

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
April 2020

**The return of the wolf –
why not everyone is happy**

**Whither e-voting?
The Federal Councillor gives us his take**

**Leysin – the Swiss mountain village
where foreign nationals outnumber locals**



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“My, what a big mouth you have, grandmother.” “All the better to eat you with!” The wolf dressed as the grandmother had scarcely finished speaking when he jumped from the bed with a single leap and ate up poor Little Red Riding Hood. As soon as the wolf had satisfied his appetite, he climbed back into bed, fell asleep and began to snore very loudly. We all know how Little Red Riding Hood met her gruesome end.

Never trust the big bad wolf was the message we all took to heart as young children.

Fairy tale will flirt with reality in May, when Switzerland decides whether or not the wolf is still big and bad. Voters are set to give their verdict on the Swiss Hunting Act and say whether we should continue to give full protection to the wolves that have repopulated the Swiss Alps and Jura mountains, or whether we should resort to shooting wolves to regulate their numbers and protect the livestock that they have been known to attack.

The Little Red Riding Hood story is still strangely relevant, because the wolf divides opinion. People demonise or idolise this controversial animal depending on what side of the debate they stand. On the one hand we have the animal-loving contingent from the low-lying cantons, who romanticise the wolf as a mythical symbol of the untamed natural world. On the other, the sheep-rearing, anti-wolf mountain farmers who want their livestock to be free of these deadly predators and who feel overlooked by Switzerland’s city dwellers. A new divide threatens to split Switzerland along rural and urban lines.

Of course, wolves care little for referendums. They are gradually reclaiming their natural habitat in the Alps and Jura mountains – and will continue to do so regardless of whether we put yes or no on our ballot papers. At least we hope they do. The creature also gives us hope amid the alarming loss of biodiversity and species that we increasingly see in countries such as Switzerland. We thought the wolf had disappeared. It hasn’t. Read the article on page 6 to follow its trail.

Voters on 17 May will also decide the fate of the “limitation initiative”, an issue with claws and teeth that is as far removed from a fairy tale as you can get. If the SVP initiative is approved, Switzerland will have to terminate the Swiss-European Union agreement on the free movement of persons (see page 10). The consequences would be far-reaching, especially for the 460,000 Swiss Abroad who live in the EU and are reliant on Switzerland and the EU having good relations.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano



From 21-23 August 2020, the 98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Lugano.

Further information is available on page 25 of this magazine and on our website www.aso.ch.

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Swiss citizens in Hitler's death camps



I was born during WWII and in my early years remember a Genevois uncle returning from a concentration camp.

I never knew why he'd been sent there but they were living in France at the time. It was never discussed. I agree with the shameful lack of information about the Nazis in school education where one was indeed stuffed with history of Swiss battles and European wars which had Swiss mercenaries... I agree it is essential to discuss all this now given the rise of the far-right all over Europe and beyond. Thank you for this article, and I do hope that after President Sommaruga's actions to recognise the effect of the Holocaust on Swiss citizens, the government does agree to support the building of a monument to reflect the damage and ensuing shame this dark episode of our history represents.

JOELLE MANN, OXFORD, GREAT BRITAIN

This is a tremendous piece of journalism. It certainly should have been written much earlier, but simply telling these stories is important, given that xenophobia and anti-Semitism is rife in so many countries. The idea of creating a digital form of remembrance is something that the Swiss government could help to implement and fund. Perhaps it would then be easier to apologise for what happened.

MARTIN SCHLATTER-ROGGENKAMP, NETHERLANDS

Thank you very much for writing this piece. We should never stop having critical discussions about the past.

SWEN RUHNKE, HAMBURG, GERMANY

Great work! I didn't know this, as I am an 80s child. Let's not blame but learn from the past. May the story of this dark time be remembered and told in future and its victims and heroes never be forgotten.

SOFIE RYTZ, SCOTLAND

Might I suggest it is about time we turned the page. No one is denying the crimes against humanity that took place in Germany between 1933 and 1945. Seventy-five years have passed since the end of the Second World War. We should stop playing the Nazi card once and for all. It does nothing to further our understanding and just perpetuates an inferiority complex among yet another generation of children.

PETER FÄSSLER, VIENTIANE, LAOS

There is a very common trope today, that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." It's a ridiculous idea, assuming that if everyone just learns about past atrocities, they will somehow turn to a state of peaceful bliss and affection for all human beings. Bunk! Black and white children in America go to grade school together, knowing nothing of history – they become friends and play together and pay no attention to colour – are not even aware of it. Then they're taught about slavery and the mistreatment of their great grandfathers, and they learn to be resentful and indignant.

CHRISTOPHER EGLI, DEVON, USA

Thank you for creating this great effort! We may not learn from our past mistakes, but we must always be reminded of them! Creating a Digital Memorial would be a powerful and beautiful idea!

CRISTINA WYLER, VIRGINIA, USA

Editorial note:

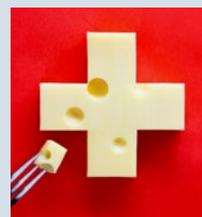
Max Spring



The "Gezeichnet 2019" exhibition that ran from December to February at the Museum of Communication in Berne provided a walk-through review of the best cartoons published in the Swiss press in 2019. Among the outstanding works by Switzerland's 50 leading cartoonists was Max Spring's illustration that appeared on the cover of last year's "Swiss Review" election edition (6/2019).

It was remarkable how many times Spring's tongue-in-cheek drawing to mark the election success of the green parties was used by Swiss media outlets reporting on the exhibition. (MUL)

The art of translation



Most of the original content for "Swiss Review" is written in German or French. However, the magazine is published in four different languages. Without the meticulous work of SwissGlobal, our translations partner, "Swiss Review" would not be the magazine that it is. SwissGlobal recently provided its take on the idiosyncrasies of two

languages: Swiss German and English. We highly recommend both these informative, thought-provoking blog posts.

Swiss German: ogy.de/helvetismen

English: ogy.de/the-uk-us-divide



The wolf is here to stay

The first wolves wandered back into Switzerland 25 years ago. Around 80 wolves now roam the Swiss Alps and Jura mountains, and their numbers are growing rapidly. Currently a protected species, the wolf is beginning to come under pressure again.

THEODORA PETER

In 1995, wolves re-entered Switzerland via the rough mountain terrain that straddles the country's southern border. All males, they had broken off from their packs in the French-Italian Alps and set off north in search of new territory. Female wolves followed later, providing offspring. At the end of 2019, the total number of wolves counted in the cantons of Grisons, Ticino, Valais and Vaud stood at around 80 (divided into eight

packs). If their numbers continue to grow unchecked, up to 300 wolves could be roaming the country within the next ten years. This would bring Switzerland to the limit of what it can offer wolves in terms of liveable habitat. Theoretically, the 20,000 or so square kilometres of Swiss Alpine and Jura terrain is big enough for 60 packs of five to six wolves each. According to Reinhard Schnidrig, head of the Wildlife and Forest Biodiversity Section of the Federal Office for

the Environment (FOEN), 20 packs are necessary to assure the wolf's long-term future (see interview on page 9).

For over 120 years, Switzerland was a wolf-free country, after centuries of hunting by humans culminated in the last native wolf being shot dead in Ticino in 1872. The only place *Canis lupus* was still welcome was in captivity. The mammal was among the most popular attractions when Basel Zoo opened in 1874 –



Nature photographer Peter A. Dettling took this photo of a feral wolf in Surselva in August 2006. It was one of the first such pictures taken without the help of a photo trap.

along with the lynx, the badger and the fox. Basel's wolf enclosure is now no more after Cleopatra and Caesar, the last-surviving members of an old wolf pack, were put to sleep on compassionate grounds last summer. The zoo will no longer be housing wolves in future, but it is still possible to admire the carnivore in several of Switzerland's animal parks.

Sympathy and antipathy

In the wild, however, wolves are harder to spot as they shy away from humans. In 2006, nature photographer Peter A. Dettling photographed a wolf in Surselva, one of the very first

pictures of a feral wolf in Switzerland. The Swiss expatriate Dettling, 48, has been living mainly in Canada since 2002. It was there that he studied the social behaviour of wolf packs for a number of years in Banff National Park. Following the first-ever confirmed sighting of a pack of wolves on the Calanda massif in 2012, Dettling returned to Grisons to document how these wolves were faring. Through presentations, field trips and books (see box), he has lifted the lid on an animal that, in his opinion, has been misunderstood and unjustly demonised for centuries as a blood-thirsty predator. As the forebears of dogs, "wolves are our oldest allies and have therefore contributed greatly to human development", Dettling argues.

However, sheep and livestock farmers whose animals have been mauled by wolves are less than delighted about the lupine resurgence. A wolf's natural instinct is to attack whenever easy pickings present themselves – entirely reasonable behaviour as successful hunting in the wild is never assured. However, panicked sheep will in turn rouse the wolf's killer instinct even more. This results in 'massacres' that leave herders tearing their hair out. Now that sheep farmers have started to cut

their losses by providing their flocks with better protection, the angry calls for wolves to be wiped out have died down somewhat.

Wolf killings already allowed

According to the carnivore ecology and wildlife management foundation KORA, around 3,700 farm animals were killed by wolves between 1999 and 2018. On behalf of the federal government, KORA monitors Switzerland's carnivore populations and the interactions that they have with humans and other animal populations. Farmers who lose livestock due to wolf attacks receive financial compensation from the Confederation and cantons. However, this money will in future only be paid out to farmers who have adequately protected their herds, e.g. by installing electric fences or using specially trained dogs to guard livestock enclosures and defend their occupants against wolf attacks. The federal government subsidises these preventive measures to the tune of some three million Swiss francs a year.

