

# SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
May 2019

**How Apollo 11 and a sheet of foil  
put the wind in Swiss sails**

**Scaling the wall –  
Petra Klingler has the Olympics in her sights**

**All that glitters –  
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# From the moon to the stars

## 5 Mailbag

## 6 Focus

The first moon landing was one giant leap for Berne's space science programme

## 10 Politics

No other country consults its people more frequently than Switzerland

The Swiss gold industry is under scrutiny

## 14 Sport

Sport climbing at the Olympics – Petra Klingler is aiming high

## News from around the world

## 17 Literature series

## 18 Society

Women's strike across Switzerland – what are today's activists demanding?

Civilian service is popular – now the government wants to make it less attractive

## 23 OSA news

## 25 news.admin.ch

The number of Swiss Abroad has risen to 760,000

## 28 Images

The village photographers whose body of work resembles a long-term anthropological study

## 30 Books / Sounds

## 31 Top pick / News



Anyone and everyone who enjoys science fiction will have heard of Jules Verne (1828–1905) – a pioneer of the genre who described things that no one really else could. He travelled around the world in 80 days, journeyed to the centre of the Earth, and flew to the moon. In purely literary terms, Verne set foot on the moon in 1865, a good century before US astronaut Neil Armstrong.

From afar, the Earth looked like a “cloudy light” and a “dark spot, drowned in the solar rays” according to Verne. This is incorrect – we live on a blue planet. Blue because we now know what the Earth actually looks like from space. Space science has transformed our understanding of things.

Take the first moon landing 50 years ago, for example. Thanks to the University of Berne's solar sail (or Solar Wind Collector), Apollo 11 was also a major Swiss event. Astronauts Armstrong and Aldrin made sure that this experimental device was in place even before they thrust the American flag into the lunar soil.

As you will learn in Berne-based journalist Dölf Barben's lead article, the reputation of Swiss space science has gone from strength to strength ever since. Metaphorically, Berne's physicists have travelled from the moon to the stars. Their research continues to help change our view of the universe – from taking high-resolution images of Mars, to searching for planets outside our solar system.

Former astronaut Claude Nicollier from Vaud notwithstanding, Switzerland has remained a nation of space researchers to this day rather than becoming a space travelling nation. Science is first and foremost a story of delving into the vast unknown. It is about the beauty of knowing, learning, understanding and comprehending. This ethos is more important than ever as a counterpoint to the growing clamour among those who view near-Earth objects as a potential source of raw materials. Especially, it is also an antidote to the global superpowers hell-bent on militarising space – talks in Geneva to prevent an outer-space arms race ended in spectacular failure at the beginning of April.

The lesson from Berne is that we should maybe attend to some of the much more pressing and urgent problems on our own planet first. And that we should probably let science fiction writers worry about manned missions to the red planet. In the words of one of the Berne physicists who worked on the solar sail 50 years ago: “The red planet is so far away. Most people don't even know where it is in the night sky.” So why fly there? **MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Cover image: Astronaut Buzz Aldrin deploys the University of Berne's solar sail on the moon, 20 July 1969  
Photo: Nasa/Keystone

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## Pressure on voting rights for Swiss Abroad



I always vote, it gives me a feeling of belonging. I am happy not to be a “citizen of nowhere”, especially considering what happened in the Brexit referendum. Certainly, it is always good for outsiders to keep their counsel. But I don't view myself as an outsider.

Life (outside Switzerland for the last 30 years) has expanded my horizons. Surely this is a good thing, particularly at a time when nationalism and xenophobia are rearing their ugly head around the world. Indeed, maybe the UK would have avoided this debacle in the first place had all those British citizens who live abroad been able to vote.

DANIELA VAN DER HEIJDEN, FOREST ROW, UK

We have been living in Canada for almost 25 years. In all this time, we have never made use of our voting rights in Switzerland. I would have no problem at all if Swiss expatriates were no longer entitled to vote. What gives me the right to tell people living in Switzerland what they should and shouldn't do?

DANIEL SCHWIZER AND FAMILY, DIDSBURY, ALBERTA, CANADA

I think it is great that I can vote while living abroad. Because I am retired, I have plenty of time to view what is happening in Switzerland from afar. I am sure the same applies to others. Retirees like me also want to vote on issues such as school reform because it is our grandchildren who will be affected. We might be old, but we still have a lot of life experience.

MARKUS KÜNG, SANTIAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Swiss ‘dual citizens’ should not be able to vote when they live somewhere and vote in that new country if they have become naturalised. I have been in Australia since 1970 and this is my permanent home, hence I believe I have no right to tell Swiss people how to live their lives.

THERESE SALADIN-DAVIES, EMU PLAINS, AUSTRALIA

Some popular votes certainly affect me as a Swiss living abroad, and I would feel like a second-class citizen if I was no longer entitled to vote. We, the Swiss, are always keen to extol our country's democratic credentials – which is all the more reason for us to avoid introducing two classes of

voter. I have always followed a rule of thumb whereby I choose not to vote on issues that do not directly affect me. I did the same when I was still living in Switzerland. Swiss citizens should be able to make up their own mind either way though.

PATRIK MÜLLER, GERMANY

Swiss by marriage and French by birth, I lived in Switzerland for 28 years without ever voting in France, despite the border being just a few kilometres away. For the last 23 years, my husband and I have lived in France. We do not vote in Switzerland, but I do now vote in France. All of which is to say that we find it unacceptable to participate in the politics of a country in which we are not living. Only the residents of a country should be allowed to vote in it and this should be defined by law. I therefore find it completely logical that this subject should be put to the vote.

GINETTE MEMBREZ, DORDOGNE, FRANCE

Since retirement, I have been living in the Philippines. I would love to vote but my voting papers never arrive on time. I have now decided to stop receiving them and will wait until I am able to vote electronically. I basically don't have any voting rights at this time.

PETER SCHMUTZ, DUMAGUETE, PHILIPPINES

The question of whether voting rights for Swiss Abroad are justified in their present form generated a huge amount of debate among our readers. For more reader comments, visit [www.ogy.de/stimmrecht](http://www.ogy.de/stimmrecht)

## Tighter gun laws



If the suggested changes lead to one less death over the next twenty years it is worth the inconvenience of all those gun owners who have to jump through extra loops. At the end of the day it appears you can still keep your guns.

Try to look at it from the point of view of families who have been affected by senseless murders – and don't ever think it could not happen in Switzerland. New Zealand was in the same situation until two months ago – and the recent mass

murder has changed the landscape for ever down under. Nobody will stop you from using your semi automatic guns for sporting or leisure purposes – but it might just make it more difficult for an illegal buyer to purchase a weapon. It is a fact of life that there are bad fruit in every delivery of the harvest – be that in Switzerland or anywhere else in the world.

JOST SIEGFRIED, WHAKATANE, NEW ZEALAND

Firearms are not the problem in the horrible tragedy that happened in New Zealand, racism is. If firearms were not accessible, the extremist would have set the mosque on fire, or driven a truck through it; the firearms were just the means to an end. Restrictive laws impede good citizens in practising their hobby and living the way they wish.

DANIEL CONUS, BETHLEHEM, USA

The Swiss still don't get it. Without bilateral agreements with the EU, Switzerland would have had to shut up shop long ago. It's also about being able to compromise. The question of whether a few gun enthusiasts can keep their weapons is a pretty minor issue in the grand scheme of things. But what I do know is that fewer guns equals fewer potential problems with guns.

ROLAND SCHMIED, FRANCE

In my opinion, the Swiss government are giving the EU ever more opportunity to meddle with the rights and laws of our country. To date, no other country has managed to regulate and control things as well as we do when it comes to gun ownership. Remember that virtually every Swiss male has an army gun including ammunition at home.

URSULA RAUEN, SPAIN

## 'House rules' for our comments section

"Swiss Review" reports on events in Switzerland – and is keen to receive feedback from Swiss nationals living abroad. Therefore, letters, comments and other input are most welcome. The same applies to lively debate. The "Swiss Review" editorial team regularly gets contacted by readers asking why the comments that they have written online do not appear immediately on our website. This is not a technical problem. Comments are not published automatically. Instead, they are checked first by the editorial team before being manually approved. First and foremost, this is a routine procedure to eliminate obvious typing errors and thereby ensure that the automatic translation feature that many readers have enabled works more accurately. The editorial team will not and cannot publish any comments that are deemed under Swiss law to be racist, defamatory, insulting or offensive in any other way.

(MUL)

For the rules on posting comments, please visit [ogy.de/comments](http://ogy.de/comments)

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# The beautiful lunar toy from Berne

Man first walked on the moon 50 years ago. It was also one giant leap for the University of Berne whose Solar Wind Composition Experiment on the moon ultimately helped to clear up a misconception about the Big Bang.

DÖLF BARBEN

As the rocket took off, television viewers saw the three letters “U – S – A” slowly ascend. And on 21 July 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin planted the American flag on the moon. Great PR for the United States. No wonder America is making the most of it 50 years on.

But the University of Berne is also entitled to celebrate, given that its Physics Institute was responsible for an experimental device used during the Apollo 11 mission. Weighing 454

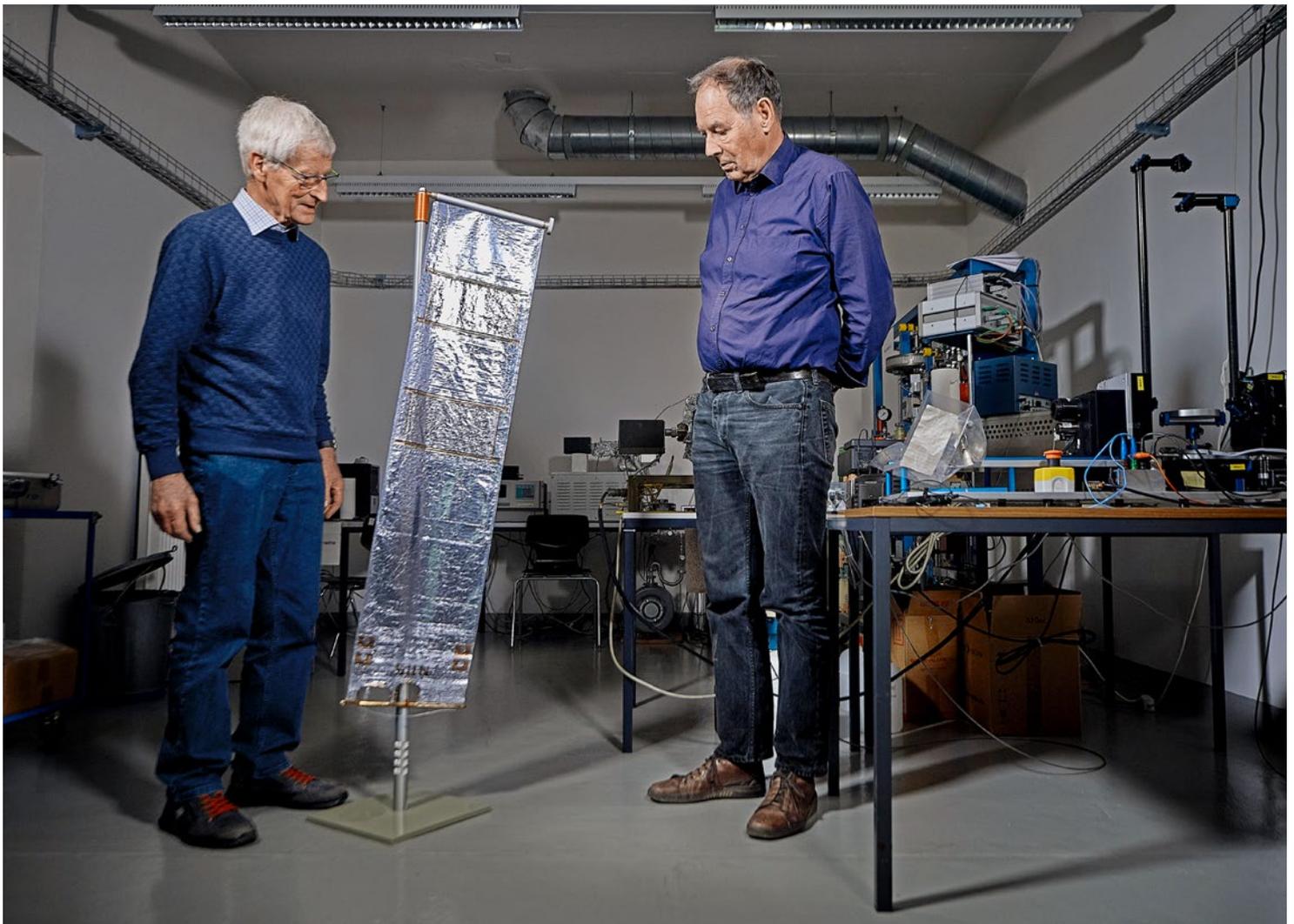
grams (equivalent to a pound), the instrument was tiny compared to the nearly 3,000 metric tons of spacecraft in which it flew. Yet of trifling importance it was not. Astronaut Aldrin assembled the contraption – a simple sheet of foil along an upright, 30 centimetres wide, 140 centimetres long – even before unfurling the Stars and Stripes. Its purpose was to collect solar wind: particles such as protons and electrons which originate from the sun. After 77 minutes, Neil Armstrong rolled up the foil and took it

