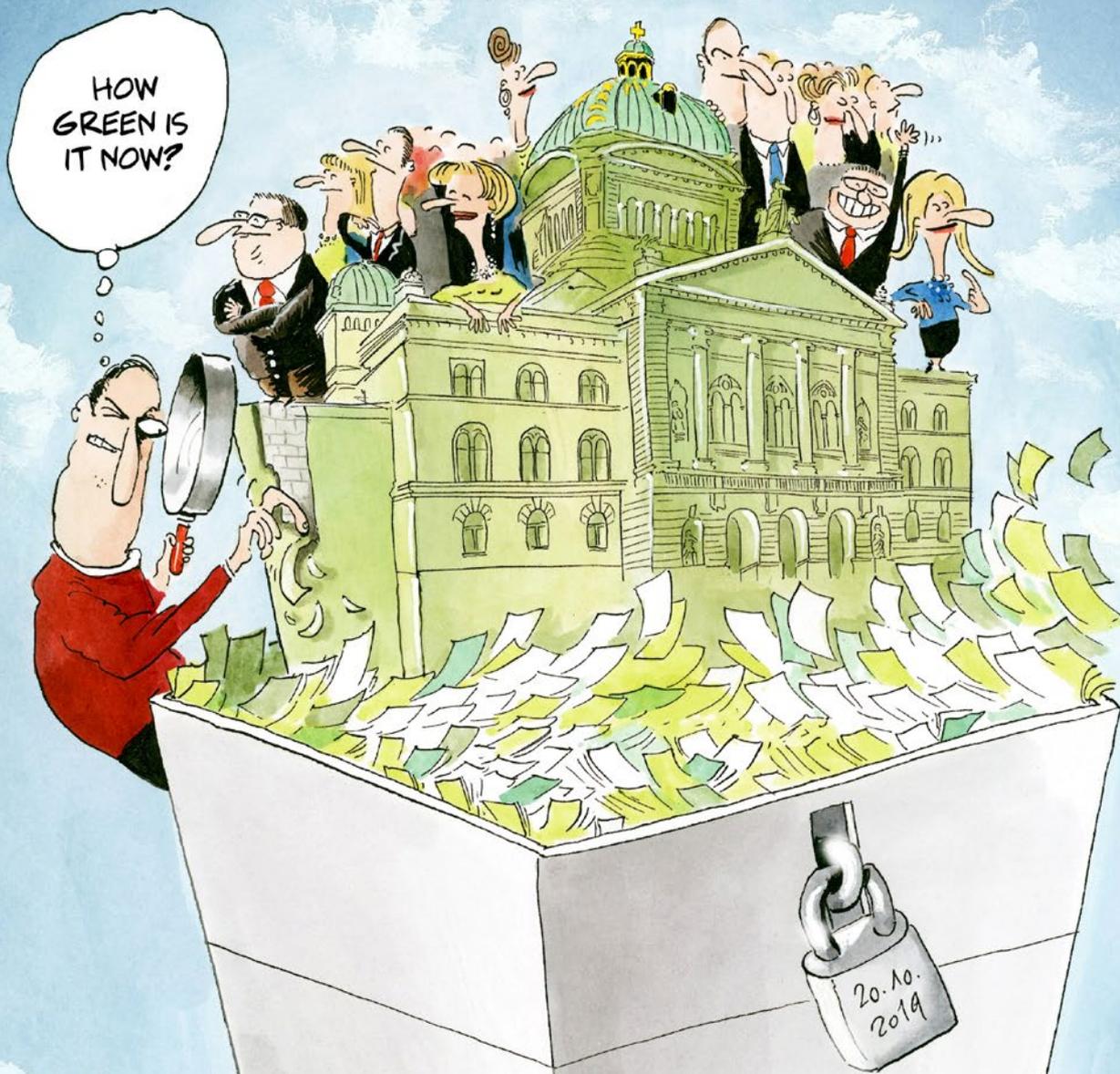


SWISS REVIEW⁺

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
November 2019



**All change in parliament –
greener, more women and more left-wing**

**No more interest on savings –
the spectre of negative interest rates**

**Nuclear decommissioning –
a challenge for the energy sector**

Max
Spring



Happy New Year!



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Buone Feste!
Happy Holidays!

We wish you lots of fun and good entertainment with the «Swiss Review» also in 2020.

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Switzerland's exoplanet discoverers win the Nobel Prize



Don't worry, I will come to the federal elections of 20 October 2019 in a moment. But first I want to turn to the place where Swiss politics happens, the Federal Palace itself. Did you know that the colour of its dome roof was originally a shimmering copper red when the building was completed in 1902? The copper slowly oxidised over four decades, gradually giving the dome a turquoise-green patina. The artisans

who carried out necessary renovations to the roof in 2007 used artificially aged copper to preserve the oxidised colour to which the nation had become so accustomed.

Parliament itself will have a very different, distinctly green, appearance when it reopens for business, courtesy of the dramatic gains made by the country's environmental parties at the ballot box. Superlatives are rare in Swiss politics, but we can use them now – this is a political shift of historic proportions. Never before in the last 100 years has a party gained more seats on election day than the Swiss Green Party. The resurgent Green Liberals also helped ensure this is the greenest parliament of all time.

The political green wave rolled in much faster than the pace of oxidation on the Federal Palace roof. The shift began before ballot papers had even been printed, as the previous parliament came around to supporting green ideas that no one thought would have had a chance at the beginning of the legislative term. For example, the National Council voted in favour of a climate tax on plane tickets this autumn. One year previously, the same National Council had vehemently opposed such a levy. Concerns surrounding the obvious impact of climate change have evidently hit home in Berne. The search for solutions is under way.

Not interested in elections? Perhaps we can engage you with our take on the crisis besetting savers. The Swiss virtue of putting money away for a rainy day is losing its lustre, because banks are barely paying interest anymore. Banks even charge savers fees for this zero-rate ignominy. Many in Switzerland shudder at the prospect of negative interest. No one really knows what the antidote is. "Swiss Review" has no answer either. But we hope you will enjoy and maybe even be enriched by our dedicated feature on page 16.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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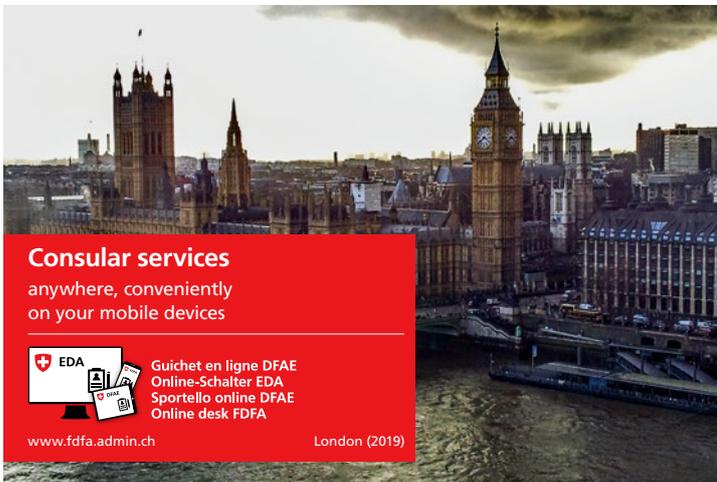
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No e-voting option available for the 2019 elections

E-voting was a really good, convenient option for us Swiss Abroad – unlike postal voting. I didn't even receive my voting papers at the last elections, which is a poor show. As a former politician at municipal level who now lives in Thailand as a Swiss expatriate, I still want to be able to exercise my right to vote. It is therefore imperative that my ballot papers arrive in time. But e-voting also needs to make a comeback. It is certainly more fraud-proof than postal voting, as I have experienced at first hand.

ARMIN THÜRIG, MAETANG CHIANGMAI, THAILAND

If the will had been there – and more pressure exerted – e-voting would already have been fully rolled out ages ago. Otherwise, you could make the same tired arguments about e-banking. If we can't have e-voting for the Swiss Abroad, then at least they should make sure that the voting papers arrive in time instead of weeks later! We expats also have the right to vote at federal level.

GIGI GEIGER, THAILAND

Mass tourism in Switzerland



It is indeed essential not to give in to greed when it comes to mass tourism. The key thing is not the potential income but preserving the authenticity of tourist destinations.

VINCENT PODER, FRANCE

We visit as often as we can now, and after retirement we plan to spend months each year in Switzerland. Luckily it is easy now to find Swiss food products in the USA, and the cheeses appear to be less expensive here than in Switzerland! That is always surprising to me.

PETER VOGEL, MEMPHIS, USA

Voting rights for Swiss Abroad under pressure

Why on earth should they question the right of the Swiss Abroad to vote? For me it would be like someone taking my Swiss passport away. It wasn't until I was 70 that I was able to vote. That was when they introduced postal voting. Since then I have voted every time. I subscribe to the NZZ to keep up to date, and have come to realise that Switzerland and Germany share much the same problems. Hence, I use my

own experiences to inform my voting decisions. I don't need my "own" national councillor. The choice of parties is wide enough for everyone. And because I'm always trying to explain things about Switzerland, the printed version of "Swiss Review" is indispensable. Plenty of people here take an interest in what is happening. I also intend to continue voting by post – pushing the envelope into the letterbox is almost like going to the ballot box

ELINOR KIRSCH, LIMBURG, GERMANY

Albert Bächtold, the "Klettgau Russian"

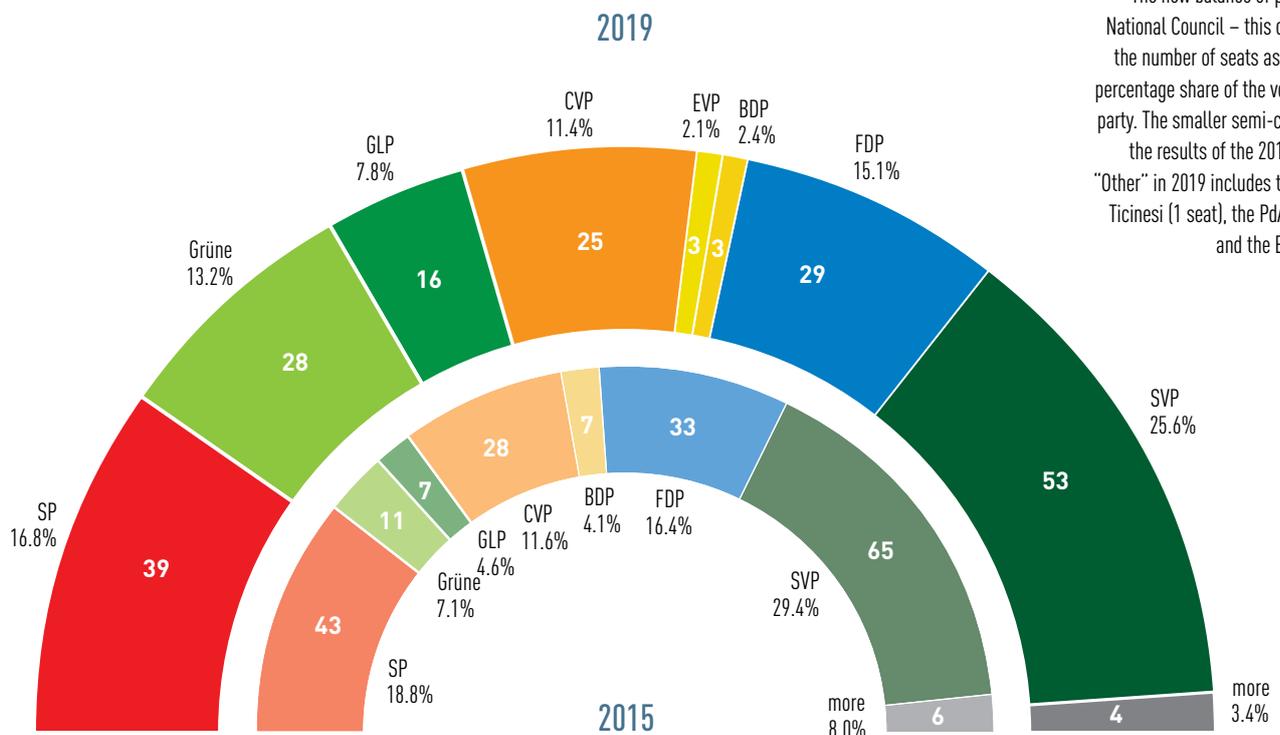
I honestly had tears in my eyes when I read your account about the Schaffhausen author Albert Bächtold. Memories of a bygone era came to mind. I was 16 and studying at commercial college in Zurich at the time. As I grew up in Schaffhausen, I used to take the train every day to Zurich and back with a girl I knew. One day in the train, we started talking to a gentleman who must have been aged around 50. He said he wrote books. We found this incredibly interesting, so we asked our German teacher to invite Mr Bächtold – that was his name – to do a book reading at our school. Mr Bächtold was more than happy to oblige, and, from then on, the two of us paid him frequent visits. We always had plenty of time after college before our train to Schaffhausen left at 6 p.m. "Let's call at Mr Bächtold's!" we would say. And off we went. I have fond memories of those visits. We would sit and listen intently as he reeled off stories about his interesting life. He was always delighted when we rang at his door – not just because the three of us all spoke in Schaffhausen dialect, but also because he was very lonely, I suspect.

MASCHA M. FISCH, MAYEN, GERMANY

"Swiss Review" in general

When I was 8 years old my parents left Switzerland due to the Great Depression. Once I reached adulthood I often returned to my home country to visit relatives, and bask in the beauty of Switzerland. I loved to eat cheese fondue, beef tartare and a wonderful loaf of Swiss bread. Now that I am 89 years old I cannot travel freely so I look forward to my copy of the "Swiss Review". Thank you for helping me keep in touch with my home country.

