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Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



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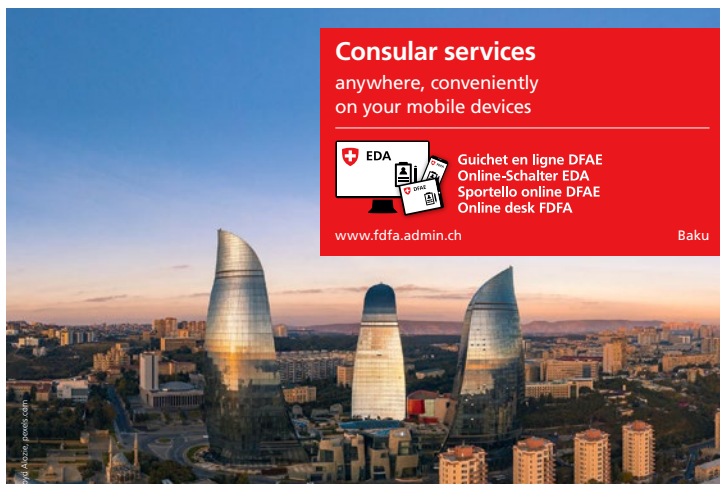
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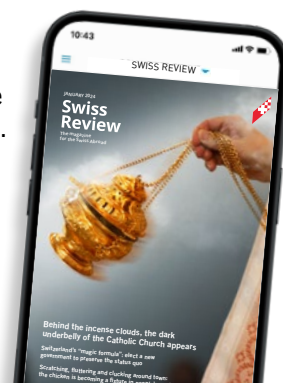
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Cover photo: Incense is burned during worship in the church of a Swiss monastery. Photo: Keystone

Priests: from protectors to abusers



It is horrifying and shameful: hundreds of children and young people, if not more, have suffered sexual abuse from Catholic priests in Switzerland. Sexual assault is inexcusable no matter who does it. However, when perpetrated by those who – in the eyes of children – stand for goodness and safety as the upholders of faith and moral standards, it is even more monstrous. Both for the victims and for the church itself. The Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland being an extreme case in point. It was the church itself that initiated the exploration of its murky past, but that has in no way tempered the torrent of fury being unleashed against it. People are leaving the church in droves. And many secular trustees of church life in Switzerland – the parishes with their democratically elected committees – are asking searching questions of the Catholic clergy. We consider what this shocking state of affairs means for the church in our Focus article – and quote an expert: The Catholic Church is in its worst crisis since the Reformation.

Is this catastrophe also relevant to non-Catholics? Most definitely: the decline of religion in Switzerland has been becoming increasingly apparent for decades. Our society is based on Western Christian values and readily invokes these; meanwhile, the country is becoming ever more secular. In 1970, almost 98 per cent of all people in Switzerland adhered to the Catholic, Protestant or Jewish faiths. In 2020, the figure was still over 60 per cent. Now, those who have no interest in the church or religion in the conventional sense already form the biggest “community of faith”. The files from the Catholic Church’s archives that are now seeing the light of day are accelerating this change.

Some things change more quickly than others. Look at how Switzerland elects its national government: it starts with animated debate as to whether the secret, unwritten law about the representation of the parties in the government – the so-called “magic formula” – should be adjusted. Then, everything stays the same. The “magic formula” could also be called a “static formula”. But that doesn’t make it bad: many Swiss approve of the reliably boring nature of politics in Switzerland. They think it’s preferable to the upheaval that comes with populist movements. On that note, Switzerland has elected a new government for the next four years – see page 18.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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**Swiss
Community**



The church protected the perpetrators, not the victims

An academic study has for the first time established the facts relating to sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland over the past 70 years. The rank and file are up in arms. Church leaders have come under pressure, and the country's largest official church is in crisis.

Photo Keystone

SUSANNE WENGER

A research team from the University of Zurich led by historians Monika Dommann and Marietta Meier spent one year combing through church archives in all Switzerland's language regions. The researchers viewed tens of thousands of pages of previously confidential records and conducted many interviews. The conclusions of the pilot study published in September were devastating. Evidence was uncovered of a broad spectrum of cases of abuse ranging from problematic boundary violations to severe, systematic abuse over a period of years.

The study uncovered 1,002 cases of abuse, 510 accused and 921 abused persons dating from the mid-20th century onwards. Three-quarters of the victims were minors and slightly over half of them were male. The accused

were almost all men, mainly priests working as ministers or curates, such as vicars or chaplains, in parishes. According to the researchers, the most conducive situation to an attack was "social spaces with specific power constellations": pastoral work, serving as altar boys, religious instruction, youth associations, Catholic homes and boarding schools.

Transferred instead of suspended

Sexual abuse has never been the exclusive preserve of the Catholic Church and clergy are not generally speaking under suspicion. Nonetheless, the 136-page report reveals how irresponsibly the church handled the abuse. Canon law, which has long classed sexual abuse of minors as a serious criminal offence, was largely bypassed. Church officials instead

looked the other way, played down or covered up what was happening. There were many instances of priests who had been accused or found guilty simply being transferred (see box). This enabled the perpetrators to re-offend. The church prioritised its own interests over protecting its members, argue the researchers.

The research team consider the cases covered in the report as the tip of the iceberg, as there are still many records under lock and key, for example at the Apostolic Nunciature (the diplomatic representation of the Vatican in Switzerland). The study was commissioned in 2021 by Catholic Church bodies in Switzerland, including the Swiss Bishops' Conference and the Central Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, a type of umbrella association of cantonal churches under public law. The Swiss investigation

happened late by international standards, and its findings have shaken the church.

Preliminary investigation of bishops

Church expert Daniel Kosch argues in the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” that the real scandal is how an institution with the role of a moral authority can be so dismissive of those who have suffered abuse while in its care. He called it the worst crisis in the Catholic Church in Switzerland since the Reformation. In response, the church has taken a harder line with sexual abuse since the turn of the millennium. In 2002, the Bishops’ Conference issued guidelines. In addition, all six dioceses must now have a prevention strategy and a specialist committee for the abused. Victims of



attacks falling under the statute of limitations are receiving payments from a compensation fund set up in 2016.

In its response to the study, the Bishops’ Conference recognised “the suffering of those who were abused and the culpability of the church”. The

The venerable Saint Maurice monastery (VS): several children and adolescents are said to have been sexually assaulted here.

Photo: Keystone

President of the Bishops’ Conference, Basel Bishop Felix Gmür, announced additional measures including contact points separate from the church. The Bishop of St. Gallen, Markus Büchel, apologised – he was tainted through a serious case of abuse in his diocese, described in the study, that continued until fairly recently. However, the public were not convinced. Instead, the high-ranking clerics found themselves under investigation, as reported by the media. The Pope ordered a canonical investigation in the summer into four acting members of the nine-person Bishops’ Conference, among others.

What the victims went through

Vreni Peterer, who is now 62, was sexually abused by a village priest in the canton of St. Gallen in the early 1970s when she was ten. To encourage others to come forward, she recently spoke out about her experiences after having kept quiet for decades. The priest had repeatedly touched girls inappropriately during religion classes. One day, he insisted on driving Peterer home. But instead of taking her home, he took Peterer to the edge of the forest and raped her. She was then told off by her mother for being late back from school. Looking back, Peterer says there is no way she would have said something at the time. Her abuser threatened that she would go to hell. In any case, the priest was beyond reproach as an authority figure. Peterer experienced recurring physical and psychological problems in adulthood, for which she required therapy. It wasn’t until 2018 that she was able to bring herself to contact the specialist committee established by the Diocese of St. Gallen in 2002 and report the priest. He had since died. Peterer learned from the records that this priest had history in another



parish. He had even received a suspended custodial sentence from a secular court for sexual misconduct with and in the presence of children. Despite that, he was still appointed as priest to Vreni Peterer’s parish. In other words, her suffering could have been avoided. Peterer now presides over an association for people who suffered abuse within the church. She did not leave the church. Peterer says she is not against the church, instead she opposes a church where there is abuse. (SWE)

Bishop Joseph Bonnemain appointed head of investigation

The abbot of Saint Maurice monastery in Valais – a member of the Bishops’ Conference as head of a territorial abbey – is himself accused of having sexually molested a youth. He initially took leave of absence from his position. Three bishops are alleged not to have acted as they were supposed to in response to cases of abuse. While they admitted some errors, they also rejected other allegations. Rome appointed Joseph Bonnemain, bishop of Chur since 2021, to lead the preliminary investigation. He takes a firm line against abuse in his own diocese. Nonetheless, critics question whether he will really move



Chur Bishop Joseph Bonnemain had to investigate alleged cover-ups involving fellow bishops. Rome appointed him to the task. Photo: Keystone

against fellow bishops on his own. As a result, Bonnemain was assigned an expert in criminal law and a cantonal judge to support the investigation.

The bishop of Chur intended to deliver his report by the end of 2023 (after this edition of “Swiss Review” goes to press). Depending on the outcome, the papal authority may initiate disciplinary measures or open proceedings under ecclesiastical criminal law. Meanwhile, among the rank and file the impression has grown that, despite assertions to the contrary, the bishops will not go far enough to resolve the problem. The Central Conference of the Roman Catholic Church issued a number of demands. These are designed, inter alia, to establish a sepa-

The church pews – here in St. Gallen – have been slowly emptying for years. Many people are leaving the Roman Catholic Church.

Photo: Keystone



ration of powers in canon law. That would mean having a nationwide tribunal involving laypersons and church figures.

Unrest among the faithful

Catholic parishes all over the country felt the fallout from the report as people left in droves. This church exodus has admittedly been an issue for some time, however, and it affects both the Catholic and the Protestant churches, Switzerland’s largest and second largest faith groups, respectively. Thousands of people are leaving both churches every year. In the canton of Lucerne, a Catholic heartland, the cantonal church was so alarmed that it resorted to open rebellion. In September, 14 church councils decided to block payments of their church taxes to their Basel diocese (see interview).

In November, the synod, the parliament of the Lucerne Cantonal Catholic Church, came out in favour of the rebels. It paid an advance on the condition that the bishop of Basel, Felix Gmür, commit to a more effective approach to combat abuse. Otherwise,

Lucerne will withhold the second half of the annual payment to the bishopric in autumn 2024. A special committee of the Synod will evaluate the measures taken. “A thunderbolt has hit the Catholic Church,” commented information portal kath.ch.

“I report to the Pope.”

The bishop of Basel, seen as a source of hope, was alienated by the cantonal synod’s confrontational stance. Some of the demands had already been implemented, he argued; others had been raised in Rome by the Swiss bishops. There was a lot he could not do under his own authority: “I report to the Pope and no one else,” Gmür told the synod. Other cantonal churches, although in agreement with Lucerne’s position, refrained from imposing their own sanctions. There is widespread agreement that the abuse saga stems from deeper problems within the Catholic Church, with regard not only to its hierarchical structures, but also to its outlook and opinions.

