

News round up

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NEWS ROUND UP

THE MARKET BECKONS

The Swiss are the people most of the members of the Common Market would like to see as new members.

A recent poll within the community shows that 50 per cent of EEC citizens would like Switzerland to be the next joining member if such a move were possible.

Some 9,000 people were questioned, some of them from Britain and Ireland, about whether they want to see the Community enlarged and if so by which countries.

The West Germans and Luxembourgish were the most enthusiastic about Switzerland's membership, probably because of linguistic and cultural affinity. Switzerland, along with Spain, also came top in Italy.

The poll also showed that while existing Community members might welcome applications from several countries there was less enthusiasm about the prospect of membership of some southern European countries and Turkey.

THE LADIES ARE ON THE WARPATH!

In his report about the Swiss Rifle Association (*Swiss Observer*, February) Father Bossard concluded by asking whether 1977 might be the year of the first lady competitor.

Since the report was published the British Army's ladies team has put up a splendid show at Bisley. Many of the prestigious shooting clubs up and down the country have active and keen markswomen (let's not use the word "marksperson", please) among their members. The Olympic Games have medals for the modern Annie Oakleys of this world. But ladies are still not admitted to the Swiss Rifle Association.

Let me add a few more points for contemplation. In his interview with the

Swiss Observer last spring our Ambassador Dr. Ernesto Thalmann added his voice to the furtherance of equal opportunities for women although admittedly not specifically with reference to the SRA.

Also, in recent months the Equal Opportunities Act and Sex Discrimination Act have become law in the United Kingdom.

So, gentlemen members be warned. I know of at least one lady who has her beady eye set on the target — she will remain anonymous for the moment — but will very probably make official application to join very soon. In all likelihood there will be others!

W.G.S.

European Security Conference

Switzerland was among the nine neutral and non-aligned European countries represented at the beginning of February in a conference at Belgrade intended to define common positions in the field of European security and co-operation.

The other countries attending were the three neutral countries — Sweden, Austria and Finland — the European members of the non-aligned group — Yugoslavia, Cyprus and Malta — and the two tiny states of Liechtenstein and San Marino.

The meeting took place to establish a common stand at the conference which will take place next June in Belgrade as a follow-up to the European Security conference which ended in Helsinki in August 1975.

This major conference at which the United States, Canada and 33 European nations from East and West took part approved a major declaration pledging peace and a new order of human contacts in Europe.

For Switzerland, this was a first participation at an international platform of this importance since the days of the League of Nations. Berne took the Conference very seriously, putting forward proposals to guarantee collective security which had proved itself in the early days of the Confederation. Unfortunately, these proposals were not universally adopted by the participants, which, after all, were grouped mainly into the two power blocs of East and West.

But there emerged a new sense of identity between the neutral states of Europe which have now virtually formed a group of their own in the international arena.

The Radicals turn down the latest anti-foreign initiatives

The Radical Party Congress meeting in Neuchatel on the last weekend in January turned down the two latest Initiatives against the presence of too many foreigners in Switzerland.

The Radicals, who despite their name are a right-of-centre party representing the middle classes, and one of the four regularly represented at the Federal Council, also turned down an Initiative proposing to submit to an optional referendum every treaty, past and present, concluded by Switzerland with another country.

The two anti-foreign Initiatives that were rejected were the fourth and the fifth, respectively launched by the Republican Party and the National Action against "Overforeignization". The first aims at reducing the percentage of foreigners holding a residents or yearly renewable permit to 12.5 per cent of the population in ten years.

This, in practice, would mean 300,000 forced departures. The sponsors of the Initiative would like to proceed with 30,000 such departures, or expatriations, as some other parties would see it, every year. The other Initiative would set a limit of 4,000 naturalisations a year, as against 7,000-8,000 at present.

As for the Initiative on foreign treaties, it had been sponsored by the National Action for the express purpose of abrogating the treaty passed with Italy on the exchange of labour. Few people take this proposal very seriously, but it is likely to get some support from those who resent most having to work with "imported labour".

The high value of the franc helps to contain inflation

According to the Economics Research Institute of Lausanne University, if the outside value of the Swiss Franc hadn't soared so fast since December 1971, production in 1975 would have been 4 per cent higher than it actually was, and there would have been 80,000 more jobs available.

But the inflation rate would have reached 16 per cent instead of 6 per cent. In 1976, production and the level of employment would have been the same, but the present inflation rate would have been 10 per cent, and not 1.7 per cent as it is now. The main reason why inflation is so low in Switzerland is that a high Swiss Franc reduces the cost of imports for the Swiss housewife.