MICHEL P. BARBEZAT, CHICAGO, USA



The new balance of power in the National Council – this chart shows the number of seats as well as the percentage share of the vote for each party. The smaller semi-circle shows the results of the 2015 elections. “Other” in 2019 includes the Lega dei Ticinesi (1 seat), the PdAS (2 seats) and the EDU (1 seat).

Switzerland has been hit by a green wave

The green parties made unprecedented gains in the national elections. The new parliament will comprise far more women, and its make-up will be slightly younger and more left-leaning. Overall, the shift is dramatic. Voters from the “Fifth Switzerland” helped to drive this result.



MARC LETTAU

Stability and balance are such strong influences in Swiss political life that national elections rarely produce tectonic shifts. Yet political experts have had to resort to employing superlatives in the aftermath of the 2019 elections, as they unanimously cite a change of “historic proportions”.

What happened? Essentially, the electorate opted for environmental parties in greater numbers than ever before. The Swiss Green Party (the Greens) gained 17 seats in the National Council and now has 28 National Councillors. No party has made such a leap forward since 1919, with the Greens now one of the four strongest parties in terms of voting share (Percentage share of the votes: see diagram).

This result is notable for how consistent it is across the country, regardless of the linguistic divide. The Greens even made strong gains in Ticino. They also outdid the opinion polls by a considerable margin. National Councillor and Green fraction leader Balthasar Glättli (canton of Zurich) reacted to the spectacular result almost in disbelief: “I never expected this in my wildest dreams.” The gains of the centrist Green Liberal Party (the Green Liberals), who ended up with more than twice as many seats as previously, made

for a green win-win. With a combined total of 44 seats in the National Council, the Greens and the Green Liberals now wield considerable clout on environmental issues. The ongoing climate debate was certainly a driving factor behind the power shift. Forget elections to the National Council and the Council of States – “climate elections” was instead the term on everyone’s lips.

Parliament is now greener than the results would suggest

Indeed, the success of the two green parties at the ballot box is only part of the story, because the “green wave” had already begun rolling in before the elections. The writing was on the wall from the outset. Take the Liberals (FDP), whose stance on a number of important environmental issues suddenly turned greener towards the end of the election campaign. For example, they announced in autumn that they were in favour of introducing an environmental tax on plane tickets, whereas previously they had tried to scupper this green levy. The party lost four National Council seats, yet the outcome might have been worse without

this about-turn. A poor showing from the Swiss People's Party (SVP), which railed consistently against "climate hysteria", shows what could have happened. The SVP lost as many as twelve seats but remains Switzerland's strongest political party. These losses are not only due to the SVP's attempt to ride out the climate debate, but are also down to the party's key messages on migration and the EU falling on much less receptive ears than four years ago.

Parliament has shifted only slightly to the left

All four parties in government – SVP, FDP, CVP and SP – were punished at the ballot box. The SP, which sees itself as green by nature, was hit hard, evidently losing votes to parties that are green by name. Although the Greens more than offset the SP's losses with their emphatically left-wing social policies, the upsurge of the Green Liberals means that the new parliament will primarily be much greener but not considerably more left-leaning.

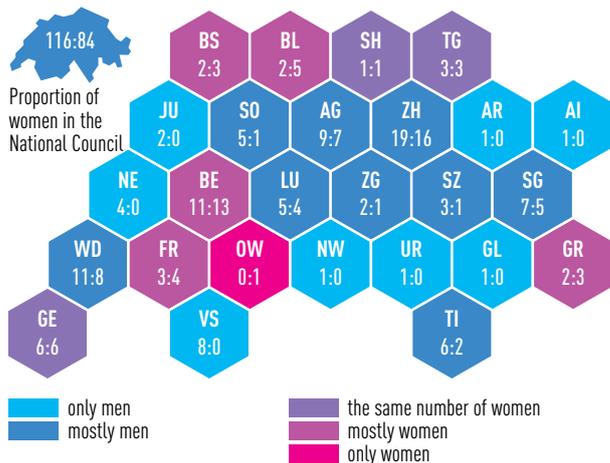
This could have a liberating effect on political discourse in Berne, as the bloc mentality of left and right wing loses significance. The combined green parties will constitute a third pole on environmental issues, while the centrist CVP, still a strong force despite election losses, will focus increasingly on striking compromises with the various power bases.

Many more women in parliament

Besides climate issues, the national women's strike in June also had an impact on the election results. The proportion of women in the National Council has risen from 32 to 42 per cent – a sizeable contingent even by international standards. Never has the number of elected females increased as much since the introduction of women's suffrage in 1971 – a result not even the initiators of the Helve-

Proportion of women in the National Council

Male-to-female ratio



Green trend includes the Council of States

At the time of going to press, the make-up of the Council of States was still undetermined. There will be a second round of voting in 14 cantons. Nevertheless, the elections to the small chamber can also be viewed as a clear success for the Green Party, regardless of the deciding ballot. Having already captured two seats courtesy of new face Céline Vara in Neuchâtel and Mathias Zopfi in Glarus, the party is well placed to win the run-off in at least four cantons (Berne, Basel-Landschaft, Geneva, Vaud). In particular, newcomer Mathias Zopfi caused a stir in the traditionally conservative canton of Glarus by winning his seat at the expense of the established SVP, which now has no representatives in Glarus. (MUL)



Mathias Zopfi
Glarus sensation – Green newcomer Zopfi ousted the SVP's Werner Hösli from the Council of States.

tia is calling! women's movement dared hope was possible (see page 8).

Parliament is slightly more youthful

Not only has Berne become decidedly greener, notably more feminine and a little bit more left-wing, but the average age in parliament has also fallen. Many of the newly elected MPs are relatively young. This is partly down to first-time voters, who in post-election surveys expressed scant regard for what some of the more established National Councillors may have accomplished in the past. A total of 30 MPs of every political persuasion consequently lost their seats. These include prominent trade unionists such as Corrado Pardini (SP, canton of Berne) as well as the two linchpins of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce, Jean-François Rime (SVP, canton of Fribourg) and Hans-Ulrich Bigler (FDP, canton of Zurich).



Regula Rytz
The Bernese National Councillor brought home a double victory – one for the Greens and one for women.

The Swiss Abroad doubled down

It would be fair to say that voters in the "Fifth Switzerland" amplified the major trends in this election. Initial surveys showed they were particularly keen on the colour green. A quarter of all votes from abroad (25.2%) went to the Green Party, who consequently overtook former front runners, the SP (17.1%), as well as the SVP (17.8%) to become the strongest party in the "Fifth Switzerland".

Incidentally, with e-voting unavailable, voter turnout among Swiss living abroad plummeted. In cantons that offered e-voting for the 2015 elections, the participation rate among Swiss Abroad fell by up to a third. Voting dropped from 31.8 to 21.4% in the canton of Geneva, from 32.1 to 23.4% in Lucerne, from 26.0 to 19.2% in Basel-Stadt, from 29.7 to 24.9% in Neuchâtel, and from 28.5 to 22.6% in Thurgau. These figures are bound to reignite the debate on e-voting.



Corrado Pardini
A generational shift claimed 30 casualties across the political spectrum, including trade unionist Pardini (SP, canton of Berne).

“Swiss democracy is improving in quality”

At 42 per cent, the National Council now contains more women than ever before. The Helvetia is calling! cross-party campaign masterminded by Switzerland’s women’s associations played a significant role in this regard. Project manager Jessica Zuber explains why the election results are historic.

The National Council – the large chamber – comprises 200 members, of which 84 are now female. The proportion of women has risen from 32 to 42 per cent. Female representation in the Council of States – the small chamber – will be a lot lower. But, as Jessica Zuber says, “It is an historic election for women.” Zuber, a political scientist, headed the Helvetia is calling! campaign by Alliance F, the umbrella organisation of Swiss women’s associations. She notes that Swiss women, who only gained the right to vote in

1971, have increased their parliamentary presence in baby steps over the past decades. “The increments were always three to four percentage points,” she says. Voters have now elected almost a quarter more women to parliament – a record for left-wing and conservative camps alike. “Swiss democracy is improving in quality, because men and women are now more equally represented,” Zuber adds. It is fair to say that this result had been anticipated. Never before have so many women stood for election. Women

“These were the climate elections”

Apart from the scientific facts, the election success of the green parties should be motivation for Switzerland to pursue more ambitious climate targets. This is the view of Swiss climatologist Sonia Seneviratne, who has some recommended reading for the newly elected parliament.

Sonia Seneviratne believes that the tremendous increase in seats and voting share achieved by the green parties is due to the Swiss people realising that something urgently needs to be done about climate change. “These were definitely the climate elections,” she says. Seneviratne hails from the canton of Vaud and is currently Professor for Land-Climate Dynamics at ETH Zurich. She is also a lead author of reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that warn about the severe consequences



“The SP needs a return to pro-European values”

We now need fresh impetus to break the impasse over Europe, says Thomas Cottier, chairman of the Switzerland in Europe association, who views the election results as a hint to the Social Democratic Party (SP) that it should stop trying to obstruct progress on a framework deal with the EU.

It is hard to tell at this early stage what impact the elections will have on Swiss EU policy, as not all parties in the election campaign were clear on whether Switzerland should sign the framework agreement with the EU that has been on the table for months. This is due to sticky issues such as wage protection. “The clock is ticking,” says Thomas Cottier, Professor Emeritus of European and International Economic Law at the University of Berne and chairman of the pro-EU Switzerland in Europe association. Cottier recommends that the Federal Council and the newly

elected parliament “take their cue from voters”, who handed a rebuke to Switzerland’s most EU-sceptic party, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP). Not only is the SVP against the framework agreement, it also wants to put an end to freedom of movement through its limitation initiative. “But this policy of obstruction was rejected at the ballot box,” says Cottier, explaining that the Green Liberals (GLP), a party emphatically in favour of the framework agreement, emerged stronger from the elections. “The seat gains for the GLP can be viewed as an endorsement of this stance,” he says. Cottier inter-



also stood a better chance of being elected from their lists than in 2015. Helvetia is calling! was actively involved in around a thousand local party sections across the country, motivating and supporting hundreds of female candidates on the campaign trail. Helvetia called – and was heard. Now was clearly the right time. Zuber believes that several factors prove this, not least the women’s strike in June that attracted hundreds of thousands of people. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority in parliament

chose to elect two women to the Federal Council one year ago. Regardless of party differences, greater female representation could also have a tangible impact on the political agenda, says Zuber. Examples include policies to promote work-family balance, combat gun violence and tackle environmental issues. Zuber stresses that the Helvetia is calling! campaign will continue beyond the elections: “Our aim is equal gender representation in both chambers.” (SWE)

of global warming. The Federal Council recently tightened the country’s climate targets on the basis of these findings, announcing that Switzerland must aim for climate neutrality and reduce net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. Before the elections, the Council of States approved a revised CO₂ Act that proposes a surcharge on the price of petrol as well as a levy on air tickets. We will soon see what a greener National Council thinks about this, and whether voters are prepared to swallow the new

taxes. “There is a good chance that Swiss climate policy will become more ambitious,” says Seneviratne, who thinks the Federal Council’s targets are realistic, not radical. Switzerland, a highly developed country, has committed in the Paris Agreement to do its bit against climate change, and green taxes are a socially acceptable means of going about it, she explains. “And you can refund these contributions by reducing health insurance premiums, for example.” In particular, the climatologist recommends

that members of the newly elected parliament read the IPCC special report on global warming, which details the climate risks of exceeding the 1.5°C threshold. “I would even suggest that we begin discussing whether we want to make Switzerland carbon-neutral by as early as 2040,” she adds. (SWE)

prets the losses for the SP as a sign that people want the left-wing party to return to its traditional pro-European values. For example, prominent trade unionists who had recently expressed their opposition to the framework deal lost their seats. If the SP grabbed the bull by the horns and took the lead, he believes that a big “coalition of common sense” could come together in the same way that it did to oppose the SVP’s limitation initiative. This is the only way to preserve and develop the bilateral agreements, which are important for the economy and the country as a whole,



says Cottier: “Swiss who live in EU countries also need legal certainty.” The Europe expert wants the Federal Council and parliament to take other things into account besides domestic considerations. “The geopolitical climate has changed,” he says. In the coming years, Switzerland will become much more dependent on stable relations with the EU, he believes. (SWE)



Turn off the light and be lit up by the stars

Switzerland has its first star park, an area where special care is taken to preserve the darkness of the night. This is much more than a romantic project.

MARC LETTAU

One thing is for sure: the Ottenleuebad hamlet on a sunny mountain slope in the municipality of Guggisberg (BE) is not exciting. It may have been in the past. A health spa was opened there in 1886, i.e. a slightly infamous wellness and pleasure facility. However, the thriving, sensual bathing culture of that time has completely disappeared. Nowadays, it is truly unspectacular once more: a few farms and weekend homes, grazing cows, and circling birds of prey. Occasionally, you can hear a dog barking. Sometimes a mushroom picker wanders past. The peaks of the Bernese-Fribourg alpine foothills tower over the southern horizon. Gantrisch, Bürglen, Ochsen, Kaiseregg. This pre-alpine world forms the Gantrisch Nature Park.

Take the fuse out

The only thing which stands out in Ottenleuebad today is the large number of small observatories. On moonless nights, the area seems to attract stargazers, and their numbers will probably increase further. That is because, although the nights have already been quite dark up to now, they

have been a shade darker since 30 August 2019. That was when Guggisberg's mayor, Hanspeter Schneiter, unscrewed the electrical fuse of Ottenleuebad's few streetlights without further ado. As they say in the area, it was "as dark as the inside of a cow" afterwards.

