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Cover photo: Emmental cheese.
Foto StockFood / Michael Wissing, Cartoon Max Spring

Our cheese, and our neutrality



Anyone wheeling out the hoary old clichés about Switzerland is bound sooner or later to talk about cheese. Probably Emmental. This cheese, with its large holes, has become a veritable Swiss icon. The only thing is that far more cheese labelled as “Emmental” is manufactured outside Switzerland than within the country. The Swiss cheese industry is thus seeking to protect the brand more strongly and has called on the jurisdiction of the European Union (page 10). This is not without a touch of irony: it would be the very same “foreign courts” so often warned about in Swiss farming circles coming to the aid of an agricultural product that could not be more Swiss. The outcome of the case remains uncertain.

Young Emmental is mild. The cheese may be strong, spicy or sharp, depending on its age. If it is allowed to mature for a long period, its texture changes and salt crystals form in its holes. Emmental is thus synonymous with variety and is anything but a ‘neutral’ cheese.

This, coincidentally, brings us to the topic of neutrality. Neutrality is currently the subject of some passionate debate in Switzerland. Is a nation that participates in sanctions against a warring Russia still neutral? Or is neutrality a set of values that actually requires compassion and action in the face of the horrors of war? Should we look more closely or look away?

If we examine the question more closely, the meaning of neutrality has frequently changed in the past and is doing so again. Sometimes, the abstract concept also provides no clear answer as to what is to be done when war erupts across the continent.

It is very likely that the Swiss people will be given the opportunity in the foreseeable future to express their opinion on neutrality at the ballot box (page 4). This is definitely a privilege, as neutrality does not constitute a solid fundamental value unless we all agree on what it means. Anyone looking to join the discussion now will furthermore observe to their amazement that neutrality is a topic that cannot be discussed neutrally at all.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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