It is also permitted to kill wolves if the same wolf is shown to have been responsible for too many livestock losses; the red line is normally

A Maremmano-Abruzzese sheepdog protecting its flock on the Grisons mountain pastures.

Photo: Peter A. Dettling.
www.TerraMagica.ca





On the trail of the wolf in Valais. A still shot from Thomas Horat's feature-length documentary "Wolves Return".

crossed when a wolf attacks more than 25 sheep. Local authorities have issued 23 of these permits since 2000. Ten of these cases resulted in the wolf being successfully dispatched. In the remaining instances, the wolf made off before the hunter could pull the trigger. Around 20 wolves met their end in other ways: they were hit by cars or trains – or shot illegally. Wolves that die a natural death are rarely found and therefore do not appear in any statistics.

Vote on the Swiss Hunting Act

With wolf numbers increasing, politicians in Switzerland's mountainous

cantons want action. Parliament instructed the Federal Council to relax the laws on species conservation back in 2015, so that wolf numbers could be regulated before conflicts of interest arose. On 17 May, voters will now decide whether to endorse a controversial change to the Swiss Hunting Act that would authorise shooting as a way to regulate wolf numbers before the animals cause any harm. The conservative-leaning parties, the Swiss Farmers' Union and the hunting lobby are in favour of the reform, because they regard controlled killing as crucial to wolf-human coexistence.

However, environmental and animal welfare groups are opposed to "preventive shooting", saying that it would send out the wrong message and undermine species conservation efforts. Within a short space of time, they managed to collect the 50,000 signatures that are necessary for a popular vote. The groups also object to the fact that the revised Swiss Hunting Act even allows wolves to be

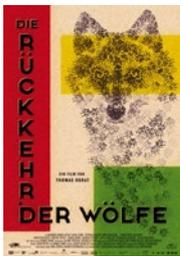
shot in designated no-hunting zones. They believe that these conservation areas should remain a haven for wolves too.

Protected status under scrutiny

According to FOEN, the planned revision of the Swiss Hunting Act respects the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979), which, it says, expressly permits the killing of wolves to prevent serious damage. A request lodged by Switzerland in 2018 to downgrade the wolf from "strictly protected" to "protected" within the context of the Bern Convention remains pending. The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention rejected an identical request by Switzerland in 2006. EU member states first want to ascertain wolf numbers throughout Europe before deciding on the matter again. Those figures are still to be published.

Wolves are an emotive subject – these evocative, mysterious creatures divide opinion. The federal parliament has already seen fierce debate about the Swiss Hunting Act. Representatives of the mountainous cantons accused their counterparts from the lower-lying cantons of romanticising the wolf and of dictating how affected mountain populations should deal with the animal. The vote on 17 May threatens to reopen this rural-urban divide. But the wolf is here to stay, regardless of what the people decide.

The movie and the book



In his 2019 feature-length documentary "Wolves Return", Schwyz-born film-maker Thomas Horat examines the human struggle with wolves. His film extends beyond Switzerland, also drawing from research conducted in Austria, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and the USA over a three-year period. Horat talked to shepherds, mountain herders, academics and wolf experts (including Reinhard Schnidrig) about the facts and myths surrounding this controversial yet fascinating animal. The result is a highly watchable movie that cuts to the chase. "Wolves Return" will be released on DVD and on-demand this coming autumn.

Trailer with German subtitles:

ogy.de/trailer-wolf;

Trailer with English subtitles:

ogy.de/wolf-trailer



Wolves have not only made it to the silver screen but are also the subject of a new book. In his latest work, "Wolfsodyssee" (Wolf Odyssey), Swiss-Canadian nature photographer Peter A. Dettling documents his years of searching for the wolf. Ever since encountering ten wolves in the Canadian wilderness in 2005, Dettling has been fascinated by the animal. His book is part biography, part nature chronicle, part behavioural study, part adventure story. Wolf whisperer Dettling wants to promote greater understanding and empathy for what he calls our "oldest allies". The book contains numerous wolf-related photos, including the ones used in this edition of "Swiss Review".

"Wolfsodyssee" (Wolf Odyssey). Peter A. Dettling.

Werd & Weber Verlag (2019), 350 pages, CHF 39.

Only available in German.

“Wolves need to know that humans aren’t always harmless”

We need to regulate wolf numbers to foster wolf-human coexistence, says Reinhard Schnidrig. Switzerland’s chief wildlife officer advocates a pragmatic approach to dealing with an animal that tends to be either demonised or idealised.



INTERVIEW: THEODORA PETER

How many wolves can a small country like Switzerland take?

Reinhard Schnidrig: It is less a question of wolf numbers and more about wolves retaining their natural shyness. There is enough space in the Swiss Alps and the Jura mountains for about 60 wolf packs or 300 animals. That is the upper limit of what is ecologically tolerable. At the lower end of the scale, 20 or so packs are necessary for the wolf to remain in Switzerland for generations. Nevertheless, we must control the growth in numbers to foster wolf-human coexistence.

Is it not just a case of getting used to wolves in Switzerland again?

The Swiss have developed a certain tolerance to wolves in the last 20 years. Every single wolf was an issue at the beginning. I am happy to say that we are past that stage now – because wolves are back and they are here to stay. On the other hand, we cannot have wolves wandering through villages in broad daylight. Wolves belong in the forests and mountains. They need to respect us humans and the animals that we rear. Wolf management and the revised Swiss Hunting Act will help to nip wolf-human conflict in the bud.

How dangerous are wolves to humans?

Wolves do not pose much of a threat to people. There have been no wolf attacks on humans in the Alps in recent history. Central European wolves have learned to avoid humans as a result of being hunted for centuries. However, wolves quickly learn whenever they are no longer under threat. They will then encroach on the places we live. The aim of wolf management is to ensure that wolves retain their instinctive shyness. Wolf packs need to know that humans aren’t always harmless.

Is it at all possible to influence a wolf’s behaviour?

Wolf management is all about knowing when to act and when not to. For example, you need to intervene when wolves learn to evade measures designed to protect livestock – in which case you must stop such situations from becoming routine for them. Shoot a young member of the

pack at the scene of the attack, and the parents will learn to avoid humans and respect the physical boundaries protecting the livestock that they rear. Experience has shown that this approach works. Wardens have done it before, and the wolf pack in question never returned.

Can you not leave the job of regulating wolf numbers to nature?

You can in the vast forests of Alaska, but not in a densely populated and intensively farmed country like Switzerland. If we do nothing and the revised Swiss Hunting Act is rejected, the cantons will have no means of controlling the growth in wolf numbers. Shooting a young wolf may seem cruel, but there is no point feeling sorry for an individual animal when you are trying to preserve the wolf population as a whole in the long run.

Wolves tend to be either demonised or idealised. Why is this?

Wolves are neither all bad nor all good. They are very adaptable and highly intelligent creatures that live in families – just like humans. Indigenous peoples used to venerate the wolf. It was only in the Middle Ages that wolves became the enemy because of the livestock that they attacked. Although wolves never killed humans, they would scavenge on bodies strewn across the medieval battlefields. Fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood then helped to fuel the myth of the “big bad wolf”.

Reinhard Schnidrig heads the Wildlife and Forest Biodiversity Section of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). He has been interested in wolves for almost 25 years. He has never seen a wolf in the wild in Switzerland, although he has seen them in Alaska and Mongolia.

Showdown over the bilateral agreements

Should Switzerland abandon the Swiss-EU agreement on the free movement of persons? It should, according to an SVP initiative that will be put to the people on 17 May. The outcome of this vote will decide the future direction of Swiss-EU relations.

EU commissioner Johannes Hahn (left) and Federal Councilor Ignazio Cassis shake hands at the WEF in Davos. After their meeting, Cassis said that the EU was very understanding of the Swiss government's wait-and-see stance.

Photo: Keystone



THEODORA PETER

The aim of the SVP's popular initiative, "For moderate immigration", is for Switzerland to have full control over immigration. This is something that "any independent and economically successful country should take as a given", according to the SVP, which believes that "mass" immigration is pushing Swiss out of the job market, reducing living space and putting a strain on social security.

If the SVP initiative is successful, Switzerland will either have to renegotiate or terminate the Swiss-EU agreement on the free movement of persons. An end to free movement would result in around 450 million EU citizens losing the right to live and work in Switzerland without any formal restrictions. But, in turn, it would also affect Swiss who want to live and work in the EU.

The SVP launched the initiative in 2018 in reaction to what they view as the non-implementation of the "Stop mass immigration" initiative, which saw 50.3 per cent voting in February 2014 to introduce immigration curbs and quotas. Parliament found it hard to agree to anything

other than a watered-down version of the 2014 initiative, because implementing it to the letter and restricting immigration is legally at odds with the bilateral agreements. In the end, parliament merely agreed on an arrangement that obliges employers to advertise vacant positions to job centres and invite Swiss job seekers for interview. The SVP accused parliament of violating the constitution.

Crucial question on Europe

How should Switzerland fundamentally interact with the EU? This was and still is the key question. In both 2000 and 2009, voters decisively put their weight behind the bilateral agreements with the EU. With its latest attack on free movement, the SVP is politically isolated. All the other political parties including industry groups have called it the "termination initiative" and warned that adopting it would jeopardise the bilateral relationship between Switzerland and the EU. This is down to a "guillotine clause" stipulating that if just one agreement is not

extended or is cancelled, all seven bilateral agreements cease to apply.

