

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
February 2015



**The Prix de Lausanne – a major event
for talented young ballet dancers**

**Switzerland's secret army bunkers
open up for tourism**

**Swiss scientists and universities lead
the way in aerospace technology**

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Battle over political direction

- 5 Mailbag
- 6 Images
Caspas Wolf and the mountains
- 8 Focus
A new chapter for Swiss army bunkers
- 12 Column
Georg Kohler on election year
- 14 Politics
The President of the Swiss Confederation – a profile
- 16 Literature
John Knittel
- Regional news
- 17 Culture
A springboard for outstanding dancers
- 20 Science
Switzerland in outer space
- 22 Culture
The maverick humour of Plonk & Replonk
- 25 OSA news
- 27 nesw.admin.ch
- 27 Imprint
- 30 Little gems and Echo



The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” has been the focus of media and political interest since mid-December, and not just in Switzerland as the NZZ is the only Swiss newspaper to attract attention internationally. What has happened? The editor-in-chief, Markus Spillmann, a high-profile journalist, was ousted by the Board of Directors, not officially but de facto. The editorial staff, which includes over

200 journalists, protested against the Board’s plans to appoint Markus Somm as Spillmann’s successor. Somm, also a well-known journalist, leans very much to the right politically. He is also a close friend and the biographer of Christoph Blocher, the Vice-President and driving force behind the Swiss People’s Party (SVP).

The decision on who will be the future editor-in-chief of the 234-year-old NZZ, which is closely allied with the FDP.The Liberals, was unclear at the time of writing this editorial. The “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” wrote: “There is tremendous disarray”, with its “inept behaviour” the Board of Directors has “created a shambles”.

This showdown undoubtedly reflects the struggle over the future direction of Swiss politics. The liberal outlook and differentiated criticism of the NZZ and its editor-in-chief is a thorn in the side of those close to the SVP and they are attempting to bring the newspaper into line with their positions for the current election campaign.

Georg Kohler, a professor emeritus of political philosophy at the University of Zurich, has a profound understanding of Swiss politics. His analyses are so clear-sighted that he is held in high regard by all political parties. He will provide observations during the electoral campaign and reflections upon it this year in a column in every issue of “Swiss Review”. On page 12 onwards of the current issue, Kohler looks at the decision-making process, the “classe politique” and compromises.

The article in the December issue of “Swiss Review” on the row over languages and the debate about the early learning of French and language teaching in Swiss schools generated a tremendous response. What we found surprising was that in the readers’ letters and comments from the Swiss Abroad the vast majority regarded the early teaching and knowledge of the second major national language, in other words French or German, as more important than the teaching of English at primary school level. Here is a quotation that reflects the view of many people: “(Almost) everyone will learn English sooner or later because it is an omnipresent, prestigious and useful language.”

I would like to thank all our readers who also expressed their opinions – constructively without exception – on the new layout and the new website.

BARBARA ENGEL



Cover photo: Miko Fogarty, an 18-year-old Swiss Abroad from California, is one of the great hopes at the Prix de Lausanne.
Photo: donated

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Known all over the world

Look at how the modern world works. Without a common language – at least a basic knowledge of the second major national language – it will be difficult to explain to future generations how Switzerland works. We Swiss are also well known for our linguistic skills all over the world. And I'm not referring to English here because that is now spoken by many people. Let us not give up this advantage through being idle!

STEPHAN BERNHARD, BY EMAIL

Early English is superfluous

(Almost) everyone will learn English sooner or later because it is an omnipresent, prestigious and useful language. Early English learning is therefore superfluous. Our children and young people should learn French (or German) first. The minimum requirement is a passive knowledge. The call for Swiss German to be spoken in French-speaking Switzerland is absurd. We write our readers' letters and comments in High German without any problems.

ANDREAS ERNST, BY EMAIL

"Home advantage" of linguistic diversity

The Swiss should make the most of their home advantage to start learning French as early as possible. They will learn English at some point anyway. I am extremely grateful for having "home advantage" with French in my new home in Belgium, both professionally but also privately and culturally. Switzerland should maintain its cultural and linguistic diversity, otherwise it risks being diminished. The German-speaking Swiss, even if they make up the absolute majority in Switzerland, should not become idle. The example set by the people of Ticino and the Romansh speakers should be followed!

GRAZIA BERGER, BY EMAIL

Can the people also get it wrong?

I holiday in Switzerland every year. It is the most wonderful country on earth. The natural environment is perfect, the food is of the highest quality, transport is readily available, and the Swiss people generally are a pleasure to deal with. The most wonderful thing of all about Switzerland is that, through direct democracy, the Swiss have the power to stop government from destroying their society, and that is why Switzerland is the envy of the world. Naturally, there will be an element within Swiss society who resent the fact that they cannot force their views on everyone else, but, fortunately, the Swiss democratic system prevents this from happening. In contrast, in my home country, Australia, we truly have a "tyranny of the minority". The media, academia, the public services and the institutions of the country are predominantly leftist and they tightly control the political agenda, ensuring ordinary people have little or no say in national policy. As a consequence, our society and our economy are in decline. So, be thankful that you have the power to stop politicians from making self-serving decisions that cause great harm to your country.

BARRY, AUSTRALIA

Max Lobe and the language of joy



MAX LOBE: "La Trinité bantoue" (in French only), éditions Zoé, Geneva 2014. 208 pages.

In 2010, when the Swiss people were called upon to vote on a federal popular initiative entitled "For the deportation of foreign criminals", posters displayed by the majority party on which white sheep chased a black sheep out of Switzerland's borders could be seen everywhere. In Max Lobe's latest novel, "La Trinité bantoue", the same posters adorn the walls of "Helvetia". This small country at the heart of Europe strangely resembles the Switzerland we know and it is here that the narrator Mwána lives. Originally from an imaginary African country, Bantouland, he lives in poverty in Geneva with his friend Ruedi.

They have difficulty making ends meet, as Mwána lost his job as soon as he finished studying. His applications never come to anything. Ruedi, unemployed, refuses to accept any help from his family in Graubünden. Fortunately, Monga Míngá, Mwána's mother, sends them food from Bantouland – "cassava pancakes, cassava and more cassava". But not for very long: Monga Míngá, diagnosed with throat cancer, comes to Helvetia for medical treatment, staying in Lugano where Mwána's very Catholic sister, Kosambela, lives. "Misery is knocking hard at our door," laments Mwána, who will not give in. With a joyful spirit and inventive use of language, he chooses to laugh about the xenophobic climate prevailing in Helvetia where skin-heads disrupt 1 August celebrations on the Rütli meadow. But something more tragic lies beneath the salutary laughter – the hard-to-imagine misery that plagues this country, often invisibly and silently. Max Lobe looks at unemployment, charity organisations, social welfare and the sense of shame associated with it with a deep sense of humanity and sharp observation to reveal the antechamber to the idyllic and wealthy Switzerland.

Max Lobe casts a sharp eye on the time in which he lives, using a language that reveals the constant search for identity. Dreamed up, warm and powerful, Max Lobe's language draws upon many sources – German, Swiss German, Italian, various forms of French and African tongues. All of these languages sit side by side, clatter together and complement one another to provide an open outlook on the world, forging links between Bantouland and Helvetia. This language also represents a means of not giving in to the silence imposed on Monga Míngá by her illness.

ROMAIN BUFFAT

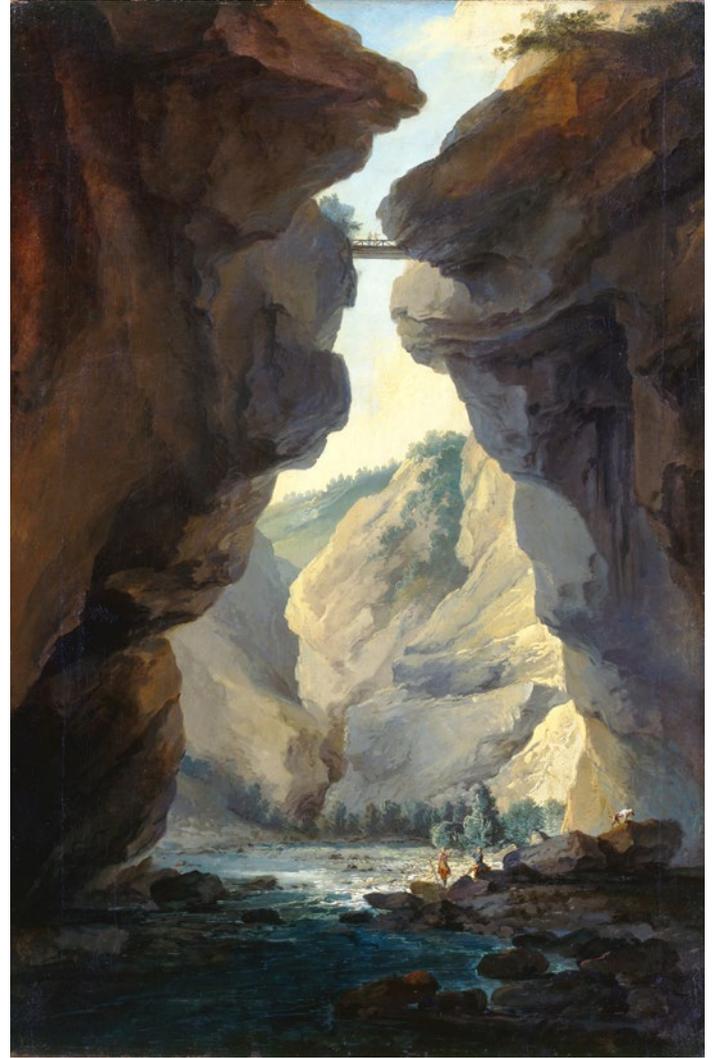
When the mountains became the subject of art

The Alps – as well as other mountain ranges – were first regarded as aesthetically appealing and “noble” during the course of the 18th century. Caspar Wolf – who was born in Muri in the canton of Aargau in 1735 and died in Heidelberg in 1783 – was one of the first people not only to document the largely undeveloped mountain regions but also to portray them artistically. He idealised the alpine landscape through dramatic lighting and unusual perspectives, such as from caves. The Museum of Fine Arts in Basel is holding an impressive exhibition of Caspar Wolf’s work which also features paintings by a number of his contemporaries and recent photographs of some of these locations in the Alps.

www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch



Panorama of the Grindelwald Valley with the Wetterhorn, Mettenberg, and Eiger



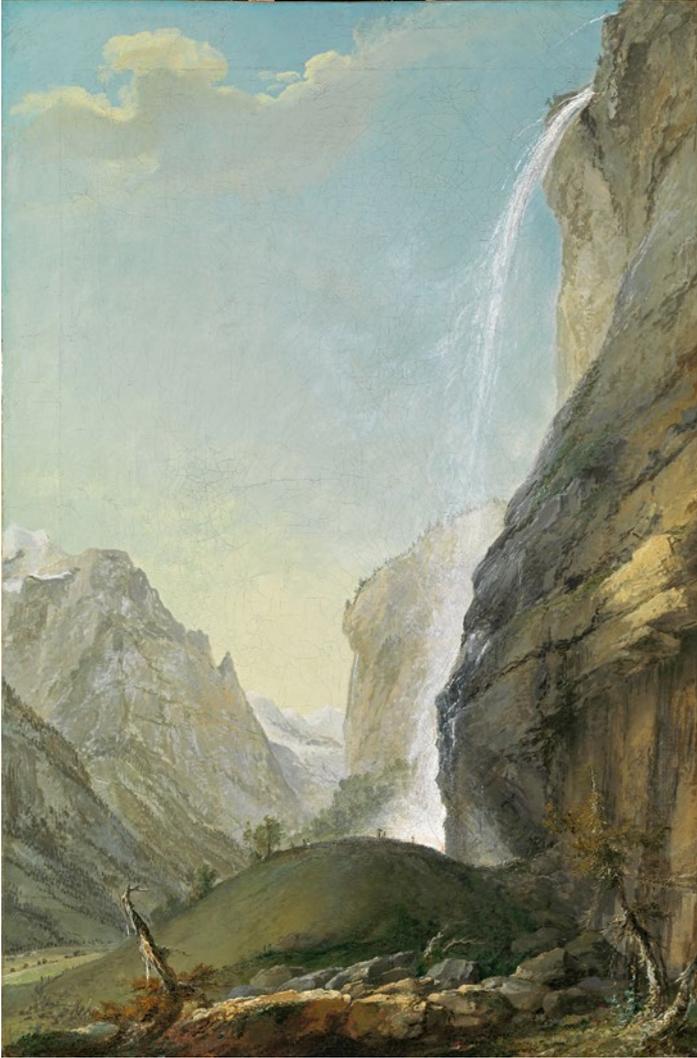
Dala Gorge near Leuk, exit Looking north



