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Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



Switzerland's culinary heritage –
a patchwork of delights

Swiss-EU relations –
the moment of truth awaits

Reaching for the sky in Switzerland –
high-rise buildings made of wood



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Our partners:



4 Focus

Switzerland and the EU want to overcome their differences

9 News

Debate on stricter banking rules following Credit Suisse debacle

10 Society

The book covering hundreds of Swiss culinary specialities

Federal Council proposes legislation to ban Nazi symbols

14 Report

The new trend in high-rise buildings made of wood



Ina Invest/Implenia

News from your region**18 Switzerland in figures**

It's official: the Swiss are Europe's bookworms

20 Books

How direct democracy framed Switzerland's relationship with its diaspora

22 Sounds

Meimuna – soft voice in a turbulent world

24 Sport

Euro 2025 – Swiss women's football on the big stage

28 Notes from the Federal Palace

Interview with Marianne Jenni, the new director general of the Consular Directorate

31 SwissCommunity news

Cover photo: Regional specialities from the canton of Appenzell. Illustration from the new book "Das kulinarische Erbe der Schweiz", Echtzeit Verlag, Basel

Cliff edge



A friend recently told me what would happen if Switzerland were to be levelled into a single plateau. Let that sink in for a moment. If we bulldozed all our mountains, filled in the valleys and distributed the earth and rubble evenly across the entire country, the whole of Switzerland would sit around 1,300 metres above sea level. The fun would really start if our neighbouring countries did the same thing.

For the nerds out there: there is a very detailed "List of countries by average elevation" on Wikipedia, according to which Germany would have a continuous altitude of under 300 metres. France would be just under 400, Italy over 500, Austria over 900 and Liechtenstein over 1,100. With every country in Europe flattened, Switzerland's border would be like the edge of a towering cliff. We would be the new sheriff in town. A vertical 1,000-metre cliff would separate us from our northern neighbours.

Why this mental image? We all know that Switzerland's border is just a line on the map. You can often walk over it without knowing, let alone falling off a cliff. If you hike in the Jura mountains, you sometimes don't know which country you are in.

Nevertheless, the next few months will see Switzerland arguing whether its cliff edge is real or not. After a seemingly interminable series of negotiations, we now know the outlines of how Switzerland and the European Union want to cement and maintain relations in future. The stakes are high, affecting the everyday lives of people who have got used to open borders and the principle of free movement. Affecting students, trade, goods supplies, energy, and of course that old chestnut, immigration. It is time to get specific on how much of a relationship Switzerland wants with the EU without becoming an EU member itself. Read about it in our lead article.

The Swiss Abroad will also have decisions to make when they elect the people to represent them on the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the de facto "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland", for another term. Many will be able to elect their local delegates directly via e-voting for the first time. This will make the CSA more representative, giving delegates greater legitimacy to defend the interests of the "Fifth Switzerland".

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

List of countries by average elevation: www.revue.link/cliff

"Swiss Review", the information magazine for the "Fifth Switzerland", is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.



Swiss-EU relations – the moment of truth awaits

Switzerland and the European Union (EU) are keen to overcome their differences. Following a hard series of negotiations, an updated set of Swiss-EU treaties is now on the table. Yet the prospect of a bilateral deal continues to divide opinion in Berne. Voters will have the last word.

THEODORA PETER

The Federal Council spread good tidings just before Christmas when it announced that Swiss-EU talks had reached a substantive conclusion. Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis (FDP) called it an important milestone. “Good relations with the EU and neighbouring countries are important in these turbulent times,” he told the media.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen underlined the significance of the deal by paying a visit to Berne. “We are as close to each other as we could possibly be,” she said, adding that Brussels and Switzerland were equal partners. The package of agreements with the EU contains updates to five existing treaties as well as three new agreements governing electricity, health, and food safety.

Swiss-EU relations had been strained for a long time. The Federal Council had unilaterally abandoned talks on an institutional framework agreement three years ago (see “Swiss Review” 4/2021) amid unbridgeable differences on matters such as wage pro-

tection and freedom of movement. The EU was not amused and, among other things, promptly excluded Switzerland from its prestigious scientific research programme Horizon Europe (see “Swiss Review” 5/2022).

“The world’s biggest trading bloc”

The two sides put an end to the hiatus when they resumed talks last year. Two hundred rounds of negotiations later, and a new deal has been unveiled – one that builds on the bilateral approach approved by the

Trade in goods and services between Switzerland and the EU is worth well over one billion Swiss francs each day.

Swiss electorate 25 years ago. Unfettered access to the EU single market, “the world’s biggest trading bloc” (Cassis), remains the cornerstone. Trade in goods and services between Switzerland and the EU alone is worth well over one billion Swiss francs each day. “Our prosperity depends on it,” said Cassis.

Access to an economic area with some 500 million consumers does not come free, with Switzerland set to pay an annual 350 million francs for the privilege from 2030 to 2036. These “cohesion payments” will not flow into EU coffers but will instead be used to help economically weaker EU states. Until now, Switzerland’s yearly contribution has amounted to 130 million francs.

Alongside access to the EU single market, freedom of movement is another core element of the bilateral deal. Free movement is the principle that allows people to live and work across the borders of the EU bloc. The 500,000-plus Swiss Abroad who live in the EU rely on it. EU citizens are also entitled to live and work in Switzerland.





Illustration: Max Spring

Concessions for Switzerland

The Swiss negotiators extracted some concessions from their counterparts in Brussels. For example, Switzerland will be able to restrict EU immigration to workers. This will prevent EU citizens from moving to Switzerland solely to receive higher social security payouts than in their home country.

The agreement also includes a safeguard clause that will allow Switzerland to limit immigration if “serious economic or social problems” arise. When and how this clause would be triggered is still a matter for debate in Switzerland.

Wage protection also remains a tricky issue. The principle of equal pay for equal work in the same location continues to apply across Europe. This safeguards Switzerland’s high wage levels by stopping EU companies from undercutting local salaries. However, trade unions are unwilling to accept EU rules on expenses, which would require foreign employers to cover accommodation, meals and other expenses in Switzerland based on rates in their home country. This, for example, would mean that a Polish worker doing a stint on a Swiss building site would only be paid the same amount for board and lodging that they would receive in Poland. Even the Swiss Employers’ Association calls the practice “grotesque”.

Employer and employee organisations, therefore, want to force the Federal Council and parliament to declare in law that Swiss rates should apply to expenses as well as wages. The Swiss Trade Union Federation has cited this as one of the preconditions for its support of the Swiss-EU deal in any future popular vote.

The Federal Council intends to clarify all outstanding points by summer, before conducting a consultation on

the full package of agreements and the associated changes in legislation. Parliament will begin debating the matter in 2026, with the popular vote unlikely to take place before the next national elections in 2027 – and maybe not until 2028.

Opposition from the right

Reaction to the new Swiss-EU deal was mixed. The Greens and the Green Liberals were the only parties to voice immediate and unequivocal support, whereas the left-wing SP – with trade unions in tow – wants assurances from Berne on wage protection as well as public services.

After the deal was announced, the response from the foreign minister's own party, the FDP, was guarded. "We are neither jubilant nor downcast," said the liberal party, which had previously given its unreserved backing to the bilateral approach. It wants to scrutinise the new treaties before drawing any conclusions. The Centre Party was not exactly euphoric either but called the deal "a step in the right direction" after the collapse of the framework agreement in 2021.

Centre-right reticence has much to do with massive opposition from the right-wing SVP. It rejects any form of convergence with Brussels, dismissing

The 500,000-plus Swiss Abroad who live in the EU rely on free movement.

outright what it calls a "subjugation treaty" that would see Switzerland adopt EU legislation in a multitude of areas (see statement by SVP National Councillor Magdalena MartulloBlocher on page 7). The SVP is also concerned about "uncontrolled" immigration. Yet its "limitation initiative" failed at the ballot box in 2020, because the majority of voters were unwilling to jeopardise freedom of movement.

Now the SVP is trying again. It submitted the "sustainability initiative" in 2024, which aims to limit the Swiss population to a maximum of ten million by 2050. At present, nine million people reside permanently in Switzerland. The electorate is set to vote on the controversial proposal in 2026 – just when parliament is expected to debate the bilateral agreements. A yes result would most likely plunge Swiss-EU relations into crisis again.

"People need to commit their support"

While the SVP would vehemently oppose any Swiss-EU treaty, there remains a lack of impetus from support-

ers of the deal. Apart from the political parties, responsibility for changing the narrative lies with industry groups such as *economiesuisse*, which threw their weight behind Bilaterals I and Bilaterals II in previous referendums. Business leaders like Ypsomed CEO and FDP National Councillor Simon Michel (see statement on page 7) have been among the first to endorse Bilaterals III.

"People need to commit their support and explain how important the deal is for Switzerland," says Fabio Wasserfallen, professor of European Politics at the University of Bern. Only then will the agreements gain the needed approval.

Without any such commitment from stakeholders inside and outside politics, it is easy to see why the Federal Council wants to sit on the fence instead of taking the lead. "I get the impression that people are playing for time once again." It remains to be seen which side of the argument this tactic favours. But everyone will have to put their cards on the table sooner or later.

Swiss-EU dossier: www.revue.link/euswiss

2025



Federal Council to conduct a consultation on the full package of agreements and the associated changes in Swiss legislation

2026



- Federal parliament to debate the Swiss-EU agreements and the proposed changes in legislation
- Scheduled popular vote on the SVP's "sustainability initiative"

2027



Federal elections to the National Council and Council of States

2028



Electorate expected to vote on the new Swiss-EU agreements



Simon Michel at the Ypsomed company headquarters in Burgdorf. Michel is the CEO of Ypsomed Holding as well as FDP National Councillor for the canton of Solothurn.

Photo: Keystone

For

“Having good, tolerant neighbours makes life so much easier. Mow the lawn late on a balmy summer’s evening? Borrow next door’s parking space? No drama, no problem. Nice neighbours are worth their weight in gold. They are the glue that binds us. It is no coincidence that property prices in happy neighbourhoods tend to be a little higher.

Roughly the same principle applies to Switzerland and its European neighbours. Good relations with the European Union are not only important from an economic perspective. They also make sense from a societal point of view. We, too, can enjoy social, practical and security benefits but still be true to ourselves, our identity and our distinctly Swiss rules, customs and laws.

The bilateral agreements have formed the basis of our relations with the EU for the past 25 years. It is time to strengthen and expand them to include much-needed provisions on things like electricity supplies and conflict resolution. Having clear rules to govern the Swiss-EU relationship does not mean that we have to do everything by the EU book. Switzerland will maintain its identity and independence, regardless of Bilaterals III.”

“Good relations with the EU are not only important from an economic perspective.”



Magdalena Martullo-Blocher – businesswoman, Grisons National Councillor and SVP vice-president – carries out a practical demonstration during the 2025 EMS Group annual media conference. Photo: Keystone

Against

“Switzerland’s deal with the EU is a form of capitulation, forcing us to cede control to Brussels in areas like trade, overland/air transport, energy, food, health, finance, immigration, and education. If we fail to toe the EU line, Brussels will punish us. And the European Court of Justice will have the final say. There is no limit to EU bureaucracy. We will be subject to thousands of rules and regulations virtually overnight, with 150 bureaucrats currently in the process of rewriting our constitution and laws. And we will have to pay billions for the privilege. The EU is already broken. High inflation, swingeing job cuts, and a mountain of debt are crippling its citizens as well as its businesses. Adapting to the EU would be a race to the bottom. We would also have to give up direct democracy as we know it. We don’t want this.

But there is another way. Switzerland plays a valuable international role on account of its innovation, stability and neutrality. Free trade agreements have helped to power our economy for decades. We currently have 33 such deals – many more than the EU. Some of our latest partners include Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Kosovo, and India. Talks to strike deals with Japan, China, the US, and the Mercosur bloc are currently ongoing. None of these countries want to impose their own laws on Switzerland. We must reject the EU diktat. The global winds are favourable for Switzerland. All we need to do is unfurl the sails.”

“The global winds are favourable for Switzerland. All we need to do is unfurl the sails.”

Germaine Seewer



Photo: Herbert Zimmermann/13Photo

Germaine Seewer is the highest-ranking woman in the Swiss Armed Forces. “She is actually the highest-ranking woman in Swiss history,” says Delphine Schwab-Allemand, spokesperson for the armed forces. Major General Seewer has been the head of international relations for the armed forces since 1 August 2024. Her rank is equivalent to a divisional commander in other countries. Her mission is to direct and coordinate relations with foreign armies. The career soldier was the first female brigadier general in the Swiss Armed Forces. She then oversaw the training of military officers. The native of Upper Valais is remarkable in two respects. She holds a rank traditionally reserved for men and is one of the 1.6 per cent of women in the Swiss Armed Forces. In March 2024, there were 2,301 women enlisted.

