General Guisan – Did he save Switzerland in the war?

To what extent should Swiss German be used?

On the trail of Lord Byron in Switzerland
The General

Why Switzerland emerged unscathed from the Second World War and why it was spared by Hitler’s army is still being discussed 65 years after the end of the conflict. Was this simply chance or was trade with Switzerland – weapons, financial services and gold – simply too important to the Germans? Or does alpine transit explain why Switzerland never came under attack from Greater Germany? Was it the military victories of the Allied forces or was fate simply kind to us? Did General Guisan and the Swiss army perhaps make the price of entering Switzerland too high for Adolf Hitler?

The question as to why Switzerland was not swallowed up by the German Reich will never be answered definitively. Still, it would appear that the general and the army had a considerable influence on the decisions of the Nazi leadership: “The réduit in the Alps and control of the north–south axis significantly increased the importance of the military factor”, wrote Fred Luchsinger, former editor-in-chief, in the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”. He continued: “Without military defences and the will to resist, Switzerland would simply have become a pawn in Germany’s quest for domination of Europe.”

Various factors undoubtedly came into play, probably least of all fate. At any rate, General Henri Guisan deserves recognition for ensuring the Swiss army was up to the task and that Switzerland held its own against its sizeable northern neighbour tactically and politically. This is illustrated by Rolf Ribi’s portrait of an extraordinary figure in Swiss history who is still of great interest to historians and biographers. The Swiss abroad also voted General Guisan as the fourth most important Swiss citizen of all time in the survey conducted by “Swiss Review” (page 5).

www.swisscommunity.org is the name of the Internet platform launched by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. Swiss people abroad now have their own platform for searching for and finding information as well as for chatting. This electronic network aims to promote worldwide contact among the Swiss abroad and with Switzerland. www.swisscommunity.org offers the ideal platform for anyone specifically looking for contact with other Swiss nationals abroad who requires particular information about Switzerland or other Swiss abroad groups, wants to buy or sell things or simply wants to get in touch with like-minded people. Swiss abroad who would like to visit their old homeland will find tourist information and offers, and Swiss associations and institutions abroad can use the new electronic Swiss club to advertise for members. People can find out about their canton of origin and Switzerland and also discover where the best fondues and the crispiest rye bread can be found abroad. www.swisscommunity.org is a bit like Facebook, Xing or Linked-In, yet different at the same time. This electronic community for the Swiss abroad is an exclusive communication platform specifically tailored to the needs of Swiss citizens abroad.

We hope that the 700,000 Swiss abroad on all continents enjoy using our new site.

HEINZ ECKERT, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Cover photo: General Henri Guisan: His popularity remains high.
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Switzerland and crisis

Many congratulations on your editorial “Switzerland and the crisis”. Every word and every sentence was spot on. Your article ought to be published in a prominent place in all Swiss newspapers over the coming weeks to make people stop and think.

I hope you and your team keep up the good work and that “Swiss Review” – printed or electronic – continues to enjoy a strong readership.

E. DIETHELM, ALTENDORF

Women in Switzerland

“Thank you for the very interesting article about the achievements of Pascale Bruderer Wyss. Swiss women have come a long way! When I left Switzerland in the summer of 1969, women were not allowed to vote. A married woman was not allowed to open a bank account or rent an apartment under her own name. Now women are running the country! Congratulations, well done.”

M. JOHNSON, CANADA

Policy on the EU: all aboard the Titanic!

“In your rough calculation, you generously overlooked the enormous consequential costs of migration and social insurance, etc., not to mention the billions on top which Switzerland would continually have to pay out to bankrupt states as an EU member. You also failed to mention the EU directives, which Member States constantly have to implement, decreed by an unelected body of commissioners. Switzerland is not yet without alternatives as the people are being told by those who have deliberately taken us down the bilateral cul-de-sac, are vigorously undermining our institutions and are propagating defeatism.”

M. WITTTEL, GERMANY

Strong argument

“My hearing is failing, but my sight is very good. I was captivated by the April edition’s front-page photograph of Pascale Bruderer. This is a strong argument for the printed version and against the online one. Switzerland is blessed with extraordinary people as well as wonderful scenery. I look forward to future editions.”

W. SCHALLER, GERMANY

The Federal Palace in Berne

The Federal Palace of the Swiss Confederation is made up of three buildings – the west wing, formerly the federal government building, built between 1852 and 1857, the east wing, built between 1888 and 1892, and, in the centre, the Parliament Building constructed between 1894 and 1902. Berne was chosen as the new federal capital in 1848 at the first meeting of the chambers. The Federal Council and the Parliament were temporarily based at different locations in Berne. In 1852, the Bernese architect, Jakob Friedrich Studer (1817-1879), started work on the construction of the government building in neo-renaissance style. As the size of the federal administration became much greater than anticipated, extension plans had to be drawn up in 1874. Work on the building of the east wing began in 1888 under the guidance of Hans Wilhelm Auer (1847-1906), an architect from St. Gallen. The same architect was also responsible for the construction of the Parliament Building adorned with its cupola and built exclusively from Swiss materials. Illustrated with many contemporary and period photographs and plans, this guide also looks at the interior decor and the building’s most important rooms – an extraordinary variety.


Switzerland under the microscope. In “En retard au paradis” (Late for Heaven), the humanist, Paul Grossrieder, and political analyst, Brigitte Perrin, examine Switzerland and its values in a lengthy work which interweaves the viewpoints of two generations. One, born in 1944, is a Dominican friar who later became a diplomat at the Vatican, before going on to work for the Red Cross at the age of 39 and becoming head of the ICRC from 1998 to 2002. His counterpart, born in 1974, works for TSR – the state French-language broadcaster in Switzerland – as a journalist. The book examines Switzerland’s socio-economic and political landscape touching on humanitarian issues, solidarity, individualism, poverty, young people, neutrality, national identity, disparity in wealth, May 1968 and the erosion of social benefits. The tradition of compromise, the right of asylum, criticism of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the Federal Council, banking confidentiality, the tax system, discretion, openness and diplomacy are also explored. The debate is based on the experiences and professional backgrounds of the two protagonists. It then becomes more general and more global, addressing the issues of the environment, climate change, man and nature. Parallels are drawn between the Swissair and UBS affairs. Finally, religion, philosophy and wisdom are also dealt with in the latter part. Times are changing and Swiss tardiness is scrutinised in detail. On the topic of punctuality, Paul Grossrieder’s grandfather would say “hurry up or you’ll be late getting to heaven” when he saw him dawdling.

Video interviews on the book can be found at: www.enretardauparadis.com

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The Marlboro Man.
Hannes Schmid, born in Zurich in 1946, photographed the Marlboro Man between 1993 and 2002. He is considered one of the most significant Marlboro photographers as he was able to bring new dimensions to the already well-known figure. The Swiss Foundation of Photography is honouring him with an exhibition in Winterthur (until 19.9.2010) www.fotostiftung.ch
“Heart of the resistance, saviour of the nation”
Henri Guisan, commander-in-chief of the Swiss army in the Second World War, died 50 years ago. His speech on the Rütti and the withdrawal of the troops into the alpine stronghold of the Gotthard were the foundations on which national resistance was built. General Guisan was adored and revered by the entire nation. Even though his life was not completely untainted, he was the father figure of the war generation. By Rolf Ribi

On 12 April 1960, an expanse of blue sky stretched over Lausanne. A bitterly cold North Wind blew across the canton of Vaud. The scene was dominated by the army green worn by thousands of soldiers who served from 1939 to 1945. Troops involved in active service lined the streets, several rows deep, together with 300,000 people from all walks of life. General Henri Guisan, the commander-in-chief of the Swiss army in the Second World War, had died five days earlier, aged 86.

The funeral procession made its way from Pully, where the deceased had lived, to Lausanne’s Place de la Riponne. Here the army bid farewell to its general in a dignified ceremony. The four-kilometre-long cortege was made up of more than 3,000 dignitaries, a battalion of fusiliers, a howitzer division, a squadron of dragons and the bearers of 400 military ensigns. The artillery carriage carrying the coffin draped in the Swiss flag was drawn by six horses. It was followed by the general’s last horse with an empty saddle and lowered head. The Swiss President, Max Petitpierre, stood in the pulpit of Lausanne cathedral and gave the funeral address. The church bells were then sounded across the country.

Never before had Switzerland experienced a state funeral like this. The Swiss people went into deep mourning. They saw their military leader at a time of danger as the “heart of the resistance” and the “saviour of the nation”. He was the general adored by the entire population. In those days, his picture hung in almost every living room, in many inns and in all army barracks. Streets and squares were named after him, even during his lifetime. A memorial by the artist Charles Otto Bänninger was constructed in Ouchy on Lake Geneva.

Election as general
Germany’s European neighbours were anxious about potential plans to attack them in spring 1939. In Switzerland, the border guards were enlisted on 28 August to safeguard the mobilisation of the entire army on 2 September. On 29 August, Federal Councillor Rudolf Minger, Head of the Federal Military Department, made a telephone call to Senior Lieutenant General Henri Guisan to summon him to Berne. The next day, 30 August, the Federal Assembly, convened in the middle of summer, elected him as commander-in-chief of the Swiss army with 204 out of 229 votes. Radio Beromünster broadcast the vote directly to living rooms, factories and offices.

No sooner had 64-year-old Henri Guisan been elected than he strode into the National Council chamber with his officer’s hat in his hand, his sword in his belt and wearing riding boots. Everyone in the chamber and in the galleries rose to their feet. The Federal Chancellor read out the oath and the general simply responded “I swear”. The President of the assembly then said: “We entrust to you the protection of our nation, which we love so dearly and would never want to give up. May God bless your work, General.” When Henri Guisan emerged from the Federal Palace people on the Bundesplatz started singing the national anthem. The newly elected general joined in.

