

JANUARY 2023

# Swiss Review

The magazine  
for the Swiss Abroad



**In the shadow of war, Switzerland is relying on the power of the sun**

**Lake Brienz: How a murky body of water became probably the cleanest lake in Switzerland**

**In the run-up to the 2023 elections, the parties are focusing on the “Fifth Switzerland”**



# SwissCommunity – the international interface for Swiss Abroad

The SwissCommunity online platform is the place to meet for Swiss Abroad. Find and contact members in your local area, for example in Hawaii.

Register now at:  
[members.swisscommunity.org](https://members.swisscommunity.org)



Install the SwissCommunity app on your smartphone!



Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

Our partners:

Switzerland Tourism.



Swiss Travel System.



SWI swissinfo.ch

BCGE

ASN International Insurance

CSS

YAPEAL

## For a sustainable future for the Fifth Switzerland

With a bequest, you make it possible for the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad to continue to support and represent the rights of the Swiss Abroad.

[www.swisscommunity.link/bequests](https://www.swisscommunity.link/bequests)



Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

### Consular services

anywhere, conveniently on your mobile devices



Guichet en ligne DFAE  
 Online-Schalter EDA  
 Sportello online DFAE  
 Online desk DFDA

[www.fdfa.admin.ch](https://www.fdfa.admin.ch)

Petra, Jordan (2022)



**4 Focus**

Switzerland ups the pace  
in the production of solar energy

**9 News**

Federal Council elections 2022: stability  
preserved and only limited change

**10 Report**

Lake Brienz: once well  
fertilised and now almost too clean...

**13 Economy**

Coffee wars: Migros challenges  
market leader Nespresso

**14 Nature and the Environment**

The revival of chestnuts  
as Swiss cultural heritage

**News from your region****17 Swiss Figures****18 Politics**

The impact of the 2019 elections  
A political scientist takes a look back

Swiss parties react to the growing  
weight of the “Fifth Switzerland”

**22 Literature****24 From the Federal Palace**

How the FDFA wants to raise awareness  
among seniors in the “Fifth Switzerland”

**27 Swiss Community News**

The Council of the Swiss Abroad  
adopts a position on Swiss neutrality

**30 Discussion**

Cover photo:  
solar technicians on the roof of the Sevelen (SG) gym.  
Archive image: Keystone (2011)

# The speedy banana



Have you heard of the “Banana” from the Biel engineering college? It was not a fruit. It was a banana-shaped, banana-yellow solar racing vehicle, built in 1985. Hence the nickname. The only power source it needed was direct exposure to sunlight. Other than this, the fragile looking speedster was primarily a sort of utopian soapbox car cobbled together using low-cost building materials: the chassis was made from recycled aluminium ski poles from Swiss Army stocks. The “Banana” was not a thing of beauty. It was, however, fast.

In the 1985 long-distance race across Switzerland, it finished just behind the winner, Mercedes. By 1986, the Biel team had become unbeatable. Competing with an updated version of their vehicle, they were the first official solar racing vehicle world champions. Then, in 1990, the Biel team reached their zenith during the longest and hardest race for solar vehicles – all the way across Australia: their vehicle “Spirit of Biel II” outclassed the clear favourites Honda and all the other major high-tech groups in the race. The sun often shone brightly on the Biel team. In 1996 alone, they broke ten speed and distance records. They achieved a speed of 161 km per hour, leaving the previous record of General Motors in the dust.

Why are we looking back at this now? Because it raises the question of why a once pioneering solar energy nation is now languishing at the back of the European mid table. The Biel crew brought home the silverware, but they did not inspire any great transition in energy policy.

This transition was finally made possible by the Swiss parliament in September 2022. It decided that extensive solar power stations could now be built in a very short space of time in the Alps. The driving force behind this decision was not utopia or enthusiasm; it was fear. The war in Ukraine is threatening energy supply even in Switzerland – and energy prices have risen massively as a result. It is no great surprise that there is an internal conflict at the heart of the new Swiss solar offensive, as it plays natural resources off against each other: more energy from natural sources, and less protection for the natural mountain landscapes in the process. We take a closer look at this in our Focus article (starts on page 4).

We have included a couple of nostalgic pictures of the “Spirit of Biel” on [revue.link/spiritofbiel](https://www.swissreview.ch/revue.link/spiritofbiel). These pictures are a good 30 years old and date from a time when solar energy looked set to catch on in Switzerland.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

“Swiss Review”, the information magazine  
for the “Fifth Switzerland”, is published by the  
Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.







# Boosted by the war, the Swiss solar energy sector is now eyeing mountain pastures

In Switzerland, photovoltaic energy represents around 6% of electricity consumption. This is a rather mediocre figure by European standards. The war in Ukraine has delivered an electric shock. Solar projects are springing up everywhere, including in the Alps. But the controversy is growing.

## STÉPHANE HERZOG

Swiss photovoltaic solar energy specialists have been taken by surprise. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, installing photovoltaic panels has suddenly become a priority. Firms cannot keep up with demand. “Our headcount has doubled since 2021,” says Yvan Laterza, owner of I-Watt, a small company based in Martigny (VS), which is currently wrestling with supply issues. “Forty years ago, our message fell on deaf ears. Now, the conditions are in place for renewable energy, and for photovoltaic solar in particular,” states Jean-Louis Scartezzini, who runs the Solar Energy and Building

Physics Laboratory at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL).

The engineer describes a Switzerland that was ahead of the curve for solar between 1985 and 1995 but that ended up resting on its laurels, and failed to train enough professionals in the field. Stéphane Genoud, a professor of energy management at the HES-SO Valais-Wallis, thinks this delay is a pity. “In Europe, there is legislation to say that all new buildings have to be fitted with solar panels, and existing buildings will soon have to be as well,” he points out. “We were a bit slow with the transition,” admits





Member of the National Council for the Liberals, Jacques Bourgeois (FR), who cites the example of southern Germany, where solar power has a firm foothold.

Fresh interest in solar was sparked by Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin, amongst other people. In September 2021, the minister mentioned the possibility of an electricity shortage, based on a report on the security of the electricity supply in Switzerland. This triggered a wave of panic. When Ukraine was invaded, the Swiss became aware of their energy dependency, especially on French nuclear energy, but also on German electric-

The solar offensive in Switzerland now means that large photovoltaic power plants can be built outside building zones, such as in high-altitude areas in the Alps. Photo: iStock

The order books of Swiss solar firms are full to bursting, but they are short of personnel: there is a massive skills shortage in the sector. Photo: Keystone

ity produced partially by burning Russian natural gas. Electricity prices shot up, with increases of over 30 per cent. In central Valais, inhabitants saw the price of kWh go from 20 to 28 centimes, breaking 20 years of stability, according to Arnaud Zufferey, whose consulting firm advises local authorities on the energy transition. The whole process is gaining pace, “but solar power was already profitable five years ago”, he emphasises. His house is fitted with solar panels. The current produced costs 15 centimes per kWh and charges an electric car. The surplus energy produced will, in the near future, be purchased at the same price by Valais electricity distributor Oiken. One solar panel of ten metres square can provide enough energy to drive 10,000 kilometres a year, he says.

### Swiss Federal Parliament speeds up introduction of solar

Another major boost was observed in September 2022, when the Federal Parliament passed an emergency law to facilitate the construction of large-scale solar installations in the Alps. These power stations, which will have an annual yield greater than 10 gigawatt hours, will qualify for easier planning permission and a subsidy from the Confederation. Whenever a

new building with a surface area greater than 300 m<sup>2</sup> is built, a solar installation will have to be fitted to the roof or the facades. These installations will not be subject to the rules set down by the Federal Act on Spatial Planning: the purpose of building them will benefit other national, regional and local interests.

The provisions were voted into law with help from the Green Party and have stirred up some heated discussions in Valais, where an Alpine solar megastation project is being drawn up (see box). For Green MP Céline Dessimoz, these decisions are a sign of excessive haste. “Parliament is being extreme, and ignoring the laws on spatial planning and the environment that we fought so hard for,” she complains. The ecologist believes that installing solar panels in mountain pastures is being done for purely commercial reasons. “Now that towns have recognised the potential of such projects, everything is going full speed ahead. But we cannot promote photovoltaic power at the expense of the countryside and biodiversity.” Jacques Bourgeois is amused by this statement. “We’re being told we have to get out of nuclear power, and as soon as we can do so, people oppose it,” he says. The Liberal politician believes that the Alpine projects enabled by the Federal Act on Spatial





Planning are a step in the right direction. “Solar panels are twice as effective at high altitude,” he explains.

### Solar panels on train tracks and motorways

In the view of engineer and professor at EPFL, Jean-Louis Scartezzini, the focus must be on fitting solar panels to roofs, railways and motorways. All these potential locations are already connected to the power grid and are in close proximity to consumers. The building physics expert cites the fact

“Forty years ago, our message fell on deaf ears. Now, conditions are favourable for renewable energies, and for photovoltaic power in particular.”

Jean-Louis Scartezzini  
engineer and professor at EPFL

that there are 850 square kilometres of roads in Switzerland and 500 square kilometres of roofs. Scartezzini also emphasises the need to strike a balance between producing energy and protecting the environment. “Switzerland has lost two-thirds of its insect mass since 1990, which is having incalculable consequences on biodiversity and on life in general. We have to take this into account.” Converting alpine pastures into industrial solar energy sites would therefore involve a risk disproportionate to the reward, he believes.

## Grengiols solar megastation: a case in point

This was a planned solar power station in the Valais Alps, launched in an article published by a local newspaper. The article’s author was politician and former chairman of the Swiss Social Democratic Party (1987-1997) Peter Bodenmann. The article, titled “Make Grengiols Great Again!” and published in the “Walliser Bote” in February 2022, sang the praises of a potential facility that would generate a billion kilowatt hours of electricity, mainly available during the winter. The Grengiols meadows, located in the Binn Valley natural park, were to host two-sided solar panels spanning an area equivalent to 700 football pitches. This site, supported by the town of Grengiols, would meet the electricity requirements of at least 100,000 inhabitants. As a bonus, these panels would be twice as effective as normal, owing to the altitude and the sunlight levels.

“This facility could be built right now,” centrist Valais Member of the Council of States Beat Rieder told the media, which conveyed Peter Bodenmann’s idea to the government in Berne. The government then passed September’s legislative programme at record speed in order to promote solar energy.

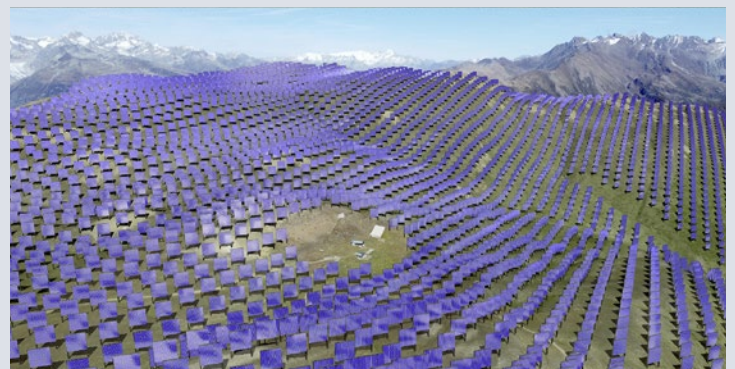
This project triggered a wave of protest from environmental organisations, especially from the Franz Weber Foundation. Even the Swiss Academy of Sciences urged caution. Member of the National Council for the Green Party Christophe Clivaz (VS) condemned the fact that no feasibility study had been carried out for the scheme. He believes that the operator Swissgrid will be unable to transport current to the valley within the deadline imposed by this urgent law, which makes the subsidies contingent on the facility being operational by 2025. “We can manage

to build gigantic installations on empty sites, but we don’t have the political will to fit them to roofs, car parks or motorways,” he laments.

