



SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
November 2020

**Return of the mountain king –
the ibex is back**

**Switzerland's relationship with the EU –
everything is still up in the air**

**Changing mobility – fewer and fewer
Swiss city dwellers own a car**



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Switzerland works by direct democracy. Everyone is regularly invited to go to the polls and have their say in national politics. This deeply embedded culture of co-determination was suspended by the pandemic for a few months before returning emphatically in early autumn. “Super Sunday” on 27 September saw an extremely high turnout as the people had their say on a number of significant issues. Top of the list was a re-

sounding no from the Swiss electorate to the SVP’s “limitation initiative”, which clarified Switzerland’s position towards the European Union (EU). Voters want to maintain the current partnership-based bilateral arrangement with the EU.

If the initiative had passed, it would have most certainly marked the end of the close relationship between Switzerland and the EU. As a non-EU country, Switzerland cannot leave the EU. Yet for Switzerland, surrounded by EU member states, terminating the bilateral agreements would have been on a par with such a scenario.

The people expressed themselves clearly, but this should not be interpreted as a ringing endorsement of Brussels. The relationship between Switzerland and the EU is one of conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, close proximity naturally results in economic, cultural and even personal interdependence. However, most Swiss are not primarily supporters of the EU as an institution; their interest lies more in a Europe of open borders with freedom of movement – something that people value even more now since the lockdown showed us just how small our country really is when the borders are closed. The people opted for a pragmatic approach: “European openness” and accessibility means having a regulated relationship with the EU.

The eligible voters of the “Fifth Switzerland” mainly live in the EU and their support for the bilateral relationship was particularly strong. Nonetheless, that does not mean Switzerland and the EU are now ready to ride off happily into the sunset. Nothing could be further from the reality. Partnerships work by establishing agreements – and the diplomatic back and forth over the small print of the bilateral agreements will continue. The stage is set for further drama, as we explain in this edition’s Focus report.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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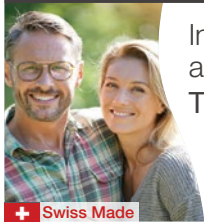
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Switzerland's "colonialism without colonies"



Many Swiss multinationals are still busy exploiting the south. The idea that Switzerland became one of the richest countries in the world solely through its own hard work is absurd. Colonialism is still here. All we have done is replace the white racketeers with national puppets we approve of. We keep them in power with money and weapons.

ERICH GAMBA, BOAC, PHILIPPINES

It is quite incredible how Switzerland has developed this collective guilt because a few Swiss benefited from colonialism and slavery. And now people today who had nothing to do with it have to pay compensation. The recipients of the compensation cannot be traced back to the real victims either. This is no moral tale.

MARKUS ZEHNDER, LOS ANGELES, USA

History is the study of the past. What happened then was the accepted norm of that era, not necessarily the present. To try to apply the norms of the past to those of the present is an unacceptable comparison. Yes, the past was wrong in our eyes, but it was the acceptable practice of that time. Are we to be blamed for the actions of our ancestors? The answer is no, nor would it be acceptable in any court of law. As long as we live our lives, in a way that makes us proud, without harming others, and without breaking any current laws we are leading good lives. Who knows how the future will judge us?

NORMAN GERSHON, USA

We should look and search more the present - how much is the West including Switzerland, benefitting from slavery today? The past is the past, we should learn from the past and adapt our action today - do we? Can we afford our western lifestyle, or are we living on the back of others? I venture to say, we still do - slavery still exists, maybe it is not as visible as in the past - but it is still as brutal as it was. It is a complicated world - greed for money and power is an obstacle for humanity to flourish.

ERIK WAELCHLI, SOUTH BEND, USA

Tearing down statues because people's values have changed? Granted, making money from the slave trade is reprehensible in today's world. Then again, maybe a CEO's salary at a hundred or a thousand times more than the minimum wage will also be seen as reprehensible in a few years. Someone who is highly thought of today may be seen as an exploitative criminal in future. Changing values could affect us all, even me and you. This is why I would prefer if every monument were changed to incorporate modern perspectives. For example, you could add another plaque to Mr de Pury's statue showing the source of the wealth used to finance his philanthropy.

ANDRE BURKI, PERTH, AUSTRALIA

The divisive issue of 5G



People will not rest until everything is destroyed. Then it will be too late. Climate change is enveloping us and causing problems that 5G cannot fix. Real progress can only happen when people look inwards instead of outwards all the time. But who wants to hear that? New ideas come from inner peace, not from being constantly bombarded with information.

IRMA FURRER, BAVARIA, GERMANY

I was disappointed not to see any mention of the pros and cons of Huawei in the "Swiss Review" article on 5G. Unlike in English-speaking countries, this issue almost seems non-existent in Switzerland. The significant security concerns associated with a manufacturer from a totalitarian state do seem justified to me in some respects.

PATRIK SCHMUKI, GERMANY

In my view, there are two important arguments. First, who will benefit the most from 5G? The big corporations that can gather more information on users. Second, do we want to entrust our personal data and all our interests to a totalitarian state that tears up agreements?

CORNELIA BAUMGARTNER, NEW ZEALAND

La Brévine, Switzerland's very own Siberia



Thank you for this rural article on La Brévine. It warmed my heart! Born in Lausanne in 1950, and having spent the last 40 years in Miami, my heart remains in the forest and our mountains.

JEAN PERROD, MIAMI, USA

Great article! Thank you for granting me this moment of nostalgia.

DAISY BENTURQUI, FRANCE

Thank you for this lovely walk through Little Siberia, Switzerland. I was born not far from this town, in 1956. On the way home from transporting the milk from the farm to the dairy, I got lost in the wind and the snow. I found my way thanks to the electricity poles, but my ears were freezing. They didn't fall off, but I couldn't feel them! I put up with the cold for years.

BERNARD COLOMB, PLAN TAWAN, THAILAND

A stamp of approval, or is it?

The Swiss electorate have said yes to partnership with the European Union. However, future bilateral ties with the EU remain less clear. A number of sticking points regarding a new framework agreement have cast a shadow over Swiss-EU relations.

THEODORA PETER

The most significant EU-related popular vote in recent years took place on 27 September. Its outcome left no room for doubt, with 61.7 per cent of the electorate rejecting the “limitation initiative” proposed by the SVP in place of freedom of movement with the European Union (EU). The “no” vote was therefore a resounding “yes” to continuing the bilateral relationship with the EU. The majority of voters did not want to jeopardise the status quo with their biggest trading partner. An end to freedom of movement with the EU would have annulled the other bilateral

was the only border canton to support the initiative. Just six years ago, a majority of cantons and voters approved the SVP’s “Stop mass immigration” initiative calling for restrictions on immigration. On that occasion, the Swiss parliament skirted around the issue, thus ensuring freedom of movement remained intact. To the SVP’s displeasure, parliament simply granted “national priority” in relation to vacant job positions, in other words people living in Switzerland have priority over applicants from abroad in sectors with above-average unemployment.

The sensitive issue of sovereignty

Bloodied but unbowed, the SVP are already looking forward to the next round of their campaign against the EU and its “foreign judges”. They are now targeting the institutional framework agreement through which Switzerland and the EU aim to establish a new basis for their bilateral relations. A draft proposal has been on the table since 2018 (see “Swiss Review” 2/2019). The SVP are not alone in opposing the new framework agreement either. Most of the other parties across the political spectrum view the outcome of the negotiations with scepticism or have even rejected the agreement outright.

The most sensitive issue is marrying Swiss sovereignty with the role of the European Court of Justice. The current draft agreement allows for an independent arbitration panel to mediate between Berne and Brussels in



Dramatic motifs on both sides of the “limitation initiative” argument – the referendum ended in a chastening defeat for new SVP president Marco Chiesa.

Photo: Keystone

agreements (guillotine clause). The emphatic referendum result was a painful defeat for Switzerland’s biggest party – on its key issue no less.

It came as cold comfort to Ticinese National Councillor and new SVP president Marco Chiesa that Ticino

the event of differences. However, where questions of EU law are concerned, which would be the case with most issues under contention, the panel would be bound by rulings from the Court of Justice.

CVP president Gerhard Pfister sees the role of the European Court of Justice in relation to the framework



agreement as “toxic”. It is not acceptable to have a “unilaterally European court deciding on matters arising from the relationship between the EU and a non-EU member state”, argued Pfister in a newspaper interview. The centrist politician is particularly concerned that the Court of Justice could force Switzerland to adopt the Citi-

**By Max Spring,
the “Swiss Review”
cartoonist**

zens’ Rights Directive, which would make it easier for EU citizens to access welfare benefits in Switzerland. However, the Directive is not explicitly mentioned in the framework agreement.

Employee organisations oppose the agreement because of concerns over wage protection. They want Swit-

zerland to be able to protect itself from wage dumping – as is currently the case through the accompanying measures. The Trade Union Federation is also sceptical of the European Court of Justice, whose rulings in recent years have weakened collective labour law, e.g. in relation to collective labour agreements and the right to strike.

The Federal Council wants to renegotiate

Only the Green Liberals, the BDP and the FDP – of which Federal Councillor and foreign minister Ignazio Cassis is a member – approve of the framework agreement. However, support from the Liberals is also starting to wane. Former FDP Federal Councillor Johann Schneider-Ammann recently spoke out against a loss of sovereignty in an interview with the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”. The balance between national sovereignty and access to the EU internal market has been overlooked in the draft framework agreement, “to Switzerland’s detriment”, argues the former economics minister. The “de facto subordination” of the arbitration panel to the European Court of Justice would be a step too far.

The government has already indicated that it intends to hold further negotiations with the EU regarding the “unresolved issues”, including the Citizens’ Rights Directive and wage protection. The Federal Council nominated a new chief negotiator in mid-October. State secretary Livia Leu, the former Swiss ambassador in Paris, is already the fifth leading diplomat to take over the complex EU dossier. The

New welfare initiative as an accompanying measure

Older unemployed who fail to find a new job will now receive a bridging pension until retirement. The new welfare benefit is for people who have become jobless aged 60 or over and who have lost their entitlement to unemployment benefit, having failed to find alternative employment. It spans the period until a person is eligible to receive the normal state pension. This new welfare initiative will help around 3,400 people avoid the poverty trap. The federal government has earmarked some 150 million francs a year for this purpose.



The Federal Council first floated the idea of a bridging pension last year as a domestic policy measure to promote freedom of movement. Many voters over the age of 50 voted for the SVP's "Stop mass immigration" initiative in 2014 because they feared being squeezed out of the job market by an influx of foreign labour. The Federal Council saw the new welfare initiative as a way to allay these fears. Initially, the scheme was more generous in scope and would have benefited around 4,600 people. Parliament subsequently cut the number of potential recipients and introduced a benefits cap. The SVP rejected the bridging measure in principle. Opponents of the new scheme said that it could have the unwanted effect of giving companies an excuse to lay off older employees. However, critics were unable to collect enough signatures for a referendum. (TP)



The framework deal's effect on wages and job security remains a contentious issue. Photo: Keystone

Federal Council hopes that she will add fresh impetus to break the current impasse. At the time of going to press, the negotiation parameters on the Swiss side had yet to be defined.

Growing impatience in Brussels

Brussels is becoming increasingly confused by Switzerland's wavering. Following the outcome of the referendum, the EU had assumed there were no more obstacles to signing what was, at least from the Brussels perspective, a fully negotiated framework agreement. On the day of the referendum, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stressed that, while the EU was prepared to work on "clarifications", it also expected the Federal Council to move "swiftly" towards ratifying the agreement. Nonetheless, it is possible that backroom dealings are still ongoing to help the Federal Council make the agreement acceptable to the majority. After a parliamentary

vote, the final word will lie with the people.

The current bilateral agreements remain in force until the new framework agreement is signed. However, the EU could refuse to extend these agreements – this, for example, would have serious consequences for the Swiss medical technology industry, which stands to lose direct access to the single market. Swiss involvement in the EU research programme Horizon Europe could also be affected. However, Switzerland has an ace up its sleeve. At the end of 2019, parliament blocked the additional 1.3-billion-franc "cohesion" payment that had been earmarked to help structurally disadvantaged EU member states. Evidently, a few relationship issues need to be ironed out before Berne and Brussels enter into their new partnership agreement.

This article reflects the situation at the time of going to press in mid-October.

The “Fifth Switzerland” defends international mobility

Almost 80 per cent of Swiss Abroad opposed the limitation initiative. The end of free movement, demanded by the SVP, would have dealt a hard blow to the 460,000 Swiss living in EU countries.