Guisan – the farmer and officer
Who was Henri Guisan? Born in 1874 in Mézières, canton of Vaud, the son of a country doctor from Avenches, he lost his biological mother at a young age. Little is known about the childhood of this small, slightly built and handsome lad. He did not particularly excel in the cadets, or in sport or at grammar school. At the University of
Secret talks with France

The German army marched into Poland at dawn on 1 September 1939. The Second World War had begun. The Federal Council ordered the general mobilisation of the army on 2 September. 430,000 soldiers and 200,000 auxiliaries signed up on the first day of mobilisation. General Guisan knew what the army was lacking most – tanks and aeroplanes. It also had significantly more horses than motor vehicles. To take advantage of the terrain, Guisan decided to position the army along a front running from Sargans through Lake Zurich and the Limmat to the Jura. It ran right through the city of Zurich.

The front only faced north, as the general saw no danger in the west of the country. Guisan had a close personal relationship with France and its army. He had visited French troops on the front in the First World War. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, he maintained personal relationships with key army leaders. This gave him an insight into the French defence strategy in the border region. In autumn 1939, secret talks were held with French army officials at the general's command. The aim of the cooperation was to ensure that as soon as German soldiers attacked Switzerland, French units would cross the Swiss border and occupy the Basel region. An entire division of the Swiss army would be placed under French command. Neither the Federal Council nor the general’s staff knew of these agreements.

The army’s open west flank

The situation suddenly changed. In May and June 1940, the German army defeated France within six weeks and occupied large parts of the country. The armistice between Germany and France on 25 June 1940 left Switzerland’s western border exposed to danger. “As a result of numerous misjudgements, the leadership of the Swiss army suffered a disaster of catastrophic proportions with its defence strategy”, said the historian Klaus Urner. He added: “If the Germans had decided at that time to advance towards Switzerland’s western frontier, which had been left exposed without French protection, they would have quickly accomplished their mission.”

In July 1940, German troops discovered confidential files belonging to the French general’s staff in a destroyed railway carriage in the small town of La Charité-sur-Loire, near Dijon. These included documents on the secret negotiations between Swiss officers and the French army on how to respond to a German attack. In the view of Edgar Bonjour, author of the reference work “Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität” (History of Swiss Neutrality), Guisan’s approach jeopardised neutrality: “Germany could have used the situation as a pretext for a military invasion.” General Guisan’s position was “unquestionably in jeopardy” in 1940/41, according to the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” back then.

The collapse of France sent shockwaves through Switzerland. However, hopes soon emerged that the threat of war had been temporarily avoided thanks to the German-French armistice. The general believed that the Germans were unlikely to consider military action. The Federal Council ordered the partial demobilisation of the army and sent home almost two thirds of the soldiers. General Guisan did not oppose this move. Powerful German divisions with 245,000 men stood on Switzerland’s western border on 24 July, waiting for Hitler’s order to march into Switzerland. Military historian Walter Schaufelberger believes it would have been a debacle for Switzerland if the German army had attacked at this time.

Speech by the Swiss President

On 25 June 1940, the Swiss President, Marcel Pilet-Golaz, made an ill-fated speech. He said: “We are greatly relieved that our
neighbour has resolved to pursue a peaceful course.” Europe would now have to establish a new balance, he said, explaining: “Citizens of Switzerland, it is your duty to follow the government as a reliable and devoted leader who will not always be able to explain and justify its decisions.” Pilet-Golaz made no mention of democracy, independence, freedom or neutrality. The radio address came over as a capitulation and as an acceptance of the “new Europe”. The general remained silent for a month after the Swiss President’s gloomy speech.

For August R. Lindt, who went on to become Swiss ambassador to the US and UN High Commissioner, the speech was a “crushing” blow. In that time devoid of leadership, a number of courageous men formed a secret officer association and demanded unconditional resistance. This was a conspiracy against the Federal Council – and also against the general. Alfred Ernst, August R. Lindt, Max Waibel and Hans Hausamann were the key figures behind the secret association of 25 officers and sub-officers. However, the plot was leaked and the general was informed. Guisan received the leaders of the conspiracy and punished them leniently with 5 to 15 days of military confinement. In his heart, he was actually proud of the brave officers and shook each of them by the hand.

Rütli – call for resistance
As no one yet knew of the officers’ conspiracy, General Guisan made an historic decision. On 25 July 1940, the paddle steamer, the “Luzern”, took all Swiss army commanders up to the rank of major over the lake to the historic site on the Rütli Meadow. Around 420 officers – the entire army leadership – gathered around in a semi-circle with a view over the lake and the Gotthard railway. Guisan gave a short, largely improvised speech. “We have reached a watershed moment in our history. Switzerland’s very existence is at stake”, began the general. The address focused on two key issues – the will to resist and the new defence strategy. Guisan warned against the emerging defeatism among the soldiers, the politicians and even the Swiss people. The general called for “the will to resist any external attack and internal threats, such as the country relaxing its efforts and becoming defeatist”. Guisan then mapped out the new national defence strategy – the creation of a military réduit, or fortress, around the Gotthard. A large part of the army would withdraw to this area to defend the strategically important alpine passes.

“On the Rütli, the general emerged as a national leader figure”, wrote the military historian Hans-Rudolf Kurz. Professor Edgar Bonjour sees the Rütli address as a “decisive turning point in the history of the Second World War”. The general addressed the nation on the radio on 1 August, Swiss National Day. He said: “Are we able to resist? This question is unworthy of a Swiss citizen and most definitely of a soldier.”

Withdrawal to the mountains
In June 1940, Switzerland was surrounded by Axis powers. The fronts that the Swiss army had to defend were so long that German and Italian troops could have invaded at any point. “The shortcomings in tank and aeroplane defences would not have enabled the army to engage in battles in the Central Plateau”, wrote Hans-Rudolf Kurz. A new military strategy had to be found. Colonel Oscar Germann drafted the decisive memorandum: the army is to be stationed in the Alps to wait for Hitler’s main offensive and to counterattack. General Guisan, not a man for rash decisions, hesitated. He was concerned about the difficulty of providing supplies of munitions and food and about relinquishing such a large part of the country to the enemy.
On 9 July 1940, the general decided in favour of the réduit strategy and informed the government three days later. Guisan justified his strategy after the war. The “cost of entry” had to be so high that any invader would be put off “because he would never have taken our alpine passes intact”. In summer 1941, all nine divisions of the army as well as the mountain brigades had joined the réduit, which stretched from the Sargans stronghold in the east to the stronghold of St. Maurice in Valais. In the centre stood the Gotthard stronghold. There were bunkers, tank traps and runways everywhere. The railway lines through Gotthard and Simplon were prepared for destruction. According to Hans-Rudolf Kurz, the withdrawal of the army into the mountains meant the almost uncontested relinquishment of around four fifths of the Swiss population, industry and state assets.

Switzerland’s security situation remained precarious until spring 1941. However, a surprise attack by Hitler on Switzerland could still not be ruled out, as the historian Klaus Urner proved. The remaining years of the war until 1945 were hard, anxious ones for the Swiss people. The landing of the Allied forces in North Africa and Germany’s occupation of Northern Italy increased the importance of the alpine passes once more. The Allies’ invasion of Normandy and the Allied landing in the south of France in 1944 ended the encirclement of Switzerland by Axis powers. The army left the réduit to march back to the borders.

**Soldiers of Switzerland!**

The German army surrendered on 8 May 1945. In his daily command, the general declared: “Soldiers of Switzerland! We should thank God that our nation has been spared the horrors of war. Soldiers, you have served your country honourably.”

On 4 June, the general called on the Federal Assembly to introduce the end of active service on 20 August and to discharge him from office. Before a convened Parliament, the President said: “As a man of duty, General, you have proven yourself a man of good and great humanity. Switzerland is proud of you.” On the previous day, General Guisan had ordered that all army ensigns and standards should be brought to Berne as a final military gesture. At the end of the moving celebration on the Bundesplatz to mark the end of active service, everyone stood bareheaded and sang the national anthem.

**A life slightly tainted**

What is history’s verdict on the Swiss army’s senior lieutenant general in the Second World War? There are some reservations from a political perspective. The general “tolerated” democracy as a form of government, according to Markus Somm, he kept his distance from Parliament, he thought the government lacked strong leadership and he did not hold the parties in very high regard. Despite certain sympathies with an authoritarian, corporative state regime, Guisan never left the path of democracy. Guisan always held the French marshal Pétain, victor at the battle of Verdun in the First World War and a head of state in Hitler-friendly France, in high regard. In autumn 1937, when he was a lieutenant general, he invited the marshal to army manoeuvres. Even in 1941, he sent him an admiring letter on his birthday. Guisan met the fascist leader Mussolini in 1934 while visiting Italian manoeuvres. “He was very friendly towards me and Switzerland”, he said after the war. Markus Somm believes that Guisan allowed himself to be duped by the Duce.

Guisan’s attitude towards the Federal Council’s asylum policy hardly covers him in glory. “The military believed these foreigners represented a threat to public security”, wrote the magazine L’Hebdo. According to the Berger Commission, more than 20,000 refugees, including many Jews, were turned away at the border. Was the general aware of this? Most certainly – the army questioned German deserters who had fled the Holocaust. The general, like other officers, mainly blamed the press for the strained relationship with Germany. As early as 1941, Guisan was calling for tighter controls on the press. He was denied the introduction of extensive censorship by the Federal Council.

