

Carnival, an old tradition in some German parts of Switzerland. Picture above, Canton Luzern

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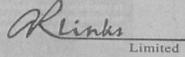
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"Swiss Confederation Day"

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# Language diversity and 'Swissness'

is characterized by the diversity of its geography, its languages and its religious affiliation. This is reflected in the variety of its literature, art, architecture, music, and customs. The culture of the mountains of Switzerland is not the same as that in the plateau, there are significant differences between the language areas, and between the mainly Roman Catholic and the mainly Protestant regions.

Switzerland is the home of three of Europe's major languages, but apart from Rumanstch - spoken by only 0.5% of the population - it has

Whichever language group they belong to, the different Swiss communities have linguistic and cultural ties with one of their larger neighbors. The language communities eat different things and have different traditions and customs. Language distribution

The diversity is reflected in the linguistic makeup of the country, which encompasses three main languages - German, French, and Italian - that stem from the cultures

German is by far the most widely spoken language in 'Switzerland: 17 of the 26 cantons

HE culture of Switzerland no written language of its own. are monolingual in German. French is spoken in the western part of the country, the "Suisse Romande." Four cantons are French-speaking: Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud. Three cantons are bilingual: in Bern, Fribourg and Valais both French and German are spoken. Italian is spoken in Ticino and 4 southern valleys of Canton Graubünden. Rumantsch is spoken only in the trilingual canton of Graubünden. Rumantsch, like Italian and French, is a language with Latin roots. It is spoken by just 0.5% of the total Swiss population

The many foreigners resident in Switzerland have brought with them their own languages, which taken as a whole now outnumber both Rumantsch and Italian. The 2000 census showed that speakers of Serbian/Croatian were the largest foreign language group, with 1.4% of the population. English was the main language for

Each canton makes its own decision about which language will be taught at school and when. In business meetings or at national conferences, it frequently

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Quadrilingualism--Protected Natural Reserve: sign in four languages. From top to bottom: French, Italian, Rumantsch, German. The same sign is found all over Switzerland, regardless of language area.

# SME: The backbone of Swiss economy

corporate giants in industry, consumer foods, bank- 1998 companies in this category come up. Media headlines are generally dominated by these employed in the market economy, often overlooked that the Swiss economy is based primarily on panies were reducing their staff small and very small companies. In the 1998 census of companies, 98.2% of all companies had fewer than 50 employees, and therefore counted as small companies. The just under 290,000 firms represent ones with less than 10 employees considerable potential in terms of are family-oriented.

"SUALLY when we talk entrepreneurial initiative even if of Swiss business com- many became entrepreneurs more panies, the names of or less involuntarily, in the face of impending unemployment. In ing, and pharmaceutical sectors employed some 1.45 million people. This represented 53% of those major corporations However, it is i.e not counting state-sector employees. While the major comduring the last recession, the number of jobs especially in the very small companies, with fewer than 10 employees, was growing. Many Swiss enterprises, especially the

# The textile and clothing industry

ees, the Swiss textile and clothing industry is very small by international standards, but nonetheless country's fourth largest export industry. Production levels are high and it is very innovative and creative sector, famed for its quality, variety and constant flow of newspecialties. The Swiss textile and clothing

industry has a long history spanning many centuries. It started around the 12th century mainly as cottage industry. Before industrialization the textile industry was centered around Zurich (silk from (weaving during the same period) and St. Gall (linen and later cotton). The textile industry was already an important factor at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Switzerland. The original cottage industry character was carried over into the largely decentralized textile industry in northeastern Switzerland. The clothing industry is centered in Ticino. In the 19th century, cotton and silk together with watches were the main industries in Switzerland.

Today, the Swiss textile and clothing industry has maintained its competitiveness in the face of tremendous challenges, particularly from low-cost Asian countries. The industry grew at the rate of 3 per percent in 2004. This has been achieved through promoting creativity and high quality, finding

**Swiss** 

niches in the market and maintaining efficient organizational structures. The industry has retained the market niches of highly specialized products, such as yarns made of seaweed, non-flammable textiles for airplanes, yarns enriched with silk which reduces perspiration, Nanotechnology, special silk yarns (200 meters of which weigh only 1 gram). The Swiss textile industry's top fashion fabrics and embroidery still enjoy a high reputation among international haute couture designers. Elegant dreams made out of Swiss fabrics are in demand all over the world. Presently, the clothing fabrics represent around 13th to the 15th century), Fribourg 50% of production, furnishing fabrics around 30% and technical materials the remaining 20%

> Approximately 90% of Switzerland's CHF 4.1 billion textile and clothing production is exported. Like the other export industries, the textile and clothing sector depends on open markets. In Europe duty-free access to markets is ensured by a free-trade agreement with the EU and a pan-European agreement with Eastern Europe which came into force in 1997. As far as other countries are concerned, in particular the important emerging states, high custom duties and import barriers are still a problem.

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# machinery

CONTINUE FROM PAGE 12 ndustry. The site http://www.swissmem.ch offers information about the association as well as links to all the member companies. The service is continuously expanded and enhanced.

The Swiss engineering and capital goods industry will coninue to keep up with or even outperform the global competition due to the significant research and development investments. «On site»-research, keeping well in touch with the production process, together with a well formed and motivated workforce guarantee, that the Swiss Engineering Industry can offer products of high quality in due time Strong momentum forecast to continue in 2006

The Swiss mechanical and electrical engineering industries can look back on a gratifying 2005. Exports clocked in at over Swiss Franc (CHF) 61 billion, a 3.9% rise on the previous year's figures. Sales +3.0%) and new orders received (+4.5%) both reported healthy growth rates. The outlook for the Swiss machinery industries in 2006 remains favorable.

Swissmem (www.swissmem.ch)

# Our warmest felicitations to the Government and the friendly people of Switzerland on the auspicious occasion of SWISS NATIONAL DAY

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