The Central Conference of the Roman Catholic Church argues for “the abandonment of rigid and homophobic sexual morality” as well as “the unconditional acceptance of church staff living in partnerships”. The Zurich researchers also raise the question in their study as to whether “characteristics specific to Catholicism” may have facilitated the sexual abuse: sexual morality, celibacy, gender roles within the church, and its ambivalent stance regarding homosexuality. The academics will look at these – and other aspects – in greater depth. More in-depth research will ensue from the pilot study. The church has committed to that until 2026.

The study is available via the following link (in German): revue.link/kirche

“Be brave and implement reforms”

Following the disclosure of more than one thousand cases of abuse in the Catholic Church, the parish of Adligenswil in the canton of Lucerne has suspended payments to the diocese. There needs to be fundamental change, says parish president Monika Koller Schinca, a voice from the rank and file.

INTERVIEW: SUSANNE WENGER

“Swiss Review”: You are church council president in Adligenswil. What does that entail?

Monika Koller Schinca: The Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland is the only one in the world with two pillars: one is pastoral with bishoprics and parishes, and then there is the secular pillar under state church law with the cantonal churches and congrega-



Monika Koller Schinca calls for “a full investigation, and drastic measures across the board”, arguing that people are losing confidence in the Catholic Church.

Photo: provided

tions. My position is on the secular side. Our democratically elected church council is responsible for finances, buildings and recruiting, while the pastoral side is in charge of the church’s teachings. We work closely together.

Your parish began the resistance movement by withholding payment to the diocese, which the cantonal church parliament subsequently also threatened to do (see main article). What made you take this unusual step?

We are shocked by the high number of documented cases of abuse. We feel solidarity with all the abused. There were so many instances where church officials covered up what had happened. We find that shameful. The final straw was the unsatisfactory response of the bishops to the findings of the study. Now is the time for action and not just words: we demand a full investigation, and drastic measures across the board. People are losing faith in the Catholic Church. They are leaving us in droves.

That’s why you are taking a stand, although the abuse has been known about for a long time now?

Yes, the rank and file should take a stand and show they mean business. That’s why we are making payment contingent on our demands being met. The church is still an important part of the community in the villages of our region. Many people are involved in the church and want to contribute to it. After the study was published, we received more notifications of withdrawal from the church than usual. What hit me hardest was that this time we also saw older people leaving, people from the generation of regular churchgoers. Something has gone seriously wrong. Besides revisiting the response to the abuse, we also need reforms and cultural change. We want to set the wheels in motion and shake up the system.

What needs to change?

One of the most important things is equal rights for women. In the canton of Lucerne, 60 per cent of church employees and 75 per cent of volunteers are female. Women do a lot for our church; however, the higher up the ranks you go, the more men you find. Women are still ineligible for ordination, either as priests or deacons. The

vow of celibacy for the priesthood also needs to go. Anyone who is happy to remain celibate should be free to do so. But it can no longer be compulsory. Sexuality is a gift from God. Besides, mandatory celibacy creates a risk factor for abuse. Studies indicate that it can attract people with problematic traits, paedophile tendencies for example.

You are calling for Swiss bishops to commit to reforms. They argue it is a matter for Rome.

That sounds like an excuse to me. Rome is ponderous and completely detached from the reality of life in Switzerland. Swiss bishops are talking the talk without walking the walk. We need to be brave and find a way to at least implement some reforms in Switzerland, even if that risks incurring disapproval from the Vatican. Time is not on our side. In my view, time is running out for the Catholic Church.

What is your personal relationship to the Catholic Church today?

I grew up in the Church and it’s in my heart. I haven’t entirely given up hope that it can change. That’s why I’m investing time and energy to set things in motion. It’s heartening that our small parish in Adligenswil has made its presence felt at such a high level. People are seeing that something is happening. Time will tell whether it’s enough to restore the church’s credibility.

Monika Koller Schinca has been president of Adligenswil parish near Lucerne since 2021. The 50-year-old has a coaching business. She is married with three children.

Simon Ammann



How many times has Swiss ski jumping champion Simon Amman taken off during his career, having started at the age of 11? About 4,000 jumps, with an average duration of four seconds. That works out at slightly over four hours floating between earth and sky. Given that ski jumpers describe these moments as timeless, that is a huge total. The time spent in the air stays in the mind. And that is 80 percent of the sport's appeal. The indescribable joy of ski-powered flying at more than 100 km/h - welcome to the sporting world of Simon Amman, the ski jumper from Unterwasser in the canton of St Gallen, who keeps jumping despite regular media hints about his pending retirement. A photo from 2002 shows Amman celebrating two gold medals from the Salt Lake City Olympic Games. His tousled hair sticks up over a pair of oval glasses. He is wearing a chestnut brown checked shirt. The Americans think he looks like Harry Potter. To the Swiss, he is the flying bird from Toggenburg. This son of a farmer is known as Simon, or Simi to his friends. Amman is known for his compact position during take-off and his capacity to keep his form in flight. He also lands with remarkable precision. These qualities have made Simi a global star: four-time Olympic champion, double gold medallist. At the same time, he has known failure as well, having experienced a marked dip in form in 2015. However, from then on Simon has rediscovered his edge, having decided to lead with his right foot on landing. A minor revolution. In March 2023, Simi, aged 41, was the veteran and top Swiss performer at the world championships in Planica, Slovenia. And he will fly again.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Switzerland significantly reduces its protection for wolves

The Federal Council has approved the preventive shooting of wolves with effect from 1 December 2023. Entire packs can also be shot in justified cases. This marks a significant downgrade in wolf protection. Previously, wolves could only be shot if they had caused damage or attacked farm animals. There are currently 32 wolf packs living in Switzerland. According to Environment Minister Albert Rösti, a minimum of 12 packs nationwide are to be left untouched. That is not enough to ensure the species' survival. Three years ago, Switzerland's chief wildlife officer, Reinhard Schnidrig, told "Swiss Review": "There is enough space in the Swiss Alps and the Jura mountains for about 60 wolf packs, or 300 animals. That is the upper limit of what is ecologically tolerable. At the lower end of the scale, 20 or so packs are necessary for the wolf to remain in Switzerland for generations." This watering down of wolf protection is thus more political than ecological. By the way, did voters not come out strongly in favour of protecting the wolf three years ago? – Read the interview: [revue.link/wolves](https://www.swissreview.com/en/revue/link/wolves).

(MUL)

Ukrainian refugees can stay longer

Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have sought refuge in Switzerland since the Russians invaded. Switzerland has granted them Protection Status 'S'. That enables rapid admission on a temporary basis without undergoing the asylum process. The Federal Council has now decided to extend Status 'S' for Ukrainians refugees, until at least 4 March 2025. The federal government does not anticipate a rapid end to the conflict. Switzerland is now in line with the EU, which had already approved this extension. (MUL)

Antisemitic attacks on the rise

The number of antisemitic incidents in Switzerland has increased by about a quarter since the terror attack by Hamas against Israel and the Israeli response. The president of the Federal Commission against Racism, Martine Brunschwig Graf, says that what is striking is not only the number of incidents but their intensity. However, she has also observed a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities strongly denounced the trend in November and called on the Federal Council to be clearer in its condemnation of antisemitism. (MUL)

Qualified applause for the Swiss football team

The Swiss national football team will again take part in a major tournament next year. The Swiss qualified for the summer 2024 European Championship in Germany. The team, managed by Murat Yakin, initially saw themselves as favourites in a qualifying group consisting of Andorra, Belarus, Israel, Kosovo and Romania. But it didn't really turn out that way. (MUL)



Photo: iStockphoto

Switzerland's latest pet craze sees demand for chickens soar

The evolution of chickens from farm animal to pet is gaining momentum. Tens of thousands of private gardens now have chicken coops. This has prompted a response from the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office.

DENISE LACHAT

Switzerland's most popular pet is – the fish. Not the cat, as most people tend to assume; in terms of numbers, the fish takes top spot, as the animal welfare organisation Schweizer Tierschutz (STS) is well aware. The exact number of fish swimming around the country's private aquariums is unknown. But it must be quite high. After all the cat, Switzerland's number two pet, will soon number two million. The dog comes in at number three on half a million.

Need for nature

However, another animal is gaining ground in the popularity stakes. And

it isn't the usual cuddly furball either (although nor is the fish, to be fair). Enter the chicken. That's right – the Swiss now like to keep chickens: an estimated 70,000 private households have chickens as pets and their popularity is growing. "More and more people want chickens. That may well have something to do with the Covid pandemic," says Sarah Camenisch, spokesperson of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO). No-one knows exactly why chickens are in such high demand; however, Camenisch suspects it has something to do with a growing yearning for nature. General Covid surveys tell us that the Swiss felt increasingly drawn to nature during the pandemic. Shops,

restaurants, schools, gyms and ski areas were all closed. So, people suddenly had time for walks in nature, baking bread and buying fresh vegetables straight from the farm instead. Many people also acquired dogs and cats during the pandemic to combat the loneliness of working and studying from home.

Another factor behind the chicken's evolution from farm to domestic animal, writes Samuel Furrer, zoologist and head of the STS wild animals department, is that consumers increasingly want to know the origin of their food and how it is produced. What better way to know than keeping your own animal? "Some people slaughter and eat their chickens,"



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records. **This edition: Switzerland's latest "in" domestic animal**

says Furrer. However, in most cases people make do with the eggs. Especially those who name their feathered friends and like to hold them affectionately; after all, chickens can be cute. Think, for example, of the Pekin Bantam.

Yes to animal welfare, no to animal diseases

However, chickens shouldn't be held to the chest or carried around. "They tend not to like that," says Sarah Camenisch, stressing that chickens are more for watching than for petting. There are also other things people should know about when keeping chickens, so the FSVO in conjunction with the STS launched a nationwide campaign in spring 2023 with two objectives: to uphold animal welfare and to prevent the spread of animal diseases. The first thing to consider

"The key is to look after the animals' interests – it's the same whether you keep blue whales, honeybees or chickens."

Bernd Schildger, former zoo director in Berne

is whether you have enough space. Ideally, three chickens should have 50 square metres of green area for scratching, pecking and dustbathing. They are also social animals and must not be kept in isolation. So, you need at least two or ideally three. The lockable coop should be at least two square metres for three chickens.

You also need a closed aviary as protection against foxes and martens, and as an alternative to the coop, so the animals don't have to be kept locked up in the coop if there is an outbreak of disease such as bird flu. This infrastructure does not come cheap, as Samuel Furrer from STS points out. Three chickens – depending on the owner's DIY skills – can cost 1,500 to 4,000 Swiss francs, with annual feeding costs of about 400 francs on top of that. Chickens are not to be fed kitchen leftovers, but should be given pellets or corn middlings. As with any pet, chickens also need to visit the vet occasionally. According to the Swiss Veterinary Society, there are veterinary clinics that specialise in treating domestic animals like birds or rabbits. Chickens are to them what dogs and cats are to a standard veterinary practice. The vet can treat respiratory infec-

The government is taking an interest in domestic chickens: people who keep chickens at home must register them with the veterinary authorities as a protective measure against the spread of disease. Photo: Keystone

The chicken is not a cuddly creature. But they are comfortable around people. Photo: Keystone

tions, injuries or illnesses affecting their ability to lay eggs, worms, fleas, mites and other parasites. In a nutshell: think it through before buying chickens. They must be registered with the relevant cantonal offices so immediate remedial measures can be taken in the event of diseases such as bird flu or Newcastle disease. Chickens may have to stay cooped up to prevent the spread of disease.