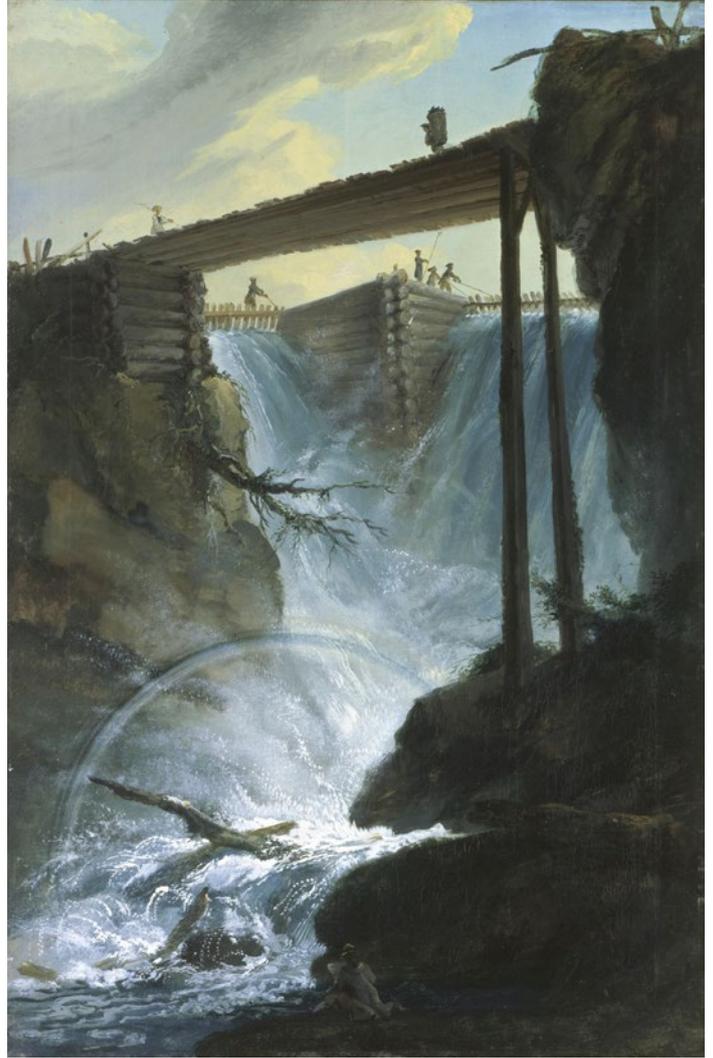
Gadmen Valley with Tittlis, Wenden Glacier, Grassen and the Fünffingerstock



Lower Grindelwald Glacier, with the Lütschine River and



The Staubbachfall in summer



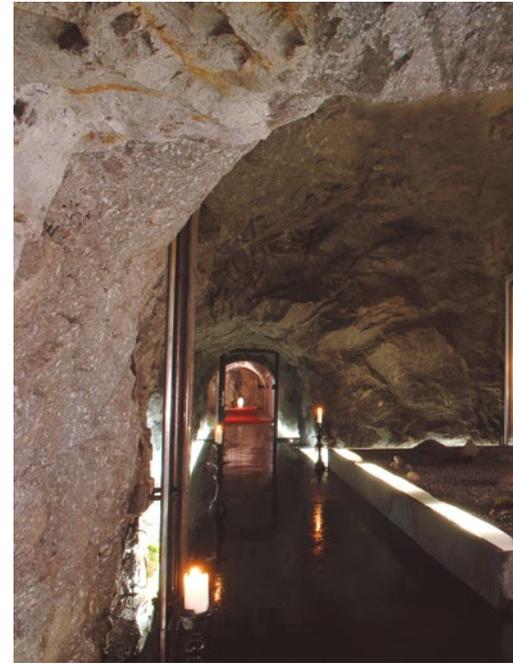
Weir near Mühletal, east of Innertkirchen



Mettenberg



Rhône Glacier from the valley near Gletsch



A second lease of life for Swiss alpine fortresses

The once gigantic fortifications in the Swiss Alps have been taken out of military use. But their legend lives on. The previously top secret bunkers are now being turned into theme parks.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

An idyllic forest path at the foot of the Harder, the mountain above Interlaken in the Bernese Oberland. Off the beaten track there is a wooden-clad structure attached to the rock in log cabin style with a solid wooden door – a shelter for forestry workers or perhaps a tool shed. Around 20 people are standing in front of the entrance on a rainy Sunday in April 2014, including a now 84-year-old former Chief of Staff in the Swiss army. What has brought this group together? A wider public is being given the opportunity to take a look behind the wooden cladding for the first time. It is, of course, not a tool shed but until recently a top secret military facility. The Swiss army's General Staff used

this bomb-proof bunker deep in the mountain during the Second World War. Until the 1990s, the so-called Goldey Tunnel was used as a command and control installation and as a key communication centre, liaising with all the army's major units and with the Federal Council. General Henri Guisan's protected emergency command post was in a separate location just a few kilometres away.

Headquarters in Interlaken

Interlaken, a magnet for tourists for centuries, was also a key military site for many years. Its position in the heart of Switzerland, shielded by Lake Thun and Lake Brienz and surrounded by high mountains, meant that it was predestined to become the location of the army headquarters from 1941 to 1944. Still today, the mountains around Interlaken contain numerous tunnel systems, command posts, underground munitions and fuel stores, infantry bunkers and artillery fortifications. All access routes to Interlaken – by water, by land and

even from the air – could have been fired upon from large-scale military installations in the event of war. This was the time of the *réduit*, the withdrawal of large parts of the army to the central regions of the Alps. The *réduit* was intended to act as a deterrent and to engage attackers in protracted battles if an invasion took place.

Switzerland fortunately never had to prove that the army entrenched in the mountains could successfully defend the nation. The significance of the *réduit* is a point of contention among historians. Nevertheless, the legend of the impregnable alpine fortresses is deeply engrained in the Swiss collective consciousness.

Gigantic cave systems

However, little more than legend remains of the once impressive alpine fortifications. In 1995, most of the facilities were decommissioned and all the others will soon follow suit, except for a few command and control bunkers that will remain secret. Financial and strategic considerations

The entrance to the artillery bunker beneath the Gotthard, which is today the La Clastra seminar and themed hotel

The concealed entrance of the Goldey Tunnel near Unterseen in the Bernese Oberland





spelt the end for the military tunnel system after the Cold War. The scale of this system was absolutely gigantic during its heyday. It was made up of a total of around 26,000 components of various sizes. The fortresses with permanently installed heavy artillery and other weapons were distributed across the entire mountain landscape. As a rule of thumb, wherever there is a mountain, there is or was a military underworld. Many facilities were self-sufficient, which meant they were equipped not just with weapons but also with an infrastructure that enabled survival deep inside the mountains for long periods. They had their own power supply, dormitories, restaurants, recreation rooms, kitchens, bakeries and hospitals. The fortifications constructed after the Second World War were also designed to withstand a nuclear bomb attack.

Many of the facilities became superfluous with the “Army 95” and “Army XXI” reforms. They all had to be inventoried. Silvio Keller, the former project manager for military

monuments at the Federal Department of Defence (DDPS), outlines the procedure: “We had to carry out a selection process to determine which facilities were of national, regional or local importance, which should be maintained and which could be dismantled or sold off.” Many private army clubs and foundations are in fact currently purchasing these caverns throughout Switzerland and making them accessible to the public.

New worlds of experience

The unused caves are being restored with great care and fitted with military equipment true to the original, providing an additional tourist attraction. Not only will people climb up Swiss mountains more frequently in future, they will also explore inside them. “An experience for young and old alike: Visit this fascinating bunker in Beatenbucht on Lake Thun,” reads the leaflet for one infantry bunker, for example. The St. Maurice fortified facility in Valais offers an “historically significant visit”. Visitors can discover

The restaurant at the La Claustra hotel

There is great interest in the Sasso San Gottardo bunker

the “highlights of the history of Swiss military fortifications from 1911 to 1995 and gain an insight into garrison life”. The “Schwyzer Festungswerke” foundation advertises the “immaculately preserved” underground command post at Selgis in Muotathal. It can be visited throughout the year and provides wheelchair access. Tours are available, of course, as are aperitifs and dinners at the fortress. What was once highly confidential is gradually being transformed into an underground theme park.

In the heart of the Gotthard

Such an initiative has already been set up at the Sasso San Gottardo military facility. “An unforgettable experience” is offered, according to the advertisement. The entrance, an inconspicuous door, is found just off the mountain pass at the Gotthard hospice. Warm clothing is advisable, even in summer, for visits to the military cave system. When passing through the damp, rather claustrophobic access tunnels, visitors feel as though they have en-



The entrance to the La Claustra seminar hotel

The former government bunker in Amsteg – today the business premises of Swiss Data Safe and Swiss Gold Safe

tered the mother of all caves. This is Switzerland's largest fortress facility. Tunnels that run for miles connect caverns which are so high that they stored not only tons of munitions but also food, water and other items essential for survival as provisions for several hundred soldiers for months at a time.

After a ten-minute walk, visitors reach a subterranean funicular railway which previously served as an ammunition hoist. Here tourists visiting the facility are greeted in person by a soldier wearing the uniform of the Fortress Troops. He transports the visitors in a little munitions train, and now the tour begins in earnest. The little train goes further and higher into the mountain. On arrival at the top, tourists soon enter a cafeteria where souvenirs are also on sale. Over a glass of fortress wine, they can now decide whether to visit the military section of the facility first or go straight to the multimedia exhibition.

In the military section, in addition to a film, the troops' accommodation, the command and telephone centres and pieces of artillery can be seen. This is a site that was still highly confidential until the 1990s. Revealing information about such military locations was deemed high treason,

an offence punishable with the death sentence during the Second World War. A large share of the Swiss gold reserves were also stashed away here during the war. One tunnel leads to a newly built outside platform for visitors where the view of the mountains can be enjoyed from a remarkable perspective right alongside a four-metre-long gun barrel.

The non-military part of the Sasso San Gottardo fortress contains a multimedia theme park. Where hundreds of soldiers once served, information about water, weather and climate, energy, security and living space and our use of natural resources is now provided in a permanent exhibition. One topic is the Gotthard as the reservoir of Europe and a watershed, while a small underground glacier provides viewing material on the subject of climate change, and the constant increase in traffic along Europe's most significant north-south axis is also covered.

Wellness instead of heavy artillery

Not far from Sasso San Gottardo on the Ticino side of the pass lies the former artillery facility of San Carlo. This site, standing at 2,000 metres above sea level, was converted into probably Switzerland's best-pro-



tected hotel in 2004. The former fortress is now the four-star La Claustra seminar venue and themed hotel. But it is not recommended for people who suffer from claustrophobia. The advert says: "Anyone who visits this hotel can feel, smell and hear it. Guests will find themselves in a cave, or more precisely a disused artillery bunker on the Gotthard. Seminars and retreats can now be held at this venue where an underground world and its sense of security can be explored."