The Milky Way is visible to the naked eye

Schneiter made it dark because the sparsely populated, remote region had seen the light. The night is disappearing everywhere, but not in Ottenleuebad where you can still see the Milky Way on clear nights. That is no longer possible in the Swiss urban areas because of the omnipresent artificial light. The night-time darkness has therefore become something special in areas where it still exists at all. For this reason, large portions of the Gantrisch Nature Park have been designated a star park, i.e., an area where the night is protected.

Those in charge at the Gantrisch Nature Park have been planning the very first Swiss star park for years (see "Review" 5/2016 for further information). It has not been an easy road, says project manager Nicole Dahinden:



den: "You first need to understand the importance of the night." However, now she is excited by "the dark heart" of the star park, i.e. the 100 square kilometres of the large core zone in the central area of the Nature Park that is well shielded by the mountains.

The light comes from the outside

As Dahinden knows, a dark heart does not remain that way when everything around it depends on illumination. The star park, this little Swiss chamber of darkness, cannot become even darker by itself: "Light enters the park from the outside." So, cities in particular have to combat light pollution.



“They have to cut down on unnecessary light,” she says. The amount of light pollution in Switzerland is enormous: “The price of lighting objects at times when no one is looking at them is lost energy, sleeplessness and the loss of animal species.” Municipalities in the vicinity of the “dark heart” of the star park are already working on this and have undertaken to use less artificial light. Furthermore, they are directing companies to turn off their display window lighting after 10 p.m. And if private citizens want to build, they are told how they too can contribute to the fight against light smog. Gantrisch Nature Park wants to become a competence region for sustainable lighting over the long term.

Lukas Schuler, President of Dark-Sky Switzerland, is very taken by the first star park. The organisation has been campaigning against light smog in Switzerland for years. “The star park project is helping to retain night in



The Milky Way stretches like a glittering band from the horizon between the Gantrisch and Bürgeln mountains right across the entire night sky. Photo: Bernhard Burn

the alpine range,” says Schuler. Many people are aware that light pollution harms animals and human beings. However, many places have no idea what they can do to combat it. “The star park project now means that the municipalities can control and change more in regard to night-time darkness than they were aware of in the past.”

Insects stay away

The star park is far more than a romantic project for night-time enthusiasts. It has been scientifically evaluated for years as it was being developed. There are already new findings on the essence of the night.

Hanspeter Schneiter unscrews the fuses – and it turns pitch-dark. Photo: provided



Researcher Eva Knop and Dark-Sky activist Lukas Schuler observe an artificial light experiment in the star park. Photo: Marc Lettau

That is also necessary, says Eva Knop, a researcher at the University of Zurich and the Swiss Confederation's Centre of Excellence for agricultural research, Agroscope: "We still do not know enough about the ecological importance of the night." It is true that life as we know it couldn't even exist without the day-night cycles. However, we are only just starting to understand what happens when the night disappears. For example, Knop came to understand through her field research just how much artificial night light affects biodiversity. In the past, we did not see just how much occurs in the meadows at night, she says. A surprising number of insects pollinate flowers at night. "They do this a lot less when artificial light disturbs them," says Knop. Insects that are active during the day are not capable of compensating for the absence of nocturnal pollinators. If the subsequent experiments substantiate these initial findings, then this would unfortunately be a "new problem to address", says Knop.

Clarity instead of bravery

In light of the seriousness of the situation, Mayor Hanspeter Schneider was also praised for his bravery in unscrewing fuses and prescribing more darkness for his municipality. Schneider waves that aside: "Bravery changes nothing at all. But the power of persuasion may do." This can only happen when the people living here understand the importance of a star park. Thus, a great deal depends on the principle of hope and mutual encouragement. When asked whether the "dark heart" would one day see more circumspect handling of the night beyond its limited borders, Dahinden responds: "It is written in the stars."

Further information on the topic:
www.sternenpark-gantrisch.ch
www.ogy.de/nachtdunkelheit
www.darksky.org; www.darksky.ch

About Emmas, lightning strikes and waste

30.7

Statistics back the claim that women are having children later in life. The average age of Swiss women on the birth of their first child is currently 30.7 years. In Europe, only Spain and Italy have a slightly higher average age.

504

A propos births: of the 42,838 girls born in Switzerland last year, 504 were called Emma and now there are more than 41,500 Emmas in Switzerland. The only name more popular is Maria (82,500). The most popular name for boys in 2018 was Liam. However, Liam is (still) a minority name: the Swiss prefer traditional names like Daniel (62,500), Peter (58,500) and Thomas (52,500).

85,270

There were 85,270 lightning strikes recorded in Switzerland during June, July and August this year. That is an unusually high number. By way of comparison, the electronic monitoring network recorded 53,430 strikes in summer 2018. Ticino was the main lightning hotspot.

24,849

How many kilometres do the Swiss cover in a year? On average 24,849 km. The most common mode of transport is the car (10,371 km), followed by the aeroplane (8,986 km) and the train (3,499 km). On foot the distance covered is 459 km, and by bike it is 301 km. It is interesting to note that holidays and leisure pursuits account for far more kilometres than commuting to work.

706

The Swiss recycle or compost more than half their waste every year. At the same time, the volume of their waste is on the rise, with 706 kg of municipal waste per person, per year. That is a lot higher than the European average of 486 kg.

“Robbed of all privacy” – internees at Bellechasse detention centre in Fribourg Photo:

Fribourg cantonal archives



Locked up in Switzerland for being poor and socially undesirable

Until 1981, the authorities institutionalised tens of thousands of men and women throughout Switzerland without a trial. An Expert Commission has now appraised these “administrative detentions”. The findings run contrary to the country’s self-image.

SUSANNE WENGER

“Administrative justice is one of the most appalling things you can imagine.” That was the opinion of an observer in 1939, who was widely quoted by the Independent Expert Commission (IEC) eighty years later: Bernese writer and reformer, Carl Albert Loosli. While criminals had a right to a trial, the reality was very different for people who were interred by the welfare authorities and other administrative bodies, he complained. Swiss institutions contained “state slaves abandoned to the whims

of the authorities”. And the most astounding aspect: “Nobody cared.”

Loosli, the illegitimate son of a farmer’s daughter, was admitted to a juvenile correction facility as a young man. However, critical voices such as his clashed with the system for a long time. It was not until 1981 that the cantons repealed their administrative detention laws and the federal government revised the Civil Code. In the meantime, the social welfare system had professionalised, and society had become more liberal after 1968. However, the decisive factor was interna-

tional pressure. Switzerland’s practice of depriving younger and older adults of their liberty at a stroke of the pen was incompatible with the previously ratified European Convention on Human Rights.

A “house of the other Switzerland”

Innocent victims who had spent time in jail were not rehabilitated. They also initially kept silent out of shame. “We dealt with the stigma of having spent time in a house of correction, but we were never criminals,” says Ursula Biondi. As a young woman she now 69-year-old was “administratively detained” in Hindelbank prison for re-education, as it was known in bureaucratic terms (see page 14). After the turn of the century, some courageous individuals, including Biondi, began to tell their stories. The media showed interest, and the topic found its way onto the political agenda. Between 2011 and 2016, there

were two federal apologies, a Rehabilitation Act and a parliamentary resolution to organise a solidarity contribution for victims of all compulsory social measures. Besides administrative detainees, former contract children, institutionalised children and people who were forcibly sterilised demanded recognition of and redress for their suffering (“Swiss Review” 5/2018).

The Federal Council appointed an independent expert commission (IEC) to examine the administrative detentions in particular. More than thirty researchers were involved in the work. After four years’ work, the commission has published ten volumes in the last few months, including portraits of victims. This autumn they presented their final report and recommended further rehabilitation

measures, ranging from additional financial payments to the victims through to the suggestion that a House of the Other Switzerland be set up as a place to raise awareness about these processes. The Swiss Justice Minister, Karin Keller-Sutter, accepted the recommendations. A decision also needs to be made on whether to extend the elapsed deadline for the solidarity contribution of 25,000 francs per person. This could see further victims making contact, along with those who live abroad and have not so far lodged a claim.

Fight for justice

Ursula Biondi was 17 years old when she was sent to Hindelbank prison. She had not committed any crime. Rather she was admitted by the Zurich Guardianship Department to a “closed reform school” because she had fallen pregnant as a minor. The fun-loving girl had previously been put into a girls’ home, which she ran away from several times. While still at home, she argued with her parents about going out, fashion and music. Her Italian father did not want to be viewed in a negative light by the authorities due to his citizenship application, so her parents agreed to a second placement for their daughter. They did not know that the “reform school” was a women’s prison that also housed criminals. Ursula was not able to get an education there. When she gave birth to her son, the authorities took him away and forced her to give him up for adoption. But she fought back and her baby was returned to her three months later. After a year in Hindelbank, where she was forced to work in the laundry, she was released in 1968. She moved to the anonymity of Geneva, had a family, worked in the IT department of a UN organisation and in the social field. “I was fortunate,” she says, “but that was hard-earned”. Biondi was severely traumatised. The fear of being exposed as a former Hindelbank inmate worried her for a long time. The injustice that she suffered haunted her. Biondi published her life story in 2002; it was picked up by the magazine “Beobachter”. She has been closely involved in the appraisal and redress of the “administrative detentions” for years. The term is belittling, she warns: “It hides a horrific cruel bureaucratic arbitrariness.” She sees the report of the expert committee as valuable. But one thing still worries the dedicated campaigner who was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2013 by the University of Fribourg. Due to the extremely late rehabilitation of the former “detainees”, the following generation has never known just



Ursula Biondi in prison attire in 1967. The then young mother was banished to a detention centre. Photo: private/provided



Ursula Biondi had the courage to write a book about her story.

Photo: Jos Schmid

what freedoms they had to fight for. “We were still sanctioned with prison for ways of life that are now widely accepted,” says Biondi who gives talks at schools so that people today remain vigilant against official arbitrariness.

Repression in the constitutional state

The Expert Commission’s report contains four hundred pages of historical knowledge, and it holds a mirror up to the country. There is no other way to put it: until recently, Switzerland was actually an uncomfortable, even repressive place for the marginalised, the poor and non-conformists in society. There was a real second class and very few people were concerned by it. In a nutshell, the most important findings of the IEC are as follows:

- At least 60,000 people were administratively detained in 650 institutions in the 20th century. The number is higher than expected. Locking people up without a criminal conviction was not just an aberration of Swiss law; there was an actual system.
- The lower class in particular attracted the attention of administrative justice: the poor and the marginalised without permanent employment, social or family networks. However, those who were part of minority groups such as the Yenish were also detained, along with increasing numbers of rebellious young people after the Second World War.
- The decision to institutionalise was made by militia bodies: municipal

councils, communal welfare committees and legal guardians. Tradespeople, housewives and bookkeepers all decided the fate of their fellow citizens in the evenings after work. Regional councillors and government officials were also involved. The step was justified by welfare and educational goals, or as a means to protect society. Moral assessments and traditional gender images were prevalent in the judgments. Men, who made up 80 per cent of the detainees, were accused of being work-shy and alcoholics; women were accused of licentiousness.

■ Some of the many institutions in Switzerland had multiple purposes, which resulted in administrative detainees living in jails under the same roof as convicted criminals. Detainees were also admitted to forced labour facilities, labour colonies, reform schools, alcohol rehabilitation facilities, and workhouses. In the under-equipped, badly supervised institutions, men had to do physical labour outside, while women were put to work in the household. Forced labour was either badly paid or not paid at all.

■ The life-changing experience of institutionalisation also affected victims after they were released, often for the rest of their lives. Some suffered a nervous breakdown, while others emigrated. Some of them are still living in precarious conditions to this day. The authorities did not succeed in their goal of integrating “vulnerable persons” into society. The detainments actually increased the problems and marginalisation.

Unjust even back then

From today’s perspective, the attacks on personal freedom seem extreme; the welfare measures brutal. However, these were different times and the detainments were based on laws. Did they only become unjust with hind-

Flight to the foreign legion

Peter Paul Moser was 21 years old when he was administratively detained in 1947 by the Grisons’ guardianship authority in the Herdern labour colony, canton of Thurgau. The young man did not understand the drastic measure; he had been working as a showman’s assistant and before that in a factory. As he was of Yenish origin, the authorities had been on his trail for some time. As a small child, the Pro-Juventute aid organisation Kinder der Landstrasse had separated him from his family and placed him in an orphanage. The goal was to turn the children of travelling folk into settled citizens. Later, his guardian, aid worker Alfred Siegfried, placed him in a foster family on a farm. Siegfried was a convicted paedophile, which highlighted the unbelievable double standard. In his three-volume autobiography, Moser later wrote: “Separation from one’s family heralded the start of the persecution of a member of an ethnic minority: attacks on the human sphere, discrimination, loss of freedom, detentions, admission to labour colonies, through to deprivation of liberty in a closed institution with the intention of destroying an entire

ethnic group.” With the help of his employer, he initially escaped internment in 1947. Out of fear, he crossed the Swiss border in Geneva and applied to join the Foreign Legion in Annecy, France. The police returned him to Switzerland, where the authorities again admitted him to the labour colony. However, Moser ran away again and got a job in a machine factory. On the way there, his guardian had him arrested and transported to Bellechasse Prison in the canton of Fribourg. He describes the regime there as inhuman. After he was discharged from the prison, his guardian placed him on a farm and forbade him from marrying. It was not until the 1950s that Moser was able to escape their clutches and start a family. Later, he got involved in the association Naschet Jenische for the appraisal and redress of the systematic removal of the children of travelling folk. Moser lived to hear the apology to the Yenish folk given by the Federal Council in 1986; however, not his own rehabilitation as an administrative detainee. He passed away of a heart attack at the age of 77 in 2003.

sight? Not according to the Commission. The detainment laws were leveraged on applicable laws and constitutional principles. People were often detained indefinitely, not listened to, often locked up without any legal ruling; in many places, there was no possibility of legal recourse to an independent court. The laws were also vague, which allowed the authorities to interpret them flexibly. Initially, the admissions to institutions were a cheap way for the state to manage the poor. However, over the course of the 20th century, they became instruments of social control. Throughout the country, people knew that whoever strayed from the path of common decency risked losing their liberty. It was not only the authorities who were actively locking up people. The researchers also determined that the measures were often prompted by family, neighbours, priests or teachers. They talk of “marginalisation practices that were deeply rooted in Swiss society”.