Adopt a chicken

The chicken as a domestic pet still pales into insignificance next to its farmyard counterparts, of which there were more than 13 million in Switzerland in 2022; about four per cent more than in the previous year. At the same time, a growing number of ‘retired’ laying hens can be found pecking and scratching around people’s gardens, having been adopted. Laying hens for fattening are of no commercial use during the four to six weeks spent moulting, as they do not lay eggs during that time. This leads to them being culled after about a year, whereas their normal lifespan can easily last four to six years. After moulting, hens return to laying an egg a day, as Samuel Furrer stresses. He approves of such initiatives as “Adopte une cocotte” (a chicken adoption programme in French-speaking Switzerland) or a similar programme called “Rettet das Huhn”. “That way the chickens can enjoy their autumn years.” However, they would have to adapt to their new environment, as they come from a factory farming background of being fattened with high-energy feed.

Animal awareness

Is the chicken currently Switzerland’s ‘in’ pet? “We can’t really say, as we don’t have the comparative figures,” says Furrer. Nonetheless, there does seem to be something of a craze for the animal. Moreover, such outpourings of affection are not restricted to chickens. Social media abounds with heartwarming stories of cute mini pigs, although they don’t belong in their owner’s bed any more than the chicken. Veterinarian Bernd Schildger, former director of Dählhölzli Animal Park in Berne, which also includes Bern Bear Park, considers this a fundamental point. Schildger says:



Chickens renew their plumage after a year and stop laying eggs, making them commercially unviable. People often adopt these unproductive chickens. Photo: iStock

“The key is to look after the animals’ interests. They aren’t there just to please people – it’s the same whether you keep blue whales, honeybees or

“More and more people want chickens. That may well have something to do with the Covid pandemic.”

Sarah Camenisch, FSVO spokesperson

chickens.” Schildger passionately supports the idea of people keeping animals, in principle. He believes people have grown estranged from nature and animals and have banned them from their environment and consciousness. “Why are slaughterhouses surrounded by barbed wire?” he asks. In other words: what people don’t see leaves them cold. If bringing animals into households would make people more aware of them, that would be better for the animals.

Chickens sometimes live in the worst conditions for the sake of commerce, he says, therefore “private owners are doing something good”. Of course, hens are more than just

egg providers. They have their own charm and personality. These amusing animals, who watch us alertly with tilted head and make us smile, are also communicative and thus rather noisy. That’s why it is advisable to talk to the neighbours before getting one, says FSVO representative Camenisch.

Given that Swiss people have been known to go to court over church or cow bells, she makes a fair point. Still, chickens seem to be well-liked, adding a touch of rural Switzerland to all those urban gardens. There is no flip side either, unlike cats with their penchant for terrorising birds.

Animal welfare advocate Samuel Furrer also has an answer for those who would blame the cats: put collars with bells on them, and having more hedges and shrubs in private gardens would also provide a safe place for birds. Closeness to nature seems again to be the way forward.



Why take a chicken as a pet? Mainly for the eggs, hardly ever for the meat. Photo: iStock

Parliament opts for status quo in the Federal Council

The ‘magic formula’ for apportioning the seats on the Federal Council remains intact: the four biggest parties divide up the seven seats among themselves. However, unease is growing about the ‘power cartel’.

THEODORA PETER

The general elections to the Federal Council on 13 December 2023 were all about continuity. A parliamentary majority voted to preserve the balance of power. That means the Federal Council will, for the next four years, comprise two members each from the SVP, SP and FDP plus one member from the Centre (page 13).

The ‘magic formula’

The unwritten law known as the ‘magic formula’ stipulates a coalition government where the four main parties are represented according to their share of the vote. The election victory of the SVP and increased share of the vote for the SP cemented their claim to power. The two biggest parties won 27.9 per cent (SVP) and 18.3 per cent (SP) of the vote. However, the entitlement of the third-placed FDP to its two seats is rather more tenuous: it accounted for 14.3 per cent of the vote, a mere whisker ahead of the Centre party (14.1 per cent). This obviously raises the question as to why the FDP has two seats, while the Centre ‘only’ has one despite winning practically the same number of votes.

‘Respect for the institutions’

Nonetheless, the Centre party decided not to demand a second seat in December at the expense of the FDP. The reason given was out of ‘respect for the institutions’. They did not want to remove any serving federal councillors from office, as Centre President Gerhard Pfister had made clear at the outset. The FDP government members, Ignazio Cassis and Karin Keller-Sutter, stood for re-election. The SVP also argued in favour of stability during times of crisis –



and naturally was keen not to weaken the FDP as its ally in the right-of-centre camp.

Attempt by the Greens fails

However, the Greens as the fifth-placed party did go for one of the two FDP seats. “A government is stable and strong when it represents the maximum possible number of voters,”

A beaming smile from the new Federal Councillor: Beat Jans (SP) is replacing the departing Alain Berset on the Federal Council. In Jans, the canton of Basel-Stadt returns to the national government following a 50-year hiatus.
Photo Keystone

argued faction leader Aline Trede. The Greens represent just under 10 per cent of voters. “That puts us closer arithmetically to one Federal Council seat than the FDP to two seats with its 14 per cent.” The smaller Green Liberals (GLP, 7.6 per cent) argued that the will of the voters was not adequately represented in the current constellation. “A quarter of the voters are not represented in the Federal Council,” pointed out GLP faction leader Corina Gredig. Therefore, they felt they had a case to challenge for the second FDP seat.

However, Green candidate Gerhard Andrey ultimately fell well short as both FDP government members kept their seats with a comfortable majority. This was also due to the SP not wanting to break with tradition: the ‘magic formula’. That

Smaller parties remain outside the Federal Council. A quarter of voters are not represented in the government.

was because the left-wing party relied on the right-wing camp's support on 13 December to retain the seat of departing SP minister Alain Berset. This prompted the Greens to accuse them of selling out to the 'power cartel'.

The voting procedure also placed the social democrats in something of a dilemma. The vacant SP seat was the last item on the agenda – i.e. after the re-election of the six government members (the seventh one having opted not to stand). The SP was mindful that it could be penalised by the SVP and FDP if it threw its weight behind the Green candidate. The strategy worked as the parliament selected one of the two official SP candidates to succeed Alain Berset.

A new face on the Federal Council

The successful candidate was the almost 60-year-old president of Basel-Stadt cantonal government and former national councillor, Beat Jans. The SP member campaigned as a builder of bridges and promised to keep his door open when in office. Jans is Basel-Stadt's first federal councillor in over 50 years. Through

his election, the urban centres are once again prominent in the federal government. The departure of Alain Berset (Fribourg) also marks the end of French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino's majority in the Federal Council: four of the seven government members are once again from the

ceded by his deputy, Viktor Rossi of the Green Liberals. This is the first time a member of a non-governing party has filled the hot seat. As head of the Federal Chancellery, Rossi will also be responsible for advancing the cause of e-voting. In a pre-election survey by the Organisation of

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| SP | SP | The centre | FDP | FDP | SVP | SVP |
| Elisabeth Baume-Schneider Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) | Beat Jans Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) | Viola Amherd Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) | Karin Keller-Sutter Federal Department of Finance (FDF) | Ignazio Cassis Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) | Albert Rösti Fed. Dep. of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) | Guy Parmelin Fed. Dep. of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) |

German-speaking areas, including Viola Amherd (Centre) from Valais, the federal president in 2024. The parliament also elected a new federal chancellor to act as chief of staff and coordinate government business. Walter Thurnherr of the Centre party has stepped down (see Review 6/2023 for profile) to be suc-

ceeded by his deputy, Viktor Rossi of the Green Liberals. This is the first time a member of a non-governing party has filled the hot seat. As head of the Federal Chancellery, Rossi will also be responsible for advancing the cause of e-voting. In a pre-election survey by the Organisation of

A qualified slide to the right

The right-wing conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) emerged as the resounding winner in the National Council following the federal elections of autumn 2023 (see "Swiss Review" 6/2023). However, in the Council of States, the second chamber, the SVP achieved a more modest result. Despite having been in a promising position, their candidates fell short in several cantons at the second vote, particularly in the canton of Zurich.

The FDP also performed well below its own expectations.

By contrast, the Centre built on its leading position in the Council of States. To the left, the SP consolidated its representation, while the Greens again lost ground. The Green Liberals (GLP) returned to the Council of States. The breakdown of the 46 seats in the Council of States is as follows – compared to the 2019 elections: Centre 15 seats (+2 seats), FDP 11 (-1), SP 9 (-), SVP 6 (-), Greens 3 (-2),



ELECTIONS 2023

GLP 1 (+1), MCG 1 (+1). Overall, the Council of States will remain a bastion of conservatism. At the same time, the centre will have greater clout than hitherto. (TP)

Overview of all the election results to the National Council and Council of States: www.wahlen.admin.ch/en/ch/

Switzerland's crack epidemic causes shock

Since 2022, Switzerland has experienced a flood of concentrated and cheap cocaine. Part of this product is sold as crack. People can be seen openly taking drugs in several cantons. Geneva is the hardest hit.

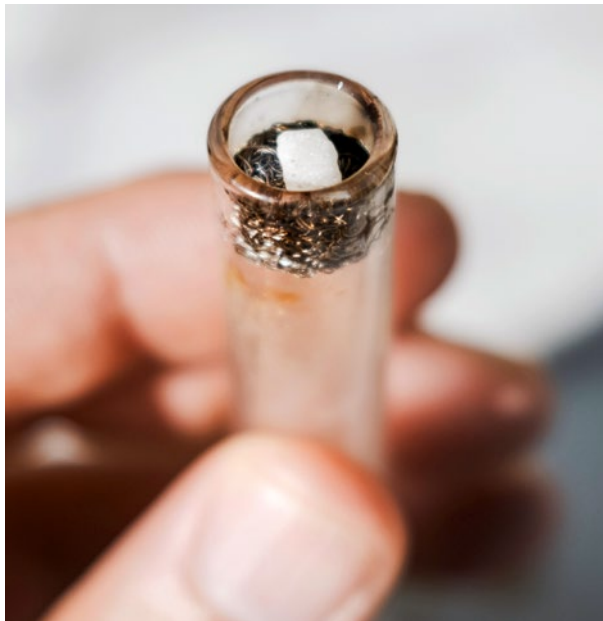
STÉPHANE HERZOG

Thirty years after the closure of Platzspitz and Letten, where Zurich's heroin addicts used to indulge their habit in the open, hard drug users have reemerged in public view. "You can see them in the large cities, but also in Vevey, Biel, Solothurn, Brugg and even Chur," observes Frank Zobel, deputy director at Addiction Switzerland. There is a park in the Grisons capital where drug users congregate, as they do in the Bäckeranlage park in central Zurich. Geneva's crack addicts normally gravitate to the area around Cornavin station. This time cocaine is driving consumption. The white powder is flooding European cities and supplanting heroin. The drug is cheap, with a purity sometimes exceeding 70 percent.