back with him to the lunar module. He left the supporting upright on the moon. The experiment was so successful that the US space agency NASA repeated it on four other missions, increasing the length of exposure each time. Johannes Geiss, the physics professor who had developed the sail – or Solar Wind Collector (SWC) – with the help of his team, became world-famous.

Jürg Meister, 80, and Peter Bochsler, 76, worked at the Physics Institute at the time. On a return visit,

**Jürg Meister (left) and Peter Bochsler with their ‘old friend’, the Bernese solar sail, in a windowless laboratory on the basement floor of the University of Berne Physics Institute**

Photo: Adrian Moser



they recount their experiences and talk their way through a series of photos. In these pictures, young men with dated haircuts are busying around a solar wind simulator. These were the Berne scientists. Experimental physicist Meister helped to develop the SWC. Professor Bochsler was not yet directly involved at that stage, but would later succeed Johannes Geiss by becoming the Institute's co-director. Geiss himself is now over 90 and has retired from public life.

Meister and Bochsler walk into a windowless laboratory teeming with devices on the basement floor of the Institute. The SWC (the reserve sail, to be precise) stands in the middle of the room, glittering in the lamplight. Meister and Bochsler greet it almost as they would an old friend. Meister gives a little demonstration, showing how a preloaded spring draws the foil up. "Just like a roller blind."

### "Incredibly good and simple"

You rolled out a sheet of aluminium foil on the moon to catch the solar wind. Then you rolled it up again. "It was an incredibly good and simple idea," says Meister. Solar wind particles travelling at speeds of several hundreds of kilometres per second – much slower than light – collide with the foil and are collected there. By melting the foil back in the laboratory, you could ascertain how many of each type of particle were captured.

Everything on the SWC had to be designed for it to be easy to use and to work perfectly. The upright – a telescopic tube with ultra-fine threads – stretched the ingenuity of the university's engineers to its limits. Then you had the roller that was hidden in the upright until it was time to pull it out. Finally, you had the foil itself, reinforced with Teflon tape to prevent tearing. "The weight specification of one pound was quite a headache," says Meister. "Everything would have been

a lot easier had the desired weight been one kilogram."

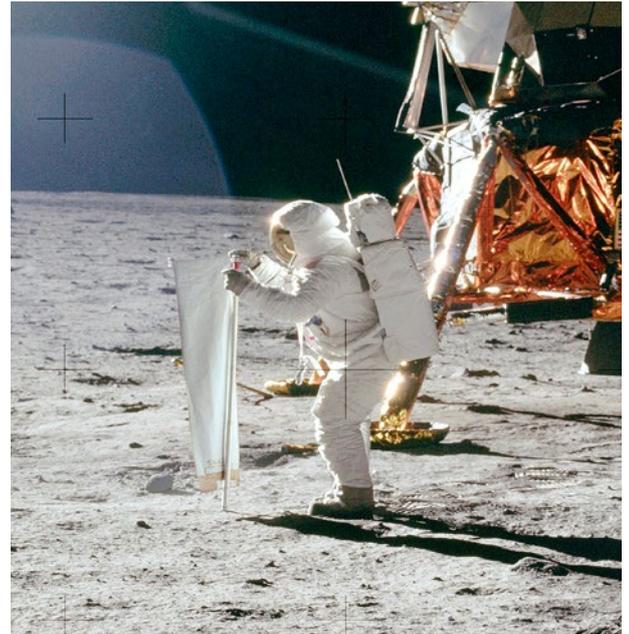
NASA left nothing to chance and instructed astronaut Don Lind to test the device in Berne. Unlike the physicists and engineers, Lind employed a spaceman's perspective. He knew what you could and could not hold on to with those big unwieldy gloves. Meister: "Lind gave us a multitude of instructions, which we painstakingly followed." For example, certain sections of the upright were roughened for gripping purposes, while key components were coloured red. "But he loved the contraption – just as if it were a big toy."

### Why Berne?

But how did the only non-US experiment of the Apollo 11 mission originate in Berne of all places? "It was no coincidence," says Bochsler. The University of Berne had previously made a name for itself through its research into meteorites. This opened the door to possible experiments involving lunar rocks. In addition, Professor Geiss knew many of the NASA scientists and, according to Bochsler, "showed great skill and determination" in developing relations with NASA.

It was Jürg Meister who took the solar sail to the USA in his hand luggage. Meister was able to watch the lunar rocket taking off on three later missions – from a viewing point one and a half kilometres away. "It was an incredible and remarkably loud experience. The low frequencies reverberated in my stomach. My shirt on my skin quivered. It sounded like a huge pan full of sizzling eggs."

It was 3 a.m. in Switzerland when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin set foot on the moon. The team in Berne followed the event live on television at the Institute. "I wasn't worried," says Meister. "We had tested the sail hundreds of times, so I knew it would work without a problem." Bochsler, on



**Astronaut Buzz Aldrin planted the Bernese solar sail on the moon – before un-furling the American flag.** Photo: Keystone

the other hand, was simply hoping the guys would "get back down in one piece".

Jürg Meister lives near Thun nowadays. After leaving the University of Berne, the young physics doctor spent time in Texas analysing data from a different Apollo experiment. On his return to Switzerland, he worked at an armament factory in Thun and specialised in armour-piercing ammunition. He continues to be fascinated by all things that fly, although aircraft and rockets are no longer his primary preoccupation. He and his wife breed butterflies. And every time he looks at the moon, he remembers he held five uprights in his hand that are still on the lunar surface. "Remarkable, don't you think?"

Peter Bochsler's travels took him to Israel. He found the USA less appealing. "Not least because of America's involvement in the Vietnam War". After returning to Berne, he continued his research into solar winds. Later measurements taken by space probes confirmed the results of the Apollo experiments.

### Better understanding of the Big Bang

What did scientists learn from the Solar Wind Composition Experiment? Bochsler says it was the first-

ever time that they were able to collect solar wind particles in a systematic fashion and analyse them in a laboratory. Solar wind cannot be measured directly on Earth, because our planet's atmosphere and magnetic field deflect and shield us from it. Meteorites had previously contained the only solar wind particles that had ever been detected, although it was never clear how long

the meteorites had been exposed to solar wind before they had fallen to Earth. The SWC facilitated the first-ever detailed analysis of the composition of the solar wind. It also threw up some surprises. For example, scientists discovered that solar hydrogen differs greatly from terrestrial hydrogen and meteorite hydrogen in terms of the amount of deuterium or 'heavy hydrogen' it contains.

Bochsler says: "We were suddenly able to clear up some discrepancies regarding the Big Bang, so the implications were quite major."

## Boost for Berne

The SWC put wind in the sails of Bernese (and Swiss) space research. Firstly, Professor Geiss was adept at exploiting his fame to expand the Physics Institute, thereby laying the foundation for further successes. Berne's scientists went on to play a regular part in international projects. The Rosetta probe's rendezvous with comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko, or "Chury" for short (see also "Swiss Review" 1/2015), is still fresh in the memory. High-performance instruments from Berne were on board the probe, capturing data on the chemical make-up of this mysterious celestial body – and ascertaining, among other things, that Chury stinks of horse manure.

## Exoplanets

The University of Berne is a global leader in space science. This is according to none other than Thomas Zurbuchen, the Associate Administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate. Citing exoplanets – the study of planets outside our solar system – as an example, Zurbuchen tells "Swiss Review" on the phone that scientists in Berne and elsewhere in Switzerland have discovered, developed and played a key role in new areas of research. He believes that it would have been wrong for them to rest on their laurels: "To make an international mark, you need to keep pushing. You don't stand still."

Zurbuchen, who grew up in the Bernese Oberland, embodies Berne's thriving space science programme to some extent. It is unlikely his own career would have taken off as it did, had it not been for the Solar Wind Compo-

## Switzerland's celestial pioneers:

Lucerne Jesuit Johann Baptist Cysat (1586–1657)  discovers new binary star systems; Lausanne scholar Jean-Philippe Loys de Cheseaux (1718–1751),  documents numerous star clusters and nebulae; Rudolf Wolf from Zurich (1816–1893)  recognises that the sunspot activity cycle corresponds with the Earth's magnetic field cycle; Fritz Zwicky (1898–1974),  the Bulgarian-born astronomer from the canton of Glarus, transforms astrophysics in the USA with his theories on extragalactic nebulae; Paul Wild (1925–2014)  University of Berne, discovers over 90 asteroids as well as seven comets; the Zenit rocket developed by Hans Balsiger  and Ernest Kopp  flies into space in 1967; Johannes Geiss (born in 1926)  develops the Apollo 11 Solar Wind Composition Experiment at the University of Berne (see main text); in 1995, Michel Mayor  and Didier Queloz  of the Geneva Observatory discover the first planets outside our solar system, orbiting the star Helvetios (51 Pegasi); in 1992, NASA astronaut Claude Nicollier (born in 1944)  becomes the first Swiss to fly into space; Markus Griesser (born in 1949)  discovers ten main-belt asteroids and the minor planet 113390 Helvetia in 2002; Kathrin Altwegg (born in 1951)  becomes a leading figure in Swiss space science due to her involvement in the Giotto and Rosetta missions. (MUL)



**Switzerland's most powerful scientist: Thomas Zurbuchen, Associate Administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate.**

Photo: Keystone

sition Experiment and the boost it gave Berne. At the beginning of the 1990s, Zurbuchen worked in Berne – incidentally as one of Peter Bochsler's PhD students – on the development of an instrument for an American solar probe. “It was a direct descendent of the SWC,” he says. As NASA's top scientist, Zurbuchen currently manages a budget of almost USD seven million. His decisions have implications for around 10,000 scientists and engineers.