Germaine Seewer was born in Leuk and studied chemistry at ETH Zurich, obtaining a doctorate in the quality of pork meat and fat. She worked as a scientist at the Federal Animal Production Research Station (Fribourg). In 1998, she began her peripatetic military career, serving in missions in Kosovo then in Ethiopia and Eritrea. In 2009, her name was mentioned as a potential successor to head of the armed forces Philippe Rebord. “Her CV is perfect, except where it says she comes from Valais,” claimed Valais newspaper “Le Nouvelliste”. A German-speaking Swiss, Thomas Süssli, pipped her to the post. Germaine Seewer still lives in Valais. She loves the mountains, and has taken part in the Patrouille des glaciers (a ski mountaineering race organised by the Swiss Armed Forces). Another trait of her personality is discretion and reserve. One exception was when she came out in favour of the women’s strike in 2019, judging it to be “necessary”. She did not, however, join the protest marches in the streets.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Challenges mount at the DDPS amid high-profile departures

It is all change at the top of the defence ministry (DDPS). Viola Amherd announced in January that she would be stepping down as Federal Councillor and head of the DDPS (see page 26). In February came the news that Chief of the Armed Forces Thomas Süssli, and the head of the Federal Intelligence Service, Christian Dussey, would be leaving their posts – only days after the commander of the Swiss Air Force, Peter Merz, had resigned. The departures mean that Amherd’s successor in the Federal Council, Martin Pfister, voted in on 12 March, immediately has some very important staffing decisions to make. (MUL)

SFAO audits accuse armaments company RUAG of fraud

In February, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) released three audits detailing suspected fraud at the state-owned armaments company RUAG. The SFAO found irregularities in the purchase and sale of spare parts for Leopard tanks, with estimated financial damages to the state “in the high double-digit million range”. The SFAO also criticised a lack of oversight, finding that there was “a questionable culture” and “significant organisational shortcomings” at RUAG. It also questioned the role of the defence ministry (DDPS). In 2019, a whistleblower contacted the DDPS with information about suspicious activities. The SFAO says that the DDPS did “not respond appropriately”. (MUL)

The Federal Council acknowledges “crimes against humanity” committed against the Yenish and Sinti communities

Between 1926 and 1973, the Kinder der Landstrasse programme, run by the Pro Juventute charity, forcibly removed 600 Yenish children from their families and placed them in homes or with foster parents. Church charities and authorities did the same. As many as 2,000 people were affected, many of whom were placed under guardianship at an adult age, prohibited from marrying or even sterilised against their will. Based on a legal report, the Federal Council now admits that “crimes against humanity” were committed against the Yenish and Sinti communities, and acknowledges that the state shares responsibility for the injustice. The victims themselves had previously called for the crime to be classed as “cultural genocide”. Link to the report (in German only): www.revue.link/jenische (MUL)

Ariane Rustichelli steps down as OSA director – and is succeeded by Lukas Weber

Ariane Rustichelli stepped down as director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) in April (more on page 34). At the time of our editorial deadline came the news that Lukas Weber had been appointed as her successor. “Swiss Review” will introduce Weber in the next issue. The OSA published a media release (in German) to announce Weber’s appointment: www.revue.link/weber (MUL)

What has Switzerland learned from the Credit Suisse debacle?

The demise of Credit Suisse was down to corporate mismanagement, but other authorities should have been wiser to the danger, a parliamentary inquiry has concluded. Will UBS, which swallowed up its ailing counterpart, now be kept on a tighter leash?

SUSANNE WENGER

In mid-March 2023, the financial world was eyeing Switzerland nervously. Despite an emergency loan from the Swiss National Bank (SNB), large bank Credit Suisse (CS) was on the brink of collapse as money ran out. The state-enforced merger of CS and UBS – put in place in extremis by Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter, the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA), and the SNB – helped to prevent a global financial crisis, the Parliamentary Investigation Committee (PlnC) noted in its report, which was published at the end of 2024.

The 14-strong committee presided over by the Fribourg Centre Party member of the Council of States, Isabelle Chassot, describes at length how the authorities responded to the bank's predicament, which became more acute in autumn 2022. The authorities considered different solutions, such as a corporate restructuring, bankruptcy, and temporary nationalisation. They chose their favoured option, UBS's takeover of CS, when the situation escalated in spring 2023 – the federal government pledging billions of Swiss francs as a backstop. This was a broadly appropriate solution, says the PlnC, notwithstanding the risk that it posed for the taxpayer.

The PlnC is unequivocal in its view that the near collapse of a once solid bank was down to years of mismanagement on the part of the CS Board of Directors and the CS Executive Board. Its report details how CS officials tried to extract concessions until the very last minute – like “poker players”. However, the PlnC's remit was to scrutinise the response at federal level, not the failings of CS. Its report is kinder on some parties than others.

Criticism of Ueli Maurer

More could have been done earlier in terms of diagnosis and prevention, says the PlnC. The Federal Council and parliament introduced the “too big to fail” regime after the bailout of UBS in 2008 but were too hesitant in implementing and improving it. When CS found itself in crisis, the finance minister at the time, Ueli Maurer, failed to adequately inform the Federal Council of the situation. He also cancelled an emergency meeting at short notice. Then he failed to provide his successor Keller-Sutter with a written dossier at the end of 2022. Maurer rejected these allegations in early 2025. He said he had wanted to prevent leaks that would have further endangered the bank.

FINMA had demanded improvements, castigating CS several times from 2015. But it was unable to assert its



The PlnC, presided over by Isabelle Chassot, criticised years of mismanagement at CS.
Photo: Keystone

authority, explained the PlnC. Banking misdemeanours remained unpunished despite ongoing investigations. In 2017, FINMA granted the CS a “regulatory filter”, which allowed the bank to ease its capital requirements and maintain the illusion of holding more capital than it did. The SNB had advised against FINMA taking this step.

Stricter capital requirements?

What lessons will politicians learn from the report with a view to minimising risk and protecting the taxpayer from similar fiascos in future? The PlnC wants FINMA to have an improved range of sanctions at its disposal, for example. In general, it advocates placing “greater emphasis” on financial stability while taking the “significant size” of UBS post-merger into account. The question is whether the only systemically relevant global bank remaining in Switzerland should be subject to stricter capital requirements that would allow it to compensate for any losses it makes abroad. Opinion is divided.

The centre-left parties are in favour of restricting Switzerland's new “monster bank” in this way, while those further on the right warn that UBS may relocate to another country as a result. UBS boss Sergio Ermotti has spoken out against the bank holding more capital, with the media portraying this as a battle between him and Keller-Sutter. How far the Federal Council is prepared to go should become clear by early summer. Parliament was due to debate the PlnC report in March. After two dramatic bailouts in 15 years, Switzerland is arguing again about how it regulates its banks.

Link to the PlnC report: www.revue.link/cspuk



“Switzerland’s culinary wealth is regional in character.” Pictured here: an artistically arranged Genevan tableau. The wine glasses contain Chèvre. Photos: Echtzeit Verlag, provided

Discovering Switzerland’s culinary heritage

A new, inspiring encyclopedia showcases hundreds of culinary specialities from various regions in Switzerland as well as the stories behind them. To preserve valuable knowledge for posterity. And – writes author Paul Imhof – because a country also defines itself through its food.

SUSANNE WENGER

The book covers 700 pages and contains 453 different entries – from Alpenbitter to Zigerkräpfen. There is a lot of material. Can the author name one of his favourite items? How about Chèvre? “A real discovery,” Imhof calls it. Chèvre is a sparkling digestif from French-speaking Switzerland that dates back three generations or more. A handful of vigneron in Geneva still produce it at harvest time. Imhof visited one such grower, where he learned how rice flour, grape sugar, eau de vie, and vanilla pods are added to grape juice that has started to ferment.

The blend continues to ferment for at least a month in a barrel reinforced with steel hoops. “The vessel would explode otherwise.” This produces a sparkling beverage that is ready to

drink by New Year’s Eve. Fresh on tap, the white liquid shoots out almost like milk from a goat’s udder. Chèvre is French for goat. Another of Imhof’s discoveries is Furmagin da Cion from Val Poschiavo, a valley in the Italian-speaking part of the canton of Grisons. Cion means pig in the local dialect, while the name Furmagin derives from a type of cheese called Formaggetta.

But Furmagin da Cion is not a dairy product but a meat speciality. Every local family traditionally used to make their own Furmagin during pig slaughtering, using the inferior cuts and the offal. They would bake it in the oven like a cake. Nose-to-tail eating is now a trend but was par for the course back then. Butchers in Poschiavo still produce Furmagin to this day – and have refined their rec-

ipes. Imhof: “What used to be a type of food eaten by the poor has become a popular speciality.”

Investigating and documenting

Why study Switzerland’s culinary heritage? And how? The Vaud National Councillor Josef Zisyadis got the ball

From the southern valleys of Grisons: traditional Coppa ham from home-slaughtered pigs, and Pizzoccheri – a pasta made from buckwheat flour and wheat flour.





No Swiss culinary encyclopedia is complete without chocolate, of which Fribourg's Cailler is Switzerland's oldest brand.

rolling 25 years ago. “Zisyadis submitted a motion to prevent Switzerland’s culinary traditions and knowledge from being forgotten,” Imhof explains. The Federal Council and parliament approved the motion, and a team of experts commissioned by the government and the cantons started work. They scoured libraries and archives, spoke to producers and built up a catalogue of products, preparation methods, and recipes. The results of their investigative work were published online at www.patrimoineculinaire.ch in 2008.

Imhof, now 72, was involved from the outset. The journalist took it upon himself to produce a readable guide book based on this detailed online inventory. Five volumes were published in 2016, some of which sold out. His latest work is an updated, complete edition. It covers new items that have since met the requirement of having been available for at least 40 years. Ticino rice is one example – thanks

to climate change, the author notes.

Imhof’s writing is humorous and rich in information. The author supplements his entries with historical facts and lively anecdotes that he has researched himself. Structured by canton, his book takes the reader on an educational journey through Switzerland’s diverse culinary heritage, where myriad domestic and outside influences intersect. There is no such thing as a Swiss national dish, he says. “Switzerland’s culinary wealth is regional in character.”

The role of the land

Nevertheless, the undulating nature of Switzerland’s own patchwork landscape was a key influence in itself. Arable land used to be scarce before many of the country’s waterways were artificially straightened. According to Imhof, widespread livestock farming meant that the Swiss were masters at preserving food. Milk was

preserved as cheese, and meat was turned into sausages or dried into ham – building up provisions that could be sold immediately. Sbrinz, “the oldest Swiss cheese export”, was transported across the Alps to the markets of northern Italy. Schabziger herbal cheese from the canton of Glarus found its way to the markets of Zurich. “A land or country always defines itself by what it eats,” says Imhof.

Switzerland’s rich culinary heritage is born of resourcefulness, he continues. Commercial products like Aromat, the famous yellow powdered seasoning, or Rivella, the quintessentially Swiss fizzy drink derived from whey, are as much a part of our repertoire as Birchermüesli and grandma’s lebkuchen recipes. In this age of ready-made meals, additives, and social media food porn, Imhof believes that a return to the tried and trusted is more important than ever. The book is also an eulogy to the original guardians of good taste – “the farm-

PAUL IMHOF:
 “Das kulinarische Erbe der Schweiz – Ein Panoptikum des Ess- und Trinkbaren”,
 Echtzeit Verlag,
 Basel, 2024,
 776 pages, CHF 78





From Schaffhausen: Aromat powdered seasoning, Hallauer Schinkenwurst, and Schaffhauserzungen – a protected biscuit speciality dating back to 1902. Photos: Echtzeit Verlag, provided

ers, the maids and the cooks”. And to the creativity of butchers who through the centuries came up with over 400 types of sausage, of which only a fraction appear in the book. Such traditional products continue to underpin the work of all artisans, he adds. Incidentally, Imhof claims that the canton of Solothurn is the spiritual home of Switzerland’s favourite sausage, the Cervelat – not because the smoked speciality was invented there, but because of Olten, one of Switzerland’s most important rail hubs. The hearty Cervelat-based salad (Wurstsalat) served at Olten’s famous station restaurant made a name for itself well into the 1980s.

Glacier wine

The book’s Vin du glacier entry provides an insight into the old nomadic, transhumance lifestyle of people who moved between the high pastures and the valleys of Valais. Farmers in

the 18th century grew vines in the former marshlands of the Rhône Valley. After pressing the grapes, they would transport the wine up to the high-mountain villages, such as Grimetz below the Moiry Glacier. Each family made enough wine for themselves, and then a little extra.

This went into an old larch barrel, kept to one side in a cold, dark cellar, and never emptied. The barrel was topped up every spring. Some of these vessels are now very old and are treasured family heirlooms. “In 2022, the oldest barrel, dating back to 1886, contained wine from 130 different vintages,” says Imhof, who can report first hand that glacier wine tastes a bit like sherry.

Imhof himself was a Swiss Abroad in the 1980s and 1990s, reporting for the “Basler Zeitung” as a journalist in south-east Asia. He observed how Swiss chefs at hotels in Singapore liked to cook with local produce but had things like cream and chocolate



delivered to them. “Swiss Abroad have also done their bit to preserve our culinary heritage.”

One last question for the author. When Swiss expat clubs meet around the world, they invariably eat fondue together. Shouldn’t that be our national dish? When push comes to shove, yes, fondue, he replies. If Switzerland is synonymous with one thing, it’s cheese.

The Bernese tableau consists of a whole leg of Bauernschinken, alongside Sauerkraut, and military biscuits – a dry but nutritious staple of Swiss army rations.