When contacted in his hotel in Brig, Peter Bodenmann dismissed these arguments. What about the fact that the calculations of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland and the University of Geneva show that transporting electricity from Grengiols to the valley will pose technical problems? “Those people are misinformed,” replies Bodenmann. How about the impact on the environment? “The panels will promote biodiversity by creating areas that are protected from the heat.” “We have a problem in the winter. But the panels installed at high altitude will be able to generate four times as much power as those at ground level,” concludes the former Socialist Party chairman. (SH)

The Alpine countryside in Grengiols today (left picture) – and a simulation of the planned project by IG Safflischtal. It is critically opposed to the proposal.

Image materials:  
IG Safflischtal



# Swiss solar energy's growth curve is as steep as the Alps

At its current rate, photovoltaic solar energy is on course to meet its objectives for 2050. The price of solar panels is falling, and their effectiveness has doubled. Wind farms are emerging as an ad hoc winter energy source.

Around three terawatt hours (TWh) of solar energy is produced in Switzerland, a little over the electricity produced annually by the former nuclear power plant at Mühleberg (BE).

This figure represents approximately six percent of the electricity consumed in Switzerland, a pretty mediocre share by European standards. In future, the roofs and facades of Swiss houses could produce 67 terawatt hours of solar energy a year, Swissolar estimates. Some 700 megawatts' (MW) worth of photovoltaic panels were fitted in 2021. This figure is set to reach a record power rating of 1,000 MW in 2022, in the estimation of Jean-Louis Scartezzini, professor at EPFL. If this trend continues, the Swiss Confederation's objective of producing 34 terawatt hours of photovoltaic power by 2050 could be met, he believes.

Total electricity consumption is currently 58 TWh, with 18 TWh coming from nuclear power and 10 TWh

from hydroelectric dams in Valais. The determining factors in the expansion of solar power are the efficiency and the price of solar panels. Their price has fallen by over 90 percent in the past 12 years and their energy yield has doubled in 30 years. An EPFL study showed that simply making use of all south-facing roofs in the country could meet more than 40 percent of Swiss electricity demand. The first step in extending solar power will be to set up large-scale solar power stations. "The bigger it is, the cheaper it becomes," says Valais engineer Arnaud Zufferey. The cost price of one kWh produced on a large roof ranges from three to five centimes. This price triples for a villa.

## A panel of differing opinions

Ever since the second amendment to the Federal Act on Spatial Planning in 2018, the only formality required

In Switzerland, enough sunlight falls on the south-facing roofs alone to cover 40% of the country's energy requirements. Facades are also increasingly being used, such as here in Winterthur.

Photo: Keystone

when fitting solar panels is to fill out a registration form. On the other hand, the process of installing solar panels in locations other than buildable areas and buildings is long and drawn out, because there is no clear legal basis for it. It is precisely these rules that the parliament decided to relax (see main text on page 4). Yvan Latenza, who runs a solar panel installation firm in Martigny, allows for 20 hours in order to get all the legal paperwork done before beginning an installation. "The fire brigade or chimney sweeps sometimes demand certain documents, which have to be in paper form, so that takes time," he says. In Geneva, independent engineer François Guisan highlights the obstacles that can arise with regard to protecting national heritage. These restrictions can even apply to buildings that were built in the 1960s.

## Wind: solar's cousin

Alongside solar energy, there is wind energy. More wind energy is generated in the winter, at a time when photovoltaic energy production drops. "Austria has over 1,400 wind turbines and Switzerland has around 40; however, our national geography is very similar to theirs, and the Austrians are not renowned for destroying their natural environment," remarks Scartezzini. Switzerland's potential for wind energy production was estimated at 5 TWh per annum in a study carried out by the Swiss Federal Office of Energy in 2012. "However, under the current legal framework, where wind turbines could potentially also be set up in forested areas, this estimate has been increased." This potential is now rated at 30 TWh. (SH)





# Julia Steinberger



Last autumn, activists blocked ten busy streets in Swiss cities. The movement refers to itself as Renovate Switzerland. It is campaigning for more buildings to be renovated so that they save energy. Activists claim this could be implemented quickly and contribute to protecting the climate. The protest was designed to draw attention to that. In Berne, Julia Steinberger, an internationally renowned climate scientist and Professor of Ecological Economy at the University of Lausanne, also put on a high-vis jacket and sat on the motorway. The 48-year-old said, “Our planet is being rendered uninhabitable before our very eyes. We have to do everything to save our future.” When the police arrived, Steinberger glued her hand to the asphalt.

She was then roughly dragged away. The rather dangerous blockade lasted half an hour, the commotion afterwards lasted a lot longer. That was the plan, but the scientist’s radical behaviour was harshly criticised by some in political circles. Some said it was an unseemly way for a public official to behave. Even the media asked: aren’t research and activism supposed to be separate? Steinberger’s answer was that science has spent long enough delivering data. The Geneva-born scientist worked on the report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2022. She realised that all the research results had failed to produce enough action. An alternative approach was now needed to make people realise the urgency of the situation. She feels that “peaceful civil protest” is legitimate. The University of Lausanne did not prevent its lecturer from protesting. Professor Julia Steinberger thus became the serious face of the climate movement in Switzerland.

SUSANNE WENGER

## Canton Basel-Stadt becomes a climate pioneer

Canton Basel-Stadt is aiming to become climate-neutral by 2037, i.e. to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions. The population of the city canton voted for the measure in November 2022. This makes Basel-Stadt a climate pioneer. This is the most ambitious environmental political goal ever set in Switzerland. Climate neutrality for the whole country is set to be achieved by 2050. The city of Zurich is aiming to become climate-neutral by 2040, and Berne by 2045. (MUL)

## Federal Council extends the ‘S’ protective status

Because the war in Ukraine is not expected to end in the near future, the Federal Council is extending the ‘S’ protective status for asylum seekers from Ukraine. Initially, the decision was taken to provide refugees with protection and support for one year, i.e. until March 2023. Now, however, these protective measures have been prolonged by a year. (MUL)

## Federal railways losing millions

Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) generates most of the electricity it needs in its own hydroelectric power plants. Owing to this year’s severe drought, however, the SBB needed to purchase large amounts of electricity and is forecasting a loss of 180 million Swiss francs for 2022. The sharp rise in energy prices triggered by the war in Ukraine is thus hitting the railway company full force. (MUL)

## Valais votes Yes to assisted dying in retirement homes

Accompanied dying, also known as assisted suicide, is legal in Switzerland. In the Catholic and conservative-leaning Canton Valais, however, many retirement and care homes do not support it. A cantonal referendum is now set to correct this. A good 75 percent of voters approved the proposal to allow assisted dying in all retirement and care homes in Valais in future. (MUL)

## Green Liberals campaign for the EEA

The unresolved, non-contractual and therefore increasingly cloudy relationship between Switzerland and the European Union (EU) is making alternative solutions sound more attractive. The Green Liberal Party (GLP) pushed in December for Switzerland to enter the European Economic Area (EEA). As a reminder, Switzerland voted very narrowly in 1992 against joining the EEA. The GLP is arguing that the non-EU countries of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein have done very well out of their EEA membership. Switzerland, on the other hand, is making no headway in renegotiating a framework agreement with the EU and is getting bogged down in the details. Entering the EEA would provide a rapid solution with long-term stability for Switzerland, the GLP argues: EEA entry has already been brokered and covers the entire internal market, including the bilateral aspects. Whether Switzerland would actually be accepted into the EEA is another matter entirely. (MUL)



## Two new faces in the Swiss government

Albert Rösti (SVP), from Berne, and Elisabeth Baume-Schneider (SP), from Jura, have taken up positions in the Federal Council. The election of the replacement ministers by parliament maintains the existing balance of power in the government. But it has sparked debate over the representation of the regions.

At the end of last year, the Swiss parliament filled the two seats vacant in the seven-member Federal Council at the same time. The two members of the government who had served the longest, Ueli Maurer from Zurich, representing the conservative SVP, and Berne native Simonetta Sommaruga from the Social Democratic Party (SP), had both announced their retirement. The parliament elected Berne National Councillor and former SVP President Albert Rösti as Maurer's successor. Sommaruga's successor is the Council of States member from Jura, Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, former director of education for Canton Jura.

This means that the party-political composition of the federal government retains its conservative majority. Traditionally, the largest parties on the left, right and centre of the spectrum are represented in government, to steer the fate of the country together and search for balanced solutions. The concept of a system of majority and opposition is foreign to Switzerland. Both newly elected members were among the candidates put forward by their respective parties, even though the election of Elisabeth Baume-Schneider came as a surprise. As before, there are three women and four men on the Federal Council.

### German-speaking and urban Switzerland are under-represented

Although the by-election was marked by stability overall, there were nonetheless a few peculiarities. The outlying canton of Jura, the youngest member of the Swiss Confederation, is now, to its great joy, represented in government for the first time. The government also now has a Latin majority: three members from Romandy and one from Ticino stand alongside three members from German-speak-

ing Switzerland. Only once in the history of the 175-year-old federal state has there been a similar composition, and then only briefly, between 1917 and 1919.

Critical votes demanded that this Latin majority be only temporary this time too. Because 70 percent of the population live in German-speaking Switzerland, this area is now heavily under-represented. The Swiss Constitution actually stipulates that each language region should be appropriately represented. The fact that the larger cities are no longer represented on the Federal Council is also giving rise to hefty debate.

### The Left loses a key department

New SVP Federal Councillor Rösti took over the vacant Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications. This saw the Left lose this key department, previously led by Simonetta Sommaruga, to the conservatives. New SP Federal Councillor Baume-Schneider is in charge of the Department of Justice and Police and is thus responsible for Switzerland's asylum policies. This department became vacant when the previous incumbent, FDP Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter, moved to the Department of Finance. The remaining federal councillors stayed in their respective ministries.

Whether everything will remain exactly the same in the Federal Council will become clear later this year. Following the federal elections in the autumn, an entire government will be elected by the new parliament in December. Depending on how the parties perform – and depending on whether there are any further retirements – there could be further changes in the executive. The increasingly strong green wing has been pushing for its own seat in government for years. (SWE)



#### Retired:

Ueli Maurer (SVP, ZH) retired from the Federal Council in late 2022. The finance minister saw himself as a cautious saver.



#### Appointed:

Berne native Albert Rösti from the SVP joined the Federal Council. He is the new environment, transport and energy minister.



#### Retired:

The retirement of Simonetta Sommaruga (SP, BE) in late 2022 came as something of a surprise. She was responsible for climate and energy policies in her capacity as minister for the environment.



#### Appointed:

Elisabeth Baume-Schneider (SP, JU) takes Sommaruga's place in the Federal Council on behalf of the SP. She is minister for justice.

Photos: Keystone



## All of a sudden, Lake Brienz was too clean for some

The largest mountain lake in Switzerland has seen some ups and downs. Back in 1980, it was “over fertilised” – too high in phosphates. Then, in the space of a few years, it became so clean and free of nutrients that the fish died of hunger. Since then, the lake’s ecosystem has stabilised, and the fish are doing better.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Water plant manager Michael Baumann stands on the roof of the new facility in Brienz, Canton Berne, and allows his gaze to wander. Below are construction vehicles, behind him the clarification tanks and in front of him, three hundred metres away, are Lake Brienz and Hasli beach. Residents of the Hasli valley come here every summer to swim. Today, there is no-one to be found. Small waves break on the shingle beach; the emerald-green water is otherwise calm – high season has long since ended, and the ships are no longer running.

Around a hundred metres from the lake shore, 18 metres deep, purified water from the treatment facility flows into the lake. “The quantity of wastewater that we process here is highest during peak season in the summer,” says Baumann. This is when the neighbouring campsite is occupied, the Ballenberg open-air museum is open and the hotels are fully booked. In winter, on the other hand, it takes longer to clean the waste water. “The microorganisms that purify the water move more slowly in the winter cold – just like people,” explains Baumann.