## Off to Mars?

And now? Half a century since Apollo 11, the possibility of a return to the moon and a mission to Mars is on everyone's lips. NASA is at the forefront, although the issue is a contentious one. Bochsler and his former student have differing opinions. Zurbuchen knows that opponents would say that there are other, urgent matters to attend to on Earth, and that manned missions are considerably risky and much too expensive anyway. Yet he believes it is human nature to aim high and push the limits of what is possible. “Why do we want to go Mars?” he asks, before answering his own question. “Because we can.” He points out that you can never predict the good that can come of such ventures either. When the first probes shot into space in the middle of the last century, no one had thought yet of satellites that record climate data

or play an essential role in modern weather forecasting. “We at NASA do the most accurate global CO<sub>2</sub> measurements,” Zurbuchen says. He also thinks that science brings people together. “For me it is one of the key reasons why we gravitate to these projects in the first place.”

Bochsler acknowledges the arguments in favour of human space flight. The lunar rocks that the astronauts brought back 50 years ago were of great scientific value, he concedes. “I was one of the scientists who handled quite a lot of them,” says Bochsler, who goes on to praise NASA, explaining that the US space agency distributed the rocks generously to research centres around the world. Nevertheless, he believes that unmanned probes probably would have achieved much the same findings. In his view, the immense outlay needed to fund manned projects – “often for nothing more than reasons of prestige” – inevitably means less money being available for programmes of potentially much more immediate scientific benefit. When Bochsler sees photomontages of colonies on Mars, he wonders how many “beautiful experiments” would be possible on unmanned missions using the same amount of money.

And what does Jürg Meister think? Not much, if you mean Mars. “The red planet is so far away. Most people don't even know where it is in the night sky.” On the other hand, the moon means something to everyone. He believes we were quite right to fly there once. “No question.” But there is no need to do it again. “We've known what it looks like up there for the last 50 years.”

Related article: [www.ogy.de/swiss-universe](http://www.ogy.de/swiss-universe)

DÖLF BARBEN IS EDITOR AT THE NEWSPAPER “DER BUND” IN BERN

## Berne in space

Notable space projects with Bernese involvement:

**1986:** The Giotto probe of the European Space Agency (ESA) flies to Halley's Comet in 1986. On board is a University of Berne spectrometer carrying out the first-ever close-proximity study of a comet's dust and gas.

**1990:** Launch of the joint ESA/NASA Ulysses mission. The Ulysses probe observes the sun over a prolonged period of years, using a Swiss-made instrument to study the solar wind.

**1995:** Launch of the ESA/NASA Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO). On board is Cielas, a highly sensitive ion mass spectrometer from Berne.

**2004:** Launch of the ESA probe Rosetta. The probe reaches comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko (Chury) ten years later, keeping it company for two subsequent years. The spectrometers developed in Berne function perfectly.

**2016:** The ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter begins its journey to Mars. CaSSIS – the University of Berne's specially developed camera system – has been producing high-resolution colour images of the red planet's surface over the past year.

**2018:** The BepiColombo probe sets off for Mercury – a joint venture between the ESA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency. The University of Berne developed and built an on-board instrument designed to produce a three-dimensional map of Mercury's surface.

**2019:** CHEOPS, the space telescope for observing planets outside our solar system (exoplanets), is set to launch in the second half of the year. The University of Berne oversaw its construction.

# Switzerland consults its people more than any other country

The Swiss participate in up to 20 referendums per year. Approximately 80 % of the population vote regularly, but participation per subject is very low, with the youth vote showing signs of stagnation despite initiatives such as easyvote.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

“The residents of this country are asked to give their opinion on political matters more frequently than anywhere else in the world,” states Nenad Stojanovic, political scientist at the University of Geneva. In the City of Geneva, for example, over 70 subjects were put to the people between 2015 and 2018, over and above the six federal, cantonal and municipal elections. Far fewer votes are held in France, where presidential and legislative elections take place once every five years. “There is no other opportunity for people to express their discontent at a national level, and this leads to demonstrations like the yellow vest protests,” explains Stojanovic. “Voters in France use the European elections to express their opposition to national politics, which is absurd,” underlines Lionel Marquis, head of the Research Group on Elections and Political Citizenship (GREC) at the University of Lausanne.

## A record abstention rate

Yet the Swiss people are irregular in their participation. The vote on accession to the European Economic Area in 1992 saw voter turnout of 79 %, whereas the vote at the end of 2012 on epizootics saw only 25 % participation. The complexity of subjects put to the people and the frequency of voting go some way to explaining this irregularity. “It’s one of the lowest turnout rates in the world compared with other democracies,” states Marquis. “Participation typically varies between 35 % and 45 %, with 48 %–50 % considered high. In comparison, turnout at the last presidential elections in France was re-

corded at 77 % for the first round, and this was considered very low.”

So, who votes and who doesn’t? “One quarter of Swiss people vote on every occasion, one fifth never vote, and the rest – accounting for 55 % of the population – vote on a case by case basis,” says Stojanovic. For the specialist in political participation, a voter turnout rate of 25 % is good, while an abstention rate of 20 % does not make Switzerland an exceptional case. He considers the average turnout rate of 80 % to be “excellent”. But why do some people choose never to give their opinion? “There are at least three different reasons: the first is disengagement with politics. This accounts for those who tend to confuse subjects and have no particular knowledge of the sector. It’s the same idea as people who skip to the sports section in a newspaper. The second reason is frustration. The people in this category may be the long-term unemployed, for example. They feel disillusioned. Finally, there are those who abstain from voting for rational reasons. In this case, individuals consider that their vote will not have an impact on the outcome.”



## Low turnout, a sign of low dissatisfaction

The low level of voter turnout does not worry Marquis. “It’s a sign that dissatisfaction is low amongst the population. People know that for important subjects, they will have multiple opportunities to give their opinion.” The political scientist notes a particularly high level of abstention amongst young people, which is an international phenomenon. “In the 2015 federal elections, only 30 % of 18–24 year-olds voted, compared with 67 % of 65–74 year-olds: this affects the results,” explains Marquis. Stojanovic recalls that “in the past, in the small municipalities, young people would go to vote with their families. But this form of voter turnout was socially restrictive and influenced voting”.

The downside of Swiss politics? The lack of transparency regarding financing for parties and campaigns, says Stojanovic. This situation does not have a direct impact on voter turnout, but rather on the forming of opinions. “The richest parties can influence a vote, but this doesn’t guarantee victory,” he concludes.

**Lionel Marquis: Low voter turnout is evidence “that the level of dissatisfaction is not very high”.**

Photo provided

**Nenad Stojanovic sees “excellent figures”: 80 per cent have turned out every time or at least occasionally.**

Photo provided



# Videos and ‘smartspiders’ to help people vote

Making politics clearer to encourage voting: this is the objective of the easyvote and smartvote initiatives. Easyvote is supported by the Swiss Federation of Youth Parliaments. It provides simplified content as an alternative to the official brochures and videos. “The most easily understandable documents are the two video clips. Easyvote’s video is considered even more straightforward than that of the Federal Council,” states the programme. Thanks to this system, which has been tested in a Ticinese municipality, the turnout amongst 18–25 year-olds for the federal referendum of 24 September 2017 exceeded that of the rest of the electorate, according to smartvote. “If a young person can be convinced to vote once, there is a greater chance that they will vote again in the future,” explains Lionel Marquis, who nevertheless considers the effects of this programme to be “limited”.

Introduced in 2003 by an association, smartvote works like a dating website. Based on questionnaires filled out by candidates and parties, voters are presented with options which match their chosen criteria. The political profile of candidates can then be viewed graphically (see examples opposite). “In 2011, this system was very widely used, with more than a million submissions,” notes Marquis. “In the last elections, in 2015, 30% of those who voted used this programme, including people who would not have voted otherwise,” adds Nenad Stojanovic.

According to Marquis, one criticism of smartvote “is that it reduces politics to a chart, whereas it should also be a matter of values and feelings”. In 2011, then National Councillor Jean-Christophe Schwaab wrote: “Smartvote is riddled with such major errors that it would be foolish to trust this software to fill out your ballot paper.”

## Smartvote: a neutral tool?

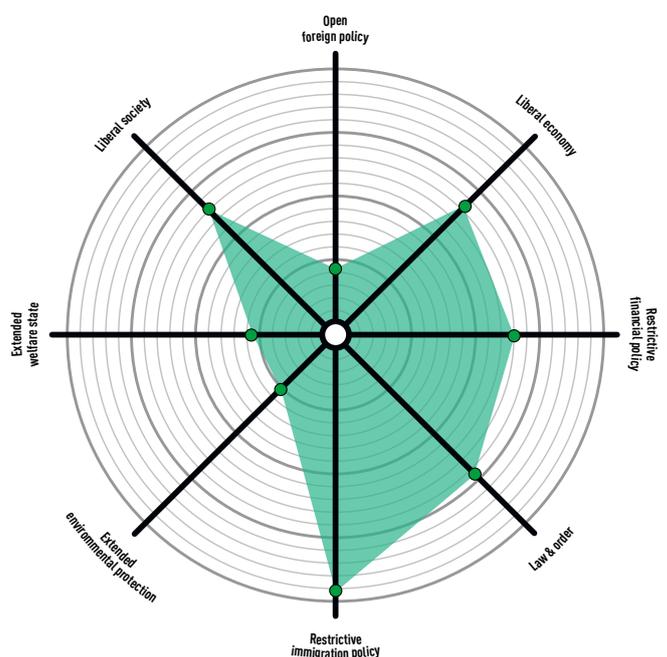
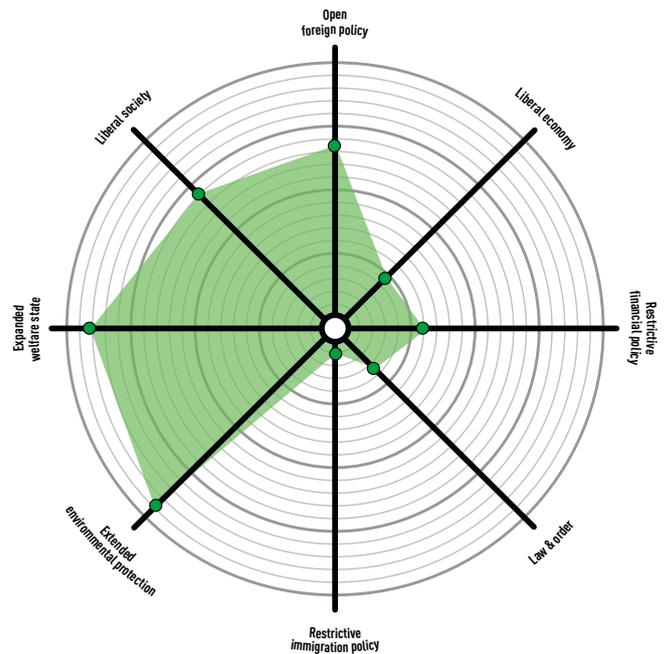
Based on an algorithm, smartvote is suspected of rendering voting unbalanced. “In the 2011 federal elections, which took place after the Fukushima catastrophe, the Green Liberals saw a strong increase in support at the expense of the larger parties. Smartvote made this little-known party visible by suggesting it to people who had ticked both economy and ecology,” explains Marquis. The political scientist from Lausanne does not believe this tool will be able to positively influence voter turnout. Nor does he think the electronic vote will have an impact: “it works more like a replacement for a postal vote”, he says.

Can we do better? In Geneva, Professor Stojanovic’s team are preparing a test for November based on the Oregon model. This process was launched in a Swiss municipality with 20 citizens chosen at random. After listening to experts and various opinions, they will debate the subject of a vote. The group will draft a neutral presentation on the subject and a summary of the reasons for voting yes or no. “This model provides a summary constructed by a group of ordinary individuals, who will be seen as being closer to everyday citizens. It is also a real lesson in democracy,” adds the political scientist. (SH)

## ‘Smartspiders’: examples from two youth parties

The ‘smartspiders’ for the Young SVP party in the canton of Bern and for the Young Greens in the canton of Zurich during the 2015 federal elections

The graphs in the form of spider webs provided by smartvote are created from eight political objectives. A value of 100 indicates strong support for the subject, whilst a value of 0 represents the opposite. In 2015, the Young Green Party (ZH) presented a smartspider which showed support for the environment and a liberal society. For the Young SVP party (BE), ‘order and safety’ is shown to be an important value, indicating that this party is in favour of strict laws, a strong army and police force, and that it advocates values such as order and discipline. Smartspiders are created for individual candidates as well as parties.