The share of the “Fifth Switzerland” who said no (78 per cent) was about 16 percentage points higher on average than for Switzerland as a whole (61.7 per cent), according to the results of twelve cantons, which count the Swiss Abroad votes separately (see chart). The other cantons cannot provide the same breakdown. Nonetheless, the twelve cantons displayed are highly representative as they account for over 70 per cent of Swiss Abroad in the electoral register: 133,000 out of 181,000 in total.

Opposition to the limitation initiative from Swiss Abroad registered in rural cantons exceeded the average by over 30 percentage points – in Uri and Appenzell Innerrhoden, for example. The latter is one of four cantons that actually supported the initiative, the other three being Schwyz, Glarus and Ticino.

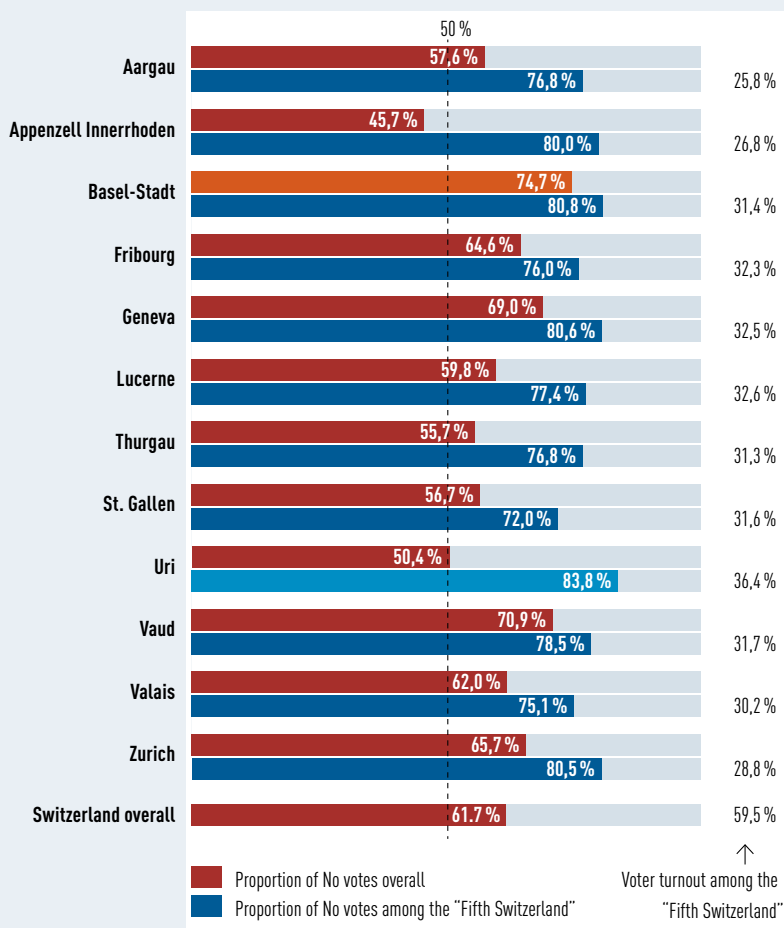
For Remo Gysin, President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), this emphatic statement from the “Fifth Switzerland” came as no surprise. “These results underline the importance of freedom of movement and international mobility,” he said, adding that freedom of movement was the mechanism that allowed Swiss to work and settle in any EU member state. International mobility was in the interests of all Swiss, regardless of whether they currently lived in Switzerland or abroad. Besides social and economic security, it was crucially important that all Swiss were treated the same as EU citizens at the workplace and in relation to taxes and social welfare. This includes the right to remain in an EU country after having worked there.

Many were unable to vote

Voter turnout in Switzerland on 27 September was a high 60 per cent, compared to a mere 30 per cent of the Swiss Abroad. Many frustrated voters contacted the OSA after polling day to express their disappointment at having received their official voting papers too late. Those living overseas were particularly affected. The OSA subsequently sent a message to all 26 cantons, calling on them to adhere to the statutory notice period and issue eligible voters living abroad with their official voting papers five weeks before each voting date. According to the OSA, only two cantons actually managed to do this for the 27 September vote.

Some 460,000 of the 770,900 Swiss expatriate population reside in EU member states. A quarter of all Swiss Abroad (199,800) live in France. The next largest expatriate communities live in Germany (92,200) and the USA (81,100).

THEODORA PETER



Only the above-listed cantons published the votes of the Swiss Abroad separately. The highest percentages are shown in red in each category.

Corona cases soar as winter approaches

Following the shutdown in spring, Switzerland significantly eased its virus-related restrictions. But in spite of protective measures, the number of infections rose sharply again in autumn. Switzerland is now in the grip of the pandemic's second wave.

SUSANNE WENGER

When the number of coronavirus infections suddenly increased throughout Switzerland at the start of October, Basel epidemiologist Marcel Tanner said the main reason for this was that Switzerland had not been as restrictive in combating the pandemic as its neighbouring countries: "Now more than ever, every person in society must realise that they share a responsibility for what lies ahead," he said. The liberal Swiss approach would not work if people failed to observe social distancing and hygiene rules. The situation actually looked good for a while. As businesses cautiously opened their doors again following the lockdown and infections didn't rise, the Federal Council was quick to announce further easing measures. The feeling of relief was palpable.

"We can handle the coronavirus," the head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, Alain Berset, said proudly in May. The President of the Swiss Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga, coined the phrase "new normality". The virus had not gone away. However, subject to certain conditions, the old freedoms could be brought back, and industries that suffered during the lockdown could start up again. Back to restaurants, night-clubs and shops. Back to school and the office. Back to mobility and demonstrations. Subject to precautionary measures as well as the mandatory collection of contact details in some cases. This was the "new normality". Parliament resumed its ses-

sions, and the Confederation handed control back to the cantons in mid-June. The extraordinary situation, which conferred special powers to the federal government under the Epidemics Act, was declared over.

Easy summer

Targeted responses to local coronavirus outbreaks make more sense than blanket measures. That, at least, was the thinking. Switzerland followed a strategy of containment and testing. The cantons developed a track-and-trace system to break infection chains quickly, notifying people who had been in contact with anyone who tested positive for the virus. Cantonal health authorities would order these people to self-isolate, if necessary. Thousands have since been quarantined, including revellers, sportspeople, churchgoers and a federal councillor. After infections started to rise again in June, the government briefly intervened once more – making face coverings compulsory on public transport around the country from July, and telling people returning from high-risk areas to go into quarantine.

Many Swiss opted to spend their summer holidays in Switzerland. The mood was more relaxed than in spring, even without the usual open-air festivals and 1 August celebrations. Demonstrations against the remaining restrictions failed to attract the masses. When the infection rate increased again between July and September, there was no sense of alarm. The fig-

ures were still lower than in March and April. There were fewer hospitalisations, and fatalities were significantly down. Nevertheless, scientists issued warnings. Switzerland needed to act now to prevent the situation from deteriorating, said Geneva-based virologist Isabella Eckerle. Some cantons introduced stricter measures, but the government continued to relax restrictions, following through on its plan to lift the ban on big events, for example.

Autumn angst

From October, football and ice hockey matches could take place in front of more than 1,000 fans again. People were also allowed to attend concerts, albeit subject to strict protective measures as well as cantonal approval. At the end of February, Switzerland became the first country in Europe to ban major events with more than 1,000 people. It also became the first country to lift this restriction. "We have to learn to live with the virus," said Alain Berset. Sports associations and cultural institutions welcomed the move. The majority of cantons would have preferred to wait until the end of the year. All in all, it was a balancing act.

It was also at the beginning of October that cases began to soar. Under 20 people a day had been testing positive at the start of June, whereas the figure stood at over 7,000 by the end of October – a new record. The positive test rate passed the thresh-

old that was set by the World Health Organization (WHO) to gauge whether a country has the pandemic under control. The respite was definitely over, as hospitalisations and fatalities also rose. The national COVID-19 Task Force declared that bringing the numbers down was the “highest priority”. If contact tracing

now,” admitted Berset. The finger-pointing began. Switzerland’s decentralised, federal system was not equipped for the pandemic. Voices inside and outside parliament called on the government to intervene and take charge of the situation. Certainly, the cantons applied the face covering requirement in a rather hotchpotch

But this actually had the effect of diluting the overall message to the public. The federal government and cantons called on people to adhere strictly to the rules to avoid a second lockdown. “It is five to midnight again,” warned Sommaruga. Uncertainty reigned again long before winter’s first snowfall. People could maybe cele-



became impossible, there was no knowing how quickly the virus would spread.

Lack of data

The number of infections was expected to increase as temperatures dropped, given that people would spend more time indoors. But so many cases so soon? How could that have happened to Switzerland, a country that had managed so well thus far? “We are worse off than other countries

fashion across the country. The forwarding of track-and-trace data to the government could also have been handled better. As a result, experts had no access to the data that would have allowed them to find out where people were contracting the virus.

A cavalier attitude also crept in among certain sections of the population. It was as if people had only listened to the second word of Simonetta Sommaruga’s “new normality”. Scientists also made various statements – and were perfectly entitled to do so.

brate Christmas together in the forest, as they used to do as scouts, suggested epidemiologist Marcel Tanner.

The National Council returned to session in September. However, the venerable surroundings of the parliamentary chamber now contain 200 Plexiglas cabins.

Photo: Keystone

This article covers developments up to the time of going to press in mid-October. Up-to-date reports from the Swiss COVID-19 Task Force are available online in three languages at: www.ncs-tf.ch



The improbable return of the mountain king

The Alpine ibex is an imposing, iconic creature. Yet the “mountain king” almost disappeared from Switzerland for good. Poachers, of all people, smuggled young ibexes back into the Swiss Alps before the animal was officially reintroduced 100 years ago. Resettling any endangered species is a very complicated business.

◀ A remarkable sight in the Spöl Valley (canton of Grisons) – a line of people carry heavy boxes containing some of the ibexes that were reintroduced into the Swiss National Park in 1920.

Photo: SNP / archive, 1923



MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Stockhorn mountain in the Bernese Oberland rises 2,190 metres above sea level – the highest elevation for miles around and a magnet for hikers, climbers, paragliders and snowshoe enthusiasts. If former managing director of the Stockhorn cableway Alfred Schwarz has anything to do with it, the Stockhorn massif will soon also be home to the Alpine ibex. The Freunde des Stockhorns (Friends of the Stockhorn) association and the canton of Berne hunting inspectorate are planning to reintroduce the mighty mammal. “We want to return the ibex to its old habitat,” says Schwarz.

Ibexes were indeed roaming the Stockhorn massif 200 years ago. From the Middle Ages, these elegant and hardy extreme climbers were popularised as the embodiment of rude health. The ibex was an admired, much sought-after animal, whose every body part (almost) was said to have medicinal powers. Ibex remedies were once all the rage. Yet ibexes were also killed for their meat. Hunting them became a lucrative business.

Intensive hunting and extensive deforestation made life difficult for the “mountain king”, as did the proliferation of pastures at increasingly high altitudes. So much so that the animal disappeared from the Swiss Alps

altogether. Its fate sounds strangely familiar. The last Swiss ibex was shot in Valais in 1804. A handful of surviving ibexes took refuge over the border in northern Italy, subsequently enjoying protection from the then King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, whose gamekeepers carried out their duty with vigour.

Meanwhile, it took grassroots action to champion the animal’s cause in Switzerland. The Swiss Hunting Act of 1875 laid the ground for the reintroduction of the ibex, yet politicians did little to follow up with concrete measures. Private initiatives ultimately got the ball rolling instead – first in the canton of St. Gallen, then shortly after in the canton of Grisons.

Ironically, the same poachers who had wiped out ibexes now played an important role in re-establishing them – smuggling young animals from Italy into Switzerland on behalf of a hotelier. “One ibex was worth up to 1,000 francs, which is equivalent to the cost of a mid-range car in today’s money,” says Hans Lozza, spokesman of the Swiss National Park in the canton of Grisons.

Emblematic mountain dweller

But what was the motivation behind reintroducing the animal into Switzerland? Lozza believes that emo-

A female with offspring in the Swiss National Park – higher temperatures are driving the ibex further up the mountains. Photo: Hans Lozza

tional factors were key. “People wanted to make amends for what had happened.” Tourism also played a part, “particularly in the canton of Grisons, whose coat of arms bears an ibex,” he says. Conservation was less of an issue. “Environmentalism hadn’t really taken off in those days.”

Around 300 ibexes now live in the Swiss National Park. However, ibex numbers have also grown steadily elsewhere in less-protected areas ever since the first reintroduction measures began in 1920. Last year, some 18,500 ibexes were counted around Switzerland, spread over various colonies in the Alpine cantons.