This is probably another reason why the detainment laws lasted so long. Switzerland’s social-political backwardness also played a part: supportive social insurance benefits were introduced to the Confederation later than in other European countries. Whatever the case, it is now officially time to reconcile the self-image of Switzerland – a country of geraniums, prosperity, freedom and direct democracy – with its other side. The remembrance work will be important, says IEC member Thomas Huonker who was one of the first historians to research the forced interventions. He emphasises: “Just as the wonderful story of Wilhelm Tell is retold over and over, the murky chapter of Switzerland’s abusive administrative care measures also has to be retold time and again”.

The ten volumes of the Expert Commission are available free of charge online:
www.uek-administrative-versorgungen.ch

No interest for savers

Saving money for a rainy day is a very Swiss virtue. However, savers have little to cheer about at present. The interest on their savings accounts has never been so low. Their assets are simply stagnating.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

In May of this year, the big Swiss bank UBS spooked savers by announcing that account holders would no longer receive any interest on their savings. This was unprecedented, as the public had always been rewarded with interest for entrusting their money to banks. Benjamin Manz, managing director of the Swiss banking and insurance comparison website moneyland.ch, believes that UBS has turned the accepted wisdom of savings returns upside down. “Zero per cent interest basically means that it no longer pays to save.”

But UBS is not alone. Interest rates are at record lows at all Swiss banks, where the average rate of interest on savings accounts is 0.05 per cent. According to moneyland.ch, the average interest rate on personal accounts is 0.00



Generations of Swiss learned how to save money from an early age. Record-low interest rates have now made saving almost irrelevant.

per cent (September 2019). Interest rates in Switzerland have never been this low. “The current low level of nominal and real interest rates is unprecedented,” writes Peter Kugler, Professor of Economics at the University of Basel, in an essay for the economic magazine “Die Volkswirtschaft”.

Extremely low interest, coupled with inflation and the various fees that many banks have introduced, have resulted in savings effectively losing value. “It is no longer

worth having your money tucked away in a conventional savings account,” says Karl Flubacher of VZ Vermögens-Zentrum in Basel, adding that many Swiss are concerned by this. “Saving is a big issue in our consultations.” So what will happen to saving – this quintessentially Swiss attribute – if the incentive to save has gone?

Job security is vital

Theory number one: When personal assets lose value, people just start spending more. Wrong, says André Bähler, head of politics and economics at the Swiss Consumer Protection Foundation, who believes that the nation’s economic health is the main factor influencing consumer behaviour among savers. In his view, job security has a much more direct effect on consumer habits than low interest rates. “If I know that I will still be in a job tomorrow, my behaviour as a consumer will be different to what it would be if my work situation was unclear – not that the current interest rate climate isn’t having any effect at all, I hasten to add.”

Desire for alternatives remains limited

Theory number two: Faced with record-low interest rates, the Swiss are looking to other forms of saving and investing. Benjamin Manz of moneyland.ch explains that the average Swiss saver is reluctant to experiment. “We are still waiting for alternative investments to catch on properly in this country. The Swiss are risk-averse. Only rarely will they try a different approach.” However, he does not rule out the possibility of a behavioural change in the future.

Are we hiding more money under the mattress?

Theory number three: Instead of looking to alternative forms of investment, more Swiss savers are withdrawing their money – and stashing it under the proverbial mattress. There are no fresh figures to support this hypothesis, but a survey carried out by the Swiss National Bank in 2017 provides some clues. Back then, the SNB wanted to know why people chose to hide their monetary assets in this way. Seven per cent of those questioned – anything but a sizeable contingent – said they had resorted to this tactic in order to save money and/or because they were



A thrifty lifestyle

The 23-year-old Zurich-based financial blogger Thomas Kovacs lives a minimalist, economical lifestyle aimed at achieving maximum financial freedom.

Thomas Kovacs is 23 and, notwithstanding this tender age, has already thought long and hard about money and how to economise. He has even produced a public chronicle of his journey so far – on a financial blog and YouTube channel called “Der Sparkojote” (“The Thrifty Coyote”). Kovacs was only 17 when he opened his own online game shop. Since then, he has amassed assets worth 182,000 francs. The 23-year-old invests in the stock market and lives off the money from his online shop, his blog and his YouTube channel. His outgoings are no more than 2,000 francs a month. This hard-working, disciplined minimalist chooses not to spend money on expensive fashion, luxurious holidays, restaurant meals, or nights out. “Because none of this enhances my quality of life.”

He openly shares details of all his investments and finances in his blog and videos. Ultimately, his aim is to gain financial freedom and live the way he wants. “I like to focus on what really matters in life. Saving money is a by-product of this approach.” He learned a lot at school, Kovacs explains, but nothing about what he calls “the most important life skill”: managing money – a quality that is actually becoming essential, he believes, not least with advancing age and in the current interest rate climate. Each of Kovacs’s uploaded videos attract several thousand clicks, especially from 18- to 30-year-old men – an indication of how much his message is also engaging young people.

(GUM)

scared of negative interest rates. The authors of the survey therefore concluded, “The low interest rate environment does not appear to be a major motivation for people to keep money at home or in safe-deposit boxes.” Admittedly, interest rates have fallen further and bank charges have continued to rise since the survey was published.

“Many don’t and can’t save at all”

Based on the above, we can assume that the Swiss have not (yet) changed their savings behaviour despite the low interest rates. Academic findings underpin this view. For example, a study on German savers by the Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW) revealed that the average citizen had until now barely changed his or her savings behaviour as a result of low interest rates. However, Flubacher of VZ VermögensZentrum believes that the actual reason for this may be quite simple: “Many don’t and can’t save at all,” he says. Indeed, the ZEW study points to a specific group of people who are in fact changing their approach and investing in securities: young, wealthy, risk-tolerant men (see feature on page 17).

Finally, another finding indicates how concerned many savers are despite the fact that little in their behaviour has changed to date: more than a third of those surveyed said that they would withdraw their money from the bank if negative interest on savings was introduced across the board. But what they would do with all the cash remains to be seen.

Decommissioning Mühleberg

At the end of 2019, Mühleberg will become the first-ever Swiss nuclear power plant to be switched off permanently. The pioneering work of decommissioning the plant will take around 15 years. The question remains of where the high-level radioactive waste can be securely stored for tens of thousands of years.

THEODORA PETER

At exactly 12.30 p.m. on 20 December, some 20 kilometres west of Berne, the on-duty technicians in the control room of the Mühleberg nuclear power plant will press two buttons. Control rods will be inserted into the reactor and the nuclear chain reaction stopped. After 47 years in operation, Mühleberg – the second oldest of Switzerland's four nuclear power stations – will then be off the grid for good.

This will not yet allay the risk of a nuclear accident, but within three days of the switch-off the temperature and pressure inside the reactor will have dropped to such an extent as to preclude an explosion. Nevertheless, a devastating meltdown will theoretically still be possible. Independently operated, earthquake-proof cooling systems are designed to prevent this from occurring.

The 15-year process of decommissioning will begin on 6 January 2020. First, the highly radioactive fuel elements will be moved from the reactor to the adjacent storage pool, where they will stay for a few years to cool down before being transported bit by bit to the interim storage facility for radioactive waste in Würenlingen (canton of Aargau). This will be done by 2024. However, Mühleberg will not be completely free of radiation until 2031. Before then the parts of the plant with a low level of radioactivity will also have to be removed in addition to building debris. The decommissioning should then be fully completed by 2034. Whether this piece of the land by the River Aare is returned to green meadow remains to be seen.

Low electricity prices make nuclear energy uneconomical

It was for economic reasons that the Bernese energy group BKW decided in autumn 2013 to shut down the Mühleberg nuclear power plant. Low prices on the electricity market and the high cost of necessary upgrades meant that continuing with the plant simply made no sense. Building a new reactor was no longer an option either, with the Federal Council having introduced a moratorium on new nuclear plants and approved the transition towards renewable energy following the 2011 Fukushima reactor disaster. News that nuclear power would be phased out came as a shock for the 300 or so workers at Mühleberg. Yet most of these staff remained on board and are now giving the last rites to a technology that they used to regard as having a future.

BKW is entering uncharted territory in this, the first-ever decommissioning of a Swiss power reactor. By moving quickly to acquire a number of German companies specialised in nuclear technology and radiation protection, it has equipped itself with the necessary exper-

tise. The group hopes to gain valuable experience from dismantling Mühleberg, because the decommissioning of nuclear power plants could well gain traction abroad. Germany intends to phase out nuclear power completely by 2022, while plant closures are also on the agenda in other European countries.

Waste remains hazardous for hundreds of thousands of years

It will cost 927 million francs for BKW to decommission Mühleberg. Added to this is over 1.4 billion francs for the interim and subsequent final storage of radioactive waste. However, it will be decades before an appropriate deep repository is built. Until then, high-level waste from all Swiss nuclear power plants will be stored at the Würenlingen interim storage facility in steel containers weighing up to 140 metric tons. Each of these vessels will contain almost 20 metric tons of highly radioactive material that will remain hazardous for hundreds of thousands of years unless new ways are found to significantly reduce the radioactive decay time.

For almost half a century, the National Cooperative for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste (Nagra) has been looking for a suitable site to build a final repository deep below ground. According to the Nuclear Energy Act, disposal in deep geological repositories is the only way to protect humans and the environment from radioactive contamination in the long term. Three potential locations are currently in the running: Jura Ost in Bözberg in the canton of Aargau, Nördlich Lägern in the cantons of Aarau and Zurich, and Zürich Nor-



High-level radioactive-waste containers at the Würenlingen interim storage facility – with survey meters in the foreground. Photo: Keystone



Mühleberg nuclear power plant at twilight. Its lights will soon go off for good. Photo: Keystone

dost on the Zurich side of the Zurich/Thurgau cantonal border. By 2022, test drilling will have revealed which place merits further consideration. The approval process will also be put to a popular vote – probably in 2031. Switzerland’s final repository should then be ready by 2060.

Other countries also lack final repositories for high-level radioactive waste. Work to build the world’s first-ever deep geological repository in Olkiluoto, Finland, has been ongoing since 2016. This new facility is due to begin operations in 2024. France is planning to build a final repository in the eastern department of Meuse, which will receive highly radioactive, spent fuel-element waste from France’s 60 or so nuclear power plants. Low- and intermediate-level waste repositories exist in Finland, Sweden, South Korea, and Hungary.

No nuclear revival

Mühleberg is one of five nuclear power stations around the world that will have been switched off by the end of the year. At the same time, nine new reactors – seven in China – have been connected to the grid. Nevertheless, fewer new installations are being built, according to the latest World Nuclear Industry Status Report. Whereas 68 projects were under construction in 2013, only 46 were ongoing in mid-2019. Experts believe that this is not enough to sustain nuclear energy in

Beznau – aged 50 and still running

Switzerland’s oldest nuclear power station in Beznau (canton of Aargau) will turn 50 at the end of year. Unlike BKW, the plant operator Axpo is still committed to nuclear power. The Aargau-based energy group wants to continue running the two reactors on the banks of the River Aare for a further ten years and has invested 700 million francs on upgrades in recent years. Axpo calculates that some 300 million metric tons in CO₂ emissions have been saved in Beznau alone – compared to the average emissions of a brown-coal power station. Besides Beznau, the Gösgen nuclear power plant (on the grid since 1979) and Switzerland’s youngest and most powerful nuclear power plant in Leibstadt (1984) continue to be connected to the grid. Nuclear power accounts for around one third of Swiss energy production. (TP)

the long term. Despite having a positive carbon footprint, nuclear power is of little use as a means of fighting global warming, they say. Not only is nuclear the most expensive type of energy, it is also the slowest. Building a new nuclear power plant takes five to 17 years longer than installing a solar or wind power plant that would deliver the same output. Yet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change believes that the next ten years will decide whether the goals of the Paris climate agreement can be achieved.



Switzerland in cardboard

In Bern, tourists gather on the hour in front of the Clock Tower built in 1405 and wait spellbound for the movements and chimes of the historic clock. The locals are much more blasé about the capital city's iconic landmark, with many even claiming to have actually constructed the Clock Tower (known as the Zytlogge) themselves. In fact, this is not as outlandish as it sounds. In spite of its uniqueness, the tower has been built ten thousand times, albeit from cardboard, as the "Zytlogge" is one of the models in the basic range of listed model buildings issued for sale in Switzerland for the last 100 years and mainly popular with children. The steeple has been placed on the Zytlogge tower more than 70,000 times and both towers flanking the Spalentor in Basel have been formed a good 130,000 times. However, that is a mere drop in the ocean compared to Chillon Castle, which has been constructed well over 500,000 times

with scissors and glue. And it is not just buildings; Swissair planes, railways, Rhine ships and paddle steamers have also been assembled ten thousand times. Over 22 million landmarks and vehicles have been thus created from 1919 to 2019. This impressive total shows that modelling is a part of Switzerland's cultural heritage. The future of this cultural pastime is uncertain as sales are falling. Suppliers are also aware of "decreasing assembly skills" among children. That is why the different parts are now prepunched in the new models. Nonetheless, proponents of modelling do not accept that the discipline's days are numbered.