Ban on Nazi symbols to be introduced after all

Responding to pressure from parliament, the federal government has proposed an immediate ban on the display of Nazi symbols and gestures in public

SUSANNE WENGER

Only when displayed in public for propaganda or discriminatory purposes are Nazi symbols and gestures currently prohibited in Switzerland. A special bill submitted for consultation by the Federal Council at the end of 2024 now proposes that the display of Nazi symbols and gestures in public be banned completely. Anyone who breaches the ban will incur a fine of 200 Swiss francs. The bill is in response to a number of parliamentary motions challenging this gap in the law – which the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) spoke out in favour of closing, at the request of one of its members, Ralph Steigrad (see “Swiss Review” 3/2022), in 2022.

“These symbols of hatred, intolerance and suffering must be eradicated completely from public life.”

Justice Minister Beat Jans

The Federal Council’s bill constitutes an about-turn. Nazi symbols and salutes are “shocking” but must be tolerated as freedom of expression, the government was saying just a few years ago. Its message was that prevention is better than cure in the fight against anti-Semitism. But the situation has changed, as the Federal Council noted in its report on the bill. Nazi symbols have become more widespread in public, particularly since the 7 October 2023 terror attack on Israel and the beginning of the war in Gaza. Switzerland has seen a proliferation of anti-Semitic incidents, ranging from swastika graffiti to physical assaults on Jews.

Jans – society must take a stand

According to the Federal Council, Nazi symbols and gestures are synonymous with fascist tyranny, the Holocaust, and the persecution of minorities. “These symbols of hatred, intolerance and suffering must be eradicated completely from public life,” Justice Minister Beat Jans told the media, adding that society must now take a stand. Besides obvious Nazi symbols and gestures like the swastika or the Nazi salute, Jans explained that the ban would also cover far-right codes such as “18” and “88”, but only

in relevant contexts. Exceptions would apply to the educational, academic, artistic and journalistic spheres. Existing religious symbols, such as those similar to the swastika in Hinduism, would also be exempt from the ban.

The Aargau Centre Party member of the Council of States, Marianne Binder, is the parliamentarian who has been advocating zero tolerance on Nazi symbols from the outset. She welcomes the Federal Council’s bill and has told “Swiss Review” that glorifying or playing down Nazism and its “sickening ideology” is unacceptable in any country governed by the rule of law. The use of fines is a “quick and effective measure” in her view, although 200 francs is “too lenient”. Binder, whose grandmother Paulina Borner provided refuge to Jewish refugees at Hotel Rosenlaube in the town of Baden during the Second World War, believes that offenders should also be made to brush up on their history in addition to paying fines. By banning Nazi symbols, Switzerland would be setting an example “at a time when autocracy is back in fashion”.

Consultations on the special bill finished at the end of March, after the editorial deadline of this edition of “Swiss Review”. Once all comments have been evaluated, the Federal Council intends to bring the bill to parliament. Later, it wants to extend the ban to other symbols that are racist, glorify violence or are extremist, as parliament has demanded. Narrowing down the terms of this second step is likely to prove harder. Justice Minister Jans says that the government has prioritised the ban on Nazi symbols as a matter of urgency, to allow for quick implementation.

Museum for a hero

Carl Lutz, Swiss Vice-Consul in Budapest, issued protective passports and diplomatic letters of protection to tens of thousands of Jews during the Second World War, saving these people’s lives in the process (see “Swiss Review” 3/2023). He was rebuked by the authorities after returning to Switzerland, but his heroic acts have since been given the recognition they deserve.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Lutz’s death, a museum in the diplomat’s honour opened in February at his birthplace of Walzenhausen in the canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden. The exhibition – sponsored by the municipality of Walzenhausen as well as the Gamaraal Foundation and a local company called Just – is scheduled to run until the end of 2025. A decision is due later on whether it can become a permanent fixture.

(SWE)

The renaissance of wood in Swiss construction

Wood, with its capacity to store CO₂, is all the rage in the construction industry. It is even being used to build skyscrapers. Swiss expertise is flavour of the month. Demand is growing, but tensions lurk beneath the surface.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The Geneva engineering and wood design firm Charpente Concept is a mecca for woodworking. The firm, founded in 1991 by master carpenter Thomas Büchi, designed the Broken Chair at Place des Nations in Geneva, made the Goûter Hut on the slopes of Mont Blanc out of wood and came up with the Palais de l'Équilibre, the massive wooden sphere presented at the Swiss National Exhibition in 2002 before being installed at CERN. This firm's other point of pride is that it was enlisted in the wake of the fire at Notre-Dame in Paris to carry out a technical analysis of the cathedral's nave in preparation for its reconstruction. The firm looked into archives 600 years old, a real immersion into the Middle Ages, when 20 years could go by between when wood was cut and when the resulting beams were fitted.

A case of reclaiming

"Wood is reclaiming the place it used to hold centuries ago, before it was replaced by steel and then by concrete. People had forgotten its qualities as a material," says Rafael Villar, vice-president of the company. He qualified in 1996 and still remembers starting out in the industry, when proponents of wood were considered eccentric. Granted, the firm in question had just erected a wooden exhibition hall 300 metres in length in Geneva, but most of its orders were for chalets and a few gym roofs. Today, wood is used to build residential buildings. "Over the past 30 years, the delivery turnarounds for some parts have more than doubled," notes the Geneva native. This is a sign of high demand. Ultrasound is used to define the resistance of parts before they are processed. Digital machines

are used to cut them to size. On construction sites, prefabricated wooden parts can be assembled considerably more quickly than mineral walls. "Wood is light, which makes it suitable for taller constructions," emphasises Sébastien Droz, spokesperson for Lignum, the umbrella association for woodworking professions.

We are even entering the era of wooden skyscrapers. In the Lokstadt

district of Winterthur, the Rocket Tower is set to be 100 metres high. "It is one of the tallest wooden residential structures currently planned," according to Ina Invest, the building developer.

The tower will need 3,300 cubic metres of wood to build its load-bearing structure. "We will be using beech and spruce from Switzerland and neighbouring countries," says spokes-

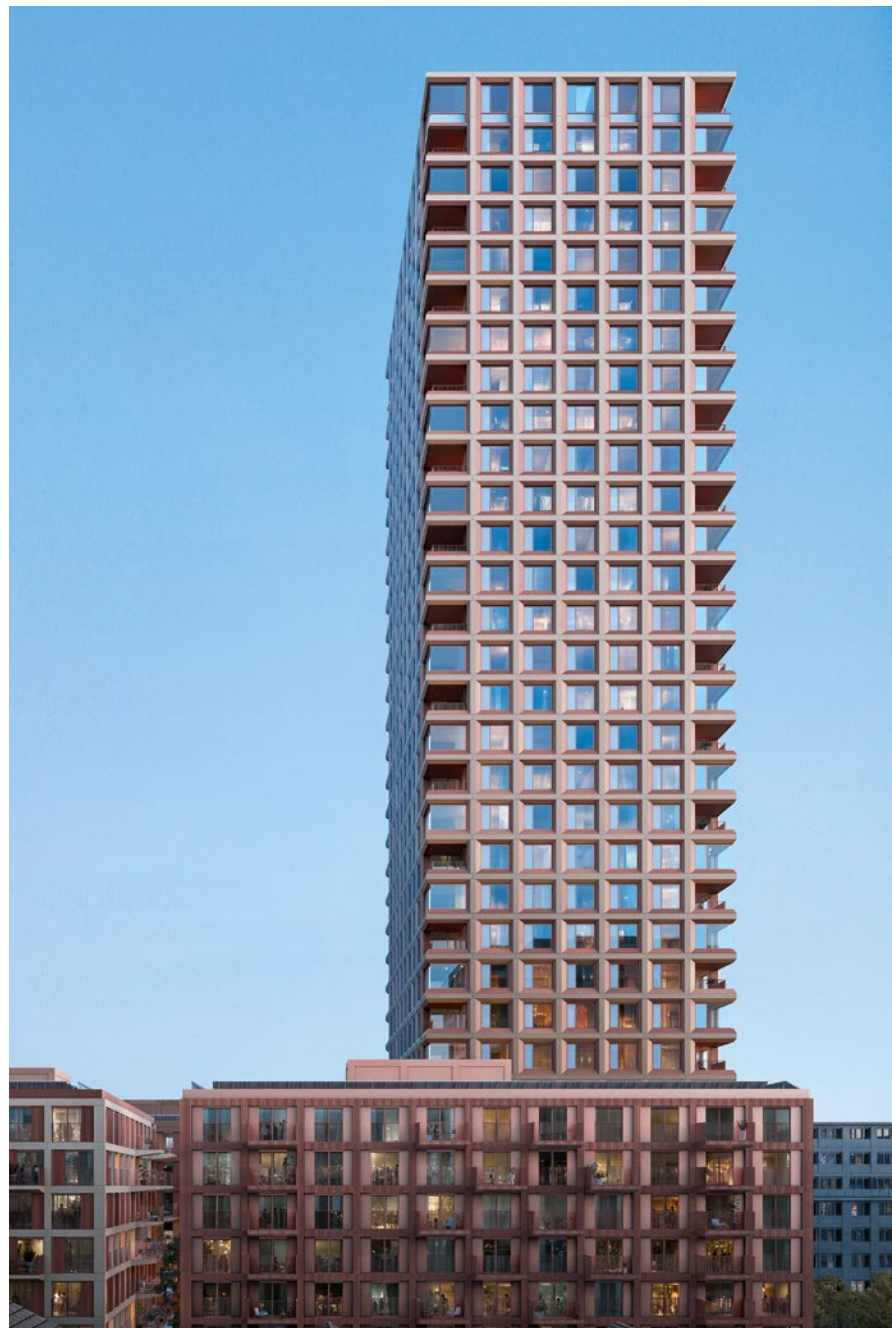


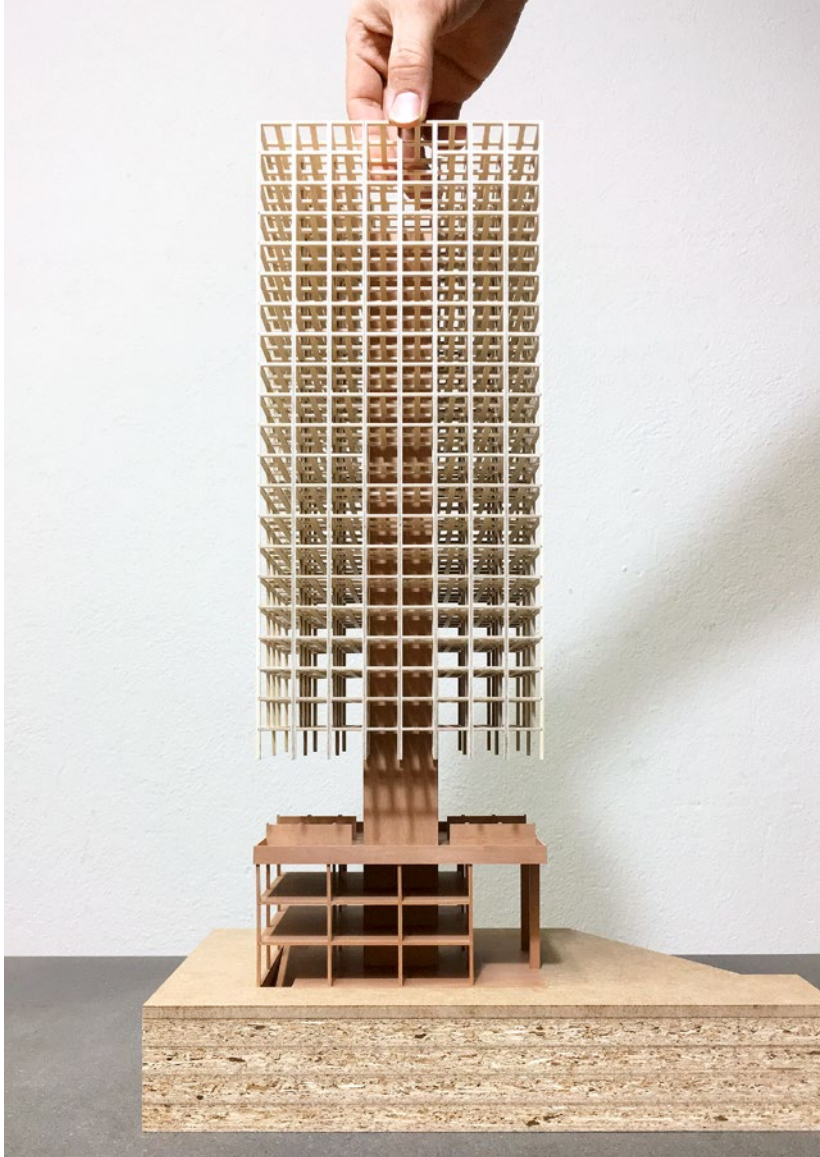
Higher, farther, faster,
more beautiful?
In search of somewhat
unconventional Swiss
records

**This edition: Building
up to the highest
wooden construc-
tions in the world**

Rocket, a 100-metre
high-rise in Winter-
thur (canton of
Zurich), will be the
world's highest resi-
dential building
made of wood.

Visualisation: Ina Invest





Zwhatt – the 75-metre high-rise due to be built in Regensdorf (canton of Zurich). As the model on the left shows, the building will consist of a massive concrete pillar surrounded by a skeleton frame of wood.