The thorny issue of resettlement

The ibex is one of several animal species that were wiped out in Switzerland and have returned in recent decades, either of their own accord or through human assistance. Wolves and sporadically sighted bears are the best-known and most controversial returnees. Both simply wandered back into Switzerland. However, beavers and lynxes – like ibexes – were proactively resettled. Whereas the ibex found its way back into Switzerland illegally at first, the beaver and lynx owe their reappearance to the work of conservationists and their po-



litical lobby. Provisions governing the reintroduction and resettlement of once-extinct animals are now legally enshrined.

Despite legislation, arguments flare up practically every time any species is transplanted back into Switzerland. And the fundamental question never changes: how many of these animals can be resettled without causing major problems such as crop damage or livestock losses? The law stipulates which animals can be controlled and when. Yet public feeling regularly runs high regardless, either when animals cause harm or damage, or when animals are shot because of the very problems they cause. The revised Hunting Act, rejected by voters on 27 September 2020, was the latest chapter in this perennial and emotional saga. It was mainly wolves that were caught in the pre-referendum crossfire.

Taking into account such sensitivities, the reintroduction project on the Stockhorn massif has already involved in-depth consultation with farmers and pasture owners. Alfred Schwarz: “They told us that they are worried about ibexes depriving their

livestock of food and potentially transmitting diseases.”

Big challenges

Reinhard Schnidrig, the man at the Federal Office for the Environment with overall responsibility for wildlife conservation, is currently assessing the Stockhorn project application. Schnidrig says that the reintroduction of the ibex into Switzerland has basically been a success. But he also believes that big challenges lie ahead over the next 100 years: “Unregulated hunting used to be the problem. Now it is our intensive use of Alpine areas.” Due to the boom in outdoor sports, the ibex and other wild animals now compete with mountain lovers for space, he explains. Interest in the Alpine environment is a good thing, but this should not be to the detriment of wild animals. “Before we reintroduce animals, we always need to think about how we manage the situation on the ground,” he says.

Climate change is another issue. Higher temperatures are driving the ibex further up the mountains. In the

A mighty ibex in the Valais mountains. These impressive animals will soon be a feature on the Stockhorn massif if the Friends of the Stockhorn have anything to do with it.

Photo: Willi Zengaffinen

Swiss National Park; females and their offspring now live at altitudes that are 120 metres higher on average than they were 25 years ago. This brings them closer and closer to the summer grazing areas of the males. “Over the long term, this could lead to greater competition for food within the species,” says Lozza.

Yet outside influences are not the only challenge facing the Alpine ibex. A lack of genetic diversity is another Achilles heel. Essentially, Switzerland’s ibexes are descendants of the animals that were originally smuggled from Italy; their gene pool is still very small. These genetic limitations probably explain why some ibex colonies are no longer growing as strongly as they once were. Inbreeding also means that they are more susceptible to diseases. Schnidrig therefore believes that inserting both Swiss and foreign ibexes into new colonies is an option worth considering.

It remains to be seen whether foreign ibexes will be scrambling around the slopes of the Stockhorn massif one day. First, the project is hoping to get the green light from Berne. The aim is to start introducing the first animals as early as spring 2021.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST WHO LIVES IN THUN

Doing without a car is becoming the new normal

In Switzerland's large cities, private vehicles face strong competition from alternative means of transport. Leading the way is Berne, which now allows carpark-free buildings. Geneva has yet to emulate that, but attitudes are certainly changing.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Every year more people in Switzerland are giving up their private vehicle. In some parts of Berne, the flagship city for public transport, households without a car now make up the majority. Take, for example, Mattenhof-Weissenbühl, where non-car ownership is almost 70%. In 2015, on average 56.8% percent of homes in Bern did not have a private car, “but this figure is probably now over 57%,” states city councillor Ursula Wyss, approvingly. She is in charge of Civil Engineering, Transport and Green Spaces in the city of Berne.

This change is also evident in Basel (52.1%) and Zurich (52.8%). Geneva, a city currently tackling serious congestion problems, is at the bottom of the group (41%). But even the historical home of the Geneva motor show “is following the same trend, just 20 years later”, comments Vincent Kaufmann, professor in urban sociology at EPFL. Indeed, Geneva has recorded an increase of car-free households of more than ten percentage points in ten years. Lausanne, a city which, like Geneva, has been very car-centric since the 1960s, is now following the same trend.

An icon of the “Glorious thirties”, the car is becoming less popular throughout Europe. “Fifteen years ago, young people associated cars with freedom. Driving was empowering. Today, their means of escape are the internet or social media, which, for them, represent a more tangible world,” says Vincent Kaufmann, who directs the Mobile Lives Forum, a foundation supported by the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF). The balance is tipping towards a different type of mobility, considers Sébastien Munafò, head of the Geneva-based mobility research firm, 6t.

On the one hand, car-related costs and the price of cars themselves have increased. On the other, alternatives to the car have evolved. Citizens now have access to car sharing (see page 17) and chauffeur-driven cars. They are increasingly opting to use public transport services, electric bikes and even motorised two-wheelers, of which the largest number is found in Geneva. “This means that more and more city dwellers, and also commuters, are choosing this cheap and practical means of transport over owning

A different style of protest in Geneva, where residents made their own boules pitch to slow the traffic. In Geneva, the percentage of households with cars is higher than in any other major Swiss city.

Photo: Keystone



Councillor Ursula Wyss inaugurating a bike hire scheme in Berne, where more than 50 per cent of households no longer own a car.

Photo: Keystone



a private vehicle, which represents a sizeable cost,” comments Munafò.

This trend is less noticeable in cities of under 100,000 inhabitants, which “creates a divide between cities and the countryside, where many homes have several cars”, points out Kaufmann.

The people of Berne trust their public transport

For communities looking to reduce congestion in public areas, there must be a good incentive, as is the case in Berne. “In the city, students and elderly people do not have cars. For others, in particular for families, the choice to give up a car is based on trust. In Berne, you know that you can find a Mobility car near to your home,” explains Ursula Wyss. Additionally, the quality of public transport in Berne is high. “It is the only city in Switzerland where the inhabitants consider the public transport as one of the things they like best about where they live,” the socialist politician is pleased to note, quoting a recent survey.

Once this position has been achieved, the authorities can actuate one of the key factors in soft mobility: limiting the number of carparks. The city of Berne plans to remove half of its 12,000 public parking spaces over the next few years. Ursula Wyss indicates that the spaces marked for removal are mainly those located on the pavements, which are currently problematic for

Cars on the road, cars above the road – Geneva remains a very car-centric place compared to other Swiss cities.

Photo: Keystone



people with disabilities. Considered dangerous, parking spaces located alongside tramlines are also to be removed. These modifications face opposition from the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), “but the rulings have gone our way so far”, says the Berne city councillor.

One less visible car-related element is the number of private carparks, above and below the ground. Berne is authorising the construction of premises without carparks. In Geneva, there is “great political tension whenever a project reduces the role of the car in the city, or seeks to increase it”, explains Karen Troll, the spokesperson for the Department of Infrastructure. “There is a conflict of interest,” considers Damien Bonfanti, green mayor of the Commune of Lancy (GE). “Drivers want to keep what they have, whilst another section of the population are left feeling frustrated.” The politician supports the construction of buildings without parking spaces, provided that there are a sufficient number of spaces in the surrounding area, and that housing has sufficient public transport links. Bonfanti also highlights the costs generated by underground carparks. These constructions cost around 50,000 Swiss francs each and require major excavation work.

Another issue with this underground urbanisation is that it prevents the planting of trees. Yet localised neighbourhood plans continue to factor in a high level of motorisation. This is the case in Allières, an area next to the new Eaux-Vives station, for example: 400 homes will come with 409 parking spaces. “We have to anticipate changes in the urban environment. In fact, it’s the developers themselves who are asking to build fewer underground parking spaces, which just sit empty,” states Caroline Marti, vice-president of the Geneva branch of the VCS, the transport and environment association. She has co-signed a motion which specifically requests the creation of a car-free neighbourhood as a pilot. A sign of the times, this proposition has even gained support from FDP representatives.

A sea change in Geneva

Faced with these requests for a less motorised city, the Touring Club Switzerland (TCS) Geneva section has been quick to respond. It initiated a referendum against a change to the law, which would ease the requirement to maintain parking spaces. On 27 September, the people of Geneva supported this legal change, thereby authorising the elimination of 4,000 parking spaces, in favour of cycle paths, in particular. But despite this, Switzerland is not turning into a car-free country, and the move away from private vehicles does not mean people no longer travel by car. In Switzerland, automobile traffic still counts for 50% of journeys and 65% of distance covered, with cars becoming increasingly large and heavy.

The long road to success

More and more of Switzerland's urban households manage without a car – not least thanks to car-sharing provider Mobility, who now want to switch their entire fleet to electric.

JÜRIG STEINER

In Swiss cities, customers of car-sharing cooperative Mobility are just a few swipes away from their next vehicle. The Mobility app shows where your nearest free vehicle is. You can book it in a matter of seconds, use your Mobility Card to unlock the vehicle, drive off and then return the vehicle to its original station before the end of the reservation period. Fees are charged based on the number of kilometres travelled and the duration of use.

This business model has made Mobility Switzerland's leading car-sharing platform. Mobility's customer numbers and fleet size have been growing for years. "We believe there is no limit to how far we can grow," says Mobility spokesman Patrick Eigenmann. Car sharing belongs to the smartphone era, yet it took decades for it to become mainstream.

Mobility dates well back into the 20th century, to a time before the internet and smartphones but when green awareness was starting to grow. Conrad Wagner, who would later become a Green politician and a mobility consultant in the canton of Nidwalden, founded the car-sharing cooperative Auto Teilet Genossenschaft (ATG) in Stans along with a number of colleagues in 1987. His company's original fleet consisted of a red Opel Kadett (equipped with

catalytic converter) and a 125cc Honda motorcycle. This pioneering start-up from central Switzerland was regarded as a bit of a joke and had trouble finding an insurer that would issue a policy for more than one user of the same vehicle, Wagner recalled in a recent radio interview.

Nevertheless, ATG kept going. In 1997, they merged with their Zurich competitor ShareCom to form Mobility – a new cooperative that began operating in Switzerland with a fleet of 760 vehicles and a membership of 17,000. Today, Mobility operate a fleet of some 3,000 mainly bright red cars at over 1,500 locations. The company have over 220,000 customers.

Mobility's success as a company is down to two key development factors at national level: the growth of conurbations in the Swiss plateau and the heavily state-funded expansion of public transport. "Seventy per cent of our locations are in cities or conurbations, and half of our customers live in one of Switzerland's eight biggest cities," says Eigenmann, adding that car sharing works particularly well in tandem with public transport, which has a high service frequency to relieve road traffic in Swiss cities (see article on the traffic situation in Berne and Geneva, page 15).

Mobility shed their hippy credentials on the road to business success. They took this too far the other way in 2019, drawing criticism from their own customers after introducing a premium category that consisted of high-consumption SUVs. Mobility quickly ditched the plan, because there was hardly any demand for the cars. Now the company are taking major steps towards sustainability and have set 2030 as the target for converting all their predominantly petrol or diesel vehicles to electric drive.

A few months ago, the cooperative arranged a study to assess their own sustainability impact. According to the findings, there would be 35,500 more cars on Switzerland's roads if Mobility did not exist. As impressive as this sounds, it is still a drop in the ocean given that 4.6 million cars travelled on Swiss roads in 2019.

A familiar sight in Swiss cities – the now-ubiquitous red vehicles of car-sharing cooperative Mobility. Photo donated



Living the quiet life

The Verena Gorge near Solothurn is home to the only person in Switzerland who lives as an official hermit. However, keeping this historic site tranquil is easier said than done, given its popularity among tourists. Is it still possible to live a quiet life amid the crowds?

SUSANNE WENGER

The route to the Verena Gorge Hermitage is signposted. Yes, you read that correctly. A hermitage should be secluded, remote and hard to reach. Not this one: the Verena Gorge Hermitage is a bona fide tourist attraction situated just outside the city of Solothurn in the heavily populated central plateau region. According to the local tourist board, the hermitage is a “mystical place that exudes spiritual energy”. Sounds intriguing – even to the more secularly inclined. The southern entrance to the gorge can be reached on foot in half an hour. Signs tell walkers that they are approaching a listed national heritage site situated within a nature reserve. No vehicles are allowed, and dogs must be kept on their leads.

Along the stream, through steep Jurassic limestone cliffs. Birdsong. A green canopy of leaves high above. Frenchman Baron de Breteuil knew what he was doing when he built a footpath within this dreamy landscape garden setting in 1791. He had

fled to Solothurn, weary of the revolution in his home country.