And the hotel has plenty to offer. In addition to meeting rooms, elegantly furnished guest rooms with running water from its own five underground sources and a restaurant, there is also a steam bath and a water grotto. "We are continuing to invest," says Rainer Geissmann. The businessman from Liechtenstein purchased the facility in 2012 and is full of drive. Geissmann reveals that "two exclusive suites and a Finnish sauna are to be installed" in winter 2014/15. The transformation of the site between 1999 and 2004 already cost eight million Swiss francs and it has never operated on a break-even basis.

Even the new owner concedes that the business is not yet highly profitable, but he says that it is on the up as "we are a globally unique hotel".



Interest is growing: The travel magazine “Geo Saison” has included La Claustra in its list of the 100 finest hotels in Europe. Television stations from all over the world come and go non-stop. In November 2014, shortly before the winter break, a team from Russian state TV also visited the Gotthard to produce a 45-minute programme.

The notion of protection redefined

The former government bunker in Amsteg, north of the Gotthard, is still used for security purposes rather than wellness or gastronomy. This place where a two-storey chalet was once built into the rock to provide the most senior body in the land with something akin to a civilian environment and which once housed 123 cars and 13 lorries is now occupied by a business which attaches just as much importance to discretion as the army once did – Swiss Data Safe AG and Swiss Gold Safe AG.

According to its advertisement, Swiss Data Safe provides “comprehensive protection and security services for a national and international clientèle in high-security facilities deep in the Swiss mountains”. “IT systems, data, files and archives, as well as valuables, works of art and

cultural assets” are bunkered there. The infrastructure in the Swiss Alps is more secure than in any bank, according to the advert, as its security measures “exceed the banks’ guidelines” in terms of locking systems, access control, surveillance and fire protection.

The second company, Swiss Gold Safe, hires out safe deposit boxes. It also provides this service for “non-Swiss citizens for valuables such as documents, jewellery and precious metals (without opening an account with a bank) in one of the world’s top private high-security facilities”. Why Switzerland? The company’s homepage states that Switzerland “is one of the most stable countries in the world politically and economically

In the vaults of Swiss Data Safe

and has a long tradition of protecting assets”. The old fortifications are therefore no longer being used for the protection of the population and the state but instead for safeguarding worldly goods.

Whether it is modest, small-scale museums run by local nostalgics, the cultivation of mushrooms – another activity being pursued – in cool, damp vaults, theme parks, highly professional museums, extraordinary hotels or high-security bunkers, the imaginative purposes know no bounds. The second life of these once top secret military sites with their tunnels, fortresses and bunkers has only just begun.

JÜRIG MÜLLER IS AN EDITOR WITH THE “SWISS REVIEW”

Importance during the war

Together with the fortifications of Saint-Maurice in the west and Sargans in the east, the military facility in the Gotthard formed the backbone of the réduit defence capability during the Second World War and the Cold War. General Henri Guisan wrote the following about the importance of the fortifications in his report on

active service from 1939 to 1945: “I am convinced that our fortifications had a major impact on German plans from 1943 onwards, and it is likely that they made a significant contribution towards the decision to refrain from attacking Switzerland. The expenditure on these facilities therefore certainly paid off.”

Parliament, polarisation, political class and the popular vote

Modern, pluralistic democracy and its fundamental principle of popular sovereignty cannot be achieved without political parties or, to be more precise, without a party political system.

GEORG KOHLER

The size of the population, the complexity of social control mechanisms and the need for various, sometimes very opposing, opinions to find permanent representatives makes the democratic formation of will and decision-making based on the model of the people's assembly or the Athenian polis assembly an impossibility. "Popular sovereignty", as the result of the direct encounter between government and autonomous citizens, as a process between stakeholders dealing with one another directly so that pending issues are discussed and decided upon in lively public debate by a society mindful of social solidarity, is impossible if the state is no longer a city or a small region.

Switzerland's very special form of democratic governance also requires political parties. The years in which the national parliament, the actual forum and objective of modern party formation, is elected and renewed, are consequently of great importance. Admittedly, in considering the Swiss situation, parliamentary elections cannot be discussed without taking account of the impact of the popular rights which constantly traverse Swiss parliamentary democracy.

This is clearly evident in three respects: firstly, with regard to the *classe politique*; secondly, in the analysis of our political system, which is essentially based on concordance but is facing increasingly acute polarisation trends; and, thirdly, in addressing the issue of the nation's collective identity which has been exigent for some years now.

1. The term "political class" is a polemically applied category but also the designation of a sociological fact. In a society which places demands on its leadership roles that can no longer be met through part-time engagement but instead only with great time commitment and personal specialist knowledge, a group inevitably has to emerge to professionally perform the functions of the political system (which also includes the upper echelons of the judicial system and the public administration). It is not possible to explore this in detail here.



Georg Kohler is a professor emeritus of political philosophy at the University of Zurich. He will be providing observation and analysis for the Swiss Abroad throughout the 2015 election campaign.

However, it is evident that a National Council mandate cannot be combined with a full-time position in another profession.

Group-specific interests do, of course, quickly emerge as a result of such professionalisation, and this is recognised by everyone concerned with the *res publica*. "After the elections everything remains as before the elections" – "All politicians only want to serve the wishes of their electorate" – "These people are ultimately only concerned with personal gain", etc. are examples – in characteristic progression – of the polemical conclusions which the "people" (and above all their self-declared advocates) draw, usually much too quickly, from the fact that politicians have become professional. And the state of affairs in contemporary society has produced the populist buzzword of *classe politique* as the name for an upper stratum of people who unashamedly profiteer from democracy.

The disappearance of amateur politicians, who are deserving of the title, is certainly a serious problem for a nation long committed to the notion of part-time contributions from more or less unpaid civic volunteers. Furthermore, the trend demonstrated by the political economy whereby public interest orientation is sacrificed if it no longer concurs with personal professional interests is undeniable. "*Classe politique*" – used critically – denotes decadent developments which can be observed in many parts of the world. Somewhat different, however, is the use of this category to discredit those people who, for commendable reasons, have dedicated themselves to the work undertaken at the national parliament as part of (semi) direct democracy.

The disdain now inextricably associated with the term *classe politique* almost always appears in conjunction with simultaneous praise for popular rights. This is because these are seen as the remedy to the self-seeking of false elites. This sort of thing is often heard in the election campaign getting underway. Such sentiment is dangerous, extremist and untypical of Switzerland. On the one hand, such rhetoric undermines the trust of the public in their representatives and, on the other, turns popular rights, a single element of our constitution that

only works well in the overall context of the carefully balanced system of institutions, into the be-all and end-all. Thirdly, it disguises the fact that its critics are also part of the professional political class.

2. Polarisation has become a dominant trait of domestic Swiss politics over the past 20 years. The previous Swiss system of concordance democracy intended to ensure balance has, since the turn of the century, increasingly been transformed into a dissenting community which only grudgingly achieves the compromises demanded by institutional structures. A good example is the ongoing dispute over the interpretation of the “magic formula”, the row over the party political allocation of the seven Federal Council seats.

Various reasons exist for the change in the nation’s political culture. The most significant is probably the changed perception of Switzerland’s position in the European state system after the epochal watershed of 1989. The small neutral country universally respected, which undoubtedly belonged to the West, became the outsider nation whose reputation no longer entirely concurred with its economic significance.

Switzerland’s new position in Europe is a key factor in the debate over the nation’s collective identity and provides an explanation for the remarkable increase in (successful) constitutional initiatives over the past decade. The role of popular rights in the state of Swiss domestic politics has thus once again come to the forefront.

While referenda – the opportunity to overthrow a law approved by parliament through popular decision-making – inevitably ensured consensus in the post-war period of 1945 to 1990 (only laws “fit for referendum” made through compromise had a chance of succeeding at the ballot box), Switzerland is today overshadowed by fierce disputes over emotionally charged initiative proposals.

The fact that constitutional initiatives are easier to orchestrate and win than before in the new media democracy environment is explained by technological factors amongst others. The mobilisation of support is easier to achieve digitally than with the old analogue media. In addition, one of the federal parties, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), is in any event extremely well organised and possesses a powerful party apparatus which operates with instinctive understanding for those collective moods which are not easily reconciled with official politics – moods which are often an expression of anxiety and anger over general social developments, collective sentiments which are not directly political but can be politicised. The “people” therefore become the antithesis of the *classe politique*,

and the SVP perceives itself as their guardian and mouth-piece to express their needs.

The price of this strategy, which often sees over half of the electorate support the SVP, is nevertheless the aforementioned polarisation and therefore the dissolution of the long-practised consensus procedures which made the nation politically predictable, accordingly dull and, in many respects, economically attractive.

That is not a criticism but an observation. It is explained by the fact that the post-industrial transformation of civilisation, which further accelerated after the end of the Cold War, undermined the nation’s traditional political culture and brought it into stark contrast with the previous functional requirements of its institutions. The forthcoming election campaign and its outcome are therefore also a plebiscite on the SVP’s political agenda and on Switzerland’s political culture which is therefore under scrutiny.

3. “Who are we?” – This is the question that underlies to a greater or lesser extent all of the main points of contention in the 2015 election year.

Due to the political framework conditions, which means the continental ones, to which Switzerland – situated at the heart of Europe – is exposed, this question must be answered more explicitly than in the past. This is because the old definitions – a point of reference for Switzerland and its foreign and domestic policies – have become fragile. Too many facts seem to contradict the established and entrenched notions of identity.

Switzerland as an armed, neutral and republican society that does no harm to anyone, a small state whose citizens do business worldwide but at the same time live on the autonomous rock of their very own democracy, on a small planet, so to speak, which cuts itself off from the rest of the world – can such a perception be in keeping with the times?

At the 2015 parliamentary elections, the people will voice their opinions on this matter one way or the other. It just remains to be seen whether they do so in a harmonious or in a discordant manner.



ELECTIONS
2015

Calm, composed and undogmatic – Swiss President Simonetta Sommaruga

Concert pianist Simonetta Sommaruga has been playing the political keyboard virtuoso for years. As President of the Swiss Confederation in 2015, the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police is responsible for some of the most contentious issues.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

September 2013: The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) was celebrating its 125th anniversary with a huge public celebration in Berne's historic centre. The news spread through the crowd like wildfire – in a few minutes there would be a surprise event at the nearby “Progr” cultural centre. The hall was packed to the rafters, and there was a great sense of anticipation amongst the crowd. The two SP Federal Councillors, Minister of Justice Simonetta Sommaruga and Minister of Home Affairs Alain Berset, stepped onto the stage, sat down at the piano and delighted the audience with their piano duet. Sommaruga was wearing a long, black evening dress and Berset a black tuxedo with a bow tie.

It was a spectacle that you would have expected to see in a bourgeois classical concert hall rather than at a public celebration held by the Social Democrats. A trained pianist, Sommaruga does not suffer stage fright. With her understated and elegant appearance, she even appeals to representatives of the most conservative factions. This gave her a decisive advantage over her rival Jacqueline Fehr, the SP National Councillor from Zurich, in the vote to replace the retiring SP Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger in September 2010.

Cool-headed minister dealing with emotive issues

The allocation of departments provided a bumpier ride than the election. The fact that Simonetta Sommaruga had to take over the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) against her wishes and the wishes of her party sparked a sharply worded protest from SP President Christian Levrat. It was clear even then that few plaudits could be won at the FDJP, which is a political minefield. Sommaruga not only bears responsibility for several popular initiatives approved by the Swiss people with complex implementation problems, but also for the emotive issues of asylum and immigration policy. While the implementation of the SVP initiative against mass immigration adopted in February 2014 is a Herculean task in itself, the Federal Councillor is also driving forward the restructuring of the refugee system at a brisk pace. The dispatch on major asylum reform was submitted to Parliament in September. The main objective is much faster procedures. To achieve this goal, six large-scale federal asylum centres will be built. The search for sites, which was due to be completed by the end of last year, is proving difficult.