"We've never seen this before," comments Zobel, author of a report on the crack wave engulfing Geneva. The cocaine-based product is smoked with a glass pipe and gives a powerful high. So, it isn't long before the addict is ready for the next hit. Although the drug has been consumed in Switzerland for years, its availability has exploded. "Supply has doubled within a year, which has created demand," concludes Nicolas Dietrich, cantonal commissioner for addiction-related issues in Fribourg.

Ready-made crack

The explosion in crack consumption is particularly high in Geneva, where it is sold ready for consumption by dealers of African origin coming from France. The "modous", as small-scale suppliers are known in Wolof, a west African language, have established a market based on selling small quantities at cheap prices. Crack users once bought cocaine in the street and



Small amounts ready for consumption and sold at discount prices have made demand for crack soar in Geneva. Photo: Nils Ackermann, Lundi13

bicarbonate of soda at Migros, before cooking the drug at home. The discounted crack has increased the pace of consumption. Every day, dozens of smokers gather around Quai 9, a secure centre for addicts in Geneva beside Cornavin station. "One third are from Geneva, one third from France and one third are migrants," estimates Camille Robert, co-director of local addiction study group Groupe-ment romand d'étude des addictions.

In June, Première ligne, the association in charge of Quai 9, closed its doors for a week due to the aggressive behaviour of crack users and brawls breaking out in front of the centre. "Colleagues were being caught up in disputes on the premises," says Thomas Herquel, director of the association. Since then, the smoking room has been out of bounds to crack users, except for those who come to sleep in one of the 12 camp beds at Quai 9. This came as a shock, acknowledges Pascal Dupont, manager of Entracte, a daycare centre for drug addicts in Geneva.

This epidemic is shaking the foundations of the support structures. "Crack is like a series of explosions going off in quick succession. The users tend to be vulnerable and prone to depression, so it's all about the here and now; they have no perspective of time," comments Gérald Thévoz, psychosocial counsellor and addiction expert. Users stop eating, drinking and even sleeping. "The drugs basically detach people from their social network," says Thévoz. Their condition shocks people and they lose touch with their friends and acquaintances.

"My initial aim is for the users who visit Entracte to come back," states Pascal Dupont. He has seen some of his regulars cut their ties with the centre. Sometimes it takes a hospital visit before they start to think about getting off the drugs.

Medicine in Fribourg

To combat the crisis, the cantonal government of Geneva has approved a programme costing six million Swiss francs, mainly to finance an enhanced police presence. Quai 9 will be expanded and have more staff. Users will have more night shelters to choose from. The idea is to offer addicts, some of whom receive no social welfare, places where they can have a break. Some of these people have no access to social welfare, such as users from France or the homeless in Geneva, who include those from a migration background.

Elsewhere in Switzerland, crack is usually cooked by the user and sometimes a portion of it is sold on. "You can find cocaine anywhere," comments Frank Zobel. "The drug scenes vary in line with social and geographic factors," adds Nicolas Cloux,



Thomas Herquel of Première ligne in his clinical-looking premises, Quai 9 in Geneva. Addicts sometimes behave aggressively, says Herquel.
Photo: Nils Ackermann, Lundi13

manager of the foundation that supports drug addicts in Tremplin, Fribourg. Psychotropic drug users take more medicine there than elsewhere. “If ready-made crack comes here, we will apply the lessons learned in Geneva,” remarks Nicolas Dietrich, Fribourg commissioner for addictions. The canton has already witnessed the early stages of the drug and has set up a dedicated working group in response.

Cocaine: a reaction to living on the edge?

The popularity of crack in Switzerland may be partly due to precarious circumstances. “Switzerland has reached a nadir in the deterioration of its social and economic conditions,” believes Hervé Durnat, member of a cantonal commission of addiction experts in the canton of Vaud. Experts were surprised that crack was being used in Switzerland’s streets. “We found it incongruous that people would consume crack so openly in a rich country like Switzerland,” says Durnat. Some of the people are already familiar with the drug or are on replacement medication and susceptible to relapse. “We take in people who may be close to retirement, are often ill and sometimes live in hotel

accommodation. What prospects have they got?” asks Pascal Dupont rhetorically. In Geneva, the Quai 9 social workers bring bottles of water and food to the exhausted users taken in from the street. Emergency shelters offer respite and there are places that will take in crack users regardless of their condition, but the usual thresholds – minimum stay for example – are sometimes too high for these unstable people. “Policy-makers don’t want to make the situation

look bad, but we also need to consider the right medical and psychosocial approach to help these persons,” emphasises Gérald Thévoz referring to a heroin-based medical treatment. The authorities in Zurich, Berne and Lausanne are also looking into the regulated sale of cocaine.

“We found it incongruous that people would consume crack so openly in a rich country like Switzerland.”

Hervé Durnat,
addiction expert in the canton of Vaud

Overt addiction: crack addicts are becoming conspicuous, especially in the cities. A photo from Geneva.
Photo: Nils Ackermann, Lundi13



A global coordinate grid

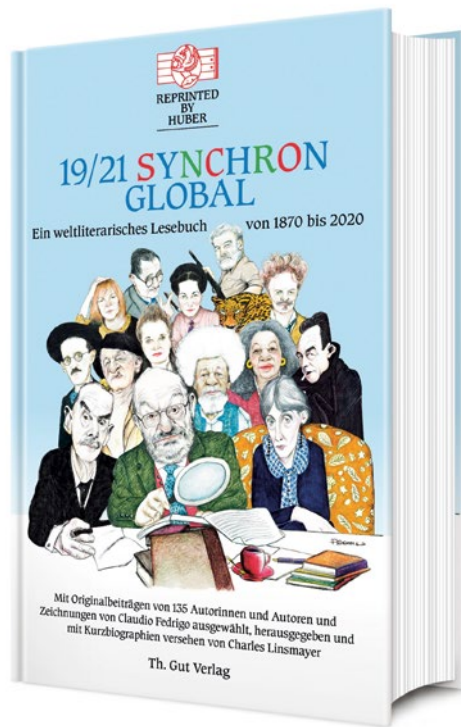
One-and-a-half years ago, Charles Linsmayer published the lavish reader “20/21 Synchron”, showcasing literary texts from Switzerland. Now he has brought out a global version: “19/21 Synchron global”.

BEAT MAZENAUER

Switzerland is not the world, as Charles Linsmayer may have thought to himself as he looked over his book collection and formed a plan to create a reading book of literature from all over the world. And now it's here: an attractive, thick volume containing (analogously to its Swiss counterpart) 135 texts all by different authors and written between 1870 and 2020.

Linsmayer starts off with a powerful piece attesting to the passionate immediacy of literature: “Discovering Books” by Richard Wright, an extract from “Black Boy”, written in 1945. Wright recounts his first visits to a library. He brings to life his experiences of having to resort to trickery to take out books on loan as a coloured boy and how he had to put up with suspicious looks as he sought to satisfy his thirst for literature. “It was so strange, as if I had discovered a new world! Once I had finished the book and closed it, I realised I had discovered something that I now couldn't do without,” and that he carried around with him “like a criminal”. Wright's later work shows that he overcame all the obstacles and ended up being a writer.

An anthology like “19/21 Synchron global” is not (necessarily) made to be read cover to cover. It is more suited to brief, funny, whimsical, random literary experiences. From Richard Wright's opener, the reader could, for example, go straight to Abdulrazak Gurnah's egregious debate among colonialists, who see the native Africans as wild animals at best. A suitable riposte to that could be Toni Morrison and her text on home and migration. Then there are a number of options for the next stop, such as the childish plot to kill Hitler by Carson McCullers, or Camus' fond memory of a youth in a Moorish café, or even Nelly Sachs' “Schwer zu sagen, wie man lebt im masslosen Leiden” [It's hard to say how to live through perpetual suffering]. Wright's bibliographical experience also contains a touch of Hesse as the guardian of the “intellectual world”, especially important during times of need.



Charles Linsmayer (publisher): “19/21 Synchron global. Ein weltliterarisches Lesebuch von 1870 bis 2020.” Th. Gut Verlag, Zurich, 2024, 656 pages, ca. CHF 40.

“19/21 Synchron global” offers the reader a whole host of options to chart their own course through the names, themes and stories in the book. The publisher has established a broad platform on which to base the journey: stretching from Akhmatova to Tsvetaeva (in German: Zvetajewa) alphabetically – there is a considerable time-span between the two contemporaries – from Victor Hugo (*1802) to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*1977). The stories start with Richard Wright and end with David Malouf, with a cultural world tour in between. Moreover, Linsmayer does not necessarily select the most prominent texts; instead, he prefers pieces that fit smoothly with his thematic structure. The 20 chapters cover all the basic topics from birth to death, from the seriousness of war to cheeky satire, with motifs including magic, nature and the animal world. Linsmayer's intent is neither to create a new canon nor to achieve completeness. The collection contains literary testimonies that he considers important. His own perspective is integral to that, as he writes in the epilogue, as a publisher faced with the wealth of “world literature” is “ultimately reliant on their own literary experiences and subjective perception”. The brief biographies of the authors in the appendix are as personal as they are pointed, each illustrated with a drawing by Claudio Fedrigo.

“19/21 Synchron global” would make a good small literary compendium. However, the essence of the book lies in its many literary “amuse-bouches” in the form of extracts from his favourite works. Richard Wright's “Black Boy” is definitely worth (re)reading to close the circle.

Find out more about literature in “Swiss Review” at: revue.link/books

Charles Linsmayer has been responsible for the literature section of “Swiss Review” for years. It is very popular among many of our readers (see page 24 of this edition). The editorial team is holding a draw for three copies of Linsmayer's latest work. To take part in the draw, send an email with the subject line “Synchron” to revue@swisscommunity.org. No correspondence will be entered into regarding the draw. (MUL)

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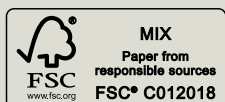
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Switzerland – a nation of settled people and places in shadow



9.5 %

The Swiss are becoming more settled: the number of people moving home is lower than it has been for a long time. Only 9.5% of the population moved in 2022. It’s easy to see why: there is a lack of rental apartments on the market. And these are often prohibitively expensive. Source: Federal Statistical Office

15

Something almost unbelievable is going on under the radar: Switzerland is sinking. Several large areas have sunk by up to 15 centimetres within a few years, such as Linth plain (GL). However, the experts see no cause for concern: the areas affected were extensively drained in the 19th and 20th centuries. Those water corrections are still making their presence felt.