### Worms, insects and crabs thriving like never before

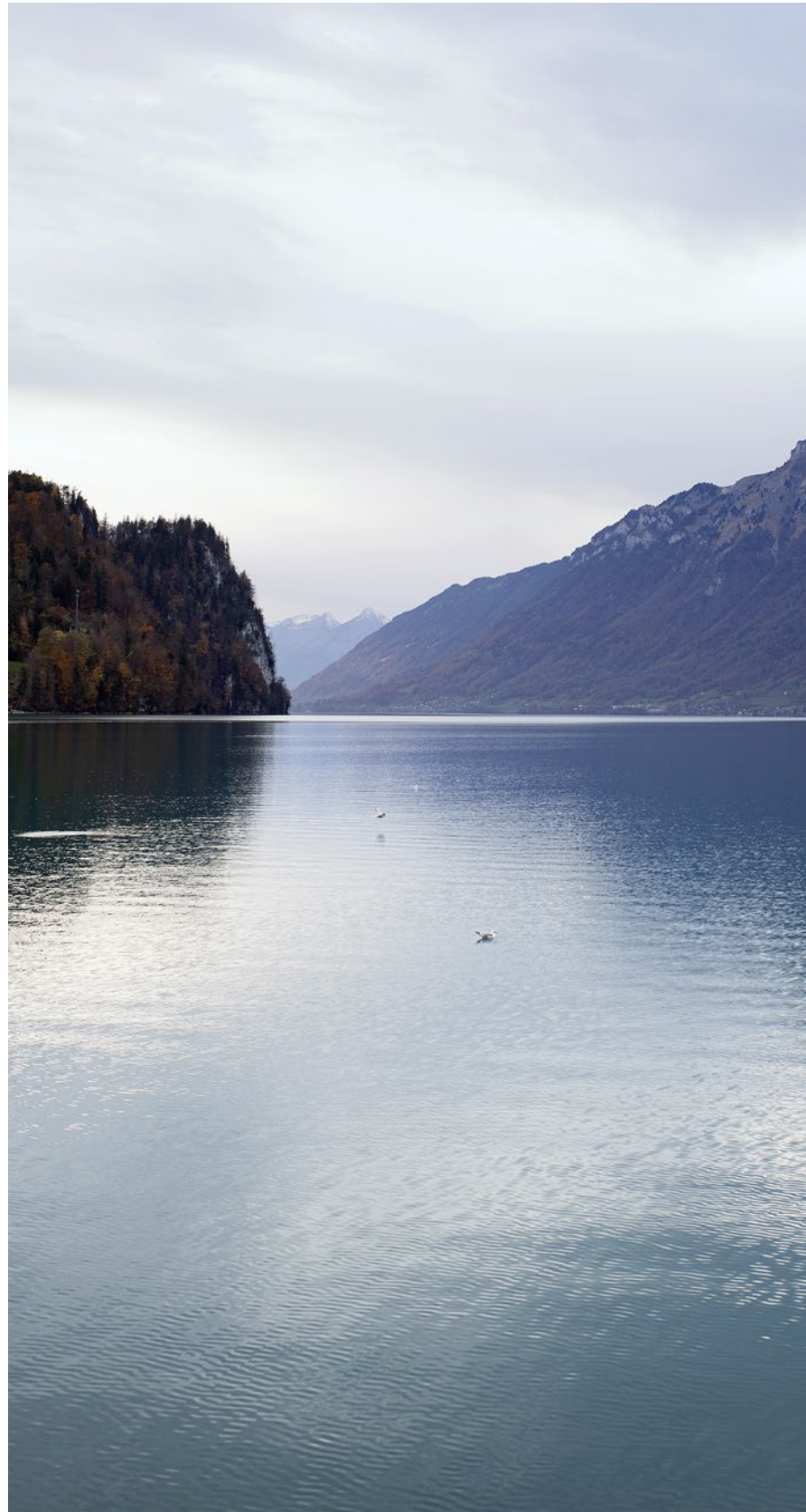
The water treatment facility at the upper end of Lake Brienz is new, and replaces the previous facility, which dates back 50 years. The new facility is computer-controlled and is monitored by Michael Baumann and his colleagues. Its construction is not quite complete, but it is already operational. The previous facility was also able to break down numerous chemical compounds. However: “Thanks



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records

**This edition: On the shores of the cleanest lake in Switzerland.**

Lake Brienz, flanked by the slopes of the Bernese Alps, is probably the cleanest lake in Switzerland today. For a long time, this was not the case.  
Photos: Danielle Liniger







to the new facility, we can clean wastewater a lot more effectively,” says Baumann.

The results are impressive: the water treatment facility is one of the main reasons why Lake Brienz is currently in great health, compared with other Swiss lakes. This large lake on the fringe of the Alps, which was still heavily contaminated with nitrogen during the 1980s, is now the cleanest lake in Switzerland. It has a comparatively intact ecosystem, where animal organisms – crustaceans like water fleas, insect larvae and worms – can thrive particularly well. These organisms then serve as food for the fish. If there are many of them in a body of water, this is a sign that the water is relatively unpolluted. One year ago, the positive biological condition of Lake Brienz was documented in a report commissioned by the Federal Office for the Environment.

### Fish and fishermen endured hard times

The lake’s current good condition is in stark contrast with the bleak years of its past. One of the people most concerned about it was Beat Abegglen. He is a trained fisherman and lives in Iseltwald, a small former fishing village on the south bank of Lake Brienz.

In the late 1980s, he built up his fishing business there. Shortly thereafter, however, catches collapsed. “In the mid-90s, fish in their fourth year of life weighed between 150 and 200 grammes. At the turn of the millennium, their average weight was 40 grammes,” says Abegglen. “This loss in weight and a drastic reduction in catch sizes are always a sign that something is wrong with the water.”



The new Brienz water treatment facility, managed by Michael Baumann, is largely responsible for the good quality of the lake’s water.



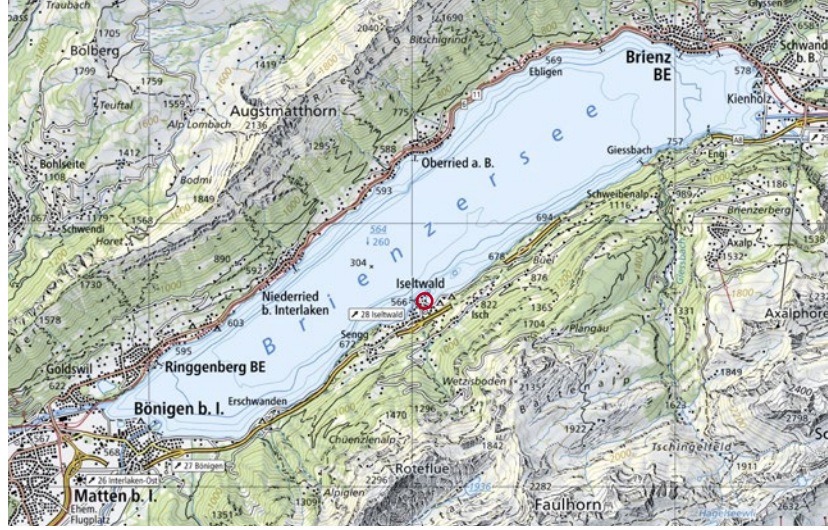
Beat Abegglen takes a look back on his difficult years as a fisherman. First, catches collapsed. Since then, he has been landing more fish from the lake again.

At the same time as Beat Abegglen was making his observations, experts at the water protection office of Canton Berne determined that the water fleas, or daphnia, had disappeared. Water fleas, which form part of plankton, are chiefly eaten by whitefish. These are the most common species of fish in Lake Brienz.

Based on all these observations, Canton Berne commissioned a research project aimed at finding out the reasons behind the fall in catches and the disappearance of the water fleas. The investigations showed that the changes observed were connected with the decrease in nutrients in the lake. The main reason for this decrease in nutrients was the massive reduction in the levels of phosphorous – including from faeces and from detergents and cleaning products – entering the lake. This decrease, according to the research report, is in turn due to the “decades of efforts made in technical water pollution control” – in other words, the good work done by the water treatment facility.

For Lake Brienz, which already has naturally low nutrient levels, this success in preventing water pollution also had a downside: “The tiny quan-





© Swisstopo

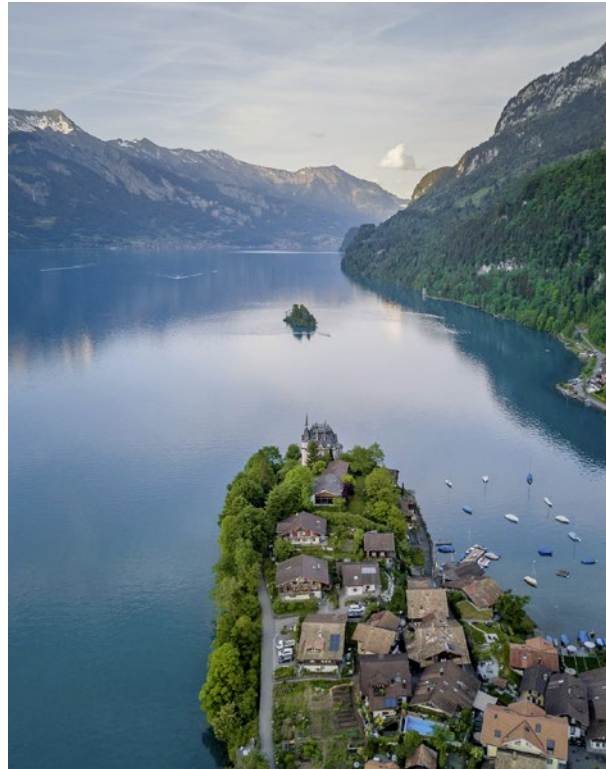
tities of nutrients hinder the already meagre growth of algae, and reduce food sources for plankton, leading to less food for the whitefish,” the report states.

The drop in catch sizes in Lake Brienz led to discussions in fishing circles, but also in politics. A proposal was made to artificially raise the levels of phosphorous entering the water by making treatment facilities purify the water less thoroughly. The canton, however, refused. Deliberately adding dirty water to the lake was environmentally undesirable.

### Rising temperatures favour food production

Because the drop in fish catches was so massive, Beat Abegglen was forced to abandon his job as a fisherman. Today, he runs his fishery as a hobby and works in another industry as his main job. He sells his fish to customers in the region, who can react flexibly to his catches. However, for the past four years, Abegglen's catches have been increasing again. Fish no longer weigh around 40 grammes – they now weigh 170-180 grammes again. “At the same time, the whitefish and perch are back,” says Beat Abegglen. Theoretically, Abegglen could now make a living from fishing again. He no longer wants to, though: “I am not giving up the security of a fixed income.”

As for why the fish are now doing better, Beat Abegglen has an explanation: the water that flows into Lake Brienz from its tributaries is warmer than it was a few years ago. In Abegglen's view, this is due to global warming. “Glaciers melting used to result in very cold water flowing into Lake Brienz all year round.” Now, the



Iseltwald is a picturesque peninsula rising up out of Lake Brienz. During the summer, historic paddle steamers churn through the often emerald-green water of the mountain lake.

Photos: Keystone

volume of glaciers has shrunk considerably, and less glacier water is flowing into the Aare and the Lütschine, Lake Brienz's two main tributaries. The rivers are also transporting less debris into the lake. This means that the lake is less cloudy and sunlight can penetrate deeper into the water. The warmth of the water and the fact that sunlight can now reach great depths has an impact on plankton production in the lake. “So, much more food is being produced for the fish,” says Beat Abegglen.

### An unstable lake for years

Whether Lake Brienz's ecosystem will remain in such good health is hard to predict. “Lake Brienz has always been in an unstable state,” says Beat Abegglen. This is also recorded



in Canton Berne's research report. In addition, even the new treatment facility cannot eliminate all substances from wastewater. As for how this micro-contamination will affect the lake's ecosystem in the future, no-one knows. However: “In a couple of years, we will definitely be able to filter these substances out in water treatment facilities,” says treatment facility manager Michael Baumann.