# All that glitters is not gold: gold industry under scrutiny

Switzerland is a leading global player in the gold trade. Yet some of the raw gold that ends up in Swiss refineries comes from dubious mines. There is now growing pressure on the entire raw materials sector to take greater ethical responsibility.

THEODORA PETER

“We cannot completely exclude the possibility of gold entering Switzerland that has been produced in a way that violates human rights.” This was the bombshell that the Federal Council included in its report about the gold trade and human rights last November. In response to a motion submitted by parliament, the government’s gold report shed a little light on an otherwise secretive industry.

Gold is of key importance to Switzerland. Some 40 per cent of global gold refinery capacity is Swiss-based, while four of the nine industry world leaders have their headquarters in Switzerland. Gold refineries such as Argor-Heraeus, Metalor, Pamp and Valcambi process imported raw gold or remelt existing gold. In 2017, over 2,400 metric tons of gold worth almost 70 billion Swiss francs was imported into Switzerland for further processing. This equates to around 70 per cent of global gold production. The raw gold is sourced from approximately 90 countries. These include developing economies that are heavily dependent on gold exports – such as Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali.

## Precarious conditions at small-scale mines

Industrial mines account for about 80 per cent of global raw gold supplies, while 15 to 20 per cent is sourced from small-scale artisanal mines where the working and environmen-

tal conditions are often precarious. Nevertheless, millions of families depend on small-scale mining for their livelihoods. More than 15 million people work in such mines around the world, of whom 4.5 million are



## The ‘Vreneli’ – a much-loved gold coin

‘Vreneli’ – Switzerland’s best-known piece of gold – is the name of a series of coins depicting Helvetia that were minted from 1887 to 1949. The gold used to produce them came from other European countries. A total of 58.6 million 20-franc ‘Vrenelis’ entered into circulation back then. A 10-franc denomination (2.6 million units) and a 100-franc denomination (5,000 units) were also released.

The ‘Vreneli’ remains a popular gift coin – and a simple investment vehicle – to this day. Containing 5.8 grams of gold, the 20-franc coin has a current market value of around 270 francs and can be exchanged at any bank counter in Switzerland. The rare mintages can go for more, with coins from the 1926 release even known to change hands for sums of up to 400 francs. Coins from the 1904–06 mintages, worth around 300 francs each, are also collector’s items. The ‘Vreneli’ – a Swiss-German diminutive of Verena – probably owes its name to the coin’s youthful depiction of Helvetia, whose plaited hair makes her look more like a farmer’s girl than the mother of Switzerland. (TP)

women and 600,000 are children – groups particularly at risk from human rights violations. Some countries, including Peru and Ethiopia, are trying to regulate unofficial mining activities through the introduction of prospecting licences, for example. Yet implementation is proving difficult, while on-site checks are few and far between.

A suspected case of illegal gold trading recently hit the headlines in Peru, where customs authorities confiscated almost 100 kilograms of gold from exporters Minerales del Sur in March 2018. This raw material was bound for the Swiss refinery Metalor. The Peruvian judiciary is now investigating the matter. Minerales del Sur, which had up to 900 subcontractors at one stage, may have sourced the gold from illegal mines, public prosecutors believe. Criminal proceedings have not yet begun. Metalor say that they have stopped importing gold from Peru since the seizure, insisting that they have always procured gold from legal, registered mines.

## Of indeterminable origin

According to the Federal Council’s gold report, industrial mines are the source of most of the raw gold refined in Switzerland. But that is as detailed as it gets. Import statistics are unable to provide a clear indication of where the raw material was sourced or how it was produced. The Federal Council therefore recommends that the in-



dustry open up more, e.g. on customs declarations, regarding the origin of its gold. However, the government sees no need for action on due diligence, pointing to the sustainability standards implemented voluntarily by the industry. Switzerland also supports implementation of the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, in order to prevent the gold trade from fuelling armed conflict in places including the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Federal Council wishes to examine whether blockchain – a tech-

nology of decentralised databases – can be used to improve the traceability of gold.

### An initiative targeting multinationals

The Federal Council believes that further regulation is unnecessary. Citing intense competition from abroad, the Swiss government would prefer it if the gold industry regulated itself. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are not the only stakeholders criticising this pro-business approach. In an opinion piece published

**Liquid gold at the Metalor gold refinery in Neuchâtel.**

Photo: Keystone

on [swissinfo.ch](http://swissinfo.ch), Basel-based criminal law professor and anti-corruption expert Mark Pieth said that the Federal Council were “shooting themselves in the foot”, showing that they “cared more about business than about human rights” – thereby “giving more ammunition” to those who support the Responsible Business Initiative (RBI). The aim of the RBI, which was proposed by around 50 NGOs in 2016, is for Swiss companies and their subcontractors abroad to be held accountable for any human rights violations or environmental damage that they cause. Pieth’s main criticism of the Federal Council’s gold report is that it places the blame for these problems “squarely on the shoulders of artisanal and small-scale miners”, when in truth it is multinationals that are often responsible for producing mountains of toxic waste, for contaminating water and for appropriating land from indigenous communities.

Opinion polls show that there is a lot of public support for the RBI. The National Council opted for a counterproposal to take the wind out of its sails. This counterproposal would have introduced provisions on corporate liability into Swiss company law. Yet the Council of States would have none of it. In March, a majority within the small chamber of parliament rejected the initiative without considering the counterproposal. Ruedi Noser, FDP member of the Council of States for the canton of Zurich, argued that provisions on corporate liability would put companies at a significant disadvantage and could even result in Swiss businesses having to withdraw from numerous countries. The issue now heads back to the National Council. If the chambers fail to agree on a way forward, the RBI is likely to go to a popular vote without any counterproposal. A voting date has not yet been set.

Scaling the heights with Tokyo on her mind – Petra Klingler at the SAC's utilitarian training facility in Biel

Photo: Danielle Liniger



## Far from the mountains

Sport climbing will feature at the next Olympics. This has understandably raised hopes in Switzerland, the alpine country par excellence. What we are also seeing is the rise of an ultra-hip indoor sport – with notable side effects for its original outdoor equivalent.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

“Allez! Allez!” – Go! Go! Petra Klingler has heard her coach shout at her once or twice already this morning. She has reached that tricky spot again on the boulder wall. Klingler holds on to one of the grips with one hand, then pushes off with her legs. The elite climber pulls herself up and dangles

there for a few seconds... then lets herself fall, breathing heavily. This time her pulse was racing. “It doesn’t always,” she says, laughing.

With the first Bouldering World Cup event of 2019 round the corner, the purpose of this morning’s training session at the Swiss Climbing national performance centre

in Biel (canton of Berne) is all about getting into competition mode. But for Klingler this is just a staging post on the way to a much bigger goal: qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Sport climbers will be competing for Olympic medals in Tokyo for the first-ever time (see additional text). The Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) Olympic Pool consists of five athletes. Petra Klingler, 27, is one of them. As the speed and lead climbing Swiss champion and the bouldering world champion, Klingler excels in the three disciplines that will feature in Tokyo.

## Training on artificial walls

The SAC built its national performance centre in an old industrial building in Biel. A worn sofa and a side table stand in the corner. A coffee machine complements the extremely spartan setting. Training schedules are pinned up on the wall. The performance centre has all the charm of a student digs – a world away from rocks, wind and weather. The athletes train on climbing walls made of synthetic material. Outdoor rock climbing is not a priority at the moment. “Rock climbing will remain on the back burner during the next two years until the Olympics are over,” says Klingler.

For Switzerland – the country of mountains – the Olympic moment of truth will be played out not on a rock face but on an artificial wall. Although this reflects the evolution of the sport in Switzerland as well. Until the 1990s, climbing was purely an outdoor pastime. In 1993, Switzerland’s first-ever indoor climbing centre opened in Niederwangen (canton of Berne). Hanspeter Sigrist and his wife Gabriele Madlener Sigrist currently manage the facility. Sigrist is also the SAC’s performance director for climbing. “Everyone thought we were crazy when we said we were planning to build a climbing wall,” he says. Alpinists, most of them male, could not yet imagine themselves climbing on an indoor wall. There are now over 50 indoor climbing centres in Switzerland, while countless schools have at least one climbing wall in their gymnasium. The country’s big-



gest facility in Uster (canton of Zurich) has welcomed ever-increasing numbers of visitors since opening in 2014. “If you want to take up climbing nowadays, you normally go to an indoor centre,” says Martin Baumeler of Griffig, the cooperative that runs the climbing centre in Uster. Two thirds of people who start indoors will also climb outdoors later, although a third will continue just using climbing walls, he adds.

**World champion Petra Klingler: “I can now make a modest living from climbing.”**

*Photo: Danielle Liniger*

## Female and ultra-hip

According to Hanspeter Sigrist, women are one of the factors behind the boom in indoor climbing. “Women climbers weren’t taken that seriously for a long time. The lead climber in a rope team was always the man – the roles were clear.” Indoor centres have given women the type of independent access that they previously would not have enjoyed. Today, women account for around half of all people who climb indoors. And those who practise the sport – men and women (and children and teenagers) – no longer just belong to the alpinist fraternity. Sigrist believes that indoor climbing has become an ultra-hip mass-participation sport. Basically, it is the modern, sophisticated version of climbing in its original form.

The trend of “away from the mountains and into the city” seems to have boosted the sport. But there is at least one other factor contributing to the rising popularity of indoor climbing: safety. For example, in bouldering – a form of climbing without any ropes or harnesses – thick

## Olympic climbing

A total of 20 female athletes and 20 male athletes will take part in the first-ever Olympic sport climbing competition at Tokyo 2020. They will have qualified for the event primarily on the basis of their performance at international meetings. The competition in Tokyo will consist of three disciplines:

- Lead climbing – climbing as high as possible using a rope and harness
- Speed climbing – scaling the wall as fast as possible on a safety rope
- Bouldering – climbing without a rope on a low-level wall

Only the best athletes in all three disciplines have the chance of a medal.

mats are used to cushion falls. Indoors it is a world away from the wild, risky unpredictability of climbing in the Alps. If something untoward happens, the climbing centre operator will in many cases be liable, hence the people who run such facilities are acutely aware of the need to minimise risks.

### Overused rock faces

However, the flourishing indoor scene has implications elsewhere. “People who suddenly want to climb outdoors expect the same high level of safety that they enjoyed indoors, so they transplant their ‘all-risks-insured’ mindset to the mountains,” says Tim Marklowski, mountaineering project leader at the alpine protection organisation Mountain Wilderness. As Marklowski explains, it means that in various climbing areas around Switzerland, including the high Alps, many routes are dotted with permanent bolts to secure belays, whereas easily accessible unmarked routes are now few and far between. The bolts allow everyone to climb safely. Such routes are very popular. He points out that the resulting rock erosion is dramatic in some cases. This “human encroachment into the Alps”, as he calls it, means that we lose something along the way. “We no longer enjoy nature in its original state, or the pleasure of making decisions for ourselves.” Mountain Wilderness is therefore working to preserve bolt-free routes that “allow you to take charge” and experience a



purser form of climbing. Marklowski says: “There are climbing areas in the UK, the USA and Italy where bolts are still a no-no.”