Photo: Pensimo, Boltshauser Architekten

350 and 400 kilos of CO₂, whereas a cubic metre of wood traps 1,000. “However, instead of using cubic metres of wood to create spectacular structures, a better idea would be to use it in square metres,” he says. In other words, wood could be used to cover surfaces instead of forming the framework of very large-scale construction projects. The specialist cites the example of the stone walls of Grisons houses, where wood is fitted to the interior walls, significantly improving the home’s insulation and comfort. This approach could be adopted to insulate part of the estate:

person Stephan Meierhofer. “Wood is very sturdy and, even in the event of a fire, retains its load-bearing capacities for a long time,” he explains. Construction is set to begin in spring.

On the way to world records

Even taller will be a tower planned by UBS in the Altstetten district of Zurich. The skyscraper will be 108 metres tall when it is completed in 2027, making it the tallest wooden building in the world. Its offices will house 2,800 employees. Wooden buildings are also going up in French-speaking Switzerland. The Tilia Tower (Latin for “lime tree”), on which construction began in 2024, will combine wood and concrete. It will capitalise on the strengths of hardwoods, like beech, which are sturdier than softwoods. This 85-metre building will be built in the Prilly district in the east of Lausanne. Close by, the Malley Phare Tower is to be constructed on an existing building. The 2,000 cubic

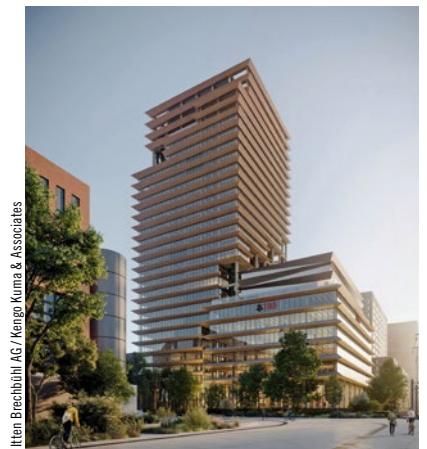
metres of wood required for this residential building come from fir and spruce, 95 per cent of which comes from Switzerland. The tower is set to be completed this year.

“What is the best way to use wood with regard to the environment and biodiversity? That is the question,” according to forestry engineer and emeritus professor in wood sciences Ernst Zürcher. One cubic metre of reinforced concrete generates between



Old-school: a wooden “high-rise” in La Sage (canton of Valais) – one of the first forms of multi-residential living.

Photo: Cortis und Sonderegger, 13Photo



Itten Brechtbühl AG / Kengo Kuma & Associates

In 2031, the tallest wooden tower in the world should be Swiss

The bank UBS has set its sights high. The proof is in the tower it is planning in the district of Altstetten, in Zurich. The tower, scheduled for completion in 2031, is to be 108 metres tall, making it the tallest wooden tower in the world. Unless, that is, another project overtakes it: a wooden skyscraper planned for Basel for the same year, as a building for the Bank for International Settlements. It will be 122 metres high! (SH)

apartment blocks, industrial buildings, schools, etc. “Building new skyscrapers is a thing of the past, an expression of power. We should really renovate existing ones, by using the valuable medium of wood to make them comfortable and biocompatible,” the expert argues.

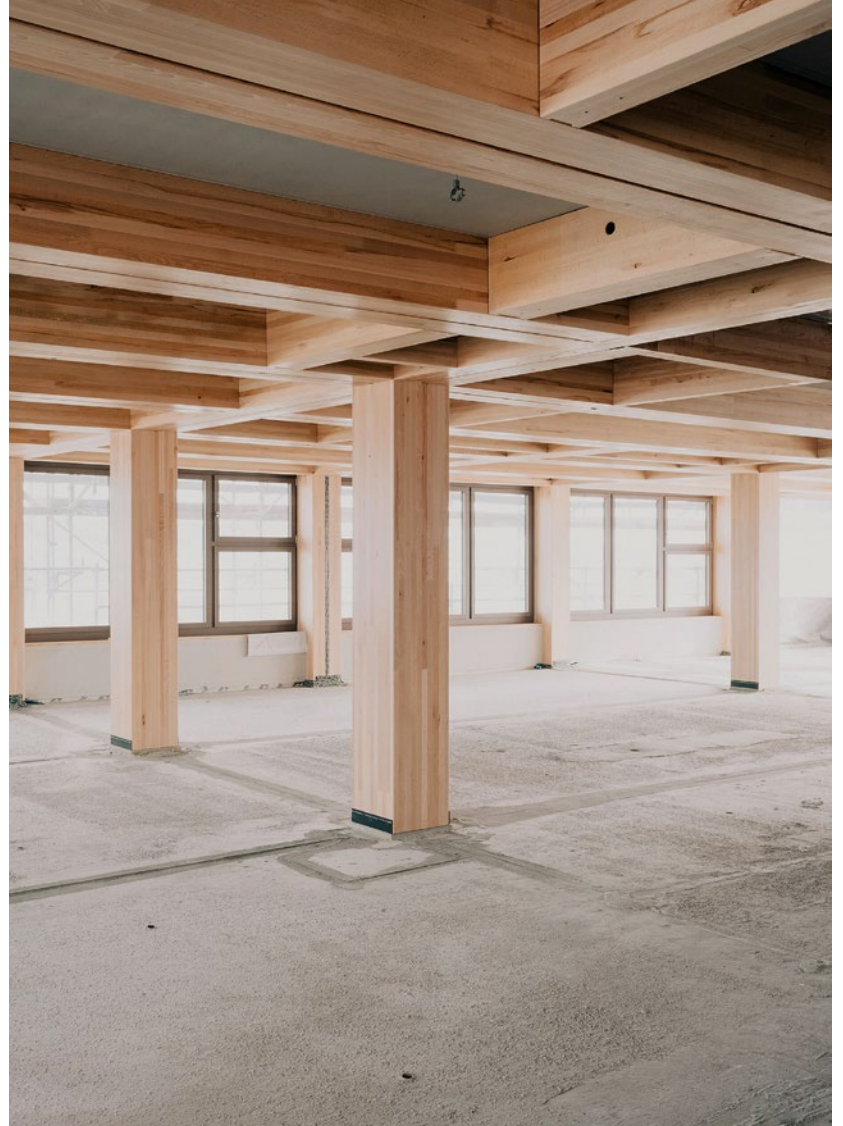
Utilising and preserving the forest

Switzerland has a unique law governing its forests, dating from 1903. “We cut down the forest in order to maintain it,” says Rafael Villar, who underlines the fact that the cost to local authorities of maintaining forests is not balanced out by revenue from wood. The trick is cutting down trees strategically, as for a gymnasium project in Aigle (Vaud), with which his firm was involved. The firm selected trees in the forests of Vaud colonised by

The Zwhatt high-rise has a very clean-lined structure, consisting of an interior skeleton of wooden beams and pillars, with flexible partition walls.

Photos: Pensimo, Sandro Straube, Boltshauser Architekten

State-of-the-art: massive beams of beechwood are glued together and then made into custom-made building parts.



bark beetles, an insect that feeds on sap and whose presence exposes the bark to a fungus that can turn the wood blue. “Cutting these trees down saves the wood and lets us put the trees to good use,” the engineer says.

A lot of wood is burned

However, not all wood cut in Switzerland is used wisely, and some of it ends up as firewood, remarks Ernst Zürcher. One of the main reasons for this is the rise in the price of fossil fuels. A better approach would be to use wood by order of priority, with wood being devoted first and foremost to construction, then to composite products, then to paper and finally as a fuel. “In Switzerland, saw mills are closing because of lack of demand. We even export wood only to reimport it once it has been processed,” laments Zürcher. He stresses the value of promoting forests locally. “There are 5,000 people working in forests, so we are creating employment

for over 50,000 people in the wood industry. Burning wood, on the other hand, creates very little added value,” he reflects. Currently, the Swiss wood industry employs 85,000 people.

Do we have enough wood? The natural growth of Switzerland’s forests produces ten million cubic metres of wood every year. The country harvests five million of those on average every year, of which 25 per cent is used for heating. The available potential is equivalent to three million cubic metres annually. There is therefore real room for improvement in how Switzerland uses its wood. And there is no shortage of projects. Sébastien Droz cites the Lignum prize, launched in 2009, as an example. “Since then, the quality, diversity and volume of projects have grown significantly,” he says. Another example is the 500-metre wooden skyway that meanders through the forest canopy in Toggenburg, near St. Gallen. This achievement is a reminder of the power of wooden constructions in Switzerland.

“You are near, you are far, but I will never reach you”

The works of poet Francis Giaouque, who died 60 years ago, tell of a love that was all too fleeting.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Some say he was possessed by something deadly and mysterious, others that he was doomed from the very beginning. It is undeniable that a sense of fear, despair and desolation hung over the life and thoughts of Francis Giaouque, who in 1965 passed “through the noble gates of death” in Lake Neuchâtel at the age of 31. When the end finally came, it was a blessed release.



Francis Giaouque
(1934–1965)

The love of his life

Born the son of a postman on 31 March 1934 in Prêles in the French-speaking part of the Bernese Jura, Giaouque went to high school in La Neuveville. But he quickly dropped out of business school in Neuchâtel and retreated to his parents' home, afflicted by a skin ailment. Living there as a recluse, he began to study the works of Samuel Beckett and the French poète maudit Tristan Corbière, both of whom would soon inspire him to write his own prose and poetry. Giaouque worked for a while as a bookseller and proofreader in Lausanne, and it was there that he met the love of his life, the stunning 20-year-old artist Emilienne Farny, in 1956. Unable to forget her, he continued commemorating her in his poems long after she had left him.

In the throes of depression

It was as a French teacher in the Spanish city of Valencia that Giaouque was first hit by severe depression in 1958. Once he had returned to Switzerland, he would become acquainted with the psychiatric hospitals of Geneva, Yverdon and Neuchâtel, moving from one institution to the next. His time in these units was punctuated by electro-

if I die
tomorrow
bury me
in moist, heavy,
warm soil
may the curve
of the coffin
be my halo
may no one weep
I knew not how
to live
I will finally
rise up
amid clear sounds
of night

Translated excerpt from
“Die Glut der Schwermut im Schatten der Nacht”,
Francis Giaouque; Th. Gut Verlag, Zurich 2019

shock therapy, insulin jabs and suicide attempts. Vacillating between the deepest despair and optimism, he felt increasingly disgusted not only by the shackles of “normal” life – but life as such. The only thing that kept him going was his writing. Giaouque published two works during his lifetime – “Parler seul” in 1959 and “L’Ombre et la Nuit” in 1962. Long in

the making, a complete edition of his poems and prose was not finished until 40 years after his death, in 2005. Giaouque’s mother prevented her son from committing suicide on more than one occasion, repeatedly picking him up from the abyss in which he had fallen. She died on 29 July 1954.

Testimony of a tortured soul

That a tormented individual could produce 156 poems of such immense power – first in his self-imposed dungeon, then in forced psychiatric care – is quite incredible. Giaouque’s metrical, measured verses bear stark, unsparing testimony to his suffering: “Twisted soul. You must leave. Now. All exits are blocked. Thick walls. Cell bars. Locked doors. Barricaded windows. A world in which terror moves like a snake. You must leave. Through the noble gates of death.”

And yet it was not illness alone that transformed Giaouque into such a brilliant yet self-destructive wordsmith. It was also his unrequited love for Emilienne Farny, to which one of his very last poems is dedicated: “Hours of agony / waves crash over me / deepest despair / and you have gone, never to return.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Die Glut der Schwermut im Schattenraum der Nacht” – the inaugural German translation of the poems and prose of Francis Giaouque, containing a biographical epilogue by editor Charles Linsmayer – is available from Th. Gut Verlag, Zurich 2019 (volume 37 of the “Reprinted by Huber” series).

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZURICH

Books and other food for thought

15



Are you a prolific reader? If so, you're not alone. Did you know that the Swiss are Europe's biggest readers of books? Swiss women in particular love reading. One in four read over 15 books a year. More than any other European nation. And the printed medium is still very much alive and kicking in Switzerland: 80 per cent of us mainly read books, not e-books.

Source: YouGov survey, 2025



99

Talking of exercise: 99 per cent of residents in Zurich are able to access all their essential everyday amenities on foot or by bike within 15 minutes. Zurich tops the list of the world's most walkable cities. When people live within 15 minutes of all their daily necessities, this not only makes a city more sustainable but also leads to better social interaction. Incidentally, the ranking starts on Z (for Zurich) and finishes on A, with the American city of Atlanta languishing at the bottom. Source: M. Bruno et al., Nature Cities 1

3,500

But moving to Zurich in the first place is easier said than done. Renting is expensive there – a four-room 100m² apartment on the market will cost 3,500 francs a month on average. People who have been living in the same apartment for a long time pay much less in comparison. Anyone moving to Switzerland and hoping for a renter's market is best advised to try St Gallen or Biel.

Source: Wüest Partner

43

Books are food for the brain. But food of the high-calorie sort is very popular too, given that 43 per cent of Swiss are overweight. Not only that, but the proportion of people who are clinically obese has doubled in 30 years. Cheeky question, but could more exercise and less reading be an option?