The military verdict on the general is not entirely positive either. His secret negotiations with the French army and, above all, the Germans’ discovery of the files showed that the general had taken too great a risk here, according to Hans-Rudolf Kurz. When Switzerland was surrounded by Axis powers in late summer 1940 and elite German troops stood on the western border, the Federal Council and the general ordered the mobilisation of around two thirds of the forces, probably as a gesture to Berlin. However, Hitler was thinking of conquering Switzerland at that time. In March 1943, the famous SS General Schellenberg met with the Swiss commander-in-chief at the Bären restaurant in Biglen, canton of Berne. During this private meeting, Guisan reaffirmed to Hitler’s confidant that Switzerland firmly intended to defend its borders (against the Allies as well). In return, he expected an assurance that Germany would not attack Switzerland, enabling him to demobilise large parts of the army.

Despite these reservations, biographer Willi Gautschi believes history’s verdict on Henri Guisan as a general and as a man is that he was a “father of the Swiss nation”, even during his lifetime. The people and the army were completely united by the general during a difficult time. Rising above all political and ideological boundaries, Guisan appeared as an “outstanding figure of integration for the Swiss people, an undisputed symbol of the spirit of resistance, unity and avoidance of war”.

**DOCUMENTATION**

Willi Gautschi: General Henri Guisan. Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zurich 1989, out of print
Markus Somm: General Guisan. Stämpfli Verlag, Berne 2010, CHF 49, EUR 29.80
Library am Guisanplatz www.gs-vbs.admin.ch
Documentation centre www.doku-zug.ch
En route to the forbidden paradise

With a comprehensive exhibition, the Museum of Fine Arts in Berne is offering a unique opportunity to discover and rediscover Albert Anker, one of Switzerland’s major artists. His paintings are a key part of Swiss art history.

By Annemarie Monteil

Albert Anker (1831-1910), from Ins in Berne, is as much a part of Switzerland as the Alps and yodelling. Reproductions of his portraits of children and village scenes are well-known from calendars, school books and living rooms. Of late, his “country lad” has featured on an 85 cent stamp, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Berne is organising a major retrospective to mark the centenary of his death. Anker would appear to be an undeniably important figure. This is reflected in the high prices achieved at auction, yet in conversation people are rather underwhelmed. For progressive strategists, Anker represents a folklore that is no longer relevant. They see the fact that Christoph Blocher, a politician from the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), owns a quarter of the paintings in the exhibition as confirmation of this. Opponents of an “ideal world” see Anker’s paintings as deceiving idylls. For others, the reading grandfather supersedes attending church. Snobs say “nothing new there”, while young people are captivated and want to know more.

These contrasting opinions are no reproach to Anker. True simplicity can confuse those who are complicated. He himself did not follow the easy road. Having grown up in the educated family of a vet, he studied theology as his father wished, agonising over his longing to become an artist: “Art seems like a forbidden paradise to me”, he wrote. He finally became a pupil of Charles Gleyre, which made him happy, but left him with a bad conscience. To his disappointed father he remained “my painter contre-coeur”.

This made his success even more significant. Anker was able to exhibit at the much-coveted “Salon”, whereas Manet, Degas and Monet were rejected. He lived in Paris in the winter months, he was well versed in topics ranging from Plato to Darwin and he spoke French with his friends. In the summer, he lived and painted in his grandparents’ house in Ins, popular and revered. His genre paintings were in keeping with contemporary tastes. In the emerging federal state, Anker...
like Calame, Koller and Zünd – was a voice for the nation. “Armensuppe” (Distribution of Soup to the Poor) symbolises Switzerland’s humanitarian tradition and the “Schulspaziergang” (School Promenade) embodies Pestalozzi’s liberal approach to education. Paintings of dead children were popular. Anker depicted a small group of children weeping softly around a small corpse: “Die tote Freundin” (The Little Friend) is a piece of theatrical melodrama, along with its title. Anker later painted his own dead child using vivid art far removed from popular taste, and in the dark background he inscribed “liebe liebe Ruedeli” (my dearest Ruedeli).

That is another side to Anker. It is impossible to make sweeping statements about him. Even the title of the exhibition in Berne, “Schöne Welt” (Beautiful World), falls short of the mark. Anker painted neither a happy nor a beautiful world. Many of his paintings are tinged with a slight melancholy. The children often look stern or precocious, old people are thin-lipped, and the farmers still have dirt under their fingernails even in their Sunday best. Forbidden paradise?

Perhaps we get closest to Anker in his portraits, which make up the biggest part of his work. With slightly conventional elegance, he painted urban ladies and gentlemen as his clients wanted. The portraits – like some genre paintings – seem somewhat academic and laboured (was he still trying to please his father?). Despite the fineness of the brushstrokes, layer upon layer, the texture of the art seems too restrained. As though he were performing a duty. He once sent a wealthy businessman to a photographer, saying he did “not do such work on command”.

It was an altogether different matter with the people from the village, whom Anker would invite into his studio – this was fine portrait work. Is the secret of great art empathy? Feeling a connection? In wondrous unity, everything seems equally important to the artist – the little face bent over the writing tablet and the apple for break time, the grandparents’ wrinkles and knitted stockings. It is this engaging outlook on life which gives ordinary people and things a brilliant majesty, turns intimacy into art and still life into rural icons. The painting is soft and airy, and an indescribable light pervades everything: no “prohibition” here, just paintings of paradise.

Exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Berne until 5 September 2010. Albert Anker - Beautiful World catalogue CHF 58

ANKER GOLD COIN
The Federal Mint Swissmint is dedicating the official 2010 gold coin to Albert Anker to mark the year commemorating the famous Swiss artist. The special coin with a face value of 50 Swiss francs is available from all banks and coin dealers. It is limited edition. www.swissmint.ch
The earthquake in Haiti – protection for Swiss citizens

1. Successful mission on behalf of Swiss citizens in Haiti

The earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010 caused large-scale destruction to buildings and infrastructure, cost more than 250,000 lives, according to Haitian estimates, and left thousands more people homeless. One hundred and thirty Swiss citizens were registered with the embassy in Port-au-Prince before the earthquake struck. In total, just over 200 Swiss were in Haiti at the time of the earthquake (including tourists, unregistered persons and business travellers). Contact was established with 199 of them. Four people were reported injured. One person remains missing despite intensive, ongoing search efforts.

Directly after news of the earthquake broke, the crisis centre at the FDFA’s Political Affairs Division VI, in parallel and in close cooperation with the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), set up a 24-hour crisis unit. Shortly afterwards, this was strengthened by the other sections concerned within the FDFA, FDJP and DDPS. The mandate of the crisis unit was:

- to manage the search for and identification of Swiss citizens,
- to organise on-the-spot help for Swiss citizens in need (in cooperation with the Social Aid for Swiss Citizens Resident Abroad Unit of the Federal Office of Justice),
- to assist persons wishing to leave the country with repatriation using all available means. In cooperation with the local representations, the Consular Protection Section of Political Affairs Division VI coordinated the return of Swiss citizens and organised medical care for the injured as well as their subsequent repatriation to Switzerland.

In order to help relieve the workload on the embassies in Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo, the FDFA’s crisis centre dispatched a total of eight staff from the crisis mission pool to Port-au-Prince and

Guidelines on emergency provisions:

RISE –
R egister and notify
I nform contacts
S tockpile supplies
E xercise a proactive approach

- Register with the Swiss representation responsible for you on your arrival in the foreign country (www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/reps.html).
- Notify the Swiss representation immediately of changes of address, additions to the family, deaths, changes to your civil status and changes to your contact details (telephone, e-mail, work and home addresses). If you are passing through, inform the representation of where you will be staying or your travel route and let the representation know how you can be contacted.
- Provide the Swiss representation with as much contact information as possible concerning contact persons – your closest relatives and friends – in the country abroad and in Switzerland. You must make sure you respond to corresponding questionnaires from the representation and complete the question sheets as fully as possible. It is in your own interests to do so.
wanted to leave by land on five buses and by air in a Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit helicopter to Santo Domingo. Twenty of this group returned to Switzerland and were looked after by the DDPS' Federal Office for Civil Protection immediately on arrival.

2. What lessons can be learned from the mission?

The mission on behalf of Swiss citizens in Haiti can be regarded as a success in light of the smooth management of the repatriation operation. That said, the Swiss embassy in Port-au-Prince did face difficulties in the search for Swiss nationals and in providing support to those wishing to leave. Some of these obstacles were unavoidable and are explained by the extraordinary nature of the disaster. Others were self-inflicted and could have been avoided through careful preparation for a crisis situation by all Swiss citizens residing abroad.

What hindered the search for Swiss nationals and assistance with leaving the country?

The earthquake temporarily caused a complete failure of the telecommunications system. Owing to the temporary loss of the local fixed network, the mobile communications network and satellite connections, the embassy was unable to reach Swiss citizens. Only communication via the Internet was possible.

The record of registered persons at the embassy did not correspond to the current status of Swiss citizens residing in the country because the registrations were not up-to-date. Some Swiss nationals had left without giving the embassy notice of their departure, while others had arrived without registering with the embassy.

The addresses entered in the records were inaccurate owing to a lack of precise information provided by those registered. The records often contained no precise address details (street, house number). This made the search for Swiss citizens more difficult amidst the widespread devastation.

- Always keep a small supply of cash available at home in a safe place. Keep a supply of drinking water and food and, if necessary, a supply of fuel which will last for the first few days of a crisis. Keep an emergency kit at the ready which contains a radio, batteries, a torch, a change of clothing, personal hygiene items, a first aid kit and your travel documents (passport). Make sure you take out accident and illness insurance covering medical expenses in the event of injury.

- Exercise a proactive approach yourself in a crisis situation and wherever possible immediately provide notice of your status to the Swiss representation or the FDFA’s crisis team in Berne, either by telephone via the FDFA’s hotline available in emergency situations (031 325 33 33) or via the search mask published on the FDFA’s website (www.eda.admin.ch).

- The authorities in certain risk areas (e.g. areas at risk of earthquake) have crisis management provisions. Please take the proactive step of contacting the local authorities for this information and follow their instructions.