The new Swiss President nevertheless seems to be spurred on by challenges. The minister shows no sign of emotion or anxiety, even in the most testing moments. She always appears cool and composed and exudes a calm of deep concentration and focus. Even during heated public debates, she does not betray any more emotion than an almost undetectable slight twitch of the facial muscles. And even though she occasionally speaks very frankly, she always maintains a rather detached friendliness.

Tirelessly striving for perfection

The new Swiss President is the ideal exponent of the art of networking, who attempts to engage all parties in the decision-making process and persistently endeavours to reach a compromise. When she suffers setbacks, she conducts herself like a model pupil, or perhaps a musician tirelessly striving for perfection. She starts afresh, reflects on the issue again and tries a new approach.

She still plays the piano regularly but has not performed as a pianist for some time. During her career, Sommaruga for a long time held the position of chief executive and then president of the Swiss Consumer Protection Foundation, which made her a well-known and popular figure with large sections of the public. She gained experience on the executive in the commune of Köniz, a suburb of Berne, from 1997 to 2005, and also held a seat on the National Council from 1999. In 2003, thanks to her popularity, she won one of the two Council of States seats in the canton of Berne for the SP. With the exception of a short period in the 1950s, these seats had always been held by conservatives.

The 54-year-old politician, who grew up in the canton of Aargau and is married to the author Lukas Hartmann, is no slave to the party. On the contrary, as the co-author of the so-called Gurten manifesto in 2001, she was long regarded as a rebel within the party. The left-wing, liberal document questioned various traditional social democratic principles and said that the SP's voter base was in the centre rather than on the left. This infuriated prominent colleagues and the party establishment who saw this as “neo-liberal pandering” to the conservatives. Sommaruga was treated with disdain in some circles. However, the SP was obviously unable to overlook her popularity and cleverly took advantage of it. What has remained nevertheless is Simonetta Sommaruga's reputation as an independently-minded politician.

JÜRIG MÜLLER IS AN EDITOR WITH THE “SWISS REVIEW”

A brace of tax bills

Two tax bills will be put to the vote in a plebiscite on 8 March 2015. One popular initiative calls for tax relief for families with children while the other seeks to replace VAT with an energy tax.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

The Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) is striving to position itself as a "family-oriented party". The first item in the party's 2014 manifesto states: "We are fighting on behalf of families." It is therefore fortuitous that the first referendum of the 2015 election year will address the party's key issue. "Child and education allowances are tax-free": By incorporating this simple provision into the federal constitution, the CVP aims to ensure families have more disposable income at the end of the month. The party believes the taxation of these allowances constitutes an "unjustified increase in taxable income".

This reignites a debate about tax and families which took place the year before last. An initiative proposed by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) then sought to provide tax relief for families looking after their children themselves, but the bill was rejected in November 2013. Financial policy arguments were put forward on that occasion. The same applies to the new bill. The Federal Council estimates that the approval of the CVP initiative would result in a fall in tax revenues of around one billion Swiss francs for federal government, the cantons and the communes.

The CVP essentially fought a lone battle in Parliament. Daniel Stolz, the FDP National Councillor from Basel, dubbed the popular initiative a "nice election campaign gimmick" but that was about the only compliment the CVP received. The overwhelming majority of parliamentarians from left to right were unable to lend support to

the initiative. Child and education allowances are a salary component and therefore income-generating, they argue. Families with children already receive tax relief of around nine billion Swiss francs a year (through reduced health insurance fund premiums, graduated nursery charges, social and supplementary benefits and cantonal tax allowances). Already almost half of all households with children do not pay any direct federal taxes. The fact that primarily the wealthy would benefit from this tax relief is also regarded as a shortcoming of the initiative by many parliamentarians. "59 % of children in Switzerland live in middle-class families, and this initiative is for them," argued Pirmin Bischof, a CVP Council of States member. His words fell on deaf ears. The Federal Council and Parliament advised the Swiss people to reject the bill.

Energy tax instead of VAT

The same applies to the second proposal to be put to the people on 8 March. The Green Liberals (GLP) want to abolish VAT, federal government's most important source of income, and replace it with an energy tax. A tax on non-renewable energy would make saving energy more attractive. Renewable energies would also benefit from a competitive advantage. Those behind the proposal argue that sustainable energy sources would become competitive compared to petroleum, gas and nuclear power and that the withdrawal from nuclear power could be implemented in a climate-friendly and economically feasible way.

The Federal Council generally supports the popular initiative's goal of using energy levies to achieve climate and energy policy objectives. However, sacrificing VAT goes too far for the Federal Council and Parliament. Thomas Hefti, the FDP Council of States member from Glarus, calls it a financial policy gamble. The problem is that if public budgets are to be financed solely from energy tax instead of VAT, very high energy tax rates would be necessary and would far exceed energy and climate policy needs. The situation would become tricky if the incentive effect kicked in and households and the economy consumed less and less non-renewable energy as there would have to be a further sharp hike in tax rates.

Just how differently the bill is viewed in Parliament is revealed by a spat between two representatives from the mountain regions. Martin Candinas, the CVP National Councillor from Grisons, contended that the energy tax would have an extremely adverse effect on tourism. "Mountain railways do not run on cold air." And motorists would think twice about making another trip into the mountains. Jürg Grossen, a GLP representative from the Bernese Oberland, disagreed and argued that the mountain regions, in particular, would benefit enormously as they possess the resources for the production of renewable energies. Or as he put it: "Mountain sunshine instead of coal from the Ruhr" and "hydropower instead of nuclear power".

JÜRIG MÜLLER IS AN EDITOR WITH THE "SWISS REVIEW"

He turned the world into a stage for his novels

John Knittel felt at home in many countries and wrote bestseller after bestseller in English.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

He was born on 24 March 1891, the son of a Basel missionary in Dharwar, India, where he spent the first three years of his life. As a grammar school pupil in Basel, John Knittel seemed “remarkably foreign” to his classmate Carl Jakob Burckhardt. He went back out into the world at the age of 19 before taking his school-leaving exams. In London he worked at a bank, then for a film company and married 17-year-old Frances Rose White-Bridger in 1915. He remained faithful to her until his death on 26 April 1970. He became a dramatist as a result of an encounter with the author Robert Hichens and then a novelist, publishing his first novel in 1921 entitled “Aaron West”, the story of a madman hungry for love who falls to pieces over his love for two women. In 1924, in “A Traveller in the Night”, David Bright, a young man from a good family, is destroyed by love and his environment because he is unable to overcome the trauma of the First World War.

Like Knittel’s entire oeuvre, the two novels were written in English. So, many people took the author, who lived in London, Lisbon, Marrakesh and from 1932 in Ain Shams near Cairo before settling down in Maienfeld, Switzerland, in 1938, for an Englishman. The NZZ observed in 1921: “Knittel is the type of international author for whom language does not matter at all. In any language his work is already a translation.”

Arabian settings

John Knittel’s settings are also international. Between 1929 and 1933, he presented the first three of the novels which gained him a reputation as a savvy expert on the Egyptian and Arab world: “Nile Gold”, the imaginary encounter between an Egyptologist and a female Pharaoh reawakened from mummification; “Midnight People”, the novel about a Moroccan rebel leader who takes a general of the occupying army hostage and is killed by him without discovering that this man is his father; and finally “The Commander”, the novel set in Marrakesh about the Russian foreign legionnaire Igor, who holds an inexplicably strong fascination for women.

Two of his most successful novels are set in Switzerland. The family drama “Into the Abyss”, written in 1927, is a novel in which the young Gottfried Müller is so obsessed with his love for Thérèse, his father’s much younger second wife, that he becomes the driving force in the murder which sees the secret lover get rid of his father. “Via Mala”, published in 1934, also depicts a patricide, this time committed on the self-important Jonas Lauret, the owner of a sawmill in Grisons, who suppresses his children so brutally that they eventually kill him. In 1936, Knittel continued the “Arabian series” with the Egyptian hospital romance “Dr. Ibrahim”, which was followed by the African novel “Terra Magna” in 1948, “Jean-Michel”, the 1953 novel set in France about a soldier returning home from war, and his final work “Arietta”, a novel about industrialists published in 1959.

He was largely unsuccessful after 1945. One reason for this was that Knittel’s traditional storytelling faced competition from more modern forms of writing. There was also the fact that he was tarnished by suspicions of being a Nazi collaborator – owing to his membership of Goebbels’ “European Writers’ Association” – despite the fact that there was never any evidence of alignment with the party, only of naivety at most. With his writing, which made the whole world a stage, featured characters of all skin colours and constantly rebuked Europe for its sins against the Third World, Knittel is as far removed from the chauvinistic racial fanaticism of the Nazis as it is possible to be.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH



“Share and stock certificates are the documents which testify to the hatred and struggle between the classes that rages all over the world today. If Mr. Salomon Montague owns ten thousand pounds’ worth of five-percent war bonds and ten thousand pounds’ worth of shares in Sheffield steel from which he draws an income, I declare that Mr. Salomon Montague is living off the blood and sweat of his fellow man.”

(David Bright in “A Traveller in the Night”, 1924)

Bibliography: “Into the Abyss”, “Via Mala” and “Dr. Ibrahim” are available in German as S. Fischer paperbacks.



Experience for the stage, but also for life

They are highly talented, very determined and 15 to 18 years of age. And they all want just one thing – to win in the Prix de Lausanne. We look at why this dance competition holds such magical appeal for talented dancers from all over the world and what it takes to become a professional dancer.

MARIANNE MÜHLEMANN

“O man, learn to dance, or else the angels in heaven will not know what to do with you!” These words were uttered by the theologian and philosopher Augustine over 1,600 years ago. His advice has been heeded because people are dancing. The styles that are taught, learned and practised around the world include expressive dance, Butoh, modern dance, jazz dance, rock ’n’ roll, hip-hop, step, breakdance, disco dance, tango, oriental, street dance and folk dancing.

Dancing is more than a pastime for the young dancers aged between 15 and 18 who compete each year in the Prix de Lausanne, the Swiss bal-

let competition. These youngsters dance because they feel it is their vocation in life. They are not striving to be IT specialists, doctors or journalists like other people; their only goal in life is to become professional ballet dancers. They have opted to pursue the most demanding of all dance styles. Classical ballet, an art form in its own right, involves a sophisticated system of dance steps. They are the be-all and end-all for an aspiring professional dancer. Anyone who trains their instrument, the body, in ballet creates the optimal basis for the art of expressing moods and feelings purely through movement. But this is where the problem begins. Dance is an ephemeral art form. There are

Miko Fogarty dances variations to “Die Flamme von Paris” at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver

no scores like in music and no libretti like in the theatre. Dance is passed on and taught, from person to person.

Short career span

“O man, learn to dance!” That is easier said than done. Young dancers have a difficult path to follow and face intense competition before they make it to the top. Those wishing to turn professional must learn to dance at an early age and train regularly with great discipline but also in the proper way. Even for dancers who possess all the physical and mental attributes required – determination, a good memory, musicality and stamina – there is no guaran-



tee that they will ever perform on stage as a soloist. And because the work takes place behind the scenes at a ballet school, many things can go wrong when preparing for this career. A ballet student wishing to pursue a professional career should switch from a private to a professional ballet school at the age of just 10. However, such schools only exist in major cities. This means that many of these children have to leave their parental home at an early age and not all of them possess the self-confidence required at that stage. The dance training also presents a dual challenge as normal school lessons have to be attended in addition to daily dance training.

It is just as arduous later on. After finishing education, the search for a position with a company begins. This is particularly difficult for those who do not have any stage experience. Finally, dancing is a short-lived career as ballet dancers are considered over the hill by the age of 38 at the latest. At an age when others have not yet

peaked in their careers, dancers are faced with the question: What now?

Potential counts

One person who was very familiar with the circumstances and problems facing up-and-coming professional dancers was the Swiss industrialist Philippe Braunschweig (1928-2010). The heir of a prominent Swiss watchmaking family from La Chaux-de-Fonds studied physics in Zurich and then managed an international family company. His passion was nevertheless ballet. He wanted to help improve the lives and career prospects of talented youngsters. He also knew how to achieve this – with a scholarship competition. Together with his wife, the Russian ballerina Elvire Krémis, he came up with a scheme and founded the Prix de Lausanne.