This situation has done nothing to dispel the fascination with the largest mountain lake in Switzerland. It continues to be a beloved getaway destination – not least due to its unique colour. This year, commercial shipping on Lake Brienz recorded its highest number of visitors in ten years: 496,000 passengers travelled on the lake by boat. This is around 179,000 more guests than in 2013. In contrast to neighbouring Lake Thun, Lake Brienz is primarily a getaway destination for foreign guests.

Nonetheless, the hype is never as great as for other lakes, says Beat Abegglen, who even after more than 30 years' fishing is still fascinated by Lake Brienz: “In late August, you can always see plenty of shooting stars over the lake. There are so many that it makes you feel awestruck and small.”



# The aluminium-free coffee pod taking on Nespresso

Migros, the largest retailer in Switzerland, brought out a packaging-free coffee pod in September 2022 – CoffeeB. The sudden arrival of this biodegradable product took the world by storm. But how is Nestlé, number one in the coffee market, reacting?

STÉPHANE HERZOG

To sample a CoffeeB, the new biodegradable pod from Migros subsidiary Delica, the first step is to go to a Migros electronic goods store in Geneva. At a sales stand, a saleswoman removes a brown ball from its cardboard packet. The machine created for this innovation – on sale for 169 Swiss francs – produces an espresso with no bitter taste. Not bad! The still-warm used coffee balls have dropped into the capsule collector. Pressing with your fingertip is enough to break through the plant membrane containing the coffee. The coffee grounds spill out into your hand. You start looking for a potted plant to hide the evidence.

## A coffee ball out to conquer the world

This is the whole purpose of the product, sold in Switzerland and France, right under the nose of Nespresso, which has been flooding the planet with its aluminium pods since 1986. Migros claims that it offers the advantages of pod coffee “without the bitter aftertaste of waste pods”, thanks to a protective envelope made from plants and seaweed that means it needs no packaging. CoffeeB balls are manufactured in Birsfelden (BL), although the machines come from China. Migros has promised that the machines’ parts can be repaired or replaced.

Jann, 50, has also come to try out the product. The data manager learned about coffee balls when watching TV in Korea. He owns a Nespresso machine, but prefers another brand of pod. He has plenty to choose from – 200 firms around the world make their own pods. Thanks to CoffeeB, Migros is gaining a foothold in the massive Swiss coffee market.



No aluminium, no plastic, no waste: the CoffeeB coffee pod is entirely made from plants. The remnants can be composted.

Photo: Keystone

Nespresso, which prepares and roasts its coffee in Switzerland, generated 3.2 billion francs in revenue over the first six months of 2022. The giant also manufactures Starbucks pods, the sales of which represent 20 percent of the compatible pods sold worldwide.

### “Environmental heresy”

“It is a shame that the world leader in coffee pods is not innovating and is continuing to use aluminium packaging, which is environmental heresy,” said Philippe Nicolet, former managing director of Ethical Coffee. This Swiss brand took on Nestlé with its own compatible pods, before abandoning its fight with the giant in 2017.

Nestlé sees things differently. “The carbon impact of a cup of coffee obtained from another entirely automated machine is 30 percent higher than from the Nespresso system,” replies Jessica Chakhsi, spokeswoman

of Nespresso Switzerland. By using the precise quantities of coffee, water and electricity necessary, she says, Nestlé keeps the wastage of these resources to a minimum. “What impacts the environmental footprint of a cup of coffee the most is the coffee manufacturing and final consumption processes,” according to the brand, which runs 3,700 collection points in Switzerland.

The majority of the 63 billion aluminium and plastic pods used throughout the world every year are thrown away, according to Fabrice Zumbrunnen, CEO of Migros, at the launch of its “revolutionary” product CoffeeB. In late November, Nespresso responded, announcing that it would be releasing pods made from compostable paper in the spring.

coffeeb.com  
nespresso.com  
nestle-nespresso.com





## Chestnuts: Swiss cultural heritage is enjoying a revival

Once a basic foodstuff, and now a tourist attraction: sweet chestnuts may no longer be as important as they once were to the Swiss economy, but they are currently enjoying a cultural comeback.

EVA HIRSCHI

“Hot chestnuts! Get your hot chestnuts here!” comes the familiar cry from the small brown huts in side streets during the cold months, as the scent of charcoal-roasted sweet chestnuts fills the air. Even if this mental image is integral to how we think of winter in Switzerland and we cannot imagine the season without vermicelles, chestnut soup and caramelised chestnuts, only around 100 tonnes of these nuts actually come from Switzerland. As much as 2,500 tonnes are imported, mainly from Italy but also from Portugal, Spain and France.

The chestnut nonetheless has a long tradition in Switzerland. Until the 19th century, it was an important part of people’s diets. In the southern Alpine valleys, Ticino and Valais in particular, it was grown and either ground into flour, dried or roasted in a pan. Its high nutritional value and low price earned it a reputation as “the bread of the poor”. The sweet chestnut, brought to Switzerland by the Romans, is one of the oldest crop plants in Europe. The arrival of the potato in the 19th century, however, saw it lose its economic significance. Pale chestnut groves do however still dot the Swiss countryside today.

### A lot of work to maintain

“Hundreds of hectares of groves have already disappeared in Switzerland,” says Patrick Schoeck, Head of Baukultur at the Swiss Heritage Society. Chestnut trees were often cut down to turn the land into pastureland or fields. Some, on the other hand, are allowed to grow wild. This is because chestnut trees need intensive maintenance and a lot of work. “It is often not worth the farmer’s while,” says Schoeck. Several local initiatives were launched in Ticino in the 1980s to avoid losing this cultural heritage entirely and to prevent chestnut





Left: Pale chestnut groves are a thoroughly typical icon of the Ticino cultural landscape, prized for their diversity.  
Photo: Giorgio Moretti



Right: Chestnuts are a Swiss winter staple even in urban areas. Roast chestnuts are sold in many city centres. Vermicelles also remains a popular dessert, in defiance of all the latest trends.  
Photos: Giorgio Moretti (1) und Keystone (2)



groves becoming wild. There was resistance from the general public. Clearing space to prevent chestnut trees merging into the woods was seen as harmful to the environment. “Chestnut trees with their many light areas provide a biotope for completely different flora and fauna than other trees do,” explains Schoeck. “This is important for biodiversity. Chestnut groves are also diversity hotspots; the composition of the diversity is just different.”

In addition to the ecological aspect, Mark Bertogliati, curator of the Valle di Muggio Ethnological Museum, also emphasises the cultural value. “In the ‘90s, a process of historical renovation began. Chestnuts had almost slipped into obscurity as cultural heritage in Ticino.” In Valle di Muggio, for example, the museum worked with other local organisations on various

initiatives to promote and revive this old tradition as an element of local identity. You can now visit former chestnut-drying houses and there are activities for all the family, from gathering to sorting.

### Ticino association recognised

The association Ticino Associazione dei castanicoltori della Svizzera italiana has also been campaigning for the preservation of chestnut groves since 1999. “We work closely with schools and organise trips to chestnut groves,” says association chairman Giorgio Moretti. Publications, events and scientific collaboration are all part of its work. For example, it supported the federal government’s efforts to catalogue varieties of chestnut in southern Switzerland and carried out DNA analyses to determine

varieties. “We found around 50 types,” says Moretti. For its civic commitment, the association was recently awarded the 2022 Schulthess Garden Prize from the Swiss Heritage Society. “We are delighted that our work has been recognised,” says Moretti.

Economically, chestnuts are still not very significant in Switzerland. They have, on the other hand, become a tourist attraction: today, especially in the autumn, extensive chestnut woods are a popular destination for long walks. Chestnut festivals are also held in towns and villages in October, like the Autumn and Chestnut Festival in Ascona or the “Fête de la Châtaigne” in Fully, Valais.

The fact that some of the chestnuts need to be imported for most of these festivals does not dampen the festive atmosphere.



**2023**

Angebote für Jugendliche von  
Offres pour les jeunes de  
Offerte per i giovani tra i  
Offers for young people aged

# 15-25

Jahren  
ans  
anni  
years old



MORE INFORMATION



SUPPORT THE YOUTH SERVICE  
WITH A DONATION

Swiss Travel System.



**Swiss  
Community**





“Swiss Review”, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 49th year of publication and is published six times a year in German, French, English and Spanish in 13 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 431,000, including 253,000 electronic copies.

“Swiss Review”’s regional news appears four times a year.

The ordering parties are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. This content does not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50).

ONLINE EDITION  
www.revue.ch

EDITORS  
Marc Lettau, Editor-in-Chief (MUL)  
Stéphane Herzog (SH)  
Theodora Peter (TP)  
Susanne Wenger (SWE)  
Paolo Bezzola (PB, FDFA representative)

FDFA OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS  
The editorial responsibility for the “Notes from the Federal Palace” section is assumed by the Consular Directorate, Innovation and Partnerships, Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Berne, Switzerland.  
kdip@eda.admin.ch | www.fdfa.admin.ch

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT  
Sandra Krebs (KS)

TRANSLATION  
SwissGlobal Language Services AG,  
Baden

LAYOUT  
Joseph Haas, Zürich

PRINT  
Vogt-Schild Druck AG, Derendingen

PUBLISHER  
The “Swiss Review” is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The postal address of the publisher, the editorial office and advertising department is: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne.  
revue@swisscommunity.org  
Phone: +41 31 356 61 10  
Bank details:  
CH97 0079 0016 1294 4609 8 / KBBECH22

COPY DEADLINE FOR THIS EDITION  
28 November 2022

CHANGES TO DELIVERY  
Please advise your local embassy or consulate. The editorial team cannot access your address and administrative data. Thank you.



# The longest passenger train in the world



## 1,910

The Rhaetian Railway broke the world record for the world’s longest passenger train on 19 October 2022, when a 1,910-metre-long chain of 100 carriages gently rolled around the many bends on the picturesque Alpine stretch from Preda to Alvaneu. A select band of 150 people boarded the train, probably caring little about having to depart 20 minutes late.  
> [revue.link/rhb](https://www.revue.ch/revue/link/rhb)

## 236,000

In late autumn, the canton of Zurich auctioned off the ZH 100 number plate. A symbolic mark of sympathy for people unable to remember numbers? Maybe. A motorist snapped up the plate for the pretty sum of 236,000 Swiss francs – the highest amount ever paid for a Zurich registration. The money went straight into the canton’s ailing coffers.



## 999.9

Talking of money: Switzerland’s federal mint and reliable source of legal-tender coins, Swissmint, also produces commemorative coins. Starting with the special edition dedicated to Mani Matter (1936–1972), the fineness of its special-issue silver coins will now increase from 835 to 999.9. The new 20-franc silver coin honouring the Bernese singer-songwriter was available in a presentation case for the price of almost 80 francs – and is now sold out. > [revue.link/swissmint](https://www.revue.ch/revue/link/swissmint)

## 5,512

Good health is worth more than just a few silver coins. Daily exercise helps – and costs nothing. The number of steps that we walk every day is a good indicator of how much we invest in our own health, 7,500 steps constituting a decent yardstick. On average, no one walks as much as that in Western industrial countries. The Swiss languish in mid-table, clocking 5,512 steps a day. Driving is evidently much easier than walking – with or without fancy Zurich number plates.

## 100



Every clean river consists of 100 per cent water. But river water comes from different sources. For example, the River Aare should be made up of 55 per cent melted snow, 32 per cent rain, and 13 per cent glacier ice – but this is contingent on Switzerland’s winters being 100 per cent snowy and icy.

# What became of the environmental and women's vote in Switzerland

Parliamentary elections take place in Switzerland on 23 October. The last federal elections, in 2019, saw a green wave and shift to the left. At the same time, more women than ever were elected. What impact has all this had? We took stock with political scientist Michael Hermann at the onset of the 2023 election year.