Source: Swisstopo

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There are places in Switzerland that are beautiful, but no-one wants to move there. This is because they don’t get the sun during the winter. For example, Emmetten (NW) has been overshadowed by the nearby mountains since 30 October – and will remain so until 13 February 2024. That makes 106 days, more than a quarter of a year. And there are many more such ‘shadow locations’ in Switzerland: Cadenazzo (TI), Glis (VS), Hergiswil (NW), Oberterzen (SG) and Vicosoprano (GR), to name but a few. Source: MeteoSwiss

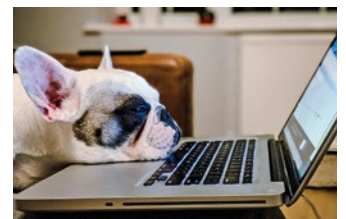
287

On the subject of water: good news! Consumption of drinking water has fallen by 21 per cent in Switzerland since 1990. Current consumption is 287 litres per person. N.B.: that’s 287 litres per day. That puts a different perspective on it.

Source: Federal Statistical Office

44 %

Switzerland has surveys and studies on almost everything. A new study based on the hypothesis ‘House pets make people happy’ concludes that 44% of Swiss have a dog-friendly workplace. And 70% of all respondents see that as a sign of a progressive corporate culture. The study was incidentally commissioned by... a dog food retailer. Source: Mars Schweiz/iVox



FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

Big decisions on retirement pensions are pending

Should OASI pensioners receive more money? Or should everyone work longer to secure the next generations' pensions? On 3 March 2024, voters will decide on two contrasting initiatives on retirement pensions.

THEODORA PETER

The maximum old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) pension in Switzerland is 2,450 Swiss francs per month. The average actual pension, however, is lower, at about 1,800 francs. Even those who have a second or even a third pillar on top of the OASI pension usually have to tighten their belts after retirement. Plus, the cost of health insurance premiums, rents and electricity keeps rising. The Swiss Trade Union Federation (SGB) estimates that this loss of purchasing power will equal one whole month's OASI pension by the end of 2024. In response, the SGB is calling for a 13th month pension payment with its "For a better life in retirement" initiative. That works out at an increase of 8.3 per cent.

How affordable is it?

However, this extra month needs to be paid for: the Federal Council calculates that the OASI would need to pay out about 5 billion more francs in 2032 if the initiative is successful. The government and a parliamentary majority argue that this additional cost is not sustainable. Opponents of the initiative argue that, even if pensions remain unchanged, financial hardship awaits the country's social insurance in the long term. This is because of the baby boomers: high birth rates from 1946 to 1964 mean more pensioners going forward, all claiming their state pension.

These warnings smack of 'pessimism' to proponents of the initiative: "The OASI is in a good place financially", states the Trade Union Federation, pointing out that the Confederation's financial outlook predicts a surplus of about three billion francs for social insurance over the next few years. OASI funds are set to rise to 67

billion francs by 2030 – about 20 billion francs more than now.

While the Federal Council and conservative parties oppose the introduction of a 13th OASI pension payment, the people seem more sympathetic to the idea. An opinion poll conducted by Sotomo in early autumn 2023 revealed 71 per cent of respondents backed the pension increase. Moreover, the pollsters noted strong support for the initiative from right-wing as well as left-wing voters. A win at the polls for the trade unions and those left of centre on a social policy issue would be a serious set-

back for the conservative camp – four months after a slide to the right at the national elections ("Review" 6/2023). Nonetheless, poll results at this early stage still have time to change as the voting campaign runs its course. The initiative also needs the backing of a majority of cantons as well as votes, and experience has shown that the former can be the more challenging of the two.

Young FDP calls for a higher retirement age

The second OASI proposal for submission to the people on 3 March is a conservative initiative and diametrically opposed to the first one. The Young Liberals aim to incrementally increase the retirement age for all from 65 to 66 by 2033 through the "For a secure and sustainable pension system" initiative. This would result in the OASI age increasing in parallel with life expectancy. This could free up several billion francs for the country's social insurance budget to the benefit of future generations: if everyone works for longer, future generations will also be able to count on receiving a retirement pension, argue the initiators.

Going to the polls for approval on an increase in the retirement age is never easy. In the Sotomo survey, 67 per cent flatly rejected the idea. Only fellow travellers from the FDP seem to identify with the initiative. Otherwise, the left-wing parties and Greens, centre and Green Liberals all oppose it. The right-wing conservative SVP will reveal its position on both OASI votes on 27 January – after this edition of "Swiss Review" goes to press.

Even if the people say no on 3 March, the idea of linking the retirement age to increased life expectancy will not disappear entirely from the

An overview of the 3 March 2024 votes

13th OASI pension: the "For a better life in retirement" initiative by the Swiss Trade Union Federation (SGB) calls for 13 annual OASI pension payments instead of the current 12. That works out at a pension increase of 8.3 per cent. If the initiative is approved, the federal government calculates added expenditure in the region of 5 billion francs in 2032. The Federal Council and a parliamentary majority therefore oppose the proposal.

Increase in the retirement age: the "For a secure and sustainable pension system" initiative is an attempt by the Young Liberals to incrementally raise the retirement age for all to 66 by 2033. Subsequently, the retirement age would continue to rise in parallel with life expectancy. This would save the country's social insurance billions. The Federal Council and a parliamentary majority oppose the proposal. (TP)



An image, itself of retirement age: the postman hands a woman her pension in the stairwell (1955). OASI payments have become less personal and more discreet.

Photo: Keystone

agenda. Parliament has already mandated the Federal Council to propose a bill by 2026 designed to bring financial stability to the OASI from 2030 to 2040. So, it will come up for discussion again by then, if not earlier.

2nd pillar showdown in June

The last OASI reform, which received the green light from voters in September 2022, secured the financing for social insurance until 2030. It stipulates that women will have to work one year longer in future: until the age of 65 instead of 64. This passed at the polls by a whisker. The reform also involves an increase in the VAT rate to boost the OASI coffers.

Voters are also set to return to the pension issue in June. This time, it

At the end of 2022, there were about 2.5 million people on an OASI retirement pension, 1.7 million of them in Switzerland and 790,000 outside the country. **Some 125,000 were Swiss Abroad and 665,000 pensioners without a Swiss passport.**

will be the 2nd pillar on the table, i.e. the pension assets accumulated by employed people in their employer's pension fund. The unions have launched the initiative in opposition to the reform passed by parliament. They argue the package will give employees a poorer deal and again disadvantage women on a low income. So, after voting on the OASI in March, the next visit to the polls will again call on the people to adopt a position regarding the welfare state.

Links to both OASI initiatives:
www.ahvx13.ch
www.renten-sichern.ch

Energy Minister Röstli pulls the plug on new nuclear plants

Nuclear power in Switzerland had been a taboo subject ever since the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. Then, fears of a power shortage increased support for building new nuclear power stations. Now, there is renewed resistance to the idea – from an unexpected quarter.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

Supporters of nuclear power rejoiced when Albert Röstli (SVP) succeeded Simonetta Sommaruga (SP) as energy minister at the start of 2023. Röstli was one of them: against the energy transition and in favour of new nuclear power plants. Proponents of nuclear energy argue that Switzerland needs new nuclear power stations more than ever. However, it seems their hopes are not to be realised.

Construction ban on new nuclear power plants

The nuclear power lobby had been saying for a long time that there is no alternative to nuclear for ensuring the country's power supply. But no one was listening. The Fukushima

nuclear disaster of 2011 pushed the (already controversial) topic firmly off the table. In 2017, the people gave the green light to the "Energy Strategy 2050", in other words to the incremental expansion of renewable energies and a construction ban on new nuclear power plants. The decision led indirectly to the decommissioning of Mühleberg nuclear power station in the canton of Berne, which is currently being dismantled. This is the first time Switzerland has actually proceeded with dismantling a nuclear plant.

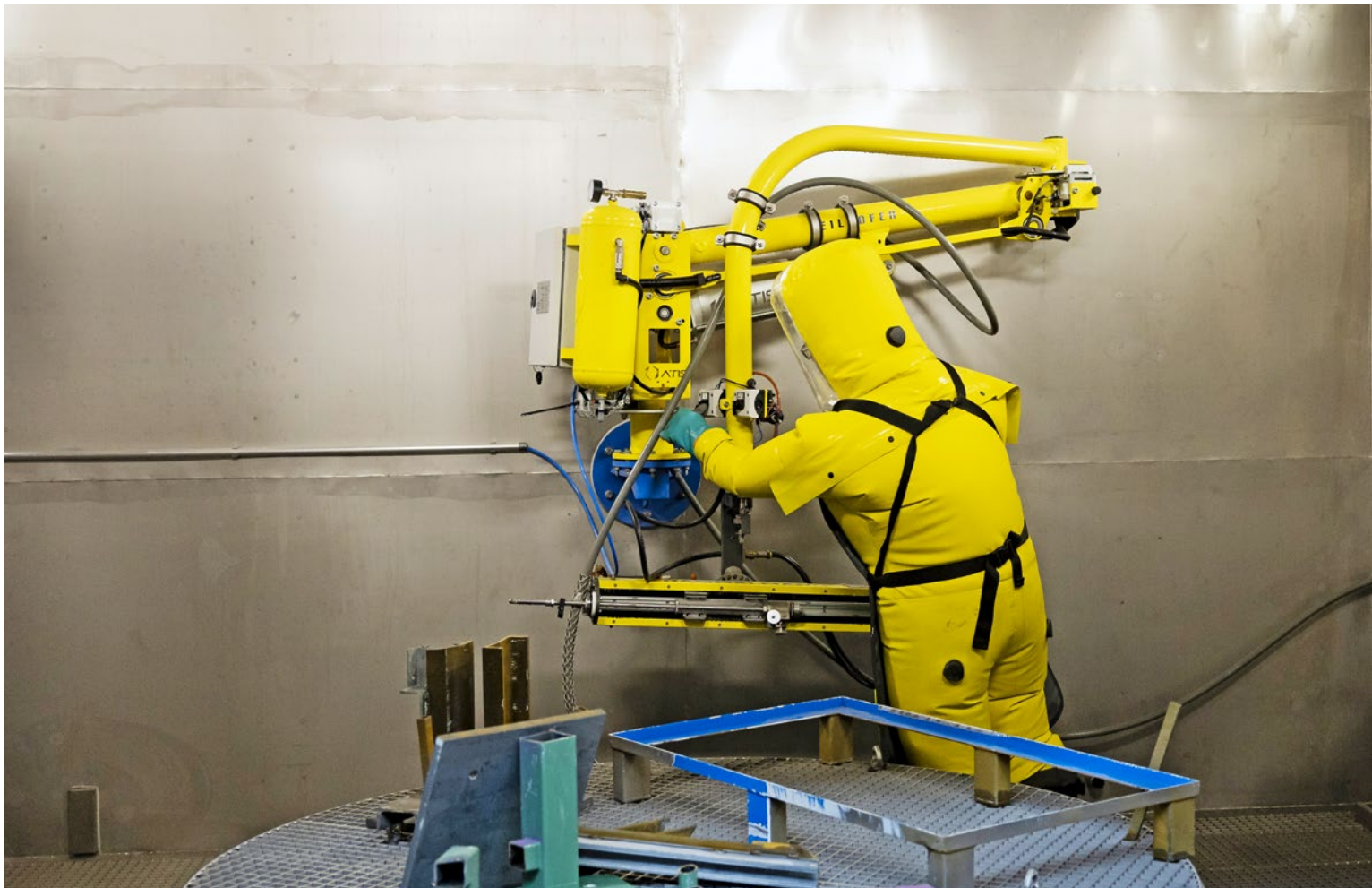
Sluggish expansion of alternative energy sources

In the meantime, the planned expansion of photovoltaics and wind tur-

bines has been underwhelming. As the country had adequate power, there was a lack of urgency in parliament to back renewables. It wasn't long before this complacency was challenged. In autumn 2021, a good four years after the vote to phase out nuclear power, the federal government issued a study warning of potential 'power shortages'. Although the study outlined an absolute worst-case scenario, it caused alarm among the political parties and population.