Only a few people have made it to the Verena Gorge so far this morning. Two dogs bounce around off the leash near the stone bridge. Their owner is in luminous outdoor attire. “Don’t worry, they’re well behaved,” he says. Further along, a married couple: they have been coming here for years to recharge their batteries. “It’s just a pity we can’t buy any postcards,” they say.

Social distancing expert

One last bend, then the hermitage appears in the clearing: two small old chapels, with the hermit’s adjacent living quarters nestled under the imposing cliff wall. Everything is close together. It is a meditative place. Michael Daum lives in the little house overlooking a flower garden. The Solothurn authorities that own the site appointed the German as its new hermit four years ago, continuing a centuries-old tradition. Since the 15th century hermits have dwelt in the Verena Gorge, where Saint Verena is once said to have healed the possessed and the blind. Nowadays, the resident hermit is entrusted with looking after the chapels and keeping the gorge clean. The council pays him a small salary in return. On moving in, Daum said he felt he had been called by God.

It would be interesting to learn how the only official hermit in Switzerland is faring. How does he seclude himself from modern life? And what does this social distancing expert think of the pandemic and the recent

reconnection that many of us have experienced with nature and the virtues of simplicity and frugality? We asked whether we could pay Daum a visit, but the council refused our request. Daum will not talk to the media, and professional photographers are no longer allowed to take pictures within the grounds.



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. This edition: The extremely rare job of being an official hermit.



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Contrast this to a few years back, when reports appeared in the domestic and foreign press about Daum's two predecessors (one lived in the gorge from 2009 to 2014, the other from 2014 to 2016). The council helped to fuel the media by going public in its search for a new hermit.

Visitor magnet

When asked to explain the difference between then and now, mayor Sergio Wyniger said that a little less public clamour was necessary to ensure that the hermitage retained its appeal as a place of tranquillity and prayer. "But we're not telling anyone they can't

visit." The council will continue to make this piece of local heritage accessible to the public. But it wants to enforce ground rules, because the hermitage has become a visitor magnet. Even more people came this year because of the pandemic. "Many had no idea that it was a spiritual place."

The negative consequences were noise, rubbish, wanton Instagramming. Drones were spotted shooting footage of the hermitage from high above. These were immediately banned. Wyniger says that all the commotion not only disturbed those who had come to pray, but also distracted people with personal problems who wanted to see the hermit. It

The Verena Gorge Hermitage, nestled under steep limestone cliffs near the city of Solothurn, consists of two small chapels and the hermit's living quarters including garden.

Archive photo: Keystone (2009)

all became too much for Daum's predecessor – a nun. The current hermit handles the situation much better, according to his employer. Daum's previous life as a police officer probably helps. But the present occupant also knows when enough is enough. One Christmas Eve, he sent away a young couple who had set up a mulled wine stand outside his house. The incident, which was reported in a local newspaper, caused some disgruntlement.

"Finding tranquillity is not always easy"

"You can't please everyone," says Wyniger. Daum is happy to help peo-



ple, but he knows where to draw the line. Groups can now book an audience with the hermit. For 150 francs, they can listen to Daum talk about his life and his chores at the hermitage. Evidently, there is more than meets the eye to being a hermit in Switzerland. But what is it really like for someone to relinquish their worldly attachments? We still wanted to know, so we contacted Einsiedeln Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in central Switzerland. Father Philipp Steiner wrote back: “Our life at the abbey is one of solitude, but also one of fellowship.”

Three hundred years ago, the monks at Einsiedeln thought long and hard about how they could reconcile the tranquillity of an abbey with all the activities connected with an im-

portant place of pilgrimage. As a consequence, the abbey’s private quarters are situated more towards the back of the building, where it is quieter and greener. Father Philipp: “Nevertheless, finding tranquillity is not always easy these days.” The abbey church attracts many visitors, so it is a constant job to maintain the hushed atmosphere. Father Philipp and his fellow monks also host laity suffering burnout who have come for spiritual retreat. “It is rare for us not to have guests staying on any one day.”

Hand in the rock for good luck

Back to the Verena Gorge Hermitage, which is now beginning to get busier as we approach noon. An elderly man prays in front of the Ölberg grotto.

Not enough space in Switzerland?

Switzerland must certainly have changed if even the Verena Gorge hermits don’t have the place to themselves. The small country’s population keeps growing and currently stands at 8.6 million. It was 6.3 million 40 years ago. According to the Federal Statistical Office, it could hit 10 million within the next 20 years. Switzerland has an average population density of 215 people per square kilometre, which is double that of France. However, Switzerland’s mountainous topography means that more than two thirds of the population live in the central plateau region between Lake Geneva and Lake Constance, where population density is at its highest as built-up areas eat into the countryside. Conversely, floor space matters more to the Swiss now than it used to. Per capita living space in Switzerland is 48 square metres – seven more than it was 60 years ago. High-density building is presented as the antidote to urban sprawl, but the pandemic has raised the question of whether that puts public health at risk. Estate agents have started to see the beginnings of an urban exodus since the initial lockdown, as demand for countryside living increases. However, politicians disagree on whether critical levels of population density have actually been hit yet.

(SWE)



Michael Daum at the press conference following his appointment as the official Verena Gorge hermit

Archive photo: Keystone (2016)

Nordic walkers and mountain bikers hurry past. A bride and groom have turned up with their photographer. A merry brigade on their works outing are walking towards Restaurant Einsiedelei at the gorge’s northern entrance. A cacophony of school children are approaching from the opposite direction. The class stop to listen to their teacher. Each child is allowed to place their hand in the “Verenenloch” – a fist-sized hole in the cliff wall. “They say it brings good luck,” she whispers.

According to scientists, our ability to cope with a physical lack of space depends less on the number of people around us and more on how we treat and respect our surroundings. This is a view shared by the Einsiedelei-Gesellschaft – the body that assists Solothurn council in maintaining the upkeep of the hermitage. The Einsiedelei-Gesellschaft has produced a children’s colouring book that portrays the hermitage and its idyllic setting as a place worth protecting. In his foreword, the author says that he hopes to plant a seed in children’s minds that will blossom in later life.

The Swiss with an irrepressible Nordic spirit

Hans Ulrich Schwaar fell in love with Finland at the age of 62. It was a fascination that remained with him until his death.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Hans Ulrich Schwaar, born in Sumiswald in 1920, was a primary school teacher, track-and-field athlete and orienteer who published books such as “Ghoblets u Unghoblets” (With or against the grain) and “Gryymts u ùngryymts” (Rhyme or reason) in his own Emmental dialect. Beginning in 1977, Schwaar also translated the works of Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz into Bernese dialect, in what ultimately became a six-volume literary epic. He followed up this spectacular achievement in 1988 with “Di sibe Brüeder” – an adaptation into Bernese dialect of Aleksis Kivi’s Finnish classic “Seven Brothers” (Seitsemän veljestä). Schwaar’s translation is the only one that is genuinely complete. Experts also say that it is closer to the original than any other.

Love affair with Finland

And there is a good reason for this. After retiring early from his job as a teacher in Langnau im Emmental in 1982, Schwaar – in his own words – left Switzerland “in a hurry” and began his passionate acquaintance with Finland, the country of his dreams. Schwaar described his Nordic love affair in the 1983 book “Erlebtes Finnland” (The Finland experience). His fascination with the country was intoxicating. “An overpowering spirit speaks to our soul, touching and enriching our emotions with indelible memories,” he wrote. Schwaar was especially intrigued by northern Finland’s indigenous people, the Sámi, whose tales and legends he collated, and with whom he enjoyed a real-life symbiosis as housemate and employee of reindeer herder Iisakki-Matias Syväjärvi.

Native to both worlds

During the last quarter of his long life, which ended at the age of 94 in his adopted home of Äkäslompola in Finnish Lapland, Schwaar spent most of his time in northern Finland, even when he had almost turned blind and could barely manage on his own. However, his fondness for the Emmental Valley never faded, with the later works in his 39-book literary career ultimately oscillating between Finland and Switzerland. Some novels were centred on Finnish Lapland: “Herbst in Lappland” (Autumn in Lapland), “Tundra, Sumpfund Birkenduft” (Tundra, swamps and the

smell of birch trees), “Am Rande der Arktis” (On the edge of the Arctic), “Näkkälä, jeden Tag” (Näkkälä, every day), “Geheimnisvoller Norden” (Mysterious north), “Die Samen und wir” (Encounters with the Sámi), “Näkkälä. Ein letztes Lied” (Näkkälä. One last song). Others harked back to Schwaar’s Bernese origins and dialect: “Gfröits u ùngfröits” (The good and the bad), “Churzwaare” (Haberdashery), “Rychs Bärndütsch” (The rich Bernese dialect), “Läbiges Bärndütsch” (The vibrant Bernese dialect), “Farbiges Bärndütsch” (The colourful Bernese dialect). Considering the author’s love of his native dialect, the 1996 monograph “René Auberjonois” marked a surprising detour into the world of art. Schwaar, who became interested in art through his dealings with the artists who had created portraits of Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, almost made a side career for himself as a professional collector from 1947 onwards. By the time he died, he had amassed 2,500 artworks that now belong to the municipality of Langnau. Schwaar also championed Swiss-German dialect well into his final years. At the age of 88 in 2008, he collected 13,000 signatures for an ultimately unsuccessful petition demanding the reintroduction of dialect into the Swiss curriculum. When Langnau awarded Schwaar the freedom of the town in 2005, the mayor said: “Time and again, people achieve remarkable things in their field of activity over a period of time. However, it is extremely rare to meet anyone who has been as tirelessly active in so many areas as Hans Ulrich Schwaar, whose body of work has mostly remained under the radar.”



“By becoming absorbed in nature, we can learn about nature’s divine wonder. This divinity lies hidden in every human soul. Showing compassion to our neighbours is just as fulfilling as marvelling at a flower – both these things are divine.”

Excerpt from “Intimitäten” (Intimacies), Hans Ulrich Schwaar, Langnau 2007; available from: ruth.wullschleger@dorfberg.ch

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

The sound of home soil

Switzerland, our home turf. Literally, the ground beneath our feet. What does it sound like? Listen closely and you will hear an underworld cacophony. No deathly silence at all. But if the soil does fall silent, we should start to worry. Scientists are now trying to gain a better understanding of our subterranean soundscapes.



The “Swiss Review” expedition in familiar surroundings. Listen to the soil and you soon run out of verbs to describe all the sounds.
Photo: Danielle Liniger

MARC LETTAU

Our adventure began with a simple hypothesis: home is the ground on which you stand. But what if we put our ears to the ground and find out what “home” actually sounds like? Our first stop was a vegetable allotment on the outskirts of Berne. We were armed with a good pair of headphones, a hypersensitive microphone, a soil sensor to record the sounds, and a great deal of curiosity.

Eardrums almost burst

What is there to hear? Absolutely nothing at first. But then a crash and a bang almost loud enough to perforate both eardrums. The reason? A blade of grass swaying in the light breeze brushes the microphone. The device amplifies this faint contact into a fortissimo. Hypersensitive indeed. The second attempt is less painful. Delicate movements in the damp earth underneath the shady pumpkin leaves. A slight rumble and crackle.

Not enough verbs

Evidently, something is happening in the soil. With each backyard experiment, it becomes increasingly apparent how astonishingly rich the acoustics beneath our feet are – and how difficult they are to describe. Dogs bark, horses neigh, crickets chirp and cows moo. But what are the tiny creatures doing in this compost-rich earth? There are simply not enough verbs. Creak, crackle, nibble, cheep, rumble, jolt, bang, rattle. Or even chew and gargle?

Röstigraben

Now for a more auspicious patch of land: the “Röstigraben” (or rösti divide). That imagined and much-discussed cultural border between German- and French-speaking Switzerland. Off we trot to a potato field on the cantonal border between Berne and Fribourg. It has to be a potato field. We carefully insert the microphone. What do we hear? Zilch. Not a hint of squabbling. A lifeless frontier?

Patriotic soil

What about the soil at Rütli, Switzerland’s most important meadow? Heavy, persistent rain puts paid to our experiment at the cradle of the Confederation. How about that other patriotic landmark, the Federal Palace? Verdant greenery dominates in front of its southern facade. Again, we pick up those familiar movements from the moist soil below. They sound much more refined than some of the bickering in parliament opposite.

“What are you doing?”

The passer-by who approaches us has a friendly, forbearing tone of voice. People are used to strange sights in this day and age. “What are you doing?” she asks. We say that we are eavesdropping on the Federal Palace worms. Only when the lady puts on the headphones does her scepticism give way. “Well, isn’t that incredible? Everyone needs to listen to this. It is teeming with life!”

