

Fall Jeanmaire, Fall Schweiz : wie Politik und Medien einen "Jahrhundertverräter" fabrizierten [Jürg Schoch]

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Raptures in red-and-white

Editor-in-Chief Heinz Eckert made an error in his excellent editorial, which we needn't therefore agree with wholesale. He describes "La Suisse n'existe pas" ("Switzerland doesn't exist") as a slogan which Switzerland used to draw attention to itself in the 1990s. In fact, "Suiza no existe" is a painting by Ben Vautier, an artist from the Vaud, which was exhibited alongside more than 100 other artworks in the Swiss pavilion at the world fair in Seville in 1992, a pavilion that the Federal Council had decided to dedicate to Swiss culture. Vautier simply wanted to say that there was no Swiss culture per se, but rather a series of local and regional cultures in our country. Although it was heavily criticised by certain conservative groups in Switzerland, the pavilion gained international acclaim and was described as very promising for the future. People tend to forget the existence of a second picture by Ben Vautier in the Swiss pavilion in Seville. Its title: "Je pense donc je suis Suisse" ("I think, therefore I am Swiss").

PHILIPPE LÉVY, FORMER CEO,
MESSE BASEL

Minor error

I'd like to start by congratulating you for your excellent magazine, which I always have great

pleasure reading. The articles are highly topical, very interesting, well-presented and written with a rare intelligence for this type of publication. Well done. However, permit me to draw your attention to a minor error that crept into your August edition. Gerhard Richter is certainly one of the great painters of our time, but although he certainly uses photography in his work, he is not at all what one would call an "artistic photographer". Many thanks once again for all your work for the Swiss abroad.

MARTIN BAENNINGER, WESTMOUNT,
QUEBEC, CANADA

Beautiful Lavaux

Thank you for your excellent article in your June 2006 issue of the "Swiss Review" on Lavaux. I was delighted to read that Lavaux may soon become a UNESCO World Heritage site. I have travelled in many countries but believe that Lavaux is the most beautiful place in the world, thanks to its exceptional landscape and to all the hard-working vigneroni who have toiled in the vineyards for generations to keep it that way. One important correction: the vineyards of Lavaux are at the foot of the Alps on the shore of Lake Lemán and not Lake Geneva. Any self-respecting Vaudois or Vaudoise would never call it anything else.

CLEO BOLENS DIBBLE, A VAUDOISE
WHO NOW LIVES IN WASHINGTON,
USA

Thank you

As echoed by many others, I would like to add my thanks to you and your staff for an excellent "Swiss Review". I read it from cover to cover each time and feel very connected to what is happening in Switzerland. It keeps the Swiss part of me very alive! Thank you!

JEANNY KARTH, SOUTH AFRICA

«Traitor»

In the late 1970s, Switzerland was gripped by the "betrayal of the century". In August 1976, Brigadier General Jean-Louis Jeanmaire, the then commander of Switzerland's air defences, was arrested on the streets of Lausanne. The allegations against him: military espionage and handing over military secrets. It was claimed that the one-star general had been passing military documents to Russian military attachés since the early 1960s. Given that the Cold War was in full swing at the time, this case of alleged treason provoked outrage in public and the media. The professional soldier was tried and convicted by a top-secret military court in June 1977, stripped of his rank, kicked out of the army, and sentenced to 18 years in prison, of which he served 12. Jeanmaire died in 1992 at the age of 81.

The Jeanmaire case still rumbles on to this day. A recent book takes a close look at the affair, the conclusiveness of the evidence, the military tribunal and the officer himself. The author, Jürg Schoch, had reported on the affair from the Federal Parliament at the time the story broke. He has since been granted access to the case files in the national archives. Almost 30 years after Jeanmaire's conviction, many questions remain unanswered: Did he really betray his country to the Soviet Union? Was he tried and convicted in accordance with the correct legal procedures? And why was his sentence so harsh?

On 7 October 1976, Federal Councillor Kurt Furgler spoke in parliament about "the betrayal of the most secret of documents", and called the officer a traitor before he had even been tried. When it was published, the list of accusations ran to 35 counts. The only document classified "secret" was one containing the regulations for military mobilisation – of which there were thousands of copies. Corps commander Josef Feldmann later discovered that Jeanmaire had "never had access to strictly confidential files".

Basic legal principles were repeatedly breached. In violation of the Human Rights Convention, Jeanmaire had no contact whatsoever with the outside world for 170 days after his arrest. As the Federal Prosecutor was subsequently forced to admit, there was no evidence against him at the time of his arrest. During the investigation, the Federal Prosecutor regularly reported to Federal Councillor Furgler in contravention of state authority. And the prosecutor and the judge discussed the case, thereby preventing the officer getting a fair trial. The sentence of 18 years was only two years short



of the maximum permissible. But the people, most politicians, the officers and the media all demanded he atone for "betraying his country". The tough sentence was also meant to show foreign intelligence services that Switzerland had its own defences under control again. Politically naïve Jeanmaire passed on a secret document and confidential files; for that he had to be punished. The author of the book is convinced that the officer could not possibly have had a fair trial in the hyped-up atmosphere of the time. "Jeanmaire was both perpetrator and victim", Schoch says.

ROLF RIBI

Jürg Schoch: "Fall Jeanmaire, Fall Schweiz. Wie Politik und Medien einen 'Jahrhundertverräter' fabrizierten" (The case against Jeanmaire and Switzerland. How politicians and the media fabricated the "betrayal of the century"). Published by Hier und Jetzt, Baden 2006, CHF 38, EUR 24.80