According to *economiesuisse* CEO Monika Rühl, Brexit has emphatically shown that, from the EU's point of view, participation in the European single market is inextricably linked to freedom of movement. Unfettered access to the EU market is the life blood of the Swiss economy, given that 50 per cent of Swiss exports go to the EU.

Waiting on a framework deal

However, Switzerland is going to have to reboot its relationship with the EU regardless. The draft institutional framework agreement designed to replace the existing bilateral agreements has been on the table for 15 months. Certain aspects of the text remain controversial: wage protection, state subsidies, and the Citizens' Rights Directive (see also "Swiss Review" 5/2019). Since last summer, the Confederation, the cantons, and employer and employee organisations have been working behind closed doors to find appropriate solutions.

The Federal Council now wants to wait until the outcome of the popular vote on 17 May before commenting on these outstanding issues. At the beginning of the year, a government delegation met European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as well as the EU commissioner responsible for Switzerland, Johannes Hahn, at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos. Hahn was very understanding of Switzerland's wait-and-see stance, said Federal Councillor Ignacio Cassis (FDP) after the meeting. There was no time limit for completing the negotiations as far as the EU was concerned. "Nevertheless, we obviously need to start moving forward after 17 May," he added.

Time is particularly of the essence for the medical technology sector, which could lose unrestricted access to the EU market as early as the end of May. As long as the framework deal remains on hold, the EU will not be prepared to update the agreements on the mutual recognition of conformity assessment. That is the technical situation at least, what it means in practice is serious complications and significant additional costs for day-to-day business. Switzerland will no longer be treated the same as EU member states, meaning that medtech companies will have to get their products certified in the EU. The business federation *economiesuisse* is therefore urging the Federal Council to sign the framework agreement as soon as possible.

Overview of all the votes on 17 May

"For moderate immigration" popular initiative:

Switzerland must take back full control of immigration, according to the SVP's limitation initiative. If the SVP initiative is approved, Switzerland will have to terminate the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. Industry groups and all the other political parties warn of serious consequences (see main text above).

Revision of the Swiss Hunting Act:

The Federal Council and parliament believe that relaxing the legislation that protects wolves and other animals will help to regulate the Swiss wolf population. It will allow wolves to be shot before they cause any harm. Environmental and animal welfare groups are opposed to the revised Hunting Act, saying that it takes things too far (see article on page 6).

Amendment to the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation:

The general childcare deduction on taxable income is to be increased from 6,500 to 10,000 francs. The SP are against the reform. In their view, it will only help wealthy families. Parents on low incomes will not benefit, the party say, because low earners hardly pay any federal tax when cantonal and municipal tax are also taken into consideration.

Results of the votes on 9 February

No to the "More affordable homes" popular initiative:

57.1 per cent of the Swiss electorate rejected a proposal by the Swiss tenants' association to promote social housing in Switzerland. Enough is already being done to subsidise housing, according to the Federal Council and the centre-right parties. However, extra money will be injected into the National Operating Fund, from which housing cooperatives can get loans on favourable terms. See "Swiss Review" 6/2019 for more details.

Yes to a ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation:

63.1 per cent of voters approved an amendment to the Swiss Criminal Code and the Swiss Military Criminal Code that extends the anti-racism provision to make homophobic abuse a criminal offence. Some conservative and Christian groups opposed the new law, calling it an attack on free speech. See "Swiss Review" 6/2019 for more details.

Sommaruga finds her calling

The new president of the Swiss Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga, seems to be in her element since moving to the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications. The SP Federal Councillor has put climate and environmental policies at the very top of her agenda.

STEFAN BÜHLER

Simonetta Sommaruga likes to wander barefoot around her garden – as the journalists of “Schweizer Illustrierte” learned to their bemusement while visiting the SP politician at her home near Berne in summer 2012. Sommaruga talked about her selection of flowers, plucked some lettuce leaves and presented her various fruit bushes and trees – apples, pears, cherries, plums, blackcurrants, etc. The article was less of a typical “through the keyhole” feature, and more a profile of the nature-loving federal councillor enjoying the sound of bees in her garden.

However, Sommaruga was head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) at the time – a position that had precious little to do with gardening or any love of the natural world. And little to do with the politician herself. Sommaruga, a trained concert pianist, reluctantly inherited the FDJP portfolio after her election to the Federal Council in 2010. She was like a fish out of water at first. Admittedly, she still got to promote issues that were important to her – such as wage equality, better protection for women against violence, and the concept of “marriage for all”.

However, it would be fair to say that the left-wing politician did the FDJP job through gritted teeth, given that her core responsibilities included tightening Switzerland’s asylum laws and organising the deportation of foreign offenders. Sommaruga had to hold out for eight years before she got the chance to

change ministries. Following the resignation of CVP Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, the top post at the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) finally became free on 1 January 2019. With no one to hold her back this time, Sommaruga seized her opportunity.

Back to her political roots

It was a liberation – that was obvious when she smiled before the media after clinching the move, looking to all intents and purposes as if she had just won an election. The new head of DETEC explained that she was returning to her political roots. Not only had she been on the environment committee in her capacity as National Councillor and later as member of the Council of States for the canton of Berne, but she had continued to keep a close eye on environmental affairs as Federal Councillor. In her view, DETEC laid down a marker that was “crucial for our children and grandchildren”. Sommaruga was positively chomping at the bit.

And, right from the off, she convinced the Federal Council during her first year in office that Switzerland should be carbon-neutral by 2050. She won majority support for her green levy on air travel and insisted, for example, that federal employees travel to neighbouring countries by train instead of plane in future, whenever possible. Circumstances certainly also played into Sommaruga’s hands when she started her new job: students launched

school strikes for the climate at the end of 2018, just before she moved to DETEC. They organised demonstrations and appeared alongside Swede Greta Thunberg at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos. Climate change later became the key issue during the election year. Sommaruga, who incidentally had urged the Federal Council to take cli-

Federal Council without Greens

After their success in the 2019 election, the Green Party immediately requested a seat in the Federal Council. The composition of this, the seven-member government, is built on a consensual model representing the main parliamentary parties more or less proportionally. The Greens complained that the FDP in particular was over-represented with two seats. With a 13.2 per cent voting share in the National Council elections, the Greens are now on an equal footing with the FDP (15.1 per cent) and the CVP (11.4 per cent). However, the centre-right parties said that one unprecedented result was no reason for changing the “magic formula” (currently two seats each for the SVP, FDP and SP, and one seat for the CVP). The Federal Council election on 11 December 2019 turned into a red-green attack on FDP Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, framed mainly as a no-confidence vote. Cassis was consequently re-elected with the lowest score. The results: Viola Amherd, CVP, 218 votes; Alain Berset, SP, 214; Ueli Maurer, SVP, 213; Simonetta Sommaruga, President of the Confederation, SP, 192; Guy Parmelin, SVP, 191; Karin Keller-Sutter, FDP, 169; Ignazio Cassis, FDP, 145. (MUL)



Red amid verdant green – both colours mean something to Environment Minister Simonetta Sommaruga. Archive photo: Charly Hug

mate action while she was still a member of the Council of States in 2006, proved adept at turning this to her advantage. Soon the new environment minister was inviting young activists into her office. She also took to the streets in September as tens of thousands walked through Berne to call for concrete action on climate change – this was also a good party-political opportunity before the federal elections.

Change in priorities

And yet, the Greens celebrated an historic election victory while the SP haemorrhaged votes. Sommaruga now has high expectations to live up to within her party, who see her as their green totem. This has implications on how she manages DETEC.

Christian Democrat Leuthard focused on infrastructure from the outset, ensuring long-term funding for road and rail connections. During her time in office, the second Gotthard road tunnel got the go-ahead. The Federal Office for the Environment, on the other hand, played a secondary role, usually only making headlines in relation to wolves and bears. Unlike her predecessor, Sommaruga is positioning herself much more as an environment minister. For her, energy and transport policy is not just a matter of infrastructure or supply security but has just as much to do with the climate. She has added input to issues such as agricultural policy, the protection of drinking water and the use of herbicides and insecticides, while biodiversity conservation is at the very top of her agenda. And she

has interpreted her role this year as president of the Swiss Confederation in the same way. Speaking to the assembled business, political and academic elite at the WEF in Davos in January, Sommaruga made a dramatic appeal for more action on climate change. “The world is on fire,” she told participants, before presenting a video about the decline in bees and biodiversity. Make no mistake, the environment minister means business. For the sake of the bees in her garden – and elsewhere.

STEFAN BÜHLER IS DOMESTIC NEWS EDITOR AT “NZZ AM SONNTAG”

“E-voting and e-banking are not the same thing”

E-voting in Switzerland has been on hold since last summer – leaving many Swiss Abroad disappointed. Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr gives us his take on the matter, reiterating the importance of “security before speed”.

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU, SUSANNE WENGER

Swiss Review: Tell us, Mr Thurnherr – have you ever missed a voting date?

Walter Thurnherr: I have not missed one yet, as far as I know. I always vote by post because it is quick and very practical – unless you are visually impaired or live abroad.

Would you be worried if voter turnout in Switzerland fell by a third?

Voter turnout is already under 50 per cent, meaning that only around one quarter of the population decides on everything. That concerns me for a start.

But this is exactly what we saw in the 2019 National Council elections: a sharp decline in turnout. The number of people voting from abroad plummeted in some instances.