INTERVIEW: SUSANNE WENGER

**Swiss Review: Michael Hermann, the left-leaning Green Party made gains in the 2019 Swiss parliamentary elections, and the Green Liberals gained ground as well. Two years later, the people rejected the CO<sub>2</sub> Law, which was supposed to be a step forward in environmental politics. What happened here?**

Michael Hermann: It's contradictory. First of all, there was a large green wave in voting, a historic shift in the balance of power in Switzerland. Then, under 50 per cent of people voted in favour of a CO<sub>2</sub> law that was not even particularly strict. Various factors led to the green wave having a smaller impact on policy than one might have thought. On the one hand, the climate and the environment are right at the top of the list of sources of concern for the population. On the other hand, as the law would have resulted in petrol and flying becoming more expensive, many people felt more attached to their wallet than to working together to save the environment. Another fact is that even in 2019, only a minority voted green.

**The green parties nonetheless won 21 percent of votes between them. The Green Party won more additional seats in the National Council than any party had ever done before.**

Yes, the Greens were outstanding in the way they mobilised. They were visible and active. However, to make an actual change to climate policy, you need to form broad alliances in the Swiss parliament, which is largely conservative. These alliances have only come about under the impetus

of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had ramifications for the Swiss energy supply. All of a sudden, people were talking less about the global climate and more about keeping warm in winter and having enough power to run their homes and their businesses. This accelerated the energy transition in record time, whereas the political mills in Switzerland grind slowly.



**You are referring to the solar offensive including funding for hydroelectric power that was approved by the Swiss parliament in autumn 2022 and came into effect straight afterwards.**

Photovoltaics was long considered an alternative green fad in Switzerland, a soft technology. Now, solar energy is seen as a potential solution for making the country more energy-independent. It has become the vision for how Switzerland wants to shape the future of its energy sector. An alliance formed that included The

Greens and the centre-right, and previously sceptical homeowners became fans of photovoltaic power. The reality of the Ukraine war has thus almost set more in motion than the green wave at the 2019 elections.

**Your institute compiles election barometers on behalf of Swiss radio and television. One year before the 2023 elections, you observed that the green wave was losing momentum.**

The Greens are having a hard time getting their message across. Their central theme of the climate and environment has become even more important since 2019, especially in the wake of the 2022 heatwave in Switzerland. However, the theme is no longer associated exclusively with the Greens, and the focus has shifted. Now, even power station people and the industrial sector are talking about renewable energies. It is more about securing Switzerland's energy supply than about what the Greens are seeking: a resource-friendly lifestyle. The 2019 elections took place after a period of economic prosperity; now we are in the midst of a crisis. Themes that are seen as idealistic, such as those promoted by the Greens, are getting less traction.

**In 2019, more women were elected to parliament than at any point since women were granted the right to vote in 1971. The percentage of women in the larger parliamentary chamber, the National Council, rose to above 40 percent. Has this also affected the policies being implemented?**

Yes, it has. The female vote in 2019 was also aimed to an extent at fighting the political stereotype of the





conservative alpha male, who has dominated Swiss politics for a long time, on both the right and the left. The parliament has now become more open and more progressive, which is being reflected in social developments. One illustration of this is the decisions being taken on child-care outside the family. This topic is now taken seriously, whereas in the past Switzerland had traditionally clung to conservative role models. Even marriage for all was adopted during this legislature, another sign of greater social openness.

**2022 saw new gender gaps opening. In the referendum on a higher retirement age for women, men outvoted women by an unusually large margin.**

The reform of the old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) had a direct effect on women's old-age pensions and career prospects. Bills with such direct consequences for one gender only are a rare occurrence. In that respect, the OASI vote does not alter the general picture. It did, however, bring one fact sharply back into the spotlight: gender politics is about more than just lifestyle. It is about a traditional welfare policy and financial protection. This was a message to the SP in particular.



“The reality of the Ukraine war has almost set more in motion than the green wave at the 2019 elections.”

Michael Hermann

**The Social Democratic Party rejected the OASI reform – one of the main legislative projects of the government – and lost by an unexpectedly small margin to the united conservative camp.**

The OASI vote showed that social security issues, particularly from a female perspective, can mobilise people who do not belong to the SP camp itself. At the same time, certain party circles tend to highlight cultural war themes in identity politics, which can frighten off potential voters. In times of crisis like these, parties benefit from issues on which they are traditionally seen as competent. For the SP, this means welfare politics, and for the FDP it means economic issues.

**In 2019, all parties represented in the federal government lost a greater or lesser percentage of the vote and number of seats in parliament: the SP, the FDP, The Centre and – by easily the biggest margin – the large, conservative right-wing SVP. Could the SVP recapture lost ground?**

Not really. It did remain the most voted for party in Switzerland. During the Covid pandemic, it took a stance against the protective measures taken and thus found itself aligned with Covid-sceptic movements. However, this frightened people away, in the same way as the pro-Putin stances adopted by SVP exponents on the war in Ukraine. In addition, the Liberal competition returned to a more conservative and right-wing position under their new

party chairman, Thierry Burkart, in 2021. What the SVP is looking for is an important topic.

**Are right-wing conservatives lacking an issue that people can get passionate about?**

Up to the 2015 elections, the SVP had primarily focused on highlighting the issues of Europe and migration. This gave it an advantage over the other parties for several years. This has



**Biography:**

Michael Hermann was born in Berne and is the owner and head of the Sotomo Research Institute in Zurich. The author and doctor of social geography has been analysing Swiss politics and society for many years.

Photos: Frank Bröderli

changed. The federal government has been so restrained in its policies on Europe that the SVP has no ammunition to use against it. Migration and immigration are now seen as less of a concern, especially with the lack of skilled personnel in Switzerland. If, however, the focus returns to the topic of foreign nationals over the next few months, the SVP will be able to mobilise more effectively than it did in 2019.

---

Why has no progress been made in European politics since the last elections? How stable are the political balances of power in Switzerland at a time of crisis? You can read the rest of the interview with Michael Hermann in the online edition: [revue.link/hermann](https://revue.link/hermann)

# How the main political parties approach the “Fifth Switzerland”

In the run-up to the 2023 federal elections the biggest parties are reacting to the growing weight of the “Fifth Switzerland”. All now have either an international section or a network for supporters.

MARC LETTAU

A dozen men and women gathered together in the capital city in late summer 2022. They worked doggedly, had lively discussions with like-minded people online – and finally lined up at the end of the meeting to take a group selfie, with everyone grinning and giving a thumbs-up.

What was going on? The Green Liberal Party (GLP) was launching its international section, GLP International. The party felt it was a logical step, as Green Liberal candidates had already achieved noticeable success in the previous federal elections, in 2019.

Founding a section in a small group like this is evidence of a broader trend: the political parties in Switzerland with the largest voting base are leading the way by attaching increasing weight to the role of the Swiss Abroad who want to vote and express their choice. As a result of this step by the GLP, the six largest parties now all have a foreign section or a network for party members abroad.

## The number of voters in the “Fifth Switzerland” is steadily rising

This is not surprising given that the number of Swiss Abroad who take an interest in politics and are registered to vote is steadily rising. Around 181,000 eligible people had registered to vote in 2017, and this figure had risen to 218,00 by 2021.

If this trend continues, there may be as many as 230,000 people registered to vote in the run-up to the federal elections on 22 October this year. This also means that the number of Swiss Abroad is growing by around 1.4 % on average, but the percentage of eligible people registered to vote is growing at a good three times that

rate – 4.7 % on average over the last four years. This changes the political weight of the “Fifth Switzerland”. If its potential over the years was comparable to that of Canton Thurgau (178,000 eligible voters), it is now closing the gap – in terms of the number of registered voters – with the cantons of Ticino and Valais. In other words, in close races, votes from abroad could become increasingly decisive.

For the political parties, fulfilling the requirements of those who live abroad is admittedly no less challenging. The six largest Swiss parties are now all investing in the “Fifth Switzerland”. The acute determining factor remains, however, that federal elections are organised at cantonal level. Yannik Beugger, from the general secretariat of the SVP, also mentions this: “Nominating candidates is the responsibility of the cantonal parties.”

## No, there is no “Fifth Switzerland” constituency

The reason behind the considerable weight of the cantonal parties is easy to explain: there is no “Fifth Switzerland” constituency; the Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote in their home canton and can also only stand for office in that canton. They therefore represent a very fragmented electorate overall, rather than a political unit.

SVP International, according to Yannick Beugger, will now at least seek dialogue with cantonal parties where there are independent lists of Swiss Abroad candidates standing.

The SP has already had a similar experience. In 2019, SP International ran an independent campaign, ran its own lists in several cantons, and was able to set its own agenda. At the up-

coming 2023 federal elections, SP Geneva is expected to field a separate list of Swiss Abroad candidates. Apart from that, the SP is pursuing the goal of fielding targeted lists of candidates from the “Fifth Switzerland”. In addition, according to the SP international secretary, Sandro Liniger, campaign rallies are to be held in key states.

## Lost votes

Anyone talking about the political weight of the “Fifth Switzerland” cannot avoid broaching the relatively charged subject of e-voting. Electronic voting is currently no longer possible in any canton. This means that many Swiss people, particularly those overseas, who are interested in politics, are effectively excluded from political participation in Switzerland. Their postal votes often do not reach Switzerland in time. SP representative Sandro Liniger says, “Without e-voting, turnout among the Swiss Abroad is around one-third lower than it is with e-voting.” SP International is therefore campaigning for e-voting to be introduced.

It is not alone in making this demand. The Swiss Abroad can exert their own pressure: the more they register to vote, the more urgently an answer is needed to the question of how exactly they are to exercise the political rights granted to them.

You can find the extended version of the party survey opposite in our digital edition – at [revue.link/theparties](https://revue.link/theparties)

You can download the application form to register to vote here: [revue.link/form](https://revue.link/form)





## The party with the strongest voter base has been active internationally for 30 years



The Swiss People's Party (SVP) was one of the first Swiss political parties to have party structures abroad: SVP International was

founded in 1992. It has sections in Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa, and has 'country contacts' in Liechtenstein, Norway, Britain and Hungary. SVP International is chaired by Inge Schütz (Switzerland), who lived in Sweden for years.

**2023 elections:** SVP International is currently engaged in negotiations with cantonal parties in the cantons in which it is running separate lists. Cantonal sections are responsible for nominating the candidates. They are free to include candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland" on their party ticket. The SVP came out of the 2019 federal elections as the clear winner in terms of number of votes. It won a 25.6 % share of the vote (down from 29.4 % in 2015). The SVP has two seats on the Federal Council.

**Online:** [www.svp-international.ch](http://www.svp-international.ch)  
[www.facebook.com/svpinternational](https://www.facebook.com/svpinternational)

**Contact:** General Secretariat of SVP Switzerland, SVP International, [info@svp-international.ch](mailto:info@svp-international.ch)

## The Social Democratic Party (SP) uses "antennas" to promote international connections



The SP has had an international section, SP International, since 1999. This section is chaired by Gaëlle Courten (Italy) and Pierre-Alain Bolomey (Switzerland). To promote mutual communication, SP International has also developed a network of so-called SP antennas. These antennas either bring members together at a local level (Berlin, Brussels, Rome, France, Israel) or help bring members who are scattered in more remote locations (Africa, USA) within the fold of the network.

**2023 elections:** the SP advises its cantonal parties to nominate candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland" too. The party is also planning on running a separate list in Canton Geneva featuring candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland".

The SP came in second place in the 2019 elections. It won a 16.8 % share of the vote (18.8 % in 2015). Two of the seven current members of the Federal Council are in the SP.

**Online:** [www.sp-ps.ch/partei/sp-international/](http://www.sp-ps.ch/partei/sp-international/)

**Contact:** Sandro Liniger, International Secretary of the Swiss SP, [sandro.liniger@spschweiz.ch](mailto:sandro.liniger@spschweiz.ch)

## The Liberals (FDP) have integrated the "Fifth Switzerland" for years



The FDP has had an international section since 1992. FDP International works not only to connect the Swiss Abroad, but also to bring the issues faced by the "Fifth Switzerland" to the attention of party members, the parliamentary party and FDP Switzerland through lively discussions. FDP International is also active at a European and global level and collaborates with The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party and Liberal International, as well as helping its mother party maintain good international party relations. The chairperson of FDP International is Helen Freiermuth (Turkey).

