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Bank mega-merger

Union Bank of Switzerland and Swiss Bank Corporation are merging to become the second biggest bank in the world. Union Bank of Switzerland's abbreviation, UBS, will probably continue – in future standing for United Bank of Switzerland. Total assets are around Sfr. 900 billion, and the respective staff associations are afraid that at least 15,000 jobs will be lost worldwide, about 7,500 of them in Switzerland. UBS hopes that this will bring savings of Sfr. 2.8 billion. The new big bank

will in fact become the world's number one in portfolio management, with Sfr. 950 billion at stake. Union Bank of Switzerland's group head, Mathis Cabiallavetta, will be chairman of the board of directors of the new UBS, while Marcel Ospel, group head of Swiss Bank Corporation, will be operations chief of the merged company. With a stock market value of Sfr. 95 billion, the size of the new group is similar to that of Nestlé. In Switzerland only Novartis and Roche are worth more. ■



The cultural foundation, 'Pro Helvetia', is under new leadership. Lausanne's Social Democrat mayor **Yvette Jaggi**, becomes president, replacing Christian Democrat national councillor Rosmarie Simmen (centre). The successor of director Urs Frauchiger is **Bernard Cathomas**, aged 51. The latter has been general secretary of the Lia Rumantscha (Romansh League) for the last 17 years. ■

People



After years of disputes within the church, Coire's controversial bishop, **Wolfgang Haas**, has given up his post at Rome's behest. He became Archbishop of Vaduz in Liechtenstein.

The new head of the Federal Office for Refugees is economist and economic diplomat **Jean-Daniel Gerber**, aged 51. He was previously executive director of Switzerland's World Bank group in Washington. Gerber replaces Urs Scheidegger, whose undoing was a drink-driving charge following an accident.

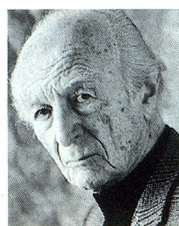


The Migros weekly, 'Brückenbauer', has a new chief editor. **Michel Danthe**, previously head of just the magazine's French-language edition, 'Construire', is now running the German-language editorial team as well. He succeeds Rolf C. Ribl, who is retiring.



For the first time in 105 years, Zurich's daily 'Tages-Anzeiger' has a woman as editor-in-chief. Jurist **Esther Girsberger**, aged 36, has succeeded Roger de Weck, who has become top editor at Germany's 'Die Zeit'.

The grand old man of Swiss advertising, **Adolf Wirz**, has died in Zurich at the age of 92. Wirz went freelance in 1936, and after the war he expanded his company to a holding group made up of twelve communications companies working on the international stage.



Peter Binswanger, one of the fathers of the government pension scheme, has died in Ticino aged 82. For many years Binswanger was president of the Pro Senectute Foundation.

Gerda Stocker-Meyer, one of Switzerland's first woman journalists, has died at the age of 85. She was one of the original fighters for women's suffrage and took a leading part in building up the consumer protection movement. Later she was one of the first women to be appointed to the supervisory board of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. In addition, she was for many years head of the press service of the Swiss Refugee Council.

The Green Party of Switzerland has a new president. Berne national councillor and bio-farmer **Ruedi Baumann** follows Hanspeter Thür.



Annette Schindler, art historian and till now curator of the Glarus Art Museum, is the new director of the Swiss Institute in New York. This Swiss-US dual national promotes cultural exchange between Switzerland and the USA.

Newspaper mergers in Lake Geneva region and eastern Switzerland



The Lake Geneva region has a new newspaper. The liberal 'Journal de Genève' and the popular Lausanne 'Nouveau Quotidien', published by Edipresse – newspapers of very different character – are joining up. The merged product has editorial offices in Geneva and Lausanne and will be called 'Le Temps', with Eric Hoesli, formerly editorial chief at the weekly 'L'Hebdo', as editor-in-chief. He is succeeded at 'L'Hebdo' by 33-year old Valais woman journalist, Ariane Dayer.