Santo Domingo. The first two pool members arrived in the crisis area, which was difficult to access, just hours after the earthquake. The crisis centre immediately set up a hotline number at the head office which received calls from concerned family members around the clock, recorded search and response messages, compared these and forwarded them on an ongoing basis to our representation in Port-au-Prince for processing.

Under exceptionally difficult conditions (collapse of telecommunications infrastructure, lack of fuel, interrupted electricity supply, shortage of food and water, widespread destruction), our embassy in Port-au-Prince succeeded in locating Swiss nationals in the country, providing care for the four injured and evacuating the 37 people who citizens in need in Haiti.
It took several days to definitively confirm the status of many Swiss nationals as many had departed individually without notifying the embassy.

Some Swiss citizens were affected by shortages of food and drinking water shortly after the earthquake. A lack of cash was also evident as the earthquake destroyed banks and disrupted automatic cash dispensers.

3. Individual emergency provisions

With a view to improving individual preparations for various kinds of future emergency situations (natural catastrophes, other major events and political unrest, etc.), the FDFA’s Political Affairs Division VI has produced brief guidelines which should facilitate cooperation for you and the FDFA in the event of future crises. (see box).

Thank you for taking note of this advice.
Christoph Späti, Political Affairs Division VI

UN reconstruction conference in New York: Switzerland to support Haiti with 90 million Swiss francs

Switzerland is committed to providing long-term support for Haiti. Martin Dahinden, Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, underlined Switzerland’s solidarity with the earthquake-ravaged Caribbean country at the UN Donors’ Conference in New York on 31 March 2010. The federal government will contribute a total of CHF 35.9 million to the rebuilding of Haiti up to 2012, while an additional CHF 55 million will come from donations collected directly by Swiss Solidarity and its partner organisations.

The Swiss delegation headed by Martin Dahinden, Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, presented its programme to support the people of Haiti at the “Towards a New Future for Haiti” ministerial conference on 31 March in New York. In addition to humanitarian aid, Switzerland will also support Haiti with its long-term reconstruction plans. At the conference, Martin Dahinden indicated where Switzerland will focus its efforts: “In the wake of the devastating earthquake, Switzerland provided Haiti with support through the biggest emergency aid operation ever carried out by Switzerland. What is more, Switzerland will also help the country with its reconstruction efforts. We anticipate that the rebuilding of social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, the development of rural regions and the security of food supplies will represent the main challenges for the long-term reconstruction programme.”

Switzerland will follow the guidelines of the UN’s reconstruction action plan for Haiti. To ensure these efforts do not focus exclusively on the capital Port-au-Prince, Switzerland will also support decentralised projects in synchronisation with the intentions of the Haitian government. Switzerland has been running a cooperation office in Port-au-Prince since 2005 and is therefore very familiar with conditions in the country.

Switzerland’s contribution to the economic, social and political reconstruction will be financed by the restructuring of existing framework credits and will be covered by the 2006 credit line for humanitarian aid (CHF 20 million) and the 2008 credit line for development cooperation (CHF 15.9 million). The aid between 2010 and 2012 will therefore total CHF 35.9 million, in addition to CHF 55 million in donations raised directly by Swiss Solidarity and its partner organisations.

NEW POPULAR INITIATIVES AND REFERENDA

By the time of going to press, the following new popular initiatives had been launched since the last edition:

- “Für ein liberales Rauchergesetz” (For a liberal smoking law), initiative committee: IG Freie Schweizer Wirtin, deadline for collection of signatures: 23.08.2011.
- “Schluss mit der MwSt-Diskriminierung des Gastgewerbes” (End to VAT discrimination in the hotel and catering industry), initiative committee: “Schluss mit der MwSt-Diskriminierung des Gastgewerbes” inter-party committee, deadline for collection of signatures: 07.10.2011.
- “Schutz vor Rasern” (Protection against speeding drivers), initiative committee: RoadCross Schweiz, deadline for collection of signatures: 27.10.2011.
- “Für ein bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen finanziert durch Energieinkungsabgaben” (For an unconditional basic income financed by energy incentive taxes), initiative committee: “Für ein bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen finanziert durch Energieinkungsabgaben” initiative committee, Ms Gabriela Coray, deadline for collection of signatures: 19.11.2011.
- “Wenden wir die Menschenrechte an auf Frauen und Männer = Schweiz” (Let’s apply human rights to men and women = Switzerland), initiative committee: IG Freie Schweizer Wirtin, deadline for collection of signatures: 03.10.2011.

At www.bk.admin.ch/aktuell/abstimmung you will find a list of pending referenda and popular initiatives and the corresponding signature forms if available. Please complete, sign and send the forms directly to the relevant initiative committee.

RESponsible for the official FDFA information pages:
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Ballenberg: A journey in time through rural Switzerland

The Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg is actually nothing like a museum. Switzerland’s rural heritage is brought back to life in all its glory, giving visitors an insight into how things once were.

By Heinz Eckert

Following the trail around Ballenberg does not feel like visiting a museum. Yet it takes visitors around Switzerland’s largest open-air museum, extending across one of the most idyllic parts of the Bernese Oberland.

Were it not for the entrance area with its ticket booths, it would take visitors a while to realise they were in an open-air museum. Perhaps only the absence of parked cars would remind them that they were already “inside”.

The surrounding area is almost as picturesque and well-maintained as the open-air museum itself. The transition from the neighbouring hamlets to the Ballenberg open-air museum, which is managed and maintained on the basis of scientific principles and monument conservation ideals, is almost seamless. “Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg – the Experience” is the advertising slogan and it delivers what it promises.

The Foundation of the Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg was founded in summer 1968 with the support of federal government and the canton of Berne. The museum was officially opened in 1978 with 16 exhibits in a park-like environment, overlooking Lake Brienz. The museum has since been extended continually. Today, over 100 historical exhibits and houses from almost all cantons are on display. Ballenberg is Switzerland’s only open-air museum for rural life.

Ballenberg is most certainly not a dusty collection of rare items. Instead, it is full of life and hustle and bustle. Everything in this open-air museum is alive, every step provides an experience. All the buildings are furnished in keeping with period style and can be explored. Living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms give visitors the opportunity to discover traditional ways of life, while the tradesmen give an insight into how people used to bake bread, make lace, weave, make cheese and produce roof shingles in the countryside. It smells of freshly sawn wood and iron wrought in the smithy. Visitors are also able to sample the many culinary delights.

All the buildings at the open-air museum were in danger in their original locations and could not be conserved there. They were carefully taken down and reconstructed in Ballenberg true to the original. Here they are surrounded by historical cottage gardens, meadows and fields with original varieties of flowers, herbs, fruit trees and plants long forgotten or in danger of dying out.

Various special exhibitions provide fascinating and unexpected insights into partly lost customs of rural Switzerland. Finally, 250 farm animals bring the stables and pastures to life. In addition to chickens, ducks, goats, pigeons, pigs and cattle, animal breeds threatened with extinction have also found a home at Ballenberg. They include the peacock goat, Swiss mirror sheep, Rhaetian grey cattle, a variety of downy-haired pigs, Diepholz geese and many more besides.

The first open-air museum, the “Skansen”, opened in Sweden in 1891. Many such establishments have since opened around the world. They all share the same goal – to secure and preserve traditional buildings and to provide an insight into them and what lay inside with authentic fittings, furniture, equipment and tools. Nowhere is this goal better achieved than at the Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg.

It is well worth spending an entire day at Ballenberg.

Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg
CH-3855 Brienz
www.ballenberg.ch
info@ballenberg.ch
Does Swiss German represent a threat to French-speaking Switzerland?

There is constantly debate in French-speaking Switzerland as to whether Swiss German is taking over and posing a threat to multilingualism in Switzerland. Iwar Werlen, professor of linguistics at the University of Berne, does not share these fears. But bilingual journalist Peter Rothenbühler in Lausanne takes a different view in his essay on the issue. Interview by Heinz Eckert

"Swiss review": Do you understand the anxiety in French-speaking Switzerland that Swiss German is increasingly being spoken at the expense of High German and this is jeopardising Switzerland’s linguistic diversity?

Iwar Werlen: I’d have to say yes and no. Fears are constantly being expressed that Switzerland’s linguistic diversity is under threat, but they are only justified to an extent.

But is it true that more and more dialect is being spoken?

Yes, this trend has been clearly evident since the mid-1960s. Dialect is being spoken in more and more situations where High German was previously used, such as in schools, at church and in the media, etc. Dialect has also become very popular today in pop and rock music and in the rap scene. And young people, in particular, write almost all their text messages and e-mails in Swiss German.

How would you explain this shift towards dialect?

Fashion plays a major role, undoubtedly – this sense of “Swissness” and the desire to create an individual identity and stand apart from other countries, not least Germany. There have also been general changes in society, with a shift from formal to informal behaviour, which is reflected in the loss of certain manners, social conventions and etiquette, for example. Dress codes that once applied are no longer observed, old people now have to stand on public transport as well and even in good restaurants women are no longer served before men. All these things were taken for granted in the past. These attitudes have also had an impact on the use of language: formal and rigid High German is avoided and people express themselves verbally and in writing in the simplest way possible.

Don’t you think that it is bizarre that the news programme “10vor10” has to be broadcast with German subtitles when it is repeated on the international, joint German-language channel, so that it can be understood in Austria and Germany?

This is probably explained by the fact that “Schweizer Fernsehen DRS” sees itself as a regional language broadcaster and produces “10vor10” as infotainment. The news programme “Tagesschau” at any rate is produced exclusively in High German. But it’s true that awareness within the SRG for maintaining Switzerland’s linguistic diversity is low. The “Idée Suisse” concept may be marketed by the SRG, but it does not do enough to meet its responsibility in this respect in day-to-day broadcasting and takes the view that foreigners living in Switzerland should not necessarily speak Swiss German, but they should understand it.