**2023 elections:** FDP International is working with FDP Switzerland and the cantonal parties to clarify the options for lists including the Swiss Abroad. The FDP, which also has two seats on the Federal Council, is going into the elections in third place. It won a 15.1 % share of the vote in 2019 (16.4 % in 2015).

**Online:** [www.twitter.com/FDPInt](https://www.twitter.com/FDPInt)

[www.fdp-international.com/willkommen](http://www.fdp-international.com/willkommen)  
[www.facebook.com/fdp.die.liberalen.international](https://www.facebook.com/fdp.die.liberalen.international)  
**Contact:** [info@fdp-international.com](mailto:info@fdp-international.com)

## The Centre has an active network instead of a foreign section



The Centre, formed from the merger of the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) and the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) in 2020, has no foreign section but does have a network of interested people under the name Die Mitte International (The Centre International). The people involved in this network are often members of a Centre cantonal party. Contact with the network – and communications with sister parties abroad – are the responsibility of the delegate for international affairs, appointed by the party leadership. The current delegate is National Councillor Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter (BL).

**2023 elections:** the party welcomes the nomination of "people with a strong local presence" from abroad, but does not make having them as candidates a requirement for the cantonal parties. The CVP and BDP had a total share of 13.9 % of the vote in the 2019 elections (15.7 % in 2015). They have since combined to form the Centre party and have one seat on the Federal Council.

**Online:** the network's online presence is in the pipeline. Centre party website: [www.die-mitte.ch](http://www.die-mitte.ch).

**Contact:** [international@die-mitte.ch](mailto:international@die-mitte.ch)

## Green Internationality – even without an international section



The Greens are as yet without an international section. Party members living abroad are currently being sounded out on how they want to consolidate the Greens' work, whether as members of a network or even an entirely new international section. At the same time, internationality is a reality for the Swiss Green party. They are already working together with the Global Greens and the European Greens. Their events are also always intended for the Swiss Abroad.

**2023 elections:** the party advises its cantonal sections to nominate candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland" too. In Canton Geneva, cross-border candidates are once again allowed to form their own list. The Greens were very successful at the 2019 elections. Their share of the vote rose to 13.2 % (7.1 % in 2015). They have no representatives on the Federal Council.

**Online:** [www.gruene.ch](http://www.gruene.ch)

**Contact:** contact details for the Green cantonal parties are available at [www.gruene.ch/kantonalparteien](http://www.gruene.ch/kantonalparteien). Contact for The Swiss Green Party: [gruene@gruene.ch](http://gruene@gruene.ch).

## The Green Liberal Party (GLP) unveils the latest international section



GLP International, founded in September 2022, is the newest international section of a Swiss political party with a strong voter base. The aim of GLP International is "to respond to the desire of the Swiss Abroad to take a more active involvement in Swiss politics, and to ensure that their ideas and perspectives are heard", thereby "contributing towards the modernisation of Swiss politics". GLP International is chaired by Thomas Häni (Germany).

**2023 elections:** the party is looking to encourage as many Swiss Abroad as possible to stand as GLP candidates in the 2023 elections.

The Green Liberals made strong gains during the previous federal elections in 2019. The GLP scored 7.8 % of the vote at that time (4.6 % in 2015). It is the sixth-largest party and has no representatives on the Federal Council yet.

**Online:** the GLP International website is under construction. The party already has an online presence at: [www.facebook.com/glpinternational](https://www.facebook.com/glpinternational)  
[www.twitter.com/GLPInternational1](https://www.twitter.com/GLPInternational1)  
[www.instagram.com/glp\\_international](https://www.instagram.com/glp_international)  
**Contact:** [international@grunliberale.ch](mailto:international@grunliberale.ch)

# When Ilaria saved Emilio from a life of celibacy

In his 1954 debut novel “Gli Ostaggi” (The hostages), Giovanni Bonalumi tells the story of young Emilio who stays in a Catholic seminary in the 1930s.



Giovanni Bonalumi  
(1920 – 2002)

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Following the death of his father, a railway worker, Locarno lad Emilio enters seminary at Lugano in 1931 to prepare for celibacy as a Catholic priest. Emilio is initially intent on joining the clergy, but the world outside proves too vibrant and too great a draw for the young man, who feels like a hostage to God in the austere, sterile, oppressive setting of the seminary. A slap in the face from the seminary prefect; an intrigue, albeit one in which he plays the role of bystander; a massage from the rector with distinctly erotic overtones; and, above all, Ilaria, the happy-go-lucky farmer's girl with whom he is secretly in love, escaping the shackles to have a surreptitious relationship with her – all these factors mean that Emilio is sad but relieved when he is eventually expelled from the seminary for rebellious behaviour.

## Autobiographical

This is the storyline of “Gli Ostaggi” (“The hostages”), the 1954 debut novel by then 34-year-old Giovanni Bonalumi, who was an Italian secondary school teacher in Locarno at the time. By no means is it an invented narrative. Indeed, much of it is autobiographical, the author – like Emilio – having attended the Seminario San Carlo di Lugano (from 1931 to 1941) before dropping out without finishing. However, Bonalumi was not thrown out but left of his own accord. Nor did the real-life equivalent of Emilio's fling with Ilaria take place. Whereas the novel ends with Emilio returning home, Bonalumi eventually managed to pass his exams – this time at the Catholic seminary in Einsiedeln. He subsequently studied literature in Fribourg and worked for many years as a teacher and translator, before lec-

turing as a professor of Italian literature at the University of Basel from 1973 to 1990.

## Decried in Ticino, celebrated in Italy

That Bonalumi's novel was more than just the whim of fantasy was not lost on the Ticino clergy, which still held great sway over the public in 1954. Far from interpreting the book as a sensitive representation of a young man's journey through puberty, the

groundswell in Ticino was that the work was an attempt to discredit the educational practices of Ticino's cantonal seminary. The local press ignored it. Some people even decried it as blasphemy. In contrast, critics in Italy and French-speaking Switzerland could not have reacted more differently. The book won the Charles Veillon Prize in Lausanne and was acclaimed in Italy, where Nobel Prize winner Eugenio Montale spoke of the “honesty of a writer who may still be shy but is incapable of lying”.

## A classic of Swiss literature

Bonalumi, who died on 8 January 2002 in Locarno, published notable studies on literary history as well as other books including the novel “Per Luisa” (“For Luisa”, 1972) – in which a Locarno intellectual goes through a deep personal crisis during the Hungarian uprising of 1956. In a collection of short stories called “Il Profilo dell'eremita” (“The hermit's face”), 1996, Bonalumi also shares stories of his time at Einsiedeln. However, none of the author's later works attained the same heights as “Gli Ostaggi”, which was republished numerous times and is available in French and German. Even in Ticino, the book has long been regarded as a classic of Swiss literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Gli Ostaggi” is available in Italian from Edizioni Casagrande, Bellinzona; Danielle Benzonelli's French translation (“Les Otages”) is available from Metropolis, Geneva; and Giò Waeckerlin-Induni's German translation (“Die Geiseln”) is available from Verlag Th. Gut, Zurich (volume 28 of the “Reprinted by Huber” series).

“Her stare was continuous. Without the slightest hint of shyness, she asked how many of us were attending the seminary. She said she watched us in the courtyard during break-time. The lights from our cells were visible from her room in the evening. I pointed at the windows of our dorm. ‘If I spot you from the courtyard, I will give you a wave.’ She seemed to like my suggestion. She was a tall, slender girl – and could not have been older than 15.”

(Excerpt from Giovanni Bonalumi's “Gli Ostaggi” [The hostages]).

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZURICH



## A shape-shifting narrative



KIM DE L'HORIZON  
"Blutbuch"  
DuMont Verlag  
334 pages, CHF 32

Non-binary author Kim de l'Horizon swept this year's Swiss and German book awards with their debut novel "Blutbuch" (Blood Book). De l'Horizon won both accolades for their audacious yet reflective exploration of social conventions and their own non-binary identity.

"Blood Book" is a work with two fundamental strands. On the one hand, it deals with our intangible heritage – the things we carry without being asked. This is symbolised by the copper beech (or "Blutbuche" in German) that the narrator's great-grandfather once planted in the family garden – at a time when the world still seemed to be a simple place with no more than two human genders.

On the other, De l'Horizon's fluid writing style leaves this linear, monotonous identity behind. The focal point of the story is the grandmother – or "Grossmeer" (literally "great sea" in Bernese dialect) – with whom the book's unnamed protagonist has a close if uneasy relationship. The protagonist, who feels neither male nor female, is prompted by their grandmother's slide into dementia to investigate the past. The more their grandmother forgets, the more they remember – touching upon emotions such as shame, desire and fear as well as the pervasive threat of violence. "I will not kill my parents," they say. "I will give my mothers the gift of life." And be born again. Choosing between paternal and maternal, the protagonist identifies more with their family's female history – a story of neglect, repression, stubbornness and resistance. These "inherited wounds" of the past underpin the protagonist's non-binary existence. But the protagonist is also plagued by a gnawing sense of self-doubt. "How do I begin and where do I end?" they ask. More than once, their narrative voice builds up a head of steam only for their "strong libido", satisfied through self-humiliation, to gain the upper hand all too easily.

This novel is hard to digest. Its shape-shifting narrative challenges the norm and treads a fine line, as the protagonist tries to wrestle their way out of the family and social straitjacket into which they were born. De l'Horizon employs a written style that flits between the vulnerable, the dispassionate and the skittish, building intensity to carry and authenticate the narrative. Their language jars against the fragility of human existence and blurs the lines of convention in remarkable fashion.

BEAT MAZENAUER

## Music about the passing of time



SINA  
"Zitsammläri"  
Muve, 2022

Maybe it's the dialect. We all like the way they speak in Valais, don't we? Or perhaps it's the calm, friendly, down-to-earth manner. Whatever it is, everyone in Switzerland likes Sina.

Some thought that "Där Sohn vom Pfarrär", her take on the Dusty Springfield soul classic "Son Of A Preacher Man", was way too cringy. Others rolled their eyes when she threw marzipan from the stage during her "Marzipan" album tour ("Wänd dir Marzipan?" [Want some marzipan?]). But we all fell for her dialect – the epitome of authenticity and honesty. "Fär wer soll i singu?" (For whom should I sing?), the disarming title of Sina's latest single, is a case in point. Although the song itself is much more than just quaint.

Indeed, Sina's qualities extend far beyond her charming dialectal sounds. The award-winning singer from Visp may sound a little too mainstream at times, but her less-upbeat moments are genuinely tender, poetic and deep.

"Zitsammläri" (Time collector), her 14th album, is no exception. Together with husband Markus Kühne, Sina wrote a collection of new songs during the quiet of the pandemic. Friends from the worlds of literature, slam poetry, and cabaret – including Sibylle Berg, Simone Meier, Bänz Friedli, Jürg Halter and Franz Hohler – provided her with the lyrics, all of which revolve around the universal theme of time. Sina's band, featuring producer and co-composer Adrian Stern, then recorded the tracks at the historic Grandhotel Giessbach near Brienz.

"Zitsammläri" is a concept album combining folk, pop and traditional Swiss music. It is also a romantic and intellectual conversation about getting older. "Hände", with lyrics from the author Bettina Spoerri, is a particularly captivating song. Sina recently referred to it in an interview: "Hands learn to tie shoelaces. Later they're riddled with blue veins. And we realise how quickly life passes us by... Getting older in public is a challenge in my opinion. I would love to say that my double chin or the rings around my eyes don't bother me, but it's natural for me to want to look my best."

The rustic, underlying humour of her lovely Valais lilt is one thing. Yet Sina's new album demands attention in its own right because it is a classic of its genre. Quite inspiring – and astonishing.