The right-wing conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP), which had always opposed the energy transition, criticised the Federal Council's 'camping stove policy' and called loudly for the construction of new nuclear power plants to address the potential power shortages. The nu-

Switzerland is currently learning more about dismantling nuclear power plants than building them: workers dismantling the decommissioned Mühleberg nuclear power plant. Photo: Keystone



clear lobby also regrouped as young Vanessa Meury added a fresh face to their ranks. The 26-year-old is president of Energie Club Schweiz, which is committed to a ‘reliable and environmentally friendly energy policy over the long term’. In autumn 2021,



Meury told Tamedia newspapers: “I believe we are now regaining momentum”. Her call for more nuclear power has been well received. The association wants to overturn the law banning the construction of new nuclear power sites and has launched a popular initiative to that end: “Stop the blackout”.

Russia’s attack triggered the energy crisis

The European energy crisis, triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, strengthened the nuclear argument. A power shortage in Switzerland during the winter became a realistic scenario. The federal government and cantons created crisis plans. Detailed rules were formed as to who could use how much electricity and when. Energy Minister Sommaruga recommended saving energy while cooking and sharing showers. This was met with surprise as people wondered how it had come to this in a country that had enjoyed surplus power for decades.

In the end, Switzerland negotiated the 2022/2023 winter without too

Albert Rösti before changing sides: as president of the SVP, he was at the forefront of the opposition to the Federal Council’s energy policy – he is photographed here submitting the referendum against the Energy Act. Archive image 2017: Keystone

much trouble, not least due to the mild temperatures and prompt substitution of Russian gas by other energy sources. Parliament acknowledged the gravity of the situation and pushed the expansion of renewables. Supporters of nuclear energy also came in from the cold as it was acknowledged that demand for electricity would grow significantly, for example for electric transport and heating. In addition to that, the existing nuclear power plants, which account for a third of annual electricity production, would need to be replaced.

Rösti surprises the nuclear lobby

The stage seemed set for a grand entrance by nuclear energy supporter Albert Rösti. However, the new energy minister had his own ideas, to the surprise of the nuclear lobby. “This discussion is redundant right now – if not counterproductive,” he said in an interview with “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” (NZZ) in September 2023. He said he had no interest in discussing nuclear power. Instead, his priority was to implement the energy strategy approved by the people to the best of his ability.

In other words, Rösti’s full attention is on expanding electricity production over the next five to ten years. Additional power will be urgently needed during this time. In Rösti’s view, a fundamental debate about new nuclear power plants would be detrimental to these efforts. New nuclear power plants are not a short-term solution: experts estimate that approval for and the construction of a new nuclear reactor would take about 20 years.

The dream of a thorium reactor

As the SVP federal councillor pulls the plug, there is no shortage of people who would gladly reinsert it. Geneva firm Transmutex is working on a nuclear power plant that runs without uranium and even disposes of

waste from old reactors. Maurice Bourquin, former rector at the University of Geneva and former president of CERN Council, is involved in the project. Bourquin recently requested that the Federal Council conduct a feasibility study on such a thorium reactor – despite the ban on nuclear power plant construction.

The reactor would be fuelled by thorium instead of uranium. In contrast to conventional radioactive waste, thorium ‘only’ remains radioactive for several hundred instead of hundreds of thousands of years. In addition, the volume could be drastically reduced with the planned fuel recycling economy. Nonetheless, there would be high-energy gamma rays and heat. The waste would have to be cooled for more secure final storage, which adds uncertainty to the process.

From nuclear power plant site to giant battery

There are also ideas circulating as to how the decommissioned reactor sites could be used in other ways. For example, the Green Liberals propose building electricity storage sites there – as security against power shortages. The electricity companies are not against the idea, although they point out that nuclear power plants need to have been decommissioned for 15 years before being put to alternative use.

By the way, Rösti does not want to pull the plug on operational nuclear power plants – quite the opposite. He does not want another ‘Mühleberg’, he said in an NZZ interview. He even backs state intervention to keep the plants running if necessary. Operators estimate their nuclear reactors have 60 years or more to run.

More on atomic energy – and nuclear waste disposal: [revue.link/deponie](https://www.revue.link/deponie)

“I notice much more than before that every evening has a power of its own”

After 20 years at the top, Swiss star cellist Sol Gabetta is still infused with energy. She is also thinking about the next generation.



SOL GABETTA & PATRICIA KOPATCHINSKAJA:
Sol & Pat, Alpha 2021

Sol Gabetta has just finished a month during which she played 16 concerts, her child is waiting at home and a journalist has a raft of questions for her. It's all in a day's work for the 42-year-old cellist, 20 years into her international career. She seems to radiate energy and has plenty to say as she shares her view of things.

Playing the cello still gives her more than enough energy: “I was very tired when I came home last week, but at the same time I was also fit like an athlete because I'd been playing the cello every day,” she remarks. Gabetta has also reached a new stage in her artistic journey – and that has nothing to do with her son having turned six years old: “I'm not

looking for quantity anymore; instead, I want more quality. All I want to do is improve my approach to the masterpieces. That's not so much because of my age; it's more due to my artistic experience. The tours have not become any less tiring but nonetheless I have a great family life.”

When she revisits Robert Schumann's cello concert, for example, as she did when touring during the spring with Estonian Paavo Järvi, chief conductor of Zurich's Tonhalle, she has to see some development: “The conductor and orchestra have to fit with me; they must also want to achieve something. Otherwise, I won't play with them anymore. There are pieces that I haven't played for years, because I feel I can't give the work a voice of its own. I need to retain an inner joy so I can see each concert as its own experience.” That way she can enjoy her work – making music – even more: “I notice much more than before that every evening has a power of its own. And I have become aware of everything that goes into a concert. This is why I now want a concert to be unique. I also care about the details – down to the lighting, which we experiment with at the Lugano Whitsun festival. It is a luxury, a gift, and I'm grateful for it.”

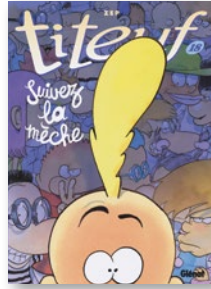
Besides Paris, Basel and Olsberg have also been home to Gabetta, who became a naturalised Swiss citizen in 2018. Gabetta's festival originated in Olsberg and has since spread to Rheinfelden and St. Peter in Germany. Still, that is no cause for alarm among the many friends of the otherworldly church in Olsberg: Olsberg will remain the centre of the festival. In fact, Gabetta opposes plans to expand the festival, which is something of a recurring issue in light of its enormous success.

What would interest her, on the other hand, would be an academy for young musicians, as Gabetta has noticed at her own festival how hard it is to sell tickets in the “Young Artists” category. There are no plans to stop showcasing young talent, but Gabetta remembers when things were different: “When I was discovered in Lucerne in 2001, there was always a big turnout for those concerts: people



were more curious to see the young artists perform. I'm lucky to have come up as a classical musician at that time. It would be harder today; the curiosity isn't there anymore. People have less faith in us, the festival organisers, actually bringing good people to play.” How could we fix that? It's hard to say, but one way would be to find a format where people are more amenable to trying something new. “Or

Zep asks Titeuf to save the planet



ZEP
 "Titeuf 18
 – Suivez la mèche"
 Ed. Glénat,
 48 pages, CHF 19.00

The character of Titeuf has hardly changed since he first appeared in 1993. He remains a ten-year-old boy – having started out as an eight-year-old – with a prominent cowlick sticking up from his otherwise bald head. By contrast, his world has turned upside down. In "Suivez la mèche" (which translates loosely as "Follow the thread"), the 18th volume in the series, Zep's childhood games have been superseded by smartphones. In the old days, "we climbed trees, ran down the street and drew attention to ourselves by playing the fool," Titeuf's grandmother tells him. This was also Zep's world, whereas now the streets are full of sport utility vehicles and throngs of people all engrossed in their phones. Having failed to make the

grade in maths, Titeuf is yet to receive his own phone. "Suivez la mèche" features two motifs: the degradation of our environment and the impact of the screen. "When I'm big, I will be a key influencer and I'll be able to fix the mistakes of grown-ups... and reduce carbon levels," states Titeuf on the back cover. As with every Titeuf edition, the cartoon sees the world from a child's perspective. The jokes do not shy away from sensitive territory. For example, Manu, a friend of Titeuf, is approached by a pretty girl called Emma on TikTok. The image is actually a front for a dangerous paedophile, as the two friends find out. "But I am your real friend," Titeuf reassures him. Titeuf has more or less given up on winning Nadia's heart. He has grown closer to Ramatou, a vegetarian. Not eating meat is a statement by the children to show their opposition to the plundering of natural resources by adults, claims Zep. As regards romance, the Geneva cartoonist provides Titeuf with another option: Thérèse. This slightly otherworldly girl irritates our hero, as she never gives him a straight answer. She also intrigues him slightly. In any case, Zep declares a fondness for this character. Not least because Thérèse does not need followers. "Suivez la mèche" has something for adults as well. Zep touches on the gender issue. Does the fact that he practises kissing on his image in the mirror make him homosexual, autosexual or double-sexual? That is the question. The role of the father also comes up in an amusing sketch, where Titeuf's father does everything he tells his son not to do. Zep was unable to save the world. The future is in the hands of Titeuf.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

maybe the artists should advertise their own concerts more as they used to do 100 years ago. Young people have to be better at self-promotion." And maybe the younger generation should also put their trust in the older and wiser Gabetta.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

A mushroom cloud above Linth plain

In his book “Junge Kräfte grünen”, Glarus author Rudolf Kuhn brought a nuclear explosion to upper Lake Zurich in 1941.