Do you share this view?

Yes, I hold the same opinion actually. German-speaking Swiss speak dialect and those who want to communicate with them in day-to-day life should understand this dialect. That applies to both Swiss and foreign citizens. This should not present a problem, particularly for Germans, as there are also many dialects in Germany and Bavarians, for example, are understood everywhere.

But shouldn’t all German-speaking Swiss be able not just to read High German, but also to speak it?

Absolutely. I don’t understand the viewpoint of some teachers who always claim that the first foreign language taught in German-speaking Switzerland is High German. That’s not right. In my view, Swiss German and High German are two forms of the same language which should both be maintained. Swiss German is our spoken mother tongue and High German is the mother tongue we read and write in. German-speaking Swiss should have a good command of both.

How important is it that Swiss German is maintained and spoken as correctly as possible?

“Correctness” depends on how you look at it. I see languages as a means of communication which are constantly changing and adapting to new requirements. I don’t think it really matters whether you say “Frühstück” or “Zmorge” (breakfast), “Lunch” or “Zmittag” (lunch), “Anke” or “Butter” (butter). Just look at the language of young people and how it is forever changing. The term “geil” (cool) used to be in, then it was “mega” again, and at one time everything was “super”. The main thing is understanding.

Swiss people abroad are often asked about multilingualism in Switzerland. Are the Swiss people at home actually aware how valuable this diversity is and how important it is to preserve it?

I don’t think many of us actually realise how different our approach to languages is to that of many other European countries. Of course, not all Swiss people speak four languages, as some foreigners might think, but surveys have shown that most Swiss have...
a fairly good command of one or two foreign languages, the highest figure in Europe. However, we tend not to fully exploit our potential – and that goes for both French and German-speaking Swiss.

Do you think that French and German speakers in Switzerland will one day only communicate in English?

That is already the case in certain sectors and in the sciences. But that certainly won’t become a normal occurrence. The key thing is to take a more relaxed approach to languages, to experiment more and perhaps even use a combination of Swiss German, High German and French if all else fails.

Could and should the government do more to promote understanding of linguistic diversity?

Yes, I believe it’s very important that cultural exchange between the linguistic regions is promoted by the cantons and made compulsory. If French speakers spend a few weeks or months in St. Gallen or someone from Uri spends time in Lausanne, they will automatically establish a different relationship with the other language and learn it with greater enjoyment and commitment. The state-funded media should also meet their responsibilities more.

And what would you say to the anxious French-speaking Swiss?

I believe one of the problems between the two language communities lies in how they regard the dialect. Many French speakers find it inconceivable that educated people can use such a “barbaric” form of language. It is the task of German teachers in French-speaking Switzerland to change this perception. German as it exists in German-speaking Switzerland also needs to be recognised. This involves addressing the issue of dialects in teaching. Antonio Hodgers, the Green National Councillor from Geneva, has come to share this viewpoint. After being elected to the Federal Parliament, he moved to Berne where he soon discovered that the High German he had learned in school was not much use to him. He recommends that French-speaking Swiss learn Swiss German. On the other hand, it would also stand German-speaking Swiss in good stead to improve their French in greater numbers. The efforts of the Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, within the framework of the “Harmos” project, are aimed in this direction. They just need to be put into practice.

The linguistic defiance of the German-speaking Swiss

By Peter Rothenbühler*

French-speaking Swiss complain from time to time that it is difficult for them to learn German correctly while people in Berne and Zurich constantly answer them in Swiss German or in English, when it would be easier to use a national language, such as High German or French, in such situations.

It adds up actually. Dialects are wonderful but should be used privately. When conversing with people from other parts of the country or indeed other countries or when communicating using electronic media, a generally acceptable lingua franca should be used, just like everywhere else in the world.

Unfortunately, it would seem that this is not possible of all places in a country known worldwide for its multilingualism. The problem is not so much the difficulties that French-speaking Swiss have with Swiss German.

The problem is more that the German-speaking Swiss have a major issue with High German and refuse even to speak the first national language. This phenomenon is globally unique. It constitutes a real defiance which is now being supported by linguists. In the interview opposite, Professor Iwar Werlen explains that the German-speaking Swiss use two forms of the same language: “Swiss German is our spoken mother tongue and High German is the mother tongue we read and write in.” However, anyone wishing to communicate with German-speaking Swiss has to learn Swiss German, or at least learn to understand it.

According to Professor Werlen, there are two half-mother tongues, one for verbal communication and one for written use. He makes no mention of High German being spoken.

You might find it extremely cool or “u-geil” that Zurich’s youth (including people up to 60) speak “Zürialbanisch”, a form of Zurich German with Albanian intonation, but that’s not a new dialect, it’s more of an ethnolect. Yes, that’s the best term for it linguistically.

Of course, it is interesting to observe the trend where German-speaking Swiss today write text messages in anything but German and automatically switch to English in an exchange, not because the other person (a French-speaking Swiss, for example) would understand this better, but because they would lose face if they were to use High German.

The growing refusal by German-speaking Swiss to use their cultural language verbally also has significant consequences. Not for the French-speaking Swiss, but for the German-speaking Swiss themselves. They no longer have a proper command of their own language and they are also losing the ability to write correctly. Over the long term, this will inevitably lead to English emerging as the main lingua franca. This would undermine the importance of two national languages, German and French. Question for the politicians: Is that what we really want?

The SRG, which until recently was still called “Idee Suisse”, has also contributed enormously to this trend. Dialect is still spoken on key information programmes (contrary to the licence), encouraging the linguistic regression of the population.

Yet miraculously a salvation is on the horizon, once again from abroad. Of all people the large numbers of German immigrants, from whom we have tried to differentiate ourselves by clinging onto our dialect, are reintroducing the spoken use of our “mother tongue”, High German, in Switzerland. A little tip for the French-speaking Swiss – there are cafés in Zurich where everyone speaks High German. And “Arena” will soon be subtitled, not in English or Russian, but in German!

* Peter Rothenbühler, 61, a bilingual journalist who grew up in Biel, today lives in Lausanne. He was editor-in-chief of the “SonntagsBlick” and “Schweizer Illustrierte” from 1984 to 2000 and editor-in-chief of “Le Matin” until 2008. He is currently the deputy editorial director of Edipresse and a columnist.
UBS plunged itself and Switzerland into crisis

In a treaty with the USA, Switzerland retroactively annulled banking confidentiality for 4,500 American clients of UBS. This step enabled the bank to move out of the firing line of the US judicial authorities. Domestically, the affair sparked fierce confrontation between the Swiss parties. The Federal Council, in particular, came in for severe criticism. By René Lenzin

Switzerland has saved its largest bank, UBS, from the threat of collapse twice within two years. Using emergency legislation, federal government came to the bank’s rescue with six billion Swiss francs in October 2008 after it had become embroiled in the US mortgage crisis. At the same time, the Swiss National Bank relieved UBS of 40 billion dollars of toxic US securities. National government argued that these measures were unavoidable as the bankruptcy of UBS would have brought the entire economy to its knees. UBS was deemed system-relevant and “too big to fail”. This effectively meant that both major banks, UBS and Credit Suisse, were granted state guarantees.

On the same premise, federal government also intervened when UBS got itself into hot water with the US judicial authorities. Some of the bank’s client advisors were accused of helping American citizens to avoid taxation, leading the tax authorities to launch investigations into tax fraud. The USA threatened UBS with prosecution at the end of 2008 and demanded the disclosure of 52,000 client names. In August 2009, Switzerland and the USA reached agreement on a compromise settlement. The USA refrained from filing civil charges and withdrew its demand for the disclosure of the 52,000 client names. At the same time, it submitted a new request for administrative assistance to Switzerland concerning 4,450 UBS clients. Switzerland undertook to filter out cases of tax fraud and serious tax evasion within a year and to pass the details to the US authorities. The Federal Council claimed this agreement was necessary to save UBS, which was still struggling with the impact of the economic crisis, from a trial in the USA that it would find almost impossible to sustain.

Court stops the Federal Council

For the clients concerned, the agreement means that Switzerland would retroactively annul banking confidentiality in their cases.

FEDERAL COUNCIL SUBJECTED TO HARSH CRITICISM

However, the Federal Council failed to take account of the Federal Administrative Court, which declared the disclosure of the account details to the US authorities illegal and stopped the transfer. The court said that Parliament would firstly have to establish a legal basis for administrative assistance on tax evasion. Under international pressure, Switzerland had in fact resolved to provide foreign authorities with administrative assistance in cases where reasonable grounds for suspicion of tax evasion existed (see “Swiss Review” 2/2010). However, the corresponding agreements have yet to enter into force.

In light of this, the Federal Council resolved to present the UBS settlement with the USA to Parliament for approval as a treaty. The National Council and Council of States passed this treaty in emergency proceedings in the summer session. This should ensure the timely processing of administrative assistance, which should prevent UBS from facing further legal action in the USA, at least for the time being. However, the approval of the treaty triggered complex wrangling between the political parties in Switzerland.

Initially, three camps emerged: the Free
The parties supporting unconditional ap-
dition to the atmosphere of mis-
committees reported that, in ad-
Boards of the US tax issue at an early
UBS needs to review its practices
The committees’ report ended with 19 recommendations, 5 pro-
problems, the Federal Council also
The report contained both praise and criticism for the finan-
countries, was the only party defending it. This
A paradoxical situation emerged: the SVP,
committees reported that, in addi-
also recognised the significance of the US tax issue at an early
The economic downturn has caused the unemployment insur-
the Federal Council and Parliament want to bring it under control through additional receipts and benefit cuts. The unions and the left-wing parties have called for a referendum. By René Lenzin
Swiss National Bank. Finma had
The reports of the Federal Council’s leadership shortcomings. The
The committees’ report ended with 19 recommendations, 5 pro-
focus on the Federal Council’s leadership shortcomings. The control committees want to see national government obliged to keep minutes, even for confidential business. It should also set up a system for strategic political management as well as a monitoring and early warning system to improve performance in crisis situations. Although the parliamentary supervisory committees do not have the authority to investigate the conduct of UBS, they also issued recommendations to the bank. They called on UBS to review its own practices during the crisis.