MARKO LEHTINEN



## “Aging abroad”: the Consular Directorate of the FDFA helps seniors abroad

Are you ready for a happy retirement abroad? The FDFA is here to provide assistance and support with planning and preparing for a relaxing retirement. However, the decisions surrounding retirement require a lot of thought.

### What is this project all about?

“Aging abroad” is a preventative project, which aims to raise awareness among its target audience of the challenges involved in retiring abroad and to provide practical information in a variety of different forms. It is also designed to inform consular offices and advise them on their role and their abilities.

### Current situation

More and more often, a large number of Swiss people are opting, for a variety of reasons, to spend their retirement abroad instead of in Switzerland. There are certainly plenty of reasons for that. One of the perennial favourites is to spend winter somewhere with better weather. Swiss people who wish to spend their retirement abroad are not always well informed. Many of them are unaware of the challenges and issues they may face abroad. A great many Swiss people fail to take their own responsibilities seriously and are often under-prepared.

### Birth of the project

The campaign launched by the Consular Directorate originated from a proposal made by our former Head of Mission in Thailand, Helene Budliger Artieda, who wanted to take a proactive approach to the issue before any political mandate was handed down.

In order to get a more specific understanding of the problems, in-depth studies and a survey were conducted with the representations of 25 countries, which revealed that the main topics were retirement planning, insurance and questions about specialised services such as health insurance, old age and survivors’ insurance and pension funds.

Other subjects included general information about finances, retirement homes, pol-



Enjoying retirement abroad: wishful thinking for many Swiss. Photo: iStock

### Individual responsibility

The framework conditions are defined first and foremost by the Swiss Abroad Act (SAA), which came into force on 26 September 2014. Article 5 stipulates the following on individual responsibility: “Every individual shall exercise personal responsibility when planning or undertaking a stay abroad or when working abroad.” The president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis, imposed the requirement for all Swiss citizens to exercise personal responsibility and, with that in mind, personal responsibility was defined as the objective for the Consular Directorate for 2022. The “Aging abroad” project will make a major contribution towards encouraging people to take personal responsibility and drawing the attention of the community to this responsibility when planning their retirement or when they are already abroad.

itics, buying medicine and finally death and the questions associated with it, such as inheritance.

A few interesting facts and figures also emerged from the recent survey carried out among the Swiss Abroad by the University of Applied Sciences Geneva (HES-SO, HETS) and by the University of Neuchâtel in collaboration with the FDFA:

- One third of the people questioned were born in the country where they currently live.
- Half of them were born in Switzerland.
- 70 percent have another nationality.
- Around 90 percent have not had to rein in their lifestyle after retirement, or “only a little” if they have.
- 84 percent own their own homes.
- The Swiss Abroad mainly encounter people who have spent most of their lives in their destination country and less often people who have lived mainly in Switzerland.

## Information and prevention in Switzerland and abroad

Swiss people interested in retiring abroad need rapid access to useful, straightforward and reliable information. Preventative preparations must be made and potential Swiss Abroad must be made aware in advance of the problems and major issues they are likely to face.

Swiss representations abroad must have the necessary tools in their arsenal to be able to give clients the advice they need in emergency situations. This will allow them to act more quickly without having to refer back to headquarters. Any Swiss Abroad who, despite this prevention work, find themselves in a difficult situation or still have questions will be able to contact the representation, which is there to support them in such situations.

Some 288,000 Swiss Abroad are aged over 55. Around 177,000 are over 65. The older demographic constitutes a sizeable and important contingent within the “Fifth Switzerland”.

Total number of Swiss Abroad: 788,000 (2021).

## Webinars

To promote the sharing of information and raise awareness further in the community, regular webinars are to be organised on topics of interest to Swiss seniors living abroad. During these webinars, special external units or speakers will give presentations on a chosen theme, thereby providing first-hand information to the target audience. The emphasis will be on having an active discussion, so attendees will be encouraged to ask questions. A pilot webinar was organised in late November 2022 for the community of seniors living in the Maghreb, on the subject of banking services. Others will follow over the course of the year.

## New SwissInTouch application

SwissInTouch will also be an important communication channel for the Swiss Abroad. This interface aims to promote discussions

and relations between the Swiss government and its official representations and the Swiss Abroad. It takes account of the latter’s needs and ideas, and gives them direct, user-friendly access to major consular services and information. Our senior citizens will thus have precise information tailored to their requirements, which may be useful to them as they prepare for their retirement or during their retirement.

The “Aging abroad” project will be developed over time, and Swiss people intending to spend their retirement abroad will be able to find relevant information there, including which departments to contact and what procedures to follow. The consular representations will be given useful information on how to answer questions and how to proceed.

MICHELE MALIZIA  
CONSULAR DIRECTORATE

## Some useful advice

- Register with the competent representation
- Give your emergency details (family or friends, including their address and telephone number)
- File instructions in advance with the competent representation in case of an accident
- File an inventory of assets with your competent representation
- Where applicable, give the contact details of your health or repatriation insurance
- Visit our dedicated web pages: Section “Living and working abroad” – “Preparations for a stay abroad, emigration and repatriation” – “Retiring abroad”



# Switzerland in your pocket

SwissInTouch.ch  
The app for the Swiss abroad



swissintouch.ch

swissintouch.ch



## Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

The Federal Council has decided not to hold a federal popular vote on 12 March 2023. The next voting date is 18 June 2023.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at [www.admin.ch/votes](http://www.admin.ch/votes) or via the Federal Chancellery's Votelnfo app.



## Popular initiatives

The following federal popular initiatives have already been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- Federal Popular Initiative 'Say yes to independent personal financial provision' (25.04.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Say yes to independent naturopathy' (25.04.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Safeguard Swiss neutrality (Neutrality Initiative) (08.05.2024)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German, French and Italian at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch) > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



## Information

Notify your local Swiss representation of your email address and mobile phone number, or of changes to these.

Register at the online desk of the FDFA via [www.swiss-abroad.ch](http://www.swiss-abroad.ch) to select your preferred format for receiving "Swiss Review" and other publications. Both the latest and previous issues of "Swiss Review" are available to read and/or print out at any time at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch). "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is delivered free of charge either electronically by email or as a print edition to the homes of all Swiss Abroad. It is also available via the iOS/Android app "Swiss Review".

# The Council of the Swiss Abroad makes a clear commitment to Swiss neutrality

The Council of the Swiss Abroad, referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, has spoken out clearly in favour of a responsible approach to Swiss neutrality – and endorsed a resolution to this effect.

With the current geopolitical situation giving cause for concern, the highly charged issue of neutrality has also become a topic of discussion within the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). At its autumn meeting on 5 November 2022, the CSA addressed a motion from one of its delegates, John McGough (Hungary). Referring to the war in Ukraine, McGough said the CSA should urge the Federal Council and parliament to “observe the right to neutrality as an absolute imperative”. Even in times of war, Swiss expats have always been “free to travel to and from Switzerland as they please” thanks to their country’s “credible and universally recognised neutrality”, he argued, adding that the Federal Council should, therefore, be “strictly neutral” at all times.

But the CSA ultimately rejected McGough’s motion – and emphatically endorsed an alternative resolution put forward by the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and its president, Filippo Lombardi. Instead of demanding that the Federal Council observe “strict neutrality”, the approved resolution now calls on the Swiss government to deliver a “coherent foreign policy that, above all, promotes peace and international dialogue, continues to walk the line of neutrality, defends our democratic values, and supports humanitarian efforts to help populations affected by armed conflict”. The CSA believes that such an approach also works in the interests of expats. “It is crucial that Swiss Abroad continue to enjoy freedom of movement and residence in times of conflict,” says the resolution. Free movement needs to be guaranteed at all times.

Not only does the CSA state its position, but it also formulates a clear set of expectations. It wants the Federal Council to pursue a policy of “strict military neutrality” and defend “our democratic values in partnership with countries that share these values”.



Picture-perfect neutrality?

Cartoon: Max Spring

Humanitarian aid is another important area. Switzerland must support the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations (UN) in their efforts to help victims of armed conflict. This also entails providing safe haven to war refugees.

## The CSA’s 2023 election manifesto

At its November meeting, the CSA also discussed the adoption of a manifesto for the 2023 federal elections. The manifesto is primarily addressed to Switzerland’s politicians and their parties, calling on them to promote and safeguard the exercise of political rights abroad, promote the development of e-government, and ensure continued freedom of movement between Switzerland and EU countries. Furthermore, the manifesto advocates removing barriers for Swiss Abroad in relation to social secu-

rity and maintaining the good level of coverage provided by Switzerland’s consular network. The CSA will approve the final draft of its election manifesto at its spring meeting on 18 March 2023 in Berne.

ANNA WEGELIN

Further information including a Zoom recording of the CSA meeting: [revue.link/council1122](https://revue.link/council1122)



## Webinar on the topics of aging abroad and OASI (Old-age and survivors’ insurance)

On 9 February 2023, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) will be holding a webinar in collaboration with the FDFA, the Swiss Compensation Office and Soliswiss on the topics of aging abroad and OASI. The webinar is aimed at people with Swiss citizenship who already live abroad or who are considering moving abroad for their retirement (see also the contribution on aging abroad on pages 24-25). During the webinar, experts will give an overview of this complex issue and answer questions directly or indirectly connected to OASI.

The event will take place in German and in French and begins at 13.30 Central European Time (CET). Anyone interested can sign up by 7 February 2023 at [swisscommunity.link/webinaroasi](https://swisscommunity.link/webinaroasi). A summary of the webinar will be available on the OSA website, [www.swisscommunity.org](https://www.swisscommunity.org), from 13 February 2023.

SMILLA SCHÄR,  
ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD (OSA)



## Our 2022 summer holiday camps – in figures

Every summer from June to August, the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) run numerous summer camps for children and teenagers from the “Fifth Switzerland”. Our holiday camps are a great place to start lifelong friendships, enjoy wonderful hikes in the Swiss mountains, and become familiar with typical Swiss specialities. But you probably know all that by now. Our review of the 2022 holiday camp season is therefore slightly different: it comes in the form of statistics.



### Hiking

At our 2022 summer holiday camps, we hiked a total of 463 km on foot. This is roughly the **distance between Berne and Montpellier or Berne and Florence**.



### Lost property

People lose things. It's a fact of life. But at every holiday camp, we collect and keep all lost items until their rightful owners claim them again. In order of ranking, the most frequently lost items of property in 2022 were:

1. t-shirts
2. shoes
3. charging cables



### Rösti

We got through 140 kg of potato in 2022. This corresponds to **approximately 560 portions of rösti**.



### Chocolate

We ate **76.1 kg** in chocolate at our summer camps – our own contribution to Switzerland's impressive annual per capita rate of chocolate consumption, which amounts to 11.3 kg.



### Staying the night

At our summer holiday camps, we clocked up 6,089 overnight stays. This would correspond to one person staying in Switzerland for **almost 17 years**.



### Leaders

The success of our summer holiday camps owes everything to the preparation, planning and organisational work put in by our sizeable band of camp leaders, who themselves represent a geographically diverse cross-section of Switzerland. In addition to our camp leaders from the “Fifth Switzerland” (of whom there were 23), they also came from the cantons of Berne (14), Fribourg (7), Vaud (6), Solothurn (6), Zurich (6), Aargau (6), St Gallen (5), Lucerne (4), Basel-Stadt (4), Nidwalden (3), Neuchâtel (2), Jura (2), Geneva (2), and Basel-Landschaft (2) as well as one camp leader each from Grisons, Appenzell-Ausserrhodens, Thurgau, Zug, Schwyz and Valais.



### Participants from around the world

The children and teenagers attending the 2022 summer holiday camps came from 50 different countries. **From which country will you be travelling to one of this year's camps?**

## Summer holiday camps for children

Every year from June to August, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) runs a series of two-week summer holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad aged eight to 14, offering these children the chance to get to know Switzerland and make friends with other young people from around the world. Information about this year's summer holiday camps is available on the FYSA website: [www.sjas.ch/en/summer-camp](http://www.sjas.ch/en/summer-camp). The registration deadline is 15 March 2023.