The competition became a milestone for the ballet world. It is still regarded as one of the most significant springboards for the career of dancers today. Philippe Braun-

schweig believed that the experience ballet dancers acquired for the stage was also valuable experience for life, as attributes such as discipline, creativity and team spirit are qualities which are also crucial in other professions. Society should not disregard this enormous potential that dancers have to offer. There were, of course, other ballet competitions at the time, such as those in Varna, Bulgaria and Jackson, Mississippi. However, these focused primarily on professional dancers, and their prizes were more confirmation of achievement than funding. The goal of the Prix de Lausanne was to select young dancers with the greatest dance ability and artistic potential from those who were not yet fully trained. As the winner of the “Prix”, they would be given the opportunity to obtain scholarships for the best dance schools in the world.

The concept was well received. Not only could numerous dance schools and companies be secured as partner institutions of the Prix de

Impressions from the Prix de Lausanne



Switzerland gains ground

The 43rd Prix de Lausanne will take place from 1 to 8 February 2015 at the Palais de Beaulieu in Lausanne. Seventy dancers from 18 countries have qualified. These also include four female performers and one male competitor from Switzerland as well as the Swiss Abroad Miko Fogarty from California. The other young dancers come from Australia, Brazil, China, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Ukraine, the UK and the USA. For many years no talented youngsters from Switzerland managed to qualify. This is undoubtedly explained by Switzerland's lack of ballet tradition. Classical dance is a courtly art form, and Switzerland has never had a monarchy, a national opera or a national ballet school. Ballet has only been fostered in Switzerland since the 1950s. Talented young people were trained at private ballet schools long before that. In contrast to other countries, the profession of ballet dancer was not officially recognised. Switzerland thus fell behind by international standards. Since the entry into force of the new Vocational Training Act in 2004 and the revised Universities of Applied Sciences Act in 2005, federal government has been able to recognise professions and courses of study in the arts. Today, Switzerland has its own professional training institution for classical dancers, the Zurich Dance Academy. Talented youngsters from 11 to 19 years of age are prepared here for a career in ballet. Whether they will make it through to the final against the strong foreign competition in Lausanne remains to be seen.

The final will be streamed live. Information, blogs and videos: www.prixdelausanne.org; Crowdfunding via: www.indiegogo.com

Lausanne, various sponsors were also attracted. The competition today operates with a budget of over two million Swiss francs. And it remains innovative. In 2015, an additional scholarship worth USD 50,000 should be awarded for the first time via a crowdfunding website.

But it is not just the prizes that make the Swiss dance competition so attractive. The intensive week – the climax of which is the public semi-final and final with an award ceremony – also provides the young dancers from all over the world with one advantage that other competitions do not offer. Through direct comparison with competitors in their own age group, the young dancers here often have the unique opportunity to discover at an early stage whether their dreams of turning professional are realistic and whether they really possess sufficient talent, personality and determination for a career in dance or whether they might be better off focusing on a different career path in-

stead of sacrificing those vitally important years between 16 and 20 in pursuit of an illusion.

More than just a competition

The "Prix" was held for the first time in Lausanne in 1973. The initiative got off to a good start. What began as a small-scale event on Lake Geneva has continually been developed, adapted and made more professional. The Prix de Lausanne almost became a victim of its own success. The number of entrants – especially from Asia – soared. Whereas 30 dancers entered the competition in the beginning, over two hundred registered just a few years later. There were 296 entrants from 34 countries for the 2015 competition. Seventy got through the pre-selection round (based on a video submitted by the candidates) and will travel to Lausanne in February.

The Prix de Lausanne has also come in for some criticism from the outset. Some harsh accusations have been levelled in more recent times. Such performance-based competitions are excessively demanding, some say. There are major risks of accident, and young girls could be driven to anorexia. The management has responded to the criticism. Since 1999, the "Prix" has been more than just a competition. Over the course of a week, it runs a fringe programme with workshops, training sessions and seminars on key health issues. Unlike previously, these courses are now open to all participants, including those who do not make it through to the final. This, too, makes the "Prix" appealing. It is an enriching experience for everyone. Viewed in this light there are only winners on Lake Geneva.

MARIANNE MÜHLEMANN IS THE CULTURE EDITOR WITH THE "BUND" IN BERNE

A second Switzerland circles the sun

Switzerland is involved whenever history is made in outer space. This was most recently illustrated by the spectacular journey of the Rosetta space probe to “Chury”, or comet 67P. Thanks to technology from the University of Berne, we know that “Chury” stinks of horse stables.

MARC LETTAU

Helvetia is far from charming and resembles a misshapen potato. Helvetia has a wonderful place in the sun but is ice-cold, in fact deathly cold. Let me be clear, Helvetia is the official name given to the small planet no. 113390, which was discovered in 2002. It is a nodule in the heavens, roughly three kilometres wide, which travels around the sun at an average distance of 344 million kilometres. The asteroid also fired the imagination and inspired rhetoric from the Swiss authorities in the year of its discovery. The address by the then Swiss President, Moritz Leuenberger, to the nation was certainly humorous: “Helvetia was discovered in outer space, increasing the proportion of females among the asteroids. A truly cosmopolitan contribution from Switzerland which proves that the universe is so close.” This discovery meant that the nation circles the sun twofold with Switzerland and Helvetia.

A giant leap for Berne

The fact that the International Astronomical Union has given a celestial body the neo-Latin name for Switzerland is an indication of the significance of the contribution made by the small nation to space research. Swiss space scientists are sometimes pioneers. Sunday, 20 July 1969 provides one such example: Before Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong celebrated his first, small step on the moon – this “giant leap for mankind” – and, to-

gether with Edwin Aldrin, planted the US flag in the surface of the moon, the two men had to conduct a Bernese space experiment. Aldrin unfolded a solar wind sail, a device which enabled solar wind particles to be caught and later investigated. The experiment was planned and analysed by the Physics Institute at the University of Berne and physicist Johannes Geiss who worked there. The solar wind sail has been engrained in the Swiss visual consciousness as a milestone achievement, despite its rather unspectacular appearance, resembling a piece of rolled-out household aluminium foil.

Service mechanic in outer space

Two years earlier, Switzerland entered outer space under its own steam. The Swiss rocket “Zenit” was launched from Sardinia and reached a height of 145 kilometres. However, Switzerland could not keep pace in the race between the major space exploration nations. Instead, it established its place in outer space as a dependable developer of components suitable for space travel. This course was well and truly set with the success of the solar wind sail. According to Peter Guggenbach, President of the Swiss Space Industries Group, almost all space missions these days contain aerospace technology from Switzerland. In light of its role as a co-founder of and contributor to the European Space Agency (ESA), Switzerland is also involved in major, joint space

The “Chury” comet’s official name is Churyumov-Gerasimenko



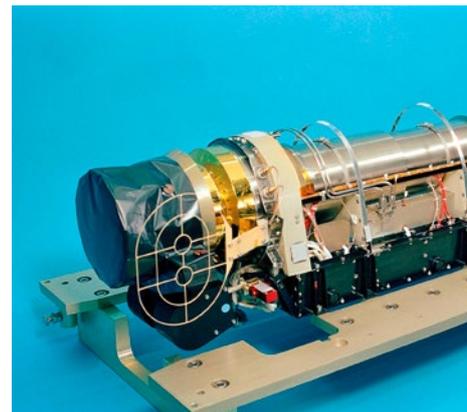
The astrophysicist Kathrin Altwegg from the University of Berne



Claude Nicollier working at the Hubble Space Telescope in December 1999



The spectrometer made using Swiss technology aboard Rosetta

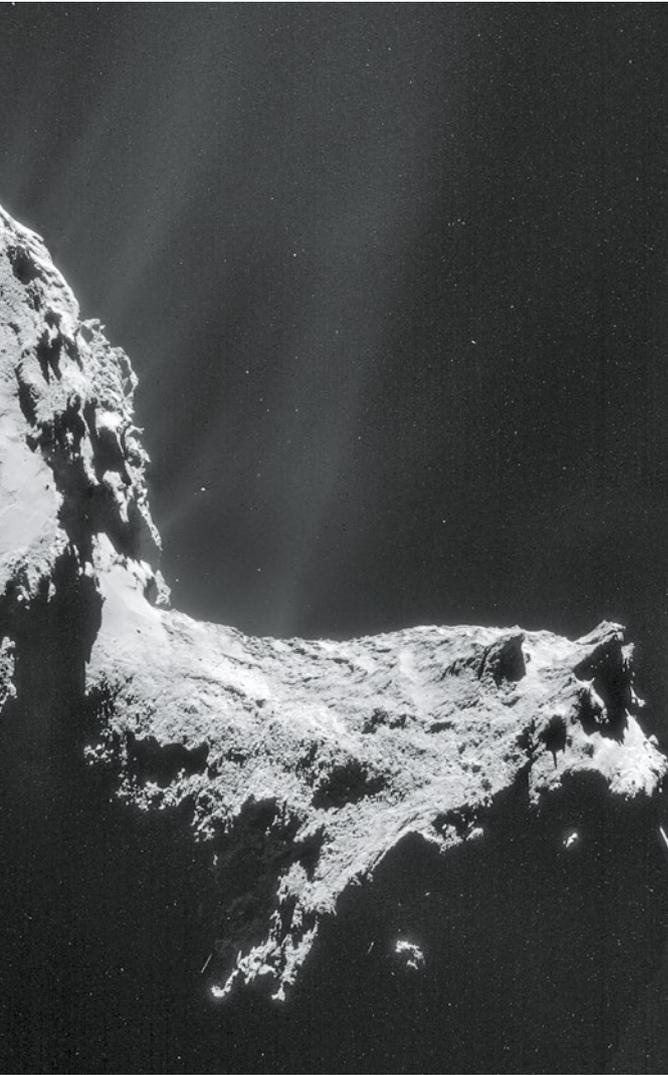


Apollo 11’s solar sail: one of the experiments conducted by Prof. Johannes Geiss from the University of Berne

Prominent Swiss figures in space research

Johann Baptist Cysat (1586 to 1657), a Jesuit priest from Lucerne, discovered new binary star systems. Jean-Philippe Loys de Cheseaux (1718 to 1751), a scholar from Lausanne, documented numerous star clusters and nebulae. Rudolf Wolf (1816 to 1893) from Zurich discovered that the cycle of sunspot activity corresponded with that of the terrestrial magnetic field. Fritz Zwicky (1898 to 1974), from Glarus but born in Bulgaria, overhauled astrophysics in the USA with his theories on extragalactic star systems. Paul Wild (1925 to 2014), from the University of Berne, discovered over 90 asteroids and seven comets, the most important of them being Wild-2.

The "Zenit" rocket developed by Hans Balsiger and Ernest Kopp was launched into space in 1967. Johannes Geiss (born in 1926) developed the Apollo 11 solar wind experiment at the University of Berne. Mathematician Bruno Stanek (born in 1943) made space exploration accessible for the mass media with programmes such as "Neues aus dem Weltraum" (News from Outer Space). The Observatoire de Genève discovered the first planet outside our solar system, the star 51 Pegasi. Claude Nicollier (born in 1944) first travelled into space as a NASA astronaut in 1992. He did a space walk in 1999. Markus Griesser (born in 1949) discovered ten main-belt asteroids as well as the small planet Helvetia in 2002. Kathrin Altwegg (born in 1951) is the latest figurehead in Swiss space research thanks to her contribution to missions such as Giotto and Rosetta. (MUL)



missions. However, those responsible for cladding rocket noses, such as for Ariane, or supplying highly sophisticated measuring systems, as in the case of the space probes Giotto and Ulysses, tend to remain in the background. To capture the imagination and have an emotional impact, personification is required, in other words faces, such as that of Claude Nicollier, Switzerland's first and only astronaut to date. He travelled into space in 1992 as a NASA astronaut. In 1999, he completed the image of a typically Swiss astronaut. He proved himself a skilled space plumber, carrying out key repair and service work to the Hubble space telescope during extra-vehicular activity.