Parliament turned upside down
A paradoxical situation emerged: the SVP, a vehement defender of banking confidence, helped to soften Switzerland’s stance on this, and the SP, which has criticised it for years, was the only party defending it. This highlights just how much the debate was shaped by party political considerations. The parties supporting unconditional approval of the treaty were ultimately triumphant. However, the issues of high bonuses and tighter banking regulation remain on the table. The parties all agree in principle that they want to bring it under control through additional receipts and benefi t cuts. The unions and the left-wing parties have called for a referendum. By René Lenzin

Unemployment insurance – balancing the books
The economic downturn has caused the unemployment insurance deficit to widen further. The Federal Council and Parliament want to bring it under control through additional receipts and benefi t cuts. The unions and the left-wing parties have called for a referendum. By René Lenzin

Democrat-Liberals (FDP) and the Christian Democrats (CVP) saw the agreement as undesirable but necessary to prevent UBS and the Swiss economy from facing difficulties. The Swiss People’s Party (SVP) rejected the agreement because it did not want to relinquish banking confidentiality. The Social Democrats (SP) and the Greens made their approval dependant on special taxes on bonuses and stricter regulation of the banks. As the FDP and CVP do not have a parliamentary majority by themselves, approval only seemed possible with concessions to the left. But at the last minute, the SVP changed its mind and gave its backing to the proposal. It claimed its decision was based on preventing a tax on bonuses, but critics argued it had bowed to industry pressure.

The parties supporting unconditional approval of the treaty were ultimately triumphant. However, the issues of high bonuses and tighter banking regulation remain on the table. The parties all agree in principle that they want to bring it under control through additional receipts and benefi t cuts. The unions and the left-wing parties have called for a referendum. By René Lenzin
SwissCommunity was set up by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and is an Internet platform for our fellow citizens outside Switzerland. It is a bit like Facebook, Xing or LinkedIn, yet different at the same time. The new Swiss abroad club will be an exclusive communication platform specifically tailored to the requirements of Swiss people living abroad. SwissCommunity primarily aims to facilitate contact between the Swiss abroad themselves and with Switzerland. At the same time, www.swisscommunity.org also intends to promote communication between OSA and the communities of Swiss abroad.

The key feature will be an online platform enabling targeted contact between Swiss people abroad and interested parties and institutions in Switzerland. We are aiming, for example, to facilitate contact between the Swiss abroad and their cantons of origin. Swiss abroad planning to visit their old homeland can obtain tourist information, tips and offers at www.swisscommunity.org. Swiss associations and institutions abroad can use the new platform and SwissCommunity to provide information on events and to advertise for members. And, for example, people from Berne living abroad who want to exchange experiences with other people from Berne abroad will also have the opportunity to do so at www.swisscommunity.org.

OSA’s online community is geared entirely to the needs of Swiss people living outside Switzerland, regardless of whether they have recently left home or have been living abroad for many years. www.swisscommunity.org is a comprehensive link to Switzerland and all Swiss citizens on all continents – at the click of a mouse and free of charge. The new platform is also useful for people returning to Switzerland who wish to keep in touch with their friends from all over the world.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad has created the new Internet platform in cooperation with its partners swissinfo, Switzerland Tourism, Mediaparx and ManRey.

www.swisscommunity.org: chat – search – find
What is OSA’s role in the age of electronic communication platforms? We are answering this question with a global network for the Swiss abroad or, to put it another way, a global virtual community for all Swiss citizens living outside Switzerland.
“Switzerland needs swissinfo”

Filippo Lombardi, a journalist from Ticino and member of the Council of States, believes swissinfo must be maintained at all costs. He also reminds the Federal Council of its legal obligations and the importance of international information to Switzerland. Interview by Heinz Eckert

“Swiss Review”: swissinfo once again finds itself under threat. Can Switzerland with its focus on globalisation afford to do without an international media presence?

Filippo Lombardi: In my opinion, absolutely not! It would be a huge mistake to abandon this privileged media site, especially right now at a time of growing international political and media pressure on Switzerland.

What are swissinfo’s main strengths?

As a journalist, I am impressed by the selection, organisation and presentation of the issues, which are, of course, different for an international readership than for a domestic one. I also believe the site’s editorial independence sets the standard internationally. We can be proud that we have such a highly regarded “voice of Switzerland” which is not a government mouthpiece. Finally, the fact that swissinfo appears in nine languages is almost unique worldwide and this feature should most definitely be retained. Just Russian is missing in my view.

How important is swissinfo to Switzerland’s image abroad?

It is vital. Talking to family and friends abroad, it has become increasingly clear to me that they really are dependent on swissinfo for keeping their links with Switzerland alive. swissinfo explains Switzerland and its political system to the international community, including foreign journalists. It was crucial in the referendum on minarets and also with regard to banking confidentiality and the Swiss financial centre.

Would it not be sufficient to just produce swissinfo in the Swiss national languages and in English?

Absolutely not! As I said, I’d like to see Russian added too. I fail to understand why we are talking about a reduction in a country like Switzerland where we are well aware that translation is vital to ensuring good communication and cohesion!

Don’t organisations such as Pro Helvetia, Economiesuisse, Osec and Presence Switzerland all have an interest in retaining swissinfo and supporting it?

Yes, they all need swissinfo. However, cooperation needs to be stepped up and improved in Switzerland’s interests.

The SRG is faced with financial problems and must make savings. Where do you see potential to do so?

Not with swissinfo, that’s for sure. If the SRG uses 1% of its licence fee income on international information, this is exactly in line with the public service mandate. Or is public service just a means of legitimising licence fees? Under the Radio and Television Act 2007, based on a Lombardi proposal, federal government is obliged to finance the other half of swissinfo. It is therefore remarkable that just three years later the Federal Council is threatening to relinquish its legal obligation as part of its drive for savings.

OSA offers young people and projects of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

OSA offers young Swiss people living abroad a wide range of opportunities to discover Switzerland and meet young people from all over the world.

A unique project will take place this autumn across Switzerland. Thousands of youth groups will be taking part when “Action 72 Hours” kicks off on 9 September. Swiss from abroad will also be involved and will hopefully be successful in completing the community-interest project assigned to them in a race against the clock. Information on “Action 72 Hours – and Switzerland goes wild!” is available at www.72h.ch

Seminar on the Federal Youth Session

09. – 15.11.2009

Switzerland’s young people have the opportunity to influence the country’s politics. In November, the youth parliament will once again convene in the Federal Palace. 200 young people will have the chance to express their views on current political issues. OSA is giving young Swiss people abroad the opportunity to take part in this event. We will prepare the young parliamentarians for the session and provide them with support throughout the week.
Swiss abroad can now register for the 2011 winter camps.

New Year ski camp in Sedrun (Grisons)  
27.12.2010 – 05.01.2011  
60 young people from more than 20 countries will meet in the mountains of Grisons. The beautiful ski resort of Sedrun is guaranteed snow. The cosy accommodation is located right in the village. It goes without saying that a lively New Year’s Eve party is also part of the programme.

Winter sports week in Wengen (Berne)  
26.02. – 05.03.2011  
A very special camp will be held in the Bernese Oberland. Participants of the winter sports week must be aged 18 and over. Quite a number of regular visitors meet up in Switzerland and enjoy the international atmosphere in the camp and in the ski resort. New faces are more than welcome.

Easter camp in Fiesch (Valais)  
16.04. – 24.04.2011  
The sports centre in Fiesch offers Swiss abroad magnificent facilities, with gyms, sports areas and an indoor swimming pool. The conditions on the Fiescheralp are still ideal for winter sports in April. Skiing in the spring sunshine is great fun.

Information on the offers mentioned is available from:  
Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
Youth Service  
Tel.: +41 (0)31 356 61 00  
youth@aso.ch  
www.aso.ch

Winter camps for children aged 8 to 14

Whether they are skiers or snowboarders, beginners or at an advanced level, Swiss children living abroad aged 8 to 14 will have a great time at our winter camps.

Winter camps  
Tschieriv (Grisons)  
Date: Monday, 27 December 2010 to Wednesday, 5 January 2011  
No. of participants: 36  
Cost: CHF 900 (contribution to the camp)  
Ski or snowboard hire: Approx. CHF 150  
Registration deadline: 30 October 2010

Arolla (Valais)  
Date: Monday, 27 December 2010 to Wednesday, 5 January 2011  
No. of participants: 36  
Cost: CHF 900 (contribution to the camp)  
Ski or snowboard hire: Approx. CHF 150  
Registration deadline: 30 October 2010

600 Swiss children, including a number of Swiss children living abroad, born in 1996 and 1997 will have the opportunity to attend Swiss Ski’s big ski camp in Lenk free of charge. This will take place between 2 and 9 January 2011. To take part in the Juskila trip, Swiss children abroad must be able to communicate in at least one of the three Swiss national languages (German, French or Italian). The draw only covers the camp itself (winter sports coaching, food and accommodation). Parents will be responsible for organising and financing travel to and from the camp. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the draw at the end of October.

Registration  
Precise details on the winter camps and the registration form will be available from 15 September 2010 at www.sjas.ch (“Our forthcoming activities”). Reduced contribution rates are available in justified cases. The form required can be requested on the registration form. We are also happy to post you our information brochure on request.