Rudolf Kuhn
(1905–1958)

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“Industry against farming, machine against people, the book of a poet and people shaper”, as it said on the cover of the book “Die Jostensippe. Roman aus der Gegenwart”, published in 1934. Jörg Jost, who is from an old Glarus family, struggles with the conflicting forces of his paternal and maternal heritage, passionately opposes the era of the machine and returns to the farming way of life of his ancestors, with its strong stability and sense of family. The sentiments of the book resonated with the fledgling ‘Third Reich’. And the ‘Reichsstelle zur Förderung des deutschen Schrifttums’ (the Reich office for the promotion of German Literature) deemed the novel by the architect and writer from Glarus, Rudolf Kuhn, who was born on 16 October 1885 in Netstal and died on 23 February 1958 in Zurich, “significant”. This was despite “the erotic element” which seemed “not entirely healthy, and in some respects decadent”. Eduard Korrodi of the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” called it “a powerful picture of contemporary Switzerland.”

“Junge Kräfte grünen”

In 1937, Rudolf Kuhn joined the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition architects’ team, and when the exhibition opened, he wrote his second and last novel on Entlebuch Alp. It came out in 1941 as the first published by Eugen Rentsch Verlag, based in Erlenbach in the canton of Zurich, under the title of “Junge Kräfte grünen” (which translates as “Young workers in full bloom”). The national socialist censors, whose verdict is unknown, enjoyed reading it. Love in the granary and on the ground, girls with “wide hips” riding nude through the wilderness, women who consider giving birth a religious act – if ever a

Swiss novel from that time met the blood and soil ideology of the Third Reich in terms of natural mysticism, fertility rites and cult heroes, it was this federally financed publication.

“Beware,” preached Simon, “that the stillness of your fields is not shattered by worldly noise and don’t fall victim to the disruption of war, boosted by greed for power and money. Watch out that the rattle of machinery does not drown out the song of the larks in the fields or the mating call of fornication the cheerful call of youth.”

From: Rudolf Kuhn, “Junge Kräfte grünen”. Novel. Eugen Rentsch Verlag, Erlenbach 1941. Out of print.

Yet, this profound, atmospherically dense work also shows the fascination that can result from such a mystically veiled, epic fertility romance. A reaction that can bring the contemporary and all too easily irked reader to a level of self-awareness, as Kuhn

understood only too well the celebrated and ultimately victorious powers of Mother Nature and the earth against modern technical civilisation in the most egregious of its conceivable negative consequences.

Nuclear power: a disaster of technological progress

The explosion of an atom bomb above Linth plain, described with visionary power and impeccable technical knowledge three years after Otto Hahn first split the uranium atom and five years before Hiroshima, is the most amazing aspect of this most disturbing and frighteningly fascinating Swiss novel from the darkest days of the Second World War.

“A blinding flash of light streamed through the window, the ground shook as if in an earthquake, and then the thunder broke above as if the earth were splitting.” The survivors stared in horror at the mushroom cloud rising high above the valley, soon to descend on them as ash rain. The core of the explosion must have been at the secret weapons factory of engineer Christian Unger. The engineer miraculously survives the inferno in an underground tunnel. His wife Gertrud, an incorporation of the healing power of the vegetative forces of nature, succumbs to the radioactive after effects of the explosion, but first nurses the engineer back to health and makes sure he uses nuclear power solely for peaceful purposes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Rudolf Kuhn’s novels are only available in antiquarian bookstores or libraries.

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Federal votes

The proposals submitted to the people are set by the Federal Council at least four months prior to the voting date.

The Federal Council decided at its session on 25 October 2023 to submit the following proposals to the people on 3 March 2024:

- Federal Popular Initiative “For a better life in retirement (Initiative for a 13th OASI pension payment)”
- Federal Popular Initiative “For a secure and sustainable pension system (Pensions Initiative)”

All information on proposals submitted to the people (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by the parliament, Federal Council etc.) can be found at www.admin.ch/abstimmungen or in the Federal Chancellery app “VoteInfo”.



Popular initiatives

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in French, German and Italian at <https://www.bk.admin.ch/> > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



Please note

Provide your Swiss representation **with your email address(es) and mobile phone number(s)** and/or any changes thereto and register at the online counter (link on FDFA homepage www.eda.admin.ch or via www.swiss-abroad.ch), to select your order of “Swiss Review” and other publications. If you encounter any problems registering, please contact your representation.

You can read and/or print the current edition of “Swiss Review” as well as back copies from 2006 onwards at www.revue.ch. “Swiss Review” (or “Gazzetta Svizzera” in Italian) is available electronically (via email, free of charge) or in print for all Swiss Abroad households, or through the iOS/Android app.

How can I acquire Swiss nationality from outside the country?

Foreign nationals with close family ties to Switzerland may submit an application for naturalisation to their Swiss representation abroad under current Swiss citizenship law and subject to certain conditions.

Some countries grant citizenship through being born in the country, known as birth-right citizenship ('ius soli'), such as the United States, Canada, Australia and some South American countries. Switzerland grants citizenship on the basis of the parents' nationality ('ius sanguinis'), regardless of the place of birth. The Federal Act on Swiss Citizenship, which came into force on 1 January 2018, and its accompanying ordinance have been adapted to meet the needs of a changing society. In order to submit a naturalisation application from abroad, applicants must meet certain conditions, including having close ties to Switzerland. Submitting an application to a Swiss representation abroad is the first step in the naturalisation process. Below are some examples that may help you in applying for citizenship.

I am married to a Swiss person. When and subject to what conditions may I obtain Swiss citizenship?

Provided you have lived for six years in a stable marital relationship with your Swiss spouse and have maintained close ties to Switzerland, you may submit a naturalisation application to the Swiss representation under Article 21 para. 2 of the Federal Act on Swiss Citizenship. Your Swiss spouse must have had Swiss nationality when you got married or have subsequently acquired citizenship through reinstatement or simplified naturalisation based on descent from a Swiss parent. If the marriage was before 1 July 2022, the duration of a prior registered partnership may count towards the duration of the marriage. If you were married after 1

July 2022, the duration of the partnership registered prior to that date does not count towards the duration of the marriage (unless the registered partnership was converted to marriage).

My Swiss father never married my mother. He acknowledged paternity when I was born in 2005. Am I entitled to Swiss nationality?

Children born to a Swiss father before 31 December 2005 and whose parents were not married are not entitled to Swiss citizenship, even if their father acknowledged paternity. If your father already had Swiss nationality

when you were born and acknowledged paternity before you acquired the age of majority, you may submit a naturalisation application under Article 51 para. 2 of the Federal Act on Swiss Citizenship (provided you maintain close ties to Switzerland).

My mother lost her Swiss nationality after she married my father, who is a foreign national. Am I still entitled to Swiss nationality?

Provided you maintain close ties to Switzerland, you may submit a naturalisation application under Article 51 para. 1 of the Federal Act on Swiss Citizenship.

“Three-quarters of Swiss people living abroad have one or more other nationalities.”

The Swiss passport: for many Swiss who live abroad, it is more than just a document. It is part of their identity and a link to Switzerland.

Photo: Keystone



My spouse has just given birth to our child.**Can the baby lose their Swiss nationality?**

If you fail to notify the Swiss representation of the birth of your child, your child will lose his or her Swiss nationality by forfeiture on his or her 25th birthday.

You are therefore advised to announce the birth quickly by submitting the original version of the child's birth certificate. Once the birth has been entered in the Swiss Civil Register, you may order a Swiss passport for the child.

I've lost my Swiss nationality.**May I apply for reinstatement?**

Anyone who has lost their Swiss nationality may apply to have it restored within ten years of having lost nationality. This application is subject to having close ties with Switzerland and meeting other conditions. Once those ten years have elapsed, the person must reside in Switzerland for three years before requesting reinstatement.

What qualifies as having close ties to Switzerland?

Maintaining close ties to Switzerland means: having stayed in Switzerland at least three times over the six years preceding the application, for a minimum of five consecutive days;

- being able to engage in everyday conversation in one of Switzerland's national languages;
- having basic knowledge of Switzerland (geography, history, politics, society);
- being in contact with Swiss people;
- being able to nominate referees residing in Switzerland who can confirm your stays in the country and your contacts.

What other criteria and conditions do I have to meet?

You must not pose a security or public order risk, or a threat to Switzerland's internal or external security, you must respect the values of the Federal Constitution, contribute to the economy or be undergoing training/education and you must encourage and support the integration of your family members.

“In 2022, there were over 500 applications reviewed by Swiss representations abroad. Most of the applications were from neighbouring countries.”

May I retain my original nationality if I gain Swiss citizenship?

Switzerland does allow multiple nationalities. However, it is possible that acquiring Swiss citizenship will mean losing your original nationality if the legislation in your country of origin stipulates the automatic loss of citizenship in the event that you voluntarily acquire the citizenship of another country. The authorities in your country of origin will provide the information you need.

How much does a naturalisation or reinstatement application cost?

The Swiss representation requires an advance payment to cover processing costs.

You can find more useful information here

How to become Swiss (SEM):

[revue.link/nationality](#)

FAQ – Swiss nationality (SEM):

[revue.link/faq](#)

Law on Swiss nationality

(in English):

[revue.link/en141](#)

Ordinance on Swiss nationality

(in German):

[revue.link/buev](#)

Questions? Go to the internet page of your representation or contact the representation if you can't find the appropriate answers on the website:

[revue.link/swissrep](#)

This advance payment covers the costs of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the cantonal authorities (CHF 600 per adult and CHF 350 per child not included in the application by one of the parents) as well as the representation fees for services rendered, for example advice, case file review, interview, processing civil status documents, clarification and research (CHF 75 per half-hour).

Then there are extra costs incurred, such as the review of civil status documents by third parties or Swiss civil status authorities. These fees are not repayable in the event of a negative decision by the SEM or a withdrawal of the application during the process. Payment by instalments is not allowed.

Where can I obtain the information and documentation I need to submit a naturalisation application?

You can find some very useful information, particularly on the conditions, processes and documents required, on the Swiss representation's website under 'Services' then 'Citizenship'.

On request, the Swiss representation can provide you with the necessary documentation to submit a naturalisation application so that you can prepare your file. On receipt of your file, the representation will organise a date with you for a personal interview, which will normally be held in one of Switzerland's national languages.

How long does the process last?

The Swiss representation generally issues its investigation report to the SEM within 12 months of receiving the full application file.

The SEM normally makes a ruling on the simplified naturalisation or reinstatement application within 12 months of receipt of the file with the investigation report issued by the competent Swiss representation.

Any change of address or civil status (marriage, separation, divorce, birth, death, adoption, etc.) during this time must be communicated to the competent Swiss representation.

FDFA, CONSULAR DIVISION

Holiday camps since 1934

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad has been running holiday camps for the past 90 years for young Swiss people living all over the world. We will celebrate our 90th anniversary in central Switzerland to coincide with the 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne.

The camps allow young people to enjoy the warm ambiance of Switzerland, make new friends and return home with memories that last a lifetime. Details of our holiday camps are below:

From 6 to 19 July 2024

In Flüeli-Ranft (canton of Obwalden), “Sports & leisure” camp attendees can expect a summer full of fun and sporting activities, hiking and excursions.