### Greater recognition for the elite

The sport’s burgeoning reputation is changing the way we view the athletes at the top. For example, elite climber Petra Klingler is no longer the complete unknown that she used to be. She was crowned Bouldering World Champion in 2016 in front of a crowd of 10,000 in Paris. This world title as well as the inclusion of sport climbing in the Olympic programme have helped the 27-year-old to attract new sponsors. “I can now make a modest living from climbing – but not enough to feed a family,” says Klingler, who finished her degree in psychology and sports science last year. Nevertheless, Klingler is inclined to think that the sport has not yet reached its full “monetary potential”.

This may well change after Tokyo 2020. At any rate, Switzerland’s National Olympic Committee (NOC), Swiss Olympic, believes that sport climbing is a particularly good fit for Switzerland on account of its varied nature. “Sport climbing connects the alpine with the urban,” says Swiss Olympic media officer Alexander Wäfler. The NOC hopes that Tokyo 2020 “will ignite this spark and get lots of people interested”.

**Indoors instead of outdoors, artificial instead of natural. Sport climbing has changed a great deal in the last 20 years.** Photo: Danielle Liniger

**Janik Spindler and Delia Büchel scaling the Rotsteini near Meiringen. Climbing is purely an indoor sport for many children. But not for these two.**

Photo: Silvan Schüpfbach, SAC

# Truth and fiction on the French coast

Kurt Guggenheim fell out of love, but fell in love with France, during his stay in Le Havre from 1919 to 1920.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“Zurich’s faces nauseated me,” wrote Kurt Guggenheim in his diary in September 1919 during his time in Le Havre. The 23-year-old trader had spent three listless and frustrating years at his father’s coffee-importing business – until his father arranged for him to do a stint at a coffee-roasting plant in Le Havre. “Entfesselung” was the title of Guggenheim’s 1934 debut novel – the story of a young man who breaks free from the conservative shackles of his home town. However, Guggenheim’s two years in Normandy take on a whole new significance in light of his 1964 work “Salz des Meeres, Salz der Tränen”, in which the same young man moves to France to overcome the pain of breaking up with Esther, the central character in Guggenheim’s earlier novel “Die frühen Jahre”. The salt of the sea – Salz des Meeres – is a metaphor for the stinging tears – Salz der Tränen – that the character sheds over his sweetheart. “I lived without love,” writes Guggenheim in the novel. “From 21 July 1918, the last date on the cover page of Esther’s diary, I was no longer able to love.”

## French revelations

Yet life in Le Havre was a different matter altogether for the young Swiss. On the coattails of Louis Dupuis, his colleague at coffee roasters Rauber, Guggenheim got to know the sunny, easy-going attitude to life that young French men and women shared during the post-war years. He buried himself in French literature, “devouring books at random” – from Pascal and Maupassant to Zola and Proust. This left an indelible mark. Guggenheim, a Jew, also found his spiritual home in the French language, enabling him to diarise his most intimate feelings during the National Socialist era without having to resort to the German that had been hijacked by anti-Semites. The artists of the impressionist movement also fascinated him so much that his 1972 work “Minute des Lebens”, exploring the friendship between Cézanne and Zola, proved to be one of his most moving novels. As Guggenheim noted in 1980, “If I didn’t have the French language, my life would be half-empty.”

## Romance over sublimation

But how did things turn out for Guggenheim in Le Havre? The lovesick young man in “Salz des Meeres, Salz der Trä-

nen” is unable to put losing Esther behind him. He falls even deeper into depression after learning of Esther’s marriage to his rival during a visit to Zurich.

However, Guggenheim’s unpublished diaries reveal that the story of a traumatised émigré who is incapable of love is a contrivance that lends the novel a special poignancy but has little to do with real life. Apart from Eva Hug, the girl on whom Esther’s character is based, Guggenheim also fell in love with the slightly older Angéline Savoy, who travelled from Zurich to Le Havre in November 1919 and lived with her admirer for two weeks in a hotel. Guggenheim would look back at that fortnight “with sweet melancholy”, calling them his “14-day marriage”. Angéline would spend an additional three months with him in 1920, until it all became too much for Guggenheim himself – the writer deciding in April 1920 that a “long period of ardent introspection” and a literary appraisal of his love for Eva Hug was the best course of action after all.

Those two years in Le Havre must have been a particularly intensive experience, considering that Guggenheim doubled the length of time by referring to “four years” in 1955. In any case, it was definitely a key period in his life, given that the novelist not only discovered France but was also able to build a wealth of material for his works, which he very consciously and elegantly moulded into a “reworking of selected memories”.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** All the aforementioned novels are available from the Kurt Guggenheim collection of selected works, published by Verlag Th. Gut, Zurich.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZURICH



“Without realising, I had very quickly begun to regard this country through the eyes of the impressionist painters. Experiencing the landscape of the River Seine and the port of Le Havre in a different way to a Sisley, a Pissarro or a Monet seemed unthinkable to me. Their literary contemporaries also influenced my view of many localities.”  
(Quote from “Salz des Meeres, Salz der Tränen”, Kurt Guggenheim, selected works, volume 1, reprinted by Huber, no. 4, Frauenfeld, 1989)

# A new women's strike for greater equality

Almost 30 years since the first major women's strike in Switzerland, women will be voting with their feet again on 14 June. Some of their demands have not changed.

SUSANNE WENGER

Let us start by looking back, because doing so helps us to better understand the present. Something unusual happened in Switzerland on 14 June 1991. Half a million women answered the call of female trade unionists and women's organisations by striking for gender equality. "Wenn Frau will, dann steht alles still" ("If it's a woman's will, everything will stand still") was Lucerne musician Vera Kaa's throaty refrain in the 1991 campaign song. The strike had a broad message, focusing not only on paid work but on cooking, cleaning and caring as well – the unpaid work that normally falls on the shoulders of women.

That Friday in early summer saw a range of different actions across the country – from isolated mini-walkouts and numerous "symbolic" strikes, to demonstrations and more creative forms of protest. Elfie Schöpf, the journalist who coordinated the women's strike, summarised the day in her book "Frauenstreik: Ein Anfang" ("The first women's strike"), which Zytglogge, the Berne-based publishing company, printed one year later: "For the first time in Swiss history, hundreds of thousands of women came together to remind the country of the indispensable role that they play in society."

## Pans in the window

Armed with whistles and violet balloons, the demonstrators illegally occupied the square in front of parliament, Berne's Bundesplatz, while men ironed shirts around the corner in solidarity. Housewives hung pans in their kitchen windows. Nurses pinned the



**Women on strike, Bahnhofstrasse, Zurich (1991)**

Photo: Keystone

strike badge on their uniforms. Female watch workers called for higher wages. Women magistrates stayed at home. The Swiss Association of Agricultural Women highlighted the discrimination suffered by female farmers. One particular sex worker closed her brothel for the day. Even the Swiss Catholic Women's League showed their support. It was the biggest protest in Switzerland since the 1918 general strike.

Women were protesting about the slow implementation of the article on equality enshrined in the Federal Constitution exactly ten years before. Wage equality was a key issue. At the beginning of the 1990s, women in Switzerland earned on average a third less than men. Other strike demands included closing gaps in social security, creating more nursery places, sharing the burden of housework be-

tween men and women, and stopping violence against women.

## Women's strike added impetus

Attitudes to gender equality have been slow to evolve in Switzerland. Swiss women had to wait until 1971 to vote – decades after women in other European countries. The final male bastion only fell a few months before the 1991 strike, when Appenzell Innerrhoden became the last Swiss canton to grant women the right to vote. Each step was hard-earned. The women's strike also helped to move things forward – even though parliament later blocked Geneva social democrat and mastermind of the women's strike, Christiane Brunner, from being appointed to the Federal Council.

One year after the women's strike, marital rape became a crime in Swit-

zerland. Five years after the strike, parliament approved the Gender Equality Act. Reforms to the compulsory Old-Age and Survivors Insurance scheme had a positive impact on women's pension situation. Switzerland also introduced a maternity insurance in 2005. Following the 2015 elections, women accounted for more than 30 per cent of parliamentary seats for the first time. This figure was 14 per cent back in 1991. Some progress has indeed been made, but not nearly enough, according to the organisers of the second women's strike scheduled for 14 June this year.

## Regional committees

It will be a nationwide strike again, but with a local touch. Regional strike committees have formed around the country. In Berne, for example, Samira Schmid and at least a hundred other women are preparing for the big day. "This strike is overdue," says the 30-year-old. When Switzerland's women downed their tools in 1991, Schmid was still a small child living with her expatriate parents in Spain. She returned to Switzerland later, studied social work and became a mother of two children. "I only know about the first women's strike from other people's accounts, which I listen to with great interest."

Schmid was born at the end of the 1980s. For a long time, feminism never really crossed her mind. She says she had all the opportunities she could have wanted. "I never thought I had fewer chances than men." However, as a working mother she noticed how hard it still is to combine family and career. "Becoming a mother was a big turning point in my life." In addition, Schmid realised how little her experience of housework and bringing up children counted for in the world of work. "The caring side of things

doesn't count for anything." As a social worker who also looks after women living in precarious situations, she sees the "impact of austerity policies" at first hand.

## Continued gender pay gap

The new women's strike in Switzerland is just the latest in a series of female protests seen elsewhere of late – from the Women's March in the USA and in a number of European countries following the election of President Trump, to the Spanish women's strike in March 2018 and the global #MeToo movement against sexual harassment, discrimination and violence against women. The Swiss strike manifesto also makes reference to protecting female migrants and the rights of the LGBT community. A lot has changed in the last 30 years. However, the strike's other demands are remarkably similar to those of 1991. They include wage equality, putting a stop to low pay in female-dominated professions, and a national strategy on combating violence against women.

Almost 30 years since the first women's strike, official statistics provide a sober appraisal of how progress

towards gender equality has stalled in Switzerland. The gap between men's and women's pay may have become smaller, but it remains 20 per cent in the private sector. Women do almost two thirds of all full-time jobs that pay gross monthly wages below 4,000 Swiss francs. Female executives are a rarity at Swiss companies. Women still provide most unpaid care – this is indispensable in itself, but continues to be of little remunerative value. And crime statistics show that there are 50 cases of domestic violence in Switzerland every day, with one fatality every two weeks..

## Ideological support

Alliance F, a major cross-party alliance of Swiss women's organisations, has given the strike its "ideological support". Some female politicians from the parties on the centre-right are keeping their distance. Doris Fiala, FDP National Councillor for the canton of Zurich, told the "Tages-Anzeiger" newspaper that she promotes women's rights all year round and that a strike seems "outdated" to her in this day and age. However, Berne strike organiser Samira Schmid feels it is vital that women stick together: "Whatever our differences, some issues affect all of us."

We will soon see whether the strike is as popular as it was in 1991. In an interesting article for the magazine "NZZ Geschichte", Swiss historian Brigitte Studer made the point that 1991 harked back to pre-trade-union days and had a festive, communal dimension. "When societal factors are responsible for the gender gap, women will only be heard if they act in political unison." For Studer, the first women's strike was an emphatic case in point.

[www.frauenstreik2019.ch](http://www.frauenstreik2019.ch)



**Colourful protests in Zurich (1991) – violet inspiration for this year's women's strike** Photo: Keystone

## Civilian service is going strong, while the army takes a hit

Thousands of conscripts would rather complete 368 days of community service than join the army. The Federal Council would like to limit this option, introduced by young objectors in the 1970s.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Today, a young person wishing to serve his country “other than guarding a bridge with a gun”, as 21-year-old Léo Tinguely puts it, can opt for a period of civilian service as he did. In this case, the potential conscript must substantiate their objection to military service with “proof through action”: the length of time owed to the nation is increased by 50 %, resulting in 368 days of service rather than the 245 asked of soldiers.