Although this was probably because the electronic voting channel was unavailable. We could correct that. In my view, it would be worse if voters lost interest in voting and no one knew why.

Since e-voting was put on ice, we in the editorial team have received an increasing number of letters from disaffected expats. Can you understand this reaction?

Yes, of course. Especially from those who previously had access to e-voting and had got used to it. It is particularly annoying for people who are only out of the country for a relatively short time and will be returning to Switzerland later – because they will be directly affected by the voting outcomes.

They say that e-voting in Switzerland is currently on hold, but isn't it clinically dead?

On hold means exactly that. But the issue cannot be resolved in a couple of days. No one can say yet how things will turn out. It depends on various factors. E-voting opponents are collecting signatures for a popular initiative calling for a moratorium. Various motions are pending in parliament. It is also about whether we have an operator that can provide a secure system.

Are you optimistic?

Good question! Four years ago, the Council of States only narrowly rejected a motion calling on the federal govern-



Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr on the prospects for e-voting: “Sometimes I am optimistic, sometimes less so.” Photos: Danielle Liniger

ment to force the cantons into offering e-voting by the 2019 elections. We were already saying back then that security takes priority over speed, stressing the importance of cantonal autonomy. Consultations on e-voting later revealed that almost all cantons welcomed e-voting. Most

of the political parties thought differently, however. Then we had the attempt by Swiss Post to roll out a fully verifiable e-voting system. Testing showed up a number of serious and even quite embarrassing flaws, so Swiss Post eventually decided to pull the existing system. We have also seen a general change in attitudes.

How do you mean?

Whereas 15 years ago we were saying that the Internet was very good for democracies and bad for dictatorships, it now tends to be the other way around. Everyone is very wary now due to all the factors and arguments that have been documented. But I am sure that if two or three cantons had a fully verifiable system in place, then neighbouring cantons would immediately wonder about whether they can follow suit. This is often how things work in Switzerland.

Berne has been sending mixed signals on e-voting. On the one hand we have you, the Federal Chancellor, in charge of drawing up a new e-voting testing process by the end of the year in consultation with the cantons. On the other, we see growing pressure from parliament to abandon e-voting. What are you supposed to think if you are a Swiss living in, say, Sydney or Ouagadougou?

Anyone who stays informed will know what is happening in Switzerland, regardless of whether they live in Sydney or Ouagadougou. Swiss politics is all about consultation and consensus – sometimes it is hard to see the wood for the trees. You go one step forward, then two steps back. Things need time. Let us not forget either that with postal voting the discussions began in the 1930s. We introduced it nationwide in 1994. Ticino actually only introduced it for cantonal ballots a few years ago.

Last summer, the Federal Council decided against rolling out e-voting throughout Switzerland. It wants a new testing process to be carried out instead. But pilots have been ongoing in several cantons since 2004. We wanted to go one step further than before and test a system that is fully verifiable. Only when we have such a system will we roll out e-voting more widely. Unfortunately, the Swiss Post system had flaws. The new testing process that we have announced is about getting to the next stage. It is about moving forward, slowly but surely.

E-voting has mainly come under fire owing to security concerns. Will e-voting ever be secure?

Security can never be completely watertight. Any electronic process can be hacked or corrupted. However, the sa-



Thurnherr: "I understand the frustration of those who feel disenfranchised."

feguards that we are putting in place mean that any attempt to hack would, firstly, require an inordinate amount of time and effort, and, secondly, not go unnoticed. The aim is to ensure the highest possible level of safety as we do with aircraft or nuclear power plants. Strictly speaking, if you are looking for absolute safety you should never board an aeroplane.

Many voters in the "Fifth Switzerland" think that the security concerns are misplaced. They can use e-banking and access e-government services, where the level of risk is considered acceptable.

Why not e-voting?

E-banking and e-voting are not the same thing. Whereas e-banking consists of individual client-server interactions, e-voting relates to an entire system. Any damage would be far greater. Even the mere suspicion of votes being hacked is bad for the credibility of our democratic system. Hence, we hold e-voting to much higher security standards than any other electronic system. This has

made us less than popular among potential system providers.

Postal voting is popular, but that can be manipulated as well. And several thousand postal votes are rendered invalid each time, because voters failed to sign their ballot papers, for example.

Your comparison is a bit too simplistic. You can manipulate postal votes here and there, but rarely on a large scale. The concern with e-voting is that someone could hack into the server and change the entire outcome of the vote. Critics are right to say that we should remain wary when it comes to our democratic processes. We therefore have to explain to people what we are doing to make e-voting as secure as possible.

Aren't there any alternatives to e-voting that would enable Swiss Abroad to exercise their legal right to vote? What about sending voting papers electronically?

E-dispatch is not a good idea in my view. It is certainly less secure than a fully verifiable e-voting system. And it would only be of use to Swiss Abroad whose post is too slow for sending voting papers both ways but quick enough for sending them one way. E-voting was not only meant as an innovation for expats, as you know. Through e-voting, we can finally ensure voter secrecy for Switzerland's 350,000 blind or partially sighted people. E-dispatch is no use to them.

Then what about keeping things simple and voting at an embassy instead?

When I used to live in Moscow, I was able to hand my voting envelope to the diplomatic courier. But that is not an option if you live in Vladivostok or Irkutsk. You would have to fly to Moscow each time you wanted to cast your vote. Another thing that has been suggested is nominating a proxy in Switzerland who will receive your ballot paper and fill it in according to how you want to vote. But you cannot vote in secret that way. Would the Swiss Abroad really want that? Of course, we are always open to making improvements. For example, we extended the deadline for returning voting papers by one week. We could also start to think about alternatives if e-voting was ever ditched for good.

Could a dedicated constituency for the "Fifth Switzerland" be another alternative?

You would need to change the constitution for that. We have 760,000 Swiss who live abroad. Anyone can launch



"Security can never be completely watertight," Thurnherr tells "Swiss Review".

a popular initiative if they want to. But that won't solve the problem of voting papers not arriving in time, I am afraid.

The complaints from the "Fifth Switzerland" are probably less to do with voting and more to do with the feeling that they are being treated unfairly. Essentially, the problem is that not all Swiss can actually exercise their voting rights to the full.

I understand the frustration of those who feel disenfranchised. However, postal voting was introduced with the caveat that there is no guarantee of voting papers arriving on time. I remember because I used to be head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. We cannot repeat the vote if the Brazilian post office fails to deliver the voting envelopes on time. Nevertheless, we do have a very democratic voting system here in Switzerland. Our expatriate communities continue to have political rights, even though some expatriates have been based abroad for generations. Maybe that is worth mentioning too.

Walter Thurnherr has been the Federal Chancellor since 2016. He is the most senior official responsible for federal elections and votes. Thurnherr, who was born in Aargau and studied physics, has served in various positions within the Federal Administration and the diplomatic service, involving assignments in Moscow and New York.

Voting rights for the Swiss Abroad – “Switzerland is already at the limit of what it can offer”

Voting papers for Swiss expatriates arrive too late in many cases. Now the courts are deliberating on the extent to which the state must ensure voting rights for the Swiss Abroad. Constitutional experts believe that the law has promised something that is basically impossible to deliver.

SIBILLA BONDOLFI

Had the votes from the “Fifth Switzerland” been received on time, Filippo Lombardi (CVP) would probably have won the latest election to the Council of States in the canton of Ticino instead of his Swiss Social Democratic Party rival Marina Carobbio. The Ticino Administrative Court and the Federal Supreme Court are now looking into the matter.

Postal voting glitches are at the centre of the furor. However, Emeritus Professor of Law and expert on voting rights Pierre Tschannen says that there is one slight problem: “International post is not the responsibility of the Swiss authorities.” In other words: according to current legal practice, the Swiss Abroad must bear the risk of voting papers being dispatched in good time but arriving too late. But what would the law say if – as in Ticino – the authori-



Polling officers doing their job. They will not count postal votes that arrive too late.
Photo: Keystone

ties sat on the voting papers for an inordinate amount of time or sent these documents by second-class post, resulting in delivery times of up to 25 days depending on the country? “It’s hard to say regarding delays that were actually caused in Switzerland,” says Tschannen. “Things might well be different if the outcome of the vote was very close.” Hence, the Lombardi case could potentially set a precedent.

Constitutional and democracy expert Professor Andreas Glaser of the University of Zurich is very interested to see how the legal dispute in Ticino pans out. “Usually it is a question of a few missing votes here and there, which have no bearing on the result,” he says. “But the delayed votes could play a role this time.” This is because 200 voting envelopes reached Switzerland too late – and only 46 votes separated Lombardi and Carobbio.

“Only e-voting can solve the problem in the long run, but there are of course some weighty arguments against e-voting,” says Tschannen. Glaser adds that the current situation is unsatisfactory. “It was thought that e-voting would save the day.” Instead, voting rights for the Swiss Abroad are impracticable in reality, despite being enshrined in the Constitution.

SIBILLA BONDOLFI is a member of the swissinfo editorial team. This piece is an excerpt from a longer article available in German and French on the swissinfo.ch website.

Do the Swiss Abroad have irrefutable voting rights?

Is there actually any obligation for Switzerland to grant its citizens abroad the right to vote? “There is no obligation under international law for countries to grant voting rights to their expatriates,” says Tschannen. “However, the federal government is bound under the Federal Constitution to enact legislation governing the rights and obligations of Swiss Abroad, specifically in relation to political rights.”

Thus, the Federal Constitution is implicitly saying that Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote at federal level. The right to vote is also enshrined in the Swiss Abroad Act, which states that votes may be cast in person, by post, or, provided the conditions are met, electronically.

