

SWISS REVIEW⁺

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
June 2021

**Stephanie Szanto – mezzo-soprano
at the music festival that never was**

**Switzerland has four national languages,
but how multilingual are we really?**

**Genevan sailor Alan Roura never went to
school and learned everything at sea**

The 98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad welcomes you back to Lugano from 19 to 21 August 2022

This year's Congress in Lugano has to be postponed until the summer of 2022 due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is already looking forward to your participation on site in Mediterranean Lugano. Put 19 to 21 August 2022 in your diary!

Current topics and important information are available online at any time: www.swisscommunity.link/congress.



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Perhaps you speak each of Switzerland's four national languages. Or perhaps you don't. Or maybe your Romansh is a bit rusty. Whatever the case, the passage above speaks of the linguistic diversity that we Swiss naturally like to think of as something quite precious. Although it depends on how you look at it. After all, countries don't speak – people speak. In a single language, or even in several. The decisive factor in a multilingual country is whether multilingual people engage with each other – or whether respective language communities keep to themselves. In the first case, language diversity is a valuable cultural asset. In the latter, it is a source of division.

What about people in Switzerland? Very few of us speak all four national languages. Nevertheless, new surveys show that multilingualism is no myth. Switzerland's permanent resident population is becoming more polyglot, with 68 per cent currently saying that they use two, three, four or more languages on an everyday basis. In other words, 68 per cent live multilingual lives – a figure that gauges our true flair for languages. This edition's Focus article examines what this means in practice.

Perhaps another thing to consider is that language diversity boils down to more than just linguistic aptitude – it is also a frame of mind and a reflection of our willingness to understand other people. **MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**



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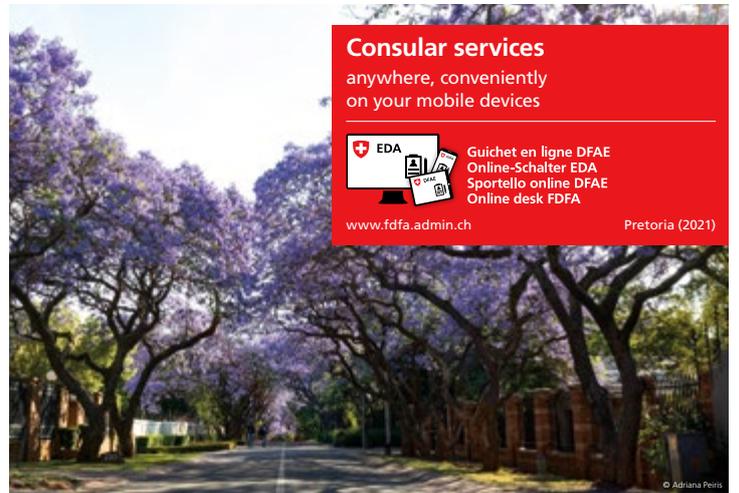
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Pretoria (2021)



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E-voting gets a second chance

The city of Zurich dispatches my voting papers in good time. But, a) I don't receive them at all, b) I receive them too late to return them on time, or c) I don't receive them at all until after the actual vote. Sending the voting papers back via the embassies seems like a good idea until e-voting is reintroduced, although the embassy in Thailand will have its work cut out, given the thousands of Swiss who live here.

ROLF RAMSEYER, NONGPRUE, THAILAND

It is extremely regrettable that no suitable electronic voting system has been found. Essentially, I am being deprived of my political voice and rights. I cannot believe that financial or technical problems are the issue. Instead, the powers that be simply lack the urgency and drive needed to get the job done.

NOEL FREI, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

It is very important for our democracy to be able to vote easily. The Genevan system that I used each time I voted was far more reliable than voting by postal ballot, where we have no proof that our envelope has arrived safely and hasn't just been mislaid somewhere! It's true that democracy has a price. But we have to decide if, on cost grounds, we want to reduce the reach of Swiss citizens' democracy.

SACHA PERZOFF, MONTPELLIER, FRANCE

Thank you very much for this enlightening article. Obviously, the federal government should help to fund e-voting. After all, it is mainly national issues on which we expatriates are able to vote. A secure e-voting system should be possible in this day and age – at least one that is as secure as ballot-box voting, which also has loopholes. We should not be so naive as to believe that in-person voting is completely watertight either.

MATTHIAS BRIAN, SUNDSVALL, SWEDEN

E-voting is an absolute necessity for Swiss expatriates. It is the only way to be sure that our votes have actually been entered in the system. I have used it for several years and had zero issues. It gives me immediate confirmation that my vote has been recorded – which is what matters more than creating a paper trail.

ROGER SUHR, INDIANAPOLIS, USA

Any e-voting system needs to be under centralised government control. As far as costs are concerned, expatriates being able to exercise their voting rights should actually be worth the government's while. In the meantime, returning our postal votes via the embassies is a good idea.

GILBERT LAISSUE, CHON BURI, THAILAND

Peter Schneider on Covid-19



What an insightful and honest comment from a Swiss colleague. Living in New Zealand, we have been successful in eliminating the virus from our population, but it has come despite the clamour of some nay-sayers who took up the views of many Swiss and their leaders. The authorities held their nerve and followed scientific advice. Viruses need to be treated as infectious agents that

do not make exceptions for commerce or personal preferences. As Dr Schneider said, you cannot have a healthy workforce if they play second fiddle to business interests.

GILBERT BARBEZAT, DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND

As someone who believed Switzerland to be beyond reproach, I was surprised to read this article. But these days anything is possible, unfortunately. But after all, we all make mistakes; the important thing is to admit them and do better next time round.

MARIE FRANÇOISE MAAG, PARIS, FRANCE

Thank you for this article. This man is a very clear thinker. It is not my place to judge the choices of each country in their handling of this virus; the life of each person must remain paramount.

DANIEL CHOLLET, FRANCE

About "Swiss Review" in general



I thought the April edition of "Swiss Review" was excellent. All the articles covered pertinent issues and were polemical, frank and compelling. Based on this material, it is good to see that you have no need or desire to pull punches any longer.

IRENE VON HARTZ, BAD BERLEBURG, GERMANY

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Grüezi,
bonjour,
allegria,
benvenuto:

A nation of polyglots

With four national languages, dozens of dialects and a total of more than 250 spoken languages, Swiss multilingualism is alive and kicking – and on the rise. However, the advance of English as Switzerland’s “fifth national language” can no longer be ignored.

EVA HIRSCHI

Renata Coray grew up speaking Romansh and Swiss German in the canton of Basel-Landschaft. She studied in French and German in Fribourg, currently lives in Zurich, often spends time in Surselva, reads through English texts at work, and Italy is her favourite holiday destination. Not all Swiss are as adept at languages as Coray, who works as a project manager at the Institute of Multilingualism in Fribourg. However, the latest Federal Statistical Office (FSO) languages survey shows that Swiss multilingualism is very much on the rise. Over two thirds of the Swiss population – 68 per cent to be precise – regularly use more than one language. The figure was 64 per cent in 2014. And it’s not restricted to two languages: 38.4 per cent regularly use two, 21.3 per cent three, 6.4 per cent four, and 1.7 per cent as many as five or more languages. It is worth noting that standard German and Swiss German were not classed as two different languages in the survey.

“Increased mobility, enhanced language teaching, a more cosmopolitan population, and improved communication

through new media and the internet and other channels are helping to fuel multilingualism,” says the sociolinguist Coray. Another reason for the increase is that the questioning in the study has changed, she adds. Until 1990, respondents were asked to indicate just one mother tongue (even if they were bilingual). Since then, respondents have been able to include any dialects, and, since 2010, up to three main languages.

Over- and under-representation

Despite its rise, multilingualism remains politically sensitive in Switzerland – exemplified by the long struggle to preserve Romansh and the controversy surrounding early-age language teaching of English at the expense of French in many schools. The promotion of the national languages – particularly the minority languages Italian and Romansh – is, however, enshrined in the Federal Constitution. Coray: “Quite a lot has been done at political and legislative level, but the reality on the ground is sometimes different.” According to research in 2020 by the Centre for Democracy Studies in Aarau, German speakers are significantly over-represented and speakers of the minority languages under-represented in around two thirds of all departments within the Federal Administration, for example.

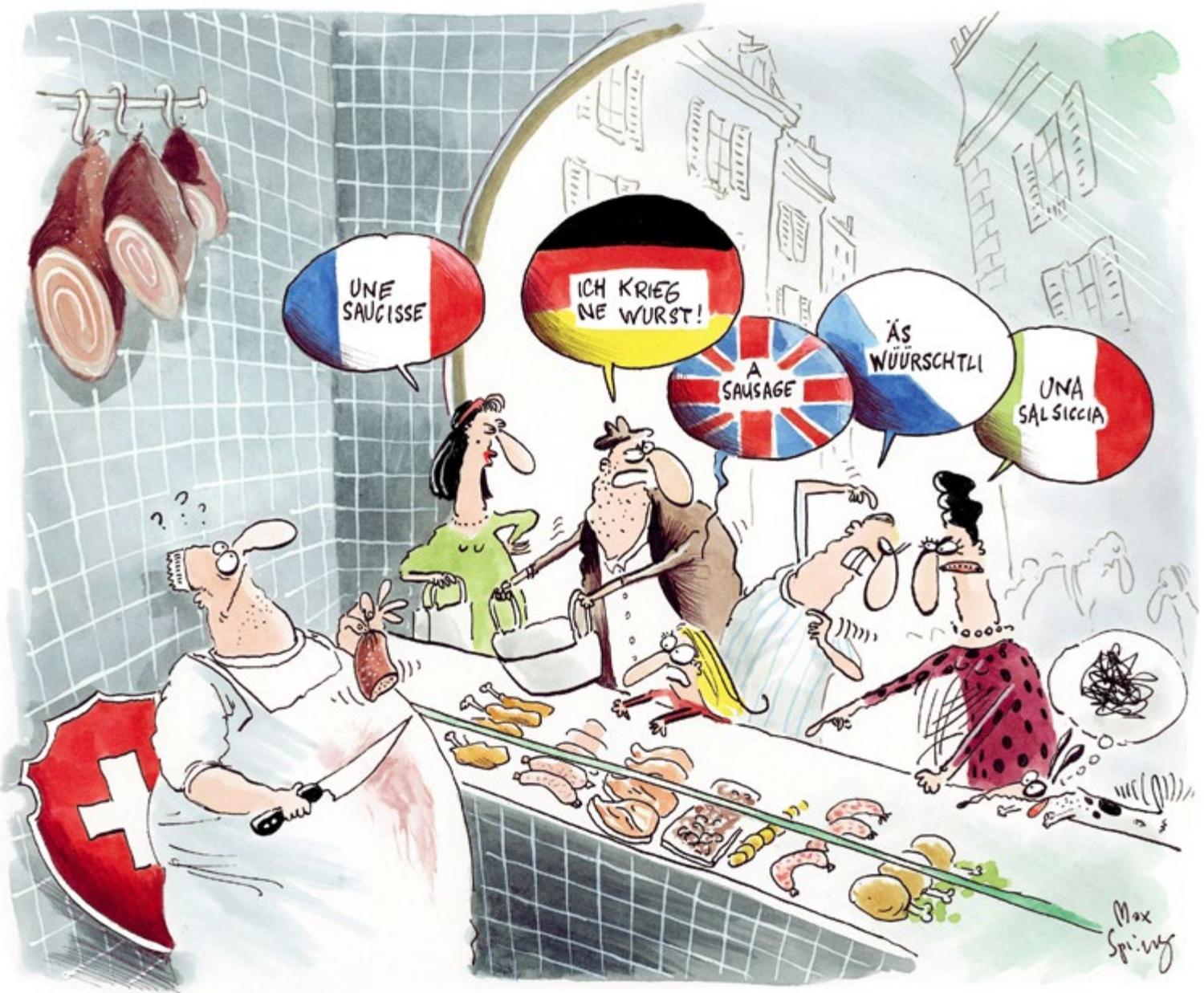
There is a similar problem in Grisons, says Coray. Grisons is the only canton with three official languages (German, Romansh and Italian), yet German continues to dominate at the administrative level. Does it even make sense to promote Romansh if only 0.5 per cent of Grison’s permanent resident population give Romansh as their main language and only 0.9 per cent regularly use it – especially



“Quite a lot has been done at political and legislative level to promote our national languages, but the reality on the ground is sometimes different.”