Orchestral manoeuvres in the dark

We end our expedition on marshland near the edge of a forest in the Alpine foothills. Microphone in and headphones on again. The tranquillity is promptly shattered. Immersed in a hitherto secret world, our perception shifts. We thought it was quiet, but now we hear a raucous orchestra of myriad elements.

A citizen science project

Since summer 2019, men and women around Switzerland have been sticking microphones into the ground during the warmer months of the year. They are taking part in Sounding Soil – a research project (see box) driven by input from experts and wannabe experts like us. This grassroots approach – pun intended – has helped to complement scientific findings.

The biologist's view

Mites, fly larvae, woodlice, earthworms, spiders, centipedes, springtails and beetles are just some of the tiny creatures making these sounds. But which sounds does each one make? Biologist Sabine Lerch of the Biovision foundation is responsible for the Sounding Soil project, but even she cannot give a definitive answer. “We don’t know. We are the first project worldwide to bring the sounds of the soil to life in this way. But our research has only just begun.” It is all about the fundamentals for now: “The more varied the sound, the more diverse the range of creatures. The more intensive the sound, the more active the mesofauna and microfauna.”



Minute springtails (collembola) crawling through the compost – just one element in a subterranean orchestra consisting of mites, fly larvae, woodlice, earthworms, spiders, centipedes, beetles, grasshoppers, cicadas, etc. Photo: Marie Louise Huskens

A new scientific discipline

Diversity and intensity. “Both these factors say something about the presence and activity of organisms in the soil,” says Lerch. By the end of 2021, the aim is to see whether these twin factors can be used as parameters to gauge soil health. If they can, this would be a breakthrough for the emerging and burgeoning scientific discipline of ecoacoustics, one of whose most prominent exponents is Swiss scientist Marcus Maeder. Ecoacoustics could one day become a tool for measuring and assessing biodiversity.

Our soils are suffering

Maeder’s original specialism was musicology. “A field of organically grown oats sounds acoustically richer than a field of conventionally grown potatoes,” he says. However, Maeder is less interested in artistic criteria. What matters is soil health. Many Swiss soils are in poor condition, says Sabine Lerch. “Our soils are suffering in many ways. We are either covering the earth with concrete and asphalt, or we are working the soil very intensively and with increasingly heavy machines.” We are also polluting the soil with chemicals such as pesticides and fertilisers.

Scratching the surface

“The question of what happens to soil has barely entered the public or political consciousness,” she adds. Many of us view the dirt under our feet merely as the “surface”. Even conservationists prefer to study biodiversity above ground, not underground. “And I can understand why. We focus on what we can see, what immediately stirs our emotions,” says Lerch.

Giving the soil a voice

Aside from the research, Sounding Soil is also an avowed attempt to raise awareness. “We want to give the soil a voice,” says Lerch. Because what happens below ground ultimately affects us all. “For example, think about how important soil is for water management and food production.” In the best-case scenario, putting our ears to the ground will not only deliver a scientific outcome but will also encourage a new appreciation of the very soil on which and from which we live. In the worst-case scenario, the microphones that Marcus Maeder developed will simply record the soundtrack of climate change and the decline of biodiversity.

An organically farmed Alpine pasture. An intensively farmed field. What do they sound like underground? What noises emanate from the forest floor? For a selection of subterranean sound recordings, visit www.revue.ch.



Sounding Soil

Sounding Soil is an interdisciplinary research project focusing on the sounds that occur in soil. Put simply: the project, due to run until 2021, aims to investigate the acoustics of soil ecosystems and better understand how differences in land use affect these acoustics. The conclusion so far: the greater the variety of living organisms in the soil, the more complex the sound.

Sounding Soil is jointly sponsored by the following institutions: Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development, Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL), Swiss Soil Monitoring Network (NABO), ETH Zurich (Institute of Terrestrial Ecosystems) and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL).

Further information:

www.soundingsoil.ch

Acoustic soil recordings:

www.soundingsoil.ch/en/listen



Direct democracy makes a spectacular comeback

After a hiatus of more than seven months, Swiss voters returned to the ballot box in their droves on 27 September. At close to 60 per cent, turnout at the polls was much higher than average.

THEODORA PETER

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought Switzerland's quintessential system of direct democracy to a standstill last spring, when the Federal Council postponed the votes of 17 May until autumn. On 27 September (or "super Sunday"), the electorate finally came out in force to vote on as many as five controversial proposals – including the limitation initiative, the revised Swiss Hunting Act, and the purchase of new fighter jets (see below for an overview of the results). Depending on the issue, 59.1 to 59.4 per cent of voters took part in the federal vote – the fifth-highest turnout since the introduction of women's suffrage in 1971.

Only the votes in February 2016 attracted a similar turnout (63 per cent) in recent times. The SVP's "implementation initiative" was one of the proposals back then. James Schwarzenbach's 1974 "excess of foreigners" initiative and the 1989 initiative to abolish the armed forces attracted even more voters (70 per cent).

However, the EEA vote of 1992 easily holds the voting record. A whopping 78.7 per cent of the electorate turned out, of whom 50.3 per cent narrowly voted against Switzerland joining the European Economic Area. This vote marked the beginning of Switzerland's bilateral relationship with the EU. The electorate have cemented this relationship several times since – most recently on the aforementioned "super Sunday" of 27 September, when they emphatically rejected the SVP's limitation initiative (read our lead article on page 6 for more details).

Proposal for new fighter jets almost shot down

A wafer-thin majority (50.1 per cent) in favour of the purchase of new fighter jets for the Swiss armed forces caused more than a few raised eyebrows, a mere 8,670 votes having made the difference. Commentators wondered whether this tight result might have gone the other way had all the Swiss Abroad received their voting papers in time. According to a dissection of the vote by the gfs.bern research institute, Switzerland's expatriate population were much less inclined to support the procurement of new fighter jets, with 56 per cent of Swiss Abroad rejecting the proposal.



The vote on replacing Switzerland's current fleet of fighter jets was a real cliff-hanger. Photo: Keystone

Overview of all the 27 September voting results

- **No to the "limitation initiative":** Switzerland will not be terminating the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. The SVP's "For moderate immigration" initiative was decisively rejected by 61.7 per cent of voters. Read our lead article on page 6 for more details.
- **No to the Swiss Hunting Act:** There will be no relaxation of the legislation protecting wolves and other animals. The proposed revision of the Swiss Hunting Act, which would have allowed controlled hunting to regulate animal populations, was rejected by 51.9 per cent of voters. Animal welfare and nature conservation organisations forced the referendum in the first place.
- **No to an increase in tax breaks for childcare:** The general childcare deduction on taxable income will not be increased. The proposal, which the SP had denounced as a "tax bonus for wealthy families", was emphatically rejected by 63.2 per cent of voters. It would have resulted in an annual tax shortfall of 380 million Swiss francs.
- **Yes to paternity leave:** In future, fathers will receive two weeks' paid leave after the birth of their child. A clear majority of 60.3 per cent voted in favour, thereby accepting parliament's compromise counterproposal to the original popular initiative, which called for four weeks of statutory paternity leave but was ultimately withdrawn.
- **Yes to fighter jets:** The Federal Council now has the green light to procure new fighter jets for an outlay of six billion francs over the coming years – thanks to a razor-thin yes vote of 50.1 per cent. The new jets should be ready to take off from 2030 or thereabouts. No one knows yet what the actual aircraft model will be. This is likely to provoke further debate.



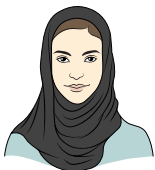
Freedom to choose? Voters to decide on burka ban

Should Switzerland prohibit the wearing of full-face coverings in public? Swiss voters will give their verdict next March on an initiative that is calling for just that. The proposal is a classic example of direct democracy in Switzerland. All eyes will be on Ticino in the run-up to the vote.

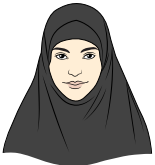
GERHARD LOB

Ticino did its own thing when it banned the wearing of full-face coverings in public – the first canton to do so, after a popular initiative was emphatically accepted by 65.2 per cent of Ticinese voters in September 2013. Although the initiative was actually aimed at prohibiting burkas and niqabs (and “countering Islamification”), the amendment to Ticino’s cantonal police legislation resulted in all types of full-face covering being banned. Demonstrators and football fans, for example, are no longer permitted to conceal their faces in public either. The law came into force on 1 July 2016.

Still allowed:



Hijab



Chador

To be banned?



Niqab



Burka

The Ticino initiative was down to a man called Giorgio Ghiringhelli, who is now 67 years old and somewhat of a political loner. Ghiringhelli, a former journalist, says that he is alarmed at the “Islamification of Europe”, explaining that the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA sparked his activism. “Afterwards, I read essays on Islam by Oriana Fallaci that shook me up.” In 2010, Ghiringhelli launched a petition calling for a ban on full-face coverings, quickly followed by a cantonal popular initiative that was modelled on a similar ban enacted in France. Ticino’s cantonal parliament rejected this effort – concluding that it was a “non-issue”, given that women wearing full-face coverings were practically never seen in the canton.

But Ghiringhelli would not let it go. He refused to withdraw the initiative, insisting that full-face coverings were the “thin end of the wedge”. In his view, the niqab is a symbol of oppression. A majority of Ticino voters chose to back him up. Ghiringhelli also hoped for a copycat effect, and this was actually what happened. The canton of St. Gallen introduced a ban on full-face coverings on 1 January 2019 – again following a popular vote (66.7 per cent in favour). However, Glarus’s annual open-air assembly, the *Landsgemeinde*, rejected a similar cantonal proposal in 2017. Instead of a canton-wide ban, there were calls in Glarus for a nationwide ruling on the matter.

This is exactly what the “Yes to a ban on face coverings” popular initiative aims to achieve. This initiative is based almost word for word on the legislative text banning full-face coverings in Ticino. It was launched in

October 2017 after amassing 105,000 valid signatures. The popular vote is scheduled for March 2021. The Egerkingen Committee, headed by the Lucerne SVP National Councillor Walter Wobmann, is behind the initiative. Its successful anti-minaret initiative in 2009 attracted international attention, because it led to a national ban on the construction of minarets.

The Federal Council and parliament have rejected the Egerkingen Committee’s latest project, saying that it infringes the autonomy of the cantons, while pointing out that very few women in Switzerland wear burkas or niqabs in the first place. According to a government estimate, only 95 to 130 women in the entire country wear full-face coverings.

The debate on banning full-face coverings is also about religious freedom, women’s rights, the right of women to self-determination, dress codes, and the role of Islam in society. Yet there is an economic element as well. Some people say that any ban would have a detrimental impact on tourism, and that regions popular among Arab visitors would lose out as a result. “An exemption for tourism would not be possible,” said the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, Karin Keller-Sutter, during the parliamentary debate.

To date, only a very small handful of fines have been issued in Ticino against women wearing full-face coverings. Nearly all of these were picked up by Nora Illi – the controversial co-founder of the Swiss Central Islamic Council who deliberately showed up in the canton wearing a full-face veil in protest. Illi, a Swiss convert to Islam, died in March 2020. Meanwhile, St. Gallen cantonal police say that they have not imposed a single fine yet for similar infractions.

The Ticino police have produced leaflets explaining the ban in English and Arabic. However, some tourists have circumvented the ban by swapping their veils for a ubiquitous symbol of the COVID-19 pandemic: medical face masks. This trend has been notable among visitors to the open-air miniature model museum *Swissminiatur*, a venue popular among Arabs. Despite this, the effect on tourism appears to be minimal. “The so-called burka ban



A veiled tourist and a local folklore group in Geneva – the Egerkingen Committee wants to ban cultural encounters like this one. Photo: Keystone (2015)

has had zero impact from our point of view,” says Giuseppe Rossi, general manager of Hotel Splendide Royal, a luxury five-star venue situated on the shores of Lake Lugano. Since the introduction of the ban, the proportion of Arab guests at the hotel has remained the same.

Visitors from the Gulf States accounted for 32,000 overnight stays in Ticino last year, equivalent to 1.7 per cent of all guests. However, Ticino saw a 28 per cent decline in overnight stays by tourists from the Gulf States between 2015 and 2019. “It is hard to say what effect the ban on full-face coverings has actually had, because only a small percentage of our Arab guests wear burkas or niqabs,” says the Ticino tourist board, Ticino Turismo. The drop in numbers is not attributed to the burka ban, but to the rift between Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council resulting in reduced flight routes to Europe.