“The unrestricted right to vote is a luxury for Swiss citizens abroad,” says Glaser. “Such a generous interpretation of voting rights leaves little room for manoeuvre. Switzerland has no choice but to grant suffrage to its expatriate community. However, Switzerland is already at the limit of what it can offer.”

“I take a critical view of voting rights for the Swiss Abroad, and I am not alone in that,” says Tschannen. On the one hand, politicians would never change the status quo because the political rights of Swiss expatriates are set in stone. “Nevertheless, voting rights for the Swiss Abroad run counter to the fundamental democratic principle that you may only participate in elections and popular votes if you are directly affected by their outcome.”

Leysin: 57.7% international residents, but the village remains sheltered from the world

The municipality of Leysin holds the biggest proportion of foreign nationals in Switzerland. With its former sanatoriums turned into international schools, the ski resort is an oasis of cultural diversity.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The mountain resort is connected to the valley by rail and by road. South-facing, it is sheltered from the north wind. Its inhabitants are a mixture of 'montagnards', those brought up here and accustomed to mountain life, and expats from every corner of the world. Some of them have settled permanently in the village at 1,300 metres in altitude. This is Leysin: a village that won its place on the world map in the 19th century through the Swiss entrepreneurs who had heard of its sun-soaked ledges and pure mountain air. The local economy was built on the fight against tuberculosis, and numerous hotel-hospitals were erected on the steep mountain-

side overlooking the village. The arrival of penicillin marked the end of this period, and after lying empty throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the sanatoriums were eventually transformed into private schools.

"It's not just somewhere you pass through, it's somewhere you come on purpose," remarks Christoph Ott, a native of the region with dual nationality, who heads the Leysin American School (LAS) with his brother. This school for the children of well-off families – fees are CHF 100,000 per year – was founded by their grandparents, who had come over from North Dakota. In total, young people of foreign origin represent around 25% of the 4,000 or so residents of

Leysin. They are spread among the village's three large international schools: LAS, the Japanese Kumon Leysin Academy of Switzerland (KLAS), and the Swiss Hotel Management School (SHMS). Jean-Daniel Champagnac, leader of the Social Democrat group in the municipal council describes these 1,000 students as "long term tourists". Mayor Jean-Marc Udriot estimates that their presence generates approximately 25% of the commune's GDP.

A student life behind closed doors

Asian, African, Arab, Russian, Anglo-Saxon... students of all nationalities who hardly mix with the wider



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. Today: The Swiss municipality with the highest proportion of foreign nationals.



Typical Leysin – foreign students account for a quarter of the population.

Photos: Niels Ackermann

population. Everything is organised for them by their schools, and outings in the village are somewhat limited. Alcohol is forbidden for students of the American and Japanese schools. The village is home to two bakeries and three supermarkets, but no nightclubs. SHMS has one, but it is reserved for its 500 students only. The school's managers-in-the-making lodge high up in the imposing Mont Blanc Palace, a former Club Med, with south-facing balconies originally intended for tuberculosis sufferers. "We offer 600 beds for our students; it is the presence of other schools and the opening up of Leysin to the world that has made such a grand operation possible in such a small municipality," notes Florent Rondez, CEO of the Swiss Education Group, which recently acquired the Palace.

The gap between base and summit

Christoph Ott is aware of the divide that exists between the upper region of the village, at Le Feydey, where the hotel-sanatoriums were built at the close of the 19th century, and the lower region, then home to 300 people. This was before the arrival of the Vevey – Le Feydey train connection, in 1900. Today, the resort boasts four train stations and there are plans to develop the rail network even further. "Our school is committed to building bridges to eliminate the divide," states the director of the LAS, which spreads its activities across 16 buildings. A member of the municipal council, married to a Pole, and with a doctorate in economics, he has suggested to his students that they provide English lessons to the 60 or so individuals lodged in Leysin's centre for asylum seekers, for example. The young people from the international schools also help out during festivals organised at the ski resort.

The staff working at the private schools constitute a further separate

community. This group counts 150 people from LAS, 100 from SHMS and 51 from LKAS, of which half are teachers. According to the director of the Japanese school, John Southworth, some of these teachers have been in Leysin for over 20 years, with an average presence of 11 years. Some speak fluent French, whilst others speak only English. "This is a bit regrettable," he admits. This anglophone, who arrived in Leysin in 1994 and who speaks French and Japanese, jokes that he is "married to Kumon". On the other hand, his colleague, financial director Riki Okura, has two children who do not attend private school. This encourages contact with the local population. But life here remains very different from his time in the USA, where he was invited to a party on a weekly basis. "The locals here lead private lives centred on family," he comments.

Patients and their posterity

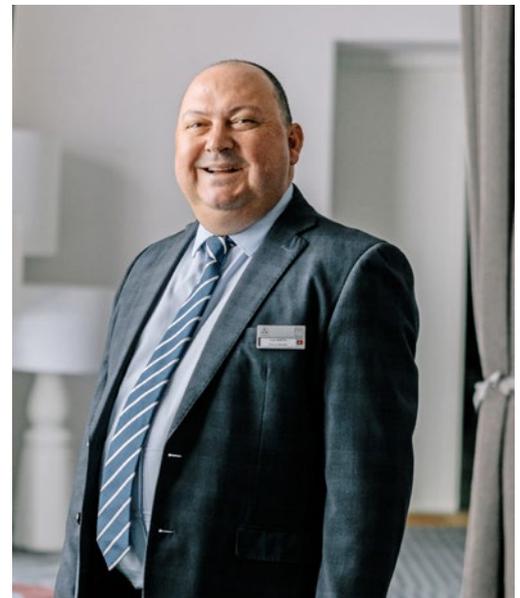
Another slice of the sociological sandwich in Leysin is made up of patients, their visitors and their offspring. Erica André, who arrived in Leysin from South Africa in 2001, is now married to Leysin-born Marc-Henri, himself the child of parents from different countries. His father arrived in the region to receive treatment for tuberculosis. "The presence of foreigners and intercultural couples helped my

57.7%: the national record for foreign residents

In 2017, 57.7% of the 4,032 inhabitants of Leysin were 'foreign', whilst the average percentage of foreign inhabitants elsewhere in Switzerland was only 25.1%, according to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. This was a national record. This rate dropped to 55% at the end of 2018. That year, the commune counted 100 different nationalities, including 446 Chinese, 282 French, 215 Portuguese, 162 Japanese and 135 Americans.



Christoph Ott, LAS, appreciates the village's proximity to nature.



Virgilio Santos, SHMS, sends his children to school in the village.



John Southworth, Kumon, loves the safety of village life.

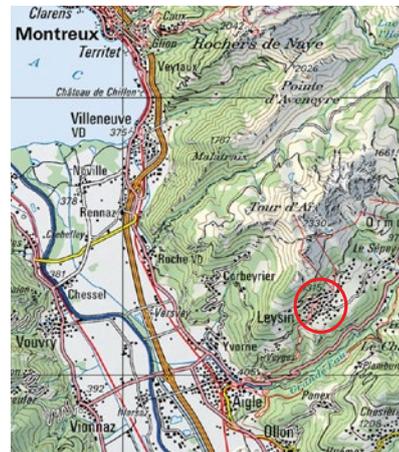


Leysin American School used to be a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. It is now a place of learning for children of the wealthy.

Photo: Niels Ackermann

A village you never leave

"I've never found anywhere else quite like Leysin," is a common remark in the village. The inhabitants have tried to define what it is in particular that draws them to the ski resort. Leysin-born artist Nicolas Vaudroz, who likes to set out on lone hikes through the snow, explains that this village has places "pulsing with life and which are good for meditating". John Southworth, director of LKAS, praises the feeling of security in the area. Virgilio Santos, of SHMS, enjoys the peace and tranquillity of his home surroundings. Christoph Ott appreciates the direct access to nature and that his children can walk around the village in complete safety. "The secret," considers Erica André "is that the Swiss inhabitants have often travelled a lot, which broadens the mind." Hippies, climbers, backpackers: all have contributed something. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, they would meet at Le Club Vagabond, a lodge now globally renowned.



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integration. I never felt 'foreign'" recalls Erica, a vet who notably cares for the cats of the Japanese teachers, amongst other animals. Meanwhile, the Director of SHMS, Portuguese Virgilio Santos, is father to twins who attend school locally. They speak with the regional accent. A further group to add to this mixed community is those who have emigrated from southern Europe.

This world, set half way between sky and plain, seems to provide a peaceful life, far from the noise and demands of the city, but also far from ostentatious wealth. During our visit, on a Monday in low season, the ski station seemed to be slumbering in deep hibernation. Above, the buildings are tall and generously spaced. Below, the village is dense and low.

"We have good quality immigration and there are no tensions," says the president of the municipal council, Serge Pfister, who teaches in Lausanne. Political life seems calmed by the reputedly healthy climate in Leysin. Jean-Daniel Champagnac, originally from neighbouring France, describes the meetings of the municipal council as being consensual.

The foreign vote

In a municipality in which the foreign population has the right to vote – after having lived there for ten years, of course – the municipal council welcomes elected representatives whose French is sometimes spoken with an accent. When asked whether this cosmopolitan presence has changed any

aspects of life in the municipality, the council president, who took on the role in 2018, admits that "it's difficult to say." For Leysin-born designer and architect Marc-Henri André, the right to vote should have remained reserved for the Swiss only, even if the impact of the 'foreign' vote has not been felt in local politics. "Leysin is made up of little communities of people who live amongst themselves, but none of them represents a majority. The Swiss themselves do not make up the majority and that's why they don't kick up a lot of fuss about it. That's just how it works between people."