Many Swiss people consider this option to be well worth it. “I loved this experience,” says Samuel Christen, 31, who completed his civilian service in a clinic in Noirmont (JU). His mission as a service technician did not enable him to progress in his career as a polymechanic, but he was able to “help his country without paying military tax”. At 43 years old, Milan\*, a senior official of the canton of Geneva, began his military training in 1995 amongst the tanks in Thun, before turning to civilian service (created in 1996). “I saw both sides of the coin and at least I wasn’t a traitor to my country,” states this ex-journalist, born in the Former Yugoslavia. He felt a strong aversion to serving in an army. During a firing exercise, a corporal who considered his performance to be lacking told him to imagine that he was firing at a man from the Balkans. “I showed him the name on my uniform,” recalls Milan. The young university student completed the remainder of his service time in a human rights NGO, then as a sports teacher for the canton of Geneva youth sports service.

### Fitness for military service: a condition for civilian service

Since 2009, Swiss candidates wishing to follow this alternative path have no longer had to justify refusal of the army before a commission. However, individuals must be fit for military service and must find their civilian mission themselves. This was the case for Tinguely, a sociology student and social worker in Fribourg, whose civilian service was spent at Tremplin, a foundation providing support for drug addicts. “The recruitment process lasted for two days. They spoke to us as if we were stupid and we spent a lot of time waiting around,” says Tinguely, who regrets the absence of information regarding civilian service during his army recruitment period in December 2016. Tinguely did not feign



illness. At the end of the recruitment process, he stated his request before a high-ranking officer who communicated his military posting to him for February. He had to move quickly to complete the steps for requesting civilian service, which must be completed entirely online. Tinguely began his mission at Tremplin in October 2017 and provided 313 days of work, leaving 40 days of civilian service to complete.

The longer duration of civilian service is generally considered to be an obstacle, as are the steps which must be

**A 'Zivi' (civilian service worker) on duty, serving lunch in a school in Kehrsatz, Bern**

Photo: Keystone

## New film pays tribute to the pioneers of civilian service

It's the incredible story of a group of young protesters who, in support of civilian service in Switzerland, laid down their weapons and uniforms before the Federal Parliament building and had women tear up their military passbooks. This event took place on 22 April 1971 in Berne and is the starting point for the film "La preuve de l'existence de Dieu" (Proof of the existence of God) by Genevan Fred Baillif. Screened in Geneva on 14 March 2019 as part of the Geneva International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights, this pseudo-documentary functions as a tribute and raises questions relating to militant activities, as well as "the status of the elderly in our social context, where they are shut out from society once their work is finished", states the producer-director.

"La preuve de l'existence de Dieu" is played by the real-life protagonists of this militant action alongside experienced actors, Jean-Luc Bideau and Irène Jacob. In the film, six senior protesters campaign against weapons exportation and turn to terrorist methods, blowing up an arms factory. In reality, the actions in Berne were to lead to prison sentences of up to four and a half months, explains Alain Simonin, one of the protagonists in the film.

The Genevan militants' operation involved 22 men and 8 women and was prepared with the help of two Genevan lawyers who would go on to become State Councillors: Christian Grobet and Bernard Ziegler. The aim was to plan a crime which would lead to criminal sentences, in the case of the women for the destruction of military equipment. In the end, the objective was not met. The group, which notably included a theologian and a garage owner, wanted a collective conviction, and so a political trial, but each group member was judged separately and the women were released. Nevertheless, the group achieved a substantive response, signed by the Federal Coun-



Michel Sermet Photo fresh prod



Alain Simonin Photo fresh prod

cil, to which a 400-page manifesto on civilian service had been delivered. "Our actions influenced the creation of civilian service," reflects Michel Sermet, who served his sentence in Geneva.

Born of a Genevan militant group which had established a concept embodying civilian service for the population, the movement in favour of a community-based service was reflected in other French-speaking cantons and attracted support from intellectuals in the German part of Switzerland too. "We paid for our actions, and our sentences brought us credibility," recalls Alain Simonin with satisfaction. (SH)

undertaken to access this option. But aside from the intrinsic value they see in their missions, supporters of this path highlight a number of advantages when compared with military service. The first is the possibility of returning home in the evening. The second concerns the reimbursement of expenses for this activity, which is paid on top of the amounts given to conscripts by their insurance for loss of earnings. Tinguely also received an additional 500 francs from Tremplin, for a total of 2,300 francs per month. Better than in the army. A further advantage is the issuance of work certificates: "I was able to use my work experience in the NGO where I completed my civilian service," explains Milan. This would not have been the case

with military service, even if the latter option can also sometimes open doors.

## Government moves to restrict civilian service

Civilian service meets needs in the social, healthcare and educational sectors, and is becoming an increasingly popular choice for young people. Between 2010 and 2017, the number of days completed as part of a civilian service mission more than doubled, jumping from 878,000 to 1.78 million, with 6,785 admissions and almost 48,000 people serving at the end of 2017. Alarmed by this success, the Federal Council has launched an offensive aiming to make

civilian service seem less attractive. It has been decided to focus notably on men who have already embarked on military service and wish to leave. The aim of these measures is “to ensure respect for the principle that it is not a question of free choice between military and civilian service...” according to the Federal Council statement which remains somewhat ambiguous given its “proof through action” approach. The government is particularly concerned by an exodus of its executives and specialists towards non-military services. In 2018, of 6,205 admissions, 2,264 were effectively servicemen who had finished their training, including 350 officers and non-commissioned officers. The government warns of “a loss in knowledge and competencies regarding conduct and a loss in technical skills...”.

### Slipping out through the back door to avoid the army

This policy has received substantial criticism. Socialist municipal councillor of Lausanne Benoît Gaillard, having himself opted for the non-military route in 2004, denounces the escape of conscripts “through the back door”. The average rate of fitness to complete military service ranges from 83 % to 55 % depending on the canton. “Today, those wanting to avoid the army simply have themselves declared unfit for service based on a certificate which is



Provocation on the way to civilian service: protesters dump their service rifles and uniforms in front of the Federal Palace (22 April 1971)

Archive image provided

not always very credible. Instead, we should be encouraging a service benefiting the country. The fact of the matter is that the Federal Council is under pressure from the right and does not want to give the impression that it is favouring alternative solutions to military service. So, it prefers to tolerate people escaping from military service through the back door.” Gaillard also claims that this system excludes women.

“The vocation of the Swiss army is not a bad one,” states Milan, who feels that “it should develop a different discourse, in order to be more attractive to young people”. As for defending the country in the event of attack: “It’s an illusion; it would be like using a Swiss army knife against a nuclear power. We need an army focused on peace-keeping missions instead,” suggests this ex-serviceman.

\*Not real name.

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[www.aso.ch/en/information/newsletter](http://www.aso.ch/en/information/newsletter)*



# Swiss Abroad launch election year

At its meeting in Berne, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) focused on the upcoming national elections. The CSA will make voting recommendations for the first time in its history.

“This year is an election year, and it is more important than ever for us to defend the interests of the 760,000 Swiss Abroad and remind politicians that expatriate votes count,” said the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Remo Gysin, at the start of the CSA meeting at Berne’s city hall on 23 March. Some 172,000 Swiss Abroad are currently entered in the electoral register, which corresponds to the number of eligible voters in the canton of Thurgau.

In Berne, the CSA decided that it will be making voting recommendations for the first time ever. Its objective in doing so is to take even greater account of the needs and concerns of Swiss Abroad in the forthcoming legislative period. These recommendations will be finalised at the next CSA meeting on 16 August 2019 in Montreux.



In session – the main focus of the CSA in Berne centred on the 2019 elections. Photo: Marc Lettau

The OSA has already started an election website specifically for the Swiss Abroad ([www.aso.ch/en/politics/federal-elections-2019](http://www.aso.ch/en/politics/federal-elections-2019)), containing practical information about the voting procedure as well as

general information about the Swiss party-political landscape. The website will serve as an expatriate platform for the political parties that currently have seats in the Federal Palace. These parties will also have the opportunity to address delegates from around the world directly at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Montreux.

Furthermore, the CSA will also approve a 2019 election manifesto officially on behalf of the Swiss Abroad, the basic tenets of which it drew up in Berne. The CSA will adopt a finalised version of this manifesto at its August meeting in Montreux. First and foremost, the election manifesto will target Switzerland’s political parties and their candidates for the federal elections. It will focus on issues of importance to Switzerland’s expatriate citizens, such as the future of voting rights, international mobility, preservation of the consular network, and the unsatisfactory deal that Swiss banks currently offer their Swiss expatriate clients.

With this in mind, the CSA in Berne again made reference to the fact that Postfinance expatriate clients pay much higher banking fees but do not receive the same level of service as their compatriots in Switzerland – something that many Swiss Abroad view as discrimination. According to the CSA, Postfinance AG, whose main shareholder is state-owned Swiss Post, also has a special responsibility towards Swiss citizens who live abroad. Many Swiss move abroad for professional reasons and often just for a relatively short time, making it all the more important for them to keep an account in Switzerland.

However, the CSA prefers a non-confrontational approach on this important matter and will not be taking any legal action against Postfinance for the time being. Nevertheless, the resolution that it adopted in Berne was unequivocal: “We, the Swiss Abroad, demand non-discriminatory access to the services of Postfinance.” (ASO)

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[www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)

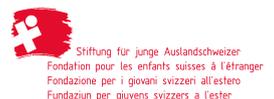


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[www.sjas.ch](http://www.sjas.ch)





## Tailored advice

Do you have any questions on the topic of education in Switzerland? If so, *educationsuisse* will help you find the right answers.

*educationsuisse* is an expert contact partner for young Swiss Abroad who are interested in studying in Switzerland. The staff provide general information on the different educational opportunities available, whether it is a degree at a Swiss university or a vocational training course. They also answer questions on admission criteria for university study, the required language skills, searching for an apprenticeship, accommodation, insurance and other topics. Nearly all of *educationsuisse*'s services are free of charge.

### Personalised advice

The staff, who speak German, French, Italian, Spanish and English, will help you find the right answers and assist you with any special enquiries. Many questions can be answered by email or by phone. Personal consultations are possible at our office in Bern by prior appointment.

### Vocational & study counselling

Targeted consultations are offered in collaboration with the official careers guidance centre BIZ Bern-Mittelland. During these consultations (in German, French, Italian, Spanish or English) with an expert on-site in Bern or via Skype, you can raise questions regarding your choice of career or study programme. These consultations are subject to a charge. Registration is via *educationsuisse*.

### Scholarships

Any young Swiss Abroad whose parents are unable to cover all the costs of their education may apply for a grant. Young Swiss Abroad usually have the opportunity to apply for a scholarship for their initial qualification (up to and including a tertiary-level Master's degree) in their canton of residence. Every canton has its own laws and regulations and thus also different conditions and deadlines. *educationsuisse* provides assistance with such matters and also looks after the documentation. Furthermore, *educationsuisse* is itself able to award

The OSA Youth Service is conducting a survey to help better meet the expectations of the Swiss Abroad.

Each year, the OSA Youth Service presents various offers for young people from Switzerland living abroad. In a manner of speaking, the Service is a memory maker for these Swiss youngsters living outside their country; through its wide variety of appealing and contemporary offers, it hopes to weave strong ties between them and their homeland. It is for this reason that in order to better meet your expectations, we have compiled a questionnaire that we would be delighted if you could complete.

By filling out the questionnaire, you will be automatically entered into a prize draw\* to win two free sets of two-person tickets for the Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which will take place in Montreux from 16 to 18 August 2019.

