

Swiss watching : inside Europe's landlocked island [Diccon Bewes]

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Stauffacher would turn in his grave

Switzerland is a unique country in the world and must remain so. The referenda on banning minarets and the extradition initiative clearly show that the Swiss have had enough of multiculturalism. What benefits does the EU bring? It has proven itself to be a money-pit institution. Accession would restrict our freedom. There are so many negative aspects to highlight. It is obvious what this idiocy will lead to. Stauffacher would turn in his grave if he could see how we again find ourselves in thrall to the EU and are allowing ourselves to take orders from Brussels.

BERNHARD BALMER, SCHOPFHEIM

Overlooking the people

I read the article on SRG in astonishment. I and many others simply see it as brainwashing. Having our radio and television stations under the management of de Weck and Matter, with Schawinsky also on board, is an absolute catastrophe. It could not be any more left-wing. "Arena", like all political programmes, is a laughing stock! It's good that we have alternatives. Most people in Switzerland, I am aware, have been turning to them since this new management team took over at SRG. They would certainly benefit from getting closer to the people. And why all this constant reverence to Mr Kreis? You cannot simply overlook the Swiss people!

HEIDI NAJADI, BY E-MAIL

Tacky commercial channel

I recently spent a week in Switzerland and was able to "enjoy" Swiss TV. This tacky commercial channel is unworthy of Switzerland. The programmes are short, the adverts are long and obtrusive, and the coverage of news from abroad is brief and superficial. After all the adverts, the weather forecast is constant-

ly featured. Whether the programmes are left-leaning or right-leaning is insignificant – the commercials take top priority. I find it very hard to believe that the people accept this. I hope they don't have to pay anything towards it.

RUTH SCHENKER, ANTWERP

Thank you

We would like to offer the editorial team our sincerest thanks for the production of "Swiss Review". The latest edition (June 2011) was extremely interesting, current and entertaining, and it packed an incredible amount of material into a very small space with the feature on Max Frisch, "Built up and sold off", the article on SRG, the call for transparency in relation to party and election campaign donations, the analysis of the Fukushima effect, the look back at the right to vote for women, the piece on the open-air summer festivals and the profile of Fabian Cancellara. The "Swiss Review" team deserves to be applauded for getting all of this into a single, riveting edition.

R.+R. FIECHTER, LLORET DE MAR

The free movement of persons and the Swiss abroad

The termination of the agreement on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU, and consequently all the bilateral agreements, would primarily affect young Swiss people abroad who embarked on education or training in Switzerland after 1 June 2002. The following example illustrates the point: young Swiss abroad have until now been able to rely on EU recognition of educational and training courses undertaken in Switzerland. If the agreement on the free movement of persons with the EU were terminated, these educational and training courses would no longer be recognised automatically in the EU. It is primarily young people who would be penalised.

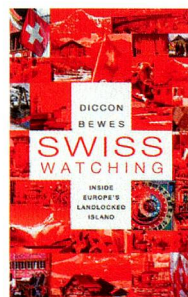
UDO ADRIAN ESSERS, KÜSSNACHT
(PREVIOUSLY AACHEN)

SWISS DRINKING RITUALS are complex when observed from a British perspective. It is not simply a matter of casually saying "cheers" to the group before taking a sip, no, a protracted ritual has to be performed – direct eye contact, a chink of the glass, a toast of "good health", addressing your companions by their first name followed by a kiss depending on the circumstances. Drinking can only begin once the entire group has completed the ritual, which can take some time. There is something else the perfect guest at a Swiss home should be aware of – you are a guest and must behave as a guest. Do not refill glasses yourself or take plates into the kitchen without being asked to do so. The host may interpret this as a subtle criticism of his or her hospitality.

Diccon Bewes has an intimate understanding of Swiss customs, rituals and psyche. The British travel writer, who works in Switzerland, has written a delightful book on the nation at the heart of Europe. It holds up a mirror to the Swiss, serves visitors as the perfect compendium and is compulsory reading for foreigners seeking to integrate. The book's title, "Swiss Watching", pretty much says it all. The author is a very keen observer. This book is in a league of its own. It is an exceptionally good travel guide which inimitably explains the country's topography, economy, society, everyday life, political system and history. The author leaves no stone unturned. Diccon Bewes shows exactly what makes Switzerland tick with Swiss precision and British humour in a highly amusing and kind-hearted way. He has a better insight into Switzerland's idiosyncrasies than many Swiss people themselves and provides no end of quirky details from a country that prides itself on tradition and identity as well as on producing groundbreaking innovation.

He constantly lightens up the text with personal reflections, such as an account of a trip to Ticino to visit a chocolate factory, describing the southern canton as the most contradictory entity "in a country full of anachronisms and contradictions" – definitely not Italy, but on closer examination not really Switzerland either. The author keeps his readers interested with poignant comparisons: "The 26 Swiss cantons are the size of British counties but have the power of American States." And the Kleine Scheidegg, where travellers change onto the Jungfrau railway, reminds him more of London's Piccadilly Circus than a tranquil alpine retreat. Bewes is particularly struck by the compactness of Switzerland's topography. There are only 70 kilometres as the crow flies between the country's highest (Dufour peak, 4634 metres) and lowest (Ascona, 193 metres) points. The author says: "That's equivalent to having a height difference of over 4400 metres between Leeds and Sheffield." This book is excellently researched and reads wonderfully well. As well as being packed with material, it contains a heart-warming sense of irony. It allows readers to discover what a truly extraordinary and rather exotic country Switzerland is.

JÜRIG MÜLLER



DICCON BEWES, *Swiss Watching: Inside Europe's Landlocked Island*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London/Boston 2010, 310 pages. (Available in German as of March 2012, by Malik Verlag, Munich)