A keen observer of late-1920s America

Kurt Mettler died in 1930 aged 25, leaving behind a remarkable diary that remained hidden for many decades.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“Americans are malleable to the point of naivety. They are docile and uncritical. You can lead them on a merry dance.” If you were unaware that these were the diary scribbles of a 22-year-old Swiss in 1927, you might mistake them for an astute remark about the current US president and his followers.

Young man from a rich family

Kurt Mettler was the young man in question. Mettler hailed from a wealthy St. Gallen industrialist family. He was a very good cellist, possessed a doctorate in law, and had made a name for himself thanks to fast cars, skiing escapades and flying as a passenger on the world’s first air routes. Mettler quickly realised that diaries were the form of literary expression to which he was most suited, viewing them as his “support system”, if not the central focus of his existence. He wanted to publish his “Tagebuch eines Einsamen” (Diary of a lonely soul) as early as 1927. However, it was not until he began travelling around the globe with his brother in the same year that the world properly opened up before him.

Witness of his time

Ready to share his musings with the wider public, Mettler saw himself as the chronicler of his era. He reported on a broad cross-section of social life in the USA in particular – where he portrayed fascinating people, described concerts featuring Furtwängler and Toscanini, and took an interest in early and contemporary art (with a view to opening an art gallery in Europe one day). His musings on the younger generation, of which he saw himself as a fully paid-up member, are particularly worthy of note. “We are the new generation, and it is up to us to think differently,” he wrote, adding that Plato, Spinoza and Schopenhauer were dilettantes in his opinion. “Did they invent anything absolute worth following?”

Gallery owner in Paris

Mettler returned to Switzerland via Japan, Korea and Russia in 1928, but contracted amoebic dysentery along the way – an infection he found hard to shake off. His American di-

ary was ready for printing by the time he left for Paris to open a gallery in March 1929. He also kept a diary of his stay by the River Seine, not only recounting his vain attempt to make it as a gallerist but also documenting the personal crisis he suffered as a result of his homosexuality, which he kept secret. Mettler’s liaison with a fascinating young man is one of the most moving passages in the Paris diary – a journal that would remain unfinished after the author suddenly died from blood poisoning on 12 September 1930 at the age of 25, leaving behind a considerable mountain of debt in the process.

Inaugural publication 90 years later

Mettler’s diaries would never have found their way into the public domain had they not been unearthed by distant relation David Streiff, the former head of the Federal Office of Culture. It was Streiff who published them, commissioning historian André Weibel to produce an expertly edited edition. To the surprise of many, this forgotten young man has returned to prominence 90 years after his death with a book that not only depicts the America of that era just as vibrantly as the Paris art scene, but is also quite visionary in many ways – Mettler’s foresight regarding technical advances such as aviation being one example. Statements such as “You cannot be happy and know you’re happy at the same time” also reveal a remarkable depth of thought in someone so young.

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“Women will understand neither the proper meaning of this diary nor its actual quality. But only because they will never dare to acknowledge anything without their husband’s permission. Essentially, they are the most capable of understanding the meaning and effect of this literary form, because they have a more immediate view of things compared to men.”
(Kurt Mettler, 4 September 1927)

Fewer schoolchildren understand what they read

The latest PISA study has found that Swiss schoolchildren are losing the ability to read a text and understand what it means. The country's leading teacher has called it a language crisis.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Ivana is raising chickens. She asks the following question on an online forum related to chicken health: "Is it okay to give aspirin to my hen? She is two years old and I think she has hurt her leg. I can't get to the veterinary surgeon until Monday, and the vet isn't answering the phone. My hen seems to be in a lot of pain. I'd like to give her something to make her feel better."

Ivana's question is part of a task featured in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) school performance study. The PISA study, which compares educational attainment around the world, is carried out every three years in the OECD member countries and in OECD partner countries. PISA assesses the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science.

Does the hen need an aspirin or a vet?

The latest PISA study focused mainly on reading – its "online forum on chicken health" being a prime example. Fifteen-year-olds not only had to read Ivana's question accurately but also understand what Ivana wanted to know. Did she want to know whether she could give aspirin to the injured hen or how often she could give aspirin to the injured hen? Was Ivana asking how to find a vet? Or was she asking if she could determine the pain level of an injured hen?

Students had to click on their choice to answer the question. For the first time ever, the PISA assessment included these interactive test questions in addition to the tradi-

tional paper-based reading tasks. According to the authors who summarised Switzerland's PISA results, this made sense because the test must always take societal developments into account – one of which is digitalisation. Hence, the definition of reading skills now takes the ability to use digital media into consideration.

Switzerland's latest PISA test results show a number of trends compared to the results of the 2015 assessment:

- Reading performance has declined
- The percentage of students who enjoy reading has decreased
- The percentage of students with reading difficulties has increased

Mean performance in reading in Switzerland is not much different to the average mean performance across OECD countries. However, European countries including Finland, Sweden, Germany, France and Belgium performed significantly better than Switzerland.

Films instead of books during free time

Why has Switzerland seen a decline in reading skills and reading enjoyment among young people, and why has the proportion of Swiss students with reading difficulties increased?

In her role as chair of the umbrella organisation of teachers in Switzerland, the LCH, Dagmar Rösler has to contend with education issues on a daily basis. The results of the PISA study reflect her experiences as a teacher. "I too have noticed in my work that fewer children are reading," she says. "Digital media are competing with books. Children now watch films in their free time instead of reading books."

The latest PISA results underscore this statement. Some 50 out of 100 Swiss students indicated that they did not read for enjoyment. In 2000, this applied to only 30 out of 100 students. There is, however, a very close correlation between reading enjoyment and reading skills, according to PISA, so should we be doing more to promote reading as an enjoyable activity? "We are already doing a lot. Teachers know that reading is very important," says Rösler, and she adds: "At the moment, school is probably still the place where young people read the

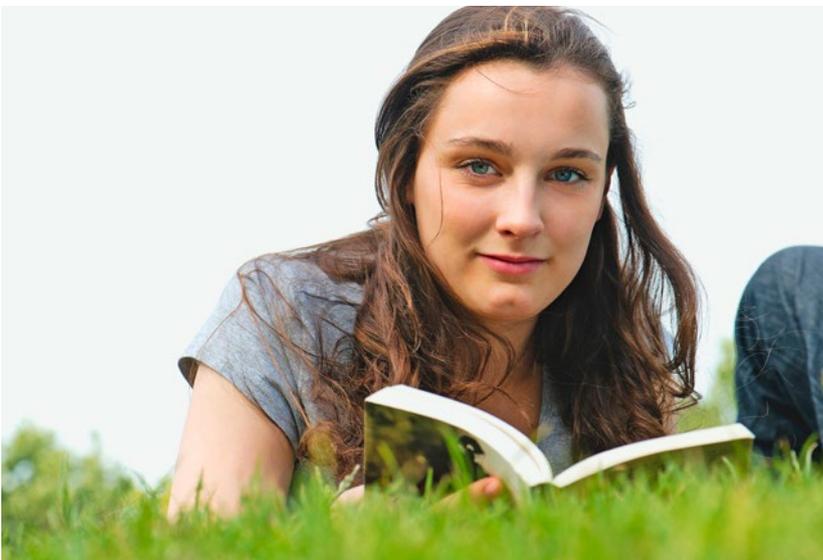


Dagmar Rösler believes that reading has to start at home.

Photo: donated

Fifty out of 100 Swiss students say they don't enjoy reading. She belongs to the other 50.

Photo: Keystone



most and have to think about the content of what they read.”

Is the reading crisis a language crisis?

Rösler believes that there needs to be more done at home within the family to develop the reading skills of children from a young age, given that a quarter of Swiss PISA students scored very poorly on reading. Young people from immigrant backgrounds account for a very large proportion of these bad results. Students from families in which the test language is normally spoken at home performed notably better.

So is the reading crisis essentially a language crisis? “If you start school without speaking the language, it is almost impossible to catch up,” says Rösler. “Switzerland is not doing enough when it comes to early language teaching.” But there are exceptions: the canton of Basel-Stadt leads the way in early language support. Basel’s cantonal authorities require families to fill in a questionnaire about their children’s command of German before they go to nursery school. Children who need extra help receive mandatory tuition free of charge in the year before entry. From summer, the city of Chur will also be offering mandatory language tuition to children who are still unable to speak enough German 18 months before the start of nursery school. The city of Lucerne is championing a similar scheme, after sending its first batch of Basel-style questionnaires to parents in January. One year ago, however, the education committee of the canton of Zurich rejected a parliamentary initiative to roll out the Basel scheme. According to Rösler, the PISA study ultimately reveals the need for action in one particular area: “We need to step on the gas when it comes to equal opportunity here in Switzerland.”

How Switzerland’s 15-year-olds performed

In 2018, 600,000 students from 79 countries participated in what is now the latest PISA study to have been published. They included 6,000 Swiss students born in 2002. The tests, conducted at 200 Swiss schools, delivered mean scores for Switzerland as a whole. The results of the assessment do not provide for cantonal comparisons or a breakdown of scores by language region. Switzerland’s students performed best in mathematics compared to other countries, while their mean performance in science was significantly above the OECD average. (GUM)

Switzerland in figures

Lots of plastic and loads of money

84

Demand for small, lightweight plastic bags in Swiss supermarkets has fallen by 84 per cent in the space of a year. This is because anyone who wants one must now pay an environmental charge of five centimes.

