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[Jost auf der Maur]

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Subtle, current and well drawn

I would like to respond to the letter entitled "Offensive" by Ms. Zingg from Taiwan. The "Drop it!" caricature by Peter Gut in your September edition is subtle, humorous, current and well drawn. I would not have felt offended even if I were a Federal Councillor. It may just be a case of the end justifying the means. But many things are all too readily called "misogynistic". I am grateful to "Swiss Review" for allowing me to appreciate some current Swiss humour.

CAROLE DAUBERSCHMIDT,
LUXEMBOURG

Sexist and lacking in respect

"Drop it!" - have I missed something or do I completely lack a sense of humour? I find this caricature misogynistic, sexist and lacking in respect. It certainly does not belong in "Swiss Review".

GABRIELE MÜLLER GLOOR,
CIUDAD COLON, COSTA RICA

A rare blunder

I was saddened and extremely disappointed to find a caricature of our Federal Councillors in such bad taste and a rare blunder in "Swiss Review". I am astonished that the editorial team allowed those so courageous and willing to commit themselves where men are not brave enough to be ridiculed.

ALEXIS WARIDEL, QUEBEC

Aloof internationalists

Philosophy professor Georg Kohler unprofessionally said of the Swiss army: "It still exists but is no longer fit for purpose in its current form. It must urgently join an alliance because the opposition forces have become too powerful." Which alliance? The EU and/or NATO? Such writing by internationalists who see themselves as being above the electorate is inaccurately

rate, undemocratic and extremely questionable in terms of state politics. The incorrect claim that the modern army is no longer fit for purpose is an affront to all those who perform military service in accordance with the constitution and, above all, the officers.

HEINRICH L. WIRZ,
RETIRED COLONEL,
BREMgarten (SWITZERLAND)

Great on the iPad too

We are delighted that we can now read "Swiss Review" on the iPad too. It is great that you have decided to do this, and we are sure that lots of readers are also grateful for the app. My wife and I have been living in Antigua and Florida for six years and continue to read "Swiss Review" with great interest. Many thanks for all your efforts.

ROLAND AND SILVIA BACHMANN,
ANTIGUA

Extremely frustrated

As an avid reader of "Swiss Review", I followed the articles on developments in Swiss politics and was preparing to vote by post. I was extremely frustrated when I received the election update on 20 October. Owing to a postal service strike, all mail was delayed and it was too late to send the ballot envelope via the consulate in São Paulo. It is time the Swiss government thought about electronic voting in all countries by using the Swiss diplomatic representations.

ALEXANDRE DEVELEY,
SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

Goodbye Swissinfo disk

The last Wahl-CD from swissinfo.ch will become a collector's item as it is the last one. What a sad loss. We are constantly encouraged to follow

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MERCENARIES DO NOT HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION. The Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi attempted for months to prevent his fall from power in October 2011 with foreign troops. The UN recently warned of a worrying rise in the number of mercenaries in Africa. The use of "external military forces" is outlawed in Switzerland but that has not always been the case. The Swiss were among the most sought-after mercenary forces for half a millennium. Well over a million Swiss mercenary soldiers fought on the battlefields of Europe. They were renowned for their brutality and boldness, which made them much coveted and feared in equal measure. They served almost every European power. At one stage, one in three of the French army's infantry came from Switzerland. And in the 19th century, liberation movements were often confronted with Swiss troops serving royal dynasties in decline. Swiss mercenaries of old are a far cry from the idyllic image of the modern-day papal Swiss Guard as an historic relic.

Probably no other phenomenon had a stronger influence on pre-modern Switzerland than its mercenaries. Journalist Jost Auf der Maur points out that it is strange that there is little general awareness of this extraordinary historical phenomenon. Extensive research has been carried out into mercenaries in military history, but the cultural history and socio-political dimension has largely been overlooked. In his book "Söldner für Europa" (Mercenary soldiers for Europe), Auf der Maur highlights this black hole in Swiss history. He felt obliged to do so as many of his direct ancestors were officers in the pay of foreign powers.

In one respect, it was a "dirty business", one that established an aristocracy founded on the mercenary trade and wielding political power. The book's illustrated annex impressively shows the financial gains of Swiss mercenary entrepreneurs, which were turned into architecture – stately homes built on blood in the truest sense of the word in many parts of Switzerland. Mercenary soldiers who avoided death on the battlefield often returned home in poverty, mutilated and suffering from alcoholism. Switzerland suffered huge population loss.



On the other hand, the long periods abroad resulted in a transfer of knowledge. Those who managed to return home in good health and perhaps even with some prosperity brought culture and knowledge from many foreign countries with them. Auf der Maur even claims that Switzerland

would not have survived without its foreign mercenaries. The courts of Europe had become so dependent on Swiss troops that they refrained from attacking their supply line of soldiers. The Swiss were able to call their troops home whenever they needed them for themselves. A mechanism was practised here that gradually became an ever stronger commitment to neutrality.

Based on his family history, Jost Auf der Maur provides new, fascinating and sometimes disconcerting insights into a turbulent and underappreciated chapter in Swiss history.

JÜRIG MÜLLER