SIBYLLE KAPPELER

Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer  
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger  
The foundation for young swiss abroad  
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)  
Alpenstrasse 24, 3006 Berne, Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 31 356 61 16  
Email: [info@sjas.ch](mailto:info@sjas.ch) / [www.sjas.ch/en](http://www.sjas.ch/en)

## News and stories for young people on Instagram

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is active on Instagram under the @swisscommunity handle. Aimed particularly at young Swiss Abroad, the page profiles a range of amazing people and inspiring projects, provides first-hand accounts and insights from the OSA youth camps, and, of course, gives a heads-up on the best “Swiss Review” stories. Help us to attract attention by adding the @swisscommunity handle as well as the #swisscommunity and #youngSwissAbroad hashtags to your own Insta posts.

FABIENNE STOCKER AND DÉSRÉE KÜFFER  
REVUE.LINK/INSTAGRAM

Swiss  
Community

Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad,  
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland  
[youth@swisscommunity.org](mailto:youth@swisscommunity.org)  
[www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)  
Tel. +41 31 356 61 25

## What changes with the AHV 21 reform?

**The question:** I have worked in Switzerland and many other countries outside the EU/EFTA over the past decades. Next year, I will be returning to Switzerland under a new employment contract. What impact does the AHV 21 reform have on me as a Swiss woman abroad born in 1962?

**The answer:** The changes introduced by the AHV 21 bill voted into law by the Swiss population in September 2022 are expected to take effect in early 2024. They apply to both mandatory and voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance. Under the reform, the retirement age – now referred to as the 'reference age' – will be the same for all genders; in specific terms, this means that the reference age for women will be raised from 64 to 65. In addition, you can now retire at any age between 63 (62 for women in the transitional generation) and 70. There is also the option of drawing part of your pension in advance, or deferring it. For example, once you reach the reference age, you can keep working, at reduced hours, and draw part of your pension at the same time. These financial incentives are intended to encourage the workforce to continue working beyond the reference age. This means that you can increase your pension even after you reach

the reference age, with contributions that can be deducted even from small salaries. Under certain conditions, you can also use the OASI contributions you pay after reaching the reference age to plug any gaps in contributions from the past. This prevents your pension being reduced due to missing contribution years.

The increase in the retirement age for women will occur progressively. One year after the changes have come into effect, the reference age will increase by three months every year, until it finally reaches 65. If the changes come into effect in early 2024 as planned, your personal reference age will become 64 years and six months. Compensatory measures are planned for women who are already on the verge of retiring and therefore cannot plan their pensions to take account of the changes. The transitional generation will probably include those born between 1961 and 1969, so you will also qual-

ify for these compensatory measures. If you decide not to draw your pension early and to wait until you are 64 years and six months of age before retiring, you will thus receive a supplement to your pension for the rest of your life. If, on the other hand, you decide to retire earlier, lower reduction percentages will apply. The exact amount of the supplement or the reduction percentage will depend on the year of your birth and your average income. You can calculate them on the website of the Federal Social Insurance Office.

Federal Social Insurance Office,  
[www.revue.ch/65](http://www.revue.ch/65)

Smilla Schär,  
OSA Legal Department,  
[info@swisscommunity.org](mailto:info@swisscommunity.org)



## What does the new Swiss law on inheritance mean for me as a Swiss woman living abroad?

**The question:** I am a Swiss woman who has taken early retirement and is now living abroad. On 1 January 2023, the new Swiss inheritance law came into effect. Can you tell me about the most important changes this law will introduce? Can I now have my estate handled via Switzerland and, for example, make sure my eldest daughter receives the maximum amount?

**The answer:** The law on inheritance when you have moved abroad is a complex topic. The answer to your question depends on where you are living. We therefore recommend, as a general rule, that you seek advice on your specific situation from an expert in international inheritance law.

In Switzerland, the Federal Act on Private International Law (IPRG) applies, which is

used as a national legal structure in international inheritance law issues. For Swiss people whose most recent place of residence is abroad, the legal structure that determines the country of residence for such a circumstance applies. As a Swiss Abroad, you can also have your inheritance governed by Swiss law via a writ or a contract of inher-

Continued on page 30.



Arranging your estate fairly is a challenge. Photo: iStock



## In the country or in the city

Why not come to Switzerland to gain your first work experience? The advisory service on education in Switzerland from [educationsuisse](http://educationsuisse.ch) also provides tips on initial work experience for young Swiss Abroad.

Continued from page 29.

itance, if this is not already the case by default in your country of residence. Nonetheless, you should contact the authorities of your country of residence to find out if they will recognise a writ of this nature. This option is not available for plots of land where a country asserts sole jurisdiction over immovable property.

The IPRG is not affected by the current revision in the law and continues to apply unchanged. Therefore, if you should decide to make your inheritance subject to Swiss law, the following changes also apply to you. In principle, you can stipulate in your will that you want your inheritance to be settled under Swiss law. However, certain limits have been imposed on the so-called compulsory portions: some family members are entitled to a minimum portion of your inheritance, determined by law. To take account of alternative forms of family life, however, heirs will now be able to dispose of their estate more freely under the new law. The compulsory portions are now lower: from 2023 onwards, the compulsory portion for parents will be abolished. The compulsory portion for children is reduced from three quarters to half of the legal estate, bringing it in line with the (unmodified) compulsory portion for spouses and registered partners.

The portion of your estate that you will be able to bequeath to your eldest daughter therefore depends on your other family relationships. If you are married or in a registered partnership, you will have to observe the corresponding compulsory portion. All your children will also be entitled to their respective compulsory portions. With the change in the law, however, you can now dispose of half your estate however you like. If you so wish, you can bequeath this part to your eldest daughter in full, in addition to the compulsory portion to which she is entitled by law.

Smilla Schär,  
OSA Legal Department,  
[info@swisscommunity.org](mailto:info@swisscommunity.org)

### In a Swiss city as a language assistant

Young students or recent graduates from countries where English, German, French, Spanish or Italian is the official national language can gain experience in the teaching profession. As native speakers they add an extra dimension to language lessons at upper secondary schools or vocational schools and illustrate cultural aspects of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which covers their living costs in Switzerland. The application period for the school year 2023/24 runs until the end of March 2023. More detailed information on the Language Assistance programme can be found at [revue.link/movetia](http://revue.link/movetia) or by sending an email to [edith.funicello@movetia.ch](mailto:edith.funicello@movetia.ch).

### Supporting a farming family in the countryside

The sound of cowbells or the smell of hay... helping out on a farm is fun and an experience for life. The association Agriviva arranges placements lasting several weeks for young people up to the age of 25 from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money,

you help a farming family with their daily work. Ideal for anyone who likes being active, loves nature, and who would like to meet a new family and life on a Swiss farm.

More detailed information on Agriviva can be found at [www.agriviva.ch](http://www.agriviva.ch) or by sending an email to [info@agriviva.ch](mailto:info@agriviva.ch).

### Au-pair – internship – temporary job

There are various ways to gain initial work experience in Switzerland. What is required is personal initiative: numerous internet portals publish vacancies where you can apply directly. Address lists and tips on staying in Switzerland can be obtained from [educationsuisse](http://educationsuisse.ch). (RG)



educationsuisse,  
education in Switzerland,  
Alpenstrasse 26,  
3006 Berne, Switzerland  
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04;  
[info@educationsuisse.ch](mailto:info@educationsuisse.ch);  
[www.educationsuisse.ch](http://www.educationsuisse.ch)



## Discussion

The continuing discussion on Switzerland's neutrality is provoking controversy. It is dividing the nation instead of uniting it. This also emerged in the reactions of our readers to the article on neutrality in the December issue of the "Review". It just goes to show: neutrality is a topic that cannot be discussed neutrally at all.



### Switzerland is clinging to its interpretation of neutrality

#### WERNER GEMPERLE, STOFORS, SWEDEN

For me, Switzerland's neutrality means not having the courage to do the right thing and always looking for a way to gain some benefit – as well as acting the great negotiator and looking good in the eyes of the world.

#### PAUL TAVAN, BAVARIA, GERMANY

In my view, there is no sensible reason for Switzerland to give up its perpetual armed neutrality. In particular, I think that taking part in the sanctions against Russia was a political mistake.

#### BEA BORNER, HUA HIN, THAILAND

Neutrality is proper and right. But when one country invades another country in the heart of Europe for no reason, Switzerland must under no circumstances turn a blind eye! Switzerland absolutely must stand with the country under attack and use every resource in every area at its disposal to do so.

#### DIETER SCHIESS, FRANCE

Neutrality during wartime is fine. This, however, is state terror by a megalomaniac. Switzerland cannot and should not just sit back neutrally and do nothing. By doing so, we are automatically condoning these inhuman crimes. As a Swiss man, I am ashamed of the way my country is acting.

#### GEORGES GLARDON, AGLOU, MOROCCO

Failing to observe strict neutrality with regard to conflicts abroad, whether these conflicts are social, political or military in nature, undermines a country's credibility. I think that taking part in the sanctions against Russia (which is justified for non-neutral countries) is the first chink in the armour of Switzerland's neutrality.

#### UELI BORNHAUSER, GIESSEN, GERMANY

For me, neutrality means not belonging to any given block or following the conditions for adopting a certain position. It is not the same thing as not having a position. Neutrality can be helpful when negotiating between two warring parties. When there is a clear breach of the rules laid down by the UN, however, neutrality cannot be used as a pretence for refusing to take a stance. We promote moral courage in private, and I think that should apply to the whole community too!

#### ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

The expression that Switzerland practises neutrality is incorrect. Since the First World War at least, this term has applied solely in theory, a sort of 'pen name' for Switzerland. It's very practical, but it's not practised.

#### RICHARD JAKOB-HOFF, NEW ZEALAND

Maybe the word neutrality is too open to interpretation, as indicated in this article. Being peaceful and standing up for peace is not a passive thing but takes active determination and action. We should consider other, less ambivalent terms that describe Switzerland's position in relation to external conflicts. A neutral peace broker or facilitator is a role much needed in Europe and elsewhere and Switzerland could be in a prime position to take on such a role. Obviously not an easy task but extremely worthwhile.

#### BEN-HAMID BERTIZ, USA

Why is being neutral important? Neutrality sets us free. It helps us see something more like the truth, what's happening, instead of experiencing circumstances in relation to expectations and desires. This provides clarity and eliminates obstacles, making this neither awesome nor awful but cool. Enlightenment, the easy way.

### The "Fifth Switzerland" and emigration

#### ANTAL TAMÁS ILLÉS, TENERIFE, SPAIN

I have some experience of emigrating myself: I moved from Hungary to Switzerland in 1956; we then moved from Switzerland to my sailing yacht in 1999; and in 2005 we settled in Spain. Two of my experiences:

Rule no. 1: Everything is different abroad. If you don't have a minimum of flexibility and adaptability, you're guaranteed to come a cropper. The most guaranteed method of making yourself unpopular in any country begins with the phrase, 'Now, the way we do it in Switzerland...'. Forget it! You are now a guest. Conduct yourself accordingly.

Rule no. 2: No-one learns Turkish or Thai just for a fortnight's holiday. If you want to live abroad for longer periods, though, the ability to make yourself at least partially understood in the national language is essential.

Visit the online edition of "Swiss Review" at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch). Read the latest comments on our articles and join the conversation yourself. You can also share your opinions on the community discussion forum of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: [members.swisscommunity.org/forum](http://members.swisscommunity.org/forum)





# I need a 360° experience.



Switzerland.



Obertal Pass, Graubünden, © Nicola Fürer

# I need Switzerland.

Discover Winter now: [MySwitzerland.com/winter](https://www.myswitzerland.com/winter)  
Share your best experiences using [#INeedSwitzerland](https://twitter.com/INeedSwitzerland)



Switzerland.  
by train, bus and boat.