Nevertheless, tourist destinations with a relatively high proportion of Arab holidaymakers share a certain unease regarding any ban. This was clear to anyone who attended a panel discussion on the anti-burka initiative that took place in Interlaken in January 2017. According to a local newspaper report, the then deputy CEO of the Interlaken tourist board, Stefan Ryser, said, “Visitors from the Gulf States are very good guests. They stay for five nights on average and bring in lots of revenue.” Travel agents in these countries would follow the debate surrounding any ban

closely and draw their own conclusions, he added. On the other hand, a number of hoteliers in attendance noted that European guests felt uneasy when they saw fully veiled women in the breakfast room. Visitors from the Gulf States accounted for 92,000 overnight stays – or 8.6 per cent of all overnight stays – in the Interlaken area last year. These figures are also down, having stood at 120,000 and 13.1 per cent respectively in 2015.

Tourism experts have avoided making any official statements regarding the anti-burka initiative. The Interlaken Tourism Organisation (TOI) says that its position is secular and politically neutral. “Neither do we define our guests by race or religion. Interlaken welcomes all visitors,” says TOI spokesman Christoph Leibundgut. Given the drastic consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on tourism, the implications of a ban on full-face coverings would also appear to be of secondary importance at the moment.

Meanwhile, Giorgio Ghiringhelli has every reason to be happy. Thanks to direct democracy, one man from Ticino has single-handedly managed to escalate a heated debate all the way up to federal level, irrespective of the outcome of the March vote.

GERHARD LOB IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED IN TICINO

Palm oil referendum adds fuel to the political fire

Swiss palm oil imports from Indonesia face stiff opposition. Consequently, Switzerland's free trade agreement with the South East Asian country is under scrutiny. Voters will soon give their verdict.

EVA HIRSCHI

For the first time ever, binding rules on sustainability directly govern the import of palm oil. This is actually quite a milestone. A special provision has been stipulated in the trade agreement between Indonesia and the EFTA countries Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, in which Switzerland played the main negotiating role.

The Federal Council signed the agreement – essentially a free trade agreement – in December 2018. Parliament approved it one year later. However, palm oil is excluded from the free trade arrangement. Switzerland grants reductions in customs duties

on specific volumes of Indonesian palm oil, but for certified, sustainable products only. “This incentivises Indonesian producers to manufacture sustainable palm oil,” explains Jan Atteslander, Head of International Relations with the business federation *economiesuisse*. “The agreement with Indonesia goes the furthest in terms of sustainability, which is remarkable.”

Opposition from the farming lobby and other organisations

However, the agreement is not yet home and dry. Swiss voters are set to decide on the matter in March, after the Genevan organic winemaker

Willy Cretegny teamed up in June with the *Uniterre* farmers' union in French-speaking Switzerland to submit a referendum proposal that has been backed by around 50 different organisations. “They are clearing the rainforest and destroying nature for the sake of palm oil,” says vegetable producer and *Uniterre* vice director Rudi Berli. “It is also having a negative effect on Swiss oilseed production.”

Swiss farmers are worried about palm oil distorting the market. Easily the most inexpensive oil around, palm oil dominates the global market. No other plant oil is manufactured in such big quantities, with production volumes having quadrupled from

Indonesian workers harvesting ripe oil palm fruit on a plantation in northern Sumatra. Fruit bunches can weigh up to 50 kilograms.

Photo: Keystone





Supporter Jan Atteslander:

“The agreement with Indonesia goes the furthest in terms of sustainability.”

1990 to 2010. Palm oil is found in numerous foods, cosmetic products, and detergents. It is robust, heat-resistant, stable, odourless and neutral-tasting, hence its popularity among manufacturers.

For Indonesia, palm oil is also a key export on which millions of livelihoods depend. Malaysia and Indonesia together produce 85 per cent of all the palm oil used worldwide. This is because oil palms only grow in tropical climates. However, NGOs have repeatedly drawn attention to the dire impact that high demand is having on the environment, biodiversity, and indigenous populations. Palm oil monocultures, for example, are often linked to illegal rainforest destruction and the displacement of local communities.

Economic incentives to promote sustainability

“We have been promoting sustainable palm oil cultivation for quite some time already,” says Damian Oettli, Head of Markets at WWF Switzerland. In 2004, the WWF co-founded the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) together with other stakeholders including producers, banks, NGOs, manufacturers and traders. The RSPO introduced a certification scheme, the

RSPO Standard, to help limit the destruction of species-rich tropical forests through a set of minimum requirements that must be met to ensure sustainable palm oil production. These include criteria stating that no primary forests may be cleared for new plantations, and that workers’ rights and the rights of local communities be respected.

Swiss importers have been buying palm oil mainly from RSPO-certified sources for a number of years already. “And doing so is in their interests. No one wants products at the expense of rainforest,” says Stefan Kausch, pro-

ject manager at Palm Oil Network Switzerland – an organisation founded in March 2020 with the aim of promoting the sustainable development of palm oil production. Members of Palm Oil Network Switzerland include companies such as Nestlé, Migros, Coop and Nutrisuisse. “We also want to continue modifying the RSPO Standard,” adds Kausch.

Rudi Berli from Uniterre has a different opinion: “The scheme is just a form of corporate greenwashing. Nothing has changed on the ground. Rainforest is still being destroyed.” This is why the referendum committee have also criticised the criteria stipulated in the free trade agreement. There is no mechanism for punishing violations either, they say. The WWF has reservations about the agreement too, but has given it a cautious thumbs-up ahead of the referendum, according to Damian Oettli. “Environmental problems are hard to solve without market access,” he says.

Oettli believes that certification schemes are very helpful for trade, if insufficient: “The RSPO Standard has already been around for 16 years, but small-scale producers that don’t fit



Critic Rudi Berli:

“They are clearing the rainforest and destroying nature for the sake of palm oil.”

into the scheme have to look to parallel markets. The main demand for sustainable palm oil comes from Europe and the USA. China and South East Asia continue to buy conventional palm oil for the most part.” Nevertheless, the WWF believes that integrating sustainability criteria into the agreement is a step in the right direction.

Rapeseed and sunflower oil are no substitute

You cannot simply substitute Swiss-made oils for palm oil, as Uniterre are suggesting, says Oettli. On a per-hectare basis, oil palms produce much more oil: around three tonnes. Soybean, rapeseed and sunflower all manage less than one tonne. Oil palms also require fewer pesticides compared to other crops, the WWF has reported. Furthermore, the oil palm is a perennial – unlike soybean, rapeseed and sunflower.

What is curious about the whole debate is that palm oil is at the heart of the politics surrounding the trade agreement with Indonesia, but it accounts for a minuscule share of the volume of trade with Indonesia. Switzerland imports about 26,500 tonnes of palm oil per year, but the biggest proportion of this comes from Malaysia (22 per cent). Indonesia supplied just 35 tonnes last year. Exports that can be sold duty-free to Indonesia are of much greater economic relevance to Switzerland, benefiting the mechanical engineering and pharmaceutical sectors in particular.

It is this streamlining of market access that Jan Atteslander of *economiesuisse* believes is the agreement’s

biggest plus. “According to the World Bank, Indonesia is likely to become one of the world’s biggest economies over the next few years, so a trade agreement allows us to steal a march on other countries,” he says. Above all, the sustainability requirements for palm oil send an important message, albeit less of an economic one. “EFTA is pioneering in this respect and can inspire other countries to devote more attention to palm oil sustainability as well.” However, it is a pity that these requirements only apply to palm oil, says Oettli of WWF Switzerland: “Unfortunately, the environmental provisos attached to the free trade agreement are of no relevance to things like wood, prawns and other commodities,” he says.

Referendum committee website:
nein-zum-freihandel.ch

economiesuisse position paper
(available in French and German):
ogy.de/palmoil

EVA HIRSCHI IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED
IN LAUSANNE

Good, not so good

75

Encouraging non-COVID-related statistics – yes, they do exist. Take the share of electricity obtained from renewable sources, for example. In 2019, 75 per cent of the power consumed in Switzerland was sustainable. In particular, solar, wind, biomass and hydroelectric power sources are becoming increasingly important..

369

Bottles, cans, newspapers, batteries, organic waste – the Swiss love recycling these and many other materials. Per capita, 369 kilograms of waste are properly recycled every year in Switzerland. We can either applaud this or we can ponder how on earth we manage to produce so much rubbish in the first place.

41

Switzerland has myriad regional newspapers. Turn the pages and we realise how similar a lot of the news looks nowadays: same content, same analysis, same layout. The loss of media diversity is most evident in coverage of domestic politics, where 41 per cent of all newspaper articles now appear in several, if not many, publications simultaneously. Our media landscape is anything but varied.

58.6

Happier news from Switzerland’s universities, where the proportion of female students is increasing. For example, 58.6 per cent of people who study at the University of Zurich are women. This figure is set to rise. Marie Heim-Vögtlin, who in 1874 became the first female student to graduate from Zurich, would certainly have been pleased. She was in a minority of one back then.

160

The number of new cars sold in Switzerland is currently down year-on-year. Electric cars are the only vehicles bucking this trend: sales were 160 per cent up in August 2020 alone. One only hopes that all these “eco-friendly” cars actually use electricity from renewable sources.



Swiss challenge, Yvonand, 2019. Photo: OSA/Youth service

Youth camps are back

In 2021, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) will once again be organising its traditional youth camps for the Swiss Abroad.

2020 began with two fantastic ski camps in the Vaud and Pennine Alps, bathed in glorious sunshine. Unfortunately, storm clouds soon rolled in: the OSA was obliged to cancel the summer camps due to the coronavirus pandemic. The situation remains critical. However, we hope that better times will soon be with us, with no clouds on the horizon, and are pleased to announce our new camp offers.

Offers at a glance:

- **10.7.–23.7.2021** Sport and activities camp in Château-d'Oex (VD) (15-18 yrs)
- **10.7.–23.7.2021** The Swiss Challenge (15-18 yrs)
- **24.7.–6.8.2021** Sport and activities camp in Gsteig (BE) (15-18 yrs)
- **7.8.–22.8.2020** Language, sports and culture camp, in Berne (BE) and Lugano (TI) (16-25 yrs)

- **27.12.–5.1.2022** Ski camp in Grächen (VS) (15-18 yrs)

- **27.12.–5.1.2022** Ski camp in Anzère (VS) (18 yrs +)

We will be happy to send you our information brochure upon request with a list of our offers. Summer and winter camp registration will be open from 11 January 2021 at ogy.de/youth-offers. The deadline for registration is 15 March 2021.

Of course, we remain vigilant regarding the developing health situation. The health and safety of our participants and instructors are our top priorities. For this reason, we will be taking all the necessary safety precautions required at the time.

For more information, please contact:
 Organisation of the Swiss Abroad OSA,
 Youth service,
 Alpenstrasse 26,
 3006 Berne, Switzerland,
 Tel. +41 (0)31 356 61 24,
 email: youth@aso.ch

Summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

From the end of June to the end of August 2021, Swiss children living abroad can have a fantastic time with around 40 other children from all over the world while also discovering Switzerland and its culture at summer camps lasting two weeks. Registration for the summer camps will begin on 11 January 2021. The summer camps 2021 will take place on the following dates:

- Sat. 26.6.–Fri. 09.7.2021
- Sat. 10.7.–Fri. 23.7.2021
- Sat. 24.7.–Fri. 06.8.2021
- Sat. 07.8.–Fri. 20.8.2021

The exact details of the various offers (locations, age groups, etc.) will be available from the middle of December 2020 at: www.sjas.ch/en. We would also be pleased to send you our information brochure with an overview of the offers available by post on request.

The registration deadline is 15 March 2021.

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) wishes to give all Swiss children abroad the opportunity to discover Switzerland in this way on at least one occasion. We can therefore offer reduced rates in justified cases. The required form can be requested on the registration form. We would be pleased to provide you with further information. (LR)

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA),
 Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland
 Tel. +41 31 356 61 16, Fax +41 31 356 61 01,
 Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch



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info@aso.ch
www.aso.ch
www.revue.ch
www.swisscommunity.org

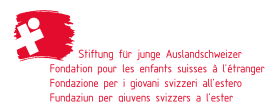


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Your chance to elect the new Council of the Swiss Abroad

Between January and June 2021, Swiss expatriates around the world will vote to determine the composition of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”. We have put together the following FAQ about the CSA and next year’s elections.

STEFANIE MATHIS-ZERFASS

What is the Council of the Swiss Abroad?

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) represents the interests of all Swiss Abroad vis-à-vis the authorities and the general public in Switzerland. It is therefore referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”.

How long has the CSA existed?

The CSA has existed in its current form since 1989. Its forerunner was the New Helvetic Society, founded in 1919.

What is the composition of the CSA?