JUSKILA Lenk  
Draw to attend a ski camp (JUSKILA) in Lenk for young Swiss abroad aged 13 and 14
SwissCommunity.org
The platform for the Swiss Abroad

“The SwissCommunity platform networks Swiss people worldwide via the web.”

Ursula Deplazes
Researcher from Graubünden, living in Rome

“Networking plays an important role among the Swiss abroad – both personally and professionally.”

Urs Steiner
Teacher from Berne, head of the Swiss School in Peru

“Get to know other Swiss people abroad, exchange useful addresses, find out about Switzerland … I can do all these things on SwissCommunity.”

Daniel Keller
Manager from Zurich, living in Hanoi

“The local experience of Swiss people can be very valuable to an international consultant like me.”

Network with other Swiss abroad
Keep up to date on relevant news and events
Find an apartment – or the best fondue in town
Discover Switzerland

Sign up for free membership

www.swisscommunity.org

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SCHWEIZER NEWS - WELTWEIT

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MEDIApax
On the trail of Byron in Switzerland
Exiled from England, the poet Lord Byron (1788–1824) stayed in Switzerland from May to October 1816. Sailing on Lake Geneva and trips into the Alps provided the inspiration for two major works. We go on the trail of one of the first romantics.

By Alain Wey

Who was Lord Byron? He was England’s literary equivalent of a rock star at the start of the 19th century, having risen to fame overnight after the publication of the first two cantos of Childe Harold (1812), which recount his adventures and reflections on travel in Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey. He is also the poet most quoted by Robin Williams in the well-known film “Dead Poets Society” (1989). A seducer from a wealthy background with a seat in the House of Lords, he was forced to leave England in 1816 after the scandal caused by his divorce and his incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta. He was 28. The pioneer of the wave of literary romanticism stayed in Switzerland from May to October where he wrote Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto III and The Prisoner of Chillon. Let’s go back in time in pursuit of this poet who never went anywhere without his swordstick.

The Villa Diodati
Byron reached Switzerland via Flanders and Germany as the French government refused him a passport. He was accompanied by his valet Fletcher, two servants, his courier Berger and his doctor Polidori. The poet passed through Lucerne on 17 May 1816 and reached Berne on 23. Passing through Avenches and Lausanne, he arrived in Geneva and stayed at the hôtel d’Angleterre in Sécheron where he entered a fabricated age in the register – one hundred! Here he met up with the poet Percy Shelley (1792–1822), who was accompanied by his wife Mary and Claire Clairmont, Byron’s future mistress. The two writers dined together and spent their evenings sailing on Lake Geneva, both sharing a passion for the water. On 10 June, Byron moved into the Villa Diodati in Cologny, on the south-west shore of the lake, where Shelley also rented a house. The location provided him with a haven of peace and tranquillity. Sometimes, in the morning, he would sit on the villa’s large balcony and work on Childe Harold or Darkness. He never tired of lakeside reverie and walks in the hillside. In his boat with an English keel Byron sometimes set out onto Lake Geneva at night during storms, indifferent to the dangers. One very windy morning when he was sailing alone on the choppy waters of the lake, the alarm was raised to send out for help. When he returned ashore, Byron thanked his poor rescuers by causing a terrible scene, remonstrating with them for having interrupted his meditations.

The birth of Frankenstein
Torrential rain, gloomy nights and the reading of German folk tales stimulated the imagination. Byron proposed that each of his companions write a ghost story - Shelley and his wife, Polidori and he himself. He produced a vampire story but without much conviction. It was Mary Shelley who best rose to the challenge. After a terrible nightmare, she finally unearthed the protagonist of her ghost story. The following day, she started to write Frankenstein, which, after starting out as a short story, became a novel.

The Castle of Chillon and its prisoner
On 22 June, Byron and Shelley went on a boat tour of the lake, sailing along the shores of Savoy, passing Evian, Tourronde, Lugrin and Meillerie before reaching Saint-Gingolph on 24 June, where they encountered a storm which nearly cost them their lives. After passing Villeneuve, the noble silhouette of the Castle of Chillon appeared at the foot of the rocks. This was the sanctuary of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the setting for La Nouvelle Héloïse. Excitedly exploring the depths of the castle, the two poets came across the dungeon with seven pillars hidden beneath the level of the lake. Byron discovered the story of the prisoner, François Bonivard, a prior locked up there from 1530 to 1536 for his opposition to the Duke of Savoy who was attempting to seize control of Geneva. They then went on
to Claren, still following in Rousseau’s footsteps. They finally arrived in Ouchy (Lausanne) where Byron rapidly penned The Prisoner of Chillon on 28 June. The literary impact of this tour of the lake turned out to be immense. On his return, Byron spent the months of July and August in the Villa Diodati, writing, going for walks, sailing and sometimes receiving guests from England. He also frequently visited the writer Mme de Staël in Coppet, who eulogistically told him: “Lake Geneva owes you gratitude, Mylord!” On 29 August, Shelley and his wife left Cologny for England and Byron headed to Chamonix and Mont Blanc.

**Journey into the Alps**

On 17 September, Byron set out on a journey into the Bernese Oberland with two English friends. They passed through Les Avants (up above Montreux), the Jaman Pass, Simmental, Thun and Interlaken before arriving in Lauterbrunnen, a village nestled between the peaks where streams fall from vertiginous cliffs into the void. He was mesmerised by the Staubbach Falls: “The torrent is in shape, curving over the rock, like the tail of a white horse streaming in the wind.” Passing through Wengernalp, the poet lingered contemplatively before the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, stretching out in front of him in all of their 4,000 metres of splendour. He was fascinated by how the glaciers cut through forests, by avalanches and the cascades of ice. He descended via Grindelwald before arriving at Lake Brienz and returning to Interlaken. In Fribourg, the poet bought a “horrible” dog without a tail called Mutz who bit everyone. On 29 September, he returned to the Villa Diodati. Byron wanted to spend the winter in Italy and had to set off before the passes were closed due to snow. He thought he would be returning because he did not sell his boat and put it to anchor in the port of Geneva.

On 5 October, he headed towards Valais, stopping in Saint-Maurice, crossing the Rhône Valley and admiring the waterfall at Pissevache before going on to Martigny, Sion, Sierre, Loèche and Viège. At Brig, he climbed the Simplon Pass to reach Italy. Lord Byron never returned to Switzerland and would never see England again. In 1824, he took up the cause of the insurgents against Turkish rule in Greece and died of malaria aged 36. The five months he spent in Switzerland were significant in such a short lifetime. And his verses from Childe Harold still resonate today: “Once more upon the waters! yet once more! And the waves bound beneath me as a steed. That knows his rider. Welcome to their roar!”

Anne Isabella Noel Byron (1792–1860), Lord Byron’s wife.

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“... yonder Alpine snow, Imperishably pure beyond all things below.”
“Lake Leman woos me with its crystal face, The mirror where the stars and mountains view The stillness of their aspect in each trace Its clear depth yields of their far height and hue: There is too much of man here, to look through With a fit mind the might which I behold; But soon in me shall Loneliness renew Thoughts hid, but not less cherished than of old...”

Childe Harold, Canto III, verses 67–68 (LXVII–LXVIII)

“Journeys into the Alps”

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Childe Harold, Canto III, verses 67–68 (LXVII–LXVIII)

“And Jura answers, through her misty shroud, Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!”

Canto III, verse 92

“Clarens! sweet Clarens! birthplace of deep Love! Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought;”
“Clarens! by heavenly feet thy paths are trod, - Undying Love’s, who here ascends a throne To which the steps are mountains;”

Canto III, verses 99, 100, 104

“Twas not for fiction chose Rousseau this spot, Peopleing it with affections; but he found It was the scene which passion must allot To the mind’s purified beings;”

Canto III, verses 92, 100, 104

“Here are the Alpine landscapes which create A fund for contemplation; – to admire Is a brief feeling of a trivial date; But something worthier do such scenes inspire. Here to be lonely is not desolate.”

Epistle to Augusta, verse 8, lines 1–5

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"... yonder Alpine snow, Imperishably pure beyond all things below."
“Lake Leman woos me with its crystal face, The mirror where the stars and mountains view The stillness of their aspect in each trace Its clear depth yields of their far height and hue: There is too much of man here, to look through With a fit mind the might which I behold; But soon in me shall Loneliness renew Thoughts hid, but not less cherished than of old...”

Childe Harold, Canto III, verses 67–68 (LXVII–LXVIII)
The alpine herdsmen of the 21st century
Cheese-makers and mountain shepherds have moved with the times and the culture of the alpine herdsmen, or armaillis, is alive and well on the alpine pastures and is certainly not confined to museums. An interview with alpine herdsman Michel-Joseph Braillard. By Alain Wey

So who are today’s alpine herdsmen, known as armaillis in French speaking Switzerland and Sennen in German speaking parts of the country? Alpine cheese-makers, shepherds, herdsmen and milkers, the traditional representatives of Swiss folklore, would have died out in the 1970s if young people from the cities with alternative lifestyles had not arrived to bolster their ranks. The tradition of cheese-making on the alpine pastures now has decades ahead of it. Alpine herdsmen Michel-Joseph Braillard looks back on a thousand-year-old tradition.

He explains: “The Olma Swiss Agricultural Fair in St. Gallen provides a reflection on the alpine herdsmen tradition throughout Switzerland today, a way of life which has updated itself enormously. The law on land improvements has enabled the construction of access routes to the alpine pastures. The alpine herdsmen themselves have also changed tremendously. They almost all drive 4x4s today. There are even cable cars and monorails on the steepest alpine meadows. People have been working in the Swiss Alps for around 1,000 years. The expertise for the production of caseus helveticus, the hard cheese for which Switzerland is so famous, was brought by the monks.” Michel-Joseph Braillard is full of anecdotes. He intends to work on the pastures all year round. In 1998, he took over a flock of 400 ewes in the Portuguese Sierra and set up a cheese dairy. On his return to Switzerland in 2005, he worked in Upper Valais, Grisons and then in Pays d’Enhaut (VD). Today, he is based in Gruyere at the “La Chetta” mountain chalet where he has a herd of goats.