This questionnaire will only take a few minutes of your time but will be invaluable for us in providing your children, grandchildren, friends or acquaintances with unforgettable memories of their stay in Switzerland: <https://www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers>. Thank you for your participation and good luck in the prize draw! (MB)

### Information

The winter camps for young people aged 15–18 years and those for young adults will take place from 27 December 2019 to 4 January 2020. They will be organised by the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland; tel.: +41 31 356 61 00; email: [youth@aso.ch](mailto:youth@aso.ch).

\*) No exchange of prizes or cash payments of an equivalent monetary value are possible. All legal recourse is excluded. No correspondence shall be entered into regarding the prize draw.

small scholarships or loans in cases of hardship thanks to various funds and private foundations.

### Information and contact

The Swiss educational system is illustrated and outlined in an easy-to-follow diagram on [www.educationsuisse.ch](http://www.educationsuisse.ch). The website also contains a lot more information on the topic of education in Switzerland. Any interested parties who have additional questions are welcome to contact *educationsuisse* by email on [info@educationsuisse.ch](mailto:info@educationsuisse.ch) or by phone on +41 31 356 61 04.

*educationsuisse*, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland, [www.educationsuisse.ch](http://www.educationsuisse.ch).

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



# Camps for children aged eight to 14

Swiss children living abroad can experience the Grisons mountains at our next winter camp. And there are still some free places available at our fantastic summer camps.

At its winter camp, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) offers Swiss children living abroad aged eight to 14 the chance to experience the Swiss Alps in winter and enjoy the snow on their skis or snowboards. The 2019-20 winter camp will take place at the Tga da Lai chalet in Valbella (canton of Grisons) from Thursday, 26 December 2019 until 4 January 2020. You can sign up your child for the camp from 1 September 2019 via our website ([sjas.ch/en/](http://sjas.ch/en/)).

## Free spots at our summer camp

There are still some free places on our two-week summer camps. Taking place between the end of June and the end of August 2019, these camps are an opportunity for children to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time. For further details as well as the relevant application form, visit [sjas.ch/en/](http://sjas.ch/en/).

## Price reductions

The FYSA wants to enable all Swiss children living abroad to visit and experience Switzerland for themselves at least once. We therefore offer price reductions whenever these are justified. Simply fill in the 'Application form for reduction of the camp fees'. We will also be happy to help if you require any further information. (LR)

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA),  
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland.  
Tel.: +41 31 356 61 16, fax: +41 (0)31 356 61 01,  
email: [info@sjas.ch](mailto:info@sjas.ch), [www.sjas.ch](http://www.sjas.ch)



# What will tomorrow's world hold?

97<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Swiss Abroad, from 16 to 18 August 2019 in Montreux



The 97<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Swiss Abroad will provide an opportunity to reflect on social, political and economic realities, as well as unemployment, current migratory situations and even the mobility of the future. What major challenges will society be facing and how can they be tackled? How can the elements for solving and responding to these issues be implemented from today? Leading figures from the world of economics, science and Swiss politics will attempt to tackle and provide answers to these questions.

Since this is election year, this congress will welcome the political parties represented in the federal parliament. Leading politicians will come to Montreux to address participants and to discuss issues of interest to the Swiss Abroad.

The congress will also provide the opportunity to explore the wealth of tourist attractions the area has to offer. This year, participants will have the chance to visit Chaplin's World in Vevey, and to enjoy a meal in the breathtaking surroundings of the Lavaux vineyards, which boast UNESCO World Heritage status. (AC)

## Full schedule:

**Friday 16 August 2019**

9:00–17:30

Meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad

**Saturday 17 August 2019**

Congress of the Swiss Abroad

9:00–12:30

Political programme:

Federal elections 2019

The Swiss Abroad and Political Parties: status report and mutual expectations

10:00–12:00

Cultural programme

Guided tour of Château de Chillon for participants not wishing to participate in the political programme

13:45–17:45

Conference: What will tomorrow's world hold?

19:00–22:30

Closing event at the Grand Hôtel Suisse Majestic

**Sunday 18 August 2019**

9:15–15:30

Chaplin's World visit – Meal in the Lavaux vineyards

## Price per person

**Saturday 17 August 2019**

Daytime events . . . . . CHF 180.00

Closing event . . . . . CHF 95.00

**Sunday 18 August 2019**

Excursion . . . . . CHF 60.00

## Register now at

[www.ose-congres.ch](http://www.ose-congres.ch)

## Special offer for Congress participants –75% reduction on the cost of a Swiss Travel Pass

With the Swiss Travel Pass, people living outside Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein can enjoy unlimited travel on the full road, rail and water transport networks of the Swiss Travel System, for a period of 3, 4, 8 or 15 consecutive days.

# In 2018, more than one in ten Swiss nationals lived abroad

There were 760,200 Swiss living abroad at the end of 2018 – a slight increase on the previous year. Most are based in Europe, particularly in France. In some countries, the 65-plus age group accounts for over a quarter of Swiss living abroad.

In 2018, 760,200 Swiss were registered with a Swiss diplomatic or consular representation abroad. This represents 10.6 % of all Swiss nationals and is a 1.1 % increase on 2017. Europe is where their numbers have grown the most (+1.5 %), while Africa is the only continent showing a slight decline (-0.5 %) compared with 2017. According to the latest “Statistics on the Swiss Abroad” of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), 567,800 Swiss Abroad (74.7 %) also have at least one other nationality alongside their Swiss nationality.

## Retiring abroad

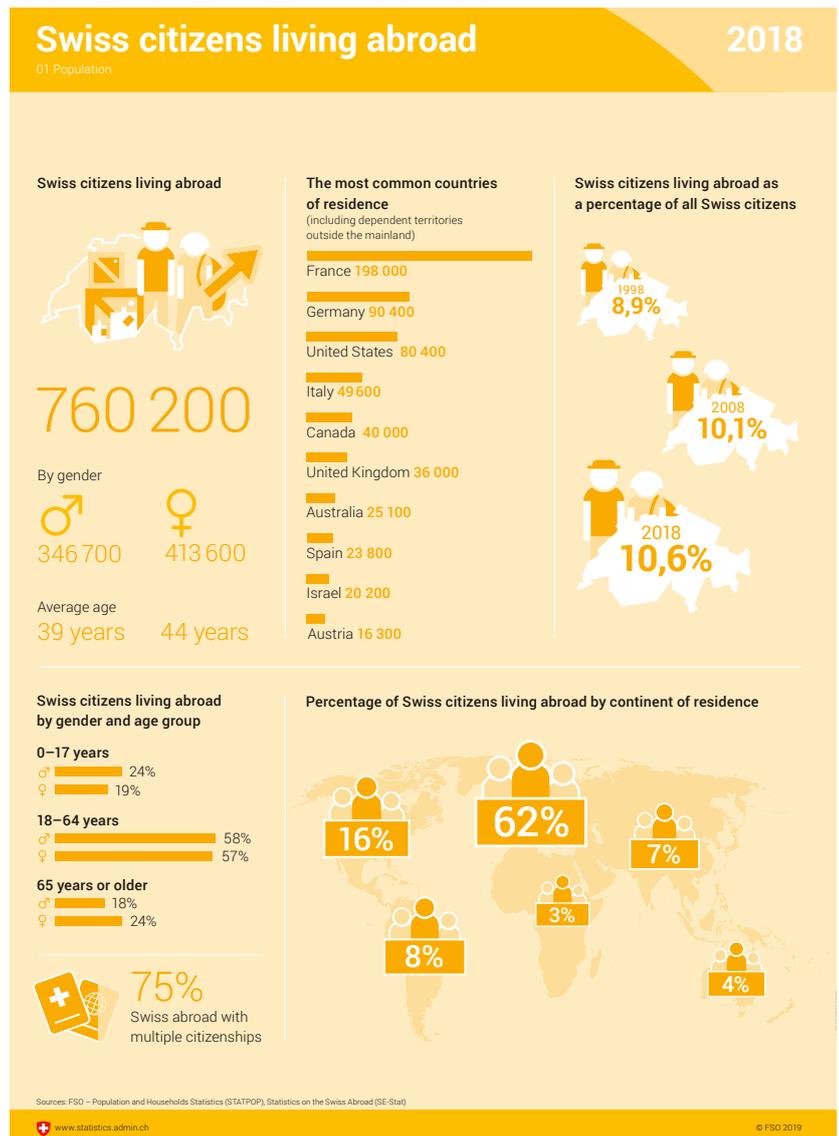
Some 21 % of Swiss Abroad (162,500 people) are aged 65 or over. This age group accounts for over 25 % of Swiss Abroad in some countries including Hungary (55 %), Thailand (33 %), Spain (32 %), Portugal (28 %) and South Africa (27 %).

The gender ratio among older members of the Swiss community is balanced in Hungary, Portugal and South Africa, but tilted in favour of men in Thailand (26 % compared to 7 % women in the same age group) and women in Spain (20 % compared to 12 % men in the same age group).

People aged 80 or older make up 6 % of all Swiss Abroad (45,700 people). The largest proportion of Swiss Abroad aged 80 or older live in the USA (8 %) – followed by Italy, Canada and the UK (7 % each). Women outnumber men in this age group in the above-mentioned countries of residence. Further information and relevant publications:

<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/news/whats-new.gnpdetail.2019-0265.html>

[www.statistik.ch](http://www.statistik.ch)



Further general information on the Swiss Abroad and about living abroad is available on the FDFA website: [www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/living-abroad.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/living-abroad.html)

## HELPLINE FDFA

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© from abroad +41 58 465 33 33  
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Skype: helpline-eda

## Travel advice

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[www.twitter.com/travel\\_edadfae](https://www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae)

## itineris

Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad  
[www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris)



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## Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date. National Council elections take place on 20 October 2019.

For information about the National Council elections, visit [www.ch.ch/en/elections2019](http://www.ch.ch/en/elections2019). Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) is available at [www.admin.ch/votes](http://www.admin.ch/votes) or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

## Popular initiatives

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

- 'Keep health insurance premiums to no more than 10% of income (Premium relief initiative)' (26.08.2020)
- 'Include the CH-sign on our vehicle number plates (Number plate initiative)' (05.09.2020)
- 'For a more secure and trustworthy democracy (E-voting moratorium)' (12.09.2020)
- 'For the future of our natural world and landscape (biodiversity initiative)' (26.09.2020)
- 'Against concreting over our countryside (country-side initiative)' (26.09.2020)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch) > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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## THE SWISS ABROAD ON INSTAGRAM



## “Being Swiss is an essential part of my identity”

*Even as a child, François Schwalb, who was born in South Africa, was interested in his father's homeland. Today the 30-year-old, who works in the fruit and vegetable industry, lives with his family and numerous animals.*

**My job:** I'm a qualified minister in the Dutch Reformed Church where I work part time. Full-time I work as a marketer and logistics coordinator within the fresh produce industry. We also export fruit to Europe, including avocados.

**My South Africa:** For the past five years we've been living in Mooketsi, Limpopo province. Interesting fact: in Limpopo less than 3% of the population is of European descent. We live on a farm with open spaces and freedom, and we love to cycle and walk every day after work with the dogs. Life is exciting and diverse with daily surprises.

**My Switzerland:** We lived in Switzerland when I was 7–9 years old. We also visited in 2008 and again in 2018. It is very organised, clean, wealthy, respects tradition and is a leader in innovation and technology. I like the organised lifestyle, public transport, drinkable water almost anywhere, its rich history and its bright and secure future.

**My heart:** Being Swiss is an essential part of my identity, of how I see and understand myself, my parents and siblings. I'm very interested in many aspects of the country and read up a lot on a weekly basis – and the more I read, the more I love Switzerland.