Renata Coray

as almost all Romansh speakers also speak German anyway? “It is true that my grandmother’s generation was probably the last to speak only Romansh, but promoting language diversity is nevertheless important for national unity and is part of who we are as a nation.” Switzerland’s vari-



ety of languages even appears to have economic benefits. A study carried out by the University of Geneva in 2008 found that multilingualism accounted for nine per cent of Swiss GDP. A new study is currently ongoing, because this percentage is likely to have increased in recent years.

Motivating young people

Naomi Arpagaus from Grisons is another fan of language diversity. The 21-year-old grew up speaking Romansh as well as Swiss German, learned English and Italian at school, specialised in Spanish at upper secondary school and is now taking French lessons. “I currently live in Berne because I am studying there, so I use a lot of German from day to day. However, I mix a lot with friends who speak Romansh.” This language is close to her heart. As president of GiuRu, the Swiss association of Romansh-speaking young people, Arpagaus does a lot to promote Grison’s minority language and encourage interaction among speakers of the canton’s

five Romansh dialects: Sursilvan, Sutsilvan, Surmiran, Puter and Vallader.

“We organise Romansh concert and games nights, we have our own column in the Grisons daily newspaper “La Quotidiana”, and we are in contact with speakers of other minority languages around Europe,” she explains, adding that there is great interest in Romansh among younger people. “Many believe that speaking Romansh puts them at an advantage. Romansh is a gateway to other Latin languages like French, Spanish or Portuguese. And it is almost like a secret language.” But young people use German on social media, not Romansh, don’t they? “People of my age mainly post in English,” she laughs.

English is dominant

It is true that English is emerging as Switzerland’s “fifth national language” (if you discount standard German; see box). English is by far the most-spoken non-Swiss language

By Max Spring,
the “Swiss Review”
cartoonist

in Switzerland (45 per cent). Young people are particularly anglophone, with nearly three quarters of 15- to 24-year-olds shown to have been regularly using English in 2019. “And this is a good thing,” says Verio Pini. “English is actually essential.” Pini is president of *Coscienza Svizzera*, an organisation that promotes language diversity. He is a good fit for the job, given that he grew up in Ticino, studied in Lausanne and Berne, lives half the time in Berne and the rest of the time in Ticino, and also uses French, English and Spanish on a regular basis – mainly for reading the press.

English is undoubtedly important, Pini continues. “Nevertheless, it exerts considerable pressure on Switzerland’s official languages – not only on Romansh and Italian, but on German in Geneva and French in Zurich.” Languages are often only promoted in the region to which they are native, he explains. However, mobility and cultural diversity compel us to look beyond language borders. “Italian, for example, is spoken by more people north of the Alps than in Ticino.” Politicians now realise this, he adds. In its message on culture for 2016 to 2020, the Federal Council set out the objective of promoting the Italian language and Italian culture outside Italian-speaking Switzerland. However, parliament is pushing for a more concerted, dynamic approach to multilingualism that promotes national togetherness as well as integration.

“Our different language regions would certainly be able to understand each other better if everyone used English,” says Pini. “However, national and social cohesion adds up to more than getting our messages across. It also means understanding the culture of other language regions.” People

Swiss German or standard German?

Some regard Swiss German as a dialect, others as a language in its own right. Jürg Niederhauser, president of the Swiss Association for the German Language (SVDS), views this as an “ideological matter” on which linguistic factors have no bearing. Be that as it may, Swiss German is often an everyday impediment to people who come from other language regions or from abroad. Furthermore, use of Swiss German is becoming increasingly popular as more and more people prefer to talk in an informal manner. “Television coverage of sports events used to be entirely in standard German 70 years ago. Now the studio pundits speak in Swiss German,” says Niederhauser, adding that this makes it harder for Swiss from other language regions to understand – and that German-speaking Swiss have, in turn, become more reluctant to speak standard German, because it is used almost exclusively in formal contexts like at school. (EH)

in Switzerland seem quite aware of this fact. According to the FSO survey, 84 per cent of the Swiss population believe that speaking other national languages is key to cohesion within the country.

Learning languages outside school

Philipp Alexander Weber shares this view. Weber, who grew up in Winterthur, went to Fribourg to study economics and had trouble understanding French at first. “Maths was more my thing at school.” Weber quickly realised that



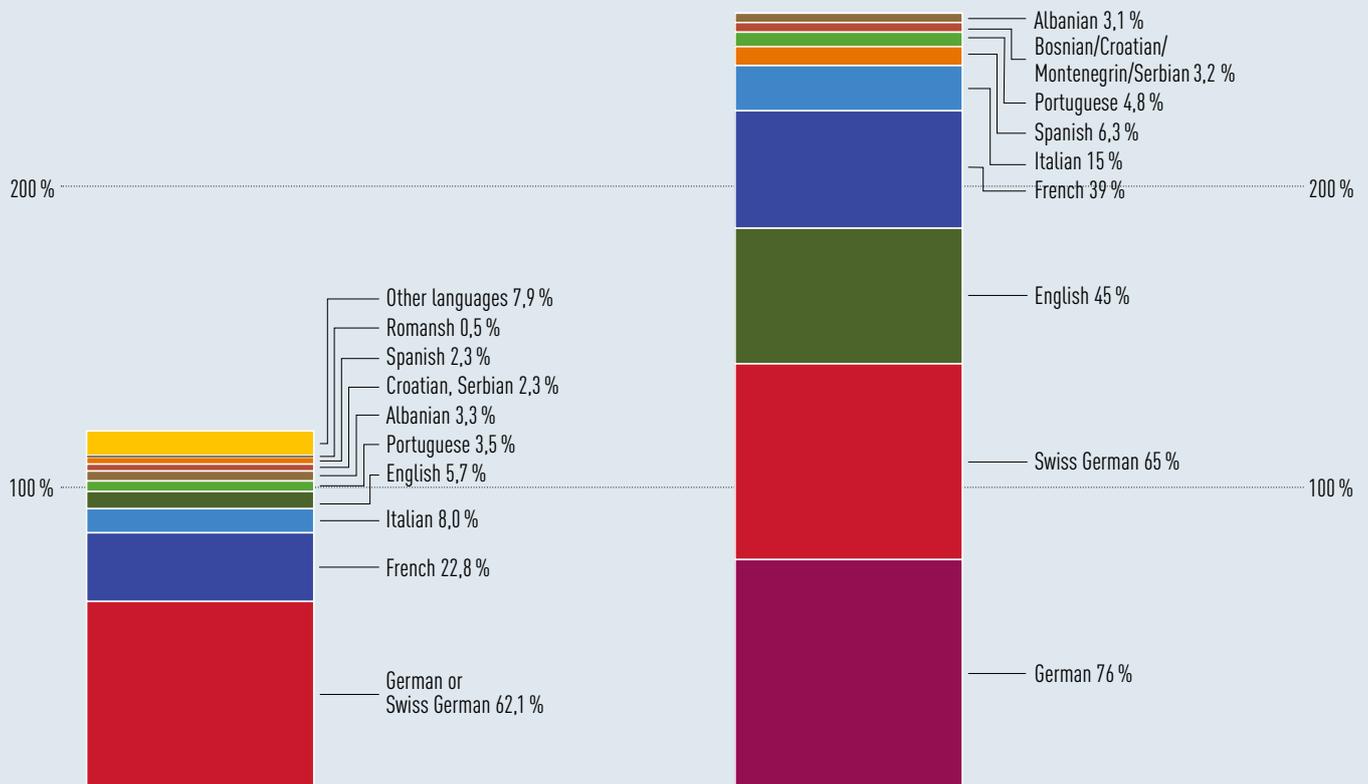
“English exerts considerable pressure on Switzerland’s official languages – not only on Romansh and Italian, but on German in Geneva and French in Zurich.”

Verio Pini

learning the language in situ was much easier than from a textbook. He therefore founded *friLingue* in 2007 – an organisation that offers language stays to young people in Switzerland. “I wanted to build bridges over the language divide,” he explains.

At present, around 1,000 children and teenagers aged between eight and 18 attend *friLingue* language camps each year. Weber has noticed that more and more French-speaking teenagers are visiting the camps. “French, the tongue of diplomacy, has always been a draw for German-speaking Swiss who regard it as a very ‘cultured’ language to learn, while French-speaking Swiss tend to have a difficult relationship with German. Simply because they learn standard German at school but then have to cope with different dialects in places like Berne, Zurich and Basel.” However, the German language became more appealing to French speakers after the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, says Weber. Germany turned into a popular travel destination for them within a few years. Many now want to go to Berlin for a gap year or to German-speaking Switzerland for a language stay.

Meanwhile, several cantons in central and eastern Switzerland have relegated French in favour of English at school. Primary schools in Uri and Appenzell Innerroden, for example, no longer teach French, while the language



Switzerland's main languages

These are the main languages (mother tongues) spoken by Switzerland's permanent resident population. The figures exceed 100 per cent when added together, because respondents to the 2019 survey were able to indicate more than one main language.

Languages used on a daily basis

These are the languages regularly used by Switzerland's permanent resident population. The figures far exceed 100 per cent when added together, because respondents to this survey (published in 2021) were able to indicate more than one main language.

Source: Federal Statistical Office



“Many believe that speaking Romansh puts them at an advantage. Romansh is a gateway to other Latin languages like French, Spanish and Portuguese.”

Naomi Arpagaus

of Molière is no longer a must in Thurgau and Zurich once pupils enter secondary and upper secondary school respectively. “This has also had an impact in terms of the people signing up for our language camps,” says Weber.

But school is not the only place where people are picking up languages. According to the FSO survey, 25 per cent of the population learn one or more languages from the age of 25 – of which English is the most popular.