Source: Federal Statistical Office

183,661

We have saved the biggest number till last. Campaigners launching a new edition of the "Responsible Business Initiative" collected 183,661 signatures within two weeks. Never before has a proposal cleared the first hurdle so quickly in Switzerland. The threshold for triggering a popular vote is 100,000 valid signatures. Source: konzernverantwortung.ch

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Voters find utopian “Environmental Responsibility Initiative” too much to swallow

With almost 70 per cent voting no, the popular initiative “For a responsible economy within our planet’s limits” failed at the ballot box on 9 February. The Swiss Abroad also rejected the proposal, which had been put forward by the Young Greens

THEODORA PETER

The Young Greens may have lost, but there are no regrets. “For the first-ever time, Switzerland voted on whether planetary limits should apply to how it runs its economy,” they said. Planetary limits – a scientific concept – are boundaries that define how much human activity the Earth can tolerate before ecological damage occurs. They can relate to areas such as biodiversity, water consumption, and climate.

In tabling their initiative, the Young Greens wanted Switzerland to drastically cut its consumption of resources in order to preserve the basic foundations of life on Earth (see “Swiss Review” 6/2024). Ten years would have been the time frame for achieving this target. But their proposal overstepped the mark, with 69.8 per cent of voters rejecting it. The Swiss Abroad no was less emphatic, at 55.1 per cent.

Conservative opponents of the initiative who had labelled the proposal “extreme” felt vindicated. During the voting campaign, they had warned that the proposal would “destroy prosperity” and jeopardise the liberal free market. The Green Liberals too, usually sympathetic to environmental issues, called the initiative “unworkable”.

According to the environment minister, Albert Rösti (SVP), the no result was “certainly not a no to protecting the environment”. It is undeniable that we need to care for our natural world, he said after the vote, albeit adding that



people in Switzerland are unwilling to change their way of life so radically.

“It will not happen overnight”

The Federal Council interpreted the outcome as an endorsement of its environmental and climate policies to date. Carbon emissions are already falling. Rösti wants further progress in promoting innovation and the circular economy. “The switch to sustainable living will not happen overnight.”

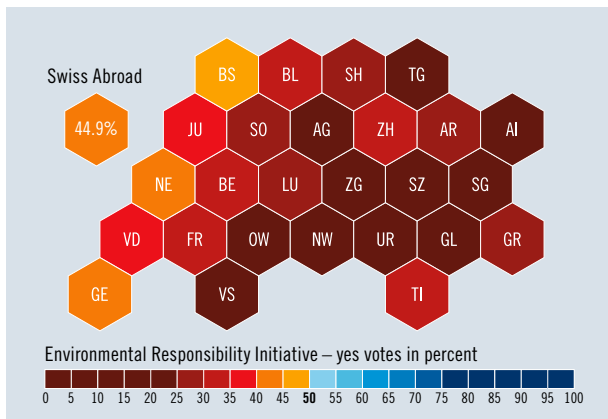
Based on the Climate and Innovation Act, which was approved by the electorate two years ago (see “Swiss Review” 4/2023), Switzerland is committed to weaning itself off fossil fuels like oil and gas in order to become carbon-neutral by 2050, in accordance with the Paris Agreement.

Net zero will only be possible if businesses, road users, and private households cut harmful greenhouse gas emissions dramatically. However, the switch to renewable energy has stalled. The initial boom in solar has slowed, electric car sales are declining, and many buildings still have oil heating. Furthermore, the federal government wants to ditch a number of climate programmes due to cost-cutting. Yet the Federal Council was sticking to its “ambitious” climate goals, said the environment minister.

The Young Greens and the Young Socialists were unable to hide their disappointment after the first exit polls on 9 February 2025. Yet they said they had no regrets about tabling the initiative.

Photo: Keystone

Voters reject Environmental Responsibility Initiative



The popular initiative “For a responsible economy within our planet’s limits” was rejected by 69.8 per cent of the nationwide electorate. The Swiss Abroad also voted no, albeit less emphatically (55.1 per cent). Not a single canton voted yes.

The next federal vote takes place on 28 September 2025. Information on the issues at stake will appear in the next edition of “Swiss Review”.

The day the “Fifth Switzerland” became official

A referendum on 16 October 1966 redefined the relationship between Switzerland and its diaspora, when voters said yes to a constitutional clause dedicated to the Swiss Abroad. In their recently published book “Heute Abstimmung!”, David Hesse and Philipp Loser pick out the vote as one of the 30 popular decisions that changed Switzerland. Here is the relevant chapter in full.

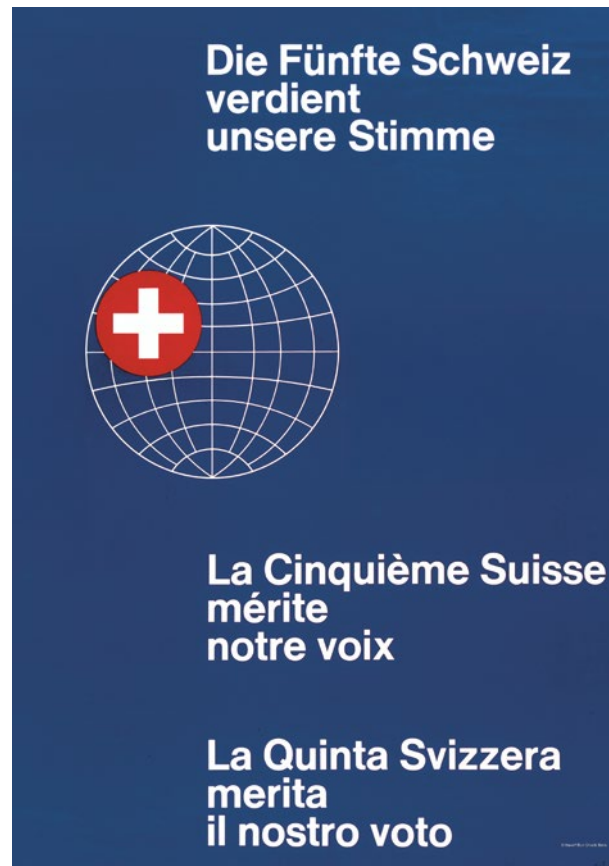
DAVID HESSE AND PHILIPP LOSER

For centuries, Switzerland was a country of emigrants. Men, women and children left the alpine valleys to seek their fortune abroad. Mercenaries, confectioners, architects, nannies, merchants, dairy farmers, chimney sweeps and others joined the exodus. It was not until the end of the 19th century that immigration began to outstrip emigration. In 1914, the official number of Swiss citizens abroad was put at a sizeable 380,000 – a not inconsiderable figure, as the domestic population back then was less than four million.

The federal government and cantons either had little interest in these emigrants or were happy to have exported some of Switzerland’s home-grown poverty. “They were glad they were gone,” says historian Patrick Kury. Anyone who had left the country lost their entitlement to state protection and welfare. Nevertheless, in 1874 the federal government began checking up on the private agencies that conducted the emigration process, because fraud was rife. And in 1900, a state-run office of emigration was opened for the purpose of advising people against leaving the country “recklessly”.

Attitudes to the diaspora changed during the First World War. National emphasis was put on the collective and the importance of strengthening the social fabric. Emigration began to be questioned. It was seen as a drain on the nation. The New Helvetic Society (NHS), founded in 1914 with the aim of “preserving the nation’s genetic heritage”, tried to promote cooperation with expatriate associations and Swiss schools abroad.

The NHS established its own sister organisation in London in 1916 as well as the forerunner of today’s Organisa-



tion of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), the Auslandschweizerwerk, in 1920.

Following the birth of the federal Swiss state in 1848, emigrants had repeatedly called on their home country to take greater care of them and give them the right to vote. But it was not until the start of the 1960s that the federal government began addressing their concerns, viewing the diaspora increasingly as an asset to be nurtured for the good of the nation. In its message to the Federal Assembly on 2 July 1965, the Federal Council wrote: “Switzerland is a small landlocked country poor in raw materials with a highly developed, globally connected economy. As such, it relies on a strong and healthy network of hard-working expatriates abroad.”

Poster promoting the “Fifth Switzerland” in the 1966 referendum campaign; 68 per cent voted yes.

Photo: Prints and Drawings Department of the Swiss National Library, Berne

The expatriate community became an economic proposition.

Consequently, the Federal Council wanted its responsibility for Swiss Abroad to be enshrined in the Federal Constitution. A new article in the constitution would empower the government to govern the “rights and obligations” of expatriates, specifically in relation to “the exercise of political rights in the Confederation, the fulfilment of the obligation to perform military or alternative service, welfare support and social security”. Voting in the referendum to decide this constitutional change was mandatory.

Referendum debate

The year of the referendum, 1966, became a landmark year for expatriates. Three former federal councillors – Traugott Wahlen, Max Petitpierre and Giuseppe Lepori – lobbied hard for the OSA in 1966, the year in which the OSA also celebrated its 50th anniversary. Swiss Post issued an expatriate-themed stamp, while the Swiss National Library in Berne put on an exhibition devoted to the diaspora. Suddenly, the consensus was that Switzerland should in fact be proud of its emigrants.

Sceptics were very much in the minority. Shortly before the vote, the NZZ called the proposal “completely indisputable”. The vote was about more than just a clause in the constitution, it said. “Switzerland owes a debt of gratitude to its compatriots abroad for their economic, political and cultural endeavours. This is about cementing unity.”

According to the National Council, Swiss Abroad would now become “equal citizens”. There were a number of outside factors at play here. One of them was the end of colonialism.

More and more Swiss emigrants in places like Algeria or Congo had turned to the federal government after being stripped of their land and wealth. This motivated Berne to frame Switzerland's relationship with its emigrants in unequivocal terms.

Secondly, the Cold War of the 1960s marked a return to "geistige Landesverteidigung", the intellectual defence of the nation, which advocated Switzerland's "otherness". Everything Swiss was good, both in Switzerland and abroad.

Thirdly, globalisation: so much was changing around the world, so it made sense to focus on what made Switzerland unique. The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s brought high levels of immigration, construction activity and population growth. The Swiss economy became more in-

The constitutional change in 1966 suited both sides of the argument, because it was an affirmation of Switzerland and its values both at home and abroad.

tegrated with other economies. Swiss banking was on the up. Berne signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in 1966. This transformation also stirred up fears: the anti-immigration far-right Nationale Aktion party was founded in 1961.

In the 1960s, Switzerland was opening its economy while pulling up the psychological drawbridge at the

same time. Calls for national vigilance during the national exhibition of 1964 were juxtaposed with messages of openness and optimism in the future. The Zurich philologist Karl Schmid described this contradiction notably as a form of malaise in his 1963 book "Unbehagen im Kleinstaat".

The constitutional change in 1966 suited both sides of the argument, because it was an affirmation of Switzerland and its values both at home and abroad. The new clause was duly accepted by all the cantons and almost 70 per cent of voters. The biggest yes vote was in Geneva, the lowest in Schwyz, Valais and Obwalden. The fact that over 30 per cent voted no nevertheless showed that some Swiss still viewed emigrants as absconders who did not merit any state handouts.

After 1966

The popular decision redefined the relationship between Switzerland and its diaspora. Emigrants and their families felt valued by their inclusion in the constitution. In its review of 1966, the OSA spoke of the "dawn of a new age". The new constitutional article prompted the federal government to gradually address some other issues: access to welfare benefits (responsibility for this shifted from cantonal to federal level in 1974); military service in peacetime; and the right to political participation.

Expatriates are entitled to vote and stand for election, based on a federal act that came into force in 1977. This entitlement never expires but is inherited by the passport-holding next of kin. Restricting voting rights to expatriates who have lived outside the country for no more than a few years (as was the case in Canada until recently) was not considered an option.

Expatriate voting was less widespread at first, because emigrants still had to physically cast their vote

in Switzerland. The situation only changed in 1992 when postal voting was introduced. Swiss Abroad can now vote at their original or most recent Swiss place of domicile – physically or otherwise. Individual cantons have been piloting e-voting for

Every vote counts

Voting papers land in our letter boxes three to four times a year. The procedure is so regular, or even humdrum, that many people don't bother to vote these days. But direct democracy can have a durable impact, explain David Hesse and Philipp Loser in their book. The two authors – both of them journalists and historians – had the brilliant idea of selecting 30 of the most consequential referendums out of the hundreds of plebiscites that have taken place since the birth of the federal Swiss state in 1848.



"Heute Abstimmung! 30 Volksabstimmungen, die die Schweiz verändert haben"; David Hesse and Philipp Loser, Limmat-Verlag, 2024, 248 pages, CHF 38.00

Some votes are automatic choices, such as the emphatic yes to OASI (1947), the belated yes to women's suffrage (1971), and the narrow no to Switzerland joining the European Economic Area (1992). Yet the book also addresses issues that are a little less memorable, including the birth of the Swiss Federal Railways (1898), the integration of the "Fifth Switzerland" (1966, see main text), and the end of patriarchal marriage (1985). Switzerland played a pioneering role in protecting workers' rights, by approving the Factory Act in 1877. And whereas the "excess of foreigners" initiative failed at the ballot box in 1970, the initiative "against mass immigration" was approved 44 years later.