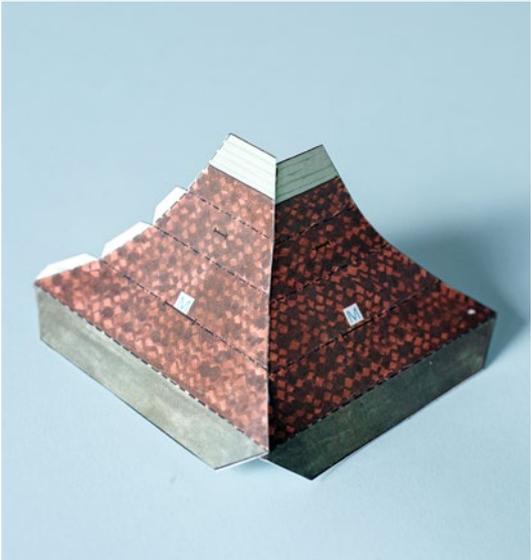
MARC LETTAU

www.modellbogen.ch

Photos: Danielle Liniger

"Swiss Review" will raffle 20 models at the end of 2019. Send an e-mail to revue@aso.ch, adding the comment "Draw" to take part.





The Swiss dream of villas, but rent apartments

Property ownership is decidedly low in Switzerland. There are material obstacles to purchasing property and the Swiss do not necessarily prioritise home ownership as an investment. A popular initiative is calling on the state to facilitate access to housing.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Under 40 % of the Swiss population are homeowners, compared to over 50 % of French and more than 70 % of Italians. This situation is changing slowly, having risen from just 34.6 % in 1980 to 38 % in 2017. At the same time, interest rates are lower than ever. The fact remains that access to housing is difficult. Rents are high in the cities and property prices are considered a deterrent. In the Lake Geneva region, it is not unusual to spend 2,500 Swiss francs or more per month on a family apartment. It's also hard to move house, given the low levels of availability: just 0.89 % in Zurich and 0.54 % in Geneva, for example. In the latter city, freehold ownership prices for properties built in the 1980s are set at over one million francs, with any property available at a state-regulated price snatched up immediately.

This is the reason behind the federal popular initiative “Davantage de logements abordables” (more affordable housing), due to be put to a vote in 2020. The text drafted by the Swiss Tenants' Association invites the Confederation to promote “the acquisition of apartments and family homes for personal use”. However, the central idea behind the project, which is opposed by the right, is to promote the construction of social housing (see below). Meanwhile, in March, the Council of States decided to inject 250 million francs into the fund for social housing.



Philippe Thalmann, Professor of Economics at EPFL in Lausanne, is a real estate expert. He answers some questions for “Swiss Review”:

“Swiss Review”: they say the Swiss dream of home ownership, but few actually achieve it. Is that still the case?

Philippe Thalmann: Four Swiss out of five dream of owning their own home, but this aspiration is still not as strong as in other countries. In fact, our survey showed that few people had approached their banks for a mortgage.

Why is that?

We have noted that tenants who dream of home ownership imagine it will improve their level of housing. They envisage a much bigger apartment or a detached house. If it were possible to suggest they buy their own apartment for a reasonable price, it might be different. The dream of a high-end property for 1 million francs or more is unattainable. And on the other hand, there isn't much of an alternative in the form of accessible housing at the more modest end of the market.

What about access to housing in the cities?

The availability of new and reasonably priced freehold apartments is low, as it is for older constructions. Regarding rental prices, it costs 20 % of income on average, which is acceptable. Aspiring buyers usually have to leave the city and live somewhere on the periphery. So, the price to be paid becomes the fact of living in a more remote location.

With interest rates at record lows, shouldn't the property market be more accessible?

If you compare rent with a low mortgage, buying, even for a high price, does make sense. However, without an inheritance it is difficult to meet the eligibility conditions for a mortgage. You have to pay a 20 % deposit and not commit to interest payments that exceed 30 % of your income. Moreover, the banks calculate this sum on the basis of an interest rate of 5 %, as opposed to the current rate of 0.9 %. At the same time, the more rates fall, the more agents can hike up the prices. As for the landlords, they haven't changed rents much to reflect lower interest rates.

Is the incentive to buy or sell apartments not enough in itself?

Real estate provides a return for pension funds or individuals. These actors rent out their properties rather than selling them. That is why two-thirds of people in Switzerland are tenants. In France, developers build to sell. Moreover, rental property in Switzerland is well maintained and 80 % of tenants consider their rent

fair. Switzerland has a tenant law system that is widely accepted.

How is the percentage of homeowners evolving?

It's changing very slowly because few rental properties are put up for sale. By contrast, the sale of rental apartments in the United Kingdom between 1980 and 1990 brought about a 10% rise in home ownership. We could just build real estate for sale, but with newbuilds generating only a 1% growth in housing a year, even that would only trigger a very small increase in homeowners.

What do you think of the "More affordable housing" initiative?

The part about having access to your own home is already in the Constitution. The real issue is making 10% of new buildings for social housing by law. The other factor is the right of

pre-emption, which would enable a municipality to have first refusal on buying a property, which it could then give to a cooperative or foundation. This right already exists in some cantons.

Housing or residents' cooperatives offer a type of home ownership and guarantee stable and reasonable rents. Why is this system, which only applies to 6% of homes in Switzerland, not more widespread?

Residents' cooperatives in Zurich are at 25%, the highest in Switzerland. But you have to first build the housing if you want to offer it! Faced with competition from the private sector, cooperatives come second when buying land. The initiative would enable some land to be allocated to affordable housing in the form of social or cooperative real estate.

¹⁾ "Locataire ou propriétaire? Enjeux et mythes de l'accession à la propriété en Suisse" (To own or to buy? Implications and myths of property ownership in Switzerland). This book provides an overview of a survey conducted by the authors and the environmental research institute at EPFL.

²⁾ The members of housing cooperatives each hold a small share of the registered capital, but are still tenants. Residents' cooperatives are similar to a freehold apartment. Each member owns part of the property (their apartment). The former are less common, but represent more apartments than residents' cooperatives.

Website of the popular initiative committee: logements-abordables.ch

Opposing position (German): ogy.de/hev-kritik



Everyday life in Switzerland: moving from one rental apartment to another.

Photo: Keystone



Using criminal law to fight homophobia

Switzerland has had an anti-racism provision for the last 25 years. It protects people against verbal abuse on the grounds of their race, ethnicity or religion. Whether this protection from discrimination should also apply to lesbians and homosexuals in the future will be decided by voters on 9 February 2020.

THEODORA PETER

Homosexual couples have been out and proud in Switzerland for some time now. Same sex love is widely accepted by society. Nevertheless, gays and lesbians repeatedly experience hostility and even violent attacks. For example, the media reported a case where a homosexual couple were beaten up by a group of young men and called “faggots” and “freaks” late at night in the middle of Zurich. By its own account, the organisation Pink Cross receives up to four reports of homophobic attacks per week. There are no statistics about crimes on the basis of the victims’ sexual orientation in Switzerland. Furthermore, many attacks go unreported because the victims decide not to go to the police.

Collective violations of personal honour are no grounds for legal action

Anyone who sows hate against homosexuals can only receive a suspended sentence. Any person who personally suffers verbal abuse can lodge a complaint on the grounds of defamation or slander. However, the violation of personal honour article in criminal law does not apply if an entire group, such as homosexuals or lesbians, is affected by verbal abuse. For this reason, a local Appenzeller politician of the extreme-right PNOS (Swiss Nationalist Party) was able to label homosexuals as “demographic deserters”, insinuate that they are capable of “doing pioneer work for paedophiles”, and propagate the “Russian solution” (in Russia, homosexuals and lesbians are subjected to reprisals) with impunity on Facebook. A collective criminal complaint by Pink Cross for violation of personal honour was unsuccessful. The public prosecutor halted the legal proceedings as there was no legal basis.

Valais SP National Councillor Mathias Reynard would like to close this loophole in criminal law by extending the anti-racism provision to include sexual orientation. “Homophobia is not an expression of opinion and should be recognised as an offence just like racism or anti-Semitism,” argues Reynard. The anti-racism provision, which protects people from verbal abuse on the

grounds of their race, ethnicity or religion, has been in force since 1995. In 2013, Reynard started a parliamentary initiative with the demand to extend discrimination protection to the category of “sexual orientation”. The national councillor received strong support from his colleagues for doing so. The National Council even wanted to take it further and include the criterion of “sexual identity” in the provision to protect homosexuals and lesbians as well as bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT) from hate crime. However, that was a step too far for the Council of States. It said “sexual identity” was not clearly tangible, which could lead to interpretation issues. Finally, the two chambers agreed on an extension of the anti-racism provision to include “sexual orientation”.

Christian-conservative opposition to “censure law”

Liberal judges in Parliament were fundamentally sceptical about additional bans on discrimination. Appenzell FDP Federal Councillor Andrea Caroni pointed out that criminal law is “too big a stick” for such cases. He invoked freedom of expression and warned against criminalising discrimination on the grounds of language, nationality or sex. “It will never end”. The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” also warned against new bans in a commentary, and called for people to stop homophobes with civil courage and clear language.

There has been fundamental opposition to the extension of the anti-racism provision to homosexuals and lesbians from the Christian Conservative Party EDU, the Young SVP and the Youth and Family working group. A joint committee collected 67,500 valid signatures for a referendum entitled “No to the Censure Law”. So, the submission will now be put to the voters for a decision on 9 February 2020.

Opponents criticise what they see as a disproportionate restriction on freedom of conscience. EDU President Hans Moser fears that pastors will attract the attention of the justice system in the future “when they cite biblical truths”. For many free churches, same-sex love is incompatible with a life according to the tenets of the Bible. Critical public examination of homosexuality must remain a “legitimate position”, writes the committee. Opinions

“Homophobia is not an expression of opinion,” says SP National Councillor Mathias Reynard, who submitted an initiative to change the law.



must not be criminalised and there is the danger of “perspective justice”. The Young SVP want to prevent “freedom of expression from being restricted even further”. In doing so, the party is basically focusing on the anti-racism provision, whose abolition they are once more calling for.

Judges place great importance on freedom of expression

Twenty-five years before the introduction of the anti-racism provision, opponents focused on freedom of expression during their campaign against the “muzzle law”. In the referendum in autumn 1994, around 55 per cent of voters

to the conclusion that the article has been used very sparingly to date, and that judges have placed great importance on the argument of freedom of expression in borderline cases. However, statements which belittle human dignity are not borderline cases. Human dignity is at the heart of basic human rights.

Accordingly, the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland convicted two SVP officials of publishing an advertisement with the title “Kosovars slash a Swiss”. During the campaign ahead of a vote on the mass immigration initiative the party brought up the case of a criminal of Kosovan origin who attacked a Swiss citizen with a knife in Interlaken. The Federal Tribunal concluded that with the “sweeping judgement” in the advertisement, Kosovars

Young people at Zurich Pride in June 2019. The rainbow flag is a colourful symbol of diversity used by the LGBT community.

Photo: Keystone



accepted the submission. This cleared the way for Switzerland to enter the UN Convention as the 130th state to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

The question of whether you “can no longer say everything” has come up time and again since then. Is freedom of expression in Switzerland actually in danger? Judge Vera Leimgruber has analysed the previous legal judgments on the anti-racism provision on behalf of the Federal Committee against Racism (FCR). In the process, she came

had been denigrated as an ethnicity and portrayed as being inferior. In doing so, the party had also created a climate of hate.

<https://jazumschutz.ch>

<https://www.zensurgesetz-nein.ch>

<https://www.ekr.admin.ch>

Switzerland struggles with an influx of unaccompanied minors

Between 2016 and 2018, more than 3,000 unaccompanied minors requested asylum in Switzerland. In addition to this number, hundreds of young men arrived alone from the Maghreb region, with most coming to Geneva. The authorities are accused of failing to respond to the situation.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

There are two types of minors who arrive alone in Switzerland. Those who are eligible for asylum because of their country of origin count as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAs). They are given a roof over their heads, meals, education and social benefits. In 2015, 2,700 UMAs requested asylum, the majority of them boys aged 16–17, from Eritrea.

The others are unaccompanied minors (UMs) coming from countries which do not make them eligible for asylum, for example, Morocco. These people do not receive social assistance and have no platform on which to build their life. “UMAs have usually grown up with their family,” explains Sylvia Serafin, co-manager of Païdos, an association which offers psychological and educational support plus a daily meal to unaccompanied minors. “However, UMs are adolescents who have fled the breakdown of their family at a very young age. They have had to live through dramatic experiences during their exile and most of them suffer from post-traumatic stress. They need appropriate support.” Most of these young people come from Algeria or Morocco and present psychological deficiencies. They may also suffer the consequences of their vagrant situation, experiencing dental problems, injuries or skin conditions. Some of them have passed through more than 15 European cities in just

three years, according to the French organisation Trajectoires.

Suicide of a young person in a refugee centre

Most of the UMs in Switzerland can be found in Geneva. There are two reasons for this: the city’s proximity to France and the fact that French is spoken there. This new phenomenon exacerbates another situation involving the UMAs. Since 2018, their treatment has come under criticism from social workers and organisations. The issue was thrust into the spotlight by the suicide in March of a young Afghan at Le Foyer de l’Etoile, a refugee centre managed by the Hospice général. “This young man’s suicide was feared but not totally unexpected following four years of exhaustion and instability,” said staff at the centre in a letter to parliament. The refuge, which holds up to 200 minors seeking asylum, has been compared to a prison. Subject to overcrowding, noise, temperature fluctuations, and lacking in educational facilities, these centres are not fit for purpose. “It’s not really a centre,” a young asylum seeker told Geneva School of Social Work, “it’s a refugee camp.”