It also goes without saying that friLingue attendees from different language regions sometimes switch to English to communicate with each other. But Weber is relaxed about this. “We don't think of ourselves as a school, but want to enthuse people about languages.” Weber himself not only uses German and French on a daily basis, but English and Portuguese too. He lived as a Swiss Abroad in Brazil for ten years and has a Brazilian son who speaks Swiss German. “Languages help you to get to know and understand other cultures and mentalities. They open up new horizons.”



Switzerland's burka ban is mainly symbolic

People in Switzerland will not be allowed to wear full-face coverings in future. Fear of radical Islam along with feminist arguments against the burka tipped the vote in favour of a ban. This outcome is primarily symbolic, because only an extremely small number of Muslim women in Switzerland wear the burka.

EVELINE RUTZ

Fully veiled tourists: you can spot them on the Jungfrau-joch, in Lucerne's old town, and on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse. Otherwise, women wearing the burka or niqab are very few and far between in Switzerland. Nevertheless, full-face coverings are now banned across the country according to the Federal Constitution, after 51.2 per cent of the electorate approved the "Yes to a ban on face coverings" popular initiative on 7 March 2021. Twenty cantons voted in favour of a ban; only six against. Switzerland has thus joined six other European nations that have already introduced bans. They include neighbour France, which took the lead in 2011.

Affecting only a small minority

Not only Muslim women risk a fine in future if they cover their faces in public. The ruling also applies to football fans, demonstrators, and advertising mascots. However, carnival participants as well as people wearing protective masks, safety helmets, or balaclavas are exempt. On voting day, the justice minister, Karin Keller-Sutter, stressed that the decision was not a vote against Switzerland's Muslim population and would affect only a fraction of the 400,000 Muslim women who lived in the country. There are 20 to 30 niqab wearers, it is estimated, most of whom have been socialised in the West, are well educated and wear the veil of their own free will. Their numbers have not increased in recent years, and they do not pose a problem, according to the federal government. During the voting campaign, opponents of the initiative called it a "phony debate" and said that those championing the ban were making a mountain out of a molehill.

Voters on the left also supported the ban

Unusual political factors explain why the initiative succeeded. The proposal found favour not only on the conservative side of the spectrum, but among left-leaning women's rights activists who believe face veils symbolise a funda-

mentalist ideology that violates the dignity of women with impunity. Full-face coverings are anathema to a free society, the activists argued. However, feminist motives were also behind people opposing the initiative, with critics saying that women had the right to wear what they wanted. In their view, putting on a niqab was integral to religious freedom.

Party politicians have framed the yes outcome as a vote against radical Islam and female oppression. According to SVP President Marco Chiesa, it is about "defending certain



values and prerequisites that are essential for society to function". SVP National Councillor Walter Wobmann of the Egerkingen Committee, which spearheaded the initiative: "In Switzerland, our tradition is that you show your face. Veils symbolise this extreme, political Islam that has no place in Switzerland." But banning them does not solve any tangible problem, says FDP leader Petra Gössi, adding that clothing rules do nothing to fight terrorism. SP co-president Cédric Wermuth agrees. In his opinion, the ruling will not improve the lives of any of the Muslim women it targeted. "We must now do something to ensure that these women are truly liberated."

Second success for the Egerkingen Committee

This is the first time that voters have approved any popular initiative at national level since 2014. And it is already the second referendum victory of its kind for the Egerkingen Committee. The group, known for its critical stance on Islam, managed to ban the construction of new minarets on mosques in 2009 – a result that took many by surprise and hit the headlines abroad. However, political commen-



Tourists will not be allowed to wear full-face coverings in future – even to keep out the chill wind on the Jungfrauoch.

Photo: Keystone

tators believe that the ban on full-face coverings cannot be compared with the controversy back then. Although supporters tried to exploit anti-Muslim feeling again, Switzerland is not the only country to outlaw face veils. A yes vote was therefore on the cards, they say.

The cantons of Ticino and St. Gallen already had burka bans in place. Furthermore, people attending demonstrations or sports events in 15 cantons are not permitted to cover their face. The cantons are responsible for use of public space, so it would be up to them to enforce the new national ban. However, the cantons are waiting for the federal government to take the lead with a uniform solution. Berne intends to make a proposal by the summer.

Had the decision been left to the Swiss Abroad, Muslim women would still be able to wear full-face coverings in public. Some 51.1 per cent of expatriate voters rejected the initiative. Tourist destinations were also opposed, with 64 per cent voting against in the city of Lucerne for example. The overriding fear was that wealthy guests from the Gulf States would stay away in future.

E-ID is off the agenda

On 7 March, the electorate rejected plans by the Federal Council and parliament to introduce an electronic identity (e-ID) scheme, with 64.4 per cent voting no. In particular, the prospect of the private sector getting involved in the scheme was unpalatable for many. Both opponents and supporters of the rejected initiative now want an exclusively government-driven solution as soon as possible. The Swiss Abroad also dismissed the proposal, albeit a little less emphatically, with 53.2 per cent voting against. E-voting could have become fully digital as a result of e-ID. It will now remain post-reliant for the foreseeable future, because PINs still have to be sent by paper mail.

Free trade with Indonesia

The electorate approved the controversial free trade agreement with Indonesia on 7 March. It was a close-run thing, with 51.7 per cent in favour. The majority of voters from the “Fifth Switzerland” rejected the agreement, which will remove customs duty on imports and exports, including on those of sustainably produced palm oil under certain conditions. Consequently, environmental and social standards have been formalised in a free trade agreement for the first time ever. The standards are likely to have a bearing on future trade agreements.

Human heat maps



Which is giving off more warmth? The radiator or the heating engineer's body?

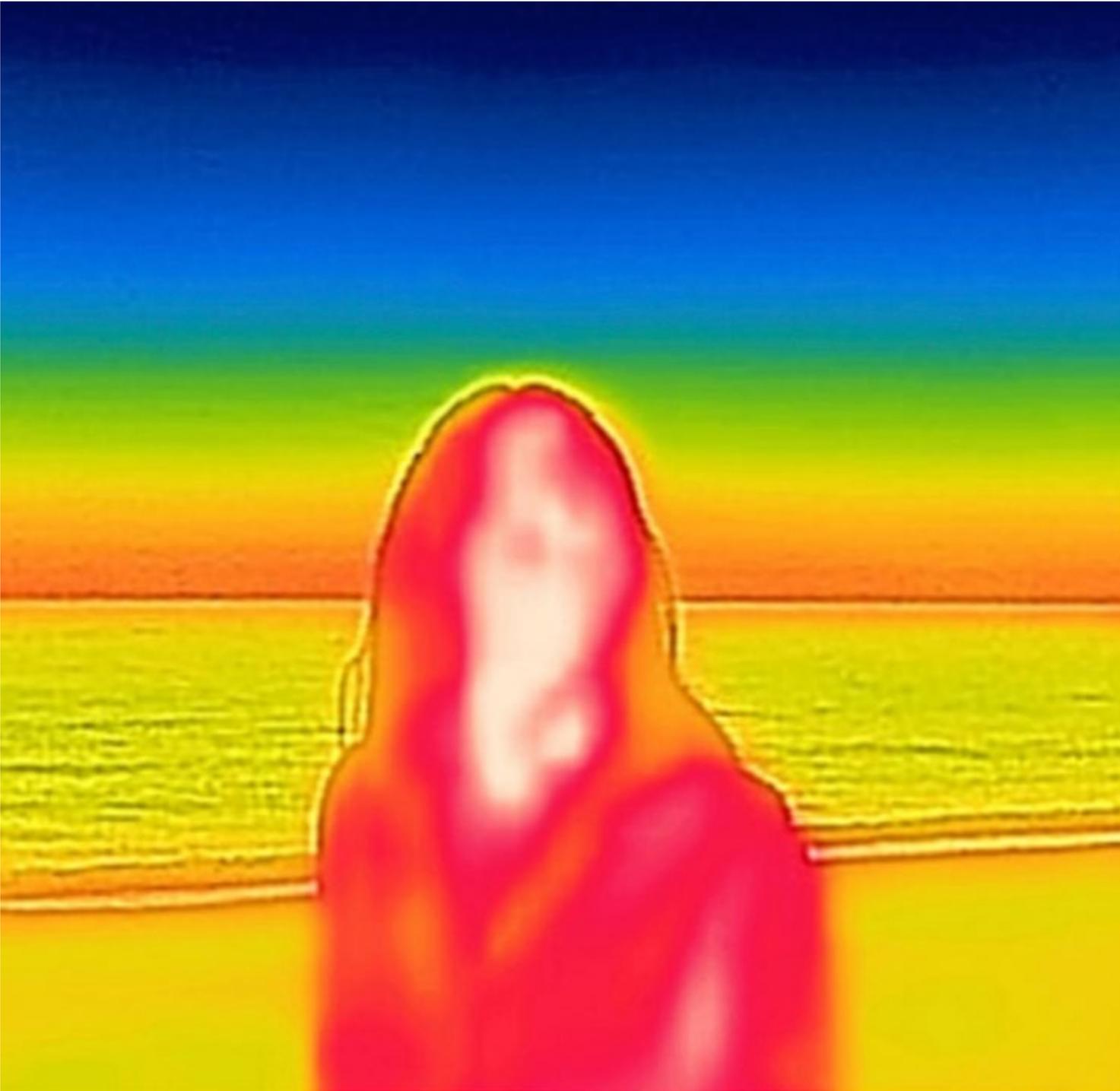
Two lovers look into each other's eyes – their faces two red islands of warmth. A protective mask covers nose and mouth – like a thermal heat shield under burning eyes – with hair, head and neck combining to create a fiery image born of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thermal images along a colour spectrum ranging from light green to dark red are familiar to anyone who has dealt with house energy efficiency issues such as gaps in insulation.

Swiss architect Philippe Rahm, 53, who was educated at the EPFL in Lausanne, has used thermal imagery to create an artistic series of fiery snapshots that are on display at the Swiss Camera Museum in Vevey until the end of August 2021. French speaker Rahm, who lives and works in Paris, is an international pioneer in atmospheric architecture, which studies climate factors such as heat, cold, wind and humidity. He designed a huge eco park that opened in 2020 in the Taiwanese city of Taichung. Rahm's favourite piece of professional equipment is his thermal imaging camera, which transforms invisible infrared radiation into different colours.

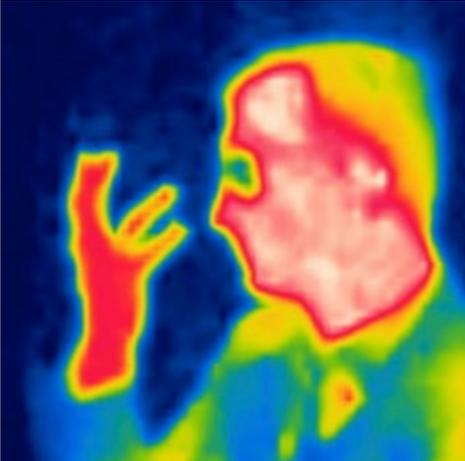
The thermal images in Vevey include an intimate portrait of Chilean architects (and couple) Mauricio Pezo and Sofia von Ellrichshausen as well as a selfie by Philippe Rahm himself. The reds in these pictures give off the most warmth. They are invisible human heat maps made visible.