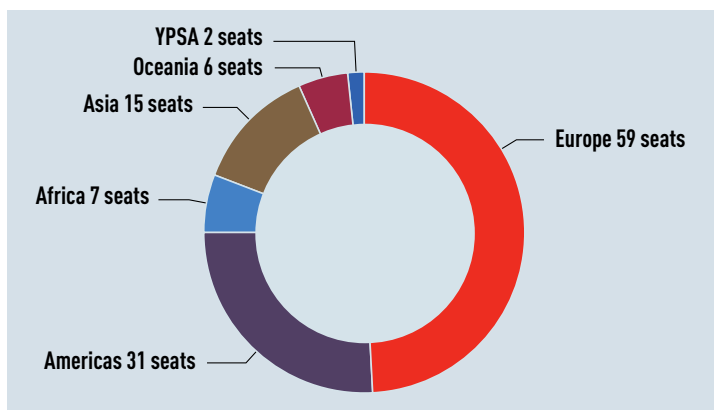
The CSA has 140 delegates, of whom 120 represent Swiss communities abroad and 20 live in Switzerland. Out of this total of 140, two seats are reserved for delegates who represent the young people in the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA).

How are the seats distributed?

The official regulations of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) govern how seats are distributed, stating that the CSA determines the number of delegates per umbrella organisation and per country or group of countries based on importance. In other words, the distribution of seats depends on how many Swiss Abroad there currently are per country or continent. The distribution of seats must also provide for an adequate representation of Swiss communities in all parts of the world. At its virtual meeting on 10 July 2020, the CSA determined that the distribution of seats during the 2021–25 parliament would be as shown below.

Why does the CSA include Swiss-based delegates?

The Swiss-based delegates represent the interests of the Swiss Abroad



Making an informed choice

Not all countries share the same procedure for electing CSA delegates, so the vote cannot be centrally coordinated. Details of elections in individual countries and regions will therefore appear in the regional editions of “Swiss Review”. The respective Swiss associations and umbrella organisations that coordinate the ballot will provide details on how voting will take place as well as information about election events. Candidates should contact the editorial office of their local “Swiss Review” to have their election profiles published in the regional edition.

Your election hub

SwissCommunity.org will play a key role during the elections, allowing voters to engage directly with candidates. You can ask questions, criticise, make suggestions, voice concerns and, naturally, discuss the issues that matter to you.

www.swisscommunity.org

in their home country — representing the CSA within the relevant bodies (parliament, Federal Administration) and championing the cause of Swiss expatriates at a political level. Some are members of the National Council or the Council of States. Others represent institutions or organisations. The CSA appoints these delegates based on the recommendations of the OSA.

How are expatriate delegates elected?

Unfortunately, the OSA is unable to offer e-voting as a centralised means of electing delegates directly in 2021. Unlike at the last elections, there will be no e-voting pilot projects in individual countries either. This is because the e-voting platform developed by the canton of Geneva is no longer available, and because e-voting has been discontinued throughout Switzerland.

When will direct elections be possible?

The OSA has since identified a suitable e-voting system to enable direct voting. However, this system still lacks the necessary funding. The OSA is currently liaising with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in this regard, having discussed the matter at a meeting with Federal Councillor and FDFA head Ignazio Cassis. It is confident of delivering a solution in time for the 2025 elections.

How are the umbrella organisations coordinating the vote?

At the forthcoming elections, the various umbrella organisations (or CSA-recognised Swiss associations, where applicable) will coor-



The Council of the Swiss Abroad meeting in Montreux – a show of hands calling on the Federal Council to do more on the issue of e-voting.

Photo: Adrian Moser (2019)

minate voting in respective countries in accordance with the CSA's electoral guidelines. They will be in charge of all other aspects related to the vote themselves, e.g. they may also hold a direct ballot (electronically or by post).

Who can vote abroad?

Any Swiss Abroad is entitled to vote, provided that they belong to a recognised Swiss association. However, umbrella organisations and Swiss associations can also extend the circle of voters to non-members.

When will the elections take place?

The elections will be held from January to June 2021. The responsible bodies in individual countries will determine their own voting dates. On 20 August 2021, the newly elected CSA will meet for the first time to appoint the Swiss-based delegates recommended by the OSA Executive Board.

Who can be voted on to the CSA?

Anyone who wants to stand for election must, specifically, be a Swiss citizen, live abroad, speak French or German, have ties with the Swiss community in their respective region, and be able to travel to Switzerland twice a year in order to participate in CSA meetings. The umbrella organisations and Swiss associations can specify additional eligibility requirements. Delegates receive a modest fee for attending meetings. They must cover the cost of travel and accommodation themselves.

What powers does the CSA have?

The CSA is the governing body of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. As an independent foundation, it represents the interests of the Swiss

Abroad in Switzerland. Not only is the CSA able to lobby and make political statements, it can also put forward specific demands, decide on referendum slogans, and issue voting recommendations. However, it has no legislative powers.

What are the CSA's key achievements?

- Swiss Abroad enshrined in the Federal Constitution (Art. 40)
- Continued voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) and disability insurance (DI)
- Training and education funding for young Swiss Abroad
- Introduction of postal voting
- Adoption of the Swiss Abroad Act

For further information, visit

[ogy.de/asr-2021](https://www.aso.ch/ogy.de/asr-2021)

Details also available from:

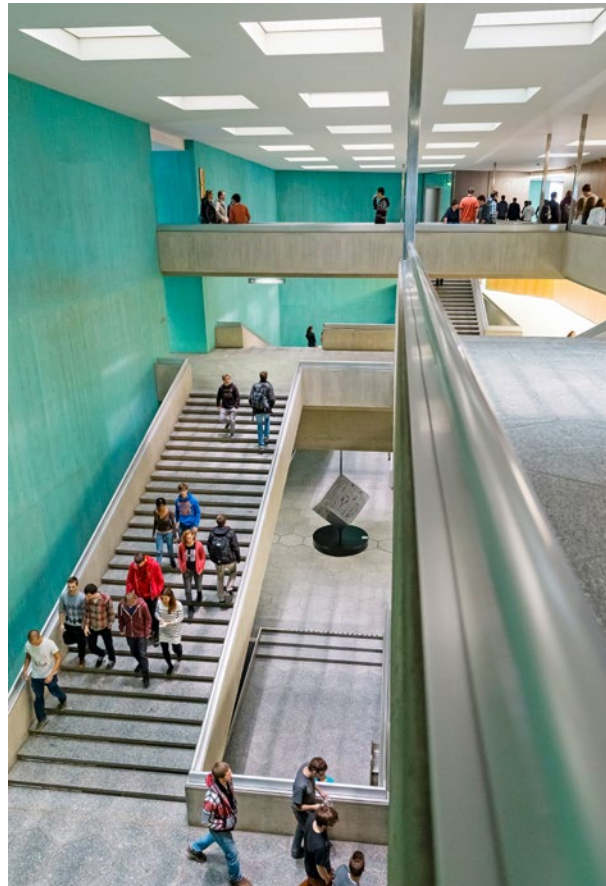
Stefanie Mathis-Zerfass,
OSA Legal Service;
tel.: +41 31 356 61 00; mathis@aso.ch

Studying at Switzerland's universities

educationsuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad who want to come to Switzerland to pursue their education.

In Switzerland, over 255,000 students are currently enrolled in Bachelor's, Master's or doctorate courses. The proportion of women studying at Swiss universities has risen to around 52 per cent in recent years.

With the exception of one private University of Applied Sciences, all of Switzerland's universities are public institutions. The ETH Zurich, the EPF Lausanne and a number of other Swiss universities are well placed in the international rankings (ogy.de/rankings). These rankings are based on various criteria and are mostly geared to a specific target audience (students, researchers, sponsors, prospective students). No rankings can reflect or ultimately compare all the aspects that contribute to a good university. Factors such as geographical location and the local culture also need to be taken into account.



Semester time at the ETH Zurich Hönggerberg campus

Photo: ETHZ / Alessandro della Bella

Find out as much as you can

Gaining a footing in today's constantly evolving job market is a daunting prospect for many young people. Before making any career decisions, it therefore makes sense to consider your own interests and aptitudes. Online tests such as the "Study interests" survey are helpful tools in this regard (ogy.de/studien-check; available in French, German and Italian). Your own circle of friends and acquaintances can also provide you with insights into the world of work. Former students are another useful source of information. For example, Switzerland's official vocational and academic counselling website www.orientation.ch now also includes profiles of former students who describe the transition to professional life as well as possible career options after university (ogy.de/portraits). (RG)

Universities and the ETH and EPF

Some 157,000 students are currently enrolled across Switzerland's ten universities and two federal institutes of technology ETH and EPF. The universities offer courses in law, economics, mathematics, natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, while the ETH and EPF focus on engineering, mathematics, and natural sciences. To gain admission, students need to have obtained their Swiss high-school diploma (Matura) or a foreign equivalent. Special require-

ments apply to students who wish to study medicine. Prospective students must normally register with any one of these institutions by the end of April.

Nine Universities of Applied Sciences

Around 80,000 students are currently enrolled across Switzerland's nine Universities of Applied Sciences, where over 60 educational departments offer practical study primarily in the areas of health, social sciences, business management, innovative technologies, music, and art. To gain admission, students need to have completed an apprenticeship-based vocational baccalaureate or a high-school diploma followed by a subsequent year of work experience.

Universities of Teacher Education

There is a University of Teacher Education in nearly every canton. Around 21,000 students are currently training to become teachers at the various school levels (nursery school, primary school, lower-secondary level, upper-secondary level) or in special needs education (e.g. speech therapy). Admission requirements vary depending on the specific course of study. (RG)

The educationsuisse staff recommend starting your research well in advance. Please do not hesitate to contact them for information or advice.

educationsuisse
Education in Switzerland
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne,
Switzerland
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04
info@educationsuisse.ch
www.educationsuisse.ch

Tips for job hunting in Switzerland

“I want to return to Switzerland and look for a job. Can you give me any tips or information?”

As a Swiss citizen, you can work in Switzerland without a permit. If you are intending to look for a job in Switzerland, remember that just sending a CV is normally not enough. Swiss employers expect a complete application. Besides a targeted cover letter and a CV including photo, your application should include job references as well as copies of degree certificates or other relevant qualifications. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) has published brochures containing valuable tips on its internet platform. Here is the direct link to an overview of SECO publications and offers: ogy.de/work-swiss

There are no official rules governing the translation of documents such as degree and other certificates. If a certain document could be a very important factor in whether or not you get the job you want, it might be worth having the document translated into one of Switzerland's national languages.

The Consular Directorate (CD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) offers the Swiss Abroad a special service in relation to the job search itself, whereby it forwards job applications to cantonal employment offices for the attention of the regional employment centres in your preferred regions. Interested employers can then look at your application at their own leisure. Here is the direct link to the CD website for job seekers: ogy.de/employment-in-switzerland

A selection of links to job search engines and job recruitment agencies is available on the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) website. Your local employment office will also be able to help you as soon as you are registered and domiciled in Switzerland. Here is the direct link to job search engines and job recruitment agencies on the OSA website: ogy.de/find-a-job

Useful links

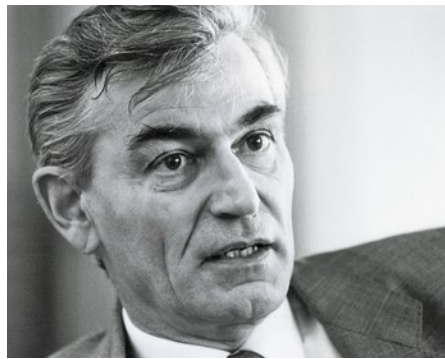
SECO: ogy.de/work-swiss

FDFA/CD: ogy.de/employment-in-switzerland

OSA: ogy.de/find-a-job

In memory of Georg Stucky

Georg Stucky headed the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) from 1998 to 2007. In August, he died at the age of 89. His legacy includes paving the way towards voting rights for the Swiss Abroad. The OSA owes Georg Stucky a debt of gratitude, as we look back fondly on his legacy.



Georg Stucky in 1989 – during his time as National Councillor

Photo: Walter Rutishauser, collection of the Library Am Guisanplatz

What a rich and fulfilling life he led! Georg Stucky worked and lived for many years in Hamburg, the Middle East and North Africa. He was the Swiss honorary consul to Libya and had first-hand knowledge about the hopes and concerns of the Swiss Abroad. Stucky was a church councillor, a cantonal government member, a National Councillor and a director at various companies. He was a member of the OSA Executive Board for 15 years, acting as vice-president from 1992 to 1998 and then president until 2007. All this is a testament to how highly people regarded Georg Stucky – and how great and lasting his legacy is.

I first encountered Georg Stucky at a meeting between the cantonal governments of Zug and Basel-Stadt. Our paths crossed again in the National Council. We became friends during the years that we spent together in the National Council Economic Affairs and Taxation Committee and, later on, in the OSA Executive Board.