"Chury" superstar

And what about today? The limelight is now undoubtedly occupied by Bernese astrophysicist Kathrin Altwegg. She and her team developed Rosina, the measuring instrument on board the Rosetta probe used to analyse the tail of the comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko. In November, when Rosetta prepared for its landing probe to touch down on the comet after a decade-long journey, Switzer-

land was also giddy with excitement – simply because of the prospect of conquering new horizons. "Chury" was around 250 million kilometres from Earth at this point in time. Altwegg hopes to discover through her measurements whether comets falling to Earth once brought with them organic molecules – the building blocks of life. She is using Comet 67P as a kind of preserved remnant from the cosmic freezer and an object from the early period of our solar system. The comet, which resembles a rubber duck lurching through the universe, is a largely unchanged remainder of the gigantic disc of dust from which our solar system emerged 4.6 billion years ago. Thanks to the chemical analysis of the comet's tail, Altwegg already knows what is being emitted by the comet: ammonia, methanol, formaldehyde and hydrogen sulphide. "Chury" therefore smells strongly of horse stables, alcohol and rotten eggs. What do these far-away odours matter to Switzerland? How will this research benefit us? Altwegg smiles and replies: "There are actually no benefits." It is just a question of the beauty of knowledge.

MARC LETTAU IS AN EDITOR WITH THE "SWISS REVIEW"

The Swiss humour of Plonk et Replonk

Jacques and Hubert Froidevaux and their friend Miguel Morales have created an entirely Swiss brand of humour that targets the army, the Matterhorn and garden gnomes. We meet Plonk et Replonk in La Chaux-de-Fonds.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

A town with no river or lake, located at an altitude of 1,000 metres and reached by a train that owing to the gradient has to take a zigzag route to arrive at its destination: This is La Chaux-de-Fonds, home of the creative artists Jacques and Hubert Froidevaux, known as Plonk et Replonk. The name in itself is a gag, as the team actually has a third member – Miguel Morales, a childhood friend of the brothers.

“La Chaux-de-Fonds is a place people leave,” jokes Jacques, the elder brother, born in 1963, reeling off the names of famous figures who have departed the town: Blaise Cendrars, Le Corbusier and Jean Chevrolet. Why would anyone want to leave? Perhaps because of the climate... “Six months of winter and six months of taxes,” is Hubert’s summary. They have nevertheless remained “up on high”. The reason why will be explained later.

Gnomes in concrete

Plonk et Replonk take their raw material from clichés. In Switzerland, this inevitably means chocolate, watches, the Matterhorn and garden gnomes. For



15 years, the cheerful team of Plonk et Replonk has been plunging gnomes into cement. The basic model – a cube from which emerges only the gnome’s head down to just above the nose – weighs 8 kilos. There are also XL models weighing 20 kilos. One of the advantages of the garden gnomes encased in concrete like a nuclear fallout shelter is that “children cannot move them”, joke the comics, who are fans of Swiss humorists such as Zouc and Jacques de Haller, and also the impressionist Yann Lambert and the comic Thierry Meury, among others.

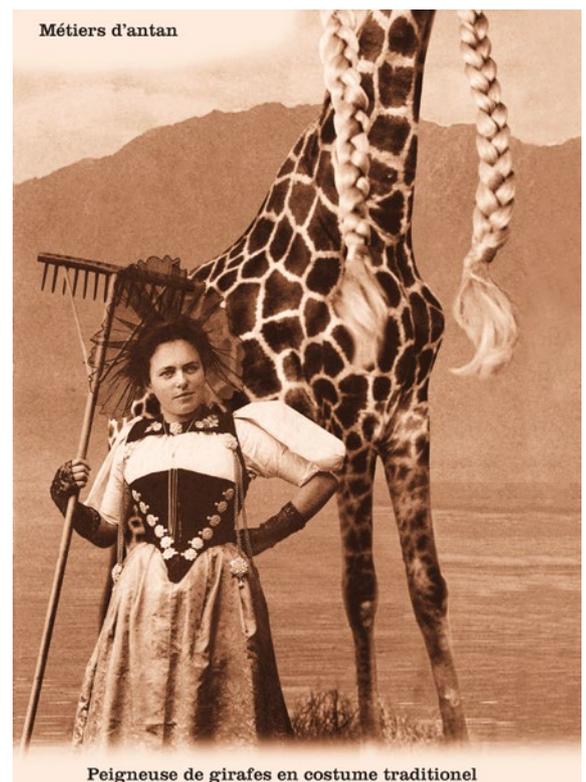
Why on earth would you dip gnomes in cement? “To make them feel secure”, say the Froidevaux brothers, describing a broken-down Europe where poverty and inequality are on the rise while the fear of foreigners is increasing all around. “In Switzerland, we are being pulled back towards the years of the Schwarzenbach initiative,” grumbles Hubert. “Switzerland is not immune to social tension, but the impact is less pronounced here. People are not being forced to live on the streets,” concedes Jacques.

When they travel, to Paris for example, the two natives of La Chaux-de-Fonds, who are passionate about Africa, find all the clichés thrown back in their own

« Offrez un nain de jardin bétonné ! »
avant qu'on ne vous l'offre.

Nain de qualité tiptop,
enrobé de béton surchoix,
résistant aux intempéries,
aux huiles, aux acides
et aux enfants.
Le discret compagnon
de toute une vie.
Un classique.
Existe aussi en
carte postale...

Give somebody a garden gnome as a gift before you receive one yourself



Professions of old: giraffe hairdressers in traditional costume

faces. “The French tend to sum us up as banks and think the Swiss-French accent is unique, whereas there are actually at least 15 of them,” says Jacques through gritted teeth. The approval of the initiative against mass immigration on 9 February 2014 has not helped matters. “We’re keeping quite a low profile,” explains Hubert, who was mocked by Parisian friends at the “Baron Rouge”, a bistro where they have exhibited their work on three occasions.

300 pencil sharpener blades

Plonk et Replonk tried out various places in Switzerland, notably Lausanne – “where people are less inclined to talk to each other”, says Jacques – but ultimately it is La Chaux-de-Fonds that suits them best. “My barber is one minute away and my doctor 37 seconds. In short, life here is straightforward,” says Hubert. Another advantage is that here in watchmaking country our two artists can find all the craftsmen and women they need, in other words all the artisans offering the requisite level of quality. “I love precision,” says Jacques, who together with his brother has created the “pinaillette”, a kind of portable guillotine for splitting hairs. “The stationer freaked out a bit when we gave him an order for 300 pencil sharpener blades. I told him I had children who do a lot of colouring-in,” guffaws the elder brother.

Not far from their chaotic studio above “Le Pod”, the main street in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a metalworker is engraving numbered plaques for the “pinaillettes” and the garden gnomes. The local Migros is well stocked with gnomes, and cement is also readily available in the town. But Plonk et Replonk confess that for the last few years they have ac-

tually ordered their garden gnomes (made in Austria) by post. They estimate that to date they have purchased around a thousand.

The art of subverting postcards

The postcard plays a central role in the humorous work of Plonk et Replonk, and it was subverting these icons of the 19th and 20th centuries that earned them their first commissions in 1995. “Postcards show the banal, things that you no longer see,” says Jacques. Within this system, Geneva is summed up by its Jet d’Eau, Berne by its bears and Switzerland by the Matterhorn. The two acolytes have incorporated other clichés into their work: the family, patriotism, soldiers, obsolete occupations and monuments, the height of absurdity.

150 years ago, postcards served as a form of media, point out the two knowledgeable artists, displaying examples of news stories with images of flooding, cyclones and aviation accidents. This dose of verité was enhanced by the quality of the images of the day. “People posed for a long time in front of the camera, and when someone looks at the lens you feel their presence, because the sensitive plates were large and the photos were consequently of an extraordinary quality,” reveals Hubert, pointing to a dreadful postcard in which British colonists in Hong Kong are posing in front of the decapitated heads of indigenous inhabitants laid out on the ground (we later discover that they have Father Christmas hats). Finally, the cards’ sepia tone gives them an antique (and thus authentic) patina. All that remains is to add some pseudo-serious captions which, when combined with images that are photoshopped to a greater or lesser degree, create a hiatus. This is the effect the Swiss duo aim to achieve.



The Gruyère region: wild and beautiful



The paschal mystery – mountaineering in high-altitude regions

Complaint to the tourism office

In La Chaux-de-Fonds, one of Plonk et Replonk's bogus postcards depicts the explosion of a water pipe (a historical event) in the town's streets. "Two old ladies commented on the image and tried to recall the event, whereas what you are actually looking at is a picture of Niagara Falls," laughs Hubert. In a similar vein, a postcard showing barges on a canal running right down the middle of Le Pod – the main street in La Chaux-de-Fonds – is said to have baffled some Belgian tourists. "They complained to the tourism office about the absence of the canal," recalls Hubert, adding that the same office asked them to be included in a cultural tour of the town that would have given Plonk et Replonk cult status – a request that really took the biscuit for these disparagers of monuments.

The high point of their already hugely eventful career perhaps came in 2010 at the Colombier military museum, during an exhibition entitled "Military extravaganza 1515 to 2015: five centuries of heroic resistance", one of the highlights of which was a castle built by Jacques out of military biscuits. The event brought together members of the Swiss political and military establishment, including the former socialist cantonal councillor Jean Studer (currently President of the Bank Council at the Swiss National Bank) and also André Duvillard, who was then chief of the Neuchâtel police service and is now the delegate of the Swiss Security Union. "The high-ranking officials certainly spluttered a little during the inauguration," says Hubert, but Duvillard said that the army's scope for progress depends on its ability to mock itself "which indicates that the army is less rigid than it seems", echoes Jacques Froidevaux. Last but not least,

the postcard images are old and therefore out of copyright. In a town without a permanent water supply, it's all about being economical with one's resources!

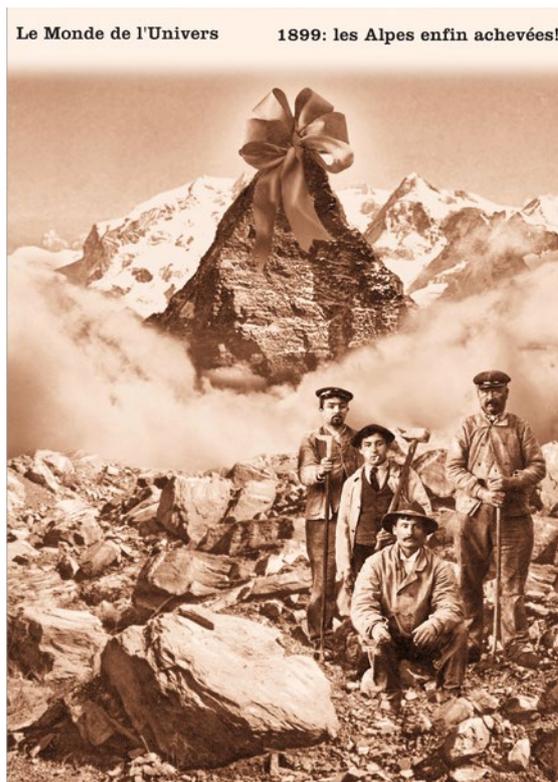
STÉPHANE HERZOG IS AN EDITOR WITH THE "SWISS REVIEW"



A Swiss childhood

Biscuits, the army and watches – all touched upon and lampooned by Plonk et Replonk from Noirmont, a small watchmaking town in the Franches-Montagnes where Jacques and Hubert Froidevaux and their friend Miguel Morales grew up. "At the time, the army had an enormous budget. We used to chase the soldiers to ask them for biscuits and chocolate," recalls Hubert. While they were

growing up the boys spent a lot of time at a café-restaurant run by their mother. The bistro brought all of Noirmont together, from workers to the factory owner. Their father was a carpenter. For a time he also made coffins, as was the custom back then. But not for long. "One day, when his VW camper was full, my dad put a coffin on the roof and drove through Saignelégier like that with a cigar in his mouth," recounts Hubert. "The workers at the Ciny watchmaking factory, who were sanctimonious, saw him going past and complained to the priest." That was the end of the mortuary concession for Froidevaux senior. And perhaps the beginning of the career of Plonk et Replonk, with a first fanzine edited by Jacques and Miguel called "Yaourt vert" (Green yoghurt), which later became "Yaourt qui tue" (Killer yoghurt). Quite some undertaking.