JÜRIG STEINER

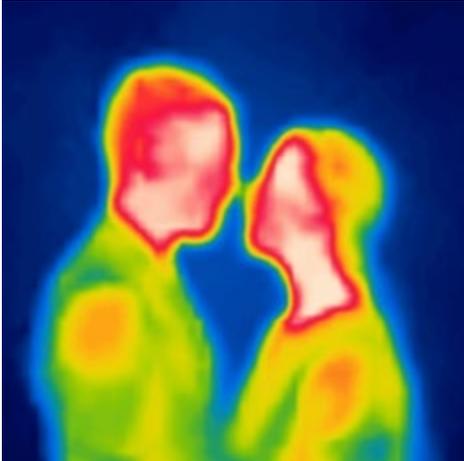
"Infrared" by Philippe Rahm – a special exhibition on display until 29 August 2021 at the Swiss Camera Museum in Vevey, www.cameramuseum.ch



The setting sun warms the body of French actress Lolita Chammah, daughter of Isabelle Huppert



Curator Samuel Gross's gesticulating hand as he makes his point



Mutual warmth between architect couple Mauricio Pezo and Sofia von Ellrichshausen in Concepción, Chile



Architect Philippe Rahm's mask exudes heat but keeps the germs in

Fines for begging? A European judgement overrules Swiss justice

A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights has put an end to the issuance of fines for begging in Geneva. This decision, based on the imprisonment of a Roma woman, has international reach.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Can a person be fined and imprisoned simply because they were holding their hand out to a passerby? On 19 January, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled unanimously that this practice was in violation of Article 8 of its charter, which concerns the right to respect for private and family life. “Being in a clearly vulnerable situation, the applicant - a Roma woman - had the right, inherent in human dignity, to be able to convey her plight and attempt to meet her basic needs by begging,” ruled the court. Unable to pay several fines for begging, adding up to a total of 500 Swiss francs, the woman received a sentence of five days in prison in Geneva. This was in

2015. The ECHR has now condemned this sanction for its severity. “In view of the applicant’s precarious and vulnerable situation, the imposition of a custodial sentence (...) was liable to further increase [her] distress and vulnerability,” it wrote. The court ruled that Geneva should pay the applicant 922 euros in respect of non-pecuniary damage.

It is surprising to learn that in 2008, the Federal Supreme Court had largely anticipated the conclusions of the ECHR, stating that the right to beg should “clearly be considered as (...) forming part of the personal freedom guaranteed by the Constitution.” Yet Swiss judges at the time concluded that Geneva had a legal basis for its prohibition. In Ge-

neva, the ban on begging was intended to safeguard public order, safety and peace.

No breach of public order

The ECHR did not stop at annulling the decisions taken successively by the Geneva justice system and the Federal Supreme Court regarding the outcome for the plaintiff. In its comments, the ECHR also attacked the article of the Geneva Criminal Code, voted for in 2007, which punishes all begging by way of a fine. The judges considered that begging did not represent a breach of public order; at most, it caused moral discomfort. Finally, the argument that pursuit of beggars is intended to fight against mafia networks – a fact that Switzerland was unable to prove – was problematic. For the ECHR, the Roma appeared more as victims.

A lawyer for Roma, congratulated and threatened

On 19 January, Dina Bazarbachi, a lawyer who has defended Roma in Geneva for 14 years, was emotional at the news. “Two weeks before the announcement, I feared I would lose before the court, which would have had harmful consequences on the way Roma are treated in Europe.” The ECHR’s ruling, the jurisprudence of which applies to the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe, represents the end of a judicial battle ongoing since 2008. Dina Bazarbachi has received several messages from

A Roma beggar in Geneva holding her takings. The Geneva police went as far as confiscating such takings – until the ECHR ruling.

Photo: Eric Roset, Geneva



lawyers congratulating her on her tenacity. But she has also received hate mail, including one death threat, about which she notified the police. “This shows the hatred that certain people feel towards Roma,” she says, noting that to her mind, the Genevan law on begging had been created and applied specifically with this population group in mind. Legislative debates have indeed effectively focused on the Roma and the majority of fines, if not all of them, are issued to Roma people. This situation, if it could be proven, would constitute a violation of the prohibition on indirect discrimination, underlined the court.

Geneva prepares a new law against begging

In Geneva, the ECHR decision has caused something of a stir. The Genevan public prosecutor, Olivier Jornot, who had been involved in drawing up the law against begging, has been obliged to halt all legal proceedings underway and to end the fining of people caught begging. Hundreds of fines issued no longer apply. In 2020, the Genevan police issued 3,723 fines for begging, amounting to 457,890 francs. In these operations, 5,278 francs was seized, as money considered the product of an illegal activity is confiscated from those found begging. For years, Bazarbachi has been vigorously opposing these fines, which end up being reduced by judges, in view of the vulnerable situation of Roma. “This whole system is extremely expensive. There are

other battles to fight,” states the lawyer, who deplores the launch of new cantonal draft legislation against begging by an FDP minister. Introduced at the beginning of March, this law would notably prohibit begging in any commercial or touristic street. The lawyer considers that the sanctions stemming from this legislation risk contravening the ruling of the ECHR. She is also uncertain of the political gain to be had from the draft legislation. “The pandemic has increased poverty amongst Swiss people as well. There is more solidarity for the poverty-stricken, including the Roma,” opines Bazarbachi.

Cantons under the spotlight

The court’s ruling has forced all of the cantons to examine the legal risks of convictions which could be challenged, or even result in the paying out of compensation. In Basel, a motion concerning the reintroduction of the prohibition on begging had been adopted by the parliament. The ECHR ruling has caused this process to be suspended. In Lausanne, where the cantonal law on begging draws on the Genevan legislation, the ECHR ruling is currently under review. In Zurich, where the police currently issue fines to people found begging (700 fines in 2020), a communication issued in March indicated that for the moment, the court’s ruling would not change anything.

The ruling in question has already had an impact outside Switzerland,



as in France where criminal law only prohibits begging termed “aggressive”. In February, Parisian lawyer Lionel Crusoe, a specialist on such questions, represented the Foundation Abbé Pierre and the French League of Human Rights in contesting a municipal ruling in the town of Metz prohibiting begging. “We used the European ruling in the arguments we laid before the court and we were successful,” he said.

Above: Begging may cause a moral dilemma, but it poses no threat to public order, ruled the ECHR.

Below: “BEGGAR” – a passport note by the Genevan police, with adverse consequences for this particular Roma.

Photos: Eric Roset, Geneva

Across America like Chaplin's tramp

Swiss popular writer Ernst Frey travelled across the United States on foot as a callow 15-year-old

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Who has not laughed at Chaplin's portrayal of the "Tramp" – that American migrant worker of the 1880s who hitched rides on freight trains, took what paying work was available, and stole chickens to eat? Chaplin's inimitable character was later immortalised in the 1908 novel "The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp" by William Henry Davies (1871–1940). British rock band Supertramp that formed in 1969 took their name in a nod to this literary work.

A Swiss migrant in America

However, not so well known is a Swiss who also travelled through America as a tramp at the age of 15, subsequently chronicling his experiences in a book that reads more like a sociological than a literary study. The Swiss in question was Zurzach-born Ernst Frey (1876–1956), who crossed the United States from 1891 to 1894 before taking over a farm in Benken (canton of Basel-Landschaft) in 1905. Together with his bookworm wife, Frey, a keen socialist, published autobiographical stories such as "Güggs. Eine Geschichte" (Güggs. A story), 1912; "Oh Menschenherz" (Oh heart), 1915; "Unterwegs" (In transit), 1925; "Die Frau in Sammet" (The woman in velvet), 1930; and "Briefe an meine Frau" (Letters to my wife), 1925 – a work that documented his notable thirst for learning. Frey described his journey as a tramp, which he claims took him on foot to nearly all the US states, as early as 1906 in "Zugvogel. Skizzen aus der Heimat und überm Ozean" (The migrant. Sketches from home and overseas).

From Knoxville to Cincinnati

He only gets on the train "as a last resort", he writes – to join a group of "20 to 50 tramps" on the way from Knoxville to Cincinnati. A stick of chewing tobacco helps him win the group's trust. "I gave each of them a piece, and their eyes melted." An old man in the empty freight car recounts stories from the Civil War. "The train began to move. Everyone lay stretched out on the deck and chewed their tobacco, evidently enjoying the rattling and shaking that grew ever more pronounced." In Livingston, the train engineer tries to banish the uninvited passengers with water from a hose. "Luckily, I managed to lie face down. Otherwise, I would

have drowned from the sheer force of the water." He then hears a voice outside the car: "No more water, unfortunately! Otherwise –the devil catch me – I would have drowned them all like rats!" A dozen tramps later beat the train engineer to a pulp, he subsequently reads in the newspaper.

Even Polly cannot stop him

Before he can return on a cargo ship to Liverpool in 1894, the young Swiss works as a chef on an oyster island, where he has a dramatic love affair with Polly, a girl of Amerindian extraction – herself only 17-years-old. Beaten and driven away from home by her father, the girl wants to accompany Frey on his journey. But the writer rules this out: "It was impossible for the girl to be my travel companion." Although head over heels in love, he holds firm – even after Polly nurses him back to health after a bout of malaria, and goes as far as to steal for him. Thanks to Frey, Polly is acquitted of theft. The teenagers leave the courtroom – and after the couple show their mutual affection on the river bank and sing American songs together, Frey secretly leaves "the most beautiful little Yankee" he had ever seen in order to resume his carefree hobo existence. "Saying goodbye to Polly a second time would have been too hard for me."

Ernst Frey's books are no longer in print.

"I love the United States because no other country allows me to satisfy my wanderlust as much as America does. I love its size and beauty, all its natural wonders, and not least its freedoms. I live my life here in such a way as to remain mentally and physically fit. Things are completely different in my home country. I soon would have come to a sticky end there."

(Ernst Frey, "Zugvogel. Skizzen aus der Heimat und überm Ozean" (The migrant. Sketches from home and overseas), Verlag Arnold Bopp, Zurich, 1906; out of print)

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

And yet they are speaking

Elements in parliament wanted the government's Covid-19 scientific task force to be banned from making public statements. In the end, this did not happen. Nevertheless, the episode has caused quite a stir. Relations between scientists and politicians remain delicate.

SUSANNE WENGER

“And yet it moves!” This is what scientist Galileo Galilei is supposed to have said in the 17th century to the Vatican Inquisition that forced him to recant his assertion that the earth moved around the sun – a claim that contradicted papal teaching. Now let us adapt and apply Galileo's famous show of dissent to the government's coronavirus scientific advisory task force. “And yet they are speaking!” one might say. Admittedly, juxtaposing the Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force with Galileo is a little contrived. Yet Swiss commentators were recently making this comparison and wondering whether parliament actually wanted to go back to the dark ages.