Georg Stucky began championing the cause of the Swiss Abroad even before he joined the OSA. In 1986, he submitted a motion calling for an amendment to the Federal Act on the Political Rights of Swiss Citizens Abroad that would give Swiss Abroad the right to vote on all federal matters. In doing so, he played a key role in the introduction of postal voting for the Swiss Abroad at federal level. It was in 1995 that the Swiss Abroad were able to use postal voting in the federal elections for the first time.

Georg Stucky continued to promote change during his time as OSA president, e.g. introduction of e-voting; increase in the number of Swiss Abroad eligible to vote; voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) and disability insurance (DI).

“Georg lived and breathed the OSA,” his wife told me. That much was obvious. All of us within the OSA have fond memories of him and owe him a debt of thanks. We extend our most sincere sympathies to his wife Elisabeth and family.

May he rest in peace.

Remo Gysin

President of the OSA

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Easy access to administrative services – with e-government

eGovernment provides people and businesses with online access to government services. Since 2008, the Confederation, cantons and municipalities have been working together to expand their online services. They have been collaborating on shared objectives and projects as part of a new strategy that began in 2020. The aim is to make digital the medium of choice for people and businesses who wish to contact Switzerland's public authorities.

Work is currently ongoing to establish a new joint project called Digital Administration Switzerland. Project head Kurt Nuspliger tells us more about it below.

What does Swiss federalism look like from your point of view?

A multilingual country such as Switzerland can only function as a federalist construct. Federalism also means competition. It enables our cantons to develop innovative made-to-measure solutions. Take moving house, for example: many cantons allow people to register or deregister online. But not all cantons do. This is also a consequence of the federal system.

What about the process of digitalising public administration? What opportunities or limitations do you think have arisen under the current form of administrative collaboration?

Authorities, businesses, the scientific community, civil society, and politicians must work together if digitalisation is to be a success. The Confederation cannot do everything on its own when it comes to digital transformation and e-government. Cantons and



Professor Kurt Nuspliger is an expert in constitutional law and an honorary professor at the University of Berne. He was state chancellor of the canton of Berne from 1985 to 2013 and has been advising public institutions on legal and organisational matters since June 2013. Photo provided

municipalities must be involved in this process as equal partners. The present form of cooperation has room for improvement.

The Digital Administration Switzerland project was launched to strengthen cooperation between the Confederation, cantons and municipalities. What are its objectives?

We currently have a public-sector framework agreement in place for e-government collaboration in Switzerland at federal, cantonal and municipal level. We also have the Swiss Information Technology Conference – an organisation that promotes cooperation among public stakeholders in the area of administrative digitalisation. Furthermore, the eCH group is drawing up and developing standards for e-government in Switzerland. The Digital Administration Switzerland project will lend these ventures a more binding character. We want to make more of an impact by concentrating resources.

What can the new project achieve?

We are focusing on joint tasks. These include developing and implementing a digital transformation strategy, defining standards for data management and the exchange of data between authorities, developing basic nationwide services (e.g. electronic IDs) and promoting innovation. We also want the various stakeholders to engage with each other and share knowledge. As we know, knowledge

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 Registrazione quando si viaggia all'estero
 Online Registration when travelling abroad

is the only resource that multiplies if you share it.

What progress can we expect over the coming years regarding digital administrative services in Switzerland?

Digital transformation affects our everyday lives – in relation to daily communication, shopping, interaction with public authorities, etc. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this process. We can still do various things to improve administrative services. For example, the introduction of electronic identity cards is crucial if we want to continue developing online transactions and e-government applications.

How will the new project benefit the Swiss Abroad?

Many Swiss Abroad live far away from their home country and are unable to visit government offices in person. Their local postal services may not be the most reliable either. This is why it is important for people to be able to communicate electronically with Switzerland's administrative authorities and process their transactions online. We need digital platforms – online hubs, in other words – providing user-friendly, multilingual and barrier-free access to government services. In this regard, it is vital that the Confederation, cantons and municipalities coordinate their efforts and optimise their digital services.

E-GOVERNMENT SCHWEIZ-SUISSE-SVIZZERA
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Simone Flubacher, Delegate for Relations with the Swiss Abroad, is moving on

Dear Readers,
Engaging with you has been an enriching experience.

Whether meeting you in person at one of the many Swiss Abroad events or communicating via "Swiss Review", it has been both a pleasure and honour for me to represent your interests with the federal government these past three years. Your needs were always very important to me.

Having served the interests of the Swiss

Abroad for almost 30 years at Swiss representations abroad as well as in Berne, I am now ready for a new

professional challenge starting in November. I would therefore like to bid you farewell and wish you all the very best, wherever in the world you may be.

Yours,
Simone Flubacher



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 voting proposals for 7 March 2021 have not yet been finalised.

Popular initiatives

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

■ No new popular initiatives have been launched.

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

Information

Notify your local Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile phone number(s), or of changes to these, and register at the online desk (on the FDFA website at www.eda.admin.ch or via www.swissabroad.ch) to select your preferred format for receiving "Swiss Review" and other publications. Please contact your Swiss representation if you have trouble signing in.

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La pozza del Felice (Felice's pool)



FABIO ANDINA:
"Tage mit Felice"
Rotpunktverlag Zurich 2020
240 pages; CHF 28

"La pozza del Felice"
Rubbettino Editore,
Italy, 2018
209 pages; CHF 22

"He is the one who knocks on the door and wakes me up. And it is barely half five in the morning." When Felice gets up at the crack of dawn in the remote Ticino village that he calls home, he starts the day with a peculiar ritual. The first-person narrator – a young man who has fled the big city – joins the 90-year-old Felice in this ritual every morning. Whatever the weather, they walk up the mountain barely exchanging a word. They then bathe in a natural pool ("la pozza" in Italian) and walk down again. The young man describes what it is like to live in the village. But, more importantly, he tells us about the time that he spends together with Felice – a charismatic man whose life has been anything but easy. Felice's daily routine consists of down-to-earth practicalities such as chopping wood, cooking, and helping the neighbours. Daily life never

changes in this mountain village, where the locals are mostly elderly. Yet things take a turn for the unexpected when Felice receives a mysterious letter. News of the letter spreads like wildfire. Soon everyone knows about it, but no one knows what the letter is about. Felice seems to be expecting a visit and starts getting a room ready in his house.

Author Fabio Andina has a simple yet resonant writing style. His portrayal of the mountains is severe but not cold. Andina's attachment to Ticino is evident in some of his more poetic prose. His description of the locality is partly autobiographical and partly fictitious, as the author said himself in an interview. Plenty of its inhabitants are quirky, it goes without saying. Everyone helps everyone here, far removed from the consumerist rat race. However, there are also mentions of problems such as alcoholism or the exodus of young people into the city.

Felice (meaning "happy" in English) is a wonderful character – a 90-year-old who takes care of himself but is always there when others need help. This is a very calming story about a man who is at peace with himself. The novel was translated into German by Karin Diemerling, who has managed to retain the feel of the original by adroitly interweaving certain words from the Italian.

Fabio Andina was born in Lugano in 1972 and studied film science in San Francisco. He now lives again in Ticino. Andina released his first collection of poems in 2005 and his first novel in 2016. "La pozza del Felice" (Felice's pool) is his second novel and the first one to be translated into German. Genevan publishing house Editions Zoé will publish the French translation in 2021.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

A seamless fusion of harp and piano



DUO PRAXEDIS:
Carl Rütli Works for
Harp & Piano,
Ars Produktion, 2019
Grand Duet,
Ars Produktion, 2017
Dreaming, Idagio, 2010

Say to a concert promoter that you want to perform as a harp-and-piano duo on stage, and they will probably ask you what your day job is. A Zug-based harpist and her piano-playing daughter were undeterred ten years ago – and have made a name for themselves as "Duo Praxedis".

Both are actually called Praxedis: mother Praxedis Hug-Rütli and daughter Praxedis Geneviève Hug. Both are trained pianists – the harp became Praxedis Hug-Rütli's second instrument when she was a student. After marrying, Hug-Rütli devoted less attention to piano playing and more time to her newborn daughter. Then one day, Praxedis senior and Praxedis junior performed together at a private event. "We didn't even know what piece to play at first, but we took Mozart's Sonata for Two Pianos in D major, K. 448, and managed to bumble our way through on harp and piano," says the mother.

The two of them quickly realised that there was a wealth of original works out there for harp and piano. They now have an extremely wide repertoire that includes original compositions from the 19th century as well as arrangements of famous works, contemporary music, and their own arrangements. The duo have a very eclectic discography spanning twelve recordings over the last seven years. Praxedis junior: "If you are an artist, you need to make albums. Every CD puts us back in the shop window."

Mother and daughter get on both personally and musically, but they also regard themselves as soloists. "We are two individual musicians, but we support and look after each other on stage." Regardless of how the other is playing. "If my mother nails her harp cadenza, I have to nail my cadenza too. If she doesn't, I have to up my game even more!"

Individualists they may be, but it is remarkable how both adapt their own sound to that of the other. Unless you listened carefully, you would be forgiven for mistaking the harp notes for the piano notes, and vice versa. It is a seamless fusion of two instruments and two musicians.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

Darius Rochebin



Last summer, RTS's star journalist, Darius Rochebin announced that he was leaving Switzerland and heading for Paris. After 20 years presenting the "Téléjournal" news programme, Geneva's media darling was to enter the fierce world of French broadcasting. It was an occasion for everyone to express their appreciation for this elegant gent, able to fire out tough questions without provoking his interlocutor. How did he manage it? With a dose of the East: Darius' Iranian origins combine to create a smooth yet pugnacious character. The Swiss public mourned his transfer to France, however flattering it may have been for him. They accused RTS of failing to retain its best people, or worse, of having pushed their hero off the Swiss airwaves. But Rochebin himself explained that he did not leave under a cloud; quite the contrary.

The presenter is now working for the channel LCI. Every evening, from Monday to Thursday, he rolls out his sense of rhetoric, interviewing French politicians and stars. In the first episode of "20H de Darius Rochebin", the Genevese journalist asked the Minister of the Economy, Bruno Le Maire, if his astounding lack of charisma, as noted by former President Sarkozy, had changed at all. All without angering the minister. Quite an achievement. He also surprised Professor Didier Raoult, expert in infectious diseases, by asking him if he kept busts of himself in his garden. A guaranteed buzz! Off the air, Darius keeps going. He notably ruffled the feathers of French cinema icon Catherine Deneuve, accusing her of being completely disagreeable after an interview. A gift for social media. Now in Paris, Darius Rochebin poses any question he wants to VIPs, from his distant Swiss cultural roots, this politically moderate land that was unable to keep him.

STEPHANE HERZOG

From plane to train

Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) needs train drivers. The airline Swiss hasn't enough work for its pilots in the current climate and is ready to let staff go. SBB and Swiss are now evaluating whether airline pilots could also be employed as train drivers. Both professional associations (pilots and train drivers) are strongly in favour of the idea. (MUL)

Sanctions against Belarus

Switzerland has voiced its criticism of the repressive measures taken against the people in Belarus since President Alexander Lukashenko's dubious election victory. Switzerland has also increased the pressure on the Belarus government by approving sanctions, mainly in the form of financial and travel restrictions for former and current office holders. A number of Swiss companies operate in Belarus, such as train manufacturer Stadler Rail. (MUL)

Changes at SRF

Swiss Radio and Television (SRF) is under pressure to cut costs. It also wants to appeal more to the younger demographic. Hence the idea to shed jobs and increase the broadcaster's online presence. At the same time, a number of long-standing radio and television programmes are to be axed. The modernisation drive initiated by SRF boss Nathalie Wappler is proving controversial. By stepping up its online presence, the taxpayer-funded SRF wants to compete with private broadcasters. Politicians across the spectrum have reacted with dismay. (MUL)

Slight increase in pensions

Given that wages and prices are rising, pensioners are to receive a modest pension increase from 2021. The minimum pension will rise by 10 Swiss francs to 1,195 francs per month, the maximum pension by 20 francs to 2,390 francs per month. Supplementary benefits will also go up. The Federal Council approved these measures in October. The total annual cost of this increase is 441 million francs. (MUL)

Bombs under a farming village

Thousands of tonnes of munitions lie in an underground depot buried under rocks beneath the mountain village of Mitholz (canton of Berne). The army now want to clear the ageing ordnance, because they believe it poses a serious danger to the people living there. However, the complicated nature of the operation will turn Mitholz into a ghost town for an entire generation. A ten-year evacuation will be necessary. swissinfo has further information (in English): [ogdy.de/mitholz](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/ogdy/mitholz) (MUL)

We need our first dance in pairs.

Silvaplana, Engadlin, Graubünden, © STST - STTP



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