Many of the referendums covered in the book were a proverbial tale of blood, sweat and tears. Hesse and Loser document the backstories, debates, results and real-life consequences of each vote, providing a refreshing and extremely interesting take on these events. "Switzerland is the product of water, weather, rocks – and popular votes," they write. (SWE)

expats since 2008. In 2015, former ambassador Tim Guldemann, who lives in Berlin, became the first expatriate to be voted into parliament. The state covered his travel costs.

Swiss Abroad are now a political factor in their own right. Well over 800,000 Swiss live abroad. If they were a canton, they would be Switzerland's fourth most populous. Around 220,000 expatriates are entered on the political register and take part in elections and votes. Many of these people have left the country temporarily and will return to Switzerland at some stage. Budget airlines and the internet have very much changed the face of emigration. "Instead of emigration, it makes more sense to talk of international mobility," says Rudolf Wyder, who was the director of the OSA for many years.

The 1966 constitutional article put Switzerland's relationship with its diaspora on a solid foundation. The Swiss Abroad Act then came into force in 2015, setting out this relationship as a piece of legislation. Expatriates are no longer regarded as suspect but as valued members of the Swiss population. The federal government subsidises Swiss schools abroad, runs an online desk for expatriates, manages the SWI swissinfo.ch platform, compiles dedicated Swiss Abroad statistics, and provides other services related to emigration and repatriation.

More has to be done, says Wyder. "We still need government to formulate a coherent Swiss Abroad policy that genuinely recognises the potential of our diaspora." Other countries like Ireland and Singapore have their own diaspora ministers. This and other innovations have also been theoretically possible in Switzerland since 1966.

Translated excerpt from the book
"Heute Abstimmung! 30 Volksabstimmungen,
die die Schweiz verändert haben"

Meimuna is a gentle voice in an uncertain world

Valais artist Cyrielle Formaz, otherwise known as Meimuna, released her first LP album in late 2024. "c'est demain que je meurs" ("Tomorrow is the day I die") features nostalgia, scars and rebirth. Meimuna sings of her native Valais, its conservative nature, but also its untamed beauty.



MEIMUNA:
"c'est demain que
je meurs"
2024, Radicalis Musics

When on tour in France at the beginning of this year, she shared the stage with another musician, guitarist Claire Moreau, to present her first album: "c'est demain que je meurs". This up close and personal approach suits singer and guitarist Cyrielle Formaz well, as she is used to her fans coming up to speak to her after her concerts. "These people have known me for years. They say my songs are about them, even though they are about me. It's the whole world at a personal level," she says over the phone during her tour, which also spanned Germany, Austria and Switzerland. She takes delight in the almost surprising fact that, in a world where "people are ab-

sorbed by screens", there are still enough people who come to see someone performing live. "It's almost a militant gesture," she says with amusement, in her trademark perky, flute-like voice.

Which words define her approach to music the best? "Melancholy, nostalgia and hope," Meimuna replies, keen to point out that she hopes her songs will comfort those who listen to them. "c'est demain que je meurs", released in October 2024, is the artist's first LP album, even though Meimuna has been performing for ten years now. The arrangements are crisp, always giving pride of place to the guitar, an instrument that Formaz plays with an assurance born of her classical training. The singer, aged 30, performs her songs solo, with just the six strings of her guitar for company, as she did in a video published on YouTube where she rattles off several numbers without batting an eyelid. She is a well-rounded artist and is involved in every creative aspect of her world: composition, recording, mixing and graphic design.

We nodded along and tapped our feet as we listened to "tomber du haut" ("Falling from a height"), a catchy track from her latest album. It is structured around a guitar picking arpeggio that is taken up by machines and looped, accompanied by drums and a bassline. The melody is irresistible. The chorus has all the makings of a hit. The lyrics are sensual and poetic. Formaz, an illustrator by training, designed the brilliantly inventive and simple music video for this song herself. It shows her singing and dancing against a background of off-white sketch paper, before transforming into an eye and then into a bird. "I did 3,000 drawings; it took me three months," says the singer, born in the village of Orsières. "Je ne serai pas l'otage / De mes histoires / Il n'est jamais trop tard / Pour tomber de haut / Souffler sur ma peau / Repartir à zero", ("I won't be held hostage/By my past/It's never too late/To fall from a height/Blow on my skin/Start



Photo: Marius Mattioni



Photo: Marius Mattioni

again from scratch,") she breathes in this featherweight song, where some lines resemble a haiku. "Est-ce que les parents tristes / Font des enfants tristes?" ("Do sad parents/Have sad children?") the Valais native sings.

Cyrielle Formaz lives in Sion, having spent two years studying art in Brussels. She says she loves the "old country", by which name Valais is also known, because it offers both living artists and mountains, where she enjoys hiking and climbing. The artist cites Ramuz and Corinna Bille, for the role nature plays in our lives. For music, she mentions Laurence Revey, a Valais musician who showed her that you can make music in Valais. Meimuna? The name comes from an Asian cicada that can spend up to 25 years buried in the ground as a larva before emerging and dying within a single day. One song in her first album stands out: "Ève V. (battre des records)" ("Ève V. (beat records)") dedicated to the late French singer, dancer and actress Lolo Ferrari, whose voice is heard on the track. Ferrari, whose real name was Ève Vallois, rose to fame by allowing her chest and its enormous implants to become her brand. "Tu veux tromper la mort / Trouver du réconfort / Changer de nom, de corps / Battre des records", ("You want to cheat death/Find solace/Change your name, change your body/Beat records,") sings Meimuna, like a funeral dirge that soothes the deceased woman. Valais is also a region where words can be stifled by silence. "I grew up in Orsières and I suffered from the lack of scope to express myself. People didn't put their emotions into words. That's not just Valais, though; it's rural areas in general," the artist concludes. .

STÉPHANE HERZOG

www.meimuna.ch

www.youtube.com/MEIMUNAofficial



Women's football on the big stage

Women's football is booming, but less so in Switzerland than in top footballing nations like Spain, England or Germany. The 2025 Women's European Championship, which takes place in Switzerland this July, should help to close the gap.

THEODORA PETER

When Switzerland play Norway in the opening match of Euro 2025 at St. Jakob-Park in Basel on 2 July, they will not be among the title favourites. But they will have won anyway, as it will be the first time that the women's national team have played in front a crowd of over 30,000 in a Swiss football stadium. Some of the squad ply their trade in leagues abroad and are already used to large crowds. One of them is captain Lia Wälti, who stars for the English club Arsenal FC (see "Swiss Review" 5/2023).

Women's football had a lowly status in Switzerland until recently. Largely ignored by media and sponsors, the Swiss national team usually

played its matches at small grounds in front of a few hundred fans. Switzerland was named host of Euro 2025 two years ago, with the women's team giving a good account of themselves a few months later at the 2023 World Cup in Australia. Public interest has been growing ever since.

Amateurish

Franziska Schild, 47, is a football administrator from Berne. She used to play in the Swiss top flight when she was younger, also picking up several Swiss international caps at the turn of the millennium. Women's football in Switzerland was still very amateurish back then, she recalls. "They

Goalkeeper Elvira Herzog (21), Luana Bühler (15), and Coumba Sow (right) defending the Swiss goal during an international friendly against France in Geneva on 29 October 2024. Switzerland won the match 2-1.

Photo: Keystone

would reimburse our train ticket and pay for two pairs of football boots each year." The shirts they played in were cast-offs from the men's national team. They would flap around in the breeze. No one had made football shirts cut for women yet. Some regarded women's football as a bit of a joke. "We players didn't care. All we wanted was to play football."

A lot has happened since then – including at youth level. Schild has done her bit in recent years as head of football development at the Berne/Jura football association, Switzerland's biggest regional association comprising some 190 amateur clubs. "To get more girls playing football, we need more girls-only football," she



“We players didn’t care.
All we wanted was to play football.”

Former Swiss international Franziska Schild

Franziska Schild – recently appointed head of women’s football operations at BSC Young Boys – has played a key role in the development of Swiss women’s football.

Photo: Daniel Rodriguez, FVBJ (Berne/Jura football association)

The SFA also wants to double the number of female coaches, referees and football administrators. This is contingent on additional money. The Federal Council originally wanted to provide Euro 2025 with only four million francs in funding – peanuts compared to the 80 million francs that it injected into the men’s 2008 European Championship, which was co-hosted by Switzerland and Austria. Following vociferous protests, parliament ended up increasing the subsidy to 15 million francs – a proportion of which will go into promoting Swiss women’s football. The host cantons and cities also pledged money. This will cover expenditure on training courses for female coaches, for example.

However, a major issue remains the lack of training facilities around the country. Limited infrastructure is a bane for many clubs, as more and more boys are also taking up football. Promoting girls’ football should not be about jumping ahead of boys in the queue, says Daube. “But we need to find ways of giving girls the same opportunities.” There is increasing awareness among everyone involved – clubs and administrators – “that things have to improve, not least with regard to training space.”

Daube hopes that the feel-good factor surrounding Euro 2025 will tur-

bocharge the development of women’s football in Switzerland, even if she thinks that winning this year’s tournament will be a step too far for the national team. Reaching the quarter-finals is the first priority. “Playing on home soil will be an unbeatable experience for our players.”

Home tournament across eight Swiss cities

The women’s European Championship takes place from 2 to 27 July 2025 in the host cities of Basel, Berne, Geneva, Lucerne, Sion, St Gallen, Thun and Zurich. Sixteen nations, including hosts Switzerland, will play in four groups of four teams aiming to qualify for the quarter-finals – followed by the semi-finals and the final. European champions England and world champions Spain are among the favourites. Each of the host cities will bring the tournament to life with a range of events, including fan zones, for visiting fans from around Europe. A Saint Bernard puppy called “Maddli” is the official tournament mascot. The name is inspired by Madeleine Boll, the first-ever female registered footballer in Switzerland. Boll, who comes from the canton of Valais and is now 71, caused uproar in 1965 when she played a game for one of FC Sion’s junior boys’ teams at the age of 12. (TP)

www.uefa.com/womenseuro

says. Talented girls are often allowed to train with the boys; “This can carry on, by all means.” Yet more and more girls are choosing football as a team sport because they want to play with other girls. Girls-only leagues and tournaments are already established in the children’s age groups.

Schmid, who has extensive experience as a football administrator, is joining the top Berne club BSC Young Boys (YB) this spring to become head of women’s football operations. Switzerland’s professional clubs in men’s football have also seen the potential that the women’s game has to offer. This is after YB almost shut down its women’s team only ten years ago. The club is now investing 40 million Swiss francs in the construction of a youth and women’s football campus.

Euro 2025 to act as a catalyst

The Swiss Football Association (SFA) has drawn up its own Euro 2025 legacy plan called “Here to Stay” in order to stimulate long-term and sustainable development in Swiss women’s football. Women currently account for 12 per cent of the 340,000 or so registered footballers around the country. “We aim to have doubled the number of girls and women playing football from 40,000 to 80,000 by 2027,” explains the director of women’s football at the SFA, Marion Daube, who has already noted a discernible uptick in interest since Switzerland was announced as host country of this summer’s prestigious event. According to Daube, experiences in other countries show that a tournament of this magnitude acts as a catalyst, taking a sport up to ten years forward in its development.

Centre Party snail race to replace Amherd

No one in the Centre Party was initially willing to throw their hat into the ring to succeed outgoing Federal Councillor Viola Amherd, after a slew of potential candidates ruled themselves out of consideration. Martin Pfister eventually won the Centre Party snail race. He was elected to the Federal Council on 12 March.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

The future was looking a little brighter for the Centre Party not so long ago. After years of trending downwards, its share of the vote finally improved slightly in the autumn 2023 national elections. The Centre was more or less on a par with the FDP in the polls. The merger with the BDP and the name change from CVP had paid off. The party had regained its mojo. There was even talk of targeting a second seat on the Federal Council.

Less buoyant

Just one year later and the Centre Party is no longer as buoyant. Viola Amherd stepping down from government evolved into a mini-drama. For a while, it was unclear whether there would be enough suitable Centre candidates to stand as her successor. Supposed frontrunners – party chair Gerhard Pfister (Zug), National Councillor Martin Candinas (Grisons), and members of the Council of States, Isabelle Chassot (Fribourg) and Benedikt Würth (St Gallen) – ruled themselves out. Why? The heavy workload. Or family reasons. Or lack of inner fire.

No female candidates

Seeing an opportunity, National Councillor Markus Ritter (canton of St Gallen), who is also head of the Swiss Farmers' Union, took the bull by the horns and threw his hat into the ring. Only at the very last moment did the Zug cantonal government minister Martin Pfister also decide to enter the race, thus sparing the Centre Party the embarrassment of only having one candidate standing for election. However, no women were willing to put themselves forward, despite the women's wing of the party calling for a female candidate.

Ritter – a familiar figure in the lower house – began as favourite, despite his aggressive lobbying for farmers having earned him a certain notoriety in parliament. Pfister, on the other hand, was banking on his consensus-seeking, personable style of politics to make up for his lack of star quality in Berne. A former colonel in the army, Pfister also tried to underline his military past, saying that he was more accustomed to the officer's mess than the Federal Palace. It was Pfister who eventually won, receiving 134 votes from the upper and lower chamber of the Federal Assembly on 12 March – just at the time of our editorial deadline. Markus Ritter, who started as the favourite, received 110 votes.