This followed attempts in the National Council to ban the Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force from making public statements. Before consultations began on the Covid-19 Act this spring, the influential National Council Economic Affairs and Taxation Committee expressed the wish that the task force no longer be allowed to comment on the Federal Council's coronavirus measures and that it simply carry out its advisory role without making any public remarks. The committee later toned down this request following fierce criticism, and the National Council eventually also rejected a watered-down motion by 116 to 78 votes. Nevertheless, the episode has gone down as an attempt to silence the scientists.

Political disgruntlement

The Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force comprises some 70 experts from many of Switzerland's renowned universities and research bodies, covering a number of specialisms such as epidemiology, economics and ethics. The experts, who work voluntarily, regularly publish policy briefs

that evaluate the ongoing situation in light of new studies or other data. These publications constitute consolidated scientific assessments. Members of the task force have not only been speaking at Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) press conferences, but have also been giving interviews and making statements on social media. Their government mandate allows them to do so – creating a delicate situation in the process.

Some scientists have used the sudden limelight to deliberately vent their frustrations whenever politicians fail to implement their recommendations. Even before calling for the task force to be silenced, critics were accusing these experts of spreading alarm, exerting pressure on the authorities, and not speaking with one voice. The issue came to a head after the task force warned of a third wave – just when the centre-right and right-wing parties were trying to make the Federal Council lift Covid restrictions. In particular, the SVP, FDP and The Centre accused the task force of lacking a single voice on Covid. “The task force's contra-

Sober appraisal of the infection curve – microbiologist and task force head Martin Ackermann was notable for his quiet, objective manner even during the controversial “silencing” episode. Photo: Keystone





National Councillor Regula Rytz: "An attempt to silence the bearers of bad news."

dictory statements have been unsettling people more than helping them," said Lucerne National Councillor for The Centre, Leo Müller, adding that clear communication and clear rules on what and what not to say were vital in times of crisis.

Freedom of speech for scientists

However, the SP, the Greens, the Green Liberals, and elements of the centre-right and right wing said that the scientists had a right to speak out. Berne National Councillor for the Greens, Regula Rytz, referred to an "attempt to silence the bearers of bad news". She said that enlightened liberal democracy would lose all credibility if it failed to take the experts seriously. The media also thought the episode crossed a line, calling it a "scandal". Limiting freedom of speech for scientists has a detrimental impact on society, wrote the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung". Scientists making their recommendations public was the only way in which people could make up their own minds about the measures being taken by politicians, the newspaper continued.

The task force, for its part, tried not to get drawn into the controversy. Its head Martin Ackermann, a professor of microbiology at ETH Zurich, whose quiet, objective manner had already been noticed, stressed that the task force was not telling politicians what to do. What it was doing was presenting a range of options, "that we know are effective in preventing infections". The information and statements provided by the task force were also of use to cantons, associations, businesses and the general public. Regarding accusations that the task force was spreading unnecessary alarm, Ackermann said that the purpose of making certain projections was precisely to prevent these scenarios from occurring.

End of lockdown – despite the data

Even though a "silencing order" never materialised, these projections went unheeded when the Federal Council announced an extensive easing of restrictions in April – contrary to the prevailing data. Meanwhile, the debate continues on the extent to which science should mix with politics. This applies not only to the pandemic, but to climate change and environmental issues. For example, the upcoming Clean Drinking Water initiative has highlighted divergences between the Federal Council on the one hand and,

on the other, water experts from ETH Zurich who have drawn attention to the pesticide issue. "Solution-oriented policymaking must take account of scientific facts," says Servan Grüninger, a biostatistician at the University of Zurich. Grüninger is the president of Reatch, a think tank that wants to bring science, politics and society closer together. Nevertheless, both science and politics must do more to make this cooperation work, he adds.

According to Grüninger, who is a member of The Centre, scientists are political amateurs who are unfamiliar with the machinations of power. "They think that their findings will automatically result in the right policies." Some need to be more aware that policymakers must also take economic and social aspects into account in addition to scientific evidence. Furthermore, they often don't know how to influence politicians effectively. When scientists start commenting on political issues, politicians can, in turn, quickly interpret this as arrogance or meddling. Scientists are only listened to when they concur.

Promoting dialogue

A project called Franxini now aims to promote mutual understanding. Scientists and politicians across the entire spectrum have launched it as a reaction to the "silencing" controversy surrounding the Covid-19 Act. The project is named after Stefano Franscini, the son of poor Ticinese farmers, who was quick to recognise the key importance of education. Franscini, a liberal, was elected to the Federal Council in 1848. He founded today's ETH Zurich and laid the foundation for the creation of the Federal Statistical Office. It is all about making scientists fit for politics, says Grüninger, whose Reatch think tank is behind the initiative. Intensive courses will equip scientists with all they need to know about the Swiss political system.

The project is already bearing fruit, at least as far as Marcel Salathé is concerned. The Genevan epidemiologist took a lot of political flak last year and has since left the task force. He now supports the Franxini project and is currently poring over the contents of the 900-page Handbook of Swiss Politics. "Read the blasted instructions," was his tongue-in-cheek comment on Twitter.

The article reflects the status as of 1 May 2021.

The Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force website:
www.sciencetaskforce.ch



National Councillor Leo Müller: "The task force's contradictory statements have been unsettling people more than helping them."



Biostatistician Servan Grüninger: "Many scientists think that their findings will automatically result in the right policies."



Alan Roura, a child of the sea

In January, Swiss sailor Alan Roura completed his second Vendée Globe, an extreme offshore race, again as the youngest participant. Son of a tinsmith, Roura's sailing journey began on a houseboat moored in Geneva.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The little house that serves as Alan Roura's base when he is in Switzerland is located high up in the port town of Versoix. It is just a stone's throw from a suspended motorway and a boatyard where old sailboats are kept. Behind the gate hides an immaculately tidied workshop. Georges Roura, the father of Genevan sailor Alan Roura, works there as a tinsmith. Welcome to the abode of the Roura family. Alan Roura meets us at the door, friendly and relaxed, having returned to dry land on 11 February after 95 days of racing across the ocean in the Vendée Globe.

Let's go back to the beginning of the story. The young Alan initially found himself on a boat for practical reasons: his parents wanted to save on rent in order to prepare for a voyage on the sea. He was two years old when his mother, Myriam, and his father, of whom he is the only common child,

bought a boat on the lake and moved in. Moored in Port-Noir, Geneva, the Almyr measured 10 metres in length. The little yacht housed both parents and the four children of this newly-formed family unit. Alan grew up across from La Rade, the Geneva City waterfront. "We slept three children to a 4m2 cabin at the back. It was the height of luxury," the Genevan tells us. Having never set foot in school, he concedes, "I'm not an intellectual." At the weekend, the family would roam Lake Geneva, a prelude to their voyages on the sea.

A family on the water

Next to the Almyr was moored the Ludmila, a yacht measuring 12.5 metres. The family purchased and renovated it before heading off to Port-Carmargue. "My father dreamt of setting sail. He was not a sailor, or someone

who read tales written by sailors. He is someone who lives for himself, not through others. He obtained his sailing licence, and we learnt everything on the sea." At the time of departure, the family had no set plan. The Ludmila carried the whole family, except the eldest sister, who stayed in Geneva, to the West Indies. The trip took a year, with the father teaching mathematics and the mother teaching French. After four years of travelling, the Rouras returned briefly to Europe, only to set off for the Caribbean again. Their intention was to work at each stop along the way in order to fill the kitty.

Working for a nabob in the Caribbean

The family was now travelling with two children aboard. They made their way following the winds and the work. In Venezuela, seven months of work in

Genevan sailor Alan Roura never went to school. Everything he needed to know, he learned at sea.

Photo: Keystone



Solo sailor Alan Roura on La Fabrique. The vibrations of a constantly moving boat make it impossible for Roura to relax completely.

Photo: Keystone

a shipyard ended in failure: their salaries were not paid. Next they headed in the direction of Martinique, and another shipyard. A phone call took them to Grenada, where millionaire Georges Cohen was building a palace on a private island. Georges Roura headed a team of eight locals, whom he trained in metalwork and tin-smithy, arts which later flourished in the area. Alan managed a little port. “That job was the worst,” jokes Alan. But the bosses were pleasant and the family had a cottage on stilts. At 15 years old, Alan would take nabobs, including Serge Dassault, on offshore fishing trips.

Later, the crew was reduced to just Georges and Alan. They took the Ludmila to the Pacific Ocean. The boat was 40 years old with the autopilot out of order. The two Swiss reached Tahiti after 22 days at sea. “We slept at the helm.” Alan was 17 years old. Today, he describes his father, who briefly enters the kitchen during our interview (svelte, white hair, weather-beaten hands, intense expression, smiling and direct), as an excellent sailor. How does he define an excellent sailor? “Someone who is able to go from point A to point B, whatever the weather, and who gets their boat there in good condition without taking pointless risks,” summarises Alan. Later on, the duo would narrowly escape an accident at sea caused by

damage incurred off the coast of New Caledonia. Some makeshift repairs amidst waves of 10 metres managed to save them.

The call of offshore racing

The Rouras’ trip on the Ludmila ended in New Caledonia. That was where Alan first experienced offshore racing. “Unlike other Swiss sailors like Dominique Wavre, Alan Roura doesn’t come from a background in regattas, but from the sea,” notes Genevan Bernard Schopfer, sailor and expert in sailing history. Gifted with prime technical and practical experience of the sea, Roura notches up all the classics: Mini-Fastnet, Mini Transat, Transat Jacques-Vabre. At the end of this journey, the young man comes across the Vendée Globe, known as the Everest of the seas. He completes the race twice, both times as the youngest sailor.

The 2016–17 edition, in which Roura finished 12th, was an adventure falling into the category of discovery and pleasure. In 2021 he finished 17th, after the vessel was damaged twice and after sailing half of the race with a keel stuck in the axis.

A zero-comfort vessel

La Fabrique, the second of its name, is an IMOCA yacht built by Switzerland’s

Bernard Stamm in 2007. “I wouldn’t last two days in a boat like that,” remarks Bernard Schopfer. “As long as everything is going well, it is a yacht like any other. But as soon as there is a problem, you realise how powerful it is,” explains Alan. A spinnaker in the water? Count up to six hours of work to get the 400 square metres of canvas back onboard. A gybe using this sail? The manoeuvre will take around an hour. The boat functions as a sounding board. “The constant movement means it is impossible to relax your body.” In terms of comfort, “there is a bucket used as a toilet and a bottle that you press for a shower”. For land-lovers or pleasure-boaters, the speed of an IMOCA yacht would be terrifying, with highs of 30 knots and above (60 km per hour). “Once you’re used to it, you feel like you’re going really slowly at 20 knots.”

Once the race was over, Roura and his team returned to work immediately. “We are looking for a new sponsor, Swiss, if possible,” says Aurélie, Alan’s wife, who handles communication. La Fabrique had been sponsored by the eponymous bakery brand, based in the canton of Vaud. The Vendée Globe is a full-time project.