The organisations, including the Human Rights League, claim the government is not doing enough to recognise and uphold the rights of these minors as stipulated in the Conven-

tion on the Rights of the Child. The Collectif Lutte des MNA (a group lobbying for the rights of unaccompanied minors), founded in 2018, highlights the lack of any procedures or benefits for these young people. Julie, 25, a social sciences student in Lausanne, was involved in launching the group: “Unaccompanied minors are found on the street and placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with people who are not equipped to care for them and who send them away if there is a problem,” she explains. They are allowed a sandwich in the evening and breakfast in the morning. They are not given any education and the case workers responsible for them are completely overwhelmed by the sheer volume of cases.”

No education for unaccompanied minors

According to the Department of Education, minors stay in designated centres; bed and breakfast accommodation is an emergency measure. At the beginning of October, it confirmed that no unaccompanied minors were in education. The Collectif has also questioned the “pointless” retention of minors in custody when they are stopped by the police and found to have no ID. If the only issue is their illegal presence in the country, the juvenile court generally decides not to pursue such cases and simply lets the people go, according



to a source within the legal sector. Sophie Bobillier, a lawyer, argues that a minor cannot be prosecuted for being in Switzerland illegally. “The right to protection for the child takes precedence,” she says. The Collectif was received this summer by a delegation of the Geneva cantonal government, where it demanded that the authorities provide minors with a document recognised by the police. The canton acknowledged that the frequent prosecution of minors under guardianship for breaking the law regulating foreign nationals was undesirable.

Minors sleeping in the street

The influx of unaccompanied minors on the streets of Geneva dates from spring 2018. In March, minors spend-

ing the winter in a Salvation Army nuclear shelter found themselves out on the street. Some were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, while others slept rough or left the area, according to Païdos. Now the influx has started again, with around 20 more young people being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation according to the Collectif and Païdos. The Child Protection Services have disclosed that they monitored 200 files on young people under guardianship between summer 2018 and 2019.

In June, the cantonal parliament sustained a motion in favour of accommodating these young people. The left and conservative parties supported it, while the SVP voted against it fearing the setting of an unwanted precedent. Anne Emery-Torracinta,

We need help; respect our rights; listen to us – written messages from minors who arrived in Switzerland unaccompanied.

Photo: HETS Genève

cantonal councillor in charge of public education, denounced the accommodating stance displayed by the organisations towards the migrants. “They commit crimes. They are a group that a priori does not want to integrate and this poses a great deal of problems,” argued the socialist.

The state opens a centre for unaccompanied minors

The cantonal authorities have responded to the lobbying by announcing the opening in October of a centre for unaccompanied minors with 25 places. It will accommodate children aged from 15 to 18, who will receive education adapted to their needs and medical care. Moreover, the authorities have launched an action plan to support unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, aimed at improving the level of care and access to education. Six unaccompanied minors also received an undertaking in October that they would receive educational support. This is a first. At the same time, the cantonal government argues that not all unaccompanied minors want to go to school and highlights doubts regarding their identity and age.

In Valais, where there are very few unaccompanied minors, the head of the population division wonders whether these minors could be French citizens. In the canton of Vaud, the issue does not even seem to exist. The International Social Service, based in Geneva, wants to dedicate one of its next conferences to this issue. The event will be held on 12 December and will be attended by guardians, social workers and doctors based in French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino.

A plurality of origins

Social change is breeding a new form of “home literature”, with Switzerland having long metamorphosed from a country of emigrants into a country of immigrants. This is reflected not least in Swiss writing, which no longer focuses on the idylls and traditions of yesteryear but critically engages with the question of origin. In searching for their own roots, authors easily drift off to faraway regions. This internationalism is a key component of Switzerland’s new multicultural literature. Nine years ago, Melinda Nadj Abonji won the Swiss and German book awards for her novel “Fly Away, Pigeon”. This work, which chronicles the hard-won assimilation of a family who have immigrated to Switzerland, hit a raw nerve at the time.

Back in 1970, “Tra dove piove e non piove” (Where it rains and where it doesn’t) by the Ticino author Anna Felder provided an empathetic portrayal of how the “latchkey children” of Italian guest workers coped in unfamiliar surroundings. Felder was followed by



Melinda Nadj Abonji, author of the novel “Fly Away, Pigeon”, was delighted about winning the German book award (archive photo, 2010).

numerous other writers such as Dante Andrea Franzetti and Franco Supino, who would go on to tell the story of the Swiss-born generation of “secondos” (second generation immigrants). In French-speaking Switzerland, Agota Kristof used the language of her new home to reminisce about Hungary, her country of birth. Books by Max Lobe (Cameroon) and Elisa Shua Dusapin (Korea) in French, and Dorian Catalin Florescu (Romania) and Kathy Zarnegin (Iran) in German are indicative of how the search for family roots is truly global. Works such as these have expanded the scope of Swiss literature. New cultures entail new stories and new images that lend colour and plurality.

BEAT MATZENAUER

“Unhaltbare Zustände”



It is 1968, and the world is in uproar in the aftermath of strikes and student protests. The wind of change has swept through Berne too, where Stettler works as a respected window dresser in the city’s largest department store. Just into his 60s, Stettler is assigned a younger colleague with fresh ideas to work with. His window displays, which used to be admired, now feel staid and stuffy. Stettler’s world begins to crumble. Feeling threatened, he succumbs to his own rage and seeks revenge. The story ends in a furious finale, with one of Stettler’s previously unseen window creations sealing his downfall. Reconciling with the new zeitgeist is beyond him. The window dresser also misses the chance of a romance with a female pianist.

Sulzer’s novel is clever, subtle, precisely written and beautifully told. Alain Claude Sulzer was born in 1953 and currently lives in Basel. He has written numerous novels and essays.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Alain Claude Sulzer, “Unhaltbare Zustände”
(Untenable circumstances) Verlag Galiani, Berlin 2019
267 pages; CHF 33.90
E-book (epub): approx. EUR 19.00

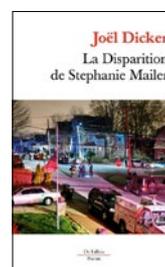
Further recommendations (German)

Arno Camenisch, “Herr Anselm” (Engeler)
Witty, exquisitely melancholic monologue of a straight-talking school janitor.

Ivna Žic, “Die Nachkommende” (Matthes & Seitz)
Brilliant literary debut that tells a stop-start story about identity and belonging.

Ruth Schweikert: “Tage wie Hunde” (S.Fischer)
A moving diary of the author’s fight with breast cancer.

A thriller without a thread



Who killed the journalist working in a small seaside town in the Hamptons? Who is the real culprit behind the quadruple homicide the young woman was investigating? This is the subject of the fourth novel by Joël Dicker from Geneva, an author whose work has been translated into over 40 languages. The seg-

mentation resembles an American series, with recurring flashbacks. It works, but ends up as regimented. In terms of style Dicker avoids being edgy, preferring to fall back on familiar phrasing. His characters are caricatures. The lawyer from New York, for example, the star of the bar, goes by the name of... Starr. Nonetheless, the critics can keep walking. The author makes that clear through a certain Meta Ostrovski. The maxim of this literary critic? "Above all, never love. To love is to be weak." This dismissal of the inevitable detractors of Dicker's work is a reflection of the thriller itself: slightly naïve, slightly comical. Indeed, it is the flashes of this schoolyard humour that save "The Disappearance of Stéphanie Mailer" from becoming dull.

STEPHANE HERZOG

Joël Dicker, "The Disappearance of Stéphanie Mailer", Edition De Fallois paperback 840 pages

Further recommendations (French)

Roland Buti, "Grand National" (Zoé)

Concise, affectionate account of a man in a mid-life crisis.

Pascal Janovjak: "Le Zoo de Rome" (Actes Sud)

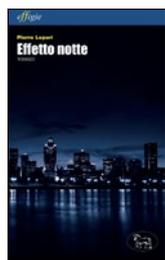
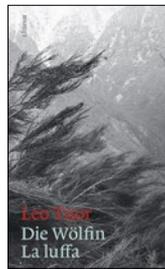
A retrospective of 20th-century history – through the lens of Rome's city zoo.

Collectif, "Tu es la sœur que je choisais"

(éd. D'En Bas) Various authors from French-speaking Switzerland look back at the Swiss women's strike of 14 June 2019.

"Effetto notte"

Alessandro moderates a night-time radio programme that allows listeners to call in and say anything they want. After a faux pas on air, he is forced to go on holiday. While in America, the beleaguered presenter slowly gets back on an even keel. Chapters skillfully alternate between listener call-ins and the story of his time on the other side of the Atlantic. This short book – earnest and observational one minute, absurd and amusing the next – offers new narrative and musical twists at every corner. The QR codes



at the end of the listener call-ins enhance this effect. Read one of them with your smartphone, and a music video will open up on YouTube.

Pierre Lepori was born in 1968 in Lugano and lives in Lausanne. The author, who works as cultural correspondent on Swiss public radio, translated "Effetto Notte" (Nocturnal effect) into French himself. RUTH VON GUNTEN

Pierre Lepori, "Effetto notte" (Nocturnal effect)

Effigie edizioni, Pavia 2019. 96 pages; EUR 13.–

Further recommendations (Ticino)

Flavio Stroppini, "Comunque. Tell" (Capelli).

A bitter and ironically written and illustrated account of the legend of William Tell.

Marco Zappa, "Al Vént Al Bófa ... Ammò" (Dadó).

The Ticino musician marks his 70th birthday with a wonderful collection of song lyrics.

"Die Wölfin – La luffa"

They call him the "boy". After his father's suicide, he grows up with his grandparents and great-grandmother in a Graubünden mountain village. His one-armed grandfather – replete with historical references, left-field ideas and philosophical musings – plays a prominent role in his upbringing, as does his silent yet assertive grandmother. Every page in this book provides a complex spin on the boy's family history and development as a person. Leo Tuor's writing is simple, effortless and poetic.

The work, which first appeared in 2002 in the author's native Romansch, has now been republished in a revised, bilingual edition. Peter Egloff has produced an outstanding German translation of Tuor's exquisite prose. Leo Tuor was born in 1959 in Graubünden and lives in the Sumvitg Valley (Surselva, canton of Grisons). RUTH VON GUNTEN

Leo Tuor, "Die Wölfin / La luffa" (The she-wolf)

Limmat Verlag, Zurich 2019, 368 pages; CHF/EUR 38.50

For more recommendations, visit www.revue.ch/en

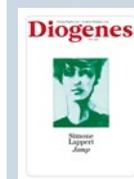


Vulnerable characters – and a step into the unknown

A young woman stands at the edge of a roof and threatens to jump off. She stays there for almost two days while an entire city watches her every move. Simone Lappert, born in Aarau in 1985, uses this situation as a device to present a host of characters from different generations, bringing each one to life and showing how they react to the situation. There are old people with their world weariness, the young with their whole life ahead of them and the middle aged all but consumed by their professional commitments. Manu is the woman who wants to jump, then there is her cool boyfriend Finn, a bicycle courier, and two resigned older people running a grocery store and falling deeper into debt, a homeless man selling questions written on paper to passers-by, a pubescent girl who wants to harm herself to avoid swimming lessons and Roswitha, the owner of the café frequented by the characters. Lappert recounts wonderfully vivid stories about the different characters, but deliberately leaves the conundrum of Manu and her jump unresolved. The jump into a net held by the fire service may come across as somewhat contrived. However, the portrayal of the individual figures and their suffering and joy add substance to the book. It is reminiscent of the Carson McCullers novel "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter" written in 1940, which also brings an entire city to life through a raft of memorable characters. CHARLES LINSMAYER

Simone Lappert, "Der Sprung", Novel.

Diogenes-Verlag, Zurich, 330 pages, hardback 30 francs, eBook 24 francs





Secure the future of the "Review"

The online edition of the "Review" is being improved as part of an upgrade of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad's web presence. That is good news all round, even for those who prefer the "Review" on paper.



OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli says the "Swiss Review" should secure the printed version while developing and improving the online version at the same time.

Photo: Danielle Liniger

lenging technical and financial project that we aim to implement by spring 2021.

It will also make a material contribution to securing the future of the "Review" by enhancing the appeal of its online presence. That will benefit everyone who enjoys using online media. The improved online edition should also ensure no further increase in the print run of the "Review", which is currently about 200,000 copies. This stabilisation will be key to retaining the printed version over the long term. That is the stated aim of the OSA directors and the "Review" editor-in-chief.

The absence of the "Review" from your postbox in June 2020 is thus ultimately a good thing for those who value the printed word. Moreover, this edition of "Swiss Review" shows that the OSA has no intention of diluting the scope of its reporting mandate, as it contains 40 pages as opposed to the usual 32. That is because there were so many topics that the editorial team wanted to report to the "Fifth Switzerland".

ARIANE RUSTICHELLI, OSA DIRECTOR

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The "Swiss Review" is published in hard copy as well as online, and that will not change. However, as an exception, there will only be five printed editions of the "Review" in 2020. A sixth edition – scheduled for July 2020 – will only appear online. It will also be available to all readers of the printed edition who want to see what the electronic version is like, whether online, via our "Swiss Review" app or as a classical ePaper.

The one-off omission of the printed edition, approved by the OSA Executive Board, is not a cost-cutting measure. On the contrary, it is an expansionary measure as it frees up funds for a key modernisation of the organisation's entire online presence. The current OSA, Swisscommunity and "Swiss Review" websites will be merged and aligned closely with the requirements of the Swiss community living abroad. This is a highly chal-

Would you like to read the "Swiss Review" on a tablet or mobile telephone? You can find the app free of charge in Google Play Store or the Apple app store.