Elected to the Federal Council – Martin Pfister began as the outsider but won the most votes.

Photo: Keystone

Challenging times for defence

When Amherd resigned as Federal Councillor, the popular assumption was that her successor would have to pick up where Amherd finished at the defence ministry (DDPS). This may have been one of the reasons why some notable names decided against running on the Centre Party ticket. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, newly elected federal councillors long regarded the DDPS as the short straw. They would normally escape to a more important and prestigious post at the first opportunity. When Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi (SVP) was assigned the defence portfolio against his will in the 1990s, he complained that it was like being relegated to Nationalliga B (the second tier of Swiss football).

Amid the Ukraine war and threats to cybersecurity, the DDPS is now one of the government's most important ministries. The military budget has been significantly increased. With 12,000 staff, the DDPS is the biggest government ministry.

Many challenges await the DDPS's new boss. Several procurement projects have been botched. Continued delays in the full delivery of Israeli-manufactured reconnaissance drones are the latest example. The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) voiced its concern in January. The procurement projects are worth 19 billion Swiss francs. Pfister will also have to manage cooperation with NATO, after the Federal Council – under pressure from both sides of the political divide – announced its intention to deepen ties with the alliance.

A good report card – helping us to improve

According to the results of our latest reader survey, conducted in 2024, “Swiss Review” is first and foremost a credible source of information and an important link to Switzerland for its readers around the world.

MARC LETTAU

What do readers think of “Swiss Review”? Our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), aims to get an accurate answer to this question every four years with its comprehensive, expert-led reader survey. We have now seen the results of the 2024 survey, which was conceived and conducted by the Zurich-based social and market researcher Jörg Schneider.

Containing over 100 individual questions, the survey not only gives a detailed insight into how people engage with our magazine and what our readers want. It is also our report card. And the verdict among readers is overwhelmingly positive. This is very good to know. In particular, our readers think our magazine’s credibility is one of its biggest assets – 96 per cent specify this as a quality, with 60 per cent giving us the top rating. Our editorial line also earns praise: 90 per cent believe that “Swiss Review” is politically balanced. In terms of the magazine’s overall score, 86 per cent rate us as “good” or give us the top mark of “very good”. Four per cent give us a negative rating. We notice that our online readers mark

Our front pages are an obvious example of how the “Swiss Review” editorial team has taken feedback on board. Following the 2020 survey, the cover page was given a makeover and now has a fresh new look. Readers have noticed, giving it a much better mark four years on.

“Swiss Review” a little less euphorically than those who read the print edition. Report-style pieces are clearly our most popular form of content, while readers consider nature and the environment to be the most important content area.

Based on the 4,000-plus questionnaires that were evaluated, it is safe to say that our readers also regard “Swiss Review” as an emotional bridge to Switzerland and not just as a source of information: 71 per cent say that the magazine strengthens their ties to Switzerland, while two-thirds view “Swiss Review” as their guide to contemporary Switzerland. For 24 per cent, “Swiss Review” is the only source of news and information from Switzerland.

Feedback leads to improvements

Readers are of course entitled to ask whether we actually act on their feedback. Taking the results of the previous survey in 2020 into account – yes, we do. The magazine’s photos and the look and feel of the front page – identified as a weakness back then – were rated much higher by readers in

2024. The same applies to certain aspects of the magazine’s content, where we took heed of readers who said in 2020 that they wanted greater focus on social topics as well as nature and the environment. The magazine now scores significantly higher in terms of its content mix.

The results of the 2020 and 2024 survey also show detailed differences in how readers rate us on specific pages of the magazine. For example, “Switzerland in figures” has emerged from relative obscurity to become a firm favourite. Other pages fare worse than they did in 2020. This demonstrates why we want to conduct reader surveys in the first place, i.e. we – the editorial team and the publisher – can take on the feedback and work on areas where there is room for improvement. A good report card is not an invitation for us to rest on our laurels.

Draw

Everyone who took part in the survey also had the chance to take part in our free draw, with over 90 prizes up for grabs. The draw has now been made and the lucky winners notified.



“The Swiss Abroad are important for Switzerland’s image”

On 1 January 2025, Marianne Jenni started work as the new director general of the Consular Directorate (CD) at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). In an interview with “Swiss Review”, she talks about the necessity of making consular services available online and defending the interests of the Swiss Abroad.

INTERVIEW: DENISE LACHAT

Marianne Jenni, you were the Swiss ambassador to Ecuador until very recently – and you now head the Consular Directorate in Berne. Were there any surprises when you returned to Switzerland?

Marianne Jenni: There were no surprises, because I already knew what returning to Switzerland is like. I returned home regularly during my three-year stint in Ecuador, and I had worked for eight years in Berne before then. You need to be adaptable as a diplomat. Without any flexibility, optimism, positivity or sense of curiosity, it would be difficult to change countries every four years and get used to a new language, mentality and culture. But Switzerland has always been my home. And I have a Swiss employer: the FDFA. My situation is different to someone who simply emigrates from Switzerland.

Nevertheless, you are well versed in the experiences of Swiss Abroad. After all, you have also lived in places like Paris, Lagos, Rome, London, Baghdad, Kinshasa and Cape Town.

One cannot underestimate the challenge of living in a new country of which you have little or no knowledge. The first few months are never easy, because you have to restructure your everyday life.

How easy is it then for Swiss Abroad to maintain that connection to Switzerland?

The events that I organised in the Ecuadorian capital Quito – Swiss National Day, coming-of-age ceremonies, an event for pensioners – were always popular. Modern communication also makes it easier for people to stay connected to Switzerland. It is quite a contrast to what it used to be like a few decades ago.

Yet modern information and connectivity are not necessarily a given. Many Swiss Abroad fear that the SRG SSR online information



Marianne Jenni, director general of the Consular Directorate since the beginning of the year, talking to “Swiss Review”: “Anyone who leaves to start a new life in another country is taking a risk.” Photos: Danielle Liniger

“The political participation of the “Fifth Switzerland” is important for Swiss politics.”

platform swissinfo.ch could be axed under government cost-cutting measures.

Informing the Swiss Abroad is a task enshrined in the Federal Constitution. It is something we have to facilitate. The CD is working with the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and with SWI swissinfo in this regard. We will of course be tabling our arguments during consultation on the proposed cuts. But it is the politicians who will ultimately decide.

In Switzerland, sentiment towards Swiss Abroad appears to have cooled. Some even accuse expats of sponging off the state. Does this worry you?

I have not noticed any such sentiment during the short time I have been in office, but the portrayal is certainly problematic. If this image exists, I will work to correct that. Those who criticise are probably unfamiliar with the real-life challenges facing Swiss Abroad. In Switzerland, we rely on a system that runs like clockwork and gives us peace of mind. This is not necessarily the case everywhere else. From administrative hurdles and changing security situations, to non-existent public transport, or difficulties in obtaining social security – Swiss Abroad have to negotiate many challenges. Anyone who leaves to start a new life in another country is taking a risk.

What message would you like to relay to the “Fifth Switzerland”?

I want the Swiss Abroad to know that we are thinking of them and are there for them. The Federal Council and parliament have handed us this remit in the form of the Swiss Abroad Act. It is a remit that we take seriously. The Swiss Abroad are our ambassadors, embodying Swiss virtues like quality and reliability, whether in business, science, culture or society. They are important for Switzerland’s image.

How will you go about taking the pulse of the “Fifth Switzerland”?

One of my priorities will be to meet as many Swiss Abroad as possible and attend OSA conferences to learn about what the Swiss expatriate community is thinking, because this varies from country to country. It is also worth repeating that the Swiss Abroad can do their own bit to ensure they have a political voice, i.e. by standing for election to the Council of the Swiss Abroad and offering their insight that way.

Many Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote in elections and referendums in Switzerland but often cannot do so because the voting papers arrive much too late – which is extremely annoying.

I totally agree, because important votes are being lost. The political participation of the “Fifth Switzerland” is important for Swiss politics.

E-voting could make a difference.

Will you lobby the cantons that are hesitant to introduce it?

We will have a conversation with the cantons. E-voting will be one of the topics discussed.

The Consular Directorate is the central point of contact for Switzerland’s consular services around the world. What does this mean in practice?

Representations in the form of embassies or consulates function a little bit like municipal councils. You register with them – and they will take your personal details, receive your passport and identity card applications, provide the necessary documentation for marriages and divorces, offer you a temporary passport if you lose your permanent passport, help you in emergencies, assist with repatriation in the event of death, contact your family, and issue visas (as many as 700,000 visas in 2024).

In some cases, they will also provide you with money: Swiss Abroad who are destitute and, for example, have no family to support them can apply for welfare payments. Each individual case is assessed according to strict legal criteria. If the necessary conditions are met, payments can theoretically be made to cover the person’s minimum living costs in their country of residence.

How effective is Switzerland’s consular network?

Switzerland provides high-quality services across a dense consular network consisting of around 170 representations and 200 honorary representations. We have considerable expectations to live up to. Both Swiss Abroad and Swiss tourists abroad are increasing in number. We also have to cut costs by around ten percent. Hence, we need digital solutions to maintain the quality of our services. These solutions must offer added value to all involved, through efficiency gains on the one hand and customer friendliness on the other.

Added value, efficiency gains, customer friendliness – but what can Swiss Abroad expect in practice?



Marianne Jenni: “I want the Swiss Abroad to know that we are thinking of them and are there for them.”

We are thinking of creating a digital consular hub, the details of which I am unable to provide at the moment. The aim is to process cases quicker than we do today. There are no plans to close representations, as Federal Councillor and FDFA head Ignazio Cassis has assured us more than once. This is good to know. By developing a consular hub, we wish to promote the concept of personal responsibility among expatriates and tourists alike.

Does this mean that the state will take more of a back seat in future?

No, it doesn't. When we are needed, we will be there. We have proven it in the past and will prove it again in future. However, Swiss who travel or settle abroad should keep in mind the principle of personal responsibility enshrined in the Swiss Abroad Act. More preventive work is needed of the type the FDFA already carries out. We have to get the message across even more effectively. The FDFA offers numerous sources of advice and support in this regard. For example, the SwissInTouch.ch app provides the expatriate community with easier access to Swiss representations abroad. FDFA travel advice is available to Swiss tourists, who can also register on the Travel Admin app. The pick-up in travel after Covid, an increase in independently booked holidays, and, not least, the security situation around the



“When we are needed,
we will be there.
We have proven it in
the past and will prove it
again in future.”

world are reflected in the figures, with the FDFA helpline having filed over 55,000 inquiries in 2024. In total, there were 1,087 requests for consular protection – 17 per cent more than in the previous year. There certainly seems to be one crisis after another at the moment.

Can people actually contact you around the clock?

Yes, in principle, they can – via smartphone.

Marianne Jenni joined the FDFA in 1991 as a consular officer. She worked in Paris, Lagos, Rome, London, Baghdad, Kinshasa and Cape Town before returning to Berne in 2013, where she oversaw the management of local and honorary staff abroad and was responsible for the FDFA's global property portfolio.

From 2021 to 2024, she served as head of mission in Quito, Ecuador. Her responsibilities at the Consular Directorate will include optimising digital services and developing preventive measures.

Federal votes

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

At its meeting on 15 January 2025, the Federal Council decided that no federal votes would take place on 18 May 2025.

The next voting date is 28 September 2025.

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



Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative “For a financially strong, sovereign and responsible Switzerland (Bitcoin Initiative)” (30 June 2026)
- Federal Popular Initiative “For responsible multinationals – protecting human beings and the environment” (7 July 2026)

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



“I liked most of all the contact with the animals and the beautiful landscapes”

The Swiss Abroad Camille Strack grew up in France. Last summer, she lent a hand on a farm in Switzerland. Here she talks about the experiences that she gained thanks to the organisation Agriviva.

“I heard about Agriviva during a stay in Switzerland. That made me curious. I found all the necessary information on their website, such as the addresses of the farms and their available placement dates, as well as information about the family, the farm and the tasks assigned to the young people. I started looking for a farming family around four months before the start of my placement.

Finally, in June, I spent three weeks living with a farming family in the Bernese Oberland, near Interlaken. My day started early because breakfast was at seven o'clock and at eight o'clock we went to work. At 12 o'clock, the whole family had lunch together and then returned to work. The coffee break at four pm was very important to ensure I had energy for the rest of the day! My tasks were very varied; the most common jobs were salting the cheese using a machine and washing out the milk churns. I therefore actively helped with the preparation of the cheese.

The family spoke Haslerdütsch, a Swiss dialect that I wasn't used to. It's also not easy to understand, although it sounds soft and harmonious. We still managed to communicate, even if it was challenging at times. And I was able to improve my German!

I really enjoyed my stay with the farming family. It enabled me to boost my self-confidence and discover the world of work. I liked most of all the contact with the animals and the beautiful landscapes.

Here are two funny little anecdotes: There was a goat that lived in the same enclosure as the sheep. She thought she was a sheep and behaved in the same way. I also played chicken catch with the little children of the farmer's family and we tried to get them to fly.

For me it was a rewarding experience to learn how to make cheese and milk cows. I was also able to take part in the “Alpauzug”, when the cows, adorned with flowers and bells, return to the mountain pastures. And seeing marmots in the wild for the first time was incredible.