Imagine all the people

Featuring 300 acts, it was the biggest music festival ever to be announced in Switzerland. They called it the Ghost Festival for good reason, because it was never going to happen – and never did happen. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of music lovers paid for tickets worth up to 100 francs each. An exercise in pure imagination – and solidarity.

MARC LETTAU

Festival posters usually contain line upon line of names – the headliners in large font, the lesser-known acts in much smaller type. No such placards have been on display around Switzerland for months. Venues are shut, festivals cancelled. We all know why.



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records.

This edition: the biggest Swiss music festival that never happened.

But then the placard promising everything began appearing everywhere at the start of the year. Stephan Eicher! James Gruntz! Züri West! Lo & Leduc! Stefanie Heinzmann! Some 300 acts, from top billing to the obscure – all in strict alphabetic order, all in the same font size. It was a mega event. And it was called the Ghost Festival.

“Elaborate safety precautions”

This despite a nationwide ban on gatherings of more than five people. The promoters had taken “elaborate safety precautions” to enable “up to eight million festivalgoers”. But here’s the thing – the festival dates were 27 and 28 February, there were no actual



Without the usual headliners in large font, the festival poster was a flat-hierarchy cross-section of Switzerland's music scene.

plans for any event to take place. All fans would hear would be the same sweet sound of nothing that they had already had to endure for a year.

Despite this being a phantom event, 35,000 people were happy to shell out up to 100 Swiss francs each for a ticket, relying on the simple understanding that none of this money would stay in the festival coffers. Instead, it would go straight to the many musicians and crew who would normally light up Switzerland's festival scene. The 'admission fee' was symbolic, leaving fans to imagine and yearn for what might have been.

Empty diaries

But what did the acts think of it? Mezzo-soprano, songwriter and composer Stephanie Szanto was one of the 300. For Szanto the Ghost Festival was undoubtedly a strange episode. But then so were the preceding twelve months – a period that has left her completely out of work. She is a freelance artist who loves to play at various live venues. The pandemic is her worst-case scenario come true. "It was a catastrophe," she says. One that hit her hard from a personal, artistic and financial perspective. With her diary empty and no engagements in sight, Szanto now has nothing to sustain her. She says she has been plunged into an "uninspiring, mind-numbing void". Money issues are all that are left for her to ponder. "How do I pay my rent?" The detailed paperwork involved in applying for compensation for loss of earnings now keeps her glued to the computer. "It leaves me with zero energy or creativity."



Mezzo-soprano
Stephanie Szanto
was one of the 300
non-performing acts.
Photo provided

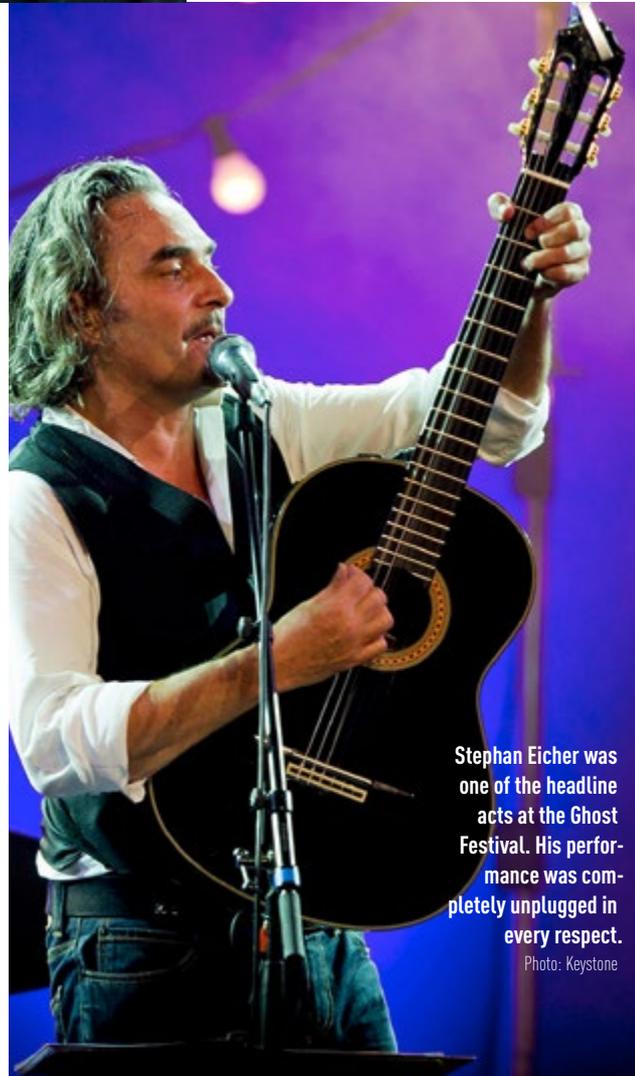
comes a point when you wonder whether choosing an alternative date makes sense at all."

Dark at the end of the tunnel

It has been a year of postponements, delays, and weary hope. Meanwhile, time passes. Stephanie Szanto no longer only talks about her lost year, but lost years – in the plural. The entire artistic sector has been affected terribly, she says. With public funding for culture drying up, no one knows whether venues, concert promoters, or (non-fictitious) festivals will ever

No more rocking

Bernese folk-rock combo Kummerbuben was another one of the 300 non-performing acts. The band has played at many well-known real-life festivals. But the boys have spent the past year more or less in limbo, says Urs Gilgen (guitar, banjo, mandolin). Some acts claim that the enforced break has spurred them on. Not in their case. "We are a group of lads who live off the adrenaline. We need a reason to play. What is the point of rehearsing when there is nothing to rehearse for?" They have no wish to make music off the back of a pandemic either. "That would be completely unnecessary." They feel like their record is stuck in an infinite loop. Gigs have been put back to later and later dates – a depressing state of affairs. "There



Stephan Eicher was
one of the headline
acts at the Ghost
Festival. His performance
was completely unplugged in
every respect.

Photo: Keystone



Had it been a real festival, Bernese folk rockers Kummerbuben would have showcased their new album "Itz mau Apokalypse" (Apocalypse now). Photo provided

recover. "It means that the long-term prospects of getting work are bleak for creative artists like me." Instead of light at the end of the tunnel, all she sees is a murky darkness. There is nothing to look forward to. No straws to clutch. Szanto is of course not the only one to have felt this way during the pandemic. "But the experience for artists like me has been particularly hard, I would say."

Boulevard of broken dreams

Zurich band Sputnik Sushi is one of the many small acts that featured on the Ghost Festival poster. The four-piece prefers to perform at minor venues, combining cover versions from the 1940s to the 1990s with

Americana influences and their own rough-and-ready material. Sputnik Sushi's double bassist Daniel Reichlin knows that he and his fellow band members are relatively lucky. At least they have a concert scheduled for September 2021, albeit one that may or may not take place. Reichlin wonders how many of the acts mentioned on the Ghost Festival poster will still be performing after the pandemic. Small, ambitious amateur formations like Sputnik Sushi should not have too many problems, he says. Bands like his live for music, but not for the money. Headline acts are also sitting pretty. "However, there is currently huge pressure on all the young, talented professional musicians who may still be starting out. These are the acts that

everyone will want to see in a few years' time." If their futures are in doubt, then there will be a dearth of talent. Sputnik Sushi is therefore waiving its performance fee, like many other Ghost Festival acts. Money that will help others instead. "We need to support those who are earning absolutely nothing at the moment."

Money for nothing?

Two purchased tickets to the Ghost Festival lie here on my editor's desk – as do a few newspaper articles that have taken the event to task. Comments range from "fraud" to "muting the musicians instead of giving them a voice". According to "Weltwoche", the Ghost Festival is a "shameless form



of begging dressed up as subversion". This begs the question: why don't all 300 acts do a gigantic live-stream event together?

Reflection of reality

"Of course, we would rather play live than be seen doing nothing," says Gilgen from Kummerbuben. But it is right to focus on solidarity, in his view. "And this is no token show of solidarity, but the biggest of its kind in our industry since the start of the pandemic. It is also very much a grassroots project." Sputnik Sushi's double bassist Reichlin has a different opinion: "Having no face-to-face audience is hard for us musicians." In-person performance is the life blood of music – his band would not have wanted to be part of a virtual concert. Only a non-event like this can reflect reality. What is happening in Swiss music at the moment? "Basically nothing."

More than just a metaphor

Isn't this a lot of fuss just for the sake of a metaphor? "No," says Szanto, "the festival is much more than just that." It is a show of collectivism – an act of

Festival tickets and arm bands, but no admission. You bought them and, in the conventional sense, got absolutely nothing in return. Photo MJL

solidarity, "in the face of a misfortune that is far from over". Wouldn't making more online music also be an act of solidarity? No, she says. "Music is organic and lives off performer-audience interaction. Without this, the ecosystem dies." Live streaming is no substitute for real gigs. More and more people getting used to free online concerts is not what we need. "Because it makes them believe that music costs nothing, which of course it does not."

No stage fright

Point taken. Real-life face-to-face interaction is the only way to ensure the proverbial spark between people making the music and those listening to it. Hence, an offline Ghost Festival makes sense. But how did the Ghost Festival actually pan out for the musicians themselves? Daniel Reichlin says it was a "difficult and slightly depressing weekend". Having said that, he experienced no stage fright whatever – a first. "But the anticipation, the stress, the sound check and the stage fright are precisely what you need to get the adrenaline going when the lights go down." The Ghost Festival weekend was a little less silent for Urs

Gilgen, who decided to play a bit of music at home with his children. Stephanie Szanto spent time in the mountains. She said she felt a world away from the concert scene while she was there.

Ghost Orchestra

The Ghost Festival went out with a discernible whimper if not a bang, spawning a curious album in record time – a weird, eerie soundtrack recorded by 200 of the 300 acts. It is a jarring record that reflects the malaise in which many musicians currently find themselves. One week after the Ghost Festival had ended, The Ghost Orchestra reached the top of the official Swiss album charts. Who could have imagined 200 different acts hitting number one at the same time? Not bad for a non-event.

Encore?

How about a second Ghost Festival? "Not if we can help it" is the consensus within the music industry. "Not necessary" is the optimistic political answer – the federal parliament has hurriedly approved a public insurance scheme that will allow Swiss festival promoters to plan ahead for summer 2021 despite the ongoing uncertainty. It remains to be seen whether the optimism is justified. Three of the biggest long-standing open-air events – St. Gallen, the Gurten Festival in Berne, and the Paléo Festival in Nyon – have since cancelled for 2021. Although the music scene has not given up all hope: a summer of many small, impromptu pop-up concerts is possible around the corner.

Unhappy brewers, happy revenue officers

7680

Cook, bake, eat – put on weight. People in Switzerland have been eating more during the pandemic. The average Swiss household spent 7,680 francs on food and drink in 2020 – more than ever before and 11.3 per cent more than in 2019.