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

Gaining life experience in Switzerland

What to do after finishing compulsory education or high school? Often the best answer is to take a year out. There is a plethora of gap year opportunities to choose from in Switzerland.

Go to university? Do vocational training? Or look for a job? Many young people ponder these questions once they have left school. Making the right choice is not always easy, which is why gap years are a popular option in Switzerland.

Bridge-year courses

Bridge-year courses, of which there are many, used to be referred to as the “tenth school year”. They are run by the cantons and can vary considerably in nature. On average, a bridge-year programme will last six to 12 months. Many help to fill gaps in schooling or provide guidance on choosing a profession. This will often include helping people to find apprenticeships.

Voluntary work

In return for doing voluntary work, you will receive free board/lodging and possibly a small amount of pocket money. Many volunteers like to work on farms. Agriviva is a body that organises agricultural placements for some 1,500 young volunteers from around the world each year. Swiss Abroad also take advantage of these opportunities. For example, Yaycia Robinson from Australia spent this summer working at a family farm in the canton of Solothurn. “I definitely want to be working with animals in future,” says Robinson, who developed a particular affection for the cows.

Internship

Internships provide an in-depth insight into the world of work. From hospitality and healthcare, to media and construction – almost all professions offer work placements. Most of these are advertised on various online platforms. When applying for an internship, you must provide a CV, cover letter and references – just like you would if you were applying for a permanent job. Interns are treated as employees and usually receive a small wage. To gain admission to a university of applied sciences, you normally need to have been on a work placement for several months.

Movetia offers a language assistantship programme that allows students from abroad to gain initial work experience by helping out for a year as a language assistant at an upper secondary school or vocational school.

Young Australian Yaycia Robinson (left) with her “Agriviva parents” Stefan and Maria Marti, alongside “Fuba” the cow. (Photo: Julia Spahr, “Schweizer Bauer”).



Au pair

Working as an au pair for a family with children can be an interesting experience for young men and women alike. Although the remuneration is nothing to write home about, you not only receive free board and lodging but are also given enough spare time to attend language courses and get to know Switzerland better.

Language courses

Intensive language courses allow you to immerse yourself in the language of your choice. Numerous private schools in Switzerland offer language courses for every level. We recommend that you aim for a course that earns you a recognised language certificate.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Information sheets on the relevant options are available to order free of charge from education-suisse by email (info@educationsuisse.ch). Education-suisse also has a Facebook page, which now also includes a closed group for all young Swiss Abroad who are currently furthering their education in Switzerland.

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



Once the water fight starts, hardly anyone stays dry.

Youth Service 2020 summer schedule

Next summer, the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is running language and holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 or over. More information about the camps will be available from 6 January 2020 at www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers.

Our schedule at a glance:

11.7.–24.7.2020 Sports camp 1 and Swiss Challenge

25.7.–07.8.2020 Sports camp 2

08.8.–23.8.2020 Language, sports and holiday camp

We will also be happy to post you our information brochure including the schedule of events on request. The registration deadline is 15 March 2020.

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Youth Service, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland; tel.: +41 31 356 61 24; fax: +41 31 356 61 01; email: youth@aso.ch / www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/youth-offers

“I remember so many great times that I could not possibly say which was best”

This is how one summer camp participant responded when asked about the highlight. Many others gave similar answers.

Every summer, Swiss children and young people from around the world meet to explore their second home country and make friends from around the world while taking part in hikes and excursions, and playing sports and games.

The camps of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) and the Youth Service of the OSA connect young Swiss people with one another and with Switzerland. In the company of motivated camp leaders they have an opportunity to broaden their horizons, learn about Swiss traditions and history, participate in sports and make friends. As a result, Switzerland starts to mean more to the participants than family ties and citizenship.

Paddling down the Aare between Thun and Bern



Summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

From the end of June to the end of August 2020, Swiss children living abroad can have a fantastic time with around 40 other children from all over the world while also discovering Switzerland and its culture at summer camps lasting two weeks. Registration for the summer camps will begin on 6 January 2020. The summer camps 2020 will take place on the following dates:

Sat. 27.6.–Fri. 10.7.2020

Sat. 11.7.–Fri. 24.7.2020

Sat. 25.7.–Fri. 07.8.2020

Sat. 08.8.–Fri. 21.8.2020

The exact details of the various offers (locations, age groups, etc.) will be available from the middle of December 2019 at: www.sjas.ch/en. We would also be pleased to send you our information brochure with an overview of the offers available by post on request. The registration deadline is 15 March 2020. Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland Tel. +41 31 356 61 16, Fax +41 31 356 61 01, Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch



Toboggan fun in French-speaking Switzerland



Dinner in Lugano

It becomes a real part of their identity, their personal story and their circle of friends.

Our camps are diverse and intensive: overnight stays in self-constructed tent camps, hikes, sport competitions, games days, outdoor games, swimming and orienteering are a major part of the sporting programme. The learning-based programme consists of museum visits, excursions to nature reserves and installations from the Second World War, as well as camp debates. The overall focus is on having fun and being together. This ensures a wealth of unforgettable moments for everyone.

The FYSA and the OSA aim to enable all Swiss children living abroad to

take part in at least one camp. This is made possible through donations to both organisations by readers of the “Review”. Your donations help financially disadvantaged families to pay the camp and travel costs. If you would like to make a donation, please contact youth@aso.ch (for the OSA youth camp) or info@sjas.ch (for the FYSA children’s camp).

Our camps simply could not happen without the help of our many volunteers. Around 160 camp leaders and 30 guest families take part every year. Our camp leaders are well prepared for the camps thanks to our annual training courses, and they organise the camps according to the Youth + Sport guidelines of the Federal Office of Sport.

Various target groups

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) is an independent organisation recognised by the ZEWÖ foundation. The FYSA’s target group are children aged eight to 14. The Youth Service is a department of the OSA which organises leisure, educational and political activities for young people aged 15 and over. Both organisations work independently of one another, have their own websites and registration procedures, but they cooperate closely.

This summer, the FYSA organised nine children’s holiday camps for a total of 340 children from more than 70 countries. The Youth Service organised four youth camps, three language courses and several host family stays. In all, 200 young people from more than 60 countries took advantage of these offers.

Bivouac in the forest near Thun



Visiting the Olympic Museum in Lausanne



Am I entitled to unemployment benefit after returning to Switzerland from a non-EU/EFTA country?

“I am a Swiss expatriate who has been living in a non-EU/EFTA country for the last two years. What would be my rights with regard to unemployment benefit if I returned to Switzerland?”

People who have most recently been working in a non-EU/EFTA country can register at a regional employment centre (RAV) in their home municipality after returning to Switzerland.

They will be entitled to unemployment benefit (for up to 90 days) provided they can prove (with salary statements) that they have been in paid employment in a non-EU/EFTA country for at least 12 of the previous 24 months. In addition, they need to prove that they have worked for at least six months in Switzerland during that time. This is because, as of 2018, this standard two-year time frame must also comprise a six-month contribution period in Switzerland. In other words: in the 24 months preceding the date on which you apply for unemployment benefit, you need to have been in gainful employment in Switzerland in order to qualify.

Anyone who has worked for a Swiss-domiciled company and consequently made Swiss unemployment insurance contributions during their time abroad will be treated the same as anyone who works in Switzerland. (US)

Further information: www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch

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

Money transfers to Cuba?

The OSA has been looking into the matter

PostFinance discontinued all payments to Cuba on 1 September 2019. What does this mean for Swiss Abroad who live in Cuba and receive a Swiss pension? The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) contacted the Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) to ask what the impact will be and whether any measures are being taken to help pensioners living in Cuba. The SCO assured the OSA that it is following the geopolitical situation and associated impact on payment transactions closely. Fortunately, payments from the SCO to Cuba are subject to an exemption, hence old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) will continue to be transferred in euros to Cuba.

At the political level, member of the Council of States and OSA Vice-President Filippo Lombardi (CVP, canton of Ticino) has filed a parliamentary interpellation. Lombardi is asking whether the Federal Council intends to take action to ensure that PostFinance executes payments to Cuba – especially in regard to Swiss pensioners who live in the country. If no action is planned, Lombardi wants to know what alternatives the Federal Council has in mind to ensure that Swiss expatriates in Cuba receive their pension benefits. The interpellation has still to be considered. (MS)

SWISS ABROAD COMMUNITY



A Swiss receives permission to restore holy Buddha statue

Alfred Soland from Basel settled in Thailand after living in Hollywood and Las Vegas. According to the local media, he is the first foreign artist to receive permission to restore a Buddha statue.

His music: Since he was young, Alfred Soland has been passionate about music. “I played bass in a group called Sidi Brahim. In 1981, we received an award for being the best jazz rock band in Switzerland,” he recalls. He later studied sculpture and painting and founded an advertising agency.

His American experience: He suffered a midlife crisis at 32. In California, he qualified as a composer and musical arranger for orchestras. He then made it into the film business. However, after six years Soland decided to completely change direction: he moved to Las Vegas, where he spent five years as a professional poker player.

His awakening: The loss of a good friend stirred something within him: “I wanted to see as much of the world as possible while I still could.” He travelled to Thailand and started meditating. “Meditation enabled me to start over.” His body gradually changed as the years went by and he now looks younger. “People don’t believe me when I say I’m nearly 60.”

His Buddha: Soland made the acquaintance of a monk through his Thai girlfriend. The monk needed an artist to restore a four-metre-high statue of Buddha in his temple. His work has not gone unnoticed: “The journalists were almost lost for words. They said that no foreigner had ever been granted that particular privilege.”

The full article is available at swissinfo.ch, the online service of the Swiss radio and TV company (SRG SSR) published in ten languages. Do you also live abroad? Mark your pictures on Instagram with [#WeAreSwissAbroad](https://www.instagram.com/WeAreSwissAbroad).

Convenient access to e-government services

E-government provides the Swiss Abroad with easy access to government services – regardless of time zone or the geographical distance from Switzerland.

In 2020, Switzerland's federal government, cantons and municipalities will adopt a new e-government strategy that will see the country's public authorities provide information and services primarily online (digital first).

Embracing a digital future

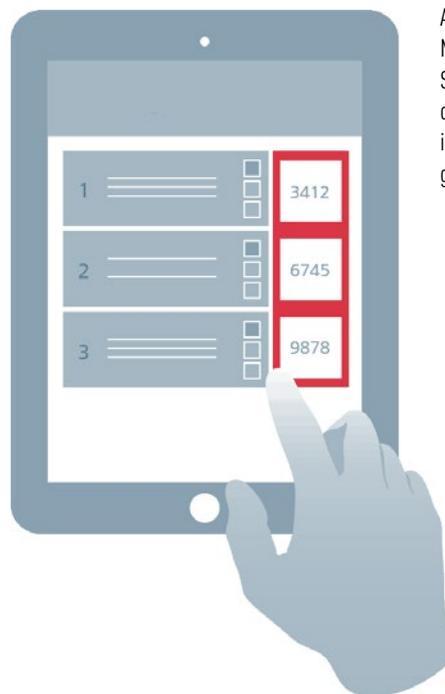
However, many digital services will only work if users can access them properly and securely. In view of this, Switzerland is preparing to introduce a government-recognised electronic identity (e-ID) scheme that will enable private individuals to identify themselves on the internet, manage their online business more easily and use e-government applications. A year ago, the Federal Council submitted its dispatch on the Federal Act on Electronic Identification Services (E-ID Act) to parliament. In its 2019 spring and summer sessions, parliament approved the division of responsibilities between public and private service providers as specified in the E-ID Act. Its final vote in favour came in the autumn session. The E-ID Act will become effective in 2021 at the earliest. As a result of e-IDs, public authorities will be able to offer digital services on an end-to-end basis. Consequently, we will no longer have to print out and sign the forms that we customarily fill out online and send by post along with the usual enclosures. Some individual cantons, for example, already offer the option of doing tax returns completely online. In the longer term, online tax returns will be possible in all cantons as well as at federal level.

Considerable confidence in e-government services

According to the 2019 National E-Government Study, around 66 per cent of the population and just under 75 per cent of businesses trust online government services with regard to personal privacy and data protection. However, demand for online government services generally outstrips supply at federal, cantonal and municipal level. For example, 68 per cent of those surveyed believe that e-voting should be made available to everyone, despite the fact that only two per cent of voters have been able to take advantage of e-voting so far.

E-voting currently unavailable

Until recently, cantons that wanted to offer e-voting could either use the Swiss Post platform or the e-voting solution developed by the canton of Geneva. However, Geneva decided to discontinue its system with immediate effect in June 2019, while Swiss Post announced in July 2019 that it would pull its existing system and focus instead on developing a new one. Switzerland is therefore currently bereft of e-voting (see also "Swiss Review" 5/2019). The Federal Council, for its part, decided in June 2019 to provisionally forgo introducing electronic voting as the third regular voting channel. It has postponed the partial revision that was scheduled for the Political Rights Act. The federal government expects the e-voting testing process to be reoriented by the end of 2020 in consultation with the cantons. Meanwhile, a cross-party committee is currently collecting signatures for



According to the 2019 National E-Government Study, e-voting is one of Switzerland's most in-demand online government services.

an initiative calling for an e-voting moratorium.

As part of the E-Government Switzerland strategic plan, the Confederation, cantons and municipalities remain committed to e-voting and want to continue expanding e-government infrastructure to take our country into the digital future. This means making interaction with public authorities easier and less time-consuming for people living both in and outside Switzerland.

eGOVERNMENT SWITZERLAND

Representing the Confederation, cantons and municipalities, E-Government Switzerland is a body that is working to expand e-government services. It manages, plans and coordinates joint e-government activities at the three government levels.
www.egovernment.swiss

Secure your pension by email

The Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) and the Disability Insurance Office for people living abroad (OAIE), which are responsible for the payment of old-age and survivors' insurance/disability pensions abroad, will now focus on digital interaction to facilitate the exchange of information with insured persons.



