a rattlesnake's. That week he'd hurtled through Europe like hurricane Nelly causing devastation to three of my counterparts and now it was my turn.

On the way to Heathrow, I steeled myself to watching ten years hard labour go down the waste disposal of big business. After three hours of talks, J.O. still hadn't pronounced sentence.

We lunched at the Four Seasons. It was there he produced the picture of his wife and kids. Invited me to his Idaho ranch.

Such is the power of good food.

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ways treated like just one more Swiss canton. However, constitutionally, Liechtenstein is an independent democratic parliamentary monarchical democracy with a five-man government and a fifteen-man parliament of its own. There are no frontiers between the two states, since owing to a treaty dating back to 1923 Switzerland considers Liechtenstein as "Customs-Inland". Due to a further treaty of 1924 Liechtenstein has adopted the Swiss franc as its own currency, while a postal agreement of earlier date attached the Principality to the Swiss postal network — yet granting it the right to print and issue its own postal stamps. This latter privilege has, owing to its philatelic curiosity-value, become quite a considerable source of revenue for the Liechtensteiners. Further agreements between the two countries regulate the problems of social insurance, the alien's police and the rights of domicile. Up to a few years ago the revenues of the Principality were nearly exclusively derived from philately on the one side and the innumerable so-called letterbox-domiciles of commercial societies on the other. But thanks to a wise policy the structure of the Liechtenstein economy has undergone considerable changes during the last few years, with the result that between 1950 and 1970 exports have risen from 15 million to approximately 280 million francs per annum and the number of industrially occupied workers from 1,330 to nearly 5,000.

Liechtenstein is also making a great effort to become a holiday centre and boasts (for winter and summer holidays) a modern and well-equipped resort called Malbun. On visiting and driving through the Principality one gets the impression of a spotlessly clean place, populated by very friendly people, living in very neat and architecturally attractive houses. But one has to be careful not to put one's foot down hard on the accelerator — otherwise one is quickly back either in Switzerland proper or on the Austrian border.

* * *

During the last week of September the Federal Council has taken a very important decision: to propose to the Federal Parliament that the Price-Watching System, which has been in force since 1973, but is due to end on the last day of December, should be continued for a further two years. There can hardly be any doubt about the two chambers of Parliament agreeing to this during their December session, particularly because the whole population of the country will then have the last word one year later in a nationwide vote. The system, as now proposed by the Government in Berne, will however be modified in so far as the surveillance of salaries, wages and dividends is to be abolished. A further novelty will be that the Federal Council is asking for the necessary power to exempt certain sections of the industry and economy from surveillance, but to

re-impose a watching brief, should this seem advisable. The system is, in other words, to become somewhat more flexible. Finally it is worth mentioning that the duty to mark all retail prices clearly, and the measures against abuses regarding rentals (tenants protection) are to continue. As I have already explained, quite some issues ago, how the price-watching system works in Switzerland, there is no need for me to go into all those details again. Nevertheless it can be said that the system works quite well and has certainly contributed to a measurable lowering of the price-inflation rate. And this is indeed a blessing.

'Unprecedented' Swiss action

The recent execution of several alleged murderers of policemen in Spain has, as everyone knows, produced world-wide indignation and a flood of protests and has induced some 14 governments to withdraw — temporarily — their Ambassadors from Madrid, ordering them to return home "for consultation". Somewhat later than most of the others the Swiss Federal Council

has followed suit. This, as far as Switzerland is concerned, constitutes an unprecedented act, as it has never happened before. It is, however, stressed in Berne that asking an Ambassador to come home "for consultations" is not, repeat not, the first step to a rupture of relations. It is, rather, a diplomatic way of showing disapproval, the depth of which is shown by the length of the period during which the Ambassador is not "en poste". In view of the nationwide — and worldwide — indignation the executions have caused, quite a few Swiss newspapers have termed the Governments diplomatic reaction a "futile minimum" and have now asked for more: namely a total stop on any arms deliveries to Spain. This, in spite of the fact that a stop on arms deliveries could cause quite some economic hurt in Swiss industries, could conceivably lead to some kind of retaliation. "Diplomatic words," says the Zürich Tages-Anzeiger, "are not enough — let us now have the courage to some deeds." Article 11 of the Federal Law concerning export permits for war material (1972) states that no such permits will be available for exports to countries "which do not respect human dignity". The Franco regime has, according to Swiss public opinion, shown gross disrespect of human rights and dignity.



SWISS JOURNALIST BACK HOME

Swiss journalist Bernard Feller has returned home after six years in London as correspondent for the Tribune de Genève, Tribune de Lausanne and 24 heures. He has moved to Berne to take up a new appointment as deputy editor of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation's European and Overseas Services. Mr Feller was in broadcasting before coming to London. He spent five years in West Germany and Africa with Deutsche Welle, the overseas service of West German radio. Mr Feller is also a former member of the Advisory Council of the Swiss Observer.