34 000 000

Beer consumption also increased, right? Wrong. It fell significantly, because no one could visit their local pub for months. The shortfall equates to 34 million fewer glasses of beer served compared to the previous year.

10

From civil servants to police officers to teachers – Switzerland's "bloated" public services are one of the things that pub regulars love to grumble about over a beer or three. Let's do a fact check. Ten per cent of employed people work in the public sector. The figure is 14 in Italy, 16 in the UK, 22 in France and as high as 29 in Sweden.

56

Sweden? Switzerland? People often confuse the two countries. Are our public-sector workers less happy in their jobs than Sweden's considerable contingent? Not at all. Only 21 per cent would like to change jobs. On the other hand, 56 per cent of Switzerland's private-sector workforce are unhappy in their current job.

7160 000 000

Revenue officers also belong to the public sector. Tax exiles certainly do not. Swiss companies and individuals have plenty of wealth squirrelled away abroad – amounting to 5.68 billion francs in lost tax revenue. Foreign tax exiles in Switzerland, on the other hand, provide our country with 12.84 billion francs in additional tax income. This gives a net profit of 7.16 billion francs.

FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

What about military service if I return to Switzerland?

I am a 19-year-old Swiss citizen who has grown up in Brazil. I am now thinking of doing a bachelor's degree in Switzerland after I leave school. But what about Swiss military service?

Essentially, every Swiss male aged 18 or over must do military service or, alternatively, civilian service until the end of the year in which he reaches the age of 36. If you return to Switzerland, you will therefore be required to fulfil your military service obligation – assuming that you are deemed fit for military service. You are liable for conscription until the end of the year in which you reach the age of 24. You must complete basic military training by the end of the following year, i.e. the year in which you turn 25.

If you wish to study in Switzerland and therefore intend to stay in Switzerland for a period of more than three months, you will be obliged to report to the relevant cantonal district command within 14 days of your arrival for the purpose of carrying out military service. If you come to Switzerland to study after you have turned 25, you will be exempt from military service due to your age. Hence, you will not have to complete basic military training, but you will have to pay military service exemption tax.

Some exceptions apply to dual nationals. If you hold dual nationality and have already carried out military service or civilian service in the other country of which you are a citizen, you no longer have to do military service in Switzerland. However, this does not release you from the obligation to provide notification of your arrival to the district command and pay the military service exemption tax. Only if you have done military service in Germany, France, Austria or Italy will you be exempt from paying the military service exemption tax, owing to agreements that Switzerland has concluded with these countries.

Incidentally, Swiss Abroad can also volunteer to do basic military training in Switzerland. Requests in such cases should be addressed to:

Kommando Ausbildung
Personelles der Armee
Steuerung und Vorgaben,
Rodtmattstrasse 110
3003 Berne
tel.: +41 58 464 20 63
fax: +41 58 464 32 70
email: personelles.persa@vtg.admin.ch
website: www.vtg.admin.ch

In Switzerland for education or training

Information on education in Switzerland specifically for young Swiss Abroad



A good education provides an excellent foundation for a person's professional future. Switzerland is known worldwide for its excellent education system. But the past year, characterised by the Covid-19 pandemic, posed a great challenge to Swiss educational and training institutions and their students and trainees. Universities and universities of applied sciences had to switch to online teaching at very short notice. Apprentices in dual vocational training had to adapt to new rules in their training companies and could sometimes only attend vocational schools virtually. Much social exchange was lost, but the most important thing remained: teaching and training continued without interruption at all levels. Wherever possible, a return to face-to-face teaching is taking place.

Young Swiss people abroad also have the opportunity to come to Switzerland for vocational training or university studies.

Educatiosuisse offers information, advice and support free of charge:

- **Information** relating to different educational options such as university studies or vocational training
- **Information relating to specific questions** regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.
- **Individual counselling** on the topic of education in Switzerland
- **Vocational and study counselling** in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider (fee-based)
- **Assistance** in applying for cantonal scholarships and administrative support
- **Student grants** from educationsuisse and private foundations

The educationsuisse staff speak German, French, Italian, Spanish and English. They will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, telephone, Skype or on-site in Bern.

Information and contact

The Swiss education system is illustrated and outlined in an easy-to-follow diagram on www.educationsuisse.ch. The website also contains a lot more information on education in Switzerland. For specific questions, contact info@educationsuisse.ch or phone +41 31 356 61 04.

Educatiosuisse
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern
Switzerland
www.educationsuisse.ch

The ETH professor Thomas Ihn and assistant Philip Verwegen give their lecture in an empty lecture theatre. Such images have characterised everyday life at Swiss universities in recent months.
Photo: Keystone

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Alpenstrasse 26
CH-3006 Berne
Tel. +41 31 356 61 00
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@swisscommunity.org

www.revue.ch
www.swisscommunity.org



Our partners:

educationsuisse
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@educationsuisse.ch
www.educationsuisse.ch



Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad
Tel. +41 31 356 61 16
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@sjas
www.sjas.ch



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

New digital offers for young Swiss Abroad

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is developing its digital presence and now has an online offer for young Swiss Abroad entitled "Switzerland".

March saw the successful launch of the OSA's first-ever digital offer. Ten participants from around the globe went online. Their objective? To acquaint themselves with one of Switzerland's national languages or improve their existing language skills, making use of a high-quality teaching package in the process. It was an encouraging experience, which is why the offer will be repeated in July and August 2021. Further information as well as application forms are available on our website.

Young Swiss Abroad are also due to hold a congress of their own for the first time ever. It will take place online on 15 and 16 July 2021 in conjunction with the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA). Topics of interest such as direct democracy and education in Switzerland will feature on what will be a varied agenda. The virtual meeting will also include lighter cultural elements. The complete schedule and application form are also available on our website.

These new online offers are a way for the OSA to stay in touch with and offer a "piece of Switzerland" to young Swiss Abroad around the world, wherever they live.

Our website:
www.swisscommunity.org/en > Youth offers

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad,
Youth Service,
Alpenstrasse 26,
3006 Berne,
Switzerland;
tel.: +41 31 356 61 24;
email: youth@swisscommunity.org

Fun in the snow with 600 Swiss teenagers

With a little luck, your children could be enjoying winter sports with teenagers from Switzerland in January 2022. The names of 25 young Swiss Abroad aged 13 to 14 will be pulled out in our draw.



The next youth ski camp (JUSKILA) is scheduled for 2 to 8 January 2022 in Lenk in the Bernese Oberland. Some 600 teenagers aged 13 to 14 will take part, again including 25 teenagers from the "Fifth Switzerland".

Those wishing to attend JUSKILA must be able to speak at least one of Switzerland's three national languages – German, French or Italian. Lots will be drawn to allocate places at the prices shown below, which cover costs including winter sports coaching, food, and accommodation. Parents are responsible for organising and paying for their children's outward and return journey. Children born in 2007 and 2008 are eligible to take part in the draw. We will announce who has won a place on the camp at the end of September.

Costs

Train tickets for travel within Switzerland, food, accommodation, ski pass, winter sports coaching **CHF 120.–**
Hire of winter sports gear (skis, poles and ski boots, or snowboard and snowboard boots) **CHF 50.–**

LOÏC ROTH

Information:
Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)
tel. +41 31 356 61 16, fax +41 31 356 61 01
email: info@sjas.ch, www.sjas.ch

Registration form for the draw – JUSKILA Lenk (2 to 8 January 2022)

Please complete in legible block letters.

Girl Boy

First name: _____

Surname: _____

Street: _____

Postcode, City: _____

Country: _____

Date of birth: _____

Child's language: German French Italian

Type of sport Alpine skiing Snowboarding

Tick one box only! After the draw, it will no longer be possible to change sport.

Legal guardian's name:

Municipality of origin in Switzerland (See passport/ID):

Parents' email: _____

Parents' telephone number: _____

Guardian's signature:

Child's signature:

Please send in the registration form with a copy of the Swiss passport of one parent or of the child by 15 September 2021 (date of receipt) to: Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, SWITZERLAND

PS: The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) will start hosting winter camps again in the 2022–23 winter season. For scheduling reasons, there will be no FYSA winter camps in the 2021–22 winter season. The timing of the next winter holidays is unfavourable and would result in the winter camp being shorter than usual.

The pandemic has changed the nature of consular services

The pandemic that began at the beginning of 2020 also affected Switzerland's consular network, with work in the area of consular protection and social support becoming more important. At the same time, it has been difficult or impossible to visit consular representations in person due to the Covid restrictions that have hampered freedom of movement. Even routine work has been hindered, although the Consular Directorate's virtual counter has remained open at all times and the entire consular network has maintained its services.

In these challenging times, a number of Swiss representations have been looking at new ways to stay in touch with and keep track of Swiss on the ground while offering them specific services. Here are three reports from Bangkok, San José and Ottawa that illustrate the agility of Switzerland's consular network and of the FDFA employees in fulfilling their mission regardless of the circumstances. Time will tell whether these experiences enhance the consular network's regular work in the long run. (FDFA)

Bangkok / Thailand

Digital "community meetings" during the pandemic

As we know, necessity is the mother of invention. When the Covid-19 pandemic came to a head in Thailand and neighbouring countries in March 2020, the Swiss embassy in the capital Bangkok decided to improve its digital reach. In less than four weeks, Ambassador Helene Budliger Artieda sent a total of 18 video messages in three different languages to local Swiss expatriate communities to inform them of the latest developments and advice.

This inspired the idea of creating a regular virtual "community meeting". #AskTheEmbassy launched on 22 June 2020 – the first of 16 live Facebook events for the Swiss communities in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Myanmar (the accumulative Swiss expatriate population of these four countries is around 13,000).

Community meetings at local level have a long tradition in Swiss democracy. The response from the Swiss expatriate community was suitably positive. Given the many questions that were asked, we have decided to build on this new form of communication.



In an improvised studio – Ambassador Helene Budliger Artieda with Pierre Hagmann (deputy head of mission, left) and Consul General Pierre Chabloz (right)

Photo provided

For example, we have already welcomed two special guests to talk with us on air. Firstly, the regional director of Lufthansa Group covered everything people wanted to know about travelling during the pandemic. Then in February 2021, the Thai health minister Anutin Charnvirakul paid us the honour of a visit to answer questions in person about vaccinations for foreigners in Thailand. Further video surprises await.

SWISS EMBASSY IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

San José / Costa Rica

Travelling to remote regions to gain a better understanding of requirements

The Regional Consular Centre (RCC) in the Costa Rican capital of San José, which is responsible for some 6,000 Swiss citizens in six Central American countries, hosted a virtual meeting during the pandemic to introduce itself and respond to people's questions.

Under the "Six countries, one region" tag line, the RCC's next event will take the form of a hybrid meeting: six colleagues who specialise in consular services at our six representations in Central America will meet in person in Costa Rica, from where they will conduct a video call with our



Our mobile passport office in Panama – travel restrictions make this a very popular service

Photo provided

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](https://www.skype.com/partners/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

Travel Admin

Online-Registrierung von Auslandsreisen
Enregistrement en ligne de voyages à l'étranger
Registrazione quando si viaggia all'estero
Online Registration when travelling abroad

Swiss community. All six countries around our region – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama – face similar challenges.