The original interview was published on [swissinfo.ch](http://swissinfo.ch), the online service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company, which is available in ten languages. Do you live abroad too? Then tag your Instagram photos [#WeAreSwissAbroad](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/weareswissabroad/).

## The village photographers

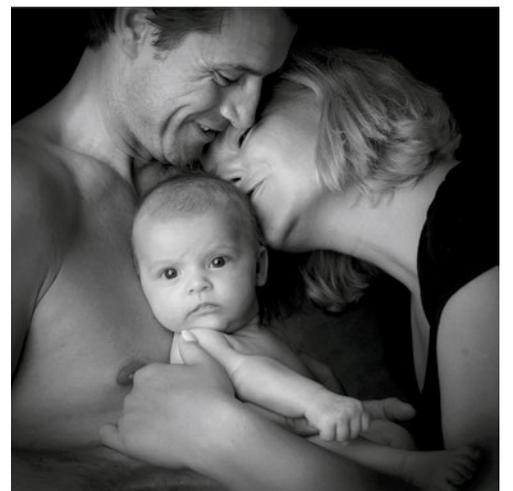
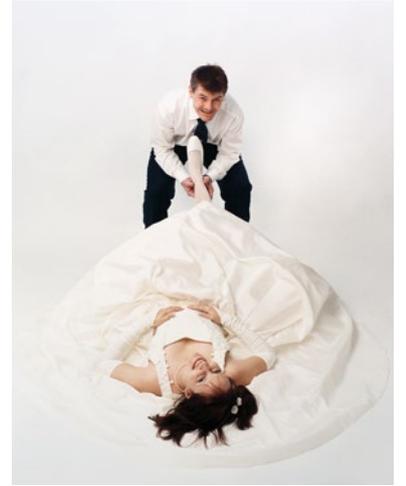
Weddings, confirmations, funerals, village parties, company photos, children's photos, family photos, photos of accidents – spanning Rudolf, Robert, Ruth and Peter Zbinden, Photo Zbinden from the Bernese municipality of Schwarzenburg is a century-old professional photography dynasty that has seen and done it all. Comprising half a million images, the family's body of work is a chronological record of how rapidly rural life in Switzerland has evolved. The Zbindens are those archetypal village photographers whose collection resembles a long-term anthropological study. Within their rural microcosm, the Zbindens have documented key changes with regard to the working world, daily family life, family ideals, and society as a whole.

No one can compare 1936 with 1976 – or 1976 with 2016 for that matter. But the Zbindens have been an enduring presence in Schwarzenburg – the 'go-to' documenters of a changing world. This journey has not been without its dramas. For example, when Robert Zbinden (alias 'Fotoröbu') captured on celluloid the blaze that consumed the Schwarzenburg short-wave radio transmitter in 1936, he was documenting a piece of history. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Swiss in the 'Fifth Switzerland' were suddenly bereft of a radio signal from their home country. Even the familiar call sign fell silent.

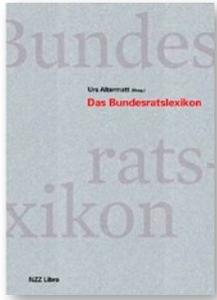
Regardless of whether or not Schwarzenburg is on your radar, the recently published book showcasing a century of Zbinden photographs is a remarkable and quite fascinating historical record of a specific locality in Switzerland. MARC LETTAU

Photo Zbinden – Drei Generationen Fotografie in Schwarzenburg 1916–2016 (Photo Zbinden – Three generations of photography in Schwarzenburg 1916–2016). Stämpfli Verlag, Berne, 2019, ISBN 978-3-7272-6038-4, CHF 34.00





## Helvetia's unofficial royals – a lexicon



URS ALTERMATT (PUBLISHER):  
"DAS BUNDESRATSLEXIKON"  
(THE FEDERAL COUNCIL  
LEXICON), NZZ LIBRO, ZÜRICH  
2019, 759 PAGES, CHF 98

For 171 years, the Swiss government has been in office without a single day's interruption. The whole government is never replaced at once, it is without exception the individual members who change. "Only monarchies enjoy the same continuity," writes Urs Altermatt in his Federal Council lexicon ("Das Bundesratslexikon"), a work that was first published under his name in 1991 and has now been revised and updated. Altermatt suggests that Switzerland's Federal Councillors are the country's "unofficial royals". His book is regarded as the definitive history of the Federal Council and a reference work for administra-

tors, politicians, the media and academics.

Altermatt is Professor Emeritus in Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg and one of the best authorities on the Federal Council. He put together a team of 93 top-class writers who provide an impressive and vivid lexicon-based account of the 119 people who have served on the Federal Council since the modern Swiss Confederation was founded in 1848, covering their elections to and resignations from the Federal Council as well as their earlier life and work as a whole. This carefully illustrated lexicon, enriched with a range of informative tables, is not only of scholarly interest, it is also a fascinating historical study based on an institution that Altermatt believes is "without doubt the most original product of the Swiss political system".

Apart from its biographical slant, Altermatt's work provides an overview of 170 years of Swiss history as well as a variety of surprising insights – and personal tragedies in some cases. The Bernese Federal Councillor Carl Schenk, who used to walk to the Federal Palace every day, is a good example. While donating some spare coins to a pauper on his way past Berne's famous Bear Pit early in the morning on 8 July 1895 – a route he often took – Schenk was run over by a horse-drawn carriage and died shortly after, having served for 31 years. Fridolin Anderwert, a Federal Councillor from Thurgau, also died in office. Immediately after his election as President of the Confederation, Anderwert was the victim of a malicious press campaign about his private life. He also had health problems. On 25 December 1880, Christmas Day, he shot himself on the Kleine Schanze within sight of the Federal Palace.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

## A fanfare of nostalgia



STEPHAN EICHER  
"HÜH!",  
UNIVERSAL MUSIC /  
POLYDOR

"Creating mayhem on stage, with kids whose mums knew me as a rock star." This is how Stephan Eicher, 58, described his latest album to the media. "Hüh!" is something of a gamble, combining the sounds of a resonant orchestra with the trademark soft voice of the Bernese crooner. The album sells itself like this: "In September 1978, Stephan boarded a night train from Bern to Paris... 40 years later, a secret from the past has finally caught up with him..."

The sleeve design is a nod to an album by the popular French singer, Alain Bashung. Showing an image of dampened confetti, it seems almost morbid. For Eicher, it is the symbol of a flawed industry. In his eyes, "the party's over". "Hüh!"'s 12 tracks – including 8 covers and 4 new songs – run back and forth between energetic rhythms and intimate ballads, with a wonderful mix of joyful madness from Traktorkestar, a Bernese orchestra with a passion for Balkan music, and the carefully edited texts of the Swiss rocker. Eicher has his luxury brass band cover two of his biggest hits: "Pas d'ami (comme toi)" and "Combien de temps". But the emotion and poetry of this CD are hidden more in tracks like "Chenilles", an original song which opens with a multitude of brass instruments, leading to a folk guitar accompaniment. The deep hum of the tuba bass line envelopes the listener in a soft glow that illuminates the album throughout. "Où que tu ailles, où que tu sois / Le superflu, le nécessaire, comme de la glue qui colle aux doigts" sings Eicher: Wherever you go, wherever you are / The superfluous, the necessary, like glue that sticks to your fingers.

The opening track of this 15th studio album, released after six years of quarrelling with his record company and health problems in 2018, "Ce peu d'amour" carries the rock feel typical of the Yenish musician's greatest hits. This time, Traktorkestar takes on the sound of a Gypsy orchestra, creating a joyous, all-encompassing brass explosion. "Louanges" is also covered in this style, with the artist singing of lost love and time gone by. The album ends with the dusky tones of "Nocturne". A translation for English speakers: "Calm at last, it's night and all is..." All is what? "All is... said" concludes Stephan Eicher. The album ends with a fanfare epilogue.

STEPHANE HERZOG

# Roland Zoss & Jimmy Flitz



No sooner has Roland Zoss started singing the rock-inflected chorus than the assembled four- to nine-year-olds join in unison: “Jimmy Flitz, Jimmy Flitz ...” Every child in German-speaking Switzerland is familiar with the adventures, sung in dialect, of mouse Jimmy Flitz and his animal friends. Zoss, from Berne, is one of a small number of children’s singer-songwriters in Switzerland – and probably the busiest of them all. Twenty years ago, he gave up his teaching job and decided to work as a children’s entertainer. This courageous move paid off. Through songs, concert tours, audio musical recordings, a Christmas musical and several picture and storybooks, Zoss has created a parallel children’s fantasy world. Cheeky but likeable mouse Jimmy Flitz, who lives in the spire of Berne Cathedral, is Zoss’s most popular character. Characterising Jimmy as a ‘Swiss mouse’ wearing a red-and-white-hooped pullover was a shrewd master stroke. Swiss Post issued a stamp in the mouse’s honour, while the Swiss tourist board Switzerland Tourism adopted Jimmy as its Swiss ‘ambassador’. “But it was on the Aeolian Islands that I noticed,” grins Zoss. Each year, the musician and author spends a few months on the archipelago situated off the north of Sicily. Zoss, a father himself, likes to do his bit for society. His works contain messages about friendship, self-confidence and environmental conservation. Xenegugeli the tousle-haired dinosaur teaches children the alphabet – the digital app is available in five languages. “Make sure you mention the app – your readers might be interested,” suggests Zoss, who has won prizes and collaborated with A-listers from the Swiss music scene. This summer will see Zoss turning 68, but he intends to continue giving concerts. A new Jimmy Flitz storybook is also due to be published. “I love doing what I do – it keeps me young,” he says in a pleasant baritone.

SUSANNE WENGER

## Jürg Müller bids farewell to “Swiss Review”

This edition is “Swiss Review” political editor Jürg Müller’s final curtain call. Relying on a deep knowledge of Swiss federal politics, Müller has spent the past seven years providing the Swiss Abroad with his expert and lucid take on the issues, and voting Sundays, that matter – always with the concerns and perspective of the ‘Fifth Switzerland’ in mind. This is no surprise, given his long track record (he was “Swiss Review” editor-in-chief himself in the 1980s). Müller is entering retirement. While we hope he enjoys his newfound freedom, we will certainly miss his input and expertise.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Setback for e-voting

The cantons of Basel-Stadt, Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Thurgau were unable to make the e-voting system available for the popular vote of 19 May 2019. Swiss Post, which developed and operates e-voting in these cantons, decided to withdraw the service, citing “critical errors” in the system’s source code. It identified these errors during tests designed to pinpoint weaknesses in the system. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad reacted to the outage with concern, saying that it amounted to a whole swathe of the Swiss expatriate community being “denied their democratic rights”.

(MUL)

## Yes to 1.3-billion-franc cohesion payment

Parliament has approved a new ‘cohesion’ payment worth 1.3 billion Swiss francs over ten years that is once again intended to help reduce economic and social disparities between old and new EU member states. The current uncertainty surrounding the framework agreement between Switzerland and the EU overshadowed the decision, following demands from various politicians for the funding to be released only on the proviso that Brussels make concessions on the deal.

(MUL)

## Environmental activist Franz Weber has died

Swiss activist Franz Weber died on 2 April 2019 aged 91. Weber, who launched countless national and international campaigns in his time, was one of the pioneers of nature, animal, landscape and cultural conservation. Two of his major battles included the fight against seal hunting and the protection of Alpine habitats (Second-Home Initiative). For a “Swiss Review” article about Franz Weber, please visit [www.ogy.de/franzweber](http://www.ogy.de/franzweber)

(SH)



Switzerland.

# Art Museums of Switzerland.

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Canton of Bern, ©Dominik Imhof

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