Washing the milk churns was one of the tasks of Camille Strack.

Photo provided

I would like to return to Switzerland to help on another farm, perhaps during the school holidays. I can recommend this experience to all young Swiss Abroad who would like to know what it is like to live and work on a farm in Switzerland.

Currently, I am completing my compulsory schooling in France. I am considering whether I should come to Switzerland for training, which would of course have an impact on my future career. The counselling session with an educationsuisse employee has already given me a general overview of the training and education opportunities in Switzerland. And looking for an appren-

ticeship in Switzerland is an option that I am seriously considering.” RUTH VON GUNTEN

Educationsuisse offers counselling to all young Swiss Abroad on all matters related to education in Switzerland and also gives tips on initial work experience.



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New Year's winter camp – now is the time to reserve your spot



Group photo in the sunshine – not on the beach but in the mountains. Photo: Pixofluna

Winter is the time for unforgettable fun in the snow, and the FYSA's winter camps offer just that. From Valbella, to the Melch Valley, to the legendary JUSKILA youth camp in Lenk – we offer the perfect place for every child and teenager to enjoy themselves, make new friends and go skiing or snowboarding. By way of exception, next season's winter camp is open to participants aged up to 15 instead of 14.


Thank you for your support

Many thanks to all the sponsors, supporters and partners of the FYSA who make our camps possible. Your commitment to us is invaluable, and is vital in ensuring that children and teenagers from around the world enjoy unforgettable holidays in Switzerland. We hugely appreciate your passion and dedication in helping us give that unique sense of joy, friendship and adventure to all who take part. Thank you for the valuable role that you play – we much appreciate it. (IS)

Our experienced leadership teams put on a varied range of activities both on and off the piste to ensure that everyone has an unforgettable time. From sporting competitions, to games nights, to exciting excursions – there is something for everyone. Participants will share that feeling of togetherness that only a camp can generate.

Important notice for young Swiss Abroad who wish to reserve a spot on our 2025/26 winter camp: we are open for bookings! Places at this camp are much sought after, so it pays to be quick. Visit our website for further information and to sign up: www.sjas.ch/winter-camp

ISABELLE STEBLER, FYSA


 Stiftung für Junge Auslandschweizer
 Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
 The foundation for young swiss abroad
 Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)
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 www.sjas.ch



YPSA – what's behind the four letters?

YPSA stands for the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad. We are a team of 13 young, committed Swiss based all over the world who joined the YPSA to help young Swiss Abroad communicate with each other across the globe. We do this by organising events, building an online presence and interacting with other international Swiss platforms.

In the past, we have run online events with, for example, educationsuisse to spread information on how to pursue an education in Switzerland. We have participated in a debate on biodiversity hosted by SWI swissinfo.ch. We have also attended the OSA's Congress of the Swiss Abroad to represent the interests of young Swiss Abroad.

We have many exciting projects and events coming up this year. Our "Moving to Switzerland" webinar took place in March, and we are planning a dialogue event involving a representative of the Swiss Guard at the Vatican. Furthermore, we are looking to hold more informal sessions to touch base with young Swiss around the world.



Max Groenveld in Amsterdam. Photo: Giuanna Egger-Maissen

Checking out our Instagram is the best way to keep track of us. Or you can visit our website (www.ypsa.ch) to learn more about who we are and what we do. You can also sign up to a newsletter while you are there. We, the YPSA, want to engage with young Swiss Abroad. Let us celebrate our Swiss identity together.

MAX GROENVELD, YPSA PRESIDENT

www.ypsa.ch



Elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad – you have until 11 May 2025 to cast your vote

The Swiss Abroad are set to vote on the new composition of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) for the 2025–29 term. As we have explained in recent editions of “Swiss Review”, expatriates in specific countries and regions can elect their local delegates directly via e-voting. A lot of time and effort went into organising the vote, and the election campaign is now in full swing.

If you are a Swiss Abroad in one of the eligible countries/regions, are aged 18 or over and registered your email address with the competent Swiss representation (embassy or consulate) before the deadline, you are entitled to participate in direct voting. What else do you have to do? Consult the “Swiss Review” regional pages or the OSA website (www.revue.link/asr25) to find out more about the people standing for election in your country or region.

Please remember to use the voting code that the FDFA sent to you by email on 12 April 2025. You can cast your vote by Sunday, **11 May 2025**, at the latest.

The interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” are best served by a strong and representative CSA, not least in today’s political climate. So please vote!

ANDREAS FELLER, DIRECT ELECTIONS WORKING GROUP

OSA to hold more virtual information events in 2025

As in previous years, 2024 saw the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) hold three virtual information events for Swiss Abroad in partnership with the FDFA and Soliswiss, focusing on the issues and challenges that students, pensioners, employees and others face when they return to Switzerland. Recordings of these webinars are available to watch on the OSA website at www.revue.link/webinars.

Given the considerable amount of interest in this format, more webinars will be held in 2025. The webinars are intended primarily for Swiss who already live abroad, but they can also be a useful source of information for those who want to emigrate. The webinar schedule is as follows:

- 17 June 2025: Civil status
- 16 September 2025: Taxes/finances
- 4 November 2025: Political rights

More detailed information on each webinar will appear in due course on the OSA website (www.revue.link/webinars).

We look forward to your attendance at these virtual events.

REBEKKA THEILER RUF, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT



CSA meeting in Lucerne, July 2024. Photo: Nicolas Brodard

Thank you! Your donations helped us to keep going

Donations, big and small, from our readers were of huge support to our magazine in 2024. Despite growing cost pressures, they helped us to continue producing the quality journalism that our editorial team strives for. They also reinforced the sense that readers in the “Fifth Switzerland” regard “Swiss Review” as their magazine. We very much hope to count on your support again in 2025 and are grateful for your contribution, because every little helps.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Ariane Rustichelli – farewell in a few hashtags

Ariane Rustichelli is leaving the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), having overseen its fortunes as director during a momentous time of change. As a final farewell, she has summarised her tenure under the following hashtags.

#Milestones

“After every milestone, we quickly move on to the next challenge. But looking back, I am amazed at the things that we, the OSA, have helped to achieve – such as ensuring that the Register of the Swiss Abroad remained an integral element for inclusion in the Swiss Abroad Act, facilitating access to banking solutions for our compatriots abroad, and implementing the new e-voting pilots in relation to federal votes.”

#Dialogue

“Establishing a ‘Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad’, or YPSA, was also important. It informs part of the dialogue that we want within the ‘Fifth Switzerland’. Our new website, which puts the Swiss Abroad front and centre and emphasises the community ethos among expatriates, is another way in which we want to promote dialogue.”

#Success

“Ultimately, others will decide how successful my time was as OSA director. But what I want to say is that success comes from hard work. The imminent elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) are an example, showing how the OSA and its bodies are evolving, and how committed people are in this regard. The CSA will not only be more representative in future – it will also be more fit for purpose.”

#Change

“The ‘Fifth Switzerland’ is not homogeneous, inflexible entity. It is always in flux. Poverty used to be the main reason for emigrating. Nowadays, young people often go abroad for a few years to pursue their career. Then you have older people leaving Switzerland as well. Only by recognising the various dynamics at play is it possible to represent and support our big and diverse community of Swiss Abroad effectively.”



Ariane Rustichelli joined the OSA in 2008, where she was initially responsible for marketing and communication. She became the co-head of the OSA’s administrative office in 2014, before taking sole charge of the OSA as director in 2019. After almost 17 years within the organisation, she now wishes to embark on a new chapter in her personal and professional life at the age of 51. The OSA Executive Board has appointed **Lukas Weber** as her successor. Photo provided

#Support

“There are headaches too. The Swiss Abroad are not necessarily flavour of the month in Berne. Many of our parliamentarians no longer see added value in the expatriate community. It feels like Switzerland is withdrawing into itself. Take the pensions debate for example. We need to be more proactive and unequivocal in explaining that Swiss Abroad – who make up ten per cent of the total Swiss population – are not ‘sponging off the system.’”

#Challenges

“The OSA is prepared for the future. But new challenges will come. It will have to cope with cuts in government funding. Its remit will also become increasingly complex. Nevertheless, many of its future responsibilities

are clearly set out. One of them includes fighting to ensure that political participation among the Swiss Abroad is unrestricted and made easier. Because the right to vote in elections and referendums is central to the Swiss identity – and the ‘Fifth Switzerland’ contributes to the diverse spectrum of opinions that are vital for our democracy.”

#Gratitude

“My departure marks a new start. For the OSA and for me personally. I look forward – but I also look back in gratitude. I am particularly thankful to everyone I had the privilege to work with. Together, we represented and defended the interests of the Swiss Abroad as effectively as possible. And proved that the collective really can make a difference.”

Discussion: Swiss Abroad are “spongers”?

Instead of being praised as Switzerland’s “ambassadors abroad”, the Swiss Abroad are receiving an increasing amount of flak. There was a big response from readers to the “Swiss Review” article on how attitudes to the “Fifth Switzerland” have cooled.



Sentiment turns against the Swiss Abroad

ROLF BRUNNER, WÖSSINGEN, GERMANY

Spongers? Are you kidding? I earned my state pension in Switzerland like everyone else! To keep my Swiss savings in Switzerland, I have to pay much higher banking fees as an expat. How would I be fleecing the state? Because I still love my home country – the country I was born in? Because I always say how good Switzerland is to anyone who asks? If you want spongers, how about looking closer to home?

DANIEL WALDER, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Swiss Abroad = spongers? I moved abroad at retirement age, because it is impossible to make ends meet in Switzerland on less than 2,000 francs a month. I cover all my living costs in my new country of residence, without relying on healthcare premium reductions, supplementary benefits, income support or any other state benefits. If I stayed in Switzerland, I could apply for all of that. I am saving the state a lot of money!

MONICA ROTH, TAROUANNT, MOROCCO

It makes me shudder how quickly attitudes change – and that politicians, of all people, are unaware of the positive contribution that expats make. The Swiss Abroad are a source of free advertising for our country. They are Switzerland’s peaceful ambassadors in an afflicted, dangerous world.

ERNST HINNEN, BRAZIL

I emigrated 27 years ago because I lost my job and was unable to find work. I was 51 at the time. Instead of moaning, I chose the difficult route and worked abroad. And I continued to make OASI contributions, which was easier said than done. I think I am entitled to my pension.

OSKAR SCHMID, OTTOBRUNN, GERMANY

By differentiating between Swiss who live abroad and Swiss who live in Switzerland, you are, in effect, questioning people’s right to be Swiss. Once you do that, it’s a slippery slope.

CHRISTOPH BÄR, BREMEN, GERMANY

Politicians without wisdom or honour blame marginalised groups and minorities for everything. Now it is our turn to be in the firing line. Many Swiss Abroad only leave the country once they turn 65. Their meagre pensions are not enough to make ends meet in Switzerland. My suggestion: how about all the older expats return to Switzerland to claim state benefits and take up valuable housing space? Do you think the politicians would be happy then? Or here’s a thought: how about they remember the Swiss Abroad Act?

ANA HÜGLI, BOLIVIA

The narrow-mindedness of some Swiss politicians is becoming increasingly disappointing. They fail to see that one of Switzerland’s greatest riches is its characteristic way of BEING Swiss. Its Swiss essence! And what better representative to fly the flag for this than Swiss people abroad? All over the world, being Swiss is a source of pride, it’s like a registered trademark, and respected companies and institutions are formed based around it and are considered to be very good, if not excellent.

MARLENE ROMANG, KALAMATA, GREECE

I would be unable to live solely off my 1,450-franc state pension in Switzerland. It would cost the state a lot for me to live in Switzerland and claim supplementary benefits. I just about manage to get by in Greece, and I am a burden to no one.

CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER, LINDEN, GERMANY

People who live abroad for a time tend to be more receptive to other cultures. It is, therefore, no surprise that expats lean more towards the liberal, social democrat, and green camps in elections and referendums. The conservatives don’t like this, and I think this is one of the main reasons why they consider us a nuisance.

JEAN-LUC PRAZ, CORONEL, CHILE

Is it really surprising that a group, which I believe to be very limited, sees Swiss living abroad as bad Swiss, or half-Swiss? I don’t think so, because being classed as a foreigner is making life increasingly difficult. In the country where I live, they are starting to legislate while singling out foreign nationals, so it doesn’t surprise me at all to see people wanting to do the same in Switzerland for Swiss nationals who have taken another path.

GUIDO PRAMPOLINI, HUNGARY

All Swiss Abroad have withholding tax deducted from their state pensions. Not just a few but everyone. Or perhaps someone knows how to get away with not paying it. Greetings from an expat who emigrated after retiring, because he would have had to have claimed supplementary benefits in Switzerland otherwise. And no, I don’t sun myself on the beach all year round.

JOEL BALDENWEG, GREECE

And what about us Swiss working abroad, doing our job and giving Switzerland a good reputation? Is this not something worth valuing for our dear compatriots and politicians who seem to be so concerned about the image of Switzerland on the international stage?

Many other comments are available to read below the online version of this article (“Sentiment turns against the Swiss Abroad”) in “Swiss Review” 1/2025: www.revue.link/spongers

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