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NEWS IN BRIEF

8 March. Switzerland's first lady, the Christian Democrat party member Thérèse Meyer (57) from Freiburg is elected President of the National Council. She succeeds Jean-Philippe Maitre of Geneva, who retired on 19 February for health reasons. She is only the seventh female President in Switzerland's entire history.

17 March. Frenchman Marc Roger, ex-president of the Servette football club, is held on remand. He is accused of fraud in connection with the club's bankruptcy, which was confirmed on 16 February after months of appeal proceedings. This club is booked to play in the first league next season, but the Super League will continue with nine teams. In its 115-year history the club has never stood down so far. Its awards include 17 championships and seven cup wins.



FC Servette Geneva facing bankruptcy.

23 March. Opening of the World Exhibition in Aichi, Japan. Cultural Switzerland is not only content with the Swiss pavilion in the Land of the Rising Sun – since two years Pro Helvetia has been organising a rich cultural programme throughout Japan to present



Federal President Schmid at the World Expo.

today's Swiss culture in a fitting manner. On 16 April Federal President Samuel Schmiel is guest of honour in the "Wisdom of Nature" pavilion, where about 15 million visitors are expected until the end of September.

29 March. Micheline Calmy-Rey, Swiss minister of foreign affairs, speaks in Turkey about Armenia and Kurdistan. In particular, she draws attention to the rights of women and minorities in Kurdistan. At the same time she discusses with her Turkish ministerial colleagues the necessity of re-examining the genocide in Armenia.

31 March. Poll on the bilateral agreement II. Meanwhile a referendum has been organised, so that on 5 June the Swiss people will vote on the Schengen/Dublin dual treaty. The SVP has launched a typically blustering placard campaign playing on insecurity, once again showing that Christoph Blocher's party is still Switzerland's unrivalled champion of political propaganda.

1 April. Marie-Christine Doffey of Freiburg is the first woman to be appointed head of the Swiss National Library, an institution founded 110 years ago.

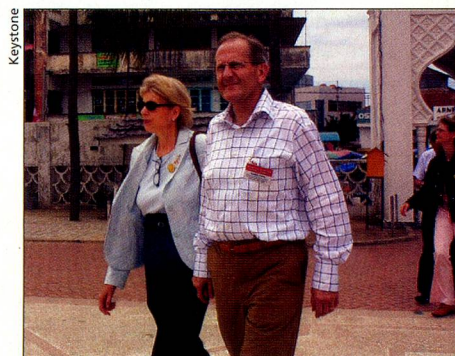
2 April. Free movement of people among the 15 European Union countries has not led to the expected abuse of payrolls. As announced by the tripartite cantonal commission, only 2.4 percent of the 14,000 people checked since June 2004 were affected by wage dumping. On September 25 the Swiss people will vote on the extension of the agreement on free movement to include citizens of the ten new EU member states as well.

9 April. The National Council's business scrutiny committee criticises the DFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) regarding the Borer affair. It questions the role of the Information Head in particular, but completely exonerates Joseph Deiss, the foreign minister at that time. The committee members also call upon the media and authorities to exercise restraint.

11 April. Joseph Deiss, now minister of economic affairs, is in Indonesia. Together with a delegation he is visiting Banda Aceh,

a town in northern Sumatra destroyed by the Tsunami. Just when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (seco) wanted to delete Indonesia from the list of most needy countries, the tsunami created completely new conditions. In cooperation with seco, Swisscontact will donate more than CHF 8 million over a three-year period to provide small to medium size companies there with consulting services and loans.

22 April. Foreign tourism in Switzerland is on the increase. According to the Swiss Tourist Office their overnight stays rose by 1.7% in 2004, as against a decline of 2.8% in 2003. However, Swiss people spent less on overnight stays in their own country: the respective figures declined by 2.8%. The "markets of the future" for Swiss tourism are China, Korea, the USA, and the Gulf States.



Swiss Federal Councillor Deiss (with his wife) on a visit to Indonesia.

25 April. At the UN Assembly in New York, ambassador Peter Maurer called upon industrialised nations to meet their financial obligations – including Switzerland. On joining the UN Switzerland had emphasised its goal of donating 0.4% of GNP to development aid, but in 2004 had fallen short at 0.37%.

27 April. A non-Italian-speaking vice-chancellor. The Zurich Social Democrat Oswald Sigg elected as successor to Achille Casanova is neither a CVP member nor from the Ticino. Pascal Couchepin sharply criticised this decision by the Federal Chancellor's office: "Democracy is not only a matter of figures, but also of the willingness to respect minorities and certain values".

Alain Wey

Translated from German.