The history of the universe – 1899: the Alps finally completed



Les couleurs de demain. Centrale fonctionnant au gérianium enrichi.

The colours of tomorrow. Nuclear reactors that work with enriched geraniums

OSA advice

I would like to arrange for my second pillar vested pension benefits to be paid out. Is that possible if I live abroad?

This depends on whether or not you live in an EU or EFTA state. A second pillar lump-sum payout is generally not possible for persons residing in an EU/EFTA state if they are subject to mandatory insurance against the risks of old age, invalidity and death in their country of residence. Self-employed persons can arrange a second pillar payout if their country of residence does not provide for mandatory insurance against the aforementioned risks for the self-employed.

Anyone living outside an EU or EFTA state can request the lump-sum payout of their second pillar vested pension benefits. However, it is advisable to find out whether this option is available from the pension fund at an early stage. The pension funds can refuse a cash payout if the person concerned has already reached the age at which the pension fund provides for the option of early retirement.

The second pillar capital can also be used to pay for the purchase, construction or renovation of owner-occupied property or to repay a mortgage. This also applies if the property is situated in an EU or EFTA country.

The supplementary part of the second pillar can always be paid out. However, in the event of a lump-sum payout of vested pension benefits, it is advisable to take out an insurance policy against the risks of invalidity and death.

OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

OSA's Legal Department provides general legal information on Swiss law, in particular in the areas that concern the Swiss Abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law and does not intervene in disputes between private parties.

Information on the right to participate in votes and elections

The Swiss Abroad can participate in elections and referenda in Switzerland provided they are registered on an electoral roll in Switzerland. Swiss citizens are not automatically enrolled when they register with a consulate or embassy abroad. They must explicitly request the right to vote. Swiss abroad are usually registered on the electoral roll at the commune where they last resided in Switzerland. This enrolment must be renewed regularly – at least every four years – with the commune (not the representation abroad). This does not take place automatically. Some communes regularly ask their eligible voters abroad to do this, while others do not. The forms for enrolment and renewal can be found at: www.eda.admin.ch > Documentation > Publications > Swiss Abroad > Leaflets "Political rights"

Direct link: <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/doc/publi/ptrali/merkbl.html>

Grants for education and training in Switzerland

The opportunity to undertake education or training in Switzerland is a very appealing prospect for many young Swiss Abroad. This is highlighted by the ever increasing number of enquiries received and consultations provided by the "educationsuisse – Education in Switzerland" advisory service.

In Switzerland, parents are generally responsible for paying for their children's education. However, as everyone, including those from low-income households, should have the opportunity to benefit from education, educational grants can be applied for. The home canton is responsible for such funding in the case of young Swiss Abroad. Educational grants are intended to provide financial support during education and not to resolve acute emergency situations. The grants do not usually cover study and living costs in full.

The grant amount is largely determined by parental income and assets. Every canton has its own legislation and provisions. It is therefore advisable to make any enquiries at an early stage: Can grant applications actually be made? Is the course concerned eligible for a grant? What deadlines have to be met? What documents are required? And so on. It is also worth finding out in the country where the parents live whether financial support can be provided for education and training in Switzerland.

A grant application can usually only be submitted if the educational institution has provided confirmation of an offer of a place. It usually takes several months for the cantonal authorities to reach a final decision on whether and how much funding can be provided.

The universities themselves can also offer educational grants under certain circumstances. However, they often only do so once a cantonal decision has been made. There are also many private foundations which support young people in education. Such support is sometimes also available from the communes of origin.

Young Swiss people abroad who wish to undertake education or training in Switzerland, whether it is an apprenticeship or a university degree, should also make arrangements for funding their stay in Switzerland at an early stage.



Education in Switzerland

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Easter in Switzerland

The snow sports week in Davos is just one of many programmes organised for young people by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). New offers are published on OSA's website on an ongoing basis.

OSA's Youth Service offers a wide variety of programmes for young Swiss people abroad focussing on leisure pursuits, education and politics, ranging from winter and summer camps to language courses and seminars on politics. Everyone is certain to find an offer that meets their requirements.

Anyone who would like to spend Easter in Switzerland and enjoys skiing or snow-

boarding in the Swiss mountains should register for the snow sports week in Davos. The Davos/Klosters region with its six ski areas has 320 kilometres of piste and several fun parks offering perfect conditions for everyone to enjoy the snow and sun and to see out the winter.

The camp will take place from 4 to 12 April 2015 at the "Ski- und Ferienhaus Davos". A well-qualified team of leaders will provide young people aged 15 and over with skiing or snowboarding lessons. There will also be workshops and a very varied fringe programme to guarantee an extremely enjoyable time in the mountains. The programme is designed to ensure all sporting levels are ideally catered for, and beginners get just as much out of the activities as experienced snowboarders and skiers.

Date: 4 to 12 April 2015

Age: 15 and over

Accommodation: Ski- und Ferienhaus Davos

Cost: CHF 980 (incl. ski pass, lessons, fringe programme, accommodation and meals); participants cover the cost of travelling to Davos

Registration: www.aso.ch or www.swisscommunity.org

The new summer offers are published on the websites www.aso.ch and www.swisscommunity.org on an ongoing basis. Various summer camps (from 11 to 24 July and from 25 July to 7 August 2015), language courses (from 29 June to 10 July 2015) and offers relating to politics (from 10 to 16 August 2015) are available.

OSA's Youth Service would be pleased to provide information on:

+41 31 356 61 00 and at youth@aso.ch

Summer camps for 8 to 14-year-olds

Are you between 8 and 14 years of age? Would you like to spend 14 days in Switzerland getting to know your homeland better? Then sign up for a holiday camp run by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad.

Programme

We organise summer holiday camps in the most beautiful regions of Switzerland during the months of July and August. Participants in our camps visit attractions, discover lakes, mountains, rivers and wonderful scenery on short hikes and sometimes visit cities. Some days are also spent at the camp base, where we enjoy games, sporting activities and various workshops.

The interaction with participants from other countries and the exchange across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries presents a unique opportunity to make new friends and enjoy some unforgettable moments.

Camp language

The people who take advantage of our offers come from all over the world and therefore

speak different languages, such as German, French, English, Spanish and Italian. The leaders run the programmes in German, French and English. The language at each camp is not determined by the language spoken at the camp venue.

Prices

The prices of the offers are set out in the list below. The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad wishes to give all Swiss children abroad the opportunity to enjoy a holiday in Switzerland at least once if possible. We therefore offer the possibility of reduced camp rates. The relevant application form can be requested with the registration form.

Travel/meeting point

The meeting point is around lunchtime at Zurich Airport. Travel to Zurich Airport and the return journey home from there are organised and paid by the parents.

Registration

The exact details of the individual holiday camps and the registration form will be available from January 2015 at www.sjas.ch. We would also be pleased to post you our information brochure on request. The registration deadline is 15 March 2015.

Summer camps in 2015

Saturday, 27 June to Friday, 10 July: Reckingen for children aged 8 to 12, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 27 June to Friday, 10 July: Aurigeno for children aged 11 to 14, price: CHF 900.–

Wednesday, 1 July to Friday, 10 July: Swiss Trip for children aged 12 to 16, price: CHF 950.–

Saturday, 11 July to Friday, 24 July: Eggberge for children aged 8 to 12, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 11 July to Friday, 24 July 2015: La Punt for children aged 8 to 14, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 25 July to Friday, 7 August: Diemtigtal for children aged 8 to 12, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 25 July to Friday, 7 August: Charmey for children aged 11 to 14, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 8 August to Friday, 21 August: Prêles for children aged 8 to 12, price: CHF 900.–

Saturday, 8 August to Friday, 21 August: Sailing boat trip on Lake Geneva for children aged 11 to 14, price: CHF 950.–

Please contact our office for further information:

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)

Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, SWITZERLAND

Tel. +41 (0)31 356 61 16, Fax +41 (0)31 356 61 01

Email: info@sjas.ch

www.sjas.ch > Our forthcoming activities



Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero
Fundazioni per giuvenis svizzers a l'ester

Visions for shaping the Switzerland of the future

Green spaces in urban areas, less traffic and a greater sense of community – this scenario is the focal point of the “Swisstopia” project with which the “Haute école du paysage, d’ingénierie et d’architecture” (hepia) in Geneva won the ideas competition “tomorrow? Switzerland”



The winning team from hepia with Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard

Students from five universities of applied sciences were invited to present ideas about life in 2035 as part of this competition organised by the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC). The jury chaired by Federal

Councillor Doris Leuthard reached its decision at the end of October.

What will Switzerland look like 20 years from now? For once this question was not put to professional forecasters but instead to five selected universities of applied sciences from all parts of the country. The students tackled the competition task of developing ideas for the Switzerland of the future and presenting them visually in very different ways.

After intensive discussions, the jury declared the “Haute école du paysage, d’ingénierie et d’architecture de Genève” (hepia), a department of the “Haute Ecole Spécialisée de Suisse occidentale” (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland), the winner with its competition project “Swisstopia”. In the view of the jury, the hepia entry developed solutions outstandingly well in a key future area of urban development – the populated landscape. The authors displayed courage by

accommodating the desire of some of the population to live in a productive landscape. Their entry also contained certain values. It attached greater importance to the community, while work was attributed a different status.

The entries for the competition, which was launched by Federal Councillor Leuthard in spring 2014, are of particular interest to DETEC given that, as an infrastructure department, it has major influence over the future organisation of Switzerland. The aim was for the entries to be incorporated into practical politics as far as possible.

DETEC GENERAL SECRETARIAT

Participating universities

The following universities of applied sciences took part in the “tomorrow? Switzerland” competition

- Hochschule für Technik Rapperswil (HSR), Fachhochschule Ostschweiz (FHO), Rapperswil-Jona St Gallen
- Hochschule Luzern – Design & Kunst (HSLU), Fachhochschule Zentralschweiz, Lucerne
- Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst (HGK), Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz (FHNW), Basel
- Haute école du paysage, d’ingénierie et d’architecture de Genève (hepia), Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale (HES-SO), Geneva
- Dipartimento ambiente costruzioni e design (DACD), Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana (SUPSI), Manno TI

More information on the competition, the participants and their projects can be found at:

<http://www.are.admin.ch/demainlasuisse/index.html?lang=de>

The law on the Swiss schools abroad entered into force on 1 January 2015

The new law gives Swiss schools abroad greater operational flexibility while also enhancing the way in which Swiss culture and education are imparted. Basic vocational education and training and new Swiss schools abroad can now also receive funding.

In addition to the proportion of Swiss pupils, the total number of students is now also taken into account when calculating federal government’s funding contribution. The minimum quota of Swiss students previously prescribed no longer applies. To enable the Swiss schools abroad to plan better, a multi-year budget in line with the dispatch on culture will apply from 2016.

Federal government today supports 17 Swiss schools abroad worldwide: 7 in Europe, 8 in Latin America and 2 in Asia. They are attended by a total of 7,200 children of whom 1,800 hold a Swiss passport.

See also: www.bak.admin.ch/schweizerschulen

FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE (FOC)

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please advise your local embassy or consulate. Do not write to the editorial office in Berne.