5,120

Talking of the environment, Swiss cleanliness, and plastic: according to the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology (EMPA), 5,120 metric tons of plastic ends up in the environment each year in Switzerland. Plastic pollution is increasing, because plastics take so long to decompose. The University of Berne estimates that around 53 metric tons of microplastics are to be found in the top five centimetres of the floodplain in Swiss nature reserves.

95,000,000,000

Now let’s talk money. Inherited wealth in Switzerland is at an all-time high, with some 95 billion francs in inheritance payments likely to change hands in 2020 – five times more than in 1990. This annual figure is set to grow in future years. Those inheriting today are also much older than the average heirs of one generation ago. This enormous flow of money remains largely untaxed in Switzerland, where politicians are nevertheless pushing for an increase in inheritance levies.

200

Dog tax, on the other hand, is not to be barked at. It can cost up to 200 francs. Many Swiss municipalities charge double if you own a second dog. Financially speaking, Switzerland is anything but canine heaven. It’s enough to make anyone howl.

551,000

And how many taxable dogs are there in Switzerland? As many as 551,000. Canine density is at its lowest in the canton of Basel-Stadt, where there is one dog per 38.4 inhabitants. The canton of Jura has the highest canine density, with one dog per 7.8 inhabitants.

SUMMARY: MUL



New Year's camp – a wonderful time was had by all

The OSA Youth Service kicked off 2020 with two winter camps. Fantastic weather, good snow conditions, and motivated participants and camp leaders were the recipe for an unforgettable time in the Swiss Alps.

The New Year's camps in Les Diablerets (Vaud) and Anzère (Valais), attended by 33 and 20 young people respectively, were both a huge success. Participants spent the morning and afternoon of almost every day on the piste, where they received tuition from qualified ski and snowboard instructors.

The camp leaders also put on a varied and exciting programme of leisure activities off the piste. Participants in Les Diablerets witnessed the Olympic torch arrive in the centre of the village, where it was lit in an official ceremony. They also went on a torch-lit procession, walked on the suspension bridge connecting the twin mountain summits of Scex Rouge (altitude of 2,971 metres), skied and snowboarded at night, and even had the chance to carve their turns on a glacier. Par-

ticipants in Anzère went sledding near their camp base, visited the local spa facilities and enjoyed a silent disco at the ice rink. They also spent some evenings in to recover from their exertions, enjoying board and other indoor games. Held in glorious weather in the beautiful Vaud and Valais Alps, the camps were a fitting way to see in the new year for all those who made the trip.

It will soon be time for our summer camps. Visit our website for more information about the camps and how to register for them: <https://www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers>
Youth Service contact details: Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland; tel.: +41 31 356 61 00; fax: +41 31 356 61 01; email: youth@aso.ch

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



Interested in education or training in Switzerland?

educationsuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad regarding educational opportunities in Switzerland.

Every year, around 70,000 young people throughout Switzerland begin an apprenticeship and over 39,000 men and women begin university studies. As Switzerland offers an excellent educational system, young Swiss Abroad are also attracted to their families' country of origin. They come from all corners of the world recognising that this is a good opportunity to get to know



Switzerland better. According to the Federal Statistical Office, some 3,500 Swiss Abroad were enrolled in a Bachelor's or Master's programme in the 2018/19 academic year.

But how do you find the right educational course? What are the admission requirements? Are my language skills sufficient? How do you find an apprenticeship? There are so many questions to be answered. Every year, educationsuisse is in contact with numerous young Swiss Abroad to answer their questions. Edu-

cationsuisse offers information, advice and support:

- Information relating to different educational options such as university studies or vocational training
- Information relating to specific questions regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.
- Individual counselling, also in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider
- Assistance in applying for a cantonal scholarship and administrative support
- Student grants from educationsuisse and private foundations

The educationsuisse staff speak German, French, Italian, Spanish and English. We will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, telephone, Skype or at our offices in Berne.

Information and contact

The Swiss educational system is illustrated and outlined in an easy-to-follow diagram on www.educationsuisse.ch. The website also contains a lot more information on the topic of education in Switzerland.

For specific questions contact: info@educationsuisse.ch or phone +41 31 356 61 04.

Educationsuisse, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland, www.educationsuisse.ch.



What challenges does our democracy face?

This year, the Annual Congress of the Swiss Abroad will focus on key questions for the future. It will be held in the Mediterranean atmosphere of the southern town of Lugano.

Immigration, data protection, digital challenges, and exercising our political rights: how is the Swiss democratic system meeting today's challenges? Where does it need to change? How can we guarantee respect of the basic democratic rights in Switzerland, unique in the world, in a time of increasing autocracy? Should Swiss political rights be granted to second generation immigrants or to young people from the age of 16?

These are just some of the questions that speakers at the 2020 Congress will be asked to answer or debate.

If you are interested in these topical issues and keen to discover (or rediscover) the incredibly varied Ticino landscapes and architectural heritage, unlike any other in Switzerland, reserve the weekend of 22–23 August 2020 and join us in Lugano, an Italian Swiss town with a Mediterranean atmosphere.

(JF)

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

Does my child automatically become a Swiss citizen?

“I live abroad and will soon become a mother. I would like to know whether my child automatically becomes a Swiss national like me, or whether formal/legal steps are necessary. Is my child allowed to have dual citizenship?”



Photo: iStock

Your baby has arrived. If you want your child to own a Swiss passport one day despite being born abroad, we recommend that you have your child registered at the registry office of your Swiss municipality of origin in good time.

Yes, your child will acquire Swiss citizenship at birth. According to the Swiss Citizenship Act (SCA), a child born to Swiss parents is a Swiss citizen from birth. If the parents are unmarried and only the mother is Swiss, the child automatically receives Swiss citizenship. The father, on the other hand, first must recognise the child as his own via the competent authorities.

Irrespective of the above, you must notify the Swiss representation at which you are registered regarding the birth. This is important, because a child born abroad to a Swiss parent who is also a citizen of another country may lose their Swiss citizenship on reaching the age of 25, unless a Swiss authority abroad or in Switzerland has been notified of his or her birth or the individual has declared in writing that he or she wishes to remain a Swiss citizen. For a detailed look at the SCA including amendments and related transitional provisions, visit the website of the State Secretariat for Migration (available in German, French and Italian only). (Short link: ogy.de/buergerrecht)

To avoid any administrative complications in future, we advise you to notify your Swiss representation (embassy

or consulate) of the birth as soon as possible. They will check your documentation and forward this information to the Swiss authorities, so that your child can be registered at the registry office of your Swiss municipality of origin.

To answer your question about whether your child can become a dual citizen: Switzerland recognises dual nationality without restriction. Swiss law allows you to be both a Swiss national and a citizen of another country. However, some other countries do not recognise dual nationality. By acquiring Swiss citizenship, you might automatically lose the citizenship of the other state concerned.

For more information, please contact the authorities of the state whose nationality you wish to acquire or have already acquired.

STEFANIE MATHIS-ZERFASS, HEAD OF THE OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The OSA's Legal Service provides general legal information on Swiss law, particularly in areas which concern the Swiss Abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law or intervene in disputes between private parties.

Consular services

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Online desk FDFA

www.fdfa.admin.ch

Milan (2020)



International Information Days provide valuable advice on pensions

If you live abroad and work or have worked in Switzerland, you can attend International Information Days in a number of EU countries to obtain free personalised advice on your rights and obligations with regard to old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) and disability insurance (DI). Experts from the Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) attend many of these events.

The social security institutions of several EU countries hold International Information Days in a number of major cities in their respective national language. Foreign social security partners representing citizens from other countries can also participate. The Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) is one such institution, attending information days in neighbouring countries and other European countries with sizeable Swiss expatriate populations. Its consultations concern the following aspects in particular:

- Contribution periods in Switzerland and abroad
- Registering for a Swiss or foreign pension
- Conditions for receiving a pension
- How benefits are calculated
- Swiss-EU coordination
- How benefits are paid out

Anyone who wishes to use this advisory service must first contact the organiser of the Information Day they wish to attend. A detailed Information Day schedule for 2020 is available online at ogy.de/sak-beratung (in English, German, French, Italian and Spanish).

A number of Information Days involving the SCO have already taken place this year, but more are to follow in Germany (Cologne and Berlin), Austria (Vienna), France (Grenoble), Italy (Ragusa, Syracuse, Florence and Bologna) and Spain (La Coruña, Valencia and Alicante).

Last year saw around 1,000 insured persons make use of the SCO's consultation services at venues in Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Portugal and Spain. (CCO)

Responsible for the FDFA official communications:
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www.eda.admin.ch, email: helpline@eda.admin.ch

Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date. Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

The Federal Council has decided to put the following proposals to the People on 17 May 2020:

- Federal Popular Initiative "For moderate immigration (Limitation Initiative)"
- Amendment of the Federal Act on Hunting and the Protection of Wild Mammals and Birds (Hunting Act)
- Amendment of the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation (DFTA) (Recognition of third-party childcare costs for tax purposes)

Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative "For a secure and sustainable pension system" (Pensions Initiative) (05.05.2021)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at www.bk.admin.ch Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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Travel advice

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www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae

itineris

Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad
www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris



Plan well.
Travel well.