Take passport applications, for example, for which there is no online facility. In this difficult year, our mobile passport offices (excluding consular services) will therefore again be touring neighbouring countries. This has proved a very popular, successful initiative to date.

Ultimately, we are focusing on elderly members of society who have been particularly affected by the pandemic. Embassy staff will travel to remote regions to listen to the concerns of our retirees and answer their questions. This will not only lend our services a human face, but help us better understand the needs of older Swiss Abroad.

SWISS EMBASSY IN SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

Ottawa / Canada

A simultaneous live stream from three different regions of our vast country

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely restricted our freedom of movement. But it has widened our horizons too. Given the global dimensions of the crisis, this means thinking outside the box to come up with good ideas that will enhance consular services. The “community meetings” hosted by the Swiss embassy in Thailand (see article on the left) were an inspiration for us in Canada to do something similar. However, we had to tailor our own virtual town hall



Simultaneously connected – Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver all attended the town hall meeting Photo: screenshot

meetings to Canadian specificities, because the sheer size of our country, along with its federal structure, have resulted in each province implementing different Covid guidelines.

In addition to the embassy in Ottawa, Switzerland has general consulates in Montreal and Vancouver. These are the points of contact for the 40,000 Swiss registered as living in Canada. It was therefore important to involve and connect with all three Swiss representations, so that we could include input from different regions and take account of both of Canada’s national languages, English and French. The town hall meeting therefore took the form of a Zoom call on Facebook Live, which was simulcast via the three Facebook pages of the Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal representations. Interest in the event was considerable, with some 500 viewers tuning in. People asked a varied range of questions and gave positive feedback. This reinforces our intention to continue harnessing the potential of digital formats in our work after the pandemic.

SWISS EMBASSY IN OTTAWA, CANADA

Federal votes

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

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

The Federal Council decided that there will be five federal proposals submitted to the people on 13 June 2021:

- Federal Popular Initiative of 18 January 2018 ‘For clean drinking water and healthy food – No subsidies for pesticides and the prophylactic use of antibiotics’;
- Federal Popular Initiative of 25 May 2018 ‘For a Switzerland with no synthetic pesticides’;
- Federal Act of 25 September 2020 on the Legal Framework for Federal Council Ordinances to overcome the COVID-19 Epidemic (COVID-19 Act);
- Federal Act of 25 September 2020 on the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions (CO₂ Act);
- Federal Act of 25 September 2020 on Police Counterterrorism Measures (PCTA).

Popular initiatives

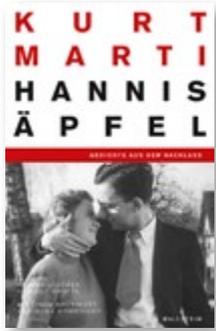
The following federal popular initiatives had already been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- Federal Popular Initiative “For individual taxation regardless of civil status (Fair taxation initiative)” (09.09.2022)
- Federal Popular Initiative “For safer vehicles” (16.09.2022)

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

Responsible for the FDFA official communications:
Consular Directorate
Innovation and Partnerships
Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Berne, Switzerland
www.eda.admin.ch, email: kdip@eda.admin.ch

Late poems on love and death



KURT MARTI:
"Hannis Äpfel", Gedichte aus dem Nachlass.
Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2021, 90 pages; CHF 18

Bernese theologian and author Kurt Marti died in 2017 at the ripe age of 96. He would have been 100 this year. Marti is mainly known in Switzerland for his poems, although he also wrote prose. He was an eloquent gentleman who served for many years as pastor at Nydegg Church in Berne's old town. Alternating between standard German and Bernese dialect, his poetry was never clumsy but always laconic, playful and critical of the times. Time and again, his works show him as an extremely keen observer. Few other authors can make so much sense with so few words. The recent 90-page publication "Hannis Äpfel" (Hanni's apples) provides a posthumous reprise, containing new poems that have not seen the light of day until now.

"Hannis Äpfel" explores themes such as old age, loneliness, and waiting to die. The death of his wife Hanni had a particularly profound effect on Marti. Kurt and Hanni Marti-Morgenthaler were married for almost 60 years, the parents of four children. The book cover includes a picture of the couple when they were young. It shows Marti holding his wife affectionately and proudly. Hanni passed away in 2007, ten years before her husband. The author would have preferred it the other way around – or even better: both of them dying at the same time, like Philemon and Baucis in Greek mythology. Widower Marti expressed his sorrow in poetic form: "Bei dir war ich gerne ich./ Jetzt aber und ohne dich?/ Wär' ich am liebsten/ auch ohne mich." (I was myself when you were with me./ But now, without you?/ I would prefer not to be here.) This is an excerpt from "Hanni", a poem that stretches over several pages. It is touching to read – a homage to a lifetime of love full of memories, with brief anecdotes characterising an entire relationship. The author is self-critical enough to shine the spotlight on his own helplessness and resentment at his ageing wife needing long-term care.

In the epilogue, poet Nora Gomringer refers to Marti's "tender notes", adding that they are a skilful, elegant recollection and memorial of Hanni's life. Marti incidentally reflected on human transience in a work that was published while he was still alive. Although residing in a Berne care home by that time, his writing pulled no punches, betraying a certain resignation but showing the same articulacy evident in these, his final poems. "Hannis Äpfel" is a very personal work, albeit one that hits a common nerve in our ageing society. Writer Guy Krneta has done us a service in publishing them – with the permission of the poet's surviving family.

SUSANNE WENGER

From light to music



22° HALO:
"Light At An Angle".
Prolog Records, 2021.
www.learmariafries.com

A 22° halo is a ring of light that forms when direct sunlight is refracted in millions of ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere. Swiss singer Lea Maria Fries has put this visual phenomenon into music on her debut album. Her band – also called 22° Halo – is a combo whose sound really does conjure up the light and purity suggested by the term.

Fries hails from Lucerne. She completed a degree in jazz vocals at the Lucerne School of Music in 2014, then lived in Zurich and Berlin. Her current home is Paris, where she also performs in other formations besides 22° Halo – Gauthier Toux's Trio being one of them. "Light at an angle" was recorded live two years ago in just two and a half days. However, Covid-19 meant that its release

has been delayed until now.

It was worth the wait. Fries has produced a delicate vocal jazz album of great acoustic appeal. Her voice exudes urgency, maturity and depth – with a controlled fragility on the higher notes. Her singing is gratifyingly free of affectations. French pianist Gauthier Toux and Swiss companions Lukas Traxel (double bass) and Valentin Liechti (drums) complement the front woman with creative restraint.

This is an album of gentle tones. The ten tracks have a fluent, intimate and timeless quality. Yet the music does so much more than go through the motions. The compositions are too sophisticated and the arrangements too refined for that. And occasionally the band lets fly at just the right moment – as in "T = G", a piece that brings noisy post-rock to mind for a moment. Elsewhere, the sound is more singer-songwriter pop than jazz. Subtle electronic pulses lend an experimental twist.

These organic-sounding departures from the conventional are what elevate 22° Halo to a higher plane than that of your average jazz combo – and will attract a wider and younger audience. This work is a welcome light in dark times – with Lea Maria Fries a star who should illuminate the Swiss jazz firmament for many years to come.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Lara Gut-Behrami



Lara Gut-Behrami won two gold and one bronze medal at the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Italy in February, catapulting proud ski nation Switzerland back among the world elite. After this memorable achievement, the 30-year-old from Ticino now belongs in the same company as Swiss ski legends Erika Hess and Vreni Schneider. Yet the ambitious Gut-Behrami does not enjoy the same level of popularity as “Golden Vreni” did in the 1990s, not least because she refuses to be pigeonholed, let alone branded as Switzerland’s “ski darling”. From criticising piste conditions to giving monosyllabic answers to journalists – Gut-Behrami has always been regarded by the media as difficult. Her father works as her personal coach – an arrangement that has also raised eyebrows. She likes to do things differently.

Gut-Behrami first burst onto the scene as a talented junior at the age of 17, when she won two silver medals at her first-ever World Championships in 2009. She now has over 30 World Cup race victories to her name. In 2016, Gut-Behrami won the coveted crystal globe after ending the season at the top of the overall standings. However, she tore her anterior cruciate ligament one year later. Her body had “pulled the emergency cord”, she said. She used this unscheduled hiatus to learn more about herself and work out her life goals. One answer came quickly at the registry office, when she married footballer and erstwhile Swiss international Valon Behrami in summer 2018. In Behrami, who is no stranger to the rigours of professional sport himself, she has finally discovered her soulmate. Since then, Gut-Behrami seems to have found a grounding in both her sporting and personal life.

THEODORA PETER

Bye Berne!

The town of Moutier has decided to leave the canton of Berne and join the canton of Jura. This is the outcome of what was probably one of the most closely supervised votes in Swiss history. Precautions were necessary, because the 28 March vote was framed as the possible last chapter of an at times violent dispute that led to the establishment of the canton of Jura in 1977. After the creation of Jura, Moutier remained a bone of contention between the cantons of Berne and Jura. Now the recent vote may have brought the polemic to a peaceful conclusion. (MUL)

The retirement age for women is now 65

Voluntary old-age and survivors’ insurance (OASI), the Swiss state pension scheme that was introduced in 1948, is in dire financial straits. The Council of States therefore decided in March to raise the female retirement age from 64 to 65 and increase VAT at the same time. However, it rejected a proposal to increase the OASI pension ceiling for retired married couples. Political rumblings over the retirement age and OASI reforms are therefore set to continue. (MUL)

Divorce law clarifications

Marriage should not be reduced to an “insurance or pension vehicle”. In a press release published on 9 March 2021, the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) cemented this view by clarifying important elements of divorce law related to child maintenance payments. The FSC believes that financial autonomy must apply again when a marriage ends. In other words, each spouse must seek to support themselves financially after a divorce, say the judges. Extensive child maintenance payments extending over many years are to remain the exception. (MUL)

Diplomatic bags to help people vote

Many in the “Fifth Switzerland” are unable to vote by post because their voting papers fail to arrive in time. As Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis announced in edition 2/2021 of “Swiss Review”, the use of diplomatic couriers and Swiss representations will be trialled in the June popular vote. We now know in which three countries the pilot will take place: Australia, Brazil and Thailand. (MUL)

Switzerland’s population is increasing at a slower rate

In the Covid year of 2020, Switzerland recorded a 12 per cent increase in deaths as well as a reduction in the number of births. Immigration was also down. However, the population grew slightly year-on-year by 0.7 per cent to 8,667,700. This is because emigration fell even more sharply than immigration, by 15.6 per cent. (MUL)

We need inspiration.

Schauspielhaus Zürich, Zürich Region, © Colin Frei



We need Switzerland.

Discover the Swiss museums now: [MySwitzerland.com/amos](https://www.myswitzerland.com/amos)
Tell us about your favourite experiences using [#IneedSwitzerland](https://twitter.com/IneedSwitzerland)