This man lives in a remote region of Mexico – and communicates with Swiss public authorities via encrypted email.

A certificate of life and marital status form is sent to all recipients of old-age and survivors' insurance/disability pensions resident abroad every year. It has to be returned within 90 days to ensure uninterrupted pension payment. If the certificate does not arrive within that timeframe, payment of the pension is halted by the system.

However, insured persons resident abroad often have to contend with complex situations. Take for example an insured Mr A, who lives in a remote region of Mexico. His nearest post office is several hours away. The postal delivery of this person's life certificate is delayed every year, and payment of his pension runs the risk of being interrupted. Consequently, in order to improve the quality of service for insured persons, as well as to facilitate

the administrative procedures, the SCO and OAIE are planning to expand the range of information that can be exchanged digitally with the insured persons and with the social security institutions.

A new secure email service

The SCO now offers a new service for sending and receiving encrypted emails. It will contact insured persons by this means as needed. Notifications of address changes and requests for information can now be sent confidentially via email.

Simplified exchanges between social security institutions

At the moment most exchanges between social security institutions in

European Union countries are paper-based. In the future, these will be replaced by electronic exchanges using the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information network (EESSI).

Duty to provide information

The new systems for exchanging data do not remove insured persons' obligation to report any changes in their situation: change of address, marital status, death, change in income, etc. (for more information, visit: www.ogy.de/renten).

Several communication channels

In countries with very long post delivery times, the SCO can always rely on local Swiss representations to forward correspondence to insured persons. The SCO can also be reached directly via the internet portal www.cdc.admin.ch (or short link: www.ogy.de/SAK). Our teams of professionals will be happy to provide any further information you may need. (CCO)

HELPLINE FDFA

☎ from Switzerland +41 800 24 7 365
 ☎ from abroad +41 58 465 33 33
 E-Mail: helpline@eda.admin.ch
 Skype: helpline-eda

Travel advice

www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise
 ☎ from Switzerland +41 800 24 7 365
 ☎ from abroad +41 58 465 33 33
www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae

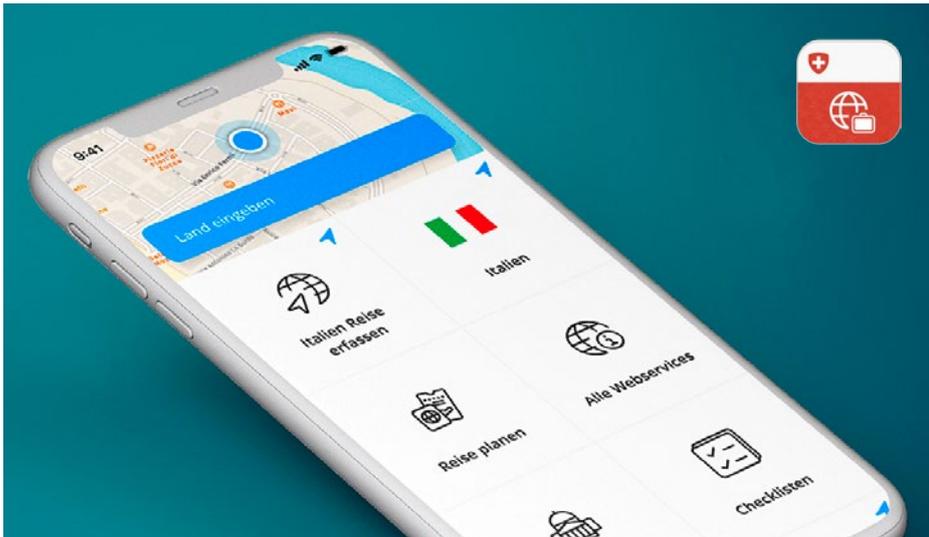
itineris

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



Plan well.
Travel well.

App available for free for iOS and Android



Travel Admin app

An unforgettable trip starts with being well prepared. Travel Admin is the new app developed by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) to replace the itineris app. The Travel Admin app meets your needs with a simple layout and a fresh, appealing design. In addition to the integrated trip registration, you can update your current location at the touch of a button, so the FDFA can contact you more easily if there is an emergency situation at your destination. The app allows you to search and display on a map all Swiss representations abroad that provide services to Swiss citizens. You can create and manage your own travel checklists and consult

the FDFA's Travel Advice. The FDFA's comprehensive travel app also features information from private-sector partners. Travel Admin app is now available for download from the Apple and Google app stores. Bon voyage! (FDFA)



Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

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

The Federal Council has decided not to hold a federal popular vote on 24 November 2019. The next voting date is 9 February 2020.

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):

- Federal Popular Initiative "New funding for care – reduce health insurance premiums! (Care Funding Initiative)" (27.02.2021)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Say yes to tax-free OASI and invalidity pensions" (24.03.2021)

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



"Eine Welt"/"Un seul monde" now available online

Starting with the latest issue, the FDFA is now providing an online version of "Eine Welt"/"Un seul monde" alongside the print edition. Providing an online version has many advantages. It means the magazine is now available worldwide and articles can be found through search engines. The magazine can be read on different

devices, including smartphones and tablets, and readers can also send links to specific articles. It is also easier to find articles by topic or country in the menu or the archive. (FDFA)

www.eine-welt.ch

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Tel. +41 800 24 7 365 or +41 58 465 33 33
www.eda.admin.ch, email: helpline@eda.admin.ch



Art before marketing



PAAVO JÄRVI:
"Messiaen",
Tonhalle-Orchester, Zurich
Alpha 2019

Why? Paavo Järvi, the new chief conductor of the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich was expecting this question. "Because I am an Olivier Messiaen fan," he replies nonchalantly. "It's great music, and it gets played far too rarely. We have now released a small collection of masterpieces on CD."

Järvi is perfectly aware that the "why" was not, "Why are you playing the music of a French composer who lived from 1908 to 1992?", but rather, "Why are you beginning your work in Zurich with a tribute to Messiaen?" His explanation is quite matter-of-fact: "What happens when a conductor begins

working with a German or Swiss-German orchestra? They start with Mahler, Bruckner or Brahms. But I wanted something different. Something that would make a statement and raise a few eyebrows. Art should always come before marketing."

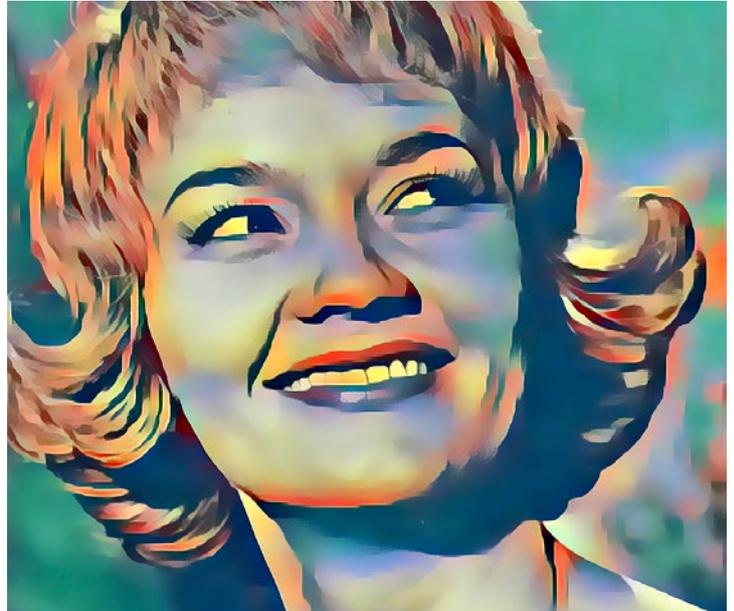
Strictly speaking, 2 October 2019 marked the beginning of Järvi's second year in Zurich, not his first. This is down to Järvi's agents and the Tonhalle management team, whose creative scheduling enabled the Estonian to work frequently with the Tonhalle Orchestra during the 2018/19 season – and use this initial stint as an opportunity to casually slip in some Messiaen. With the microphones switched on, Tonhalle Maag turned into an impromptu recording studio.

Fifteen minutes here, a quarter of an hour there – Järvi gradually weaved his magic. Sprinklings of Messiaen, combined with a notably energetic take on Beethoven, resulted in some electrifying concert hall evenings.

Amid the soaring strings and horns, the music is otherwise very controlled. The firm influence of the conductor is audible, as is the desire of the musicians to oblige their new maestro. Each register almost eclipses the next. And when these works are played with such passion, it is easy for anyone to appreciate how wonderfully sumptuous and sensual modern music can be. During the symphonic meditation of "Les offrandes oubliées", the orchestra's luxuriant yet plaintive chords pull at the listener's heartstrings. The beseeching strings then whip up a veritable storm. This music oozes positivity, rescue is in sight. Our Estonian friend in smart-casual footwear has come to save the day.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

Lilo Pulver



That contagious laugh! No report about Liselotte ("Lilo") Pulver is ever complete without reference to the ever-popular Swiss actress's trademark laughter. Pulver's 90th birthday in October was no exception. Although Pulver has now withdrawn from public life and lives in a retirement home in Berne, her city of birth, she marked her big birthday with the publication of "Was vergeht, ist nicht verloren" (What passes is not lost) – a book containing personal memoirs based on old photos, letters and notes. Having kept all her mementos, Pulver – born in 1929 to middle-class parents – has now decided to tell the story of a long life that few could have expected. It was not until after visiting commercial college that the young Pulver was allowed to take acting lessons. She would go on to have a glittering international career. It was especially in post-war Germany where the smiling Swiss belle became a star of the silver screen, thanks to films like "I Often Think of Piroshka". The Swiss public took her to their hearts in the 1950s, when she played the wholesome maid Vreneli in the Gotthelf adaptations "Uli the Farmhand" and "Uli the Tenant". She later proved how talented and versatile an actress she was in the French New Wave film "The Nun" – and in American director Billy Wilder's comedy "One, Two, Three", in which she pulls off a dancing tabletop parody of Marilyn Monroe. In her private life, Pulver took some hard blows, with her daughter committing suicide and her husband dying of a heart attack. However, the 90-year-old recently denied press reports claiming that she was very lonely. "I am very satisfied with my life overall," she said, adding that she still has plenty of reasons to burst into that legendary laughter every day.

SUSANNE WENGER

Nobel Prize for two Swiss astrophysicists

This year's Nobel Prize in Physics has been jointly awarded, with one half going to James Peebles (USA/Canada) and the other to Swiss scientists Didier Queloz and Michel Mayor. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm decided to honour Queloz and Mayor "for contributions to our understanding of the evolution of the universe



and Earth's place in the cosmos". In 1995, the duo detected the first planet outside our solar system, an exoplanet, orbiting a Sun-like star called 51 Pegasi. Their discovery revolutionised astronomy and initiated the field of research into exoplanets. Over 4,000 exoplanets have since been found. The star 51 Pegasi now goes by the fitting name of *Helvetios*. (MUL)

Dual national loses Swiss citizenship

September saw Switzerland strip a dual national of his Swiss citizenship for the first-ever time. The person in question – a 34-year-old Ticino man who also held a Turkish passport – was sentenced to prison two years ago for spreading propaganda on behalf of a branch of the al-Qaeda terror network and for helping to send two jihadists to the Syrian-Iraqi war zone. By revoking his citizenship, the federal government invoked a never-before-used legal provision that says that individuals whose conduct is seriously detrimental to Switzerland's national interests and security may have their Swiss nationality withdrawn. (MUL)

Switzerland drops one place in the WEF rankings

Switzerland continues to lose its competitive edge, according to the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report. It has dropped one place to fifth in the rankings. Singapore now tops the table, followed by the USA. Switzerland was rated the world's most competitive country back in 2017. (MUL)

Libra: a challenge for Switzerland

The cryptocurrency promoted by Facebook is proving a challenge for Switzerland. As the Libra Association is based in Geneva, it is governed by Swiss law. The initial position adopted by the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority is that Libra must adhere to the "highest international standards" in combating money laundering. The Libra project also contains "bank-like risks", which means "bank-like regulatory requirements" are needed. (MUL)

Successful Swiss peace diplomacy

Swiss ambassador Mirko Manzoni has brokered a peace treaty between the rebels and the government in Mozambique. The treaty is to end a decades-old civil and guerrilla war that has resulted in almost a million fatalities. This is a major success for Swiss peace diplomacy. Manzoni will now monitor the peace process as the Personal Envoy of UN Secretary-General António Guterres. By making this appointment, Guterres has foiled Switzerland's intention to withdraw from the country and downgrade the occasionally unconventional and independent minded Swiss diplomat. (MUL)

Jura conflict rumbles on

Forty years after the founding of the canton of Jura, the Jura conflict remains unresolved: the question of whether Moutier wants to switch to Jura or remain with the canton of Berne has been raised again. In 2017, the town voted in favour of switching canton, albeit by a very small margin. However, the Berne administrative court has now rejected the vote; one of the reasons for its ruling was the excessive propaganda by officials during the voting campaign. The pro-Jura lobby is now urgently calling for another vote. (MUL)

Two mothers – and a leading case

A court in Bern made a significant ruling in September when it ruled that a woman had to pay maintenance to her former partner. The case concerned two women living together as a couple and who conceived a child through a sperm donation. When the relationship broke down, the mother of the child unsuccessfully claimed maintenance from her ex-partner. The court ruled that same-sex parents in a registered partnership must also pay maintenance for any shared children following separation. The ruling thus has far-reaching implications for same-sex parents. (MUL)



Switzerland.

#SayYESinSwitzerland

Wengen, Canton of Bern, © Daniela Kläusler

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