Federal government acts as a role model in energy efficiency

The federal administration, the semi-public enterprises and the ETH Domain (the Federal technical universities and research institutes) are seeking to improve their energy efficiency. Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, the CEOs of Post, Federal Railways SBB, Swisscom and Skyguide as well as the President of the ETH Board have signed a declaration of intent.

Around 2 % of Swiss energy consumption is accounted for by the federal administration, the ETH Domain and the semi-public enterprises SBB, Post, Swisscom and Skyguide. They have continually increased their energy efficiency and reduced their energy consumption for a number of years now. As part of the 2050 Energy Strategy, the Federal Council is now providing a set of measures which aims to improve the energy efficiency of the federal administration, the semi-public enterprises and the ETH Domain by 25 % by the year 2020 compared to 2006. Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard and the CEOs of the semi-public enterprises signed a joint declaration of intent to this effect on 27 November 2014.

Energy efficiency at the SBB thanks to adaptive control

Swiss Federal Railways, the SBB, plans only to use electricity from renewable sources for its operations by 2025. It increased its energy efficiency by around 14 % between 2006 and 2013, while transport volumes rose annually at the same time. Train drivers are able to reduce energy consumption thanks to an energy-saving way of driving. Adaptive control provides direct in-cab speed recommendations. The rolling stock is also becoming more energy-efficient. For example, trains are only heated or cooled when they are in operation.

The Post uses electric scooters

The Post reduced its energy requirements by 6 % and increased energy efficiency by 19 % between 2006 and 2013. This was primarily achieved by using vehicles with alternative drives. With 5,500 electric scooters used for the delivery of letters, the Post has the largest such fleet in Europe. Electricity requirements are entirely met with certified green power. Further measures concerning logistical operations and its computer centres are planned for the coming years. PostAuto is testing the use of battery-operated buses.

Swisscom's customer energy efficiency measures

Thanks to measures already implemented, Swisscom increased energy efficiency by 24.5 % compared to 2006. The recently opened Swisscom computer centre in Bern-Wank-

dorf will produce further improvements in energy efficiency and in the use of waste heat. In total, energy savings were made by customers equivalent to the power consumption of around 15,000 households and the CO₂ emissions of 70,000 cars.

Skyguide: systematic deployment of LED

Switzerland's air traffic control company is not only pursuing measures to improve efficiency in the management of air traffic. Skyguide replaced ceiling lighting with LED fixtures at its control centre in Wangen near Dübendorf in 2013, for example. Specific measures concerning approach control and airspace management are being implemented and will achieve significant energy savings for the airlines.

Energy efficiency and research in the ETH Domain

The Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology in Zurich and Lausanne as well as the Paul Scherrer Institute and other research institutions have increasing student numbers and maintain energy-intensive, large-scale research facilities. Lecturing and research in new fields and technologies have been expanded. Despite this growth, per-capita energy consumption fell and energy efficiency was improved. A good example is the new building of the Swiss National Supercomputing Centre (CSCS) in Lugano, which is one of the most energy-efficient computer centres in the world. In the field of energy research, the ETH Domain is making targeted investment in training, science and direct technology transfer to industry.

Federal administration: effective programme for cutting environmental pollution

The programme adopted by the Federal Council in 1999 concerning systematic resource and environmental management (RUMBA) is the federal administration's main instrument for reducing its environmental pollution. At the buildings of the RUMBA sections, energy consumption fell by 8.4 % from 2006 to 2013. The use of heating oil and natural gas was reduced by 45 %. Through RUMBA, the Federal Council intends to cut the federal administration's environmental pollution by at least 20 % from 2006 to 2020.

The 2014 initial report "The Confederation: exemplary in energy" of the Swiss Federal Office of Energy provides an overview of the measures aimed at increasing energy efficiency in the aforementioned areas.

<https://www.energie-vorbild.admin.ch/vbe/en/home.html>

DETEC GENERAL SECRETARIAT



Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard travels eco-consciously



In 2012, Switzerland called for the green economy to be put on the climate agenda at the climate conference in Rio de Janeiro. Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC), is contributing to the improvement of energy efficiency by setting a good example, choosing a Tesla 85 as her new official vehicle. A purely electric car, it fits perfectly with DETEC's strategy of reducing CO₂ emissions and adopting an economical and efficient approach to energy resources.

There are already many charging stations throughout Switzerland for recharging the batteries of electric vehicles, some provided by the suppliers themselves, others attached to federal government's own buildings and facilities. If necessary, electric vehicles can also be charged up using an ordinary power socket.

Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters from your representation, etc.).

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent free of charge to all households of Swiss abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app) or in printed format.

Federal referenda

Two proposals will be put to the vote on 8 March 2015:

- Popular initiative of 5 November 2012 "Strengthen families! Tax-free child and educational allowances" (BBl 2014 7221);
- Popular initiative of 17 December 2012 "Energy tax instead of VAT" (BBl 2014 7217).

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlet, committees, party statements, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.ch.ch/en/votes/.

Other referendum dates in 2015: 14 June, 18 October (federal elections), 29 November.

You will find facts, instructions, useful information and additional links concerning the federal elections on 18 October 2015 at www.ch.ch/en/elections2015/ – a joint website provided by the Fed-

eral Chancellery, Parliamentary Services, the Federal Statistical Office and ch.ch.

Popular initiatives

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

- "Zur Ausschaffung krimineller Männer" (For the deportation of male criminals) (18.05.2016)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volkssinitiativen.

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Family album

Guy Krneta is a gifted wordsmith and a keen observer. “Unger üs” (Between Ourselves) is the title of a small book written in Bernese dialect in which he recounts stories from his family. In 80

episodes, which include anecdotes, myths, personal experiences, his grandfather’s teachings and his uncle’s pipe dreams, he depicts a portrait of the family. He also provides readers with an insight into life in prison, where he spent several months for refusing to perform military service. Here he comes into contact with shady characters and falls in love upon his release. He tells of family gatherings where cracks suddenly appear in the idyll and sensitivities and incomprehension become evident.

Guy Krneta, who was born in Berne in 1964 and today lives in Basel, belongs to a group of artists called “Bern ist überall” (Berne is Everywhere). He frequently comments on political issues and is actively involved in cultural policy matters. He is a co-initiator of the Swiss Literature Institute in Biel and a co-founder of the “Kunst+Politik” (Art+Politics) network (BE)

Guy Krneta: “Unger üs. Familialbum”; Edition Spoken script / Der gesunde Menschenversand Lucerne, 2014; 168 pages; CHF 23, EUR 18.50. www.bernistueberall.ch www.bibliomedia.ch > AutorInnen



Plenty of good reading completely free of charge

Is Switzerland the country of chocolate? Answer: Yes. Is Switzerland the country of democracy? Answer: No. Is Switzerland the country of security and peace? Answer: Yes and no. These are 3 of 25 questions about Switzerland to which we find answers in Credit Suisse’s recently published “Bulletin”. There is currently little good news to report about Swiss banks, which is why an exception is being highlighted here. “Bulletin”, as the subtitle points out, is the oldest bank magazine in the world. We do not know what the first edition looked like 120 years



ago, but “Bulletin” has been a real treasure trove for some years now. 25 questions about Switzerland are answered in the latest edition. The answers are short to medium in length, sometimes humorous, often clever and occasionally critical. The edition also contains the “2014 Worry

Barometer”, a survey on the concerns of the Swiss. What is great about “Bulletin” – even though you may not agree with every article – is the fact that it appears in several languages (en, de, fr, it) and is free of charge. (BE)

It can be ordered at: www.credit-suisse.com/bulletin



In free fall

She meets Herbert and in the same week discovers she has cancer. Love strikes like a lightning bolt and they want to be together for the rest of their lives. Three months later Herbert is dead. A BASE jumper, he leaps off a cliff only equipped with a parachute, loses control and plunges to his death. She had known nothing of his fascination for BASE jumping. Her loss – right in the middle of chemotherapy – throws her completely off track. How could he throw his life away while she is battling against cancer? This question constantly preys on her mind. In the search



for answers, she accompanies Herbert’s best friend and coach to the scene of the fatal accident. Here she finds out from Andreas and the other jumpers what drives them to jump off cliffs, to overlook the risks and, above all, what it means to face and control one’s own fears. The woman’s name is Miriam von Arx. She is a filmmaker and has recorded her tragic story and her journey back to life in a remarkable documentary which has also been screened in cinemas. (BE)

www.praesens.com

Miriam von Arx
“Freifall – eine Liebesgeschichte”
(Freefalling – A love story) in German, Swiss German and English, subtitles in German/English.



Referendum on bilateral agreements?

“Raus aus der Sackgasse” (Out of the cul-de-sac), or RASA for short, is the name of an association seeking to save the bilateral agreements with the EU through a referendum. The popular initiative was launched on 2 December 2014. Around 300 people from the fields of education, science, business, culture and sport belong to the RASA association. They include the billionaire Hansjörg Wyss, the artist Pipi-lotti Rist and the footballer Andy Egli. Those behind the initiative believe that the implementation of article 121a (from the Swiss People’s Party SVP initiative against mass immigration) will lead into a cul-de-sac. The Swiss people should therefore be given the opportunity to revise their decision of 9 February 2014. If enough signatures are collected, a referendum could take place in 2016 at the earliest.

Bastian Baker as a Swiss “ambassador”

“Democracy Without Borders” is the name of a project launched in August 2014 under the leadership of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). As part of this initiative, Bastian Baker, a musician from French-speaking Switzerland, will take part in “The Nile Project” in Egypt as a Swiss ambassador. This project aims to promote sustainable use of the Nile basin through music, education and innovation. Musicians from the 11 countries through which the river flows are already participating in the project.

House of Religions opens

The House of Religions in Berne was officially opened in mid-December. Five world faiths – the Alevist, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu religious communities – have prayer and meeting rooms under one roof. The Jewish, Baha’i and Sikh communities are also involved. It has taken 16 years from the initial idea to the opening of this extraordinary facility (see also “Swiss Review” no. 5/2012).

E-voting in 14 cantons

The Federal Council has authorised 14 cantons to use electronic voting at federal referenda in 2015 and 2016. From the referendum on 8 March 2015, individually verifiable systems are to be deployed in all cantons, which means that voters can check that their vote has been sent correctly. This will enable voters to identify manipulation of any kind on their platform or on the Internet. The cantons of Zurich and Glarus are planning to offer e-voting to eligible Swiss voters abroad for the first time at the referendum on 8 March 2015.



Lorenzo Vinciguerra

Lorenzo Vinciguerra spent 1,039 days on the Indonesian island of Jolo held hostage by the rebel group Abu Sayyaf. The 49-year-old Swiss was abducted on 1 February 2012 with a colleague while bird-watching on one of Jolo’s neighbouring islands. Vinciguerra managed to escape when the rebels relaxed their guard over their hostages during a wedding celebration. Vinciguerra’s Dutch colleague was too weak to flee. There has been no news of him since the Swiss got away.

The world needs Switzerland.

Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter looking back on his year as Swiss President and Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE

There are more things in Heaven and Earth ... Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

William Shakespeare (1564 to 1616), English poet and playwright

We are bridge-builders not demolition experts.

Christoph Darbellay, President of the CVP, on the role of his party

One is not realistic in having no ideas.

Max Frisch, Swiss writer (1911 to 1991)

I regard patriotism as dangerous. I see patriotism, forgive me, as a crime.

Peter Bichsel, Swiss author

Take good care of the international agreements to which our nation is committed and that are of fundamental importance to Switzerland and our treaty partners.

Markus Büchel, President of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference, in his letter to the Swiss members of parliament at the turn of the year

Remaining on the sidelines is shirking one’s responsibility. Christians are responsible for their actions but also for what they do not do.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German foreign minister

What can be said at all, can be said clearly.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 to 1951), Austro-British philosopher

To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Mark Twain, US author (1835 to 1910)

+ + SWITZERLAND + +



+ + THE ORIGINAL WINTER + +

SINCE 1864 + + + + +

Anna Furrer



Switzerland.
get natural.