Newspaper shake-up in eastern Switzerland too: 'St. Galler Tagblatt', which belongs to the 'Neue Zürcher Zeitung' group, has merged with 'Appenzeller Zeitung', which for its part has swallowed up 'Appenzeller Tagblatt'. The 124-year old 'Ostschweiz', the last competitor in the city of St. Gall, simply closed its doors at the end of the year, with the loss of 45 full-time jobs.

The present media concentration has raised considerable controversy: an ever small number of journalists are writing more of the same. ■

Texts: Alice Baumann
Photos: Keystone

Snippets

High consumption country. Switzerland counts about one million smokers, 300,000 regular consumers of alcohol and 30,000 people hooked on hard drugs. The cost of this addictive consumption amounts to over Sfr. 5 million a year – with legal drugs costing four times more than illegal ones. This conclusion emerges from a study carried out by the Federal Office for Public Health.

The richest Swiss. The 100 richest Swiss citizens and foreign nationals resident in Switzerland became richer by over Sfr. 62 billion over the last year. This may be compared with a federal budget deficit which is at present about Sfr. 8 billion. Half of Switzerland's total assets are in the hands of only two per cent of the population, while about one-fifth of the population possess no assets at all.

Living alone on the increase. Half a million Swiss citizens, making 50% of all those living alone, are unmarried. 260,000 people living alone are widowed, while 137,000 are divorced and 70,000 separated. Thirty years ago Switzerland had only 100,000 single

people. But while living alone used very often to be a consequence of poverty, today's individualisation of society is a product of prosperity.

Multiple divorces. 40% of all marriages in Switzerland end up before the courts. In Europe divorce rates are higher only in Norway, Finland and Sweden.

End of a landsgemeinde. The Appenzell Outer Rhodes Landsgemeinde (or open-air parliament), which was held on April 27, 1997, at Hundwil, was also the last. Cantonal voters have decided by 54% to 46%, with 61% participation, to abolish this 600-year old institution with immediate effect.

Point of view

"We are setting out on a search for our supposed own values in order to find a new direction. But I think it would be better to go back in time, to 150 years ago for example, and to direct ourselves outwards and consider what we can use that comes from outside. Not rejection, but receptiveness and learning, as is appropriate for a communications society."

Historian Hans-Ulrich Jost



Sensational Swiss victory at the 28th New York Marathon

Franziska Rochat-Moser from Berne is the first Swiss to win the New York Marathon. She covered the most famous inner-city course in the world in 2 hours, 28 minutes and 43 seconds. For the 31-year old banking lawyer and wife of Switzerland's top chef Philippe Rochat (the new head of world-famous gourmet restaurant 'Girardet' at Crissier, near Lausanne), this was the biggest success of her career, as also in the history of Swiss long-distance running. It means that she is high on the list of favourites for this year's European Championships in Budapest. Her achievement has a financial reward too, since the victor's prize is worth US\$ 50,000 plus a cross-country vehicle. During 1997, she was also first in the Jungfrau Marathon and new record-holder in the Morat-Fribourg event.

New four-language dictionary out

Comprehension with and within four-language Switzerland is not always an easy matter. Some Swiss, particularly young people, often speak English with each other for simplicity's sake. A publication just out aims to counter this trend. In addition, this handy little book with its practical basic vocabulary is an ideal travelling companion as well as a practical reference work for Swiss Abroad.

'Schweizer Sprachen deutsch, français, italiano, rumantsch' (Swiss Languages: French, German, Italian, Romansh), Editions Dynamicha, Neuchâtel, 1997, ISBN 3-9521323-0-6, may be obtained for Sfr. 12.–, plus postage and dispatch, from Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16.

Massacre in Luxor: Switzerland mourns



Ten Egyptians and 58 tourists, of whom at least 35 were Swiss, were killed in a terrorist attack at the temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Luxor. Members of the federal government and several cantonal executives took part in the funeral ceremony, together with relatives and the public. Responsibility for the massacre has been claimed by the Islamic underground organisation, Gama'a al-Islamiya.