App available for free for iOS and Android

Baden's Kurpark (spa park) was created at the end of the 19th century during the heyday of spas. It is now a well-manicured and popular open space. Photo: Pierre Marmy



Here is an example of "urban repair". Traffic congestion is still an issue at Schulhausplatz, but a spacious underground arcade that was completed in 2018 now intersects the junction, connecting the suburbs with the town centre. Photo: Pierre Marmy



Urban chic in an industrial district. Opened in 2003, Trafoplatz is a popular rendezvous point and event space on the old Brown, Boveri & Compagnie site. Photo Pierre Marmy

The town of Baden is nestled in the Limmat Valley near the Jura foothills. Photo: Gaëtan Bally



Theaterplatz – a new public space on the edge of the town centre. What used to be a car park is now an open space where people can enjoy the view over the River Limmat. Photo: Gaëtan Bally



Cars, buses and people used to have to fight their way through here. Weite Gasse is now a pedestrian-friendly street. Photo: Pierre Marmy



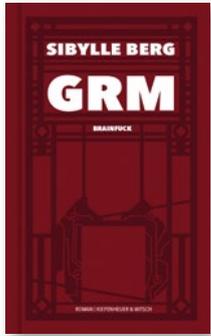
From car-friendly to pedestrian-friendly

Some 50,000 cars cross the Schulhausplatz intersection every day in the Aargau town of Baden. No one envies Baden for it. Nevertheless, the Swiss Heritage Society (SHS) has awarded the town this year's prestigious Wakker Prize for architectural development and preservation. The reason? "Baden has chosen not to surrender to the traffic," said the SHS. The town has been tireless in its efforts to improve its public spaces. Its centre is now free of traffic, with pedestrian-friendly streets and squares that make it a pleasant place to live. Historic parks and gardens are carefully maintained, and new public spaces have been created in urban development areas. The once car-friendly town of Baden has, in other words, been given back to the people.

(MUL)

heimatschutz.ch/wakkerpreis

Is this life?



SIBYLLE BERG:
“GRM.Brainfuck”
Verlag Kiepenheuer &
Witsch, 2019
640 pages; CHF 35
or approx. EUR 25
Also available as an audio
book and e-book

Four teenagers from a suburb of Manchester grow up in complete neglect. Their problem parents are either AWOL or drunk, the people around them full of pent-up aggression or utterly listless. Hatred against minorities and women is commonplace. The four of them experience poverty, sexual violence, drugs and discrimination. They decide to escape this nightmare and manage to reach London, where they ensconce themselves in an abandoned factory and plot revenge on those responsible for their misery. The society into which they have grown is deeply divided. Algorithms, artificial intelligence and a small handful of ageing politicians preside over the people’s lives. The teens try to subvert and shield themselves from this undemocratic Big Brother state.

“GRM.Brainfuck” by Sibylle Berg is an oppressive, apocalyptic novel. The book title is a reference firstly to grime (or GRM) – a breakneck, angry contemporary urban music genre from the UK – and secondly to the Brainfuck programming language.

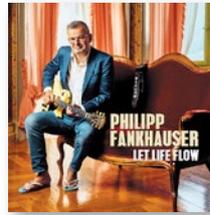
Coarse and unsparing in its language, the first 200 pages make for quite challenging reading. Things don’t get easier thereafter, but the young characters become more proactive and less impotent. The scenes often seem cruel and funny at once, while the fluidly structured prose is devoid of chapters. Berg uses a background narrative voice to flit from one character to the next. “GRM.Brainfuck” is not for the faint-hearted. To learn how so many people with zero prospects are consigned to life’s scrapheap makes for painful reading.

The book scooped the Swiss book award in November 2019. Explaining its decision, the jury said, “Sibylle Berg has succeeded in writing a novel that is formally avant-garde and that touches the reader’s heart.” In February, the author was awarded this year’s Swiss Grand Prix Literature for her life’s work. Anyone wishing to acquaint themselves with Sibylle Berg’s writing is best advised to start with her first novel, “Ein paar Leute suchen das Glück und lachen sich tot” (A few people search for happiness and laugh themselves to death).

Sibylle Berg was born in 1962 in Weimar. In 1984, she applied to leave East Germany and managed to emigrate to West Germany. She has lived in Zurich since 1994. The German-Swiss author’s 15 novels have been translated into more than 30 languages (read her short profile on page 31).

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Blues from Thun



PHILIPP FANKHAUSER:
“Let Life Flow”, Sony
Music

Based purely on appearances, Philipp Fankhauser seems very Swiss. He has the air of an accountant rather than of a blues artist who has been around the block. But this singer and guitarist has indeed been Switzerland’s best-known blues musician for years. Thun-born Fankhauser’s first album dates back 30 years. “Let Life Flow” is the title of his 16th and latest solo work.

The new album once again showcases the 56-year-old’s repertoire, with 15 songs that marry blues with soft soul and pop. Fankhauser’s music is imbued with groove, passion, catchy melodies and crowd-pleasing arrangements. His gravelly voice is quintessential to the genre, his gentle guitar masterful and affecting, interspersed with a brass sound that is peak New Orleans. Virtuosos Hendrix Ackle

on keyboard and Richard Cousins on bass provide sublime accompaniment, while the wonderful Shoals Sisters lend a hint of gospel on the backing vocals.

“Cold Cold Winter” is a fast shuffle, “Here In My Arms” a down-tempo tour de force, “You’ve Got To Hurt Before You Heal” a schmaltzy soul ballad, and “Wave You Goodbye” the earthiest blues number on the record. Fankhauser, who partly recorded the album in the southern US states with local musicians, remains true to his tried-and-trusted template. The only departure is “Chasch Mers Gloube”, a tribute in Swiss-German to the late musician Hanery Amman – the first-ever time that Fankhauser has sung in Bernese dialect on one of his albums. His version of Lucio Dalla’s “Milano”, interpreted in the original Italian, is another standout track.

Regardless of language, Fankhauser offers up a lucid collection of impeccably produced songs on “Let Life Flow”. There are no rough edges. In that sense, the sound is more Swiss than you might think. That’s not bad, it’s authentic.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Sibylle Berg



First her novel, “GRM.Brainfuck”, scooped the 2019 Swiss book award. Then she won Switzerland’s top literary prize, the Swiss Grand Prix Literature. Author Sibylle Berg has finally made it in her adopted home country. She is clearly delighted, as she explained in an interview: “What is nice is that, after 24 years, the public are starting to see me as I have long seen myself, that is, as a Swiss author”. Sibylle Berg was born in 1962 in Weimar. After emigrating to the West in 1984, the first thing she did was travel to Ascona to attend a course at the Scuola Teatro Dimitri theatre conservatory. She then studied the disparate subjects of oceanography and political science in Hamburg, before returning to Switzerland in the mid-1990s, settling there for good and eventually becoming a Swiss citizen. Her first work, “Ein paar Leute suchen das Glück und lachen sich tot” (A few people search for happiness and laugh themselves to death), was an instant hit, laying the foundation for an internationally acclaimed literary career that currently spans 15 novels and two dozen plays. Berg’s provocative style is one of the reasons for her success. She has been referred to as a “hell-raiser of the theatre” and the “hate preacher of the single society”. Her latest novel, “GRM.Brainfuck” (see page 30 for more details), underscores this reputation but has a serious message too. It is an uncompromising piece of writing and a furious indictment of contemporary society. “GRM.Brainfuck” explores our near-future, where segregation between rich and poor is absolute and human endeavour has become worthless. It makes for extremely uncomfortable reading, but is a vision of what may happen one day.

BEAT MAZENAUER

Climate activists celebrate “historic” judgement

January saw the acquittal of 12 climate activists at Renens district court (canton of Vaud). The activists stormed a Lausanne branch of banking giant Credit Suisse (CS) in November 2018. Wearing whites and wigs, the group staged a mock tennis match inside the branch to highlight CS’s “hypocrisy” in using Roger Federer’s squeaky-clean image for their advertising campaign while investing in environmentally damaging fossil fuels. In court, the judge rejected CS’s charge of trespass, concluding that the activists had been acting on grounds of “justifiable emergency”. He said that their behaviour had been “necessary and appropriate” in view of the impending climate catastrophe, and that there had been no other way for them to elicit a reaction from the bank. The activists’ lawyers called it a “historic verdict in Swiss case law”.

(MUL)

Large bank Credit Suisse in turmoil

Swiss large bank Credit Suisse (CS) has been rocked by boardroom turmoil. CEO Tidjane Thiam resigned on 14 February 2020 after Swiss media reports had revealed that CS had spied on its own senior executives. Thiam said that he had been unaware of the surveillance.

(MUL)

The “father of the solar sail” dies

Johannes Geis, the University of Berne physics professor who developed an experimental device designed to collect solar wind on the moon (see “Swiss Review” 3/2019), has died. Geis’s foil contraption was used on the first successful moon landing. The “spiritual father of the solar wind sail” passed away at the end of January aged 93. Through his research efforts, Professor Geis helped to bring international renown to Swiss space science. He also played a significant role in the European Space Agency scientific programme.

(MUL)

President of the Swiss Confederation meets Holocaust survivors

Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp, President of the Swiss Confederation Simonetta Sommaruga (see also page 12) met Holocaust survivors who live in Switzerland. President Sommaruga also invited history students to this meeting, remarking that one of the aims of doing so was to ensure that this “dark chapter in Swiss history” was never forgotten.

(MUL)

I need a place to relax.

Klosterhotel St. Petersinsel, Eflach, Jura & Three-Lakes, © Nico Schaefer



I need Switzerland.

Discover your perfect accommodation
and select experiences at
[MySwitzerland.com/hotels](https://www.myswitzerland.com/hotels)