Running in parallel, the “Swiss Challenge I” camp reveals Switzerland in all its diversity. The campers will experience the various characteristically Swiss landscapes and find out what it’s like when four languages come together in one country. This holiday experience is a mix of tourist outings, trips, mountain hikes, sport and culture.

The two camps will take place on the shores of Lake Lucerne and celebrate the 100th edition of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad and 90 years of hosting camps.

From 20 July to 2 August 2024

The second holiday camp at Flüeli-Ranft offers an action-packed programme. In addition to this, from Monday to Thursday the campers will start the day with a French or German lesson. This allows them to learn or improve their knowledge of a Swiss national language thanks to professional teaching.

From 3 to 16 August 2024

“Swiss Challenge II” marks the end of the summer season. The attendees will get to know Switzerland through games, sport and fun. Hiking in the Swiss Alps, magnificent views of the towns, lakes and plains as well as various sporting and recreational activities are all scheduled.



This small bridge in the Swiss mountains can also be seen as a symbol: holiday camps always create a connection between young Swiss people from all over the world. Photo: MAD

From 27 December 2024 to 5 January 2025

This camp will be at Davos (canton of Grisons) for an unforgettable winter adventure in the heart of the Swiss countryside. The ski camp includes an opportunity to celebrate the New Year in a unique way. It will be some people’s first experience with snow, whereas others will be able to enjoy their first ski session of the year on the slopes. Our camp has something for everyone, whether they are a beginner or an expert skier, including skiing and snowboarding lessons for all levels, to ensure that everyone can make the most of their time in the snow. Our young campers can look forward to unforgettable experiences, thrilling descents and lasting memories.

All the information on our offers can be found on our website: [revue.link/youthoffers](https://www.swisscommunity.org/revue.link/youthoffers). The Youth Service also has a budget to help those Swiss Abroad with limited financial resources to attend the camps. You can find further details on our website. You will also find information there relating to donations. Whatever you can contribute will make a difference, by helping young people to attend our camps.

MARIE BLOCH



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“What are the rules regarding health insurance when returning to Switzerland?”

Question: I have spent several years abroad and now plan to return to Switzerland. What do I need to do regarding health insurance?

Answer: Health insurance is mandatory for all persons living in Switzerland. That means you have to take out compulsory cover as soon as you register in Switzerland and are resident there. Everyone is entitled to this basic insurance and the benefits are defined by law. That means health insurers may not deny compulsory cover to Swiss Abroad re-

turning to Switzerland – irrespective of age or health.

If you would like more extensive cover than what is offered under the compulsory insurance, you can take out supplementary insurance. However, that is a private insurance matter, and the health insurers are allowed to refuse cover for a certain person



Doctors' and hospital fees are high in Switzerland. That's why you need health insurance, including for emigrants returning to Switzerland.

Photo: Keystone

Holiday camps – the best time of the year

Parents and fans of summer, take note: in 2024 the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) will again hold summer holiday camps as well as ski and snowboarding camps for Swiss Abroad aged 8-14. To keep pace with the rising popularity of these camps, we are now offering three new Swiss Trips plus three skiing and snowboarding holidays. On our Swiss Trips, around 30 children will visit various locations. We will travel around Switzerland with our hiking boots and tents. Our residential holiday camps have space for 35 to 50 people and this year they are taking place in regions rich in adventure in the cantons of Berne, Grisons, Lucerne, St. Gallen and Valais.

22 June to 5 July 2024:

Flüeli (LU), residential holiday camp for 10 to 14 year olds

26 June to 5 July 2024:

Swiss Trip for 12 to 14 year olds

6 to 19 July 2024:

Kippel (VS), residential holiday camp for 12 to 14 year olds

10 to 19 July 2024:

Adelboden (BE), residential holiday camp for 8 to 11 year olds

10 to 19 July 2024:

Swiss Trip for 12 to 14 year olds

20 July to 2 August 2024:

Pizol (GR), residential holiday camp for 8 to 11 year olds

20 July to 2 August 2024:

Evolène (VS), residential holiday camp for 12 to 14 year olds

3 to 16 August 2024:

Bad Ragaz (SG), residential holiday camp for 12 to 14 year olds

7 to 16 August 2024:

Swiss Trip for 12 to 14 year olds

27 December 2024 to 5 January 2025:

Valbella (GR), skiing and snowboarding trip for 8 to 11 year olds

27 December 2024 to 5 January 2025:

Surprise, skiing and snowboarding trip for 12 to 14 year olds

2 to 8 January 2025:

Lenk (BE), skiing and snowboarding trip for children born in 2010 or 2011

The full holiday camp 2024 schedule is available on our website sjas.ch/en/. Participants can also register via our website. Please send any questions or feedback to info@sjas.ch. We hope to see you soon!

ISABELLE STEBLER AND DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA



Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)
Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch

or to apply caveats in order to exclude certain benefits.

The Federal Office of Public Health publishes a list of approved health insurers in its capacity as a supervisory authority. You can select whichever insurer you like from this list. Each family member must have their own health insurance. All insured persons pay a premium, which may differ among the insurers. It is thus advisable to compare premiums on www.priminfo.ch.

When returning to Switzerland, you must take out health insurance within three months of registering. Your cover will then be backdated to the date you became resident in Switzerland. We would also point out that a premium supplement is charged when, without adequate justification, the insurance is taken out after this three-month period has expired.

STEPHANIE LEBER, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

Do you have any other questions about health insurance? You can find additional useful information on the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) website: revue.link/foph

Why there are different types of universities

Swiss universities are well placed in international rankings, and some are among the best in the world. There are three different types of higher education institutions: universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education. They are all equivalent, but still different in their university orientation.

All universities in Switzerland, except for one university of applied sciences, are public institutions. They offer study programmes organised according to the Bologna model and the ECTS credits system, on which 49 European countries have agreed. The study cycle is therefore divided into several successive stages: Bachelor, Master and doctorate/PhD. The basic studies, i.e. the Bachelor's degree programme, generally lasts six semesters with 180 ECTS credits. The subsequent Master's programme usually lasts three to four semesters with 90 to 120 ECTS. The language of instruction at Bachelor's level is usually that of the region in which the university is located. In contrast, Master's programmes are often bilingual or in English.

Most degree programmes start in September. The application deadline is usually 30 April, with a few exceptions such as medicine or special degree programmes at universities of applied sciences.

The prerequisite for admission is a Swiss Matura certificate or an equivalent foreign diploma. The universities set country-specific standards for foreign diplomas, which can be found at [revue.link/requirements](https://www.educationsuisse.ch/revue/link/requirements).

University—University of Applied Sciences —University of Teacher Education

The ten **Universities** offer degree programmes in law and economics, mathematics and natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, and conduct basic research. They are spread throughout Switzerland: in German-speaking Switzerland in St. Gallen, Zurich, Basel, Berne, Lucerne; in French-speaking Switzerland in Neuchâtel, Lausanne, Geneva; and in Italian-speaking Switzerland there is the Università della Svizzera Italiana. The University of Fribourg is German and French-speaking.

The **Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology** ETH and EPF are located in Zurich and Lausanne. They are specialised in engineering, mathematics and natural sciences.



One of the universities standing for Swiss educational diversity: the Università della Svizzera Italiana, here at the Lugano Site. Photo: press service Università della Svizzera Italiana

The nine **Universities of Applied Sciences** comprise numerous institutes offering practice-oriented degree programmes in numerous fields of study. The fields of health, social sciences, business administration,

innovative technologies, music and art are particularly well regarded. They are good alternatives for students who want a stronger practical orientation in their studies. Some universities of applied sciences also offer Bachelor's degree programmes purely in English.

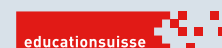
There are also smaller and larger **Universities of Teacher Education** throughout Switzerland, which train future teachers at all school levels.

RUTH VON GUNTEN



The language of instruction at Bachelor's level is usually that of the region in which the university is located. For these students at the Università della Svizzera Italiana, this means predominantly Italian. Photo: press service Università della Svizzera Italiana

Educationsuisse offers counselling to all young Swiss Abroad on all matters related to education in Switzerland.



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Small initial steps on the long road to more democratic CSA elections

The Council of the Swiss Abroad comprises delegates who represent the “Fifth Switzerland” in Berne. A working group is modernising the election procedure. What has it achieved so far?

What is the Council of the Swiss Abroad?

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) has 140 members, including 120 delegates from abroad. The CSA is in some respects the parliament of the “Fifth Switzerland”. The delegates are elected for a four-year term, during which they represent the interests of Swiss Abroad to the Swiss authorities.

How are the delegates elected?

The elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad do not follow a standard format. For a start, individual larger countries form a constituency. There are also regions of the world in which larger groups of countries are entitled to one or more seats. However, the most glaring deficiency is the lack of a uniform, transparent and representative electoral system.

Who are we and what is our goal?

This is where the working group, which was established in 2023 at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in St. Gallen, comes in: it has set itself the task of proposing and promoting a standardised process for democratic elections. This standardised process can be used in the countries that wish to use it. Specifically, the working group is aiming for an e-voting tool tailored to CSA needs – plus guidelines. These guidelines will be used in the individual constituencies and show how the system works plus any points to note in particular. The new system is scheduled to be ready for the CSA elections in 2025.

What have we achieved to date?

The project aims to improve the representativeness of the Council of the Swiss Abroad. We naturally liaise regularly with the OSA directorate to report on our progress. We are also in touch with most of the countries or regions and have received initial feedback from them. For example, we have realised that implementation has become slightly harder in EU countries due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Naturally, for a project of this scale, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) must be kept in the loop: it is the contact point for consular services for the Swiss Abroad. Having conducted initial talks with the FDFA, one challenge has become apparent: in order to hold digital elections, the email addresses of all voters will be needed as a minimum requirement. That’s why all Swiss Abroad need to provide their nearest representation (embassy or consulate) with their email address. The more addresses there are, the higher the number of people who can take part in the CSA elections – and the more representative and democratically legitimate is the election result. The exchange with the FDFA is ongoing. Other items for discussion include possible solutions to missing email addresses.

In summary, we are taking many small steps that we hope are bringing us closer to a workable and suitable solution. There is still a long way to go.

TOBIAS ORTH, WORKGROUP.OSA@OUTLOOK.COM

Is our magazine arriving late?

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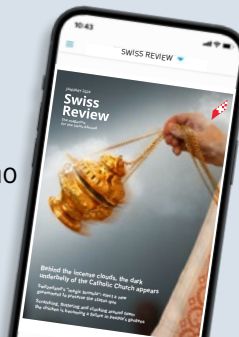
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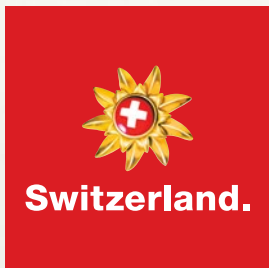
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