As long as I’ve got my health, I intend to work on the pastures.”

The alpine herdsmen also have a new role as guardians of nature. Michel-Joseph Braillard explains: “The magical relationship between the sky and the earth must be preserved. Cheese is like a good bottle of wine, a “Clos de Vougeot” or a “Château Pétrus”. It has to be savoured with respect. The aspect of the grazing land and what the cows or goats eat has a direct impact on the cheese. In the same way, the smoke of the boiler’s wood fire gives the cheese a certain flavour. The herdsmen adds: “And sometimes stormy weather can give the boiler an extra bit of spark!”


The alpine herdsmen wear traditional costumes, particularly in Appenzell, Toggenburg, Emmental and Gruyere.

THE HERDSMAN WITH A TASTE FOR ADVENTURE
Herdsman Michel-Joseph Braillard, aged 66, began learning about the different tasks involved in work on the alpine pastures at the age of five in the Fribourg Prealps. From a family involved in cattle breeding for four centuries, he attended agricultural college, traded calves between German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland, became head of the stables at a leading riding school in Geneva, and then a horse-riding instructor in St. Moritz (GR). He worked at the testing centre for the breeding of cattle at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and then at a veterinary clinic as an animal production technician. Through his visits to cattle-breeding farms in Canada and studying in Newcastle in the UK, Braillard, originally from Gruyere, has become an expert on cattle over the years. He later moved to Zollikon where he spent 12 years rearing mother cows and producing organic meat, better known as “naturabeef”. He then bred cattle on an alpine pasture in Moléson (FR) before emigrating to the Dominican Republic in 1985, where he could be “on alpine pastures all year round”. In 1998, he took over a flock of 400 ewes in the Portuguese Sierra and set up a cheese dairy. On his return to Switzerland in 2005, he worked in Upper Valais, Grisons and then in Pays d’Enhaut (VD). Today, he is based in Gruyere at the “La Chetta” mountain chalet where he has a herd of goats.

He combines cheese with aromatic alpine herbs. He says: “I met a herb gatherer, my partner, and this relationship produced a cheese, La liberta. As long as I’ve got my health, I intend to work on the pastures.”

SwitzerlandMobility coordinates the largest network of signed trails in the country. Totalling approximately 24,000 km, the routes for walking and hiking (9,000 km), cycling (9,000 km), mountain biking (4,500 km), skating (1,100 km) and canoeing (350 km) offer unlimited opportunities for discovering Switzerland. The diverse range of routes is combined with overnight accommodation offers, vehicle rental (including electric bicycles) and discount rail tickets. SwitzerlandMobility turns Switzerland into a true paradise for those seeking active leisure on an eco-friendly basis.

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**Network Switzerland**

Register at [www.MySwitzerland.com/aso](http://www.MySwitzerland.com/aso) by 30 September 2010 and win two overnight stays for two at the Hotel Hannigalp, Grächen, in the Valais region.

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**Skating alongside the river.**

The asphalt on the Rhine dam and along Lake Constance is an ideal route for less experienced skaters. This trail also offers unlimited skating enjoyment for families with children as the entire route is kept separate from motorised traffic.

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A collaboration between Switzerland Tourism and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)
“Real opportunities for the Swiss abroad”
The “SP Schweiz International” (International Section of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland) was founded in 1999. The aim was to provide a political home outside Switzerland’s borders for the many Swiss abroad who identify with the objectives and values of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SPS). Walter Suter has presided over the International Section of the SPS since 2007. Interview by Heinz Eckert

“Swiss Review”: What do the Swiss abroad mean to the SPS?
Walter Suter: As a community of over 700,000 Swiss citizens, of whom around 130,000 are registered on electoral rolls in Switzerland, the Swiss abroad are very important even purely from a numerical perspective. The SPS believes the Swiss abroad have a legitimate right to take part in elections and referenda and to represent the common concerns of the Swiss abroad directly at political level as Members of Parliament in the Federal Assembly. For this reason, in 2007, both SPS National Councillors Mario Fehr and Carlo Sommeruga submitted proposals aimed at implementing legal measures to provide the Swiss abroad with the real opportunity to stand for Federal Parliament in the elections.

What do you consider to be the most urgent political issues regarding the Swiss abroad?
The creation of a legal framework to provide Swiss citizens abroad with genuine opportunities to be elected to the National Council and/or Council of States.

What significance do the resolutions of the Council of the Swiss Abroad have for the SPS?
The SPS is represented on the Council of the Swiss Abroad by former and current federal parliamentarians, such as Remo Gysin and Carlo Sommeruga. It therefore supports its resolutions. The CSA’s resolutions give the SPS’ initiatives on policy relating to the Swiss abroad greater weight and credibility in the National Council and Council of States.

The budget for “Swiss Review” has been cut, swissinfo is in danger and savings are constantly being made on the network of representations. What is your view on these developments?
The SPS and the International Section are following developments with great concern and would like to put a stop to all cutbacks. There will be federal elections again next year. Why should Swiss people abroad vote for the SPS?
The SPS has always advocated an open Switzerland that plays a leading role in the international community based on cooperation and solidarity, while showing a healthy degree of self-confidence. Based on social justice, we aim to make a proactive and sustained contribution to a peaceful co-existence between nations. This is also in line with the long term interests of the community of the Swiss abroad. The SPS has always taken a coherent and consistent stance on all issues relating to policy on the Swiss abroad and will continue to do so. It represents the legitimate concerns of the Swiss abroad in the Federal Council and in Parliament without any ifs and buts.

Will a Swiss abroad ever make it onto the National Council?
Under the present terms where Swiss citizens abroad have to stand as candidates for a place on their party’s list in the polling canton, the chances are very slim. However, I am convinced that with perseverance and a great deal of persuasion, the constitutional and legal amendments that would be required to enable the Swiss abroad to stand for election may one day be achieved. This would also resolve the issue of electoral opportunities which needs to be addressed. With a view to ensuring improved direct representation for Swiss citizens abroad, the SP Schweiz International believes the role of the Council of the Swiss Abroad should be strengthened in the interim to allow it to function as a genuine and democratically legitimised representative of the Swiss abroad vis-à-vis the political authorities.

How do you maintain contact with Swiss abroad?
As far as our members are concerned, contact takes place electronically. Internet access is a prerequisite nowadays for membership of the International Section of the SPS. The section also maintains targeted contact with the Swiss abroad through annual participation in the Congress of the Swiss Abroad. The SPS parliamentarians on the Council of the Swiss Abroad also take this opportunity to exchange views at length with council members visiting from abroad and with many other people attending the congress.
■ The ban on smoking in public places came into force throughout Switzerland on 1 May 2010. The proportion of smokers in Switzerland dropped from 33% to 27% between 2001 and 2009. The campaign led by lung disease groups has taken a giant step forward as more previously enjoyed freedoms went up in smoke.

■ Since the opening of the World Expo in Shanghai on 1 May, the Swiss Pavilion has proven a big hit. Visitors had to wait almost three hours to enter the building above which a six-seater cable car is suspended. In an exhibition area measuring 4,000 m², Switzerland’s theme is “interaction between urban and rural areas”. This adventure is set to last until 31 October.

■ According to a study by the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland’s performance in innovation is the best in the world. It is the most innovative economy with regard to both industry and services. In terms of the innovation performance of SMEs, Switzerland is at the forefront, along with Sweden and Finland, ahead of Israel, the USA and Japan.

■ Panini World Cup stickers have come up against an original competitor – the “Der König” album presents Switzerland’s best wrestlers who will compete in the Swiss national wrestling tournament and alpine festival in Frauenfeld from 20 to 22 August 2010. More than a million stickers have been sold.

■ The Federal Council recommended the rejection of the popular initiative calling for six weeks of holiday a year for all workers. The union Travail, Suisse submitted the necessary signatures in June 2009 and the Swiss people will now decide at a referendum in 2011 or 2012.

■ Air pollution in Switzerland is still too high. Greenhouse gas emissions reached 53.2 million tonnes in 2008, 0.5% more than in 1990 and 4.6 tonnes above the limit set by the Kyoto Protocol.

■ The conflict between Switzerland and Libya over the Hannibal Kadhafi affair has finally been resolved. The two Swiss citizens detained in Libya have been released, Rachid Hamdani in February after 19 months and Max Goldi in June after almost 700 days. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Micheline Calmy-Rey hopes that Swiss relations with Tripoli can now return to normal.

■ According to a survey, more than half of the Swiss population surf the Internet (55%) every day compared to 51% of Austrians and 43% of Germans. A study by Pro Senectute showed that just 38% of senior citizens are online.

■ The employment indicator of the “Konjunkturforschungstelle” (Economic Research Unit) is pointing upwards again, reaching 2.9 points in April compared to 1.4 points in April 2009. This suggests a return to growth and a turnaround on the labour market.

■ The army will have to pay out more than a billion francs to clean up pollution left by military exercises, particularly target practice. Damage was caused by the heavy metal and residue from flamethrowers which contaminated the earth and polluted ground water in some 1,500 locations.

■ The Federal Administrative Court has annulled the 333 million-franc fine imposed by the Competition Commission (Comco) on Swisscom for charging its mobile competitors excessive termination fees. Swisscom nevertheless still faces another 220-million-franc fine, pronounced by Comco in June 2009, for abusing its market position in broadband Internet connections.
The quality of a Swiss watch